

Postal services fall into disarray

MIZANUR KHAN

Postal services have become frustrating over the years, as post offices run short of forms and applications.

"We are disappointed by the services of the post offices. When we go there for money order, postal workers tell us to make photocopies of forms to fill them in," said Akhter Jahan, who went to Tejgaon Post Office to send some money to her medical student daughter in Mymensingh.

An official at Bangladesh Postal Department (BPD) blamed the shortage of forms and applications on its rundown printing press that cannot cope with high demand.

The post offices need more than 50,000 forms, including money order forms and savings certificates, a day.

"Also, every day we need 40,000 pages of different printed materials to run our offices. The only printing press of the department, more than 24 years old, cannot supply necessary materials in time," he said.

"The situation has become so serious that we cannot do our daily work. It is hard to provide better service for people," another BPD official said on condition of anonymity.

BPD Director General SM Abdus Salam said: "This problem is not new to us. The output capacity of our press has decreased seriously over the

years. We are trying to solve the problem."

Bangladesh has 9,848 post offices, including four general post offices (GPOs), 21 first class main post offices and 45 second class main post offices.

There are also 401 post offices in upazilas, 930 divi-

An official at Bangladesh Postal Department (BPD) blamed the shortage of forms and applications on its rundown printing press that cannot cope with high demand

sional sub-post offices, 11 divisional branch post offices, 323 non-divisional sub-post offices and 8,113 non-divisional post offices.

Bangladesh Government Press, known as BG press, had printed official forms and materials for the BPD for long. "When our demand increased and the

BG press started to print forms and papers of other government offices, the postal department set up its own press in Tejgaon in 1980," he said.

The press was kicked off with only four printing machines, which could print only monochrome materials. To cope up with the increasing demand, the BPD set up three more machines.

"The BG press still printed forms for the BPD on an emergency basis, but it has now become hard to get its help because of its heavy workload," the official said.

The BPD press now prints forms and other materials with only two machines, as other four machines went out of order three years ago. "It is also understaffed and has no manager or administrator for long.

"Over the last few years, work at post offices has increased a lot. A large number of people have invested money in our savings programme and we cannot provide them with better service," he added.

To fight the crisis, the BPD has recently sent a proposal to the post and telecommunication ministry, asking for a modern press that will cost Tk 9 crore. The BPD director general said: "We are now carrying out a study to find the causes of the shortage and trying to repair the rundown machines. I hope the problem will be solved within a short time."



A day at the General Post Office in the city.

Electronic signals not before year-end



This age-old system to go hopefully by next year.

SULTANA RAHMAN

Installation of modern traffic signal system in the capital may be delayed once again apparently due to the incompetence of the officials concerned.

Work on a computerised traffic signal system was supposed to start this month. But sources said that while it could be possible to have electronic signals before the turn of the year, the first installation of the phase by phase task might not begin before September despite the recent announcement of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) that it would be able to install equipment by May.

"DCC's announcement is not practical as its officials were not aware of the terms and conditions on payment of taxes and VAT in the tender document," said an official of Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP).

The government took the initiative to install the modern signal system under the DUTP at a cost of Tk 14 crore as the existing signal lights of Dhaka went out of order a few years ago.

However, the project cost has increased by Tk 16.19 million allegedly due to ignorance of a section of DCC officials who thought that the supplier would pay the taxes.

ATS, an Australian firm that was awarded the supply and installation contract, refused to pay the taxes and instead,

asked the DCC to finish its work.

It is also threatened to put the equipment on auction unless the DCC had them released from the port.

Later, at a recent DCC meeting, chaired by its Chief Executive Officer Habibur Rahman, it was decided that the corporation would pay the Tk 16.19 million by March this year.

The meeting blamed officials concerned for not clearly spelling out the terms and conditions on payment of taxes and VAT in the tender document. As a result, a huge sum of public money had to be spent. It also demanded punishment to the officials responsible for preparing the faulty tender document.

However, the project director, Abdul Qaiyum, recently told newsmen that the government did not incur any loss by paying the additional money in tax and VAT.

"The project is being implemented as per rules which have no ambiguity," he claimed.

The new high tech signalling system would be set up in the city's 59 traffic points in phases. Initially, Gulshan-1 and 2, Matsya Bhaban and Shahbagh intersections would come under it.

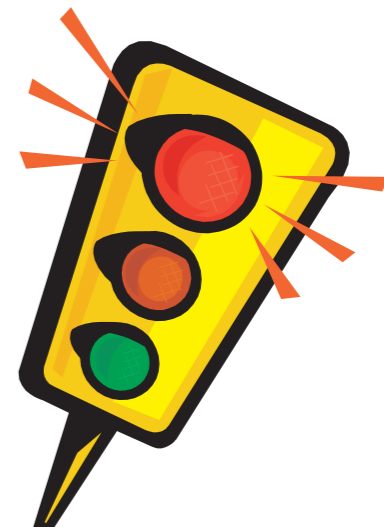
"Traffic movement in the city will be automatically guided from a central control room through the sophisticated signalling module," Qaiyum said.

It was learnt that a group of expert engineers will look after the maintenance of the system for three years and will provide necessary training for the DCC engineers.

When contacted the chief executive officer of DCC was unable to give a specific timeframe for installation.

"We will be able to install the equipment and have them up and running within the period mentioned in the

project that was approved by the World Bank," said Rahman. But when asked to mention the 'period' he said that he needed to check the papers.



FOOTBRIDGES FOR WHOM?



Many of the footbridges in the city are not being used by pedestrians as they have been installed allegedly at wrong points. Pictures show three 'barren' footbridges (from left) at Science Laboratory crossing, Sadarghat and at Ramna Park point.