

HOW FAST IS THE SPEED POST?

The postal department introduced the so-called speed post service with much fanfare. More than a customer service, it was meant to stop the courier companies eating into the business of the department. The speed post is supposed to be safe, economical and more than all fast. It promises delivery of articles within the prescribed time. But if the promise is not kept, do you have any against the department?

Despite a sea change in the communication system, the century old Indian Post Offices Act, 1898 remains untouched. It protects the department officials against any loss, misdelivery, delay or damage. What more this applies even to a specialized service like speed post wherein the consumer is charged extra fee. You have to prove that there was some fraud or willful act on the part of the officials. This is like asking an elephant to pass through the eye of a needle.

There is nothing much a consumer can do if the article, be it stone, paper or gold, is lost in the process. The maximum compensation payable is Rs 100. That is what the national commission has to say to Keltron Projectors Limited (KPL) who had claimed a damage of Rs 29,987. In this case the company had dispatched an equipment to Chandigarh from Thiruvananthapuram by speed post. Since the equipment was damaged, it was not accepted.

The district forum allowed the complaint and awarded a compensation of Rs 18,397. This was challenged in the state commission. The postal Department argued that as per the circular issued by Government of India, Ministry of Communications, the maximum compensation payable is Rs 200 only. Besides, the goods were not packed in the presence of the postal officials. Hence compensation was not payable.

Though the Commission agreed to the views of the postal department, it came to the conclusion that there was no willful act of negligence or act of fraud. It directed them to pay a compensation of Rs 10,000. But when the matter came up before the National Commission, it took a different view. It said since there was negligence or fraud, compensation more than Rs 100 could not be awarded. However it directed the postal department to pay Rs 5,000 towards costs.
