

Teachers also to Blame

President Shahabuddin is, for many, the conscience-keeper of the nation. True to this image he doesn't often mince words when lesser mortals would in his place.

The Food We Eat

The larder is laid open spilling poisonous foods all over. This time not by investigative newspaper reports but by an authentic confirmation from the Institute of Public Health (IPH).

Imitable Fathers

Of late, a very remarkable spate of morally edifying incidents has been reported across the country: fathers handing over their guilty scions to the guardians of law on personal initiatives.

Helsinki Summit: Easing Security Concern

The five joint statements relate to European security, the parameters of a future reduction of nuclear arms, reduction in the field of anti ballistic missiles, reduction of chemical weapons and the fifth on 'American economic initiatives' to help Russia.

In their eleventh meeting in four years, President Bill Clinton of the USA and Boris Yeltsin of Russia appeared to come closer than ever before.

Five joint statements were signed at the end of two days of talks between President Clinton and President Yeltsin.

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A close study of the agreements reveal the forward march in the relations between the US and Russia engaged since several years and intensified since the end of the Cold War.

Continuous efforts are being made by the West with the US playing the leading role, in integrating Russia fully into the West.

Throwing her lot with NATO would certainly mean abandoning whatever pretense Russia may entertain to a 'big power' status if not 'super-power'.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union barely five years ago has traumatised the entire Russian population and we have witnessed the emergence of ultra-nationalist Zhirinovsky.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

Arshad-uz Zaman has written a monthly column for The Daily Star since 1987. He is a former editor of the weekly magazine 'The Mirror' and has written for various international newspapers.

There are voices in the House of Congress sufficiently strident to cause some headache for Clinton. It is expected, however, that Clinton will be able to muster adequate votes for the passage of the relevant resolution concerning US-Russia relations.

That brings us to the role of NATO since the collapse of the Soviet Union. NATO's essential function was the containment of the Soviet Union.

bureaucratic behemoth and politicians may come and go but the world since less than a decade, the world will inevitably move towards a multipolar world.

The Indian Scene: Fresh Elections in the Offing?

by Zaglul A Chowdhury

The BJP seems to be calling for fresh elections because it feels it can derive benefits from such an event. It recently forged alliance with the lower caste BSP in UP and Sikhs' Akali Dal in Punjab and won elections...

THE decision of Congress to withdraw the support it gave to the United Front government headed by H D Deve Gowda was in a way a bolt from the blue for the nine-month-old government in India.

Earlier, the 78-year-old veteran rose from relatively lesser important positions to become the president of the vast Congress party and he did it when his predecessor was in a real slippery ground.

quite a few names were being discussed if Rao had to quit the position. But when he had to relinquish it following increasing pressure from the party, it was once again Kesri who was on the top.

Sitaram Kesri was a key figure in the party, who efficiently looked after the financial side of the organisation without being tainted by any charges and also contributed to its organisational strength.

Will the timing of Mr Kesri's move pay dividends to him? Will he be able to head a new government led by Congress which has only 140 seats in the 545-member lower house?

Narasimha Rao was favourably disposed to the issue of long support to the UF government, and he had also established a good rapport with Deve Gowda after the UF came to power.

market champion finance minister P Chidambaram, a Harvard educated scholar, who left Congress before last elections on the issue of party's support to another party in his Tamil Nadu state.

The Congress appears divided on the timing of the move. Former defence minister and Maharashtra chief minister and former interior minister Rajesh Pilot does not seem to be satisfied with the timing of the move.

feel this move may backfire unless the cards are played with extraordinary skill by Kesri. How can the party muster additional support which is to be more than 130 members to form the government?

And what has provoked the Congress president to take this step which many see as a gamble of high risk? His ambitions apart, his relations with prime minister Gowda was of late not going well.

As the situation remains fluid, Congress leaders are taking advice from former prime minister and Congress president late Rajiv Gandhi's widow Sonia Gandhi and the UF from former prime minister V P Singh and West Bengal's experienced chief minister Jyoti Basu.

To the Editor...

Cleaning up arsenic

Sir, Water is one of the major means of transport of arsenic. Arsenic finds its way into the water supply systems due to geothermal activities, agricultural runoff and industrial discharge.

The toxicity scale of arsenic decreases in the order: arsine > inorganic As (III) > organic As (III) > inorganic As (V) > organic As (V) > arsenium compounds and elemental arsenic.

In general, removal of arsenic (III) is lower as compared to the removal of As (V). Being a non-ionic species in the neutral Ph zone, As (III) is not removed by adsorption since no electrostatic attraction exist and the number of adsorption sites available for As (III) are less than that for As (V).

Hats off to Taramon Bibi

Sir, On March 26 night while I tuned to BBC 2 at about 11.25 pm, I was mesmerised by the picture it was telecasting. It was our Independence Day, BBC broadcasted a very special programme on our war of independence with special features - Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's active leadership, imprisonment in Karachi, freedom fighters' attack, India's help, Bangabandhu's return to independent Bangladesh, becoming the Prime Minister, innumerable family at his residence, Ziaur Rahman's coming to power, democracy's back in 1991, and AL's return to power in 1996.

The documentary, the producer of which was John Das, BBC 2, finished with the comment that it's been 25 years since Bangladesh was born as an independent country for the interest of the common people.

as poor as we were, even poorer. Taramon Bibi, I felt sorry for you. I was talking dinner at that time when I was watching that programme, and I pushed my plate away. How could I swallow English chicken while Taramon Bibi, who sacrificed herself and her family, and the like for our freedom, was demanding desh chicken.

Taramon Bibi, tomakhe salam. MG Dastagir, England.

Action against faulty vehicles

Sir, On the west coast of America, in California, then in the east coast, in New York, Connecticut and Boston, I watched hundreds of thousands of motor vehicles plying on the streets. What made me very surprised that not a single vehicle emitted slightest black smoke.

But what do we see in our country? Buses, trucks, even cars are emitting black smoke, sometimes it is so dense that it seems a smoke bomb has been hurled. It is polluting the atmosphere at such a degree that our people are suffering from various diseases - respiratory diseases has become a major problem in our country.

I don't understand as to why our government is not paying attention to this health hazard. How these faulty vehicles pass the fitness test and get clearance? It is very deplorable that those who are in charge of this department, do not hesitate to allow this, in exchange of some personal gains.

OPINION Weekly Holiday — Is it a Dead Issue?

Dr KM Maqsoodur Rahman

I refer to a news item 'Business leaders urge shifting of weekly holiday to Sunday' that was published in all dailies including the DS on 21.9.97, and the subsequent editorial (22.9.97) on it.

However, I was rather surprised to see such an outright condemnation of the democratic government on the plea of being a Muslim country. Equally surprised for not seeing the needed support for the change from other quarters.

I think the business deals including the banking transactions should not be equated with religion. There are several Muslim countries of the world who observe weekly holiday on Sunday. They are: Malaysia, Indonesia the largest Muslim country in the world, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, etc. In this connection, I would like to quote Mahathir Mohammad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia. He said: "As a developing country, we cannot have the luxury of having two days weekend. This is made on a demand from some professional quarters

soon after he became the Prime Minister. Even all the SAARC countries other than Bangladesh now observe Sunday as weekly holiday.

Before deciding for Sunday as a weekly holiday, I am sure, the Pakistan government must have looked into pros and cons of the situation. Here one should remember that the zeal of Pakistanis for religion is no less than any other country. Due to these facts, the people of our country ought to have congratulated Pakistan government for taking such a bold step.

Concerning the Arab countries, one should note a couple of things that prevail there. First is their fortune of oil wealth. Even those who do not have such a natural wealth, get immense benefit from those wealthy countries by getting employment on priority basis. The sole reason is that they are all Arabs. Second is the wealthy countries' development works that are done by the immigrants. It is due to this that almost all the decision makers and other mid-level officials enjoy long three-month holidays in a temperate climate mostly in Europe.

However, we can draw an analogy from Mahathir's comment that is mentioned above. Bangladesh, being one of the poor developing countries of the world, should not lose world's three vital business and banking working days. Furthermore, if Pakistan can switch over from Friday to Sunday, why Bangladesh cannot do it? The plea of being a Muslim country, and Muslims' weekly obligatory congregations for Friday prayer is not the valid reason for not to shift from Friday to Sunday. The Friday prayer hardly needs half an hour. Those offices that work from 9 am to 5 pm, can complete Friday prayers in their one-hour lunch time. The others who work from 8 am to 2:30 pm, such as government offices, can have half-day work on Friday as Pakistan has done it. That will be from 8 am to 12:30 pm. The staff can perform the prayers in the mosque nearest to their office. One will find a mosque everywhere within 10 to 15 minutes of walking distance from an office. One should remember that Islam is the religion for all the people, for all the places and for all the time. Furthermore, the range for prayer timings is big enough, even the Magreb timing nearly lasts for an hour.

Here I would give one of my personal recollections about Kuwait. While working in a hospital there, I had only 'out-patient' duties that used to run from 7 am to 1 pm in summer and 7:30 to 1:30 in winter. One day my Director learnt that by keeping the patient waiting, I closed the door and prayed inside the room. She told me that my duty to attend the sick is the first and foremost duty. Not only that, she also advised me to make a very brief prayer while I attend the sick patients. That is 'O Allah I pray to you in brief, I pray for the sick persons. Please accept my prayer.' She had also commented that Allah will accept your prayer. (She herself was a pious person). Furthermore, she said that Islam is a religion that has a provision to perform the obligatory prayers at a later time. It is also said service to humanity whether in need or otherwise is itself a service to God. I found logic in it to serve the sick persons as it is one of the best way to serve God. However, it was the government policy, not only there but in other Arab countries too, that none should be kept waiting unless there is a valid reason. Furthermore, the banks there start working from 8 am to 2 pm and on Friday from 8 am to 12 noon. The supermarkets start non-stop working from 8 am to 10 pm. One supermarket used to remain open 24 hours a day. In all these establishments all the staff used to have their food during their working hours, and perform prayers too without stopping the service. In fact, the staff would make a little time at the counter during the lunch and prayer time for obvious reason. That is what I have observed in the advanced countries of the world too. In order to achieve economic development very fast, we should exploit time in an optimum way. Thus the whole country will get the benefit from shifting the weekly holiday from Friday to Sunday. Therefore, I would urge the conscious citizens to lend support to the demands of the trade bodies.

The writer was a member of one of the professional groups while teaching in the Malaya University, Kuala Lumpur in the early eighties.