

Postal services fail to cope with modern times

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

..... Bangladesh Post Office, one of the oldest government organisations in the country, is limping and fast loosing confidence of the citizens as it fails to adapt to modern technologies.

Although the postal service authorities took a few initiatives to introduce new schemes to attract more customers, most of these schemes remain strapped in 'red tapes' awaiting approval from higher authorities.

"We outlined a plan to work together with a number of business organisations such as DHL and Western Union Money Transfer in a small scale, but it is still in its early stage of discussions," said KM Rafiqul Islam, postmaster general of central circle.

According to the plan, the businesses would install service booths inside post offices that would enable all service providers to offer competitive and efficient services to customers, Islam explained.

"Things like these take time and have to go through various phases of formalities at the ministries and higher authorities before getting implemented. So, it should take a while before we sign any contract," said Islam.

While the postal service officials find it a daunting task to hold on to its customer base, failure to make use of modern technologies has faded the image of its glorious past.

Postal communication still being the only means of communication for millions living in remote areas of the country, the postal service authorities are yet to recognize that without using contemporary postal technologies and having a well-trained workforce to better serve the customers, the postal service will not be able to hold on to its customer base let alone attract the new generation.

"The postal service is a very conventional organisation and the laws and provisions we go by are very old -- some dating back to 1898 during the British era," said an official at GPO (General Post Office).

"It's not that we didn't try to adopt new technologies. The ministry distributed computers for us to digitize our database and computerize our work, but the database application software that came with the computers were flawed so severely that we had to scrap the idea," he added.

Aside from having the reputation of providing severely inefficient service by an unskilled workforce that lacks minimal administrative supervision, the postal service also seems to be careless about satisfying the city inhabitants by taking better care of its mailboxes (pillar box) scattered throughout the city.

"Four months ago, I dropped a mail in the mailbox located at Surya Sen hall at Dhaka University, but my family in Sylhet is yet to receive it. It looks as if the



Letter boxes are hardly used in the city these days.

mail vanished into thin air," said Asadur Rahman, a student at Dhaka University.

According to Nazat Sultana, Bangladesh Post Office supervisor of north zone in Dhaka, there are around 277 pillar boxes in her

zone, which has 34 post offices. Only one inspector is assigned to maintain all the mailboxes.

Mahbubul Huq, supervisor of south zone, failed to provide the exact figure of pillar boxes or post offices in his zone. "I can't tell the

exact number of pillar boxes in my zone as they are scattered throughout the narrow alleys all over the city."

Although there is a rule mandating the postal officials to keep count of average number of mail

dropped in the mailboxes, the GPO officials could not provide the figure. Ironically, they however claimed that their services are strictly supervised and conducted smoothly.

Ashiqul Karim, a Dhaka resi-

dent, decided to send his mail to his uncle in Nilphamari only after registering it since he was aware of the rumour that only a few unregistered mail reach their destinations.

"After waiting in line for about 45 minutes and watching the crowd get longer by the minute, I finally got to register my mail," said Karim.

"The employee at the counter gave me a registration receipt with almost illegible writing on it," he added.

When asked, KM Rafiqul Islam, postmaster general of central circle, blamed the shortage of skilled manpower for the inefficient service.

"To say that we have the required workforce would be incorrect. Nor would it be correct to claim that our services are up to the mark," said Islam.

According to Islam, although the RMS department at GPO has job openings for around 309 staff members, the department now employs only 127 staff.

"Recruiting any employee needs authorisation from higher authorities. Therefore, it takes months to get the green light from different ministries and higher authorities. By that time, many more either retire or get promoted, leaving ever increasing vacancies," said Islam.

Another quite serious allegation against the postal service is that the GPO staff often charge additional money for their services.

Shah Alam, a Jagannath

University student, went to the GPO at Ramna to mail a package (parcel) by airmail to his brother living abroad. After waiting for about 10 minutes in a long queue, he found out that the postal staff behind the counter was not returning any change to anyone after weighing, stamping and issuing receipts for the mail.

"Since most people in the line did not have exact change, they were giving Tk 100 notes to the staff. Instead of returning the change to the customers, the staff was slipping the change -- nearly Tk 20 each time -- into his drawer without even saying that he didn't have any change," said Alam.

"A young man tried to protest this, but the employee turned so rude that the young man decided to back down fearing that his parcel might be left behind or 'lost'. We assessed that at the rate the parcels were being accepted and the staff pocketing the change, he was making at least Tk 5,000 a day," he added.

Asked, GPO officials told this correspondent that they did not receive any complaints about any irregularity or unethical practices by the GPO staff.

"We have a department for filing and inspecting complaints. In case of any complaint, investigations will be conducted and if anyone is found guilty, necessary action will be taken against that person," said Sultan Khan, senior postmaster at GPO.

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