21 November 1947 – the first postage stamp of free India

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Why in news: On 21 November 1947 India Post issued the first postage stamp of independent India – a 3½-anna stamp showing the national flag with 'Jai Hind'. The story of India's stamps and postal system – from the Scinde Dawk to PIN codes – is a favourite source of Prelims questions.

Key points

- First stamp of free India: issued on 21 November 1947, it showed the national flag with the words 'Jai Hind' and was priced at 3½ annas. It was followed in December 1947 by stamps showing the Ashoka Lion Capital and an aircraft.
- Scinde Dawk (1852): the first postage stamp in Asia was issued in 1852 in Sind (Karachi) under the Commissioner Sir Bartle Frere. The first stamps valid for all of British India came in 1854.
- Gandhi stamps: on 15 August 1948 India issued a set of four stamps on Mahatma Gandhi – the first commemorative stamps of independent India after his death.
- PIN code: the six-digit Postal Index Number was introduced on 15 August 1972; the idea is credited to Shriram Bhikaji Velankar. The first digit shows the region – PIN codes beginning with 6 cover Tamil Nadu and Keralam.
- Today: India Post runs one of the world's largest postal networks; the India Post Payments Bank began operating across India on 1 September 2018, bringing banking to the doorstep through postmen.

In the exam: TNPSC – firsts in Indian history (first stamp of free India 1947, Scinde Dawk 1852), PIN code 1972, India Post schemes (IPPB 2018). UPSC Prelims – history of communication, financial inclusion through IPPB.

Questions

1. The first postage stamp of independent India, issued on 21 November 1947, depicted:

A. The Ashoka Lion Capital
B. The national flag with 'Jai Hind'
C. Mahatma Gandhi
D. An aircraft

2. The six-digit PIN code system was introduced in India in:

A. 1947
B. 1962
C. 1972
D. 1986

Answers with explanations

1. **B) The national flag with 'Jai Hind'** – The 3½-anna stamp of 21 November 1947 showed the national flag with 'Jai Hind'. Stamps with the Ashoka Lion Capital and an aircraft followed in December 1947; the Gandhi set came on 15 August 1948.

2. **C) 1972** – The Postal Index Number was introduced on 15 August 1972. Its first digit shows the postal region; PIN codes beginning with 6 cover Tamil Nadu and Keralam.

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