

ICC Conference and Our Expectation

WE would like to congratulate the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and its Bangladesh National Committee for deciding to hold its Asia session in Bangladesh. As a newspaper deeply committed to the development of Bangladesh and especially of its private sector we are very keen to see this conference come out with specific action plan to help countries like Bangladesh benefit from the globalisation process.

However we must regretfully observe that the international community has not appropriately rewarded us for our efforts. While we have brought down our tariff wall as per the decisions of the WTO, yet we have not been given the tariff, investment and market access privileges that we are entitled to under its own provisions.

What we need is market access -- both in the developed world and also in the developing. Making regional groups is one of the ways to gain market access. Here also South Asia seems to be in a bad shape, as SAARC remains trapped in the quagmire of Indo-Pak conflict.

There is also the question of FDI. The developing world is failing to attract foreign investment to the extent that we need. We understand that we have many flaws. But the world does not seem to realise the benefit that we have to offer.

Let us remind the conference participants that mere speeches and pious words no longer interest us. We have heard them too many times in the past and have had our expectation dashed by believing them. Events at Seattle and those that followed amply demonstrated the disillusionment of the underprivileged to the globalisation process.

Let us work together -- the developed and the developing world -- to make ours a better world. We expect the ICC-Asia conference to give us some guidelines in that direction.

Message of the Night

THE holy Quran describes it as 'the night of nights' for the great significance it holds in the mundane and spiritual lives of the Muslims which in the eye of Islam are but one and indistinguishable. Muslims all over the world will seek divine blessings of the Almighty for the coming year. Of the three important nights in the Islamic calendar Lailatul Barat is one. Laila means 'night' and Barat means 'salvation'.

We observe that the sanctity of this night is undermined by blasting crackers and going for noisy fire-works. These have been a regular nuisance during the observance of Shab-e-Barat in Bangladesh. The solemnity of the holy night must be maintained.

As the devotees pray through the night, let us hope for a better year ahead of us -- both in terms of political sagacity and economic wisdom to bring welfare to our people. It would befit the spirit of the occasion to renew our commitments towards alleviation of mass poverty in the country.

Waste Management

LET'S deal with some figures in the beginning. The capital produces some 3,000 tonnes of solid waste everyday. The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), entrusted with the responsibility of keeping the city clean, only disposes of 60 per cent of the garbage daily produced. With 410 containers, 150 carrier trucks and some 6,000 men, the DCC conservancy team is unable to take care of the rest.

It is obvious that the DCC alone cannot manage the huge amount of waste generated by millions of city-dwellers. And even if it did, carrying the garbage and dump it on to open sites could hardly be called efficient or effective. The state could surely be blamed for not yet developing cost-effective composting and recycling methods.

However, what's more important at this point in time is to get the community involved in waste management. Unfortunately, residents of the capital and other major cities in the country are largely indifferent to their basic responsibilities in this regard. There are some localised initiatives for door-to-door garbage collection. But where there isn't, in most cases the residents leave the garbage out on the alleys or backyard to rot. It isn't responsible, to say the least. The precondition to community participation in waste management is, each resident's awareness of his or her fundamental responsibility in this regard.

President Clinton Makes Another Bid to End Violence

HAVING lost personal credibility that he earned with the Palestinians since he took over as the Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Barak dispatched Nobel Peace Laureate Shimon Peres to another Nobel Peace Laureate Yasser Arafat with a view to ending the violence that has been going on for over a month. So far about 170 Palestinian and Israeli Arabs were killed during the period. Apparently, both peacemakers were of similar views and hence some understanding was reached to end the violence. But it was already too late and therefore no dramatic effect could be seen.

Here is the failure of Ehud Barak. He should not have allowed Israeli forces to use "excessive force" against stone-throwing Palestinians knowing full well that this will destroy his credibility as well as the peace process. This is exactly what Ariel Sharon's aim was to destroy the peace process, and along with it, Ehud Barak. Now Barak says, "We are strong enough to stand on both fronts: the battle for peace and struggling against violence and terror."

The other wrong approach to the situation was an attempt by Barak to have a national emergency government. It was not a national emergency; it was indeed personal emergency of Barak as he was expecting a

The real sufferers due to Israel's unacceptable behaviour and consequent onslaughts are the people and they seemed to be at a stage to defy anything that comes on the way. That signals the real danger and it's not limited to the Middle East only it's apparently worldwide. Therefore, it's reasonable to suggest that the US start taking reasonable steps to put Israel in its own place and ask it to do everything that would be needed to find a reasonable solution to the conflict.

started having some good effect on the ground despite the earlier car bomb attack which must be condemned. The intensity of the violence came down and the Palestinian police were seen stopping the stone throwers. Israelis also started withdrawing tanks another heavy military equipment from some areas of the outskirts of the Palestinian territories. But later it appeared that Israelis reintroduced tanks in some areas as some violence was continuing which was, however, expected.

In any case, the Palestinians were continuing their agitation against the visit of Ariel Sharon to the holy sites. The Palestinian protest, though was generally unruly and in some areas violent, was not a military attack against Israel which could warrant deployment of helicopter gunships, tanks etc. The situation was wrongly handled which was not expected of a General like Ehud Barak.

Prime Minister Barak should now use this respite to work toward regaining his lost credibility with the Palestinians. He said, "We will persevere in our effort for peace." Only uttering of the word peace will not help; he has to withdraw all his tanks and other military equipment from the vicinity of the Palestinian areas.

stormy session of the Knesset (Parliament) at the end of October where he was set to face no-confidence motions and with only 30-member strength he was expecting the fall of his government. Inevitable as it was, Barak failed to strike a deal with Sharon. This might help the peace process, if anything of it is still left to work on. To save the situation temporarily, apparently for a month, ultra-orthodox party Shaas gave support to Barak. This enabled him to face Knesset where there were several no-confidence motions. One can expect indefinite support from Shaas as its members appear



Spotlight on Middle East Muslehuddin Ahmad

unsure about their return to Knesset if the general election is held soon. Their key leader Ariel Dery is already serving jail sentence for corruption. Therefore, Barak may not face immediate danger of the collapse of his minority government.

The Palestinian areas and borders that are closed now. Gaza airport should also be opened without any further delay. All Palestinians and indeed all Muslims regardless of age should be allowed to go and pray in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israel is, however, free to protect their prayer site - the Western Wall from any possible attack. The meetings that take place between the Palestinian and Israeli security forces should specifically agree on joint measures that could stop any possible violence after prayers. Israel is seriously interested in stopping the violence, the answer lies in total withdrawal of Israeli forces from the disputed areas and

stationing of the UN observers between the two feuding parties. It is the demand of the Palestinians which clearly indicate their desire to stop violence. But Israel has been opposing it for no reason. Indeed, the UN observers will be immensely good for Israel too as the UN then takes full responsibility for stopping the ongoing violence which Israel is unable to do. Israel should indeed welcome this as Israeli people are also tired of the situation where people's lives are at risk. The UN observers can also ultimately help in implementing peace, if peace from Washington can ever travel to the area of conflict. It is indeed praiseworthy that President Clinton is still bent upon doing something that can bring some form of peace in the area. This seems to be his dream. The President in the White House is the President even if one gets elected who would take over in January if the unprecedented US election "crisis" can be sorted out soon.

Indeed, the man who has been operating from the White House and certainly running the vast country like the United States successfully and influencing the rest of the world in some way for the last eight years cannot suddenly turn to be a "lame duck President". The President remains a President as long as he is in charge and in the White House. It is up to him to assert and make things happen. He should get full support of the President elect and the Congress to bring peace in the Middle East as peace in the area is vitally linked to national interest of the US.

It is well known that Israel is the special ally of the US but undue support to Israel at the cost of others would certainly make the rest of the area enemy of the US. Israel even with its best military establishments and arsenals cannot stop the tide that may seek to engulf everything leading to total destabilisation of the area. The signs are already there. The Arab states which had some form of link with Israel are under pressure to review their present positions. Qatar has already closed Israel's trade office in Doha as otherwise the ninth summit of OIC members was in danger. The real sufferers due to Israel's unacceptable behaviour and consequent onslaughts are the people and they seemed to be at a stage to defy anything that comes on the way. That signals the real danger and it's not limited to the Middle East only it's apparently worldwide. Therefore, it's reasonable to suggest that the US start taking reasonable steps to put Israel in its own place and ask it to do everything that would be needed to find a reasonable solution to the conflict.

East Jerusalem has been proved finally to be the real issue and the area must be given to the Palestinians and this will place others things in place without much trouble. It would be easier to achieve peace once the issue of East Jerusalem is out of the way. Let President Clinton in his latest meeting at the White House try to put this into the head of Ehud Barak. Let Prime Minister Barak take the risk as he is under the risk any way and agree to hand over East Jerusalem to Arafat. The people of Israel except the extremists would, as it appears welcome it as they know that Israel's forced occupation of East Jerusalem with the Muslim holy sites would mean *harakiri* for Israel.

And the Winner is...Oops!

I know of a local newspaper where the headline "Too close to call" at midnight became "Bush wins at the wire" at around 3:00 a.m., "Bush projected to win" an hour later, and finally "Too close to call" again when the last morning papers rolled off the presses in early morning. The story proved equally elusive for hundreds of newspapers across the country.

tioned the possibility of such a scenario (DS, October 29). But I didn't anticipate that scenario to become a reality. Anyway, I intended to write today about the role of the TV networks and print media in creating confusion not only among the voters and audiences, but also among the candidates. It was an election night of frenzied and embarrassing gaffes and retractions for television news. It was a night when the presses actually stopped, when reporters urged editors to hold on a minute, when editors rewrote banner headlines and then rewrote them again. The TV networks awarded the state of Florida initially to Gore, then retracted and awarded the state - and the White House - in Wednesday's pre-dawn hours to Bush, then finally threw up their hands and said they didn't know.

For newspapers, deadlines passed, and as they did, two fundamental edicts of the news business remained locked in conflict: Be first, and be right. The problem for the news media was that the story wouldn't stay



Connecting the Dots Dr. A. R. Choudhury

put; it ebbed and flowed, and as it did, the media scrambled to keep up. The confusion in the media affected even the candidates. Around 2:30 a.m. Wednesday morning, after CNN and four other major TV networks announced George Bush to be the projected winner of the election, Gore telephoned Bush and con-

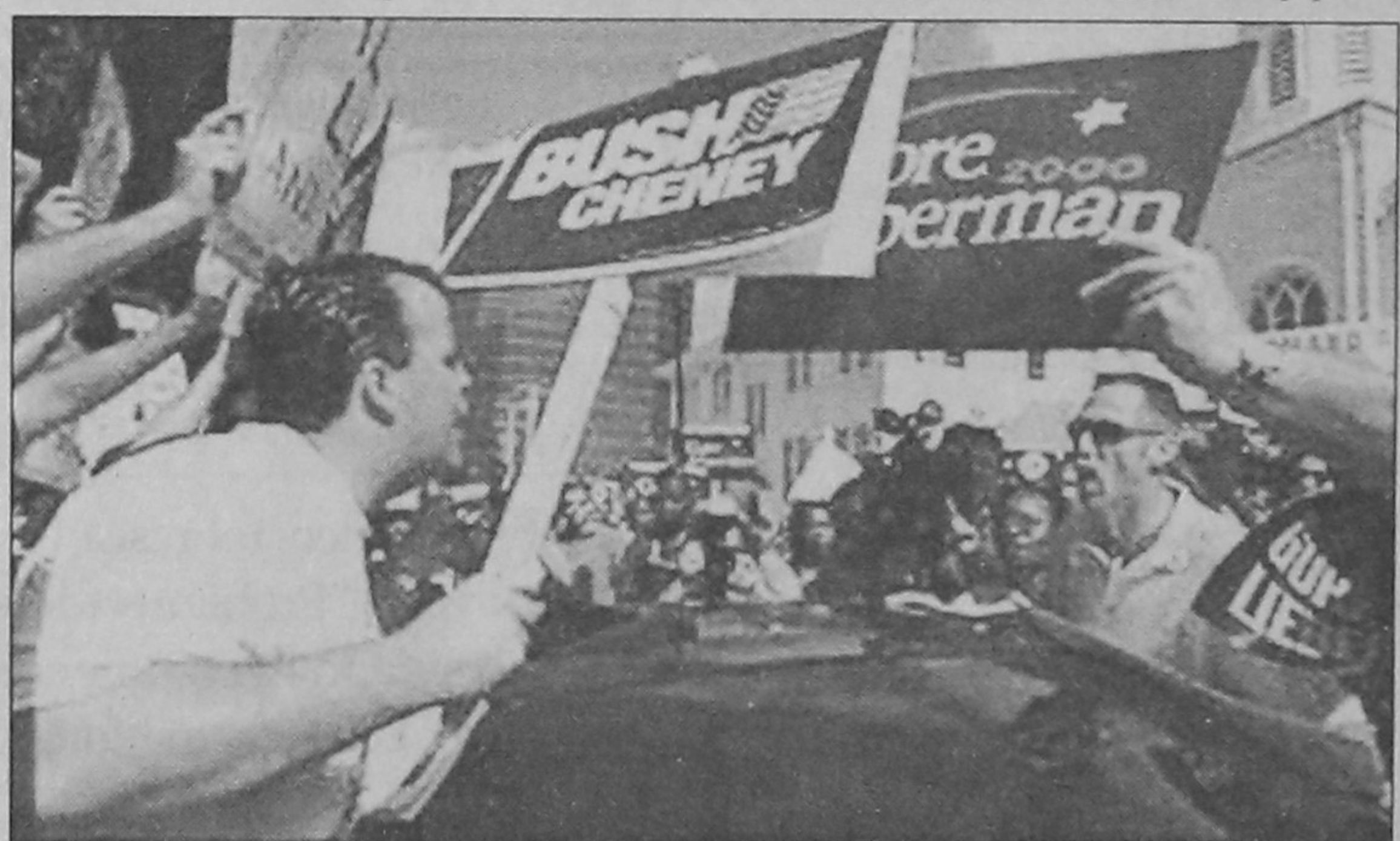
ceded victory. This inspired countless newspaper around the country to go to press with headlines erroneously declaring that outcome. BUSH APPEARS TO DEFEAT GORE, said the "New York Times". But within an hour, new reports from Florida prompted Gore to call Bush for the second time and take back

what he had said about conceding the election to Bush. The reversals were just as startling on television, radio and the Internet. And hungry for information, the public sampled the full buffet of media.

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The erroneous headlines appeared most commonly in newspapers that had the ability to push deadlines deep into the night. Misguided headlines appeared on some of the most prestigious newspapers in the country. Later in correcting the print editions, some newspapers not only rewrote headlines to reflect the uncertain outcome but also apologised for the inaccuracy of earlier copies.

The missteps have sparked recriminations and soul-searching, with media watchdogs and some TV network executives blaming television news division for jumping the gun in their haste to call a decisive state contest first. In the western world, where TV rating is crucial for attracting advertisement money, the TV networks fiercely compete with one another to be the first in breaking any news. A clear link can now be established for the embarrassing mishap that the news media experienced: the miscount and wrong assumptions and exit polling by a polling consortium that the TV networks relied on to call the race in Florida; the network predictions that then emboldened print and other media to project a Bush victory; and finally Gore's own concession call, which seemed to seal the election until he called back to retract it. Ultimately, however, the media cannot deflect the blame for the wrong information. Their first job is to get the news right, and they didn't do that. Early on election night - too early - the major TV networks projected Gore as the winner in Florida, only to retract the projection a few hours later. This misreading of a key state in a presidential election badly compromised what the media in any country need more than anything else: credibility. The American news media, in their quest to become the first to break a news, are racing to come to judgement and, in the process, sometimes giving people inaccurate information. The election night experience will probably set off some changes in how the news media provide information. They need to return to the fundamental edicts of the news business: Be first; but, more importantly, be right.



Has the election split America down to the middle?

Shab-e-Barat - the Night of Salvation

by Kazi Aulad Hossain

WE observe Shab-e-Barat every year. Many people call it "Laila-tul Barat". Is there any difference between these two compound words? There is no difference at all so far their meaning is concerned. The word "Shab" is Persian meaning "night", and the word "Lail" is Arabic also meaning "night" and Barat means salvation. As such the term "Shab-e-Barat" or "Laila-tul-Barat" means "Night of salvation". Man makes mistakes. Man commits crimes. He is prone to error, and we know there is a proverb, "To err is human". So, as man is very conscious of his follies, foibles and mistakes he is inclined to think if there is any way out to get rid of his crimes and mistakes. He is very much eager to enjoy the boon of salvation. When such is the mental condition of Almighty and Benign Allah's "bandas" (servants). He is graciously pleased to forgive His servants their crimes and mistakes. He overlooks their follies and foibles. He has assured them

through our holy Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (peace be on him) in clear and unambiguous terms that He will answer to the supplications of the believing men and women made during the sacred Night of Salvation (Laila-tul-Barat or Shab-e-Barat). Of the three important sacred nights of the three lunar months Laila-tul-Barat is one of them besides Laila-tul-Miraj and Laila-tul-Quadar. Although we find reference of Laila-tul-Quadar and Laila-tul-Miraj in the Holy Quran clearly indicating their significance and importance nothing has, however, been mentioned about Laila-tul-Barat in this Holy Book of ours. But we must not be oblivious of the important observation made by our holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be on him) vis-à-vis meaningful observation of the Laila-tul-Barat. According to Hazrat Ibn-e-Maza, one of the six great compilers (Siasittat) of Al Hadith, the holy Prophet (pbwh) says: "Almighty Allah comes down

(from his highest Seat of Authority) to the lowest heaven and immediately after sun-set asks, 'Is there any one from among the supplicants seeking forgiveness whom I can forgive?' Is there any one who wants to get rid of the predicament he is in? Is there any one who wants to recover from the ailment he is suffering from?" The Holy Prophet (pbwh) also said, "During the 15th night of Shaban offer prayers to Almighty Allah and observe Siam (fasting) the following day for Benign Allah bestows bounties on His "bandas" and forgives persons who seek His forgiveness except persons who believe Allah has a partner who cut-off connection with relatives." We know, Benign Allah has 101 beautiful names. They are all His excellent and inimitable attributes and one of them is "Gafur-ar-Rahim" which means "Allah is Forgiver". He is that Supreme Being Who forgives the sins of His "Bandas" when they supplicate

Him except those persons who think Allah has a partner. Allah is "La Sharikalah" meaning Allah does not have any partner. Nor He has delegated His power to any body. According to our great Prophet (peace be on him) Benign Allah will forgive the sins of His "bandas" if they sincerely and earnestly supplicate Him. So when Allah Gafur-ar-Rahim has Himself declared through our dear Holy Prophet (peace be on him) that He will forgive mistakes and sins we should avail the unique opportunity given by Him. Perfection is a thing which has perhaps not yet been achieved. It is a relative term. Still man endeavours to do a thing to his entire satisfaction. The night-long non-obligatory prayer and supplication to Bounteous and Benign Allah reminds a Muslim of full 30-day "Siam" (fasting) and abstention from food and drink and also from sense-inspired demands during the next month of the holy Ramadan. The month of Ramadan gives a Muslim

unique opportunity to rectify himself and become pious and God-fearing as far as possible. From that point of view, Shab-e-Barat or the great Night of Salvation brings glad tidings and message of hope to all Muslims of the world and to prepare themselves to heartily hail the holy month of Ramadan. Islam is a scientific religion. There is no scope to become sentimental. Our grown up children and youngsters become crazy for banging crackers and also for lighting candles on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat causing vexation to the devotees engaged in offering prayers in the near-by mosques, and also to old and ailing persons living in near-by houses. As clearly indicated in Surah (Chapter) Baqara of the Holy Qur-an Islam does not sanction senseless wastage and misuse of money on such frivolous activities. Our revered Imams of the mosques, guardians of the children, teachers of educational institutions and social leaders, among others, can play impor-

tant role of proper guidance of the misguided youngsters. We must not blindly imitate practice of other communities. Others may illuminate their houses and business establishments on the occasion of Diwali or other festivals for which they may have their own reasons. But we as Muslims must restrain ourselves from following such practice unnecessarily. Our Holy Prohet (peace be on him), as related by Ummul Mumineen Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah (RA), besides offering prayers during the said Night of Salvation it used to visit graveyard and pray for salvation of the departed souls. This practice is worth following. So, when Allah Gafur-ar-Rahim is eager to forgive His "bandas" (servants) of their mistakes and sins if they supplicate Him during the said sacred Night of salvation (Shab-e-Barat) we should not miss or overlook this unique opportunity and observe this Night of nights with due solemnity and fervour.