

DOWN TO EARTH

City held hostage by terrorists

By A S M Nurunnabi

Activities of extortionists and terrorists in the city appear to have swelled to alarming proportions. So much so that the whole city seems to have been held hostage by them. These elements appear to have become so bold and defiant that they can go to the extent of attacking a police outpost or snatching away criminal suspects from police custody. The fields of their operations cover a wide range and in many cases with utter impunity.

A recital of their doings in various fields as gleaned from press reports seems to convey the impression that we live in a lawless society. According to various sources, a large number of projects of construction and repair work are held up on account of interference by musclemen who make illegal demands for money from the contractors who are successful bidders for such works. In some cases, they hinder tender formalities to take their course, thereby standing in the way of many welfare projects. Such malevolent elements wield such a powerful clout for making their extortionate demands that they seem to enjoy patronage from invisible powerful quarters which makes all attempts for remedies infructuous.

Besides the works of construction, the activities of these extortionists and terrorists are directed towards businessmen and industrialists in commercial areas. They force their way into different commercial offices demanding subscriptions for various political parties, social organisations and cultural groups. Some businessmen in their anxiety to avoid unpleasant situations sometimes give in to their demands. Others who resist their demands are subjected to threats of harassment and sometimes to actual violence.

It was reported lately that the owners of tanneries in Hazaribagh area have virtually become hostage by organised gangs of extortionists and terrorists and every night leather and chemicals worth

thousands of Taka were being stolen by them from the tanneries. The situation has reportedly become so serious that some owners of tanneries were contemplating a shut-down of their business.

The four bus terminals have reportedly become good grounds for operations by organised groups of extortionists and terrorists. These elements are said to realise money by force to the extent of four lakh Taka everyday from the passengers and users of the terminals. The sufferings of the innocent bus passengers on this account are boundless, yet the law enforcing agencies appear to be inert in this respect. It is alleged that these evil elements find the strength to be defiant on the basis of patronage extended to them by influential quarters; hence perhaps the absence of effective steps to curb them.

Even the FDC studios are not free from their depredations. The other day a leading film actor called a press conference at which he expressed the helplessness of the actors and actresses in the hands of the musclemen who make illegal demands for money with threats of bodily harm and suspension of shooting. All this happens within the area of the FDC Complex; yet no relief is available to them from any quarter.

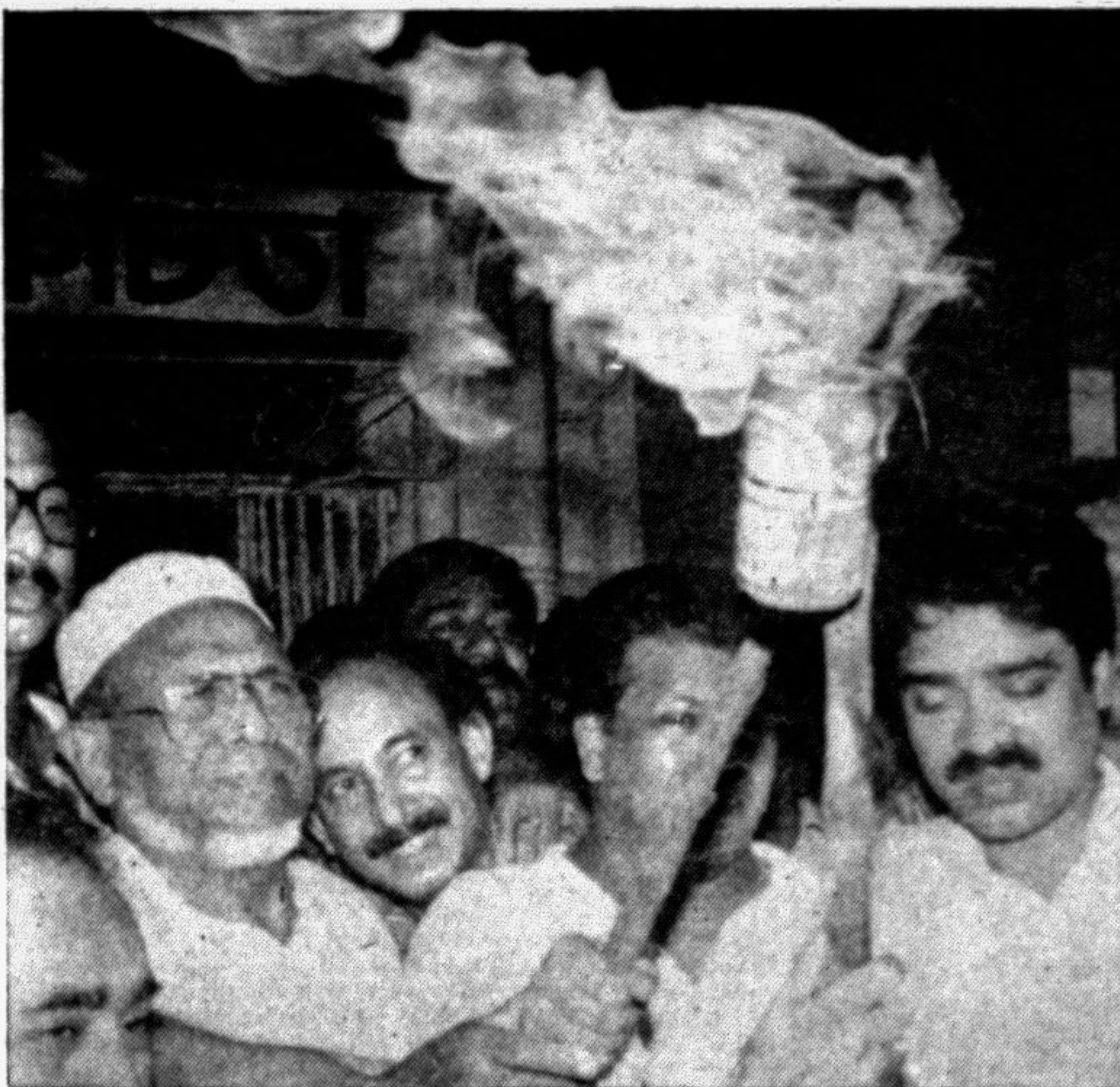
The ominous fact is that extortion of money even under full public view has become commonplace. Though normally the blame for extortion of money is put on masts, nowadays it is being perpetrated by a section of people in the name of various trade unions. According to news reports, the operations by extortionists have exceeded all previous scales at Ghorasal and Palash. There are two big fertilizer factories at this place. Fertiliser is distributed to various points in the country from these two factories. A section of people allegedly having close link with influential quarters charge money varying from Tk 20 to Tk 100 from each

truck. The extortionists have people positioned at the main gates of the factories and other exit points. Anyone refusing to pay the money asked for by the extortionists face the risk of physical torture.

There is perhaps no other country where the level of extortion has reached such alarming proportions. Contractors, distributors and those connected with transportation of goods from one place to another are not supposed to face any obstacles in their work. But like dacoits some people with indulgence from high places stop trucks on highways to extort money. Reports of any effective steps against such unlawful activities are for the most part non-existent.

There are some queer ways in which some musclemen conduct their activities to make unlawful gains. There are reports that some sections of rootless floating people who pass their nights on the footpaths of the city in some important commercial areas are forced to pay tolls at the rate of Tk 1 per head to some organised gangs for being allowed to use the footpaths. In this way such gangs are said to earn Tk one lakh every night. Besides these places, open spaces in office verandas, shopping complexes, rail stations, parks, overbridges provide shelter to many rootless people on payment of a fixed amount to certain anti-social elements who conduct a regular business in this line.

Extortion now seems to become as normal as payment of toll and duties, which raises the question whether extortion of money is becoming an acceptable practice. In this dark situation, observers strongly feel that any measure contemplated by the authorities for flushing and wiping out the persons involved in forcible collection of money will not only be applauded but will be the support of an overwhelming majority of people who fall victims to these malevolent elements.



Awami League leader Abdus Samad Azad lighting a torch before the start of a torch procession in the city yesterday to drum up support for the 32-hour hartal beginning today.

32-hr hartal

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service vehicles and press vehicles, drug stores and restaurants will remain outside the purview of the hartal which ends at 2 pm tomorrow.

The three parties will announce their next course of agitation programmes from their respective post-hartal rallies Sunday.

The leaders of the three parties will further exchange views before finalising their fresh agitation programmes Sunday morning. Opposition sources said the fresh programmes might include a 72-hour hartal, march towards Parliament and siege of the Chittagong port.

Hasina
UNB adds: Awami League president Sheikh Hasina yesterday appealed to the people to express no-confidence in the government and bring the movement to its logical end by making the 32-hour hartal a complete success.

In a statement, Hasina said the ruling party has resorted to torture, repression, killing and anarchy to curb the peaceful and democratic movement of the people and for establishing their rights to vote and food.

The BNP has established a one-party and autocratic rule violating the Constitution and democratic norms of the country, Hasina said.

Agra Bandh to protect Taj Sept 5

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: Industrialists of Agra have given a call for Agra Bandh-Taj bandh on September 5 to protect the historic monument Tajmahal as well as the industries in the city, reports PTI.

Nobody would be allowed to enter the Taj on that day to impress the centre and the state government on the need for taking immediate steps to save the 400 industries in Agra and formulate a comprehensive plan to save the historic monument.

Some shrugged and said, women are used to working in adverse conditions so this is nothing to them.

NATO orders pause in air raids on Serbs

SARAJEVO, Sept 1: NATO and the United Nations agreed Friday to suspend their three-day assault on Bosnian Serb military targets, reports AP.

Maj Panajotis Theodorakidis, a NATO spokesman in Naples, confirmed that "our

S Asian show

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against women. The other workshop dealt with gender equality and development perspective for the 21st Century and was participated by Bangladesh, Singapore and India.

Pam Rajput, the Director of Women's Studies from Punjab University in her address said that we should look beyond mere words like development and empowerment and focus on the concrete measures. Citing example, she said, India does not need Cola, rather it needs clean drinking water for her people.

Besides the workshops and discussions being organised by the Preparatory Committee members of the NGO delegation including those outside the committee are participating in various panels organised by other countries and organisations.

Also at a video programme yesterday some videos, produced by Femcom, on women's lives in Bangladesh were shown.

There was also a big celebration at the Asia-Pacific Friendship Tent with the delegation from Azerbaijan displaying their traditional products, music and dances.

Braving heavy downpour all day in Hualour yesterday, women carried out most of their planned activities. Thousands of women spent the day at the Forum site, celebrating, discussing and networking.

Some shrugged and said, women are used to working in adverse conditions so this is nothing to them.

The Midnight File

Beant Singh was crusader against terrorism: Sonia

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: Sonia Gandhi, the widow of former premier Rajiv Gandhi, expressed shock today at the car-bomb assassination of the Punjab state chief minister Beant Singh and described him as a crusader against terrorism. "I, as much as anyone else, can understand your anguish at this moment and I share your pain with you," said the Italian-born widow of Rajiv Gandhi, reports AFP.

Interim govt for polls

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"In his speech that evolved great interest of two select audience, Weatherill said "All grounds are ready here for flourishing of Parliamentary system." "But what is needed is to make some rules to make the Parliament effective. Fair share of time for the Opposition should be ensured and the Speaker should be impartial and independent," he said.

Humayun Khan Panni urged the former opposition parliamentarians to "come back" and said "Still there is a chance to reshape the things."

Taking part in the discussion Works Minister and BNP leader Rafiqul Islam Miah said he felt that some of the rules should be changed to meet the demand of the day. Accountability of the government has to be done within the House. He alleged that the parliament was made ineffective by the Opposition. "It was not given a fair chance to function."

Refuting his allegation, Awami League presidium member Tofael Ahmed said "It was the ruling party which made the parliament ineffective. How the Parliament can be made effective if the Prime Minister, who is also the Leader of the House never makes any policy statement inside the House?"

Moudud Ahmed of Jatiya Party said the Parliament lost a golden opportunity to resolve the crisis amicably. The responsibility now lies with the majority party, he said.

The function of the Parliament is to control the executives, but it was not allowed to perform its job. "The office of the Speaker is not uncontroversial as the Speaker goes to campaign for the party."

"Mutual respect has eroded. The Parliament is dead. Committee system practised today should be abolished. The prime minister attended the House for only 7 and a half hours during the last 3 and a half years," Moudud said.

Sheikh Ansar Ali of Jamaat said there will not be an effective parliament if the people are not allowed to elect their representatives through a free and fair election which can be ensured only under a caretaker government.

Matia Chowdhury of Awami League accused the Prime Minister of violating the Constitution by encouraging some Opposition MPs to join the ruling party crossing the floor.

Suranjit Sengupta of Awami League said a "political DSE trading

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crore two weeks ago. A total of 573 issues having 272 gainers and 211 losers was traded last week as against 569 issues having 241 gainers and 258 losers of the previous week.

A random sampling of 17 frequently traded issues showed that prices of most issues declined by Tk 1 to 95 in one week. Of these issues, prices of 9 issues declined, that of 5 rose and while the prices of three remained unchanged.

During the week, AB Bank and Talu Spinning Mills held their Annual General Meetings (AGMs). Of them, Talu proposed 15 per cent dividend to its shareholders.

Meanwhile, the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB) proposed 50 per cent dividend for its 1st ICBMF, 40 per cent for 2nd ICBMF, 27 per cent for 3rd ICBMF, 41 per cent for the 4th, 28 per cent for the 5th and 18 per cent for the 6th ICBMF.

The volume leader of the week - Beximco Pharmaceuticals - sold over 65,000 shares. Among the other volume leaders, there were Monno Ceramics, Sonarganj Textiles, Bata Shoes, BOC, and Purabi Insurance.

127 die
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tragic deaths of a young girl and seven others in the recent violence in Dinajpur.

The CCHRB reports the deaths under three categories - deaths under police custody, deaths in jail and killing by police firing.

Of the total 127, some 27 people were killed in police custody, 39 in police firing while 61 others died in jail.

Opposition

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newed their vow to realise demand for elections under a caretaker government through street agitation.

Awami League leader Mohammad Nasim said people want to get rid of this 'corrupt and terrorist' government which also failed to give security to the life and property of the people.

"The prime responsibility of the people is to oust the BNP government as it has stigmatised the history by resorting to terrorism, corruption, politicisation and vote dacoity in last four and a half years," he said.

Nasim said, "We reject the proposal which is designed to hoodwink the people... Opposition will realise the demand through movements."

Jamaat leader Maulana Matur Rahman Nizami said this government has miserably failed to provide security to life and property of the people.

The Prime Minister's statement for dialogue is not for saving the life and prestige of the people, but for containing the Opposition's agitating. Nizami said, adding that no government could stay in power by adopting repressive measures in the past and this government will also meet the same fate.

Nizami said there was no evidence that the BNP government has properly understood the present political problem. There was not sign of initiating any political move to resolve the political crisis.

A dialogue can only take place if the BNP accepts the demand for elections under a caretaker government, the Jamaat leader said.

Jatiya Party leader Kazi Zafar Ahmed turned down the PM's offer and said discussion cannot be held before meeting the Opposition demand for a caretaker government.

"Begum Khaleda Zia should know that ruling party's threat never stopped the Opposition movement... BNP government has failed to ensure security of the people."

Beijing NGO Forum

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Croatian women rights activist Vesna Kesic, speaking at one of the main panels, said 30,000 women have been raped as a part of the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, and 4 million people are displaced, the majority women and children.

"Women's bodies are once again battlefields for big ideas... and the ultimate proof of male dominance over his male enemy and his property," she told a capacity crowd of 3,000 at a cinema turned conference hall.

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 1: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, suffering from a high fever, today cancelled his trip to the UN women's conference in Beijing and subsequent visits to South Korea and Japan, the United Nations announced. "He has been ill and running quite a high fever," his spokesman Joe Sills said. "It is on the strongest possible advice of his doctors that he not undertake this trip," reports Reuter.

Kesic, who heads the human rights group Be Active Be Emancipated, said the United Nations spends almost nothing to try to resolve conflicts before wars start, but billions of dollars afterward.

"Could it be that war is in someone's interest," she asked.

Francoise Kaudhis-Ofomou, an Ivory Coast lawyer who is president of A.I.D Africa, a voluntary organisation founded by Africans in Atlanta, Ga, said the annual military spending of developed countries is equal to the total income of the poorest two fifths of the world's people.

She said 86 per cent of arms sales are made by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States.

Participants at the NGO Forum are hoping to lobby delegates to the official UN-sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women which starts Monday. The conference platform for action calls for greater in-

volvement of women in peacemaking and political decision-making.

Marina Beyer, an East German peace activist who founded the East-West European Women's Network when German was united, complained that governments given top priority to economic growth, not human needs.

Noting that women from the former Soviet bloc could not express their real feelings at the last UN women's conference in Nairobi in 1985, she said, "China gives us one negative example, but it's only one country where human rights have been ignored."

Rosalie Bertell, an environmentalist and head of Voice for Women, said resources are being drained by military spending.

"It's time for women to say there is no military solution to human problems," she said. "We have to refuse to build military equipment and to sell it."

Hilda Lini, the only woman in Vanuatu's parliament, said the Pacific region is still the most heavily colonised and militarised area of the world.

"I believe the Pacific needs revolution right now and I also believe that the whole world needs a new revolution... of mentality. We need to put resources where the most important needs are for human survival," she said.

"Even the UN institution, what good has it done for us at the grassroots?" she asked.

Rosy Kabir MP hurt as dais collapses in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Sept 1: Rosy Kabir, ruling party MP, was hurt today when the overcrowded podium collapsed during a discussion meeting in celebration of BNP's founding anniversary at Nasim Bhaban, party sources said.

Rosy is now under treatment at her residence, family sources said.

Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Abdullah Al Noman who attended the function as chief guest and other party leaders were however unhurt though they also fell down when the podium collapsed.

Khaleda offers dialogue

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logical, undemocratic and unconstitutional, Begum Zia said, "We'll never accept anything not permitted by the Constitution."

In this regard, prime minister repeated her earlier offer that she and her Cabinet would resign 30 days before the next general elections and added, "Nothing more can happen... nothing more is possible."

Thousands of people from across the city thronged the meeting venue to listen to the prime minister. They carried colourful banners, festoons, placards and portraits of late President Ziaur Rahman, founder of the BNP, and of Begum Zia and chanted various slogans.

Chaired by Iskandar Ali, the meeting was also addressed by, among others, BNP leaders Housing and Public Works Minister Rafiqul Islam Mia, Food and Agriculture Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Telecom-

communications Minister Tariqul Islam, State Minister for Youth and Sports Sadek Hossain, State Minister for Civil Aviation Maj. (Retd) Abdul Mannan, State Minister for Environment Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Maj. (Retd) Quamrul Islam, MP; Mirza Abbas, MP; Amanullah Aman, MP; Choudhury Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqi and newcomers in the party Khandakar Mahubuddin Ahmed,

Maulana Shakhawat Hossain and Alhaj Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandafi and leaders of the party's front organisations.

Calling upon the opposition parties to "shun politics of destruction," Begum Zia said "Still there is time and scope for a peaceful solution through talks." In this context, she vowed to go only by the Constitution, saying, "I'll sacrifice my life to protect the sacred Constitution and the hard earned democracy."

About the Opposition agitations like hartals, the BNP chief said that a handful of unruly people might queue after them but the people, favouring peace and development, would reject such harmful programmes. "We're in the government, in Parliament and on the streets and where not. We'll leave no room for them," she said.

Criticising the *en masse* resignation by the opposition MPs, the Prime Minister said they had not carried out the responsibilities they were given by the voters. They even did not seek the views of the people who voted for them, before resigning from Parliament, she added.

Mentioning the no-confidence motion moved by the Opposition in Parliament against her government, which was rejected by the House, the Prime Minister said, "They could have done so time and again had they

been in the House. But they have resigned from Parliament only to evade their responsibilities... They're now waging a war against the people who voted for them and the development efforts by the BNP government as they've become jealous of BNP's success in all fields."

"They have closed all the doors for solution of problems on the floor of the House by resigning from Parliament. Now the BNP has no option but to follow the Constitution," she maintained.

Begum Zia said her government, in the past four and a half years, had ensured remarkable development in all fields. "They (the opposition) have now become bewildered as we've left nothing for them to do."

"We even took up development projects in the areas of the opposition MPs, who failed to perform their duties," she said.

The Prime Minister ridiculed the AL claim of struggling for establishing people's right to vote and food, saying, "While in power, this party snatched people's basic rights and plundered national wealth."

Terming the next general elections very significant for the nation, she said the independence and sovereignty depended on the people's verdict in that polls.