

WEAVING DREAMS INTO REALITY

DR SIDDEEK AHMED (Chairman and Managing Director of Eram Group)

Dr Siddeek Ahmed recalls the moments he shared with the late A P J Abdul Kalam and says that the visionary scientist and former President has always been a spring of inspiration for him



"Your Deed Will Decide Your Destiny. Dare to Dream, Dare to Differ, Dare to Deliver"

These are the words that grab your attention at the very outset when you enter the personal website of Dr Siddeek Ahmed, an accomplished business visionary dedicated himself in business promotion activities across the world who headquartered in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and UAE. It is a brief abstract of how he views the world around him and a statement about his call. Also, the epigraph attests to another great visionary's influence on him. When you entered Dr Siddeek's website, from the get-go, you got a feel that your cognitive power and the urge to initiate some kind of action which was sure to yield something desirable and of high value had been spurred in a similar manner by such an exhortation before. No, you didn't have to rack your brain to get a clue. It's the visionary scientist and former President of our nation, the late A P J Abdul Kalam, who urged us to dream big. He also called upon us to give it a thought, to put it into action. Who else might have influenced Dr Siddeek Ahmed to such an extent?

Dr Siddeek also agrees to this. Although he has always been ambitious, had big dreams from a very early age and a strong urge to do something good for his fellow beings, thanks to his upbringing which helped him assimilate human values, his brush with Kalam had a great impact on him. It added more value to what he had already imbibed. Dr Siddeek recalls two occasions when he had a chance to interact with the late President.

"Years ago, during his stint as the President of India, I had a chance to meet him in person and interact with him. I was leading a team comprising my child Rizwan Ahmed, a few other students and several teachers of the Indian International School, Dammam, under the pa-

tronage of Indian embassy in Saudi Arabia, to meet Abdul Kalam at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. You know International Indian School, Dammam, is an institution of great repute. However, most of the children on the team were a bundle of nerves as we were to meet a person of high stature," he recalls.

Though Dr Siddeek Ahmed was not officially associated with any of the bodies related to the school, he had been invited to lead the team being the well-wisher of the school and a parent of Rizwan Ahmed, a student of the school. The unstinting support he was giving to the community and his stature as a prominent Non-Resident Indian businessman were also mattered. Of course, he was in high spirits as he was given a chance to meet Abdul Kalam in person. Though the team members were given a warm welcome by the Rashtrapathi Bhavan officials, they were a bit anxious as the man they were to meet was a person of high stature.

"We had heard that he was a man of simplicity. Yet we were excited. He received us warmly and his demeanour was indeed marked by that simplicity which we had heard about earlier. While interacting, I felt everyone was at ease as if we were talking to a person who belonged to our family," Dr Ahmed added.

While visiting, Dr Ahmed always presents his host with a satchel of dates. This time too, he had a packet of dates with him which he gifted to Kalam later. Kalam didn't take a moment to snip open the packet and distributed the dates among his audience and staff.

"The way he reacted to my friendly gesture made us wonder and happy. We had never expected he would give away what we had given him among his audience. I felt his action of distributing it was sweeter than the dates I had gifted.

"He was such a man of simplicity," Dr Ahmed said.

His was a life combining simplicity with lofty thoughts. His speech, as well as his actions, were awe inspiring.

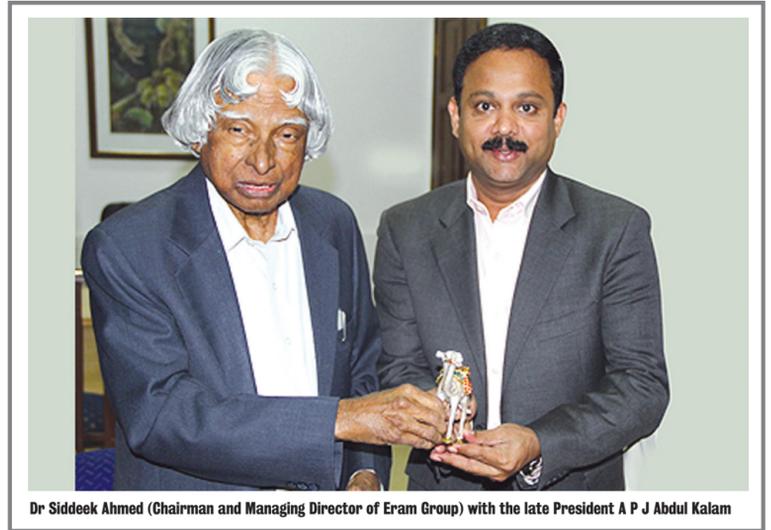
Just before leaving his office, Dr Siddeek Ahmed gifted the President with a brand new pen. He fondly took it in his hand and admired it a while. "He even tried it out on a paper," Siddeek Ahmed recalls. "I do remember my gift had lightened up his face a bit. Obviously, he liked my present. It was evident from his pleasant countenance. But a few moments later, he asked me about its price, the answer to which made him return it to me," Siddeek Ahmed said.

"It was an eye-opener for me when my assumption that I should gift the great man with a high priced pen was shattered completely by his loving pat and a gesture of humility by returning it."

In 2012, Dr Ahmed had a chance to meet Abdul Kalam again. The occasion was the unveiling function of Gandhi statue at Falcon Lia Park in Florida, the US on October 2, in which Mayor of Davie Judy Paul presided over it. Dr Siddeek was one of the two honorary members of Gandhi Square Movement initiated by the Kerala Samajam. A P J Abdul Kalam unveiled and dedicated the seven-foot tall bronze statue at the function in which Dr Siddeek shared the dais with these eminent personalities. Davie Mayor even lauded the generous contribution Eram Group made for realising the project. But what enthuses Dr Siddeek even now is the tête-à-tête he had with Kalam.

"Though informal, on the sidelines of the meet, we had a great discussion on the technology used in e-toilets. I still remember we discussed the biotechnology part in detail. We use DRDO technology and anaerobic package which was a bit expensive then. Kalam stressed on the need of more research and development in this sector to make it cheaper so that the common folk would be able to make use of it. I must say that his words has always been encouraging and will ever be a source of inspiration for me," he added.

Today, the group concerns such as ITL World, one of the top travel management companies in Gulf countries, and Eram Scientific, a world-class research and development firm and social enterprise providing award-winning sanitation solu-



Dr Siddeek Ahmed (Chairman and Managing Director of Eram Group) with the late President A P J Abdul Kalam

tions, are widely recognised for their heritage of quality service and innovations. Eram Scientific Solutions mainly focus on the development of sanitation in the world which has turned to the development of e-toilets, she-toilets (women-friendly toilets) e-shops and so on, which have bagged more than 42 national and international awards. Dr Siddeek Ahmed firmly believes that Kalam's words have had an immense impact on him, never hesitate to attribute his achievements to the encouraging words which have made him think and act.

"Kalam taught us not only to dream but to act daringly as well. During our talk, the need of skill development was also in focus. Our country has a huge amount of human resource. Talented young people form a major part of our population. Only that we have to do is creating a conducive atmosphere where their talents can be spotted, cultivated and developed. He told me that we needed top-notch institutions that help hone their skills. His words were the first thing that crossed my mind when the proposal to collaborate in setting up Esplor Academy in Angamaly, Kerala. ESPOIR gives hands on training in well-equipped labs and workshops for bridging the skill gap of youth to acquire jobs in the global market. Dr Siddeek concluded that he continues to draw inspiration from this legendary visionary and hopes to make the greatest tribute to him by contributing to fulfill his vision of nation building and to imbibe the spirit of scientific temper in his upcoming ventures.

SIDDEEK AHMED: DRIVEN BY VALUES AND COMPASSION

Dr Siddeek Ahmed, Chairman and Managing Director of Eram Group, a business conglomerate, headquartered in KSA, hails from Kerala. The group he leads comprises over 40 companies operating in different sectors such as oil and gas, power electronics, construction, manufacturing, travel and tourism, healthcare, IT, smart meters, media, logistics, automotive, animation; and training and education. The Group, founded in 1980, has operations in the Middle East, Europe and the United States employs a large, multi-cultural workforce, including a significant number of Indians. Although Saudi Arabia and India are the countries where Eram's presence is substantially felt, its operations in other countries are continuing to grow. In addition, it is on a drive to spread its wings to more countries. Today, Eram Group has become the largest diversified business group to be licensed by SAGIA (Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority).

Even being a first generation family business, Eram has achieved phenomenal growth and earned an impeccable reputation for the visionary leadership of Dr Siddeek. Eram has created winning partnerships with globally renowned firms and has won world-class clients. Having more than 25 years of experience in business and contractual activities under his belt, Dr Siddeek has encouraged excellence in varied enterprises across a range of business verticals. His expertise lies in directing, managing and dealing with complex business models and initiatives, which stand sturdily on his foundation of years of proven merit in the capacity of Chairman and Managing Director at Eram Group.

Eram Group is leading a 'Save Open Wells - Save Water' project in Kerala, joining hands with the local bodies and maintained or repaired as many as 50 open wells benefiting around 2,000 families in four panchayats. A drive to clean and revamp village ponds is also on foot. As many as 62 ponds left unusable have been identified and retrieved so far as part of the project.

Dr Siddeek is also financially supporting several institutions individuals including clinics, hospitals, NGOs, rehabilitation centres, schools, sportspersons, patients and senior citizens. His compassion has always gone beyond the limits of nationality, which is evident from the help he lent to the victims of an earthquake in Nepal as well as the flood victims in the Philippines.

DR SIDDEEK AHMED is a renowned altruist as well as a businessman. His compassion for the fellow beings and particularly Indian community has been extolled by many on several occasions. As an ardent humanitarian, he supports several charity initiatives in partnership with various governments, trusts, NGOs and individuals, including United Nations Information Centre, besides his own projects. His support to the Indian expatriates in Saudi Arabia is also praiseworthy. In addition to providing them with health care assistance and support to overcome hurdles in the event of death or permanent disability, he is a passionate advocate for higher education facilities for Indians in Saudi Arabia. Dr Ahmed played an instrumental role in the joint initiative by Navodaya Cultural Centre in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, to arrange a chartered flight from Dammam to the Nedumbassery airport. More than 100 flight tickets were distributed to those affected by Nitaqat - the new labour law enforced in Saudi Arabia. Under his leadership, ITL World, an Eram Group venture, is also extending its support to the 'Swapnasafayam' project. This is an initiative by the Non-Resident Keralites Affairs Department (NORKA) set up by the Kerala State Government to help those who have been jailed in various GCC nations for reasons beyond their control and are unable to return home even after serving the term in prison. ITL World has been sponsoring tickets for their return home. The project proved to be a ray of hope for numerous expatriates languishing in jails in the gulf countries. Dr Siddeek has always had a concern for his homeland. When Chennai was ravaged by the devastating floods, he extended support to the flood victims. He donated over Rs 2 crore to Chennai flood victims.



Dr Siddeek Ahmed with the late President A P J Abdul Kalam and former Mayor of Florida Judy Paul on the occasion of the unveiling function of Gandhi statue at Falcon Lia Park in Florida, the US on October 2



ESPOIR Academy (Enlighten Skills program for Oil & Rig) Angamaly. A skill development centre for youth based on the vision of Dr A P J Abdul Kalam