

The plot against MKA : A son's protest

Seeing that the High Court would not be easily convinced by fake charges, the government decided to bypass due process altogether; hence, we have a homegrown system of summary tribunals, extended right to detain, no right of bail, little scope of appeal, and lots of intimidation. In that system, it became hard to find lawyers. Some politely refused, saying that they are scared to defend the accused, for the government would unleash its anger on them.

JALAL ALAMGIR

THE much-publicized graft trials in summary courts have just begun. Who's the first one being put on the stand? No, not someone who has embezzled millions from state coffers, nor one who has lived in inexplicable luxury and drives expensive European cars, nor one who has stolen relief materials meant for the poor.

The case that the government has prioritized is that of my father, Muhiddin Khan Alamgir. And the official charge is that he had failed to disclose in his wealth statement fixed deposits held in IFIC Bank's Karwan Bazar branch, amounting to around Tk 1 crore.

For the moment, leave aside the amount, which is tiny compared to the amounts implicated in corruption charges against others. Don't inquire, for now, why the same government that is hunting down Dr. Alamgir has allowed seven businessmen to quietly return Tk 270 crores of "launched money" and face no

charges.

And don't be bothered by the fact that the previous BNP government had left no stone unturned to find evidence of corruption against him, torturing him in 2002 and then persecuting him for the next five years, to no avail.

Just ask, where exactly is the corruption in this particular case?

Corruption implies abuse of power for private gain. Can a simple omission made in a financial statement by a 66-year-old man, jailed in solitary confinement, be considered corruption, or even a crime, by any reasonable definition of the terms?

While in jail, my father was told to prepare and submit within 72 hours a statement detailing his life's income and assets, or risk seizure of his property. He was denied access to any of his documents or to lawyers. He was kept in darkness from sun-down to sunrise. Still, he wrote down an estimate spanning 40-plus years, as best as he could from memory.

Under these conditions, it's simply impossible to be accurate, or even for the most meticulous. But that's precisely why the government created these conditions. It wants to generate these types of forced incriminations, so that it can have a pretext for convicting whomever it hand-picks, pretending smugly that justice has been served.

And so prosecutors have gone to claim that my father's omission indicates mala fide intent. I saw the draft statement he wrote; the poor man tried to calculate even tables of compound interest entirely by hand.

So I ask myself, do our leaders forget that people are not so easily fooled by their arguments? Even our ordinary wage-earning folk, like van drivers, fruit sellers, peons carrying files -- they all know very well whose intent is malicious here.

They don't speak, but their respectful salams, their sympathetic nods, and their everyday acts of courtesy tell my father that they know his case is a farce. They willingly take risks that highbrow round-table talking heads won't, and we get rewarded with an occasional letter, or

if we are very lucky, a hushed one-minute phone call.

A few days ago, I spoke with my father for a minute, after three months. "Abba, shunte pachho (can you hear me?)" I asked.

He just managed, "Baba," and he choked up.

Then silence.

But through it I heard a deafening question: why this injustice again, why are they still after me?

People know. During a raid to our house, while one government agent declared in bravado: "Ponchash takar gormil peleo dhorbo (we'll get you even if we find a fifty taka discrepancy)," another one sincerely apologized for what they were doing, but added that they had been ordered by higher ups to find something, anything, whatever it took.

The government's first plot to frame Abba was "conspiracy against the state." A Bangali daily published parts of the hearing. The prosecutor was trying to convince the judge that Abba was conspiring at night, but the prosecutor failed to give answers to the judge's repeated questions on what exactly he was conspiring.

"Are there witnesses? Is there proof?" the judge asked.

"Yes, we have all of that in a secret file," replied the Deputy Attorney General.

"Show me that file," demanded the Honorable Justice.

The prosecutor kept silent. Then,

unable to show anything, he protested, "My Lord, we are in a state of emergency."

That, the prosecutor believed, trumped all arguments. But the High Court later dismissed the case as false.

Seeing that the High Court would not be easily convinced by fake charges, the government decided to bypass due process altogether; hence, we have a homegrown system of summary tribunals, extended right to detain, no right of bail, little scope of appeal, and lots of intimidation.

In that system, it became hard to find lawyers. Some politely refused, saying that they are scared to defend the accused, for the government would unleash its anger on them. Many journalists are scared too; we've all read about the press notes and the SMSes that the government has sent from time to time, barring them from carrying certain types of news.

Journalists were also barred entry to the courtroom on May 6, the day that the court took cognizance of my father's case. The reason? Well, it's anybody's guess; maybe there were secret files with terrible truths that could not be made public.

All told, this is what the present courts are like, operating opaque in a legal outback. With basic rights and due process dumped, and the watchful eye of the High Court sidelined, the government will try to ram its case through summary tribunals, and then put my father behind bars for crimes he did not commit.

The plot against MKA has the makings of a deliberate miscarriage of justice. It also portends a broader tragedy.

2,500 years ago the Greek playwright Aeschylus, the founder of tragedy, wrote famously: "In war, truth is the first casualty." The way the government is starting off by framing my father, it seems like our



precious war on corruption will be no different.

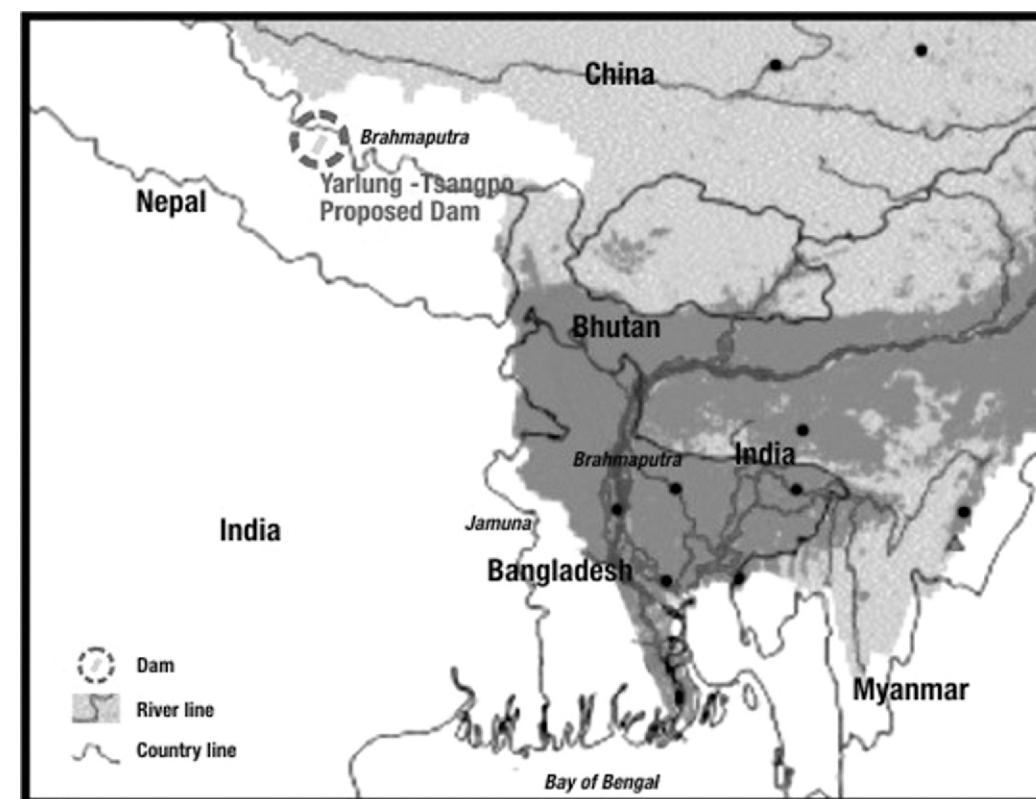
Next time I talk to Abba, whenever

it may be, I will tell him, "They may hurt you now with their newfound muscle, but people know who is right. You'll be able to tell by their salams."

Jalal Alamgir is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

China's new dam

In view of the above, there are still options for a solution by the concerned countries by taking the matter to the negotiating table. If a river water treaty could be signed between India and Pakistan despite their hostile relationship, in the early 1960s, a similar agreement can be negotiated between China, India and Bangladesh in order to ensure an environment friendly solution as well as sustainable futuristic regional development of the co-riparian countries.



KTHIS is in response to a news item published in Daily Star on May 8, where the map contains gross anomalies, and some information are not quite correct. It is unfortunate that the CEGIS, being a top GIS user and map maker, should allow a morphologist (geomorphologist) to publish a map where international boundaries have been mislabeled.

In the present case, Nepal's northern boundary has been shown as the Brahmaputra river, and that of Bangladesh near Kushtia as the Jamuna!

The proposed Yarlung-Tsangpo Dam is located on the mid-northern Nepalese boundary with Tibet (China).

In fact, the proposed dam is going to be at a location having no east-west riverine phene, having no link whatsoever with Nepal's international border with China. Having said so, the following piece may give the current situation on the proposed dam.

The Tsangpo-Brahmaputra river

The Tsangpo River originating in the western Tibetan plateau runs east then, bending acutely around a mountain knot called the Namcha Barwa, enters northeast Arunachal Pradesh as Siang, flowing south for a brief stretch, and then flows southwest into the Assam valley as the Brahmaputra.

In the upper part, the river system passes through one of the longest and deepest canyons in the world. It enters Bangladesh near Rajbirpur Upazila in Kurigram district and flows south retaining this name, but as it departs its old course as the Old Brahmaputra near Dewanganj (Jamalpur) it is known as the Jamuna.

Owing to the extremely active geodynamic condition of the terrain, characterized by frequent earthquakes and slight interference with the ecological-geological balance can initiate an enormous environmental change. It is in this set-up that a giant dam, expected to be the biggest plant ever made in the world, is to be constructed near the Namcha Barwa by the Chinese, within a few years.

China, in her own interests, could withhold water for power generation and irrigation during the dry season and release water during the rainy season, with catastrophic consequences for the lower-riparian countries. Further, this whole region would be starved of nutrient-rich sediments that enrich

the soil, but which would be held up in the reservoir instead of reaching the downstream GBM delta.

Further, if the Tsangpo project is implemented a large part of the RLP of India would become redundant and perhaps the most serious environmental disaster could ensue as this area is located in a highly active earthquake zone where breaking of the dam could cause devastating floods both in China and Indo-Bangladesh.

However, Chinese scientists hold that dam would alleviate floods and erosion in the Brahmaputra. But this makes little sense, since flooding could actually get worse due to relentless silting which, will be accelerated by the slowing down (reduced velocity) of the river flow.

This would shorten the approximately 3,000 meter altitude difference between the head and the tail. The hydropower potential could be used to pump water to northwest China over 800 km away. This multi-billion dollar project is scheduled to begin in 2009.

The environmental and socio-economic consequences of this dam and the diversion of water to northwestern China are multiple and far-reaching, not only for the Tibetan plateau but also for India and Bangladesh.

India and Bangladesh would be at the mercy of China for release of adequate amount of water during the dry season (as has happened to Bangladesh with the Farakka dam on the Ganges), and for protection from floods during the rainy season. Precipitation in northern India (particularly in Assam-Meghalaya region) and Bangladesh is very high (80%), and the monsoonal winds of June to December, and low (2%) during the remaining months of the year.

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