

## Vendors taking over space in front of post offices pose threat

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CHENNAI: Staff of India Post are up in arms against hawkers and shopkeepers encroaching upon the space in front of most post offices in the city. Postmaster general Merwin Alexander said that despite writing to the Chennai Corporation, internal security department of the city police and the highways department, little had been done. He said post offices were the first target of attack during any anti-government protest.

"People have set up sugar cane juice stalls on the pavement outside the Anna Road post office, while one man has been selling garments. These 'shops' are an eyesore and a security risk. It is baffling that the authorities concerned cannot remove them," he said.

On the pavement in front of the T Nagar post office, Alexander said, hawkers had set up shop next to an India Post ATM kiosk. "The setting up of an India Post ATM is an ambitious project but how do we deal with hawkers and vendors putting up shops there?"

He said there had been blasts in a couple of post offices in Mylapore during the peak of the Sri Lankan crisis. "The Tambaram post office is an eye sore and the authorities, including the traffic police, have turned a blind eye for reasons best known to them. There are fruit vendors, a share autorickshaw stand and a tempo stand making it difficult for customers to enter the post office."

He said the highways department was informed of the encroachments but in vain. Only a coordinated effort in dealing with the situation with an iron hand would help clear the areas, he said. In some cases, vendors leave behind their entire stock which could pose a risk to the post office concerned if it catches fire. The Anna Road post office has a Philatelic Bureau with rare stamps.