

POSTAL NEWS
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1. **Highest Average Salaries in Slovakia Paid in Telecoms. Jan 14, 2008**
2. **Weather a factor as Canada Post rewrites rules for rural mail delivery. Jan 14, 2008.**
3. **Arab countries firm up preparations for Nairobi UPU Congress. Jan 13, 2008.**
4. **UAE and India postal authorities to launch money order service**
5. **Going postal, or at least online, in the fight against junk mail. Jan 12, 2008.**

1. Highest Average Salaries in Slovakia Paid in Telecoms

January 14, 2008. Business Community

Employees in the telecommunications sector were paid the highest average nominal salaries in the first 11 months of 2007, at Sk47,701 (€1,435) per month, the Slovak Statistics Office said on Monday.

Next came salaries in real estate, rentals, business activities and other services at Sk22,319. Other nominal monthly salaries for the period were: in industry - Sk20,417, in car sales and maintenance - Sk19,910, in transport - Sk19,894, in wholesale - Sk18,846, in postal services - Sk15,801, in construction - Sk15,379, and in retail - Sk13,553. The lowest average salaries were paid in hotels and restaurants, where employees earned Sk10,588 per month.

In comparison to the same period in 2006, the biggest increase in average nominal salaries was recorded in telecommunications - 21.1 percent. Other year-on-year increases were: in real estate, rentals, business activities and other services - 9.8 percent, in transport - 8.2 percent, in car sales and maintenance - 7.9 percent, in construction and in retail - both 6.6 percent, in postal services - 6.4 percent, in industry - 6.3 percent, in wholesale - 4.3 percent, and in hotels and restaurants - 3.6 percent.

In November 2007, average nominal salaries in postal services increased by 12.1 percent y-o-y. Other increases were: in transport - 10.6 percent, in car sales and maintenance - 10.2 percent, in real estate, rentals, business activities and other services - 9.1 percent, in hotels and restaurants - 7.8 percent, in retail - 6.9 percent, in construction - 6.3 percent, in telecommunications - 5.4 percent, and in industry - 4.7 percent. The lowest salary increase was registered in wholesale - 3.4 percent.

Real salaries in November 2007 increased by 8.7 percent y-o-y in postal services. Other increases were: in transport - 7.3 percent, in car sales and maintenance - 6.9 percent, in real estate, rentals, business activities and other services - 5.8 percent, in hotels and restaurants - 4.6 percent, in retail - 3.7 percent, in construction - 3.1 percent, in telecommunications - 2.2 percent, in industry - 1.6 percent, and in wholesale - 0.3 percent.

(TASR)

2. Weather a factor as Canada Post rewrites rules for rural mail delivery

Jan 14, 2008.

FREDERICTON - The old adage about snow, sleet and rain never stopping mail delivery is being rewritten by Canada Post for its rural and suburban customers.

It turns out snowfall is one of the factors the Crown corporation is considering as it moves ahead with its Canada-wide assessment of the safety of rural mailboxes - one of the traditional icons of country life.

So far, about 14,000 rural Canadians, mostly in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes, have lost their roadside mailboxes because Canada Post has decided it's too hazardous to deliver their mail.

That represents 30 per cent of the roughly 47,000 boxes that have come under scrutiny as Canada Post begins applying a new assessment tool to determine the safety of each and every one of the 843,000 rural mailboxes it serves.

The process has raised hackles in the Fredericton area, one of the first locations to feel the sting of rural mailbox closures as Canada Post responds to health and safety concerns raised by its unionized workers who deliver mail.

In a recent assessment of 2,535 mailboxes in rural and suburban communities near Fredericton, 1,255 of them, or almost half, failed to meet safety standards.

"My mailbox was placed at a spot that has an unimpeded view of at least two-thirds of a mile down the road, but I guess that wasn't good enough for the rocket scientists at Canada Post," fumed one displaced customer in a letter to the Fredericton Gleaner newspaper.

"What I see here is the gradual but ultimate erosion of all rural mail delivery."

Canada Post spokeswoman Avril Vollenhoven said the corporation does not expect Fredericton's high failure rate to be repeated across the country.

"Every rural route is different, so I don't even want to speculate how it will play out in other parts of the country," she said.

"There are high numbers of rural mailboxes in a concentrated area in Fredericton. You also have terrible snowfall . . . and look at the kinds of roads in and around the Fredericton area. It is not a representation of what we're going to find in other parts of the country."

Vollenhoven said it's important to note that not everyone who fails the safety assessment loses their mailbox. In some cases, it's possible to relocate the box.

But if relocation is not possible, the customer will have to use either a community mailbox or a free post office box.

Vollenhoven said Canada Post has put together a priority list of rural routes to be reviewed based on such factors as volume of mailboxes and weather patterns, including snowfall rates.

"It goes to road conditions," she said.

"Weather is a great factor when it comes to delivering mail on rural routes. Snow is a major contributing factor, but I don't want to make it more important than the volume of rural mailboxes on the route."

Suspensions have been expressed by some customers and politicians that Canada Post may be seizing on health and safety concerns in order to shut down as many roadside boxes as possible.

Deborah Bourque, president of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, shares those concerns.

"I worry there is some truth to that," Bourque said in an interview. "That was our concern when all this started because Canada Post's first reaction was to simply move people to community mailboxes.

"Actually, that has been our concern for a couple of decades."

Bourque said the union is unhappy that Canada Post has failed to involve its members at the local level in determining rural route safety.

She said union members believe the post office is not seriously considering other options.

"We think there are alternatives to cutting off delivery and sending folks many kilometres down the road to community mailboxes," she said.

"We think if Canada Post involved the union at the local level it would be easier to come up with those alternatives. Right now, Canada Post is not involving the union at the local level and they have this third party assessing the mailboxes."

Canada Post expects to spend \$475 million to \$640 million over more than five years to assess rural delivery.

The federal Conservative government has ordered the post office to continue rural roadside delivery, within the law.

Canada Post says it is obligated under Canadian labour laws to ensure the safety of its workers.

Postal workers have expressed concerns about the risk to rural carriers who deliver mail to roadside boxes. There have been several accidents and two fatalities in recent years.

Carriers are also worried about repetitive-strain injury from leaning out vehicle windows to stuff the mail into roadside boxes.

Here are some of the things Canada Post looks at in determining the safety of rural mailboxes:

- Number of highway lanes.
- Number of vehicles.
- Position of stopped mail carrier's vehicle.
- Presence of double-yellow centreline markings.
- Sight distances for approaching drivers to the stopped mail carrier's vehicle.
- Sight distances for the mail carrier to merge in traffic.
- Waiting time for a safe gap to merge back into traffic.

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3. Arab countries firm up preparations for Nairobi UPU Congress

Posted: 13-01-2008 , 14:17 GMT

Postal administrations from Arab countries discussed the Arab stand on postal issues at the 15th meeting of the Arab Permanent Postal Council at the General Secretariat of Arab League, Cairo, recently. Emirates Post was appointed head of a special committee to prepare the Arab approach for the UPU Congress which will be held in Nairobi from August 13 to September 3, 2008.

A high-level delegation from Emirates Post headed by Mr. Salem Al Shaya, Assistant Director General, Operations, took part in the deliberations. The participants included senior officials from Arab postal corporations, the Arab League and the UPU.

The council discussed a number of key issues, including modernization of mail operations in Arab countries. It was decided to issue a stamp on Arab Postal Day on September 3, 2008. The meeting also urged all Arab postal corporations to participate in the Stamp Exhibition in Doha from January 30 to February 3, 2008.

The council reiterated its support to Palestine Post and called for steps to help the state modernize its mail and parcel services. It was also agreed to issue special stamps on Palestine Land Day and donate the proceeds to Palestinian Authority.

Commenting on the outcome of the meeting, Mr. Abdulla Al Daboos, President of Emirates Post Group, said: "Emirates Post shares a commitment to raise postal standards across the Arab world under the leadership of the UPU. Sharing ideas with representatives of Arab postal organizations gave us new insights that will help us draft a more effective common strategy."

"The meeting served to create greater solidarity between Arab postal organizations and share ideas on growth strategies through stronger cooperation," said Mr. Al Shaya. "Emirates Post expressed its resolve to prepare a strategy designed to upgrade all-round standards in postal services in all Arab countries. The meeting also urged for bridging the digital divide in postal services and highlighted the goal of automating all post offices by 2015."

The Emirates Post delegation made presentations on International Financial Services (IFS) as head of the Arab management committee, the Arab postal strategy for Nairobi Congress 2008 and UPU clearing.

Other members of the Emirates Post delegation included Mr. Saif Al Shehhi, Director, Operations, and Mr. Nasser Qadoumi, Postal Operations Consultant.

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4. UAE and India postal authorities to launch money order service by VM Sathish on Sunday, January 13, 2008

Competition in the money transfer business is heating up after Emirates Post and India Post agreed to jointly launch a service that will deliver payments to customers' doorsteps.

The alliance will offer an electronic money order service using the United Postal Union's secure International Financial System (IFS) – a global network of 660,000 post offices.

The partners hope the scale of the operation will enable them to challenge Western Union Money Transfer, which dominates the remittance market globally.

India Post has a network of 155,333 post offices, the largest in the world, which covers the remotest corners of the country.

"We will offer a cost-effective electronic money order facility for Indian consumers," said MG Khan, Director-General of India Post. "As our post office network covers the

length and breadth of the country, we are in a position to provide a service that is unmatched by private operators.”

Western Union and other money exchange companies that dominate the \$30 billion-a-year (Dh110bn) remittance to India business are fighting back by establishing special arrangements with banks, finance companies and mobile phone operators.

Western Union, which recently pushed up its charges, has an arrangement with India Post and operates in the country through 8,500 post offices and 14,000 bank branches.

The service being launched by the two mail operators will deliver money orders payable at post office counters on the day they are sent. Money orders payable at the addressee’s door will be handed over within two days through the IFS network. Outside the IFS network, delivery will take place within five days.

Money sent from India to the UAE will be available for collection at Emirates Post offices on the same day.

The competitors, though, don’t seem worried. Paul Sunny, marketing manager of Redha Al Ansari Exchange, said: “The postal services in both India and the UAE work like government departments.

“They cannot beat the experienced private money exchanges that have access to the wide Western Union network. Apart from delivering money to the customers’ doorstep, we can compete on all other fronts.

“We will improve our services. Even if they are offering a cheap rate for remittance, customers who normally send Dh1,000 a month will not be bothered. Only customers who send huge amounts consider remittance fees and exchange rates.”

Other exchange firms said they would increase working hours to take advantage of the time difference between the two countries and times when post offices are shut.

“Post offices remain closed on public holidays, weekends and during strikes,” said the manager of a Dubai money exchange who did not wish to be named. “It may take four or five days to receive money. Most customers want to receive money instantly and safely.”

Officials at Western Union and the UAE Exchange in Dubai declined to comment.

But Edouard Dayan, Director-General of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) international trade body, said millions of people needed reliable electronic money transfer services, which postal networks could easily provide.

The lack of high-speed internet access had been holding up the rapid expansion of the international postal financial network. But, guided by the UPU, an integrated international network was being set up progressively by developing regional exchanges, especially in Africa, Asia and the Arab countries.

The postal sector worldwide has about five million direct employees – up to 10 million if associated sectors are included.

Meanwhile, Western Union has announced a pilot mobile phone low-value money transfer scheme in India in association with telecoms firm Bharti Airtel. The partners have applied to the Reserve Bank of India, the country's central bank, for approval. Bharati Airtel has access to 50 million mobile users.

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5. Going postal, or at least online, in the fight against junk mail

Posted: Jan. 12, 2008

Jim Stingl

It's amazing how many of you figured out the same deviously clever way to go postal in your fight against junk mailers like Capital One.

Last Sunday I wrote about these pesky credit card offers and how I tried to contact this Pat W. Johnston who signs most of the letters I get from Capital One. It took some doing, but someone from the company finally admitted there is no such person. They made her up to give the letters a fake personal touch.

Here's what you do, numerous readers suggested: You take whatever other junk mail you received that day, rip it up if you like, stuff it in the post-paid return envelope to Capital One, and drop it in any mailbox.

"Don't forget to mention to add as much weight to the envelope as you can," said Paul Rapala of Oak Creek. "Not only are we helping the environment and global warming by recycling, but it makes you feel good, too."

"I take great joy in visualizing Capital One having to hire additional people named Pat W. Johnston to process my envelopes," Kathy High wrote to say. Credit Card Solicitations

"I felt quite evil and probably enjoyed doing this a little too much, but it was amazing how quickly my scheme worked. Within a month and a half, I was no longer receiving any of the credit card offers! They wanted my money, but certainly didn't want me spending any of theirs on return postage," said Mary from Hubertus.

Barb Haley from the Town of Genesee wrote an all-purpose no-thank-you letter and made numerous copies. She enclosed one in every return envelope she received in a credit card offer. That stopped them for a while, but they resumed. Now she writes NO across each offer and sends it back.

"Sometimes," said Neil Feldmann, "I stick old pictures with little notes attached wishing them luck."

I asked Capital One spokeswoman Pam Girardo if her company takes these guerrilla tactics as a no. She said people who want credit card offers to stop should register on the do-not-solicit list.

She means calling (888) 5-OPT-OUT or going to the Internet site optoutprescreen.com, which are run by the credit reporting agencies.

Here's what makes many people uncomfortable about opting out: They're going to ask for your Social Security number, which we've been conditioned to shield from anyone but God and our moms.

"It is legitimate. They shouldn't feel hesitant about doing that," said Frank Dorman in the U.S. Federal Trade Commission's public affairs office in Washington. The number is used to verify your identity, he said.

The opt-out Web site insists your Social Security number is not mandatory. "However, we strongly urge you to provide this information because it helps to ensure that we can successfully process your request," it adds.

One guy who did this by telephone told me he said no each time the automated answering system asked for his Social Security number. Finally, the computer gave up and allowed him to opt out.

As for me, the snarky column about Capital One didn't scare them off. Their offers keep arriving in my mailbox, signed by persistent but nonexistent Pat W. Johnston.

But I noticed some good news in the paper last week. Capital One Financial Corp. announced that its earnings for 2007 won't be meeting expectations.

I'm no expert, but they might want to check their postage costs.

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