

POSTAL NEWS

No. 24/2008

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

1. Postal saving schemes see dip in collection . March 4, 2008.
2. Dutch aim for postal liberalisation on July 1. March 4, 2008.
3. New Postal Package. March 4, 2008.
4. Inmates to fix postal service transmissions. March 3, 2008.
5. Postal Service Celebrates National Consumer Protection Week. March 3, 2008.
6. CWU Calls For Minimum Postal Wage In UK. March 3, 2008.
7. Postal possibilities. March 3, 2008.

1. Postal saving schemes see dip in collection

New Delhi, March 4 The once popular postal saving schemes seem to be losing out to other investment instruments prompting the Finance Minister to extend income-tax benefits to some more of these schemes as part of the Budget proposals. Almost all the various schemes offered by the postal department have seen decline in collection over the past two years.

For instance, the deposits in the National Savings Scheme have fallen from Rs 571 crore in 2004-05 to Rs 317 crore in 2006-07. The Senior Citizens Savings Scheme is down from Rs 8,818 crore to Rs 7,238 crore during the corresponding period.

The department has, however, seen the biggest erosion of deposits from its Monthly Income schemes which have decreased by almost 50 per cent from Rs 48,691 crore in 2004-05 to Rs 20,812 crore. Only the Public Provident Fund scheme has seen a rise in collection from Rs 3,112 crore to Rs 3,797 crore. Even the Kisan Vikas Patra has seen a decline by Rs 5,781 crore.

Government officials said that a number of steps have been taken to popularise these schemes in the light of competition from the private financial sector, including a media campaign and providing training to agencies involved in mobilising collection in Small Savings Schemes.

The Department of Post has also increased the maximum deposit ceiling of Rs 3 lakh and Rs 6 lakh under the monthly income account to Rs 4.5 lakh and Rs 9 lakh for single and joint account, respectively.

The restriction on opening of more than one account in a month under the Senior Citizens Savings Scheme has been removed.

Bonus at the rate of 5 per cent on the deposits made under the post office monthly income account scheme has been reintroduced. .

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2. New Postal Package

(Story Updated: Mar 4, 2008 at 7:33 AM MST)

BILLINGS - Shipping packaged to military personnel overseas can be very expensive, but U.S. Postal Officials think they've found a solution.

The post office has started selling a flat-rate box that costs the same regardless of its weight. Officials say the new box is 50% larger than the older ones. The cost of the new box is \$13.00, but if it's shipped to a military establishment the price drops to \$11.00.

One postal official says it's all about the troops. "It's just another message to our troops that we are thinking about them, we support them, and we love them," said U.S.P.S.'s Lisa Blomquist.

A select number of boxes online and at military post offices will also carry a special "We Support You" message underneath the U.S. Postal Service brand.

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3. Dutch aim for postal liberalisation on July 1

Tue Mar 4, 2008 3:29am EST

AMSTERDAM, March 4 (Reuters) - The Dutch government hopes the postponed liberalisation of the mail market, originally due in January, will come into force on July 1 depending on developments in Germany and Dutch labour negotiations.

Dutch Junior Economy Minister Frank Heemskerk said in a letter to parliament published late on Monday he hoped to have a clearer view on both matters by the middle of April.

"I hope it can then be concluded, taking into account the necessary caution, that it remains possible for the new postal law to come into effect on July 1, 2008," he said.

The Netherlands decided in December to postpone the full opening of its mail market partly because of fears that a German minimum wage for postal workers impedes competition there after Deutsche Post (DPWGn.DE: Quote, Profile, Research) lost its remaining monopoly on Jan. 1.

Dominant Dutch mail company TNT (TNT.AS: Quote, Profile, Research) had hoped to expand in Germany but says it cannot compete effectively with Deutsche Post because the minimum wage per hour is too high.

TNT has sued the German state at a court in Berlin and Heemskerk said he would report back to parliament on an expected ruling in early April after a hearing on March 7.

He also noted Dutch postal companies were due to hold talks with workers in March about labour conditions in the Netherlands and said he would follow these talks closely.

The FNV trade union says the Netherlands should only open its postal market to full competition when all workers get minimum wages and have labour contracts.

TNT's workers have employment contracts, but rivals privately-owned Sandd and Deutsche Post's Dutch unit Selekt Mail usually do not offer contracts and pay postal workers by the number of items delivered.

Rabo Securities said in a note it did not expect the government would meet the July 1 date as the outcome of the German court case was highly uncertain and it doubted whether Dutch unions would reach a deal in time.

"From sources in the market, we understand that negotiations are progressing slowly. Especially the challengers Sandd and SelektMail are unwilling to sign a collective labour agreement, as long as there is no clarity on the liberalisation," it said.

TNT has the remaining monopoly for letters up to 50 grammes in the Netherlands, estimated to be worth about 1 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) in 2007.

Shares in TNT were flat at 25.85 euros at 0809 GMT compared with a 0.6 percent firmer DJ Stoxx industrials index . (Reporting by Emma Thomasson; Editing by David Holmes)

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March 3, 2008

4. Inmates to fix postal service transmissions

PENDLETON, Ind. -- Indiana inmates will repair transmissions used on postal vehicles under a contract the state has signed, officials said.

Inmates at the Pendleton Correctional Facility will repair the transmissions in a contract with Alabama-based Ready-Built Transmission.

Only inmates with more than three years left on their sentences and who have shown good conduct will work on the transmissions, said prison spokesman Tim Horan.

The prison does not want to train workers only to have them leave in a few months, he said.

Inmates will work a maximum of 20 hours a week. Two four-hour shifts will take place each day, Horan said.

"What they learn here they can take with them when they re-enter society and begin looking for meaningful employment that will steer them away from a criminal lifestyle," Indiana Department of Correction Commissioner J. David Donahue said in a statement.

Skilled workers will make \$1.25 an hour, semiskilled workers will make \$1 per hour and unskilled workers will make 75 cents per hour, Horan said. Inmates will repair parts for post office vehicles across the nation, said Jon Klassen, a trainer and production manager with Ready-Built Transmission. More than 150 inmates have started working at the transmission plant. The goal is to have 300 inmates working to dismantle broken transmissions and reform them into functional parts, Horan said. Prison officials are planning a grand opening ceremony after initial training and preparation is over, Horan said. They have not set a date. The transmission plant is replacing the Food Industry Plant, which closed in 2007 after experiencing several years of revenue losses, according to a news release.

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5. Postal Service Celebrates National Consumer Protection Week

WEBWIRE – Monday, March 03, 2008

Postal Officials Warn Consumers About “Fake Checks,” Identity Theft

WASHINGTON, DC — Postal Service executives are marking National Consumer Protection Week by warning consumers against fake check scams and providing tips to prevent identity theft.

National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW), set for March 2-8, is a week of activities sponsored primarily by the Federal Trade Commission to draw attention to fake check scams and other threats to consumers. The Postal Service and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service are playing an important role by drawing attention to the continuing consumer problem of fraudulent checks and money orders and building on a national outreach effort to protect against identity theft.

Delores J. Killette, vice president and consumer advocate for the Postal Service, and Alexander Lazaroff, chief postal inspector of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, are leading the Postal Service effort this week to provide consumers with valuable information about protecting their assets from fraudulent schemes and tips to keep their personal information safe.

Last month, the Postal Service delivered an important message from Postmaster General John Potter to every household in America, advising Americans to protect against identity theft. A recent Federal Trade Commission survey on identity theft determined that only 2 percent of all victims reported that the theft was connected to the mail.

The Postal Service teamed up with the FTC to provide tips and tools to help Americans protect their identities and information on actions they can take if they become victims of identity theft. The FTC brochure, “Deter. Detect. Defend. Fighting Back Against Identity Theft,” was included in the mailing.

Postal Service representatives across the country also are educating consumers by distributing DVDs and brochures warning against fraudulent financial schemes, as well as by hosting information sessions and events.

“In today’s economy it is more important than ever that we partner with our customers to give them tools to avoid losing their hard-earned money to fake check scams,” Killette said.

A global fraud crackdown began in January 2007. Since then, postal inspectors and their global law enforcement partners have seized more than 600,000 fake checks with a value of about \$2.5 billion. In October 2007, the Postal Inspection Service partnered with a coalition of 20 businesses, financial entities and consumer advocacy groups to launch the www.FakeChecks.org website to educate consumers about those and other scams.

“Postal inspectors are still hearing stories from Americans approached over the Internet or through the mail by people who want them to believe it’s okay to deposit a check and wire all or part of the money away,” said Lazaroff. “We are using National Consumer Protection Week to once again warn consumers that, if they fall for a fake check scam, they will not get that money back.”

Postal officials say consumers are still being targeted for fake check scams but can take steps to protect their assets. The message is clear: The best way for consumers to protect themselves is to learn how to avoid such scams as foreign business offers, sudden riches, work-at-home schemes; love losses; overpayments and rental schemes.

Tips to avoid becoming a fraud victim:

- * Use common sense.
- * Take your time when responding to offers.
- * Educate yourself about fraud.
- * Know whom you are dealing with.
- * Protect your personal information.
- * Be skeptical of any offer that sounds too good to be true.

“The old adage still holds true: If someone offers you a deal that sounds too good to be true, it probably is,”

Killette said.

The FakeChecks.org website serves as the primary vehicle to learn about check fraud schemes so that visitors of the site don’t become victims. A fraud complaint can be filed on the site as well. Remember, fake check scams are a fast-growing fraud that could ruin your financial investment and cost you thousands of dollars.

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6. CWU Calls For Minimum Postal Wage In UK

03 March 2008 by Steve Lawson - © Hellmail.co.uk

As we reported last week, the CWU have recommended to reject Royal Mail's plan to extend the retirement age for postal workers from 60 to 65, change the way final pensions are calculated and close the scheme to new entrants. The press today have focused on the possibility of further industrial action at Royal Mail.

A national briefing attended by 380 CWU activists last week, emphasised the growing discontent over pensions and the urgent need for a review of postal reform.

CWU leader Billy Hayes said: "If we simply call for the restoration of the Royal Mail monopoly, that's not feasible in the current political climate, but there is a potential for progress."

"Postcomm reform will be in our submission. It must be made more democratic."

However, on the subject of minimum pay, Hayes said:

"The leader of the German postal union got this commitment from Germany's Tory government. In terms of principle, a minimum for the sector is absolutely the right point and we're completely in favour of it."

Postal Liberalisation is putting pressure on European countries to introduce a minimum wage to level out the playing field for postal operators looking to compete in other EU states.

Royal Mail postal workers had voted in favour of the modernisation of Royal Mail and a truce to strike action last year was only achieved by splitting the issue of pay from the ongoing row over pensions but Royal Mail recently announced it's intention to push through pension reform for April 1st this year which has angered postal workers.

Strike action has not been ruled out although the results of a CWU ballot on the future of pensions will not be announced until days before the revised pension arrangement comes into force, leaving the CWU little time to decide what action it will take.

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7. Postal possibilities

By JO DEE BLACK
Tribune Business Editor(March 3, 2008)

Kristi Paul reports to work at 4 a.m., or sometimes at midnight. Her job duties include a lot of physical labor and by the end of her shift, there's plenty of dirt under her fingernails. And she loves it.

Since June, Paul's been a mail processing clerk at the United States Postal Service's mail processing center in Great Falls.

"The salary is good, there's job security and stability and great benefits," said the 36-year-old single mother of two. "I know I can support my family with this job and that's a great feeling."

Right now others interested in careers with the nation's mail carrier have the chance to apply with the USPS. Or at least register to take a test to qualify to apply for openings.

Registration is being accepted for the USPS Battery 473 Exam. The test was last offered in Montana three years ago.

The exam tests for skills such as reading well and quickly, the ability to memorize sequences of numbers and to differentiate between similar addresses, said Jacque Stingley, customer relations coordinator for the Great Falls Post Office.

Old Battery 473 Exams are available for no charge at public libraries.

"Some people tell me they did better the second time they took the exam because they knew what to expect and I think looking at old tests could be useful," Stingley said.

She warns people to stay away from offers of courses that claim to certify people to apply for USPS jobs.

"There are a lot of scams out there," Stingley said.

The last time the exam was offered in this area, about 1,700 registered to take it and half of those showed up on the test date. About half of the people who took the test received passing scores.

"Applicants are then placed on a hiring roster according to their score, with the highest scores considered first," said Stingley.

Paul said in addition to a good income, she enjoys the collaboration of her co-workers.

"We receive mail and it needs to be dispatched by 4:30 a.m. to get it out to the carriers on time," Paul said. "We all work together to make that happen. It's a real team effort."

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