LATE S. M. ALI **DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 11, 2003** 

### **Lailatul Barat**

The occasion to seek divine blessings

HE Lailatul Barat is the time for Muslims across the world to seek divine blessings, as their destiny is determined for a year by the Almighty on this holy

The night is particularly significant at this point of time, as Muslims have emerged as the most misunderstood community. Their misfortune has been multiplied by the fact that they are blamed for the wrongs being committed by a handful of extremists in the name of religion. Muslims all over the world will pray for their tests and tribulations to come to an end.

So a better understanding of Islam by the rest of the global community is the crying need of the hour. This will help solve a wide range of unresolved issues and bring back peace to the nations which have already paid a high price for the misgivings about Islam that prompted some western nations to link it to terrorist activities . The truth of the matter is that a just world order is still a far cry and terrorist activities are nothing but a manifestation of deprivation and lack of justice.

It is a highly ominous sign for the human race to get divided on religious lines. In fact, no religion has ever preached such divisiveness which tends to negate the message of brotherhood. The believers, however, repose their faith in the divine ordain which can transform hostility into friendship and hatred into love. The night of destiny is the right time to pray for it.

The devotees eagerly wait for this night when the doors of divine benison are opened for mankind, and for the pious and repentant a year of happiness is promised. The night reminds them of the truth that the creator of the universe is also the sole arbiter and designer of man's destiny, of every detail of his worldly existence.

Shab-e-Barat, as the night is popularly known, also has a social aspect which strengthens the bond of fraternity and promotes good neighbourliness among people. They celebrate it in a mood of festivity, exchanging not only best wishes but also specially prepared foods with neighbours and relatives. The rich part with a segment, however small, of their wealth and the poor are the beneficiaries.

Let us pray-- on this night of great religious significance-- for the well being of people irrespective of their religion, caste and creed.

### Modernising the police force

Immediate and effective measures needed for positive results

E commend the Home Ministry for taking steps with the help of United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the police force. It is, no doubt, a timely decision mainly because we have become somewhat disillusioned with the law enforcing agencies in recent times. Finding out the immediate needs of the police force in order to provide them with long term facilities will only make the initiative more fruitful. But before that we must know where the lackings are more acute than the others. Of late, several issues regarding the police have been making their rounds in the media.

First, lack of modern equipment -- be it for investigation or routine patrol. It is very shocking to learn that Criminal Investigation Department (CID) does not possess modern forensic tools and technology, they have to do their jobs only with some ordinary equipment which cannot be considered effective. The less said about the other investigative departments, the better. Secondly, the arms that the police use. Well, in the age when the latest models of sophisticated weapons reach the hands of the criminals in no time, police has no choice but to depend on their decades old shot guns and rifles. What a pitiful condition! How could the authority just sit idle when in certain situations they had become more vulnerable than the common people?

We see budget increase in almost all the sectors every year, but will the government kindly tell us how much increase there have been of late in developing the police into a modern, effective force? We hope the authorities will take these issues into consideration while chalking out their plans of action. Since the people-police ratio in our country is not favourable at all, increasing the number of law enforcers cannot be ignored either.

But things can't improve just by making the force bigger in number, emphasis must also be given to training, motivation and awareness building on human rights, prosecution laws, modern investigation methods etc. Police has to earn the respect and trust of the people they serve. Unless they do so, it would be difficult for the people to consider them as their 'friend' as the police would like

# Lack of law and order and suitable governance



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

T is difficult to understand how claims are made that our country is marching towards progress and that everything is honky-dory. There is stark contrast between what is reported in the newspapers and what is usually telecast through the government controlled media. The private TV channels are somewhat fair-minded and sometimes critical, but if you go by BTV, there is nothing wrong in our proverbial State of Denmark. If there are problems, it is all due to the unreasonableness of the Opposition. This approach is disturbing to

Bangladesh today is on a downward spiral. Unfortunately, discipline, impartiality, fairness and honesty -- all such elements, are becoming rare indeed. Our national ethos and dignity are being battered through embarrassing accusations. We have managed to scale the undesirable height of being reputably the most corrupt nation.

Every morning I dread to open the daily newspaper. Without fail, I meet different sides of our character which leave a bad taste in the mouth. Unpalatable items reach out and attract the attention of the reader.

The other day while government officials were stressing on excellent existing investment climate in Bangladesh (in a seminar), a group of Japanese investors in our country were accusing 'government officials' of demanding bribes for customs clearance, visa issuance, work permit renewals, permission for selling products and other services'. In addition, other foreign investors have stated that they are regularly victims of poor law and order, of robbery and theft, carried out with impunity by 'armed mafia' at construction sites, mostly outside

The Japanese and Koreans are traditionally very patient and polite in their response to given situations abroad. They really do not want to

create ripples. The fact that the Japanese Ambassador was constrained to draw the attention of the Finance Minister to this malaise is indeed a cause for serious concern.

I feel genuinely worried. My sense of disappointment is enhanced because I have on-hand experience about the hard work that goes in to bring foreign investors to our country. I have spent more than three decades in different Bangladesh embassies abroad.

ments made in the sectors of microcredit, literacy, family planning and

In any civilized society, in any sovereign country, the State expects its citizens to behave responsibly and cooperate with the administrative machinery and abide by the laws of the land. This is done on the premise that the State will also arrange a level playing field. The citizens, on the other hand, also expect, and most rightly so, that those responsible for running the

that particular time, will have less than a viable chance to achieve any

ago, when a person's reputation was important. Call it commercialivalues. It has come to a point where utilities. Without batting an eyelid, many educated people who look upon themselves as 'bhadrolok',

streamlined if the administrative machinery could function with some

degree of certainty The picture begins to be really soggy if one turns to the judiciary. Various representatives of civil society have in the recent past categorically claimed that corrupt practices have gained ground even in this hallowed sanctum. Accumulated delays and sluggishness of the judicial process have also created their own dynamics. A press report last month indicated that nearly one

Today, lack of regulation and strict monitoring has led to the proliferation of many colleges and universities whose infrastructure and performance can only be described as dubious. Most of them have the following in common -high tuition fees but poor teaching libraries

staff and absence of suitable This approach of taking advantage of social needs and manipulating citizens is also evidenced in the raw frontier of

private clinics and pathological labs. I think it is a failure for any government if it is unable to assure satisfactory main-stream education and healthcare. I cannot understand why the government has not as yet been able to truly set up the Office of the Ombudsman or an impartial Human Rights Commission. If such facilities were available, then affected citizens could seek redress for injuries caused to them or their rights were denied.

We can move forward only if there is accountability. For law to be effective, the process of its enforcement should also be clear of political influence-peddling and interferences. Similarly, enforcement of legal provisions should avoid being selective. If this is not done, it will lead to confrontational politics and associated evils like land grabbing, toll collection, drug dealing, abduction and general lawlessness.

For some, politics today has become their meal ticket. Unfortunately, we do not produce statesmen any more. Once the elections are over, the people's representatives hardly maintain regular contacts with their electors. They are forgotten and the MP remains busy with personal lobbying at the Secretariat in Dhaka. This is done without any pangs of conscience. He feels he has to recoup the 'investments' made on

the way to the election. Reforms are needed and that too urgently. We are at an important cross-road in our national history. It is incumbent on all concerned to rise over party politics, partisanship and mutual recriminations. The first step however is good governance and that has to be provided by the administration in power.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary

food self-sufficiency.

There was a time not many years

sation, or give it any other name, we many count their most valued 'friend' to be the meter readers of

POST BREAKFAST

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projecting our country and trying to make economic diplomacy work. This has included meetings with different foreign chambers of commerce and business houses. Our diplomats in the Far East must have equally worked long hours urging businessmen to visit Bangladesh and participate interactively with its growing economy. They must have assured businessmen that there was stability in Bangladesh and that democratic norms and law and order processes were respected. They must have also informed investors about the security of prospective investment. If at the end of the day, investors have to complain in this manner. then someone surely is not looking after the store.

We are competing today for scarce funds and trying our best to emerge out of the 'negative' stereotyping with which we are usually associated. Regular cyclones, floods, loss of lives through launch disasters have all juxtaposed together to create their own trademark about our country. Added to this unsavoury brew are reports of forged certificates, acid thrown on women, work stoppages through 'hartal', cheating in examinations, systems loss (read theft) in the power sector and adulterated drugs and food items. We really have a problem.

One does not want to be pessimistic, but one should not refrain from self-criticism. This is particularly necessary given the many other creditable achieve-

State machinery will provide the citizens a minimum level of acceptable and satisfactory standard of living. Such an ambience would however depend. as far as possible, one existing

resources We are relatively a poor country and suffer from many disadvantages. However, it is time that we take steps to avert 'evils' which are of our own creation. Our government also has to assist in this process through constructive and responsive governance. This is a two way street where all of us have to strive together. Criminalisation of politics and maintaining 'mastaans' in aid of selfish interests are not helping our social and moral frameworks.

On one side, one notices larger congregations in places of worship. On the other, one also discerns a pervasive 'informal economy' that subsists and is growing on illegality and corruption. It is practically impossible today for an ordinary citizen to obtain redress or assistance from a public utility company as a matter of right. Palms have to be greased at every level.

Things which are taken for granted elsewhere are subject to all sorts of stress in Bangladesh. In the postal system, contents in parcels go missing. In other related areas ike power, gas, water and telecommunications, Bangladeshi citizens, unless they are privileged enough to be part of the existing machinery ruling Bangladesh, at

participate most willingly in the process of 'systems loss'. This web corrupt consumers is slowly destroying the State. They are being able to do so because the ill-gotten wealth finds its way to those who are supposed to ensure that such malpractices do not take place.

We have an economy that is struggling to survive amidst major challenges. If we are to succeed, we have to go back to our basics -- and that will not be achieved by politicising the administrative cadres and the judicial process. These will only create loss in credibility and an inclination among civil servants to forsake the 'straight and narrow' for the 'flexible and end justifies means' approach. This nation must not be cheated of its basic values. Senior bureaucrats and lawyers have pointed out more than once that 'promotion should be given on the basis of fitness'. Linking this to politics creates intimidation and should be avoided at all cost.

In this context, one cannot also understand why the present government has been unable till now to increase the retirement age to sixty as has been done already in Pakistan and India. This would then stop 'contracted appointments' and the associated stigma of politicisation. Apparently, the previous caretaker administration had made up its mind to do so, but refrained from taking the final decision as they thought that this was a matter of policy and so out of their area of competence. Governance would be greatly disposal. In Dhaka city alone, the number of cases to be settled in the Artha Rin Adalat is 3,543, involving a startling 6,000 crore Taka. It is true that this government has started the fast track adjudication process for some of sensational cases. This is a good step. However, one needs to ascertain whether similar efforts can be made with regard to pending civil and company litigation and adjudication Alarm bells are ringing in the corridors of our judiciary and it is

million cases are pending in

different Bangladesh courts for

important that we take note. Recently, the former Chief Justice and head of a former caretaker government, Justice Habibur Rahman has observed that the constitution is not being followed in running the country. This is indeed serious and can be the harbinger of dangerous tidings. Politicians of all shades of opinion have to abide by certain least common denominators, otherwise the advantages of the democratic process will be denied and society will be reduced to utter helplessness. Our education sector similarly

leaves a lot to be desired. The regulatory mechanism guiding this important area of activity suffers in more ways than one. Strict supervision during examinations have led to thousands of examinees being expelled. However, the more significant aspect of controlling the educational competence of the many educational institutions in the private sector is being overlooked.

## The night of salvation

SYED ASHRAF ALI

HE auspicious Night on the 15th of Shaban, known as Lailat-ul-Baraat and popularly known as Shab-e-Barat in this sub-continent, is indeed a glorious and important occasion in the life of every God-fearing Muslim. Both the words 'Lailat' in Arabic and 'Shab' in Persian mean 'Night', and 'Baraat' stands for 'Salvation' or 'Privilege'. It is on this auspicious Night of Salvation that Benign Providence, in His infinite Mercy, blesses each and every human being with a unique opportunity to receive the Divine Mercy. most coveted Acclaimed traditionalist Ibn Maja (his Sunan is universally accepted as one of the Sihah Sitta. the six authentic traditional works) reported on the authority of no less a person than Sher-e-Khuda Hazrat Ali (R.A.) that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "On this Night, from the moment the sun sets, Allah descends into the firmament of this earth and goes on asking till sunrise

"Is there any seeker of salvation, so that I may give it to him; is there any one in need of food, so that I may feed him; is there any one suffering, so that I may cure him?'

Lailat-ul-Baraat has not been mentioned directly or specifically in the Holy Quran, but that does in no way empower any Muslim to ignore or make little of the Divine Excellence of the Night of Salvation simply because there are numerous authentic Ahadith and evidence which testify so eloquently to the fact that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself used to say special prayers on this holy night. Records are there that on one occasion he (peace be upon him) spent half of this auspicious Night of Privilege through a Nafl prayer of two rakat and the rest of the Night through a long "Sejda" or prostration. What is more, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) used to offer this prayer with inimitable dedication and unfathomable concentration. Hazrat Ayesha Siddiga (R.A.) reported that on one such occasion the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was so deeply absorbed in his meditation that she became awfully nervous and thought that he (peace be upon him)

had shuffled off the mortal coil.

It is also reported that the holy

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Allah forgives every Muslim in this Night. He does not, however, forgive the Mushrek the jealous, the cruel, and the adulterer." (Baihagi) There are also many Ahadith which very clearly indicate that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) not only said special prayers in this sacred Night but also visited the graveyards and prayed for the departed souls. He also instructed his wives to honour the sanctity and Divine Majesty of this blessed Night. There is also an authentic Hadith which states that Hazrat Ayesha Siddiga (RA) went to Jannatul Bagi on this Mubarak Night in search of the holy Prophet (peace

It is not only the renowned traditionalists who champion the sacredness and excellence of the Night of Privilege but even a great and universally respected saint and scholar like Hazrat Syed Abdul Quader Jilani (RA), popularly known as Hazrat Bara Pir Sahib, testifies in his Guniatut Talebin that Bibi Avesha Siddiga (RA) herself heard the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) saying, "Allah opens the Doors of Mercy and Grace for the mankind on four Nights -- the two Nights of

Eids, the Night of the 15th of Sah'ban, and the Night of Arafat". (The two other Nights, Shab-e-Qadr and Shab-e-Miraj, have been specifically referred to in the Holy Quran). "The Doors remain open throughout the Nights till the Fajr

prayers." Glorious incidents like these testify so brilliantly to the holy Prophet's (peace be upon him) belief in the importance, sanctity, serenity and divine excellence of the auspicious Night of Privilege.

It is claimed that on the holy Night

of Privilege the heavenly tree Sidratul-Muntaha, specifically mentioned in the holy Quran (LIII: 4), is shaken to decide who shall die in the following year. "According to popular belief", says the Encyclopaedia of Islam (published in Leiden, Netherlands), "in the night preceding the 15th of Sha'ban the tree of life on whose leaves are written the names of the living is shaken. The names written on the leaves which fall down indicate those who are to die in the coming year." It is claimed by some that it is

the Sidratul Muntaha. "the Lote-tree of the extremity", a tree in the seventh heaven having its root in the sixth, which is shaken to decide who is going to die in the coming year. (Sidratul-Muntaha has been mentioned twice in the Holy Quran) No wonder the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself advised all not to forget or foolishly ignore the sacred importance and sanctity of the Night of Privilege. Lailat-ul-Barat (or Lailat al-

Bara'a), the Night of Quittancy in the words of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, is indeed a solemn and sacred occasion of Divine Excellence which has to be celebrated in a befitting way, not through candles and crackers, not through mere Halwas and Rotis, not through extravagance and merrymaking, but through prayers and penance as was done by the holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is true that hundreds and thousands of Muslims in Bangladesh celebrate this Night through zealous and active participation in private and congregational prayers held in mosques. Unfortunately, however, there are many among us who, through sheer ignorance or utter carelessness, turn this auspicious night into a mere occasion of merrymaking and gaiety, fun and frolic, forgetting the very essence of this glorious Night.

There are some who think that crackers and candles are part and parcel of Shab-e-Baraat. Nothing can be farther from the truth. This awful custom, introduced by the Barmecides in Baghdad, simply

because they were fireworshippers and loved fire even after they accepted Islam, not only disturbs the Namazis and meditators on this auspicious Night but also leads to unnecessary wastage and prodigality which are forbidden in Islam. There are also some who try to equate Halwas and Rotis with the sacred Night of Privilege, claiming that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) lost a the 15th of Shaban and hence people should not cook anything hard as a mark of respect to that historic incident. Some also claim that Hazrat Amir Hamza (RA) embraced martyrdom on the 15th of Shaban. Both these claims are totally baseless as both the incidents occurred in the month of Shawal and had simply nothing to do with the 15th or any other day of the month of Shaban.

There is no harm if delicious Halwas and other sweetmeats are cooked on this occasion, but let these be prepared only to be shared with the poor and the havenots. The very spirit of such a noble and auspicious occasion will be lost if those who are affluent fail to share the good fortunes with those who are less privileged. Our duty on this Night of Privilege or Night of Salvation is not only to seek Divine Mercy but also to seek the path of goodness, kindness, upright conduct and charity -- to be always on toes to respond to the cry of the needy, to stand by the word that is pledged, to bear true witness, to remove all artificial differences between man and man and all causes of misunderstanding in our dealings with fellow brethren in every sphere of activity, in every

# **Preparing for Ramadan**

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goodness, kindness, upright conduct and charity -- to be always on toes to respond to the cry of the needy...

IKE every year Lailat ul-Barat or Shab-e-Barat is here again to give us another opportunity to prepare ourselves for the holy month of

This is the "Night of Blessing" or the "Night of Decree", celebrated on 14 Shabaan of the Islamic year. It is the night of the last full moon before Ramadan, the month of fasting for all Muslims It was at this time every year that Prophet Muhammad (SM) used to begin

his preparations for the month of Ramadan by spending whole night in orayer and worshipping Allah. It is also said that on this holy night Prophet Muhammad (SM) was found praying for the departed souls at "Jannat-ul-Baqui" in Madinah. Therefore according to the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (SM) many Muslims also spend the night of Lailat ul-Barat by staying awake all night in prayer and visiting the graves of their near and dear ones on the 15 Shabaan and pray for the salvation of the departed

Muslims believe that every year on this night Allah makes His Order (Decree) known to the angels as to the destiny and of the life and death of every human being for that year. Therefore we should ask for Allah's mercy and forgiveness on this special night of Shab-e-Barat.

Muslims also celebrate this night by cooking and eating special meals and sweets and lighting candles. Sweets and different kinds of bread are also distributed among the less fortunate. Many Muslims also fast for two days, on 14th and 15th of Shabaan

#### TO THE EDITOR **EDITOR** T

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Why are we corrupt?

TO THE EDITOR T

It was really a very shocking morning (08.10.003) for me as heard that for the third successive year, Bangladesh was ranked as the most corrupt country among 133 nations by the Transparency International (TI). I am afraid in

future where we will go? Anyway, the fact is that we all know why are we so corrupt. From the top to bottom, this society is infected with corruption. There's not a single field that is free from it. In every sector of our daily life we are witnessing many illegal activities. But it is sad that we are doing nothing against to stop them. Because of the deeds of our own

countrymen we have become the most corrupt country. Isn't it a great shame for us? Well, who cares about that? We are just happy if our own purposes are served. And this is a reason why corruption is on rise.

We have to come out from this situation. We should think about it and save our own country. People who are serving in the highest ranks should stop all kinds of illegal things first so that their juniors are forced to give up every kind of corrupt practices. We all should start working together and promise to act responsibly. Students should also make their institutions free from any kind of political ills. Police immediately need to stop taking

alleged bribes and serve the nation honestly. In each and every sector we have to make everything free from corruption. And all that's possible if we all start thinking about the problems and how to solve

I always wonder how A Bangladeshi citizen maintain all the rules and regulation while he/she goes to work abroad!

It's high time we save our nation and every citizen must know that we alone have to do it. Just don't think about your own lives. Do we realise what kind of suffering is waiting for our future generations? So, please stop doing all kinds of illegal things and save our motherland. Or do we

want the permanent recognition as the top most corrupt country in the world? Samiha Esha

#### Reflections on Bangladesh's interpretation of democracy

Ever since the removal of Ershad's dictatorship and restoration of democracy there were hopes and aspirations of our people but that have been crushed by the cyclical leaderships of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. One is now at great pain to distinguish between the governments of BNP and AL when it comes to policy or operation. Neither party seems to grasp the

concept of stewardship instead of opting to establish a family dynasty that often strains our budget if not goes against our national interest. My worst fear is that this shortsighted self-destructive tendency may be buried deep in our collective There are no feudal past.

institutionalised mechanisms for self-righteous citizens to participate and climb up the political hierarchy. Despite past overtures and pledges neither BNP nor AL are democratic in nature. If a sketch of their rank and file is taken (not withstanding one or two exceptions) it would appear that the only paths to rise are

based on past "contributions" in muscle or money.

Since the treasury and opposition don't know how to co-exist in the House, a change of guard in the parliament has been reduced to a mechanism for self-serving by alternating set of faces and settling personal feuds. Alas this corrupt political practice permeates deep into the daily lives of common citizens: business contracts are given to leading party deputies superseding and in gross violation open tender system; police/gangsters are deployed against civilians who pose a threat or barrier to the ruling party; even the military - protected by laws

enacted in violation of human rights has been used to guash dissent; promotions and demotions of civil servants and teachers are based on an individual's political affiliation. These are hardly conducive for openness and accountability that have traditionally attracted top talents to government, industry and civil service of any thriving nation. Upstanding deputies who fall short of absolute loyalty to the leadership are simply cast aside: ex-president AQM Bodruddoza of BNP and Bir Bikram Rafiqul Islam of AL are perhaps examples.

Instead these are times for political chameleons who can quite successfully postpone say, the

establishment of an independent judiciary -- the one mechanism that could check this decay. But then again if an elected British Prime Minister can lie to catalyse war on thousands of innocent people and destroy a top scientist to save his own skin and a "selected" US President can create so much fear and havoc in the world and bring it to a grinding halt for the sole benefits of his friends, who am I or you to complain about Bangladesh's interpretation of democracy? Any progress we made in the last decade is in spite of our leaders and not because of them Shabbir A Bashar

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