

# Commemorating the 150th anniversary of Universal Postal Union

Awani Kumar, Lucknow, India

Mail or courier services to pass messages from one person in one place to another person in another place have been there since the advent of earliest civilisations. There's evidence of remarkable postal systems in ancient Persia, India, and China. The first documented use of a postal system — state-sponsored, designated couriers who were trusted to transport messages — occurred in Egypt about 2400 BCE, when Pharaohs used couriers to send out decrees throughout the territory of the state. The earliest surviving piece of mail is also Egyptian, which dates back to 255 BCE, recovered from the Oxyrhynchus papyri cache. The first envelopes protecting such messages from prying eyes were made of cloth, animal skins or vegetable parts. Paper envelopes were developed in China, where paper was invented in the 2nd century BCE. Around 550-330 BCE, Persians would deliver through a system of couriers on horseback and like Ancient Egypt, mail in the Persian Empire was not just for anyone: only the king and influential leaders could use the postal system. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote in 500 BC: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." He was describing the Persian postal service and one might also recognise this is also USPS's unofficial motto and slogan.

The birth of modern mail system can be credited to Frenchman Jean-Jacques Renouard de Villayer (1607–1691) who established a postal system in Paris in 1653. He set up mailboxes and delivered any letters placed in them if they used the postage pre-paid envelopes that he sold. Adhesive postage stamp was invented by an Englishman Rowland Hill (1795–1879) in 1837. Through his efforts, the first postage stamp system in the world was issued in England in 1840. Hill created the first uniform postage rates that were based on weight, rather than size. Hill's stamps made the prepayment of postage both possible and practical. Trade, commerce, cultural exchanges and growth of modern economy necessitated a set of rules for international mail services and this led to the establishment of Universal Postal Union (UPU). World Post Day is celebrated each year on 9 October, the anniversary of the establishment of the Universal Postal Union in 1874 in the Swiss Capital, Bern. It was declared World Post Day by the UPU Congress held in Tokyo, Japan in 1969. Since then, countries across the world participate annually in the celebrations. The Posts in many countries use the event to introduce or promote new postal products and services. Figure 1 shows few postage stamps released previously to mark the event.

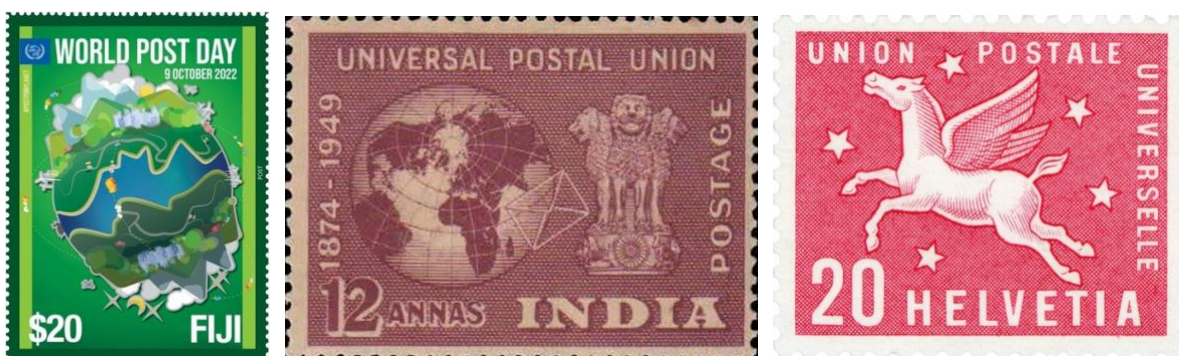


Fig.1. Postage stamps issued previously to mark World Post Day.

In 2024, the Universal Postal Union celebrates its 150th anniversary with the theme “150 years of enabling communication and empowering peoples across nations”. Hungarian Post has issued commemorative stamp as part of sesquicentennial celebration. The main motif of the graphic composition on the souvenir sheet is the postal horn, a device used from the Middle Ages onwards to signal the arrival of mail, which has become the symbol of the postal service worldwide. The design is completed by letters in the national colours of Hungary and the 150th anniversary logo of the UPU together with a detail of it. Official UPU image

elements appear on the commemorative first day cover. To celebrate this milestone, the UN Postal Administration has issued three sheets of nine stamps each.



Fig.2. Sesquicentennial celebration theme and Hungarian postage stamp.



Fig.3. Postage stamps issued by United Nations.

Over a dozen countries have also issued postage stamps and few of them are shown in Figure 4.







Fig.4. Sesquicentennial celebration theme stamps

Knight is perhaps the most fascinating piece for postal authorities (and many chess players) as they frequently come out with knight motif stamps. A creature resembling knight also appears in the postage stamp issued by Helvetia (Switzerland) to mark Universal Postal Union as shown in Figure 1. Figure 5 shows few knight theme stamps. The author wishes to celebrate and commemorate 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary with some interesting knight tours on nine-by-ten cell board (which correlates to October 9). Readers are aware of the millennium old knight tour puzzle — view *Philemat* 116 August 2021 and 117 February 2022. The challenge is to move a knight on an empty board so that it visits all the cells only once.



Fig.5. Knight on the postage stamps of Nicaragua, Mali and Niger respectively.

Figure 6 and Figure 7 are monogram tours (knight moves delineating letters) with square numbers  $1^2, 2^2, 3^2, \dots, 9^2$ , namely, 1, 4, 9, ..., 81 delineating the letters 'U' and 'P', partial abbreviation for the Universal Postal



Union. Figure 8 to Figure 10 delineate ‘1’, ‘5’, and ‘0’; the numerals in 150. UPU has grown from 21 to 192 members in the intervening years. Figure 11 has the square numbers in the shape of a tree — a symbol of life and growth.

11	6	13	44	37	28	33	46	39
14	17	10	27	32	45	38	29	34
7	12	5	16	43	36	31	40	47
18	15	20	9	26	49	42	35	30
21	8	51	4	23	64	67	48	41
52	19	22	1	50	25	80	63	66
83	74	3	24	81	90	65	68	79
56	53	82	75	2	77	60	87	62
73	84	55	58	71	86	89	78	69
54	57	72	85	76	59	70	61	88

6.

7	18	11	28	5	90	63	88	83
12	29	6	1	10	3	82	65	62
19	8	17	4	27	64	89	84	87
30	13	26	9	2	81	86	61	66
45	20	37	16	57	68	59	80	85
14	31	44	25	38	79	56	67	60
21	46	15	36	69	58	53	78	55
32	43	34	49	24	39	72	75	52
47	22	41	70	35	50	77	54	73
42	33	48	23	40	71	74	51	76

7.

83	18	5	10	1	80	3	76	57
6	11	84	81	4	77	58	79	72
19	82	17	90	9	2	73	56	75
12	7	20	85	16	59	78	71	34
21	86	89	8	25	70	35	74	55
88	13	26	23	36	15	60	33	68
27	22	87	14	49	24	69	54	61
44	47	42	39	64	37	50	67	32
41	28	45	48	51	30	65	62	53
46	43	40	29	38	63	52	31	66

8.

7	18	11	2	5	20	27	88	31
12	3	6	18	10	33	30	21	28
67	8	17	4	1	26	89	32	87
70	13	68	9	34	73	24	29	22
59	66	71	16	25	90	35	86	75
14	69	60	65	72	49	74	23	40
61	58	15	50	45	36	41	76	85
54	51	56	81	64	83	48	39	42
57	62	53	46	79	44	37	84	77
52	55	80	63	82	47	78	43	38

9.

27	12	39	8	29	10	17	6	21
38	31	28	11	40	7	20	3	18
13	26	41	30	9	16	51	22	5
32	37	14	25	34	23	4	19	2
47	42	33	36	15	50	1	52	63
76	71	46	49	24	35	64	89	54
43	48	77	72	81	90	53	62	65
70	75	82	45	78	59	86	55	88
83	44	73	68	85	80	57	66	61
74	69	84	79	58	67	60	87	56

10.

11	6	47	44	1	42	71	66	89
46	3	10	5	48	67	90	41	70
7	12	45	2	43	72	69	88	65
52	55	4	9	68	49	64	85	40
13	8	51	54	73	84	87	34	63
56	53	14	83	50	35	62	39	86
27	16	57	74	25	82	33	36	61
22	19	26	15	58	75	38	79	32
17	28	21	24	81	30	77	60	37
20	23	18	29	76	59	80	31	78

11.

Congratulations UPU on the successfully completion of 150 years. We now look forward to celebrating its bicentenary!

