



How couriers are powering e-commerce, everyday life

From city centres to rural villages, about 700 private couriers form the country's logistics backbone

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When Abdul Latif Akhanda, an officer at Sirajganj agricultural extension department, wanted to send a heavy steel almirah to his newly-wed daughter in Mirpur, Dhaka, he wasn't sure where to start. The almirah wasn't just furniture — it was a father's gift of care and permanence. But moving such a bulky item over 120 kilometres seemed a logistical headache.

The almirah, a gift symbolising permanence and protection, was no ordinary cabinet. Akhanda discussed the issue repeatedly with colleagues and friends. A mini-truck was one idea. The bazaar station's courier services were another.

"They'll pack and deliver it for you," a friend reassured him. Encouraged, Akhanda visited the local courier hub. The process was smoother than expected. Affordable and efficient, the service handled everything from packaging to transport. As the truck pulled away with the almirah, he felt relief and pride: a father's gesture of love was on its way, across districts.

This everyday story mirrors a broader shift unfolding across Bangladesh: a quiet transformation in how goods move, powered by the country's fast-growing courier industry.

From personal gifts to heavy-duty construction materials, courier services are now a cornerstone of daily logistics. Sohel Hossain, a homeowner in Bagerhat, turned to Sundarban Courier Service after struggling to source WPC doors and tiles locally. Customised in Dhaka, the items were delicate and oversized.

"I couldn't have transported them on my own," he said. "Courier services made it all manageable — and damage-free."

From agricultural districts to bustling metropolises, stories like these now abound. Courier services have become logistical lifelines.

According to the Courier Services Association of Bangladesh (CSAB), over 700 courier companies now operate across the country, though only 114 are licensed. The sector is structured into three main segments: international courier services, onboard

filings. Meanwhile, newer players such as RedX, Paperfly, Daily Courier, and Steadfast have grown out of online platforms, bypassing traditional retail altogether.

Courier services are no longer confined to letters and boxes. Today, they transport wedding gifts, electronics, fashion goods, food, pharmaceuticals, and even seasonal fruits like mangoes and jackfruits.

The evolution of Sundarban Courier Service (Pvt) Ltd exemplifies the sector's trajectory. Founded in 1983, when the country had only one air express service and minimal road options, Sundarban was launched to serve people on the ground.

"Our goal was to reach doorsteps — something air services couldn't do," said Hafizur Rahman Pulok, vice-chairman of Sundarban Courier.

Starting with just two vans, the company now operates a fleet of 600 vehicles, managing over 700 branches and agent offices in all 64 districts. It employs nearly 10,000 people across driver, messenger, and administrative roles.

Sundarban Courier offers three service types — normal, emergency, and special — with further sub-services such as e-commerce and parcel. It also runs a dedicated "Mango Service" during summer, which has become a logistical feat in its own right.

"We recruited 60 extra staff this year just for seasonal fruit," Pulok said. Deliveries are handled by a separate fleet, with home drop-offs coordinated via phone.

Though Sundarban Courier has no official overseas branches, many foreign parcels are routed through its domestic network. "We've heard of outlets abroad using our name, but they're not formally connected to us," Pulok said.

In cases where an upazila lacks a physical branch, deliveries are coordinated via the nearest district hub or a vetted local agent.

PRICES, PROTOCOLS AND PROBLEMS

Pricing remains competitive. Document deliveries typically cost Tk 15-30, while parcel rates vary based



Yet, challenges persist. The CSAB has repeatedly flagged the proliferation of unlicensed operators as a threat, not just to fair business practice, but to public safety.

"These companies bypass taxes and evade regulatory checks," said Ahsan Habib Setu, CSAB's joint secretary. "Some may be used for drug trafficking or other illicit activities."

He called for stronger enforcement and tighter oversight. "We need a level playing field," he added.

DRIVING E-COMMERCE

Nowhere is the impact of courier services more visible than in the e-commerce space.

At lifestyle brand Kay Kraft, co-founder Khalid Mahmood Khan says delivery efficiency directly shapes customer trust. "Some courier companies started small but scaled up with the market," he said. "Their use of modern tech has taken the sector to new heights."

In many countries, public postal services enabled the e-commerce revolution. "That didn't happen here," Khan added. "Bangladesh Post Office couldn't deliver reliably. So private

couriers stepped in."

Online platform Rokomari.com, now selling over 300,000 book titles and goods across 500 categories, relies on private partners for delivery outside Dhaka. "Inside the city, we manage our own operations," said Sadi Mahmud Hasan, the company's head of brand and strategy. "For the rest, we count on Sundarban, REDX, Pathao and Steadfast."

Retailers like TK Sport also rely on couriers to scale their sales. "We receive orders from every corner of the country," said proprietor Sabbir Reza. "The delivery system is smooth and reliable."

Courier use is no longer limited to businesses. Ferdouse Jannat, a student at Eden Mohila College — Dhaka, used Sundarban Courier to send a wedding gift to Faridpur. Humayun Kabir, who works in Rangpur, mailed job-related documents via SA Paribahan. "If I missed the deadline, my brother would have lost an offer," he said.

Today's courier firms offer app-based booking, real-time parcel tracking, and GPRS-enabled route management — features that were unthinkable even a decade ago.

By providing fast and reliable delivery and cash collection services to e-commerce platforms nationwide, local courier company Pathao has been making life easier for millions of consumers and hundreds of thousands of small online merchants for nearly a decade.

Fahim Ahmed, managing director and CEO of Pathao, said many Bangladeshi consumers, especially those living in smaller towns and rural areas, continue to face difficulties accessing quality products and recognised brands.

According to Ahmed, traditional courier services have largely fallen short of meeting the specific demands of online merchants, such as doorstep pick-up and delivery, handling returns, and managing cash collection and transfer.

"Pathao has enabled the growth of e-commerce through its reliable courier service," he said. "We provide a seamless logistics management solution to our customers, along with business productivity tools that can enhance their business."

Pathao runs 300 hubs, eight regional sorting centres, a centralised processing facility and a fleet of 200 vans, allowing it to deliver directly to doorsteps, even in outlying villages. The company has managed more than 250,000 orders each day, maintaining a delivery success rate of over 95 percent.

"We have also introduced innovative solutions such as InstaPay that enables our customers to get faster access to the cash collected from the recipients, and utilise their funds in growing their business," said the CEO.

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Whether it's a mango box in Rajshahi, a marriage gift in Dhaka, or a door shipment in Bagerhat, the courier boom is quietly delivering more than packages. It's delivering possibilities.



PHOTOS:
ANISUR RAHMAN,
PRABIR DAS

couriers, and domestic operators. Many firms specialise, some focusing solely on fragile packages or confidential documents.

Padma Courier, for instance, operates without a covered van fleet, instead catering exclusively to high-value documents like land deeds, ownership certificates, and corporate

on weight and bag type, ranging from Tk 100 for a 1kg yellow bag to Tk 200 for a 5kg blue one. A transparent Tk 130 polybag is used for e-commerce parcels to enable visual verification.

To ensure security and prevent illegal shipments, Sundarban complies with guidelines from the Department of Narcotics Control and the Ministry

of Home Affairs. Every item is screened before shipment.

Customer care is a growing focus. The company operates a 24/7 call centre with 46 agents and 40 active phone lines, as well as a central complaints unit called C4, based in Dilkusha in Dhaka. "If an issue arises, our team reaches out to the relevant branch immediately," Pulok said.

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