

President Speaks

At that time Salt Lake looked like desert-sand and only sand where ever any visitor's eyes can go. There existed, however, only one red coloured two storied building belonging to State Irrigation Department. Also a circular black pitch road was there up to our land and beyond and a navigable canal that runs into the river Vidhyari.



It was February, 1970, if I remembered exactly, Dr. Shethna, Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission visited our land with the Director, Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics with other senior scientists. They came in a steamer. Dr. S. Chatterjee introduced me to them. They shook hands with me. I showed them the buildings that would come up on our land.

VECC Project was the first organization to start and carry on Driven cast in situ piling in the virgin soil of Salt Lake. Before us, for the first time in Salt Lake a new technique by name Sand Piling was carried out By the Vidyasagar Co-operative Society. No organization or construction company could venture to go for "Bored cast in piling system" in Salt Lake because of poor soil strata below ground level, though the system had a number of merits. For one of our tender for piling works a Bombay based company by name "Rodio Hazrat" offered cost for both the piling systems and the cost of "Bored cast in situ piling" was lower than "Driven cast in situ piling". We adopted "Bored cast in situ piling." We experimented again for the first time with a technique by name "Bored cast in piling" in Salt Lake soil. We were successful.

I was in-charge of the office of Additional Chief Engineer, DCSE & M, Department of Atomic Energy, Government of India. The following works were being carried out under my charge:-

1. National Mathematical Research Centre, Allahabad, UP
2. Institute of Physics, Bhubaneswar , Orissa
3. Atomic Minerals Division's Research Laboratories and Housing at Khasmahal, Jamshedpur
4. Housing at Jaduguda in Singhbhum District, Jharkhand
5. Atomic Minerals Division's Research laboratories and Housing at Lalchand basti near POLO Ground, Shillong, Meghalaya.
6. Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics Research Laboratories and Peripheral services buildings and Housing at Salt Lake, Kolkata
7. Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre Research Laboratories and associate services buildings and Housing at Salt Lake, Kolkata

All the above buildings speak of my works.

I wanted to share a few incidents in my life as professional hazards:

On one fine morning when I landed at Allahabad railway station from an Express train, a staff from user office came to receive me. He took my briefcase and whispered in my ears that some contractors men surrounded the car brought for me, one of them had rifle on his back. I asked if he knew the reason. He said that he had no clue. I said if we could move. As I approached the car, workers gheraoed me instantly, not allowing me to get in the car. I did not open the door and pushed me inside the car to run away, instead I called out to the leader and asked him what was the problem. He said, "Sir, your engineer was not issuing tender." I asked him to send the contractor to see me at my office after 1.30 pm. Thereafter I met the Director. I narrated him the incident and requested him to arrange two security guards with rifles for me from that day till I leave Allahabad. And he may kindly instruct the security personnel to allow one contractor at a time to see me for issuing tender after 1.30 pm. A contractor came to see me at 4 pm. He was refused tender by our engineer stationed. I reminded him of his past performances for one important time bound work. And that our engineer had to run after him daily but he could not be located. The contractor had given us lot of troubles. I said no tender will be issued, come what may. Suddenly he pulled out a revolver from his pocket and kept on the table. I was taken aback and keeping my eyes closed for a moment, remembered an incident in UP when an executive engineer was shot dead for the same reason. I looked straight into his eyes and asked him to leave the office; and that I would not issue the tender. He said, "Sir whatever you do, whomever you issue tender, the job would get done by me only". He threatened and said he would see me at site. Next day after breakfast the engineer stationed and I went to site but no contractor was in sight.

Er Kathuria and I came to Khasmahal, Jamshedpur for inspection of works and attending site meeting with the contractor. When we were entering meeting room after site visit we saw around 50 men surrounded the room with bows and arrows. I called Mukhia (Leader) and asked the reason. He complained that the contractors were not giving the workers casual leave, earned leave, maternity leave etc etc. I asked him to be seated and showed him the clauses related to leave in the condition of contract. He read and slowly left the room with his companion. We were saved from being in troublers. On another occasion our contractor informed me that a dangerous frightful mafia wanted to see me. I knew that he used to come on a bike with two revolvers in his two pockets. I called him to my room and asked him to be seated. He said, "Sir, I see, you are constructing a canteen, I want to take it on lease and run it for the employees." I told him I would request the Client to give the canteen to you on lease. He saluted and left the room.

In 1982-83 there was a time when ASU (Assam Student Union) started movement to drive away Bengalis from Assam and almost at the same time KSU (Khasi Student Union) started same kind of movement to drive away Bengalis and Nepalis from Meghalaya. In such a grave situation I had to travel every month to Shillong for inspection of works. That included even our engineers and other staff members. I remember of an experience of one night when we were going to Shillong in a closed jeep. Our flight got delayed and it was almost evening when we landed. While we were passing by a jheel of Guwahati University Campus we found a crowd by road side near the Jheel. On enquiry we came to know that a Bengali student was shot dead and thrown here. We continued on our journey with a sense of panic

and anxiety. At Nongpoh, a place almost at the middle of our journey, we took some snacks and hot coffee and continued on our journey. Suddenly at one place the driver got down, not telling me anything; we could not identify the place. It was pitch dark outside. Helplessly we sat inside with panic on our face, thinking a Bengali proverb, "where there is fear of tiger night falls" A series of frightful thoughts swept our mind like if the driver returns back with a crowd carrying swords, sticks and bamboos etc and butcher us or they might take us to their union leader and might throw us on the Gushing Water Fall from a nearby hill top so that our bodies were lost forever. Leaders of ASU and KHASU at that time were ruthlessly creating terror amongst the Bengalis and the Nepalees community in order to compel them to leave Assam and Meghalaya. After one hour had passed thinking about numerous panic situations, we saw the driver coming back and boarding the jeep with a calm composure and taking his seat. I asked him where he disappeared for such a long time. He replied that he had gone to his house to see his ailing daughter. So that incident ended with a deep sigh.

Next day I went to the flat of Director for requesting him to shift me for a day to either a state guest house or military guest house. I then requested him to come with me for inspection of works that was going on.

The vehicle, allotted to me for return journey to Gauhati, went wrong after a few kilometers or so from Nongpoh towards Gauhati. I tried to take a lift. But no one was in a mood to offer me lift. Finally one military officer with open hood jeep gave me a lift. He asked where I wanted to go. I replied that I had a flight to Calcutta from Gauhati after 1hr 30 minutes and if he could kindly drop me at the Airport. But he was able to drop me at the city airlines office. The officer in charge arranged a taxi for me and sent message to airport manager that a passenger was coming to board the Calcutta bound flight. I reached airport just 10 minutes before the departure of flight. I ran for check in then to security. I was so terrified that I literally ran towards plane through aerobridge. As soon as I reached the flight and managed to get inside the plane, door got closed. As the airhostess was showing me my seat all the passengers were looking at me with different kind of looks. But I was not in a mood to take the silent criticism in their eyes. I sat with my eyes closed to relieve me of the tension. I thanked God for helping me get past this grave situation.

My Boss and I were once flying from Barapani to Calcutta. Barapani was a small airport on a plateau surrounded by small hills, nearer to Shillong in Meghalaya. This airport was used by Bayudut. After thirty minutes of flying, all on sudden airhostesses were seen running to and fro. Seat belt signs were activated. No cold air was blowing and passengers felt breathing trouble for want of oxygen. I asked an airhostess what was the problem. She replied that the flight engineer had been working to fix the problem and it would take a few minutes to normalize the oxygen flow. No sooner that the airhostess had replied, suddenly air-conditioned air started flowing and passengers started feeling comfortable. Everyone thanked God for saving their lives.

Er. Chittaranjan Haldar