

A hobby hobbles along time street

Stamp collection no longer attracts young generation

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Stamp collection, once a favourite pastime for many, is now struggling for survival with the advent of modern technologies like email and cellphone.

Stamp usage has drastically shrunk at the domestic level as postal service is losing its ground with most people preferring stamp-less courier services to send letters.

The number of young collectors is gradually declining. Computer games, cable TV and use of internet and cellphones have become the hobbies of the young generation.

Retired or middle aged persons who once took stamp collection as their main hobby are now searching for their successors to carry on the tradition.

The veteran stamp enthusiast said, "Now we hardly see any collectors aged below 20 because stamp collection is no longer easy and cheap for youngsters."

Commemorative stamp is beyond the purchasing power of most collectors, he said.

Alam, also a professor at the marketing department of Dhaka University, is a collector of 'error stamps' and winner of several medals in Asian philatelic competitions.

For beginners, mostly school-children, the easiest source was incoming personal letters with colourful stamps of home and abroad. Since the volume of incoming mails is coming down, the easiest source of stamps or

stamp collectors to this hobby, there will be no one to inherit the tradition."

For a stamp collector, stamps are not merely a paper evidence of postal fee, they are much more than that. It has an emotional appeal for them.

There are several types of collection and country-based collection is the most popular one. Collector's country of residence comes first when on starts collecting stamps.

Then comes thematic collection. It can be based on a specific topic such as birds, animals, nature, a renowned personality, architecture and landmarks, even a specific sport or a player. The subject of thematic collection

The starting point of every new collector is to save stamps from incoming personal mails and ask family and friends to save theirs. Official mails, pen friends, post offices, stamp dealers and philatelic bureau are the other sources of stamps. Sale and exchange of duplicate stamps among the collectors enrich their collections.

Stamp collection is also considered as a means of study and source of general knowledge.

"It is a splendid teaching aid because it leads to study of the topic depicted on the stamp. To understand the stamp better, a collector must research on the topic and that is the most exciting part of the hobby," Prof Alam

"Emails and other electronic means of communication did not end the journey of handwritten letters. It still poses a romantic appeal to many," he added.

Zarif started with collections left by his elder brother. He is now a collector of wartime postal history of Bangladesh. He focuses mainly on letters of the prisoners of war exchanged with the help of Red Cross after end of the Liberation War.

The young collector blamed lack of promotional activities for the dying condition of the hobby. "There are hardly any promotional activities by the postal department to encourage collectors and create new collectors," he said.

Bangladesh Post Office organised the last national philatelic exhibition in 1992. There were several initiatives to hold such event by both collectors and the postal department afterwards but the efforts never succeeded. Lack of sponsors and fund held them back.

The classic hobby also brings hard cash for many. There are some dealers who collect and sell rare postage items. But their number in Bangladesh is very limited.

Only four authentic philatelic stores exist in Dhaka city. Salam Stamp Store at Farmgate is the oldest specialised dealer in Bangladesh that started its journey in 1962.

However, a new breed of stamp brokers is evolving in the city. They are called the 'mobile dealers' who visit other collectors and offer exchange of their collection.

The auction organised by Bangladesh Philatelic Federation on the first Friday of each month and another one on the second Friday organised by the Philatelic Association of Bangladesh are considered as the best place to exchange stamps.

However, the auctions are also losing participants. The Philatelic Association of Bangladesh has around 500 members from across the country.

There is also online auction through which stamps can be collected from abroad. E-bay is one of the most popular online platforms worldwide.

SB Salam, a professional philatelist and owner of Salam Stamp Store, said, "Our business is on decline. We are gradually losing customers."

He said the hobby requires a good amount of money to purchase rare stamps, which most young collectors cannot afford.

The collectors also need to preserve the stamps, also very expensive youngsters. This is why we are losing young customers, Salam explained.

Most people in the beginning tend to focus on the number of stamps or covers they are able to save. Quality or the age of a stamp does not make it more valuable, rather quality and rarity is very important in stamp collection.



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Stamp collectors save postage stamps and related objects, such as envelopes or packages with stamps on them. Some collectors prefer used stamps while some go for unused ones. Most of them try to collect commemorative stamps issued on various occasions.

The future of stamp collection in Bangladesh is bleak as the number of young collectors is on decline," said Kazi Shariful Alam, president of Bangladesh Philatelic Federation (BPF). "However, the hobby is fighting back at the international level."

envelops is shrinking.

Since independence Bangladesh Post Office has issued 732 postage stamps and 28 souvenir sheets on various national and international days and events, about the country's heritage and culture, and to honour eminent personalities.

Postage stamps no longer attract the young generation who use modern communication technologies, Prof Alam said. "Modern entertainment sources are driving the young generation out of the classic hobby of stamp collection."

Expressing concern, he said, "If we cannot attract young

tion is vast.

Some collectors look for 'error stamps' which means stamps that are rejected by the printing press or the postal department for any errors. Some collectors think an error in the stamp brings value. A stamp with a missing word, bad printing, perforation mistake, misalignment or blurred colour is called an error stamp.

Stamp collection also includes collection of covers or envelopes, money order forms, even parcel packages. Anything that comes through the post office is considered as a collectible item for most of the stamp collectors.

said.

"Every stamp or cover has a story to tell. A collector discovers history, science, geography, politics, art, architecture, cultures, custom, rituals and more by analysing it."

Prof Alam said the young generation of Bangladesh is no longer interested in working hard for a mere hobby like stamp collection.

Mannan Mashrur Zarif, a young stamp collector, however differs on some points. "After the invention of television everyone thought newspapers or books will disappear but they did not. Like that stamps still exist," he noted.



With the resumption of the export of Hilsa the price of the delectable fish skyrocketed in the city markets. Although the government banned fishing and sale of jatka (fish fry) to increase production, it is still being sold in the markets at exorbitant prices.

FOLLOW-UP

DISTORTION OF LANDMARK ARCHITECTURE

Pedestal of mobile co still on rooftop of DU library

TAWFIQUE ALI

The Dhaka University authorities are going on with the distortion of some landmark architectural works on the campus for commercial gains, disregarding objections by noted architects and academics.

The authorities around one and a half years back made a 5-year deal with a private mobile telephone operator allowing erection of a concrete pedestal on the rooftop of DU central library building to set up a transmission tower.

The library building is a landmark work designed by master architect Muzharul Islam, who pioneered modern trend of architecture in Bangladesh.

Through this act the DU authorities violated the Building Construction Act of 1952 and the Building Rules of 2007 that restrict any alteration to a building without prior approval from the government agency concerned.

Though leading architects expressed grave concern over the construction of the pedestal on the rooftop of the library building, the DU authorities carried on with the work, giving a distorted look to the magnificent building.

DU Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz said they have postponed the project but yet to cancel the contract with the mobile company.

However, the DU authorities have recently formed a technical committee to assess the possible radiation impact of the telephone transmission tower.

"Final decision on renting out of the roof for the purpose depends on the technical committee's report on radiation impact, not on the building's architectural significance," Prof Syed Abul Kalam Azad, treasurer of DU, said.

Asked how was the pedestal erected on the roof before such assessment, he expressed ignorance about the matter. Replying to a question whether the authorities have taken any initiatives to remove the pedestal, he said, "No."

Mubasshar Hussain, presi-

dent of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), and senior vice-president of Commonwealth Association of Architects, said that the DU library building is an outstanding example of modern architecture.

"But attitude of the DU authorities to it is dangerous," said Hussain. "They have shown total apathy and negligence to preservation of architecturally distinct buildings."

partitions, he pointed out.

Following erection of the pedestal on the rooftop of the library building, IAB served a legal notice on the DU authorities in February 2007, but the authorities have not made any response as of today, said Hussain.

Architect Muzharul Islam set the trend for modern architecture in Bangladesh through his works like DU library building, National Institute of Public



The pedestal built for a cellphone tower on the rooftop of the DU Central Library is yet to be removed.

The DU central library building is a foremost example in the study of modern architecture in Bangladesh and one of the pioneering works of architecture accomplished (in 1953-1954) during Pakistan period.

Architectural Review published from London ran a feature in April 1960 on the DU library building in appreciation of the workmanship.

The university authorities in different manners have grossly deformed the original layout of the building's ground floor that had an airy open space and ramp, said Hussain. "It was a canopy-like and aesthetically beautiful open space with a majestic height."

But the DU authorities have altered the original design and despoiled its entire open lobby with encaging of iron grills and

Administration (NIPA) building and Fine Arts Institute building, said Architect Abu Sayeed M Ahmed.

The NIPA building has also been subject to mindless disfigurement of its original architectural features with arbitrary alteration and interventions. Mubasshar Hussain said that caging with iron grill and dull modification of the library building have spoilt its openness provided in the original architectural design.

According to the chief architect of the Department of Architecture, ASM Ismail, DU library building is unique because of its graceful facade and elevation with a beautiful ramp. The grand architectural features on the building's ground floor have all been mindlessly disfigured, he said.



People living near the Mitford area in the city wash clothes and take bath in the extremely polluted water of the river Buriganga ignoring health hazards as they often face acute water crisis.