

Lailat-ul-Qadr

SYED ASHRAF ALI

WE celebrate Lailat-ul-Qadr on the auspicious night of the 27th Ramadan. But nobody on this earth knows definitely on which particular night in the holy month of Ramadan did the Great Revelation come down to the benighted world through the agency of the angelic host, representing the spiritual powers of the Mercy of Allah. Literalists sometimes refer to some particular night in the calendar but there is no agreement as to which it is. The Night has been variously fixed as the 12th, 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or the 29th Night of Ramadan or more probably one of the latter three. Ibn Hambal reported that Ibn Omar had narrated a Hadith in which the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever seeks the Night, let him seek it on the 27th."

But Imam Bukhari (RA) transmits that Ibn Abbas reported the holy Prophet (SM) as saying: "Seek Lailat-ul-Qadr in the last ten nights of Ramadan, on the twenty-first, twenty-third and twenty-fifth."

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri said: "God's Messenger spent the first ten nights of Ramadan in devotion, and spent the middle ten nights in devotion in a round Turkish tent, after which he raised his head and said, 'I have spent the first ten nights in seeking this Night, then I spent the middle ten nights in devotion and after that I had a heavenly visitant and was told that it is in the last ten: so he who was engaged in devotion along with me should do so during the last ten nights, for I was shown this Night, then was caused to forget it, but I have seen myself prostrating in water and clay on the morning following, so seek it among the last ten and seek it in every night with an odd number.'" He said: Rain fell that night, the mosque which was a thatched building dripped, and my eyes saw God's Messenger with traces of water and clay on his forehead on the morning after the twenty-first night. Bukhari and Muslim agree on the subject matter, the wording being Muslim's up to "and was told it is in the last ten", the remainder being Bukhari's.

It was on the auspicious Lailat-ul-Qadr, the Night of Power or Honour or Majesty that the holy Quran, the most blessed and perfect of all revelations, was vouchsafed to the benighted world. By revelation, of

course, is meant the first revelation because the holy Quran was revealed in portions during twenty-three years. The real merit of this blessed Night has been expounded in the holy Quran. Allah has emphatically and very clearly declared in Sura Qadr: "We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Power". Allah further corroborates in the same Sura.

"And what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months".

Lailat-ul-Qadr occupies a unique position in the Islamic Calendar. It was this blessed Night of Majesty

It is not, however, the worldly pleasures and physical comforts that one should ask for on this holy Night. What a man should pray for in this blessed Night is forgiveness and Allah's forgiveness alone. Nothing can be more pleasant, nothing can be more beneficial, noting can be sweeter than the glorious Mercy of the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Allah.

which first witnessed the shining of the divine light which was destined to illumine the whole world.

This night of grandeur or greatness, better than a thousand months, is indeed a night of great wonders and divine blessings, wherein, as the holy Quran declares: "Come down the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission on every errand".

It is not perhaps necessary to pinpoint this particular night by the Calendar. The night on which a message descends from Allah is indeed a blessed night, like a day of rain for a parched land. It is for this that the I'tikaf, the adhering to the mosques or retiring for contemplation during Ramadan as a form of devotion is fixed for the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself used to spend the last ten days of Ramadan in complete retirement in the mosque. He even had his bed placed in the mosque behind a pillar during the I'tikaf.

"A thousand months" may be taken in an indefinite or mystic sense as denoting a very long period of time. This does not necessarily refer to ordinary human conception of Time, But may, on the contrary,

refer to the "Timeless Time." In the words of Maulana Yusuf Ali, "One moment of enlightenment under God's light is better than thousands of years of animal life, and such a moment converts the night of darkness into a period of spiritual glory."

The descent of the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission also testifies to deeper significance and religious sanctity of the auspicious Night, for though a particular Night in the month of Ramadan may be characterised by great Divine blessings, it is more especially in connection with the mission of one appointed by Allah for the

regeneration of the world that 'the angels and the Spirit' come down from heaven, such being the Divine support of his cause."

Sura Qadr, testifying so eloquently to the divine grandeur and unique greatness of the majestic Lailat-ul-Qadr, ends with the beautiful expression: "Peace.... This until the rise of more."

"Peace" Indeed is the chief distinction of Laila-ul-Qadr. This "Peace" comes to the hearts of the devotees in the form of a tranquillity of mind which makes them fit to receive Divine Blessings. When the Night of spiritual darkness is dissipated by the Glory of benign Providence, a wonderful peace and a sense of security arise in the soul. All jars are stilled in the reign supreme of peace. "And this lasts on," in the words of Maulana Yusuf Ali, "Until this life closes, and the glorious Day of the new spiritual world dawns, when everything will be on a different plane, and the chequered nights and days of the world will be even less than a dream."

The continuance of the blessed Night till "the rise of Morn" is quite clear and evident when the Night is taken literally: The work of morning signifying, "the approaching end of the reforms, when truth, like the

light of the day, has made itself fully manifest." In the words of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "The mortal night gives place to the glorious day of an immortal world."

Lailat-ul-Qadr, the blessed Night in the Great Revelation of the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Allah "Broke through the darkness of the human soul" and the holy Quran, the perfect code of human life, reached mankind as message of "Mercy from the Lord" carries another significance of Divine Excellence. As Mouli Mohammed Ali states: "The time during which a prophet appears is usually a time of darkness and as such is of ten compared to night in the holy Quran. But as in this darkness comes a blessing from on high in the person of a Divine Messenger, the Night is a blessed and majestic Night. Hence the period of the advent of Divine Messenger may also be metaphorically called Lailat-ul-Qadr. Its designation as the Blessed Night in Sura Ad-Dukhan followed as it is by the statement that in it 'every wise affair is made distinct' shows clearly that the other significance of the world is based on the holy Quran itself, because it is during the time of a prophet's advent that true wisdom is distinctly established."

Blessed indeed is this Night of Power. The divine importance of this Night of Grandeur is so great that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself declared, "He who spends the Lailat-ul-Qadr through prayers, in full faith, shall have all his previous sins and guilt forgiven."

It is not, however, the worldly pleasures and physical comforts that one should ask for on this holy Night. What a man should pray for in this blessed Night is forgiveness and Allah's forgiveness alone. Nothing can be more pleasant, nothing can be sweeter than the glorious Mercy of the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Allah.

Hazrat Aysha Siddiqua (RA) said, "I asked the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) what to say during the Night on the assumption that I knew it was the Night."

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "One should say: 'Lord! You love forgiveness, so forgive me.'"

Syed Ashraf Ali is former DG of Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh.

Tribute to Kamal Ataturk

PROF DR SUFIA AHMED

SIXTY-SIX years ago Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, the founder of Modern Turkey breathed his last on 10th November, 1938. On this solemn occasion an attempt has been made to relate how the people of Bengal along with the rest of the people of the Indian sub-Continent were deeply influenced by the ideas and achievements of Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, who was unquestionably a successful military commander the founder of a state, a nation builder, a moderniser of his society, and extraordinarily capable political leader, a creator of political institutions, and an educator of his nation.

Ataturk is indeed one of those rare charismatic political leaders whose historical and moral influence has transcended the boundaries of his own country, and became an "international phenomenon." Beyond the borders of his homeland Ataturk is revered as "one of the first successful anti-imperialist leaders of the Third World, as a statesman who deeply believed and contributed to world peace, and was one of the outstanding men in the liberation movements of the 20th century."

A befitting tribute was paid to him at the General Conference of the UNESCO in 1981 which adopted a resolution and referred to him as one of those "eminent personalities who should serve as an example for future generations, as Ataturk was an exceptional reformer and because, in particular, he was the leader of one of the earliest struggles against colonialism and imperialism."

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The people of South Asia were one of the first to perceive intensely and appreciate at the initial stage the real worth and significance of Mustafa Kamal Ataturk's "unparalleled struggle and exploits." The victory of the Turks against the Greeks at the battle of sakarya in 1921 was a "moral fillip" to the Muslim world which began to realise that the Oriental nations could stand their ground in a "duel with Europe." The very fact that Mustafa Kamal had successfully defied Europe, stimulated Muslim unrest all over the world, backed by the Muslim Eastern Press, which passionately urged the Muslims to rally round Turkey -- the only independent Muslim country.

The influence of Mustafa Kamal's movement was also profoundly felt in Bengal. During the second decade of the 20th century, the Muslims of Bengal, along with their compatriots in the different regions of India, were surging with new nationalistic political stirrings which found practical expression through various movements. In Bengal, the Muslims had specific reasons to feel politically discontented and emotionally frustrated. The partition of Bengal in 1905, which had created a new Muslim majority province of "Eastern Bengal and Assam" was revoked in 1911. The new province had emerged as a boon to the Muslims as it opened up new opportunities and privileges which were denied to them under the previous administrative set up.

The annulment of the partition of Bengal served as a death blow to Muslim sentiment and aspirations. The British government further lost credibility among the Muslims of Bengal as the question of founding of a new University at Dhaka which was promised to them as a compensation in 1912 was shelved, and it actually did not materialise until 1921.

The news relating to the Italo-Turkish War (1911) and the Balkan Wars (1911-1913) in the Middle East created serious misgivings in the minds of the Muslims against the British rulers. Through these external events coupled with the

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distressing internal situation, the Muslims of Bengal saw a clear expression of what they were vaguely beginning to feel, that Western imperialism, specifically British, was bent upon destroying Islamic culture, and oppressing Muslims all over the world.

Their anger with the government at the reunification of the province of Bengal was reinforced in 1914 by their concern over Turkey's alliance with Germany against England in World War I. Indian Muslims regarded the Sultan-Khalifa of Turkey as the spiritual head of Sunni Islam, and the fact that he was now at war with Great Britain imposed a severe strain on their loyalty to the British government. All the more so,

literary figures made a deep impact on the minds of the Bengali Muslims and made them conscious of other Muslims and their plight, living beyond the confines of their own country. It was in this psychologically and emotionally receptive state of mind and feelings, the Muslims of Bengal became aware of the Nationalist Movement in Turkey and its great leader Mustafa Kamal Ataturk. To the Muslims of Bengal, as with the rest of the people of India, he came to symbolize the spirit of resurgence of nascent nationalist opposition to Western domination in Asia.

In Bengal, along with the poets and prose-writers, historians, journalists and political leaders



as pan-Islamic sentiment was unusually strong among the Muslims during this period.

The new trend among the Muslims during this period was to read with avid interest essays and poems with anti-British flavour, expressing sorrow over the loss of power by Muslims at different periods of history, at the hands of the imperialist Western powers. The Bengali Muslim literary figures expressed their discontent through their writings, and the were warmly received by the people at large. In Bengal poems, verses and the press were important media through which mass enthusiasm was aroused in favour of political and other issues.

In this connection the name of the talented poet Syed Abu Muhammad Ismail Hossain Shirazi of Pabna deserves special mention. The Muslims of Bengal owe a great deal for their intellectual and political renaissance to this fiery speaker, fighter, and writer in the realm of poetry and prose. Shirazi had the unique opportunity to be included as a member of the All-Indian Medical Mission which was sent in 1912 by the Indian Muslims to Turkey during the Balkan Wars, to aid the Turkish soldiers with moral and material support. On his return Shirazi wrote about his experiences in a book entitled *Turoshka Bharaman* (travels in Turkey) in Bengal published in 1913. In this book Shirazi depicts the tragic condition of the Ottoman army fighting the Balkan wars, and the shabby treatment meted out to Turkey by the Western powers. He was a great supporter of the Turkish war of independence organized and led by Mustafa Kamal.

The writings of Shirazi and other have also played a major role in propagating the achievements of Ataturk among the Muslims of Bengal. "As a pioneer of anti-colonialism and nationalism" Ataturk became a "symbolic hero" to the people of the Sub-continent. This succeeded in making a powerful emotional appeal to the Muslims of Bengal, and had helped to infuse a new spirit of hope in the community. His attainments provided a sustainable theme through which the Bengali Muslims expressed their discontent.

The deep and penetrating influence of Mustafa Kamal Ataturk's revolutionary ideas and concept of nationalism had bequeathed a permanent legacy helping to give a new direction, and to usher in a new era in the field of Bengali literature. He came to be regarded as a legendary hero to whom glowing tributes were paid in prose and poetry. Ataturk's activities had a profound impact on the thought process of the Muslim leaders.

Among others, the great Bengali Muslim leader Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq took an effective part in the Indian Khilafat Movement (1918-1922) and was a great admirer of Turkey and its nationalist leader Mustafa Kamal. The other prominent Bengali Muslim intellectuals who popularized the cause of Turkey and accomplishments of Ataturk in Bengal, was Maulana Akram Khan a reputed theologian and an outstanding journalist. Mustafa Kamal's resounding victory over the Greeks, inspired no less a person than the revolutionary Bengali Muslim Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam to produce famous political poems like the *Rana Bheri* (Trumpet call to Battle)

and the more popular *Kamal Pasha*, published respectively in September and October 1921. According to Abdul Qadir a Bengali Muslim poet and literary critic of high repute, Kazi Nazrul Islam was positively influenced by Mustafa Kamal and his ideas during the early years of his literary career. The soldier-poet Nazrul discovered in "Commander Kamal his cherished Hero" whom he later immortalised in his poem *Vidroh* (an eternal rebel) "a symbol of an uncompromising fighter who would not give up his sword until he attains final victory."

The publication of these poems had created a deep impact on the minds of the Muslims of Bengal. The poem *Kamal Pasha* in particular became a special favourite among all sections of the people. A Bengali Muslim writer Khan Muhammad Moinuddin describes in his book *Jugasashtha Nazrul* (Nazrul -- the Creator of a New Era published in 1921-22), the sensational effect of this poem on the people of his generation. He wrote, "I still fondly recall the memories of the great emotion and enthusiasm this poem aroused in our tender minds. It seemed to me as if the whole of Bengal had been stirred to its depth, surging with happiness and excitement. On the roads, street-corners, side-walks, and in the tea-shops, restaurants and social gathering, the poem Kamal Pasha was the main topic of discussion."

One other well-known publication of this category is a serialised drama, entitled *Kamal Pasha* written by a distinguished academician and a prominent literary figure Principal Ibrahim Khan, first published in 1926.

The news of the sad demise of Ataturk on November 10, 1938 who was regarded in Bengal as "the invincible dynamic Muslim hero" came as a rude shock to the people. As the contemporary newspapers and journals reveal a wave of shock and grief swept the country, and his death was universally mourned by the enlightened, the educated, and by the masses. In the typical fashion, the Bengali Muslims expressed their grief, and paid homage and rich tributes to Ataturk, through the medium of literature and the press. This sad event became the most favourite subject of the writers of that period such as Begum Sufia Kamal, Poet Shahadat Hossain, Poet Talim Hossain and many others.

The popular daily newspaper "Azad" of Maulana Akram Khan came out with banner headlines on 11 November 1938 saying: "The world's greatest statesman and maker of modern Turkey Ghazi Kamal Ataturk passes away." In its issue of 19 November 1938, the paper published detailed accounts of the Kamal Dibash or "Kamal Day" observed on 18 November in Calcutta and in different regions of the province of Bengal. The Mourning Day was observed by holding condolence meetings and offering funeral prayers in absence in the mosques. Popular newspapers and journals like the *Dhaka Prakash*, *Mashik Muhammad*, *Shaukat* and others published editorials, numerous articles, essays and poems through which the Bengali Muslims and non-Muslims paid their homage to Ataturk.

The highest tribute was paid to Ataturk by the great Bengali poet Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore who was deeply grieved by his death. At the condolence meeting organized by him at his own University "SHANTINIKETAN" he spoke in November 1938, saying:

"Turkey was once called the 'Sickman of Europe' until Kamal came and set before us an example of a new Asia where living present recalled the glories of a dead pastKamal Pasha's heroism was not on the battle field only, he waged a relentless war against the tyranny of blind superstition which perhaps is the deadliest enemy a people have to contend against. To his own people he was a great deliverer, to us he should remain a great example!.."

Dr Sufia Ahmed is a national professor.

The best night of the Islamic calendar

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

THERE are one hundred and fourteen Suras or Chapters in the Holy Qur-an for the guidance of the whole mankind. And out of those one hundred and fourteen Suras there is a Sura known as Sura Qadr (Honour). In this very important Sural Allah Rabbul Alameen declares in clear and unambiguous terms the great importance and significance of Laila-tul-Qadr or the Night of Honour. "Lail" is an Arabic word and "Shab" is a Persian word for night. So, the term "Laila-tul-Qadr" or "Shab-e-Qadr" means Night of Honour. Besides Laila-tul-Qadr, Muslims over the world observe other four important night viz: Laila-tul-Miraj or the Journey by Night, Laila-tul-Barat or the Night of Salvation and two Eid nights. But we must remember that Laila-tul-Qadr

If a sinner sincerely, seriously and earnestly repents that he would refrain himself form all evils and misdeeds in future, the Benign Allah will certainly consider the penitent's supplication and forgive him, and in that case society will certainly be a better place to live in. Our supplication on the auspicious occasion of Laila-tul-Qadr should be meaningful, sincere and earnest.

or the Night of Honour is the best and most important night of all the holy nights of the Islamic calendar.

In this context, it would be worthwhile to state here what Almighty Allah says in Ayats (Verses) 1-5 of Sura Qadr:

Ayat: 1 "We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Honour."

Ayat: 2 "And what will explain to thee what the Night of Honour is?"

Ayat: 3 "The Night of Honour is

better than a thousand months." Ayat: 4 "Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission on every errand."

Ayat: 5 "Peace! Until the rise of morn." Again, in Ayats 3-4 of Sura Dukhan or Smoke Almighty Allah Says: Ayat: 3 "We sent it (the Qur-an) for We ever wish to warn (against evil)."

Ayat: 4 "In that night is made distinct every affair of wisdom."

It will not be irrelevant to state

here the comments of a world renowned translator and commentator of the Holy Qur-an Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali on this Ayat 3 of Sura Qadr. He has aptly commented like this: "A thousand must be taken in an indefinite sense, as denoting a very long period of time. This does not refer to our ideas of time, but to 'timeless Time.' One moment of enlightenment under Allah's Light is better than thousands of months or years of animal life and such a moment converts the night of darkness into a period of spiritual glory."

Mentionable, we are now passing through the holy month of Ramadan and we know it is the best month of all the twelve lunar months of the Islamic calendar, and in the same way we are fortunate also to get the best of all the glorious and important lunar nights of the Islamic calendar, that is, Laila-tul-Qadr or the Night of Honour which we observe on 27th of the holy month of Ramadan.

I may state now the background of revelation of this Sura as to why Benign Allah was graciously pleased to reveal this Sura. One day Hazrat Muhammad (SM) while discussing matters relating to religion with his companions ("Sahaba"), said, "A saint from among the Children of Israel (Bani Israel) achieved spiritual and physical power as a result of continuous prayers to Lord Creator for a long period of one thousand years." After hearing this the companions became sad for they would be unable to supplicate Merciful Allah for a thousand years as they would not be able to live for such a long period. Benign Allah heard the discussion, and appreciating the despair of the holy Prophet's companions revealed the aforesaid five verses the holy Prophet (Pbuh) while he was in Makkah.

Considering the facts stated in the foregoing paragraphs as Muslims all over the world are preparing themselves to observe this sacred night (Laila-tul-Qadr) popularly known as Shab-e-Qadr, we in Bangladesh should also avail this auspicious opportunity to observe it with due solemnity and fervour -- offering special payers, reciting the holy Qur-an and supplicating Merciful Allah for salvation and fulfilment of our just and genuine desire. We must not let this rare opportunity slip and beseech His benediction. Allah considers His Banda's (servant's) supplication specially on certain occasions and one of such special occasions is this Night of Honour. If a sinner sincerely, seriously and earnestly repents that he would refrain himself from all evils and misdeeds in future, the Benign Allah will certainly consider the penitent's supplication and forgive him, and in that case society will certainly be a better place to live in. Our supplication on the auspicious occasion of Laila-tul-Qadr should be meaningful, sincere and earnest. Let us hope against hope and hope for the best.

Kazi Aulad Hossain is a retired government high official.

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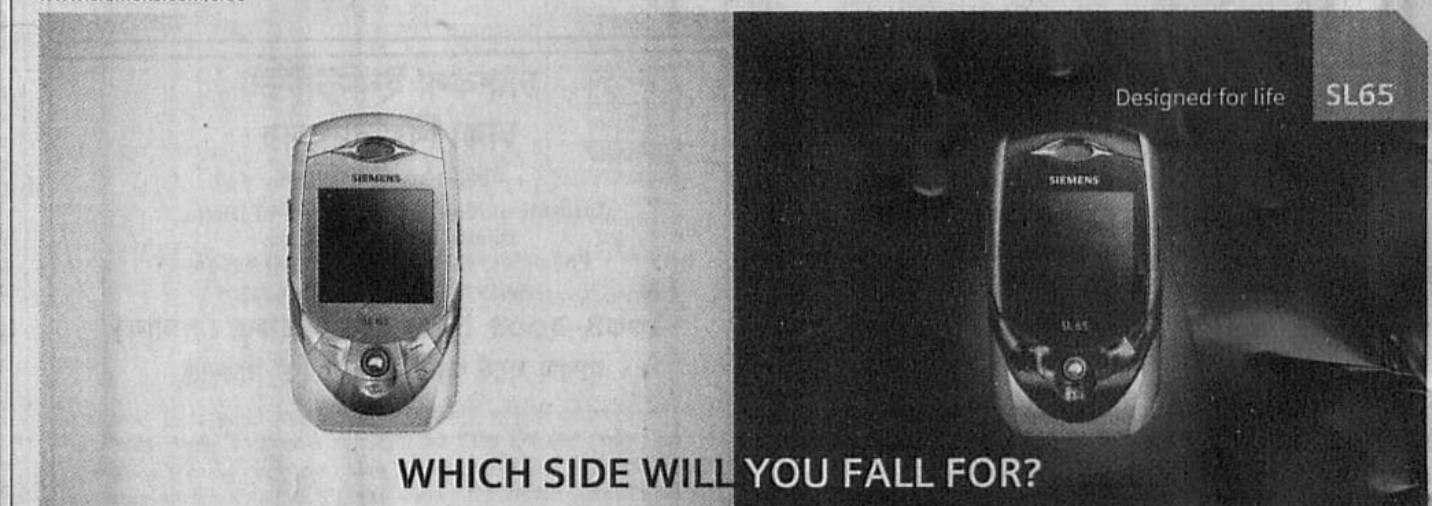
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