

POSTAL NEWS

No. 21/011

**Formulated by UNI-Japan Post in cooperation with UNI-Apro,
ASPEK Indonesia and SPPI**

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1. Book traces story of India's postal system

Press Trust Of India

Posted on Feb 14, 2011 at 05:14pm IST

New Delhi: In the early 17th century, long before the times of email and mobile phones, pigeons, barefoot runners and bullock carts were used to carry messages between one part of India to another. The postman cycle of the early 1800s, with its large front tyre, post boxes in all sizes and shapes collected from all over the country as well as the antique stamp printing presses can now be seen in photographs in a new book.

The coffee table book 'Pigeons to Post' by Steve Borgia, released at the ongoing world philatelic exhibition 'Indipex 2011' in the national capital traces the story of the origin and the evolution India's postal history over a period of nearly two thousand years. Borgia travelled across India and the world to gather every bit of collectibles that would piece together the history of the country's postal history. Photographs of old postoffices, dilapidated post boxes dating back several hundred years, stamp printing presses that are now antiquated, he has it all. "Initially I wanted to display all the items I collected in a museum but the postal department stressed on the need for a book. The research and sourcing for the book has been going on for the past 15 years," Borgia told PTI during the inauguration of Indipex.

Since there was very less material available on the mail-runners, Borgia had to take help from British archives, retired post masters and the books written by post master generals before 1947. "The mail-runner in earlier times not only carried people's messages but they also carried their emotions and hopes. They used to write and read out letters for people. They had a simple lifestyles compared to their British bosses and were the real backbone of the postal system," says Borgia. Clippings from the repositories of the London Mail, illustrations from the Global Post and etchings from the French and English artists as well as data and pictures sourced from the British and Delhi postal archives and museum of the colonial days helped piece the book together. One of the highlights of the book according to the author is the section on line drawings on the mail runners fighting natural calamities like wild animals and flooded rivers for delivering the mails in time.

Book traces story of India's postal system

Borgia feels the postal department is facing competition from new technology in the times of Internet and it is trying hard to stay in the hunt. "Postal department is doing a lot of things other than just delivering letters. Infact, they have to do more than what they can to stay relevant today. It is a big challenge for them," he says. The 51-year-old author, who also runs a chain of hotels in South India, has created small museums inside his hotels to display his various collections. "I acquired an antique stamp printing press from Sri Lanka and plan to display it in my museum," he says.

Borgia says he plans to tie up with school libraries so that children can know about the history of mail runners. After the book, he says he plans to set up a postal museum.

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2. Postal Services Go Mobile With Escher's Distributed Solution

BOSTON, February 14, 2011 /PRNewswire/ --

- 'Mobile for Retail' a Reality for the First Time and Helps Posts Take Their Services to New Markets

Global postal counter automation expert Escher Group has launched a mobile solution that takes services traditionally found in post offices and delivers them in new locations - in shops, hotels or directly to the customer's doorstep.

MobileRiposte(TM) is so versatile and easy to use that it promises to open new markets for postal operators and heralds a new future for the postman: as a provider of a broader range of products and services rather than simply a deliverer of mail.

Whilst consumers have become increasingly used to interacting with postal organizations through mobile devices - for example, signing for deliveries on handheld track-and-trace devices or buying train tickets onboard using mobile credit card terminals - many devices are specific to a single purpose or cumbersome when interacting with back-office systems.

In contrast, by employing the intuitive Windows Mobile operating system and by capturing data in a way that integrates seamlessly with the organization's back-office, Escher's MobileRiposte(TM) enables a full range of services to be delivered from a single handheld device with the same security and reliability of that achieved in post office branch offices.

MobileRiposte(TM) helps post offices expand their services into new markets including retailers and other business premises; offering their customers a wider choice of locations to acquire services traditionally provided only in the post office - including payments, phone top-ups, foreign exchange and tickets.

For example, with MobileRiposte(TM), post offices can provide hotels with a complete standalone foreign currency application, whereby hotels offer guests currency exchange at the prevailing rate at the time the transaction occurs - instead of using less accurate, fixed daily rates. This allows the post office to compete more effectively with banks and high street currency exchanges and gives hotels a whole new line of business.

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3. The postal services bill affects us all, your lordships

This overlooked bill proposes to sell off Royal Mail, devastating a good public service. The House of Lords must handle with care

Wednesday 16 February 2011 17.34 GMT

Post Office 'The government has said that there will be no more post office closure programmes. But de facto there will be as a result of this bill.' Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty Images

In the welter of activity unleashed by the coalition government the postal services bill has been under-observed by those who will be affected by it. That's all of us in the UK.

This bill has its second reading in the House of Lords on Wednesday – the start of examination and debate there on its contents. To recap, this is the bill that will sell off Royal Mail – a process inevitably referred to in the bill as "restructuring" – in order to introduce private capital and expertise to the running of Royal Mail. The bill also transfers the pension fund to the government, and moves oversight of the Post Office Ltd from Postcomm to Ofcom. There will be a bit of employee ownership of Royal Mail and Co-operatives UK is currently engaged by the government to look at models of mutualising the Post Office.

How should their lordships tackle this bill? They should be aware first that it is a plan to sell off a huge part of the public realm on the grounds that it is unaffordable. If implemented, it will devastate the localised and national postal delivery service that, overwhelmingly, the British people approve of. They will note that there is no vision in the bill of what the future might look like for this trusted and national service if it were properly managed in the national interest.

They should bear in mind at all times that this bill is not the fruit of a set of uniquely British problems that must be addressed on the grounds that the postal kitty is empty. That is, of course, how its being presented – and how it was presented by Lord Mandelson when the last government tried to privatise Royal Mail. But the truth is that this bill is part of the onward march of the liberalisation of markets that has precious little to do with the quality of service offered, or the wishes of national populations.

Their lordships may not like the idea that when the bill goes into committee they should be thinking philosophically, but looming in the background to this bill is the world of global capital and the curious fact that competition, heavily backed by European competition law, is actually a tussle between a few global communication firms who have their eyes on the postal systems of all countries.

This is a battleground, your lordships, between the idea and the reality of public services, and the tenets of market economics, which tell us that everything has a monetary value and must make a profit. Crucially, a profit for shareholders and directors, not we the public.

In fact, the efficiency and profitability of Royal Mail is pretty good. (And for customers the service is very good, based as it is on a universal service obligation, which this bill makes clear is not now sacrosanct). Royal Mail, as it exists now, makes a profit, it has shed thousands of jobs and, with the co-operation of the Communications Workers Union (CWU), it has a business transformation agreement, set out last year. It is now in the first stable period for a decade with modernisation having taken place.

Which brings us to the future of the Post Office. The government has said that there will be no more closure programmes. But de facto there will be as a result of this bill. Post offices get around 30% of their revenue (and a lot of services) from Royal Mail. This will go with break-up.

The government says that the Post Office will be mutualised. This is not a bad idea – but a third of post offices have declining revenues and mutualising them will be of little comfort to communities that lose their local post offices to the failure of successive governments to come up with a decent business vision for our post office network.

And maybe, as the bill goes through the Lords, their lordships might go to the library and look up the research paper from UNI Post and Logistics, a union-backed European research body, which looked at the results of the kind of liberalising bill they are debating on Wednesday, and found that, as a result of just these kind of measures, postal jobs were lost, part-time work increased, conditions of employment worsened, skills lessened and greater impoverishment resulted for hundreds of thousands of workers. Within the resulting organisations, innovation plummeted and competition – true competition – never materialised.

Oh, and none of the customers of these once public services seems to have got a better deal.

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4. Parcel Delivery Service Warns of Postal Disruption amid Royal Mail Strike Rumours

WEBWIRE – Tuesday, February 15, 2011

The owners of the UK's leading parcel delivery service, Parcel2Go, have warned customers that with the possibility of more postal strikes on the way, any urgent parcels or important documents should be sent via another method in order to guarantee safe delivery.

Post Office workers will be balloted between February 18 and March 4 on whether to strike over pay. The rate of pay for Crown Post Office workers has been frozen for the second year running, which has brought about the latest period of unrest, and prompted the Communications Workers Union to speak out ahead of the ballot.

Consumers will no doubt remember a similar event in 2007 where a dispute over pay at the Crown Post Office Network led to strike action, causing disruption to the Royal Mail delivery network. What it means for customers is that parcels and letters could end up being delayed as the backlog of mail builds up. Online parcel delivery service Parcel2Go has urged people to consider organising a courier delivery instead, in order to make sure their important delivery is made on time.

Les Yates at Parcel2Go said: "The last time strike action threatened to delay deliveries it was during the crucial period in the run up to Christmas in 2009. Disruption this time around wouldn't lead to quite as many urgent deliveries such as Christmas gifts being delayed, but there are still plenty of customers that would be inconvenienced.

"Businesses send confidential documents and other urgent materials every day, and a delay or lost shipment could be catastrophic for that business' reputation and relationship with its clients and partners.

Les added: "By using a courier service, individuals and businesses can make sure they receive a quick and secure delivery service from one of the world's leading parcel delivery experts. Here at Parcel2Go that has been our aim for more than 20 years - helping match people with the parcel delivery services that they require, at a great price."

Parcel2Go is the UK's leading courier service, helping customers to arrange collections and deliveries with international parcel delivery experts such as FedEx, UPS and DHL amongst others. With an easy to follow online quotation and ordering process, many people who have had concerns about courier deliveries in the past have been pleasantly surprised with the ease and convenience of ordering a delivery online with Parcel2Go.com.

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