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*Thank You*

# Bangladesh Overprints

by Dr. Allen C. Peyser

In 1971 the Asian subcontinent erupted into a state of chaos and war when East Pakistan revolted against Pakistan and became Bangladesh. As normally happens in these times, communications were disrupted, including the postal system.

We in modern times have become accustomed to the use of postage stamps to pay for the carriage of the mail. Since Bangladesh did not yet have its own stamps, existing Pakistani stamps were overprinted for use by the new country. The overprinting was done by government offices, banks, large commercial firms, and stamp dealers. In fact, anyone who had Pakistani stamps could overprint them. This use of overprinted Pakistani stamps was authorized from December 20, 1971 until April 30, 1973, when the first set of Bangladesh definitives was issued. The initial post office announcement appeared December 19, 1971:

Arrangements are being made to get the Bangladesh postage stamps printed. But as it will take some time, it has been decided that rubber stamps bearing the word "Bangladesh" should be prepared locally and impressed on the existing stock of stamps before they are put on sale. The rubber-stamps should contain the words "Bangladesh" both in Bengali and English in small type.<sup>1</sup>

I obtained some of these overprinted stamps and became intrigued with them. I located a dealer in New York who was selling the stamps and purchased the start of a substantial collection from him. The dealer had acquired his material from contacts in East Pakistan, and had mint stamps that were overprinted as well as covers that had gone through international mail.

He had identified 134 different overprints, but as I examined the covers, another thirteen types came to light. The overprints were in English, Bengali, or a combination of both, and had been created by handstamps as well as by direct printing. The latter types were used by the military (Mukti Fouze) and apparently were printed in London. The handstamps were applied variously before the stamps were affixed to the mail, after they were affixed, or by the receiving post office on their arrival.<sup>2</sup>

In his 1972–74 study of Bangladesh philately, *Bangla Desh: eine philatelistische Studie (und) Ergänzungen zur Bangla Desh Studie*,<sup>3</sup> collector and author Wolfgang Tor-



First day of exchange of mail from Jessore to Calcutta, December 21, 1971.

now prepared extensive lists of the known overprints. These he divided into groups: Group A (265 examples), Group B (105), Group C (291), Group D (100), Group E (118), Group F (41), Group G (16), and Group S (85). In his 1993 publication, *Bangladesh Provisional Overprints*, Max Smith built on this earlier research, cross-referencing his own information with Tornow's. Smith, however, devised a simpler classification system based on identifying the overprints as belonging to one of four language categories:<sup>4</sup>

- A. Bengali and English
  - A1. Bengali above English
  - A2. English above Bengali
- B. English alone
- C. Bengali alone

The overprints can be found within triangles, circles, and squares, as well as a straight-line imprint. Although normally intended to be applied to a single stamp, overprints that cover two stamps are known. The colors of the overprints include blue, red, black, and purple.

It seems that the mail was carried by any means available, including the Boy Scouts and the military (both the rebel army and their allies, the Indian Army). The international mail appears to have been gathered in Dacca and then forwarded in bulk to Calcutta, India where it entered the international mailstream. At this time Bangladesh was not a signer of the UPU agreement and so could not by itself



Carried by Mukti Fouze.



Carried by Boy Scouts.



First day of mail exchange Bangladesh to India, December 21, 1971.



Carried by Indian Parachute Brigade.



Carried by Mukti Fouze from Mongla River Port, December 10, 1971, the date the port was liberated by the Army.



Cover carried by Mukti Fouze with plea for "Indian Post Offices" to forward.



Bangladesh Scott 1 (issued July 29, 1971; Map of Bangladesh), used on military cover FPO 34, October 28, 1971. Backstamped at Central Base P.O. October 29, 1971.

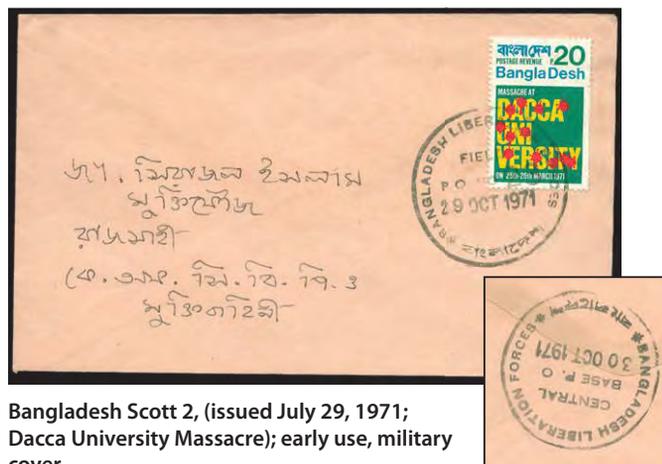




Censored cover carried by Indian Brigade and Boy Scouts.



Military cover, FPO 15, dated December 7, 1971; Army provisional overprint.



Bangladesh Scott 2, (issued July 29, 1971; Dacca University Massacre); early use, military cover.



Type 132, Jessore provisional overprint; note inverted "D" on right-hand stamp (per J.F. Droucette Dias numbering system, the Bombay Philatelic Company).

forward international mail. Thus, the Bangladesh post office depended on the Indian postal system to handle the international mail.

A wide range of forgeries exist to plague the collector. Smith addresses this issue in detail in a 1993 article in *India Post*.<sup>5</sup> He points out that the most obvious forgery is one with a date earlier than December 20, 1971 or later than April 30, 1973, when use of handstamped adhesive stamps was prohibited. (Although he notes that handstamp postal stationery items could still be used.) Also, the cancel must be from a location in the former East Pakistan.

Color can be another giveaway. Smith writes that "only a very few offices used red ink, and none used green, mid-blue or brownish black." Another major indicator observed

by Smith is that although the same handstamp design was sometimes used by several post offices, "small differences exist even the commonest handstamps.... Several examples of an identical handstamp on covers from places more than a few miles apart are sure signs of forgery." In addition, although (as noted above) the overprint was to be applied before the stamps were, a faint handstamp impression can be difficult to identify as genuine or forged.

Overall, this can be a challenging but satisfying philatelic area for the collector to explore.

[Expanded stamp album pages for this article can be found at [www.stamps.org/AP-Album](http://www.stamps.org/AP-Album).]

#### Endnotes

1. Siddique Mahmudur Rahman, *Bangladesh Stamps and Postal History* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Institute of Philatelic Studies, 1988), page 24.
2. Max Smith, *Bangladesh Provisional Overprints* (Bradford, U.K.: India Study Circle for Philately, 1994). See also, *Head Offices of Bagladesh*, bound photocopy of a 19-part series of articles by Smith that appeared in *India Post*, under the title "Head Offices of Bangladesh" (1989–1993).
3. Wolfgang Tornow, *Bangla Desh: eine philatelistische Studie (und) Ergänzungen zur Bangla Desh Studie* (Geesthacht, [West Germany]: W. Tornow, 1972–1974).
4. Max Smith, *Bangladesh Provision of Overprints*, *op cit*.
5. Max Smith, "Forged Bangladesh Overprints," *India Post*, Vol. 27, Whole No. 118 (Oct/Dec 1993): 139–144.

#### The Author

**D**r. Allen C. Peyser has been a stamp collector since the 1930s. He is a life member of the APS who currently collects Israel and forerunners, Puerto Rico, and Russia.