

MUSADDIQ 'S MEMOIRS

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3. Colonel Fraser was the commander of the South Persia Rifles. This was a force of some 6,000 men that the British government had formed during the First World War in southern Iran. More than half of them were in the province of Fars, and the rest in the province of Kirman. The force did not enjoy official Iranian status and this can be shown by an incident which occurred during the government of Ala al-Saltaneh when Mushir al-Dawleh Pimiya was the minister of war. On a hot summer day, and a day of festivity, a royal audience was being held in front of the hall of mirrors in SaltanatAbad Palace where the first sessions of my trial in the military court took place. General Sykes,¹ then the commander of the South Persia Rifles, came and stood in front of all the officers of the ministry of war. Before the shah entered the hall, Pimiya, the minister of war had a word with him, and he sent for General Sykes and spoke to him.

The General left, and the official ceremonies began. This was very well received [because the shah had effectively refused to recognise him officially]. Given this precedent, on one of the early days of my appointment when my own telegraphic code had not yet been sent from Tehran, I sent this telegram to the premier via Yamin al-Mamalik who was the counsellor in the southern ports. The text read as follows:

The South Persia Rifles which are said to consist of three thousand men are in contact with the office of the governor-general both in writing and in person, and also attend official ceremonies and festivities in the government house. Please oblige by your instructions on how the Rifles should be treated. No. 2630, 19 Mizan.²

Since I received no reply from the prime minister I decided to stop the official ceremonies which at that time used to be held on every single religious festival. For the Persian New Year celebrations, I decided to receive my own visitors informally in the large reception rooms of the government house, and, therefore, I received the officers of the South Persia Rifles [informally] like anyone else.

Regarding our correspondence with the South Persia Rifles, I followed the practice which had been established by Farmanfarma. That is, I kept Major Idris Mirza, son of Yahya

Mirza Siqat al-Saltaneh (the First Majlis deputy) who was an officer of the Rifles, as liaison between the Rifles and the governorate. He would bring verbal messages, and, likewise, take my verbal answers to the commanding officer, and that is how we kept the contact going. Colonel Fraser, who was the Rifles' commanding officer, was more familiar with our language than any of the others, and there was an intimate relationship between us.

On the night of the third of the month of Esfand 1299 AH (22 February, 1921), the telegraphic communication line cable between Shiraz and Tehran was disconnected. For three full days the capital city of a major province was cut off from Tehran, and everyone had his own interpretation until a telegraphic circular was cabled by the shah to all provincial governors including Shiraz. It read as follows:

From Tehran to Shiraz. The evening of the 6th Esfand (25 February, 1921). To all governors of provinces and cities: due to the neglect of political leaders and statesmen in the past which has led to a general lack of direction, security, and welfare, we ourselves and all the people have been deeply upset by the absence of an effective government. Therefore, we have decided to end the continuing crisis by appointing an efficient and well-meaning person to office who would prepare the ground for the country's happiness and prosperity. Hence, given our knowledge of His Excellency Mirza Sayyid Zia al-Din's capacity and potential, we have invested him with our trust, and put him in charge of the government with full powers to discharge the duties of the office of the prime minister.

FOOTNOTE

1. Tr. General Sir Percy Sykes, (1867-1945) served as British consul-general for Kirman in 1894, Consul-general for Khurasan 1905-13, and inspector - general of the South Persia Rifles 1916-8.

2. The original copy of this telegram together with some other papers in my house were destroyed on 19 August [1953 coup]. The text of this and the other telegrams quoted here are reproduced from Sal-Name-yi Dunya (Dunya Yearbook) Vol.9, p. 37 ff.

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