

M. R. SIDDIQI - A remembrance

Homage to late M. R. Siddiqi on his 2nd death anniversary



JIMMY CARTER

On this 2nd anniversary of the death of our friend, M. R. Siddiqi, let us not mourn his departure, but rather, commit ourselves to continuing the fine humanitarian work in which he was involved. Let us honor Bangladesh & Mr. Siddiqi by following his examples as a politician, social worker, family man, and friend.

February 6, 1994



Late Ambassador M. R. Siddiqi and Mrs. Siddiqi were seen with President Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter at the White House in 1977

"AS I KNEW HIM"

Alamgir M. A. Kabir

President BIRDEM, Past District Governor 315. Lions Clubs Int.

I am writing to pay my tribute to need. the memory of Late Lion M.R. Siddiqi.

It will take a volume to record the great services he rendered to the nation in various fields. So, I would mention only a few aspects of his contribution for human welfare.

I first came in close contact with him when he and his charming wife, Kohinoor, were our house guests in Gulshan, Dhaka, in early 1969 on the occasion of his official visit as District Governor, Lions Clubs International to my home Club, the Lions Club of Dhaka. The affection that grew between us then was carried to the last.

In the politico economic situation in the then East Pakistan, he was an entrepreneur. Facing many handicaps, he showed his quality of leadership in organising two successful financial organisations in the Banking and in the Insurance fields.

The nation will remember with gratitude his contribution in the War of Liberation in 1971. He paid the price and, among other things, half of his beautiful house in Battaly Hill in Chittagong was demolished by the forces of the military junta which had usurped power in Pakistan.

He was at the same time a person with wide sympathy for those who were ailing or in

M.R. Siddiqi**A Life Sketch**

Mr. M.R. Siddiqi, eldest son of the late Al-haj Mohammad Hossain Chowdhury, was born March 1, 1926 in Sitakund, Chittagong. He completed his M.Com. from Calcutta University in 1947, served as Lecturer, Dhaka University

M. R. Siddiqi and the Liberation War : A personal memoir

Prof. Rehman Sobhan

Economist, Former Adviser to the President

I have known the late M. R. Siddiqi for many years since our relations go back to an earlier generation where my father and his father-in-law the late A.K. Khan were well known to each other. However I came to know M. R. Siddiqi more intimately in the 1969/70 period after the fall of the Ayub government.

I met him at a very critical moment in our history, on the 23 March, 1971. On that day, a public holiday, he had driven up to Dhaka with Mr. Khaled, a well known banker from Chittagong. We met in the Circuit House Row, residence of Dr. Kamal Hossain. M. R. Siddiqi was anxious to obtain instructions from the Awami League high command about what to do in the face of the mounting confrontation with the Pakistani army in Chittagong. As the then District President of the Awami League he was expected to give local leadership to the nationalist forces. He told Kamal and myself that in Chittagong he was in touch with the Bangalis in the army and EPR and that they were awaiting instructions from the nationalist leadership as to what they should do in the face of the imminent attack by the reinforcements for the Pakistani forces building up in Chittagong. The stand-off over the unloading of the M. V. Swat was reaching boiling point and the Pakistan GHQ had given instructions that in the face of the non-cooperation by the dock workers in Chittagong the Swat was to be unloaded by army jawans, by force if necessary. As the principal political figure in Chittagong at that time M. R. Siddiqi was expected to liaise between the Bangalis in the military and the political forces but remained uncertain of what he should do in view of the ongoing political dialogue between Bangabandhu, Yahya and Bhutto. After his meeting with us M. R. and Khaled went on to Road 32, Dhanmondi to get direct instructions from Bangabandhu. We did not see him again, on that day so that I do not know what brief he carried back to Chittagong and how this influenced events in and after the 26th of March.

My next meeting with M.R. Siddiqi was at a no less historic moment at the Agartala Stadium around 31st March or 1st April. I had just come across the border with Prof. Anisur Rahman and the TV celebrity Mostafa Monwar. We had passed through Tetiapara tea garden where we had another historic meeting with the late Khaled Mosharaf who was then a Major who had made the tea garden his headquarters after capturing his Pakistani commanding officer and brought his Bengali troops into the liberation war. Khaled had given us a shopping list for arms which we were supposed to pass on to the *Probashi* Bangalis who were raising funds abroad to support the Mukti Bahini - that is if we got as far as London. When I therefore met M.R. Siddiqi at the stadium my first thought was to pass on my responsibility as an arms procurer to a person in a rather more responsible position than



Mr. M. R. Siddiqi seen handing over a letter to President Richard Nixon as the Special Envoy to the Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Oval office, White House in 1973.

mine. In those days teachers of economics did not have too much of a comparative advantage in the area of military hardware procurement. M.R. Siddiqi was located in the Agartala Stadium where a miscellaneous collection of M.P.s, political workers, some Bangali armed forces personnel, had been located by the local administration in Agartala after they came across the border. M.R. Siddiqi told Anis and myself that he was the senior most Awami League leader with whom the Indian authorities had till then established contact. According to Siddiqi the Indian officials in Agartala, attached to the Tripura government were quite unprepared for the dramatic events unfolding across their border. Large numbers of refugees had already begun to cross the border and were being housed in such makeshift facilities as the local stadium.

When I met Siddiqi at the Agartala Stadium he was getting ready to leave for Delhi that evening accompanied by Sirajul Huq, then an Awami League M.P. and a well known advocate from Comilla. Mr. Siddiqi suggested that Anisur Rahman and myself accompany him to Delhi where our connections with the Indian economists' fraternity may be serviceable in establishing contact with the powers that be in Delhi. Anis and myself were somewhat unprepared for suddenly being thrust from being teachers of economics to emissaries on behalf of a newly independent nation in a state of armed insurgency. If I remember correctly I had to be loaned a pyjama and panjabi as well as a razor by M.R. Siddiqi to look sufficiently respectable as an emissary for Bangladesh. Thus within hours of our arrival in Agartala, Anis

including the establishment of the Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, initially at Kalurghat Radio Relay Station. He initiated the activities of the Bangladesh Government in exile and was subsequently Chairman of the Eastern-zone (Command) comprising of the then five districts of Chittagong division and the districts of Barisal, Faridpur and Dhaka. In July 1971 he went to the U.S.A. as Envoy of the exiled Government to lobby support with the U.S. Government and people.

After liberation in 1972, he was appointed Minister for Commerce and Foreign Trade in the first Mujib Cabinet and went on record as its only member to oppose the nationalisation policy. In 1973, as special envoy of the Prime

M. R. SIDDIQI : A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

Dr. Kamal Hossain

Chairman, Democratic Forum, Former Foreign Minister.

Although I had known Mr. M. R. Siddiqi on a personal and professional level throughout the sixties when he had been a Member of the National Assembly, I had the privilege of first having direct working relations with him during the non-cooperation movement in 1971. I was then one of the persons deputed to be in the control room with Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed. Mr. M. R. Siddiqi was in constant touch reporting on the situation in Chittagong in order to obtain directives from Bangabandhu. He was maintaining contact with Bengali Officers in the Chittagong cantonment along with other important sectors. It was not, therefore, surprising that he and his family were among the prime targets after the crackdown. He had, thereafter, played a distinguished role in the diplomatic mobilisation of international support for Bangladesh.

During the last of his working days we came into contact professionally. I was impressed to see how despite having spent an active public and diplomatic life, he had remained a highly professional person, having started life as a professional chartered accountant. I remember him with profound respect and affection as a perfect gentleman, courteous and modest, but a person of firm convictions and someone whose love for the country led him to accept sacrifices and suffering for the political cause in which he believed. He has left behind a legacy and an example which will be a source of inspiration to all those whom he has left behind.

I subsequently met M.R. Siddiqi again in Washington D.C. where he had been sent by the Bangladesh government to open a diplomatic mission in the U.S.A. and become Bangladesh's first ambassador to the United States. I was then very actively involved with the local Bangladeshis and their American friends in the campaign to stop aid to Pakistan and had been formally designated by the Bangladesh government as *Envoy Extraordinary* with responsibility for economic affairs. Our main task was to influence the U.S. Congress to stop aid to Pakistan and for the Pakistan Aid Consortium to do likewise. By then the Bengali diplomats in Washington and New York had switched allegiance from Pakistan to Bangladesh so that in Washington Siddiqi could draw upon the services of senior diplomats such as Enayat Karim, S.A. Karim, Shamsul Kibria, A.M.A. Muhith and a host of others who formed the nucleus of the Bangladesh Mission in Connecticut Avenue and in New York and provided a very strong infrastructure for the campaign in the U.S. In Washington, Siddiqi served as a suave spokesman for Bangladesh, whose soft spoken manner went down well in presenting our case.

He was the District Governor of District 315 (Pakistan) Lions International 1968-69, 1969-70 and District Governor 315 (Bangladesh) from 1972-73, 1973-74. He received the "Humanitarian Award", the highest and most prestigious in Lions International, for his outstanding relief work after the 1960 devastating cyclone and tidal bore in the coastal areas of Chittagong. He was the Founder Chairman of the Bangladesh Lions Foundation and Eye Hospitals in Dhaka & Chittagong. Apart from Lions, he was also President of OISCA (Bangladesh Chapter), Chairman, Under-privileged Children Education Programme (UCEP) and Founder of Latifa Siddiqi Girls College and Girls High School, at Kumira, Sitakund. He had innumerable leadership positions in

associations and organisations of various types, including Presidency of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Bangladesh Aushad Shilpa Samity and Insurance Association of Pakistan, to name a few. He was also the founder President of Bangladesh Japan Friendship Society. He was the Convenor of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries and established it in 1985.

Mr. Siddiqi led an active and fruitful life, setting standards of personal and professional conduct across Bangladesh society wherever he was involved. He was kind and generous to a fault, and will perhaps be best remembered for his exemplary attitude towards people from all walks of life, for which he earned the affection and respect of thousands.