

35 IN DACCA FACE SECESSION CHARGE

Case in East Pakistan Poses Threat to Ayub Regime

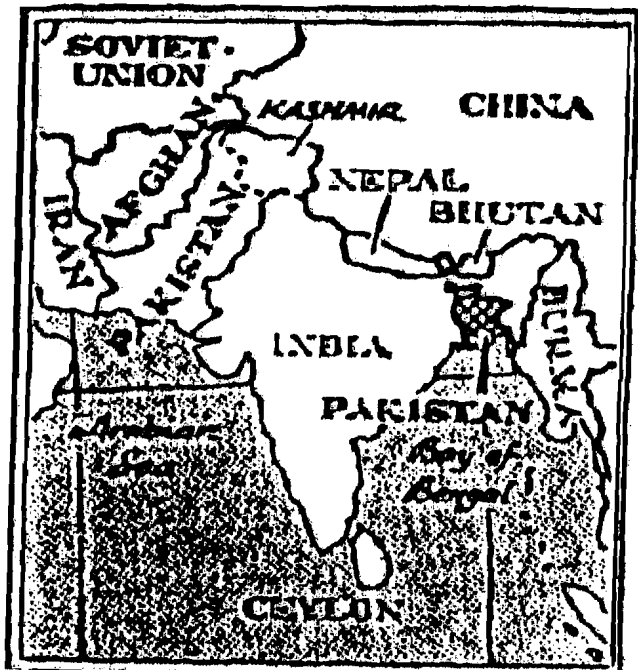
By JOSEPH LELYVELD
Special to The New York Times

DACCA, Pakistan, Aug. 4—The trial of 35 Bengalis charged with plotting the secession of East Pakistan has suddenly turned into the most serious test the regime of President Mohammad Ayub Khan has had to face in the disgruntled province in several years.

The state case contends that the leader of a movement for the province's autonomy, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, headed the secessionist conspiracy and invited Indian support.

The fact that Sheik Mujibur had been held in jail for nearly

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Secession plot is charged in East Pakistan (shaded).

two years on no charge before the conspiracy was uncovered leads opponents of the Ayub regime here to the conclusion that the Sheik himself has been the victim of an official conspiracy.

This week, as a special tribunal started hearing testimony, the defense outlined its case in explicitly political terms, as if it was the regime that was really on trial and not the 35 defendants.

Colonization Charged

The Bengalis of East Pakistan often contend that they have been "colonized" by the Punjabis of West Pakistan, 1,000 miles away across the vast expanse of India.

They note that though they have nearly 60 per cent of the nation's 105 million population and foreign earnings, they enjoy a markedly smaller share of political influence, position and development.

The chief defense counsel declared that the conspiracy charges against the 35 Bengalis had been "falsely concocted to sabotage the just demands of East Pakistan." Almost immediately this contention received what appeared to many Bengalis to be powerful support.

Tortures Described

The second witness called by the prosecution, a former seaman named Kamaluddin Ahmed, broke down in court and finally asserted that he had been tortured and threatened with death by army intelligence officials to induce him to testify falsely against Sheik Mujibur and other opposition leaders.

An army brigadier helped to dictate his statement after he gave in, he said. Letters smuggled out of jail to his wife that vividly described several gross tortures were submitted as evidence and reprinted the next morning in one of the local newspapers—probably the most damaging allegation against the Ayub regime ever to be openly circulated here.

The prosecution promised medical testimony that would disprove the allegation of torture, but this was undercut by the witness's statement that one of the doctors who examined him whispered at the time, "my hands are tied and I have no eyes."

India Role Alleged

The secessionist plot was alleged to have involved an Indian diplomat, who was expelled at the end of last year at the time of the arrest of the 35 Bengalis. The diplomat was said to have turned over the equivalent of about \$3,200 to the conspirators.

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It has been pointed out that this would be a fairly cheap price for a secession but not, perhaps, an unreasonable price for information about one. The Indians are said to have backed away from a pledge to supply arms because of misgivings about the "caliber" of the conspirators.

The defendants are a mixed group of junior military officers, enlisted men and civil servants. Their relatively low status initially led many observers to dismiss the plot as quixotic. But since there are no cadres of high-ranking officers from East Pakistan in the country's armed forces, the list of plotters could not have been much more impressive.

The evidence the state has put forth so far indicates that the plot had been in existence for more than three years.

But it has had serious consequences. According to some accounts, military intelligence suspects many East Pakistan officials of having been implicated, at least to the extent of having known of the plot's existence and doing nothing to stop it.

The defendants are being tried by a military tribunal. There will be no appeal from the court's verdict, which may not be handed down for more than a year. MMR JALAL (3)

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