

SMS, Internet and e-mail make telegraph service obsolete

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Only 20 years ago telegram was the quickest means of communication for the common people. Now the technology is almost out of date.

All the private and government offices including the President's office were once dependent on this service to deliver emergency news and official orders. There was no alternative. But now cellphone and email are available everywhere and telegram have lost its importance.

People at present no longer rush to the telegraph office to send urgent messages. The employees of telegraph offices across the country virtually have no work, except sending a few telegraphic transfers (TT) for banks, and government and court orders.

"People working in the defence agencies still use the telegraph service. When defence personnel need emergency leave, they ask their family members to send a telegram. On the basis of this document they are granted leave on emergency grounds," said an official of telegraph department.

The defence offices sometimes send telegram to the soldiers on leave to call them back to the barracks in case of emergency.

The service is provided by the telegraph department under Bangladesh Telegraph &

Telephone Board (BTTB).

Officials of the telegraph department said the department has become ineffective as the government is reluctant to take any step to modernise the department and its service.

"Modern technology is not the only drawback to our service. Even the present machines could be updated to give quicker and better service," said an official of the telegraph department.

About 2,000 employees the country over in telegraph offices now remain idle and telex machines remain silent. Most machines that have gone out of order have not been repaired. Only 34 out of 92 machines are now in working condition.

"We installed Gentex machines in all the 64 districts 10 years ago. Now we have direct connection with only 16 districts," said the official.

There are 400 local telegraph offices at the upazila level of which only 50 are now directly connected with the main network. The PCO (Public Call Office) in these offices have remained out of order for many years.

PCOs were the only source of delivering and receiving telegrams to and from these offices at upazila level. Telegraph department takes help of RMS (Railway Mail Service) where the PCOs are now working.

"These problems have slowed our pace of work. We were much faster 15 years back," said a telegraph official.



The once busy telegraph section of the Bangladesh Telegraph & Telephone Board works with only a few of the machines currently in order.

"We cannot even give 100 percent guarantee of delivering a telegram," he added.

Many of the officials believe there is still scope for making the department effective. The government should take steps in this regard, they said.

"We believe we can be effective if the government introduces Internet and e-mail services -- the easiest, cheapest and quickest means of communication -- to our department," said an officer of telegraph department.

The cost of sending the first one to 10 words via telegram is Tk 2.50, which is more expensive than sending a Short Message Service (SMS) of 160 characters (approximately 25 words), which costs only Tk 1.50 to Tk 2.00.

But the government seems to have no interest in restructuring this department. "We have submitted a number of proposals for launching e-mail service but none of these saw daylight," he said.

For the last 14 years no new recruitments to this department had been made. Officials said the revenue from this department has gradually decreased over the past 10-12 years.

Many attempts to contact the Minister for Post and Telecommunications on this issue proved futile.

SHANTINAGAR KITCHEN MARKET

Shop owners protest deal to construct 24-storey building

SULTANA RAHMAN

Shop owners and the executive committee of Shantinagar kitchen market are locked in a serious dispute over a project to construct a multi-storeyed building in the marketplace.

"The situation is very tense. Untoward incident can happen any time," said shop owner Hafiz Rashid Babu, referring to the killing of shop owner Anwarul Haq Anu in 1998 over a conflict with the executive committee.

Sources said the current dispute originated after the executive body recently signed a

shady agreement with a real estate company.

According to the agreement, the market will be handed over to the developer that will construct a 24-storey commercial cum apartment building where the shop owners will be given 20 percent ownership.

But the shop owners have been opposing the plan as the agreement does protect their rights and interests. "It is not fair that one party of an agreement gets 20 percent and the other 80 percent. It could be 40 and 60," said Iman Hossain Kanon, a leader of the shop owners' association.

The shop owners also raised question about the legality of the market executive committee. "As per the cooperatives act, the executive committee should be elected by direct vote. But the present committee is not elected by the shop owners. They have no right to represent us," he added.

The market is run by a cooperative society and it must comply with the cooperatives act, the shop owners said.

They alleged that the executive committee of the market is illegal as no election has been held since 1994. According to the cooperative act, there has to be election in every three years.

"The committee cannot take any major decision with calling all the shop owners in a general meeting," said Abdur Rahim, a shopowner.

The shop owners said the committee [Aminbagh Cooperative Society Ltd] Chairman Md Sirajuddoula Patwary and Secretary Noor Hossain undertook the project

without consulting the shop owners. Noor Hossain is an accused in the shop owner murder case of 1998, the said.

When asked, Patwary claimed himself to be the legal chairman of the society and said, "Shop owners have nothing to do in decision making."

After construction of the building, the society will distribute shops among the present owners, he said.

The chairman and secretary of the 12-member committee handed over the power of attorney to the developer, Ideal Home Builders Ltd, on May 10 to construct the building which will accommodate the kitchen market on the basement and semi-basement floors.

Residential apartments and office spaces will be built from the sixth to 24th floor. There will also be a kindergarten and a mosque in the building.

"If we are given the basement to run our business, it will not be hygienic for us. How can we accept this project?" asked Gani Mia, a shop owner.

A total of 488 shop owners of the market are against the plan for constructing the building, demolishing the existing market structure established in 1952 on 7.5 bighas of land.

"We are the owners of the market. We are paying monthly fee for market's maintenance but the so-called committee took the decision unilaterally," said Iman Hossain Kanon of the market's shop owners' Association.

The shop owners who have been in this business for three generations said they will resist the plan at any cost.

Festival to promote dowry-free wedding drew many

IMRUL HASAN

"Enchanted" would you be as the gala Wedding Festival 2005 at the Spectra Convention Hall in the city takes you up the aisle of the entire range of wedding accessories and services.

From nitty-gritty table decorations to elaborate bouquets, headresses, floral interior and exterior décor the exhibits adorned the premises as one gazed in awe.

And jewellery too, from rings to necklaces and anklets they all smiled in glamour from their stalls.

Under the slogan: "Dowry-less wedding and use of local products" the Spectra Group organised this three day long monsoon wedding festival that concluded yesterday, drawing over 2,00, 000 visitors.

The much talked-about festival began on July 21 to promote dowry-free marriages. The festival in Shrabon, was the second of its kind, the first taking place in Ashar last year and that too, organised by the same group.

The festival showcased products from 21 famous business houses catering to

such occasions including Bibi Productions, Khan Brothers, Rupahali, Divine, Nangor Silk and Mantra.

Khan Brothers, Rupahali, Nangor Silk, Mantra displayed their sarees and shalwar-kameez while Diagold and Gems Gallery exhibited jewellery. Beds specially decorated for the 'just-mar-

ried' couple and colourful pandals for venue entrances were seen as well. Paan (betel leaf) and sweets were presented respectively by Ferns 'n' Petals and Panshopari, Premium Sweets by Central. 'Persona' featured bridal make-up and hair-

styles. Adding to all the glamour was a matchmaker's corner complete with 'couple meeting sessions' that attracted a lot of visitors.

Imran, a Dhaka University student said he was very impressed at what he saw. "I brought my parents and some of my relatives along to see the exhibits. They agreed that local products certainly brought out our

Young and old, locals and foreigners, especially male youth showed much enthusiasm and remarked that such events have brought a new dimension to city life

culture," he said. "I believe like me other parents would vouch for local accessories for their sons' weddings. Even the idea of dowry would be taken off our minds," said Imran's mother.

Modir, Melange, Spectra Catering Ltd, VIP Studio, Nova Dreamland Ltd, (marketing crystal products),

Being pleased with the public response, the organisers said the festival would be held on a higher scale in future.

"We hoped to present Bengali heritage and culture to the new generation," said Eng. Khalid Hussain Khan, the vice-chairman of Spectra group.



Stalls at Wedding festival 2005 with their wedding-accessory exhibits.

