

OBITUARY



Desh Bandhu Sikka
(1927-2017)

Dr. Gokul Chand Sikka and his wife Mrs. Vasheshran Sikka, were blessed with a son on November 1st, 1927 at Lyallpur (currently Faisalabad in Punjab, Pakistan). Bestowed with Patriotic fervor, the couple named their beloved son as Desh Bandhu, after the honorific title of “Desh Bandhu” Chitta Ranjan Das, a renowned freedom fighter of India.

Dr. Desh Bandhu Sikka had a brilliant academic record - B.Sc. degree (1945, Punjab, Pakistan) securing first class. He attended specialization courses in economic geology and geochemistry: Bucknell University (1948); Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colorado (Sept. 1948- July 1950); M.S. in 1954 from New York University, NY. The topic of his Master’s thesis was “Study of Shoaling in Raritan river and Raritan Bay, New York Harbour”. His doctoral thesis was on “Aero Radiometric Survey of Redwater Oilfield, Alberta, Canada” and was awarded Doctorate by McGill University, Montreal, Canada, in the year 1960. He also won President’s Gold Medal of the Canadian Institute of Mining & Metallurgy for his Ph.D. thesis.

Dr. Sikka returned to India in 1961 and after a brief stint at the Punjab University, he joined National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) as chief geologist. He expanded the operations of the company from one geologist in 1961 to 70 geologists in 1966. In 1963, he proposed “A Scheme for Airborne Surveys” to be undertaken by NMDC, which was approved by the Government of India in November 1964, as an important program to be carried out by the Geological Survey of India. With accomplishment of this program, India became the first country to undertake systematic airborne surveys that included gamma-ray spectrometry. These surveys were followed-up by ground geophysical surveys, geological mapping, geochemistry, and diamond drilling. This marked the beginning of modernization of mineral exploration and development in India, which led to discoveries of several significant ore deposits that included the Kudremukh iron deposit (in 1964), Kolihan copper deposit (in 1966) and the Malanjkhand copper deposit (in 1971). These discoveries brought about many changes in the National Mineral Development Corporation. By 1968, Dr. Sikka became the acting chief executive officer of planning for Hindustan Copper Ltd. and was instrumental in bringing the Khetri (Kolihan deposit) into production. By 1971, the Malanjkhand copper deposit was discovered and Dr. Sikka became the coordinator of the Malanjkhand deposit, which proved to be a significant world-wide porphyry copper deposit. In 1972, Dr. Sikka joined a group of geological and mine valuation consultants in India and undertook consulting work on a large variety of projects, which included determining the sources and supply of titanium from Australia, Egypt, India, Korea, Maagassy, Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Tanzania, Canada, Norway and Sweden, as well as lithium sources from Goias, Brazil.

Dr. Sikka’s knowledge spectrum was broad based in that he was one of the few geologists in India and the world to have equal mastery of the exploration of magnetite quartzites, hematite ores, copper ores, lead – zinc deposits, titanium sands, lithium sources, gold etc., to

mention a few among others. In 1975, Dr. Sikka formed a consulting company, Sikka and Associates Limited, Nassau, Bahamas, and in 1982, converted it to Cabinet Conseil en Geologie Miniere Enr., Montreal, P. Q. He continued his world-wide consulting practice to the present day till his death. In 2003, he incorporated Barfanisai Enterprises Inc., Montreal Canada, a company for mineral exploration and development in India, and was the President of the company.

Dr. Sikka had also been active in the scientific world and has 36 scientific papers and more than 50 unpublished reports to his credit. At the ripe old age of nearly 90 years, he continued to be productive in publishing papers on the geology and mining activities in India and abroad. He was one of the few persons who had a harmonious blend of practical experience of mining geology coupled with academic bent of mind. He was a visionary and his ideas were always ahead of his times. His concepts of primary deposition of sulphides, and sulphide remobilization, though initially faced resistance, are now being accepted. Dr. Sikka promoted India’s mining sector and its mineral endowment at many international conferences, and since 2003, he has also personally invested in India.

Dr. Sikka was a Life member/ Fellow of many professional bodies that include Geological Society of India, South Asian Association of Economic Geologists (SAAEG) (India), Canadian Institute of Mining Metallurgy and Petroleum (CIM), Mining Metallurgical and Geological Institute of India (MMGI), Society of Applied Geologists and Technologists, to mention a few among others.

In recognition to his life-long, laudable achievements and contributions in the field of mineral exploration, the South Asian Association of Economic Geologists (SAAEG) proudly conferred the Association’s most prestigious honor i.e. “Lifetime Achievement Award” for 2015-16, on him at Gwalior, which was received on his behalf, by his son Mr. Madhav Sikka.

Dr. Sikka was a polyglot with an expertise in many languages like Punjabi (his mother tongue) with Gurumukhi Script, Hindi, Hindko, Urdu, Persian, English, French and German. He had working knowledge of Portuguese, Arabic and Sanskrit.

Dr. Sikka breathed his last at Montreal, Canada on February 21, 2017. By Dr. Sikka’s death, the geological community of the world lost a practical mining geologist par excellence with rare academic bent of mind, a great visionary, an uncommon administrator, a relentless fighter for the cause of mineral industry, a spiritual and upright human being with great patriotic fervor.

He leaves behind his wife Mrs. Mira Sikka, sons Madhav, Arjun, daughter Ms. Gayitri, grand children, a host of friends and admirers to mourn his death.

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