

DOWN TO EARTH

Wretched Passenger Service For City Commuters

By A.S.M Nurunnabi

Dhaka is a rapidly expanding city with a steadily volume of commuters. In similarly placed modern cities in countries, such as Philippines and Indonesia, we find mass transit system to cope with the problem. Many megacities like Calcutta, Tokyo and Hong Kong, because of space limitations, have pushed upwards from street level or downwards below ground to set up light railway systems. All this is because their road networks—and booming populations—have made commuting for both vehicles and pedestrian very difficult.

Similar situation is fast developing in Dhaka city. In the recently concluded Round Table Conference on Save Dhaka, opinions were expressed by some participants, though not very elaborately, on the growing urgency of the problem.

The number of city dwellers as well as those from the suburbs who use public transports have been steadily growing with the expansion of the city. Some of the city suburbs are old, while others have lately appeared on the scene. The more important of these suburbs are Tongi, Azampur, Gazipur, Kaliakoir, Kapasia, in the north, Savar, Nayarhat, Dhamrai, Singra in the north-west, Narayanganj, Narsingdi in the east, Keraniganj, Zinzira, Kamrangir Char across the Buriganga river, and Sonargaon, Ruppaganj, Demra, etc. in the south east. All these places are, more or less, within a radius of 75 km from the Dhaka city, which can be reached within 2 to 3 hours. The brunt of the commuters from these places is borne by public or private buses. The number of commuters dependent on trains, launches and boats is comparatively limited. During the monsoons when certain places in the suburbs are not negotiable by bus, launches and boats become the only alternatives. Before the construction of the China Friendship bridge over Buriganga, people from the other side of the river from areas such as Keraniganj, Zinzira used ferry boats to come to the city. Even now, quite a good volume of traffic is carried by ferry boats across the river.

The prime question affecting these commuters relates to the standard of service offered by the operating private or public buses. Along with the mounting traffic jams in the city, the standard of service in these conveyances, apart from their being of a vintage kind in most cases, has been steadily deteriorating, although there has been no reduction in the bus fares. The commuters travelling on various routes in the city are not getting the minimum service facility. Because of their over-riding need, large numbers of people from middle and lower middle classes as well as the poor sections are obliged to use conveyances without giving any thought to considerations of any facility or convenience.

On every route of the city, most of the transports are said to operate with faulty engine or mechanical defect. This is true not only of private buses but also of public buses run by Road Transport Corporation. Very often some double-decker buses are found stalled on roads causing great suffering to their passengers. It is common experience that once you get into a bus or minibus, you cease to be treated as a human being. If you fail to get a seat, you are obliged to be a standing passenger constantly subject to pushing by the conductor for making room for more. A good number of passengers take the risk of standing on the footboard, placing themselves under the hazard of being dashed by other vehicles or slipping on to the road to be crushed under the wheels of vehicles coming from behind. Similar are the tribulations suffered by commuters who travel by trains or launches. The over-all picture looks like one where the commuters are literally sandwiched and packed like sardines.

Another distressing aspect relates to the interior of the buses. The seats are dilapidated with torn rexin and gaped springs, the window glass panes are mostly found missing and there is cramped space between rows of seats. Above all, the excruciating experience of overcrowding is added to create a wretched standard of passenger service.

During festivals, the suffering of the commuters reaches its peak. Even before a few days before such festivals, the bus fares with the connivance of anti-social elements register a jump to the extent of four times the normal rates. The ordinary passengers are left with no alternative but to submit to their illegal exactions.

There is another deplorable aspect: Access to public transports is well nigh impossible for women commuters in the rush hours. If these women have to make it to work on time, whether it is in the garment industry of the office, they just can't make it with the men, since, by and large, women of the city tend to feel that this city is basically a man's city. Another thing is the question of security for the travelling women. When they return home at late hours, again public transport becomes a great problem.

Empowerment of women must begin at grassroots

By Staff Correspondent

Empowerment of women must begin at the grassroots. This was stressed at the National Conference on Women and Development. Chaired by Jowshan A. Rahman (UNICEF), Maleka Begum (GSS), Dr. Hameeda Hossain (Ain O Shalish Kendra) and Syeda R. Quadir, the conference was held on July 19-20 at the Bangladesh Management and Development Centre in the city.

The meeting took place in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing to be held in August. Representatives of NGOs and women's organisations and others concerned were present.

Hosne Ara Khan (USHA) welcomed the guests and participants. Begum Sarwari Rahman, State Minister for Women's and Children's Affairs, was the chief guest and Dr. Najma Chowdhury, Chairperson of the Bangladesh National Preparatory Committee for the Beijing NGO Forum '95, inaugurated the conference.

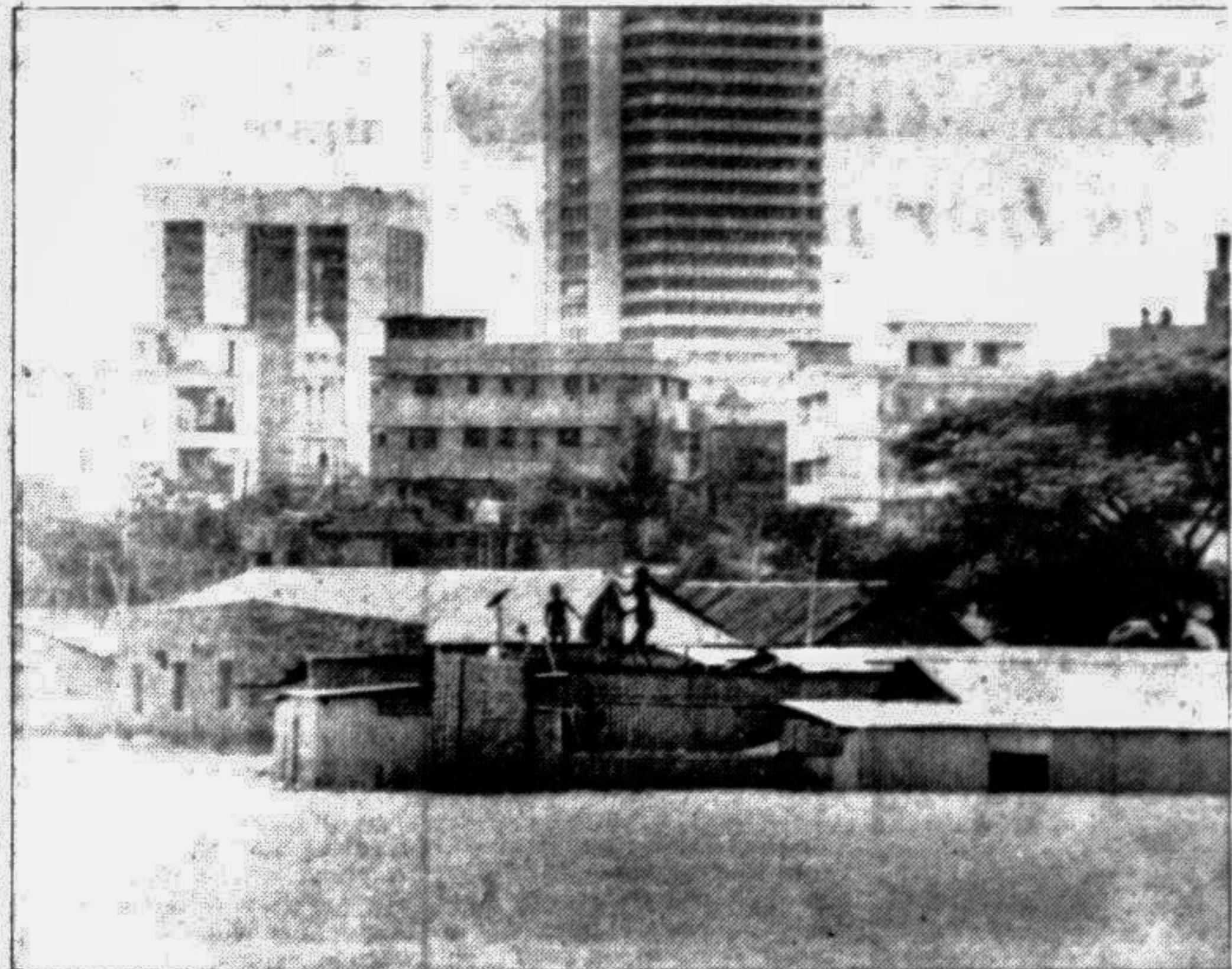
Of the various topics under scrutiny, discussions were held on the NGO Status Report on Women (prepared by the Preparatory Committee). Among the women who participated in the discussions, many had come from different areas of the country.

Two other main subjects taken up at the conference were the Jakarta Declaration and the Plan of Action. These reports will be submitted at the NGO Forum in Beijing. The core of the Plan of Action encompassed issues concerning the rights and the empowerment of women.

The subjects discussed included Women's Rights and Violence Against Women, Political Empowerment, of Women, Economic Empowerment of Women, Women and Education, Women and Environment, Women and Health, Women and the Media, Women and the Environment, Women and the Law and Religious Fundamentalism.

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The flooded Mukdipara area of the city.

Major rivers mark further fall

The Brahmaputra recorded fall at all points, the Ganges registered fall at upstream and rivers in the Meghna basin marked rise and fall during 24 hours till 9 am yesterday, reports UNB.

But all the rivers in the South-Eastern Hill basin registered fall during the period. According to a Flood Information Centre bulletin, the Brahmaputra at Aricha, the Lakhya at Narayanganj, the Kaliganga at Taraghat, the Turag at Mirpur, the Ganges at Bhagyakul and Goauldo and the Meghna at Bhatrab Bazar are flowing above their respective danger levels.

In its forecast for the next 24 hours till 6 am today the centre said, the flood situation of Faridpur, Shariatpur, Kishoreganj and Narsingdi are likely to start improving while the situation of Munsiganj may improve further. The flood situation around the capital may continue to improve while the situation around Narayanganj is likely to start improving, it said.

The Brahmaputra recorded further fall by 7 cm at Nookhawa, 6 cm at Bahadurabad, 7 cm at Aricha and slight fall at Chilmaji and Sirajganj. The river is still flowing 6 cm above the danger level at Aricha.

The Dharla registered fall by 12 cm at Kurigram and the Teesta recorded rise by 3 cm at Dalia while it receded by 14 cm at Kaunia.

The Old Brahmaputra recorded further fall by 6 cm at Jamalpur and 15 at Myensingh. The Buriganga at Dhaka marked further fall by 3 cm and was flowing 9 cm below the danger mark.

The Lakhya at Narayanganj also recorded further fall by 3 cm but the river is still flowing above the danger level.

The Ganges registered fresh fall by 4 cm at Pankha, slight fall at Goauldo and remained steady at Hardinge Bridge while it marked slight rise at Rajshahi. But it was still flowing 27 cm and 55 cm above its danger levels at Goauldo and Bhaugyakul respectively.

Dist election officers' 2-day sit-in from today

District election officers are likely to embark on an indefinite work abstention if their demands are not met by the first week of next month, their association sources said yesterday, reports UNB.

They will stage sit-in demonstration in front of the Election Commission Secretariat here today and Sunday and submit a memorandum to the concerned authorities to press for amendment of recruitment rules.

Bangladesh District Election Officers' Association sources said it will give an ultimatum to authorities to meet their demands by the first week of August when the process for finalising the voters' list will begin.

Attempt on KCC commissioner

KHULNA, July 21: A Khulna City Corporation (KCC) commissioner here today escaped an attempt on his life as all three bullets fired by snipers failed to hit him, reports UNB.

Police said unknown assailants fired three bullets towards Khatun Uddin Bablu, commissioner of Ward No 26, when he was passing through the Banargati-Arambagh area in the morning.

Bablu, who was returning home alone riding a motorcycle after attending a local *salish* (arbitration), narrowly escaped the bullets fired at him.

Transport strike in Noakhali

NOAKHALI, July 21: Bus service in three routes from the district headquarters was disrupted for the second day today due to an indefinite transport strike protesting toll collection. Bus owners and workers endorsed the strike Thursday night in Sonapur-Charghat, Sonapur-Kabirhat and Sonapur-Ramgati routes, reports UNB.

BIRDEM

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alleged that the ruling party MP assaulted the liftnan for delay in the operation of lift. But Akhtaruzzaman told a news agency that the employees assaulted him when he protested for not allowing the people standing outside the lift to board it.

Later some young men from nearby areas rushed to the hospital and ransacked the outdoor unit. Police soon rushed to the hospital and brought the situation under control.

Dhaka for settlement

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efforts are backed by force. The Foreign Minister was speaking at the international conference on Bosnia here convened by the British Prime Minister John Major.

Bangladesh was invited to the international conference in view of presence of Bangladeshi troops in the Bihac enclave.

He said Bangladesh wanted expansion of UNPROFOR with a clear mandate to retaliate. For this, UNPROFOR should be equipped with heavy weapons for striking capability, he stressed.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister opposed withdrawal of UNPROFOR saying its withdrawal would leave Bosnians defenceless. It would also endanger lives of UN peacekeepers, he added.

Thanking the UK government for convening the international conference on Bosnia, Mostafizur said this timely and important initiative would well turn out to be a significant one at this critical point when the situation in Bosnia threatened to slip completely out of control.

He underlined the need for protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and said the UN contact group's peace plan must be given effect.

Indian troops fire on civilians in Neelum Valley

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, July 21: At least three people including two women were killed today when Indian troops opened fire on civilians in Neelum Valley in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, officials said, reports AFP.

Tamils threaten to kill Muslims

COLOMBO, July 21: Tamil separatists have threatened to kill thousands of Muslim civilians unless they flee a town in eastern Sri Lanka by August 1, a police source said Friday, reports AP.

Danis: Violation of rights

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Canadian Constitution, Danis said every citizen has right to appoint and consult his lawyer of his choice.

Danis, a former Minister and Deputy Speaker of Canadian Parliament, flew in Dhaka on July 17 to defend Ershad in the Gen Manzur murder case.

He wrote a letter to the Home Secretary seeking interview with Ershad for legal consultation. Danis told reporters that local lawyers would file a writ petition in the High Court Sunday challenging the government's decision.

"My mission has been purely consultative which is permitted by your Constitution and what I wanted is an interview with my client and discuss with him matters relating to the papers so far seen and examined by me."

He said: "I wanted to render some legal and consultative services to former President Ershad within the framework of the existing law but I regret that I have been denied to do so."

"I shall, however, pursue my mission as the law consultant of Ershad and continue my effort to render consultative services to him by advising Bangladeshi lawyers to file writ application on his behalf," he said.

Danis said he will leave Dhaka on Monday for London, Geneva and Paris and take up the matter with international Human Rights organisations to seek remedy against the violation of human rights against Ershad.

He will also pursue and see that the matter is also mooted at foreign capitals through diplomatic level, "I will ask them to monitor the trials to see that the human rights are not violated."

The Canadian lawyer said he also wrote a letter to the Bangladesh Bar Council on his arrival to enroll him as an advocate so that he can plead for his client Ershad in the murder case. But, he said, I yet to get any reply.

Referring to the government's denial, Marcel Danis said he had pleaded cases in USA, UK and other countries outside Canada, but for the first time in his 22 years of legal profession, he had been refused to consult with his client.

Engaging of foreign lawyer is nothing new even in this country, he said, adding British lawyer Thomas William defended Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in late sixties in the Agartola Conspiracy Case.

Replying to a question Danis said he will come back to Dhaka when the trial of the murder case will resume.

When asked about his visa status, the Canadian lawyer said that the government has issued him 30-day business visa, but refused to comment why he is defending a person who assumed power illegally.

"I do not want to make any political statement but it would be sad for democracy if a person is not allowed to have legal consultation with his lawyer whatever be the offences against him," he said.

The Midnight File

OIC meet on Bosnia begins

GENEVA, July 21: A crisis meeting of Islamic countries on Bosnia opened today with Bosnia's Foreign Minister Mohamed Sacirbey saying his Muslim-led government needed more guns to win a peace settlement. As western powers in London debated their own Bosnia strategy, the Geneva talks brought together foreign ministers from the eight countries of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) contact group on Bosnia — Morocco, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Senegal, Egypt and Malaysia, reports Reuter.

Pak senate backs N-bomb plan

ISLAMABAD, July 21: US sanctions have so eroded Pakistan's conventional defence capability that it has no option but to speed development of a nuclear weapons programme, Pakistan's Senate said in a report published today, reports AP.

The 24-page policy report by the Senate's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto not to give up the nuclear programme to please the United States.

There was no immediate reaction from Benazir. The United States has withheld billions of dollars in annual aid and arms sales to Pakistan since 1990, when it determined that Pakistan was attempting to develop nuclear weapons. Washington also has refused to deliver 28 F-16 fighters that Pakistan has already paid for.

2 hostages hurt in gunbattle between Kashmiri militants, troops

SRINAGAR, July 21: Two western hostages in Kashmir were injured in a gunbattle between Indian security forces and their captors today, the guerrillas said, reports Reuter.

Air power against Serbs

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taking of UN troops on the ground as has occurred after previous NATO airstrikes against the Serbs.

His comments came as the five-nation contact group — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany — held its crisis conference in London to decide their response to the Bosnian Serb offensive against UN-designated safe havens in Bosnia.

British Prime Minister John Major opened key talks on Bosnia today, urging the international community to send a blunt warning to Bosnian Serbs and to clearly define the UN mission in the former Yugoslav republic.

He said the Serbs should be made to pay "a very high price" if they carry out their threat to attack the safe areas.

"Today we need to spell out in unmistakable terms the consequences of further attacks," on UN-declared 'safe areas'. Major told officials from 20 nations and organisations.

"We must mean what we say and we must be determined to carry out what we say," he added.

He described the behaviour of the Bosnian Serbs as "nothing less than barbaric" and said he had called the meeting because the international peacekeeping effort "could not continue in the same fashion."

"I believe we've reached a turning point for the United Nations mission," he said.

He said the international community needed to come to a "united voice" on the Bosnian crisis and that the allies must agree on "joint, singular" action.

"A diplomatic political settlement is the only way in which we are going to finally end the war in Bosnia," he said. "More than three years of war have shown that the conflict will not be settled by military means."

He said the allies needed to address for objectives during the talks, including clearly defining the UN mission in Bosnia and setting conditions under which the peacekeepers would stay, he said there was also some "urgency" to diplomatic efforts and that the allies needed to give more support to negotiators in the crisis.

The fourth objective he said, was to review the work of humanitarian organisations and to address the problems they face.

Major warned that "the peace process is in danger of collapse under the weight of military pressure," adding that the UN Protection Force

Constitution
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Chowdhury and Dr MA Khaleq addressed the function, presided over by Mahbub Uddin Ahmed, Convener of the Parishad's Dhaka City committee.

Justice Sobhani said the Constitution was changed several times for personal interests between 1975 and 1990 but it failed to serve democracy.

Prof Kabir Chowdhury said the present political crisis has been created by the distortion of history of the War of Liberation and for misleading the nation by propagating lies through national media.

The post-75 governments which rehabilitated the communal politics obstructed the trial of the killers and collaborators of 1971, he said.

(UNPROFOR) cannot stay and do its work if its movements are impeded.

In Sarajevo, meanwhile, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic launched a last-minute appeal today urging world leaders at the London talks to help avoid the massacre of an innocent people.

"Five thousands women, children and wounded are threatened with death" in the Muslim enclave of Zepa "while you meet in London," Izetbegovic said.

He called on the five-nation contact group to use all means to avoid the massacre. Bosnian radio today reported shelling of Gorazde that faces severe food shortages even though it is still relatively secure in government hands.

"Regardless of any imminent military threat to Gorazde, it is being slowly starved and strangled," said UN aid spokesman Ron Redmond in Geneva.

Redmond said only one food convoy had reached Gorazde's 50,000 to 60,000 people since May 6. Medical supplies also were extremely scarce, he said.

Serbs claimed Thursday to have taken Zepa, a remote mountainous enclave south-east of Sarajevo, but the Bosnian government disputed the claim.

Shells also slammed into Sarajevo, wounding 10 people, four of them children. And anti-government forces increased attacks on Bihac, another 'safe area' in north-west Bosnia.

Erosion

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The president of Chandpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry has urged the government to save Chandpur town from erosion by the Meghna. He has sent telegrams to the Prime Minister and other authorities concerned to take necessary measures on an emergency basis.

Town protection work at Chandpur was initiated in 1974. Accordingly, a scheme was taken up — Chandpur town protection scheme — at a cost of Tk 80 crore. Under the scheme, a 10-mile embankment from Chandpur to Chirchar was to be constructed. The scheme was partly implemented but could not be completed due to fund shortage, sources pointed out.

Another scheme — Meghna Survey was undertaken in 1985 at a cost of Tk 300 crore. It could not be implemented due to fund constraint, the sources said.

Over the last five years, the work on the town protection embankment was progressing very slowly. Last year, only Tk 50 lakh was sanctioned for repair works, one source said.

Clash over fishing in Ctg coastal area: 10 hurt

CHITTAGONG, July 21: At least 10 people were injured in a clash between two groups of fishermen over fishing in the coastal area of Kattali under Bandar thana today, reports UNB.

Police said the clash started when fishermen of Latifpur area tried to catch fish in Uttar Kattali area.

They also allegedly looted 200 pieces of current net worth about Tk 6 lakh from Uttar Kattali area.

A case was lodged with Bandar thana.