

A study of the accepted stamps, their clandestine varieties, and the unrecognised labels

The Purpose

The storyline of this exhibit makes use of postage stamps, and contemporaneous postal artefact to present the Format issues of Bangladesh, which includes the first definitive in eight different denominations, termed the “Independence Issue” of 29 July 1971. It will also show the “Bangladesh Liberated” issue of three denominations released on 20 December 1971. This will form the basis of the exhibit. The rest shall present a study of the clandestine “Bangladesh Liberated” issues, and the so-called second definitive issue released in the philatelic market in February 1972, but never officially recognised. For the lack of any contemporaneous field post office covers, the propaganda aspect of the Format Issues is not shown here.

Background

In 1971, the Format International Security Printers was commissioned by E E Oatway, a stamp dealer, to print the first issue for Bangladesh. Oatway was asked to issue, distribute, and sell the stamps by John Stonehouse, MP. This was done with intent to publicise the plight of the people of Bangladesh and their fight for liberation from Pakistan. At first, many rejected the new issue but this view changed on December 16 1971 when victory was achieved in the nine-month long liberation war. These stamps of eight denominations were eventually granted postal status on 20 December 1971.

The "Bangladesh Liberated" overprint issue of 20 December 1971 is also shrouded in mystery. When Stonehouse brought the original first issue in Dacca, he only had these three values with the overprint and so the government, probably for historical reasons, decided that the rest of the issue that had been overprinted would remain invalid. The three value stamps were issued in limited quantities on 20 December, and are only known on First Day Covers.

The 1972 issue would be under the status of planned but never issued. Demand for new stamps was high. Bangladesh had already rejected a large portion of the overprinted issues and E E Oatway was facing financial burden as he had invested a large sum to have the stamps made. He promptly distributed them to his dealer sources in Europe and the U.S.A. to sell. Bangladesh officials did not validate them and ties with Oatway were severed immediately.

Importance and Rarity

The events of 1971 had geo-political significance that not only aggravated the problem but also added to the loss of lives, and agony and suffering of millions. The present exhibit includes many scarce materials, not only philatelically important but also pertaining to the history of Bangladesh. Although modern by historical standards, these are testament to a period that affected the lives of 75 million people, one fiftieth of humanity at that time!

Personal Study and Research

Numerous excellent monographs and articles have been written on the post liberation provisional issues of Bangladesh, however almost nothing has appeared on the Format issues, except for a brief section at the site of R Howard Courtney, and Golowe's Collector Stamps. This exhibit, the first of its nature, is a result of over 25 years of collecting by the exhibitor. Very few documents directly related to the Liberation War have been archived, as the nature of the conflict was that of guerrilla warfare. Post war, most military documents have been classified and remains to be revealed for public perusal; many aspects of these issues are left to conjecture.

The Plan

The exhibit is structured into three chapters.

1. Independence Issue
29 July 1971. The stamps.

P2-3
2. Bangladesh Liberated Issue of 20 December
The Stamps. The Clandestine issues.

P4-6
3. The So- called Second Definitive

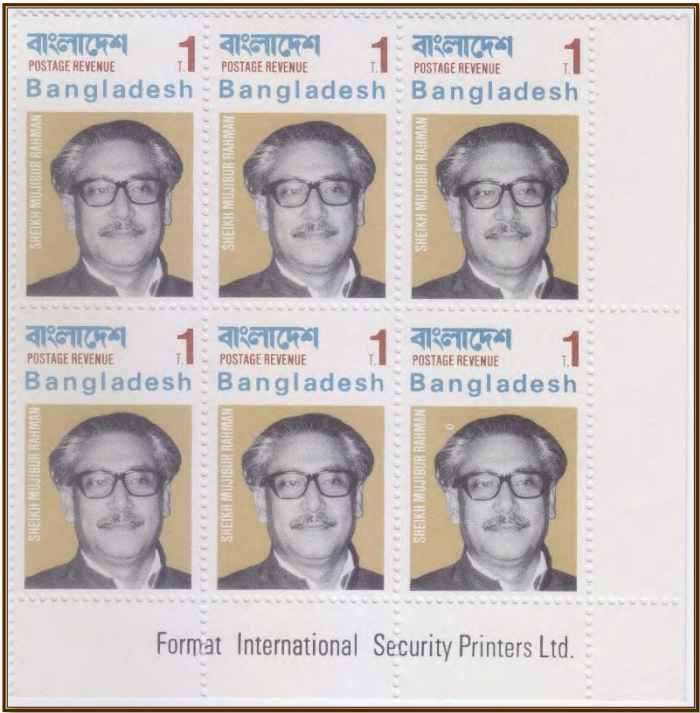
P7-8

Items of significant philatelic and historical importance include --

- Chapter One — Official document from Pakistan PO banning the Independence issue

Chapter Two — Unique archival materials.

Chapter Three —
Study of plate numbers



Presentation

The current chapter and page heading is provided in the upper left/right corners of each page. The storyline text is in normal font; *the philatelic text is in italics.*

Items are highlighted thus:
√√√ “**Very highly important**”;
√√ “**Highly important**”; √ “**Important**”

Bibliography

Philatelic references —
A Day at the Post Office. Star Lifestyle. The Daily Star
<http://www.rhcourtney-collector.com>
<http://golowesstamps.com>

Non-philatelic reference consulted —
Rahman, Hasan Hafizur (ed). Shadhinotar Dolil.

Following the election of 1970, trouble brewed in Pakistan as the military junta refused to hand over power to the Awami League, despite winning an overwhelming majority. Operation Searchlight was a planned military operation carried out on 25 March 1971, by the Pakistan Army, to curb the Bengali nationalist movement.

On 17 April 1971, the Mujibnagar Government in-exile took oath and a parallel government was established in the liberated regions. The first stamps were issued on 29 July 1971.

The purpose of these stamps were initially to generate funds for the cause of Bangladesh, and to use them as postage stamps from offices operating in the liberated zones of Bangladesh.

It is not clear how much fund was generated or whether they were officially used at the post offices.



29 July 1971. Perf 14½. Photolithography.

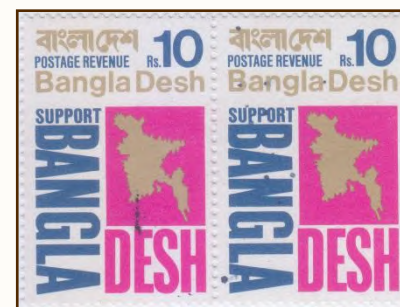
Format International Security Printers Ltd, London
Designer: Biman Mullick. 10 x 5 (50) stamps per sheet.



Shades of brown ✓



Fake
surcharge



Doctor blade flaw ✓

PAKISTAN POST OFFICE

Director General's Special Circular No. 5

Karachi, 24th August, 1971.

SO-CALLED POSTAGE STAMPS OF "BANGLA DESH"

It has come to the notice of the Director General, Pakistan Post Office, that some protagonists of the so-called Bangla Desh have brought out "Bangla Desh Postage Stamps" which have been printed in England. It has also been learnt that the series consists of eight stamps of 10 Paisa, 20 Paisa, 50 Paisa, Re. 1.00, Rs. 2.00, Rs. 3.00, Rs. 5.00 and Rs. 10.00. These so-called postage stamps cannot obviously be used for the prepayment of postage, neither in Pakistan nor anywhere else, because the imaginary country the name of which they bear does not exist on the map of the world. Smuggling of these stamps into Pakistan, particularly in the Eastern Wing, cannot, however, be ruled out. Some miscreants may use these so-called stamps as propaganda labels (in addition to the normal stamps) on some items of the inland and out-going international correspondence.

2. All Post Offices, Mail and Sorting Offices and Sections are hereby ordered that if any item of mail bearing these so-called Bangla Desh stamps is detected anywhere in the course of transmission through post, that particular items should be immediately impounded and sent in a registered cover addressed to the Head of the Circle by name.

3. Instructions to Heads of Circles, regarding further disposal of these items are being issued separately.

4. These instructions should be carefully noted by all concerned.
[C. 26-1/71 (1V).]

(47)

PCPPK—M/4085(71)D.G.P.O.—25-8-71—5,460.

Notification prohibiting the use of Independence Issue in any part of erstwhile East Pakistan. ✓✓



Plate 1A
Line of printer's name on the left
Two lines; bottom and short
Perf. running through at bottom



Plate 1B
Line of printer's name on the left
Three lines; bottom and tall
Perf. running through at bottom



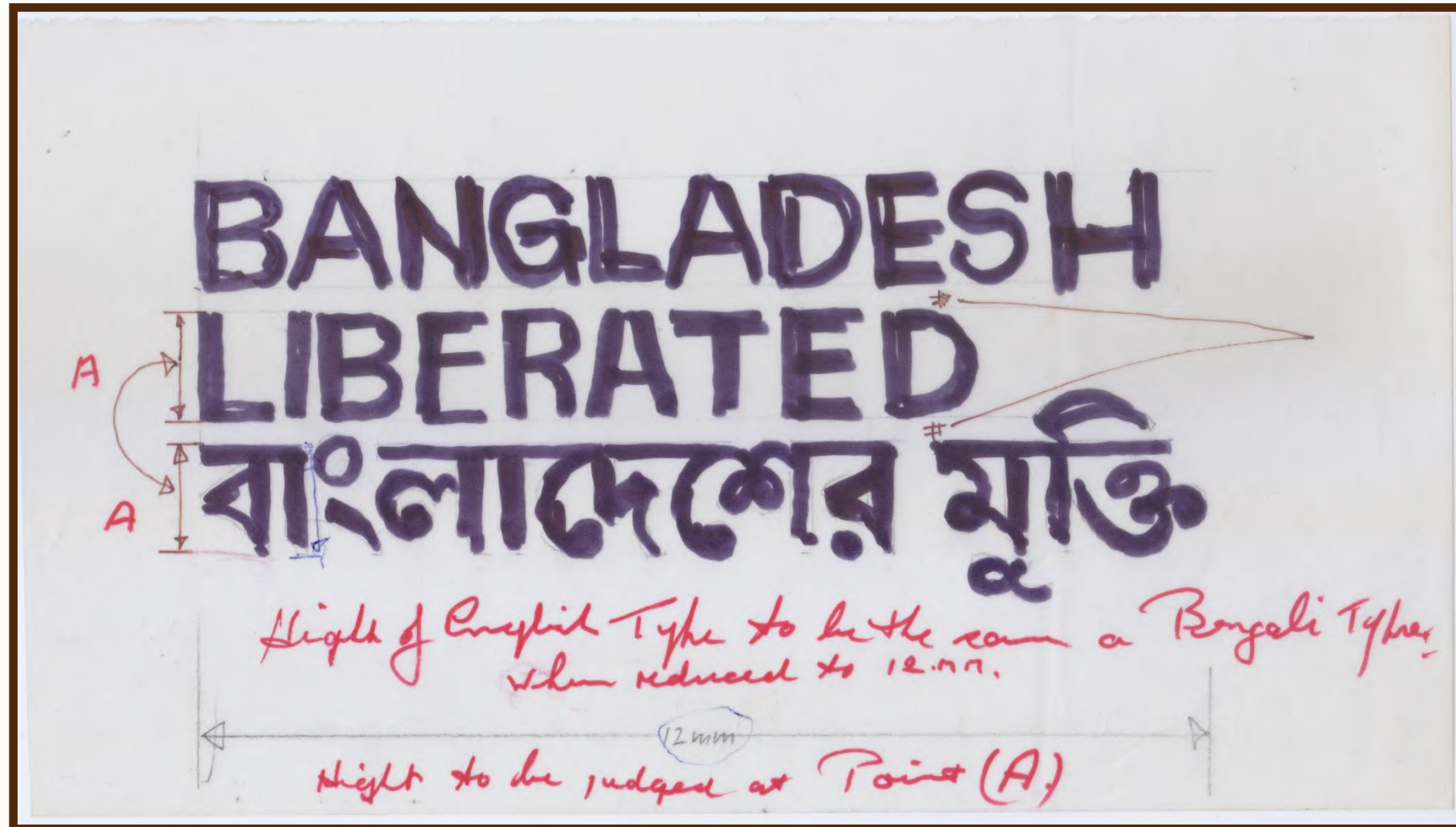
Plate 1A
Line of printer's name on the left
Three lines; **top**
Perf. running through top to bottom



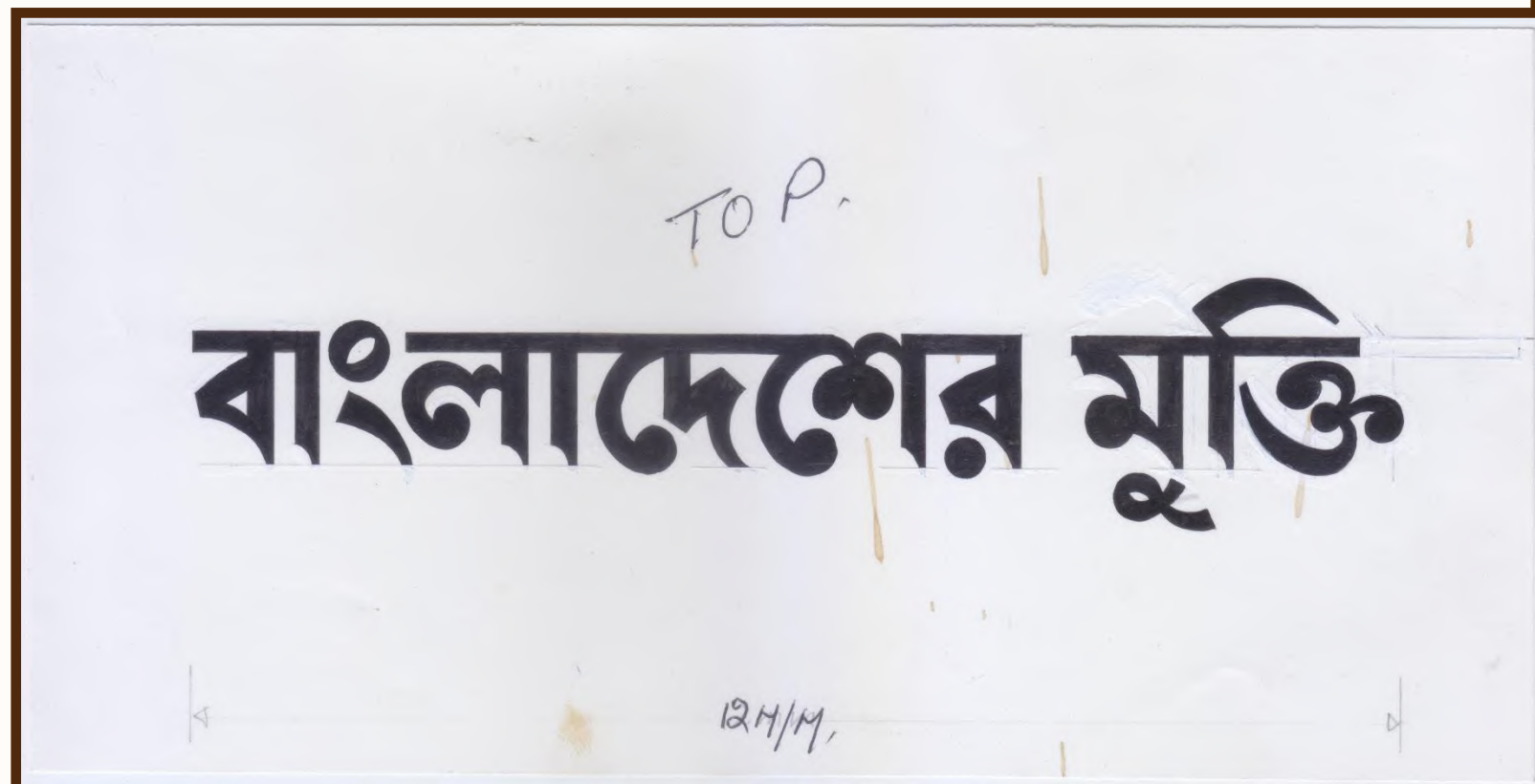
Plate 1B
Line of printer's name on the left
Three lines; **bottom and short**
Perf. running through at bottom

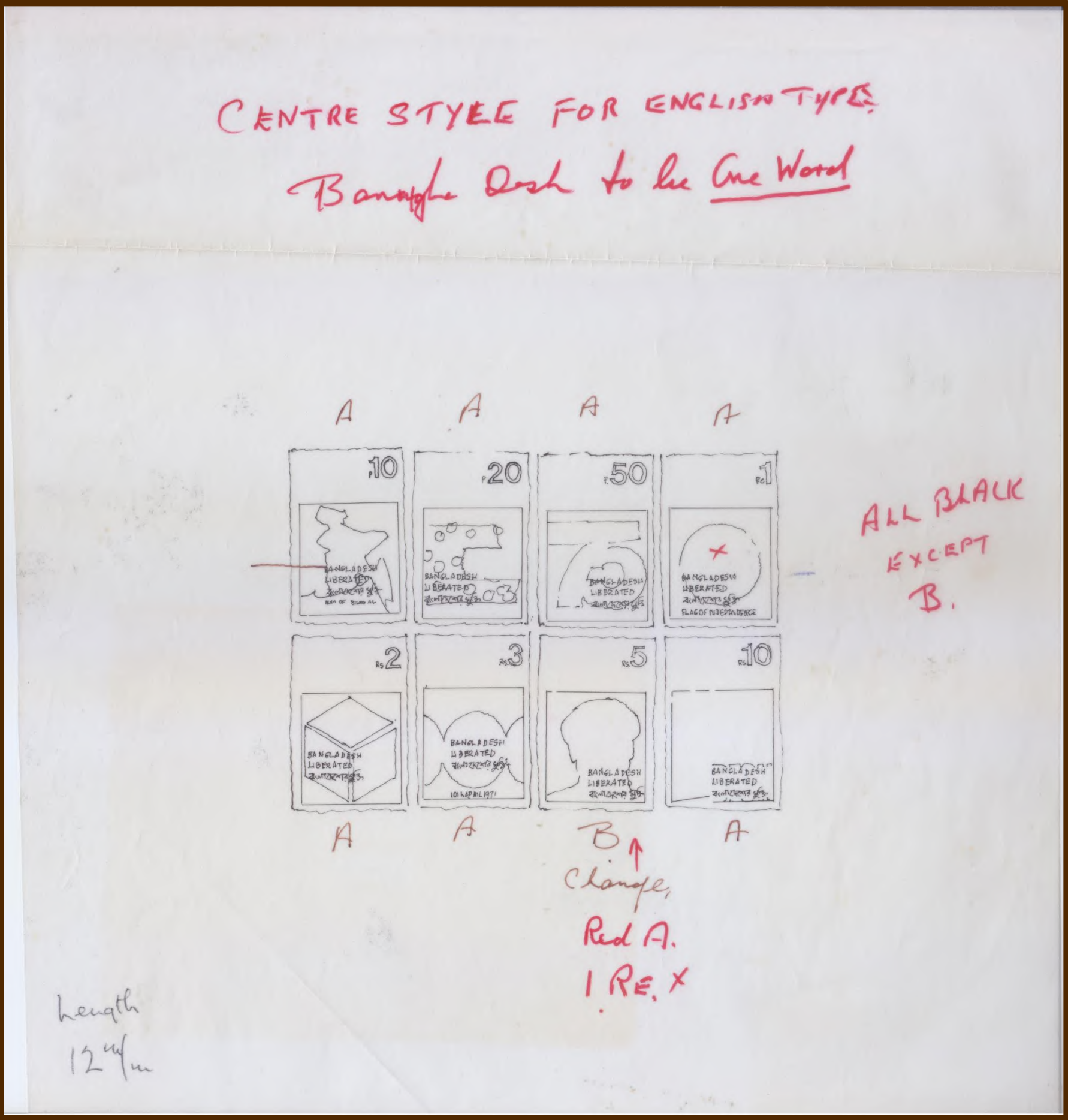


Plate 1B
Line of printer's name on the right
No lines on the left
Perf. running through at bottom



On 19 December 1971, John Stonehouse came to Dacca and handed over sheets of the Independence Issue. He also brought three denominations of a commemorative issue overprint, "Bangladesh Liberated" in English, and "Bangladesher Mukti" in Bengali. There is a difference of opinion on the number of sheets handed over to the BPO. It was informed that rest of the five denominations would be dispatched as soon as possible. Quantities were supplied to the post office, but the postal authorities refused to acknowledge the validity of the five additional values.





Accepted denominations (12 mm)



20 December 1971. Perf 14 1/2.
Format International Security Printers Ltd, London
10 x 5 (50) stamps per sheet.
Overprint: Offset

Rejected denominations (12 mm)



All eight values of the Independence set are found with overprints differing from the 12 mm one. These are not errors but created for the philatelic market. These can also not be considered as printer's waste either; they are clandestine varieties made with the intent to be different from the legitimate issue, and created to defraud collectors and the postal authorities. This is one of the probable reasons why even the five denominations with the 12 mm overprint were never accepted.



Misaligned overprint print of
varying thickness



Inverted overprint showing the red colour control mark, absent in the accepted overprinted stamps. Perforation running through from the top to the bottom.

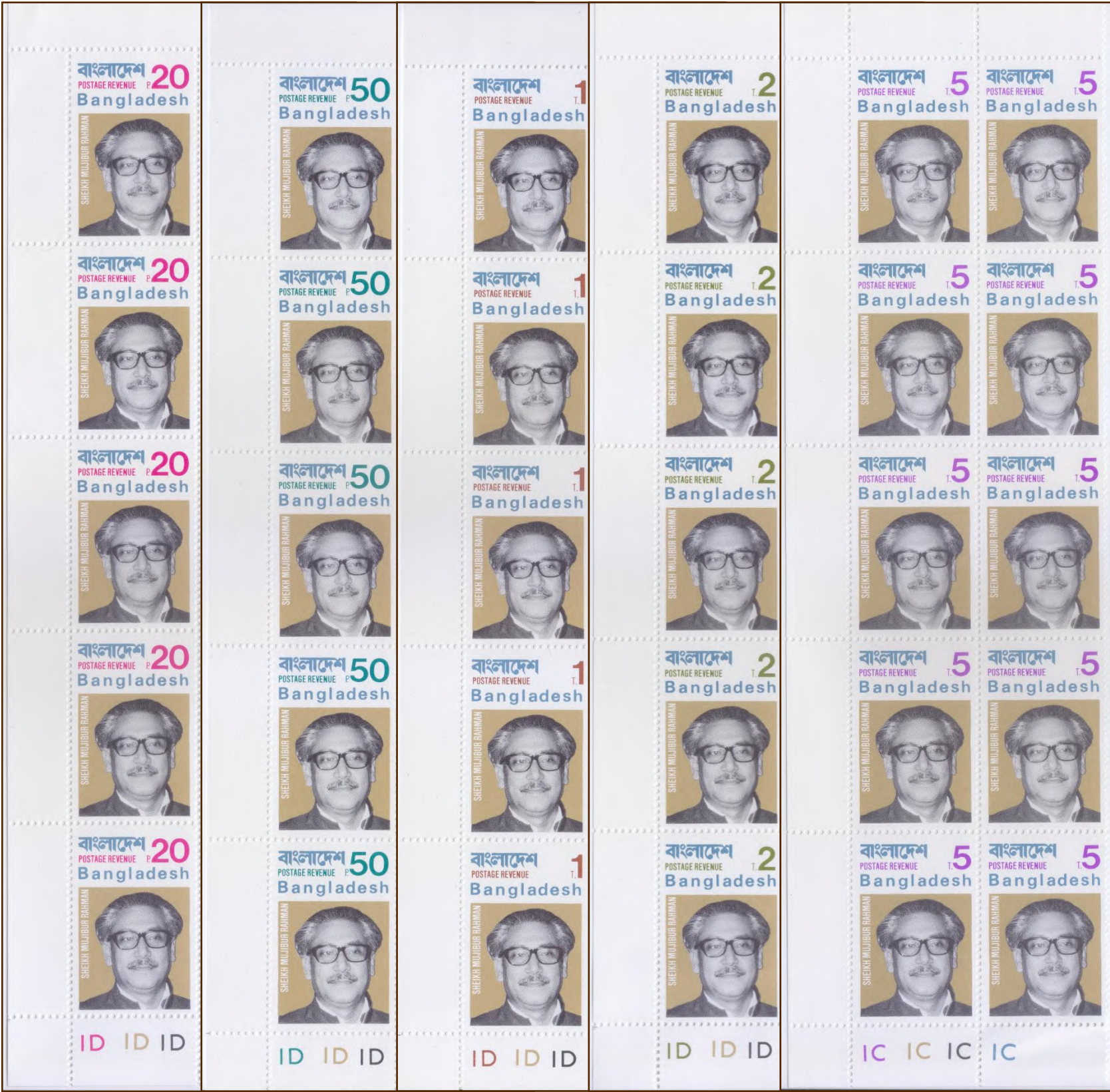
Size measuring 12; 12.5,
or 13 mm

Multiple prints.
Printer's line (two) at the bottom;
Imprint on the bottom margin.

According to the memoirs of John Stonehouse, on 19 December 1971 the Postmaster General of the Eastern Circle asked him to print the second definitive set. He also mentions that he had received formal confirmation from the government.

Postal documents show no such orders. However, it is clear that an order, perhaps verbal, was indeed placed. This is substantiated by the denominations of the so-called second definitive set, which was at par with the postal rates of the time.

Who asked Format to print this issue, or why it was never authorised is a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, one thing is clear that Format had indeed supplied a quantity of these stamps to the BPO, however as they failed to produce a work order, Bangladesh authorities maintain that this so-called definitive was never asked for, and it remains unissued.



February 1972. Perf 14½. Photolithography.
Format International Security Printers Ltd, London
10 x 5 (50) stamps per sheet.

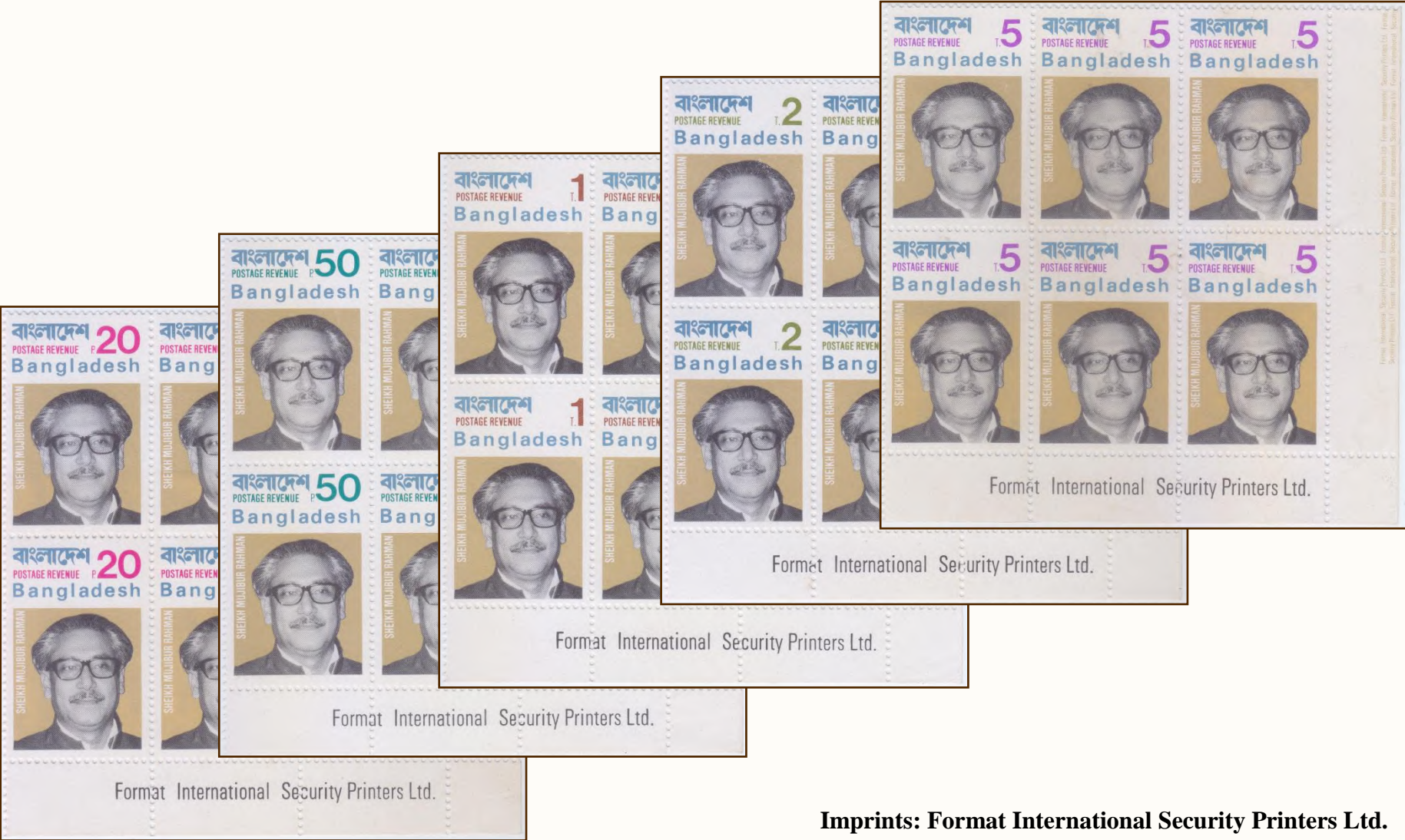
Plate Numbers

Note: Bangladesh instead of ‘Bangla Desh’
The currency is in poisha and Taka, instead of paisa and Rupees.



Colour Control Marks

Plate blocks



Imprints: Format International Security Printers Ltd.