

No Zionist, Says Benazir's Lobbyist

By AZIZ HANIFFA

WASHINGTON — On the eve of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's scheduled arrival in the United States, her lobbyist here lashed out against charges that he was a Zionist with close connections to the hardline faction of the pro-Israeli lobby in the U.S.

Mark A. Siegel, 42, is the president of Mark A. Siegel & Associates, Inc. and International Public Strategies, Inc. The latter was created specifically to look after the interests of Pakistan on Capitol Hill. Siegel said that the allegations against him were a concerted and deliberate attempt by Bhutto's enemies to discredit and embarrass her.

In an interview with *India Abroad*, he said, "A lot of that are lies, anti-Semitic lies. I am not close to AIPAC (American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee). I never have been close to AIPAC.

'Proud That I Am Jewish'

"I am Jewish. I am proud that I am Jewish and there have been people that have been associated with Islamic governments all along that are of my faith."

He said he believed "that this is a kind of a specious issue."

The AIPAC is the premier Jewish organization that lobbies on behalf of Israel. It exercises tremendous clout on Capitol Hill and has been credited with

the defeat of many a representative and Senator who has uttered a tinge of protest against America's love affair with Israel or showed a pro-Arab tilt and spoke on behalf of the Palestinians.

In January this year, Bhutto abruptly terminated the \$495,000 contract of Pakistan's longtime lobbyist, Dennis Neill, that was to have run through 1990.

Neill Was Bitter

Neill had pulled Pakistan out of many a tight spot in Congress, and was quite bitter when Bhutto appointed Siegel, her long-time friend and supporter.

But what upset even some expatriate supporters of Bhutto in the U.S. and senior diplomatic officials here, more than the arbitrary dismissal of Neill, was Siegel's strong Israeli connections.

Privately they have acknowledged their discomfiture with Bhutto's decision and expressed qualms over the prudence of such an appointment.

During the Jimmy Carter administration, Siegel was appointed a special assistant to the President with responsibility to hold a liaison with the American Jewish Community.

Quit Our Plane Sale

But on March 7, 1978, he resigned in protest over the Carter administration's decision to sell F-15 aircraft to Saudi Arabia. Later in the month, he wrote an

Op-Ed Article in *The New York Times* accusing the administration of a pro-Arab tilt.

Siegel acknowledged "I resigned from the Carter White House on a procedural issue that did relate to U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia. That's public knowledge," he said. "That's 11 or 12 years ago. I have no regrets and I have no apologies about that."

But he asserted that Bhutto "has very specific views on the Middle East. She is very close to the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and Yasser Arafat."

Always Knew her Views

"Benazir," he explained "has always had those views and I've always known that these were her views, and obviously she is the leader of an Islamic country and I think that is to be expected.

"This is not something of concern to me and she doesn't ask for my advice and my opinion," he said. "I don't input her foreign policy decision-making process."

Siegel said his involvement was specifically "in bilateral politics between the United States and Pakistan."

He said he found the campaign against him as a Jewish lobbyist for an Islamic nation "extremely curious."

"There were prominent Jews that were associated with Zia-ul-Haq (the late Pakistani President), and these people who

object to me never objected to people like Morton Zuckerman, Barry Hoffman, Julius Kaplan and I could go on and on."

Zuckerman, a New York Real-Estate developer, is now the publisher of *U.S. News & World Report*, a newsweekly. Hoffman, according to Siegel, was the Zia government's honorary consul in Boston, while Kaplan was the legal counsel to the Pakistani Embassy here.

Siegel reiterated that "There was never a problem apparently about Jews working for Pakistan and they were very close to Zia and were hired by him. Now, some people in the UI (Islami Jamhoori Mithad), object to me. This is just one additional way to get to her."

Tolerant and Decent

"She is a very tolerant, decent woman and as long as I do a good job for the government there are no problems"

He disclosed, "we are working for the government on a month-to-month basis at a fee of \$23,000 a month." Before Bhutto was elected, Siegel lobbied on her behalf for free.

In an explanation provided to the Department of Justice as to why he never registered his activities on behalf of Bhutto under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, Siegel wrote, "This was an informal, verbal agreement, and was not based upon any financial compensation."

Met Him in 1984

In her political autobiography titled "Daughter of the East," released in 1988, Bhutto described Siegel as "a political consultant whom I had met on my visit to Washington in 1984."

She writes, "He was also very helpful persuading elected officials and other influential people to write to Pakistani officials warning them of grave consequences if I were mistreated. As an added precaution, Mark brought me a bullet-proof vest."

The big question now, as one observer remarked, was whether Bhutto had sufficient teflon coating to retain Siegel in the wake of the burgeoning controversy that her opposition seemed determined to keep fanning.

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