

# POSTAL NEWS

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## 1. Window to end postal woes

- Investment plans, account balance & online records at one place

CHANDRAJIT MUKHERJEE

The renovated Doranda post office in Ranchi. Picture by Manik Bose

Ranchi, Aug. 19: Postal information and services in the capital will never be the same again.

The department has undergone a massive change and adopted the single window system to dispense information to its customers.

The upgraded and modernised Doranda main post office was inaugurated by postal services board member S. Samant here today.

The post office has been fully computerised and a database of all existing records has already been compiled. All information relating to various investment schemes, account balances and other postal facilities will be available to customers from a single window.

The operators in the post office will be connected with computers that will transfer the required information in a jiffy.

The upgrade of the Doranda main post office has been done as a target proposal of the Arrow Project initiated by the Union postal services department to improve postal services in the state and in the country.

The project involved upgrade of 35 post offices all across the state of which four were in Jamshedpur, Hazaribagh, Madhupur and in Doranda.

The Doranda main post office is the first to be upgraded in the capital and other post offices would follow soon.

The general post office (GPO) figures in the list of post offices to be modernised and upgraded in the second phase, said a postal employee today.

Samant said that the work culture of post offices has to undergo change.

“We have to meet international standards of efficiency and modernisation of the existing system is mandatory. The upgrade of infrastructure and manpower is essential for development and overall growth,” Samant said.

Samant also hinted at future prospects of a tie-up with the State Bank of India to facilitate availability of different loans to customers.

“The objective of the project is to come out of the earlier image of the postal department which was restricted to ferrying packages and mails. We will provide all facilities to our customers which will be of the same standard as services provided abroad,” Samant said.

Doranda main post office postmaster K.N. Tiwary said that the staff have been trained especially to manage and handle computers.

“Nothing will be done on paper henceforth. All transactions will be recorded directly on the computer. Even signatures of employees who are required to sign various certificates and documents have been scanned and loaded on the computer systems,” Tiwary added.

“The concept of service has changed in the present context. In the changing times, the department also needs to adorn a new look. The facelift of the post office has run into a couple of lakhs and a good job has been done. The department is already in negotiations with XLRI to impart specialised technical training of its officials to improve the standard of services,” Tiwary added.

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## **2. Postal requirements designed to help reduce bulk-mail waste**

By Rosa Ruiz

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In an effort to reduce costs and waste associated with undelivered bulk mail, the United States Postal Service will require businesses to update their bulk-mailing lists every 95 days, instead of every 185 days.

The postal service's Move Update Standard, which pertains to standard or first-class mail pieces, will take effect Nov. 23. Earlier this week, the Capitol City Postal Customer Council held a seminar for volume mailers who were told it's important to keep their lists updated to prevent forwarding, returning or disposal of mail.

Jane Wills, mailroom services coordinator for the Missouri Bankers Association, believes the new system will benefit her company.

“It will help us reduce undeliverable mail, get our information to the right people and save us time and expenses,” she said.

Jefferson City Postmaster Don Knoth said an estimated 9.7 billion pieces of undeliverable as addressed (UAA) mail are received every year by the postal service. In addition, \$1.9 billion is spent reducing and delivering that mail.

To help comply with the new standard, businesses will be required to update their lists with an approved method and send the pieces within 95 days of that update.

National Change of Address software provides address corrections to mailers, while Address Change Service (ACS) expands the mailer's accessibility to the national change-of-address list.

Each mailer uses a participant code to ship bulk mail, though there is a mechanism, the OneCode ACS-Intelligent Mail Barcode, that provides an electronic address correction notification without a participant code.

Another system, Fast Forward, matches names with addresses and compares them to a national database that is updated weekly. If there is a change, the new information will be placed on the envelope.

The regulation will not be used on alternative address formats, including mail that reads “Current Resident” or “Householder.”

Jill Huber, a customer service representative with the News Tribune's circulation department, explained some of the problems with UAA.

“Sometimes we get mail back because they (subscribers) receive their mail at a P.O. Box,” she said.

Because the department relies heavily on the postal service for subscriber mailings, it can get costly when returns result in losing the discounted bulk-mail rate.

A hot topic at Wednesday's seminar was the use of environmentally-friendly products and services.

Glenda Ayers, USPS account representative for the Jefferson City area, said there are a few simple “green” steps for businesses to consider.

To “Green Your List” means to ensure address quality to ensure the mail is sent to the targeted audience.

“If we start small, it can be efficient and cut down waste,” Ayers said.

Some tips to reduce UAA mail are to ensure zip codes are correct, to validate delivery points and to use the address change service.

Switching to post-consumer waste paper and chemical-free processing are sure-fire ways to begin and remain an eco-friendly business. Experimenting with less paper is also a step forward.

When dropping off bulk mailing, Knoth said, businesses must bring a check and statement if there is a balance.

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### **3. Controversy over N147m NIPOST contract**

By Kunle Oderemi and Jide Babalola

Published: Sunday, 24 Aug 2008

CONTROVERSY is still trailing a N147m approval granted the Post-Master General Ibrahim Mori Baba, by the Minister of State for Information and Communications for the purchase of operational vehicles.

Top officials are raising eyebrow on the procedure for the approval, alleging it breached due process.

Another contentious issue is if the minister has the power to approve any contract whose value is above N30m.

Besides, some officials were curious to know if there was any relationship between the approval and the grant the NIPOST management claimed to have received from the Universal Postal Union for the procurement of operational vehicles.

The deal was blown open following a notice placed by NIPOST for public bidding for contracts for the supply of the utility vehicles by reputable motor companies.

The minister of state was accused of ignoring official regulation that limits his power of approval to only contracts that were not above N30m.

Documents on the deal obtained by SUNDAY PUNCH indicated that the minister of state approved the purchase of the items on the very day that a proposal on them was sent to him by the PMG.

In the document, dated June 4, 2008, the PMG said the request became expedient because of the precarious state of existing NIPOST operational vehicles across the country.

The items included 15 Peugeot Partner [ordinary] at N2, 513,950, all valued at N37,707,250; one Mitsubishi Canter 4.5 tons truck [diesel] at N5,700,200; four Toyota Hilux Single Cabin Pick-up ordinary at N3,750,250 all valued at N15,000,000.

The PMG advocated direct purchase of the items so that the organisation could cut cost. Insiders were curious about the deal, alleging that it raised other fundamental issues, especially on due process.

The NIPOST chief said the organisation would save N66, 595,173.64 by direct purchase, as the cost would be N147,989,274.75 as against N214,584,444.39 through contract.

However, in a notice calling for bid for the vehicles, NIPOST management claimed that it had received a grant from the UPU to finance the cost of support to NIPOST for mail delivery.

It stated that the proceeds of the grant would be applied to eligible payments under the contract for mail delivery.

According to NIPOST, eligible bidders were to supply 15 mail delivery vans, while the date for the closing date for the submission of interest was June 27.

Other items were 200 Loncin Passion Lx motorcycle at N85,000 all totaling N17m; nine Peugeot 206; 100 blue Star bicycles at N12,650 valued at N1,265,000 and seven Toyota Hiace bus at N4,197,000 totalling N29,379,000.

There were claims that the request should have been taken to the Federal Executive Council to seek approval by the Minister of Information since it bordered on a capital project.

It was alleged that the spending from domiciliary account was supposed to receive the approval from the Presidency to the Minister of Finance and the CBN.

Besides, NIPOST was said to have spent over N45m to purchase cloned computers and refrigerators in the last one year.

Another allegation was that the ministry officials received N25m as estacodes for the meeting of Universal Postal Union held this August in Geneva, Switzerland.

The PMG said the management of NIPOST and the Ministry of Information and Communications did not do any thing wrong.

The ministry's Chief Press Secretary, Mr. Chris Nwokoro, told Sunday Punch that there was no need for the ministers to comment on the issue because NIPOST could give adequate explanations for whatever the parastatal did.

Speaking with our correspondent in his office on Wednesday, the PMG confirmed that on June 4, he wrote a memo and got immediate approval of the Minister of State for Information and Communications, Ahaji Ibrahim Nakande, and got a response the same day.

“It took me more than one month to convince him to allow us to buy the vehicles by direct purchase which costs much less than the rate for supply by contractors; we report to him because there is no board for NIPOST.

“All rules on due process for procurements were followed; N147m is the aggregate sum, no single item is above N40m and we even got some discount,” Baba stated.

He also asserted that NIPOST’s management had authority to disburse funds from the organisation’s domiciliary accounts, where it keeps funds generated from foreign transactions.

He argued that there was no need to take the expenditures to the FEC for approval.

According to Baba, Sections 52 and 53 of the Nigerian Postal Service Act empower him to make expenditures from NIPOST’s funds for the administration of the body, including the purchase of operational vehicles.

He said that about N16m and not N25m as being alleged in certain quarters was “justifiably expended” on the estacode and flight tickets of 24 NIPOST and Ministry of Information officials, who represented Nigeria at the global conference of the UPU in Geneva a few weeks ago.

“The entire amount was taken from the domiciliary account and we do not need approvals from the Central Bank or the Presidency to do that.

“I spent 25 days in Geneva for the UPU conference, working from 8am to 6pm everyday, and we had 24 officials, the same number as Algeria, while South Africa had 50 and Congo had 20 representatives. We went for serious business, not a jamboree,” Baba said.

Arguing that he only approved the procurement of computers from a respectable Nigerian firm (Zinox), he said that it was mischievous for anyone to say that he bought cloned computers for NIPOST.

He denied the allegations that he was behind the delay in settlement of NIPOST retirees’ benefits.

Baba explained that the miscalculation of some retirees’ benefits at the Bureau of Public Service Reforms caused the delay, adding that now that correct estimates had been forwarded to the office of the Accountant-General, the retirees’ benefits would soon be paid.

#### **4. The best ways to get your stuff to college**

Kathleen Pender

Sunday, August 24, 2008

Students who must fly to college are finding it harder than ever to transport their stuff.

Most airlines have added or raised fees on checked baggage and shipping companies have added fuel surcharges to package deliveries.

Packing for school "was so much more stressful than it was before," says Andrew Morgenthaler of San Mateo, who flew to the East Coast on Wednesday to attend his second year at Tufts University. When he flew home in May, he paid nothing to check two bags.

Flying on United Airlines last week, he had to pay \$15 for his first piece of checked luggage and \$25 for his second bag. Going over 50 pounds per bag would have cost an additional \$125 per piece, so he had to pack, repack and carefully weigh his luggage. "They're really anal about the weight," he warns.

A third checked bag would have cost an additional \$125, so Morgenthaler left his wilderness backpack, sleeping bag and other gear at home. His mom and dad can bring them when they come for parents' weekend, but if he needs anything before that, "I'll have to look into shipping," he says.

Airline baggage fees and policies vary widely and change frequently, so students should carefully check with their carrier before leaving. Most airlines impose steep charges, in addition to regular fees, on bags that exceed their size and weight limits.

Rule of thumb: It's usually best to carry on as much as possible, check two regular-size bags (even with the new fees) and ship everything else.

Shipping will also cost more this year because most commercial shipping companies impose fuel surcharges, which vary by month.

"To send something by air, it's about a 34 percent surcharge; on ground it's about 10 percent," says Mark Taylor, chief logistics officer for RedRoller.com, a subscription service that lets frequent shippers compare costs among various carriers.

The cheapest way to ship books, CDs and other printed or recorded material is by Media Mail from the U.S. Postal Service, Taylor says.

A good option for other small, heavy items is a flat-rate box from the postal service. They come in three sizes and can be shipped anywhere in the country, regardless of weight, for \$9.80 or \$12.95.

Compare rates

For bigger packages, get rate quotes by checking Web sites.

I compared the cost of shipping a 50-pound, suitcase-size box by ground from San Francisco to Boston College using FedEx, UPS, DHL and the Postal Service. The lowest prices ranged from about \$42 through FedEx to \$61 via UPS.

You can often get a lower rate from commercial carriers if you open an account, Taylor says. It might take a day or two to get an account number, so don't wait until the last minute.

Many associations offer discounts if you use certain shippers. For example, you can get a 5 percent discount at the UPS Store with a AAA card.

Taylor says students will usually get the lowest rate if they can ship through a parent's company at the corporate rate, then reimburse the company.

Otherwise, it's cheapest to pack your own box (it should be less than 3 cubic feet), pay online, print a shipping label and take it to the nearest drop-off location. Most Walgreens locations now accept DHL shipments, Taylor says.  
Advice from students

Veteran student travelers recommend packing light and buying what you need in your college town.

"I wish I had known that stores like Bed, Bath & Beyond let you order from home and pick up your things" at a store near school, says Emma Bushnell of Petaluma, who also attends Tufts.

Emily Campo, who attends University of Miami, says, "Don't bring too many sweatshirts because you're going to buy (and get) school apparel."

Students traveling with musical instruments should check airline policy. New York University student Joshua Rowley says that when he flew east last fall, JetBlue let him carry on his guitar, but when he flew home on the same airline in May, he could not. Fortunately, he was able to leave it with his aunt, who had brought him to the airport.

JetBlue spokeswoman Alison Eshelman says that, "Without knowing the specifics, I can't say why that happened. But we haven't changed our policy on musical instruments. We do let customers carry on instruments if they fit within the overhead bin requirements. If they don't, they are required to either check it or, if they wish, purchase a seat."

Spencer Blank, who attended Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., the past two years, says, "Ship your stuff the cheapest way a week or two before, then it'll be there when you get there."

Over the summer, pay for a storage space or split one with friends. His first summer, Blank says he left his belongings with various people but "a lot of things got lost in the shuffle." and a rug he left in a friend's garage ended up with maggots.

Getting your stuff to college

-- If you are flying:

Check your carrier's baggage policies and fees.

For domestic flights booked recently, American Airlines, United Airlines and US Airways charge \$15 for the first checked bag and Northwest Airlines will do so after Thursday.

Most major airlines charge \$25 for a second checked bag. Delta, which has no fee for the first bag, charges \$50 for a second bag.

A third bag will usually run you \$75 to \$125.

Southwest Airlines charges nothing for the first two bags and \$25 for a third.

Most airlines charge additional fees for bags that are heavier than 50 pounds or bigger than 62 linear inches (length plus width plus height).

Most airlines have cut or eliminate fees for high-status frequent fliers or first-class customers.

-- If you are shipping:

For books and CDs, use Media Mail from the U.S. Postal Service.

For other small, heavy items, a flat-rate box from the post office can be a good deal.

For bigger packages, ship from your parent's company and reimburse the company, if possible.

If not, sign up for an account with major shippers online and compare rates using an account number. Pay online, print a label and take your box to the nearest drop-off location.

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