

World: Unipolar vs multipolar



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

IN a recent statement in the House of Commons in London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has eloquently advocated in favour of a unipolar world under the leadership of his favourite country the United States of America. It may turn out to be a cry in the wilderness.

Great Britain finds herself in an unenviable situation. She joined the US in her strike against poor, defenseless Iraq and found herself isolated from her natural allies -- the European Union. France and Germany stood firm within the Security Council of the UN and was joined by another veto wielding huge nation -- Russia. China, another big power with a veto tacitly supported these powers. The world thus witnessed a spectacle where the big power the US took in tow Great Britain and launched a ferocious strike on the people of that historic city Baghdad - cradle of many ancient civilizations. The target of this bombardment, President Saddam Hussein, appears to have vanished into thin air. In the meantime the "Governor General" Gen. Jay Garner is busy organizing a new administration in Iraq.

The US will no doubt soon discover that driving out President Saddam Hussein was child's play compared to what awaits the Americans in the days and months ahead. The chances are that they will content themselves with the loot --

that is lots of Iraqi oil. Here again, although the US plays a strong hand in the domain of oil, there are large European companies who are likely to stake a claim. The fragile structure that was built by Saddam, cobbling together regional claims, linguistic and ethnic varieties and all that with an iron hand, where his Sunni minority effectively ruled over a Shia majority, will be very difficult to match. The Americans are an impatient people and how long they will be able to stand between com-

progress the EU has grown around Franco-German leadership, although the organization is of sovereign powerful states of Europe.

As the EU continued to gather strength, Britain, always cautious in her diplomacy, tried to obstruct the growth of EU, tried in vain to set up a parallel organization, and joined reluctantly as a member. Thus Britain, in spite of her strength has remained the outsider looking in as far as the EU is concerned. She has

her power after the Second World War. She has been steadily losing ground since then. It has been effectively masked due to Superpower confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union which the US won in 1962 following the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba under US threat. In the beginning of the eighties the US author Paul Kennedy wrote a remarkable book entitled "Rise and Decline of the Great Powers." In that book Kennedy wrote eloquently about the steady decline of the Great Powers including the US since 1945.

2001 was the turning point. This is when the US officially lost her Superpower status. What we witness today is the convulsion that this state of affairs is bound to create. Giant US is passing through a crisis in order to come to terms with its new status. There is no wonder, therefore, that President George W. Bush declares that French President Jacques Chirac will not be welcome in his Texas ranch. France, with her Permanent Membership of the Security Council and nuclear arsenal, has thrown a challenge at the US that the world has ceased to be unipolar. True, the US, as we have seen in the case of Iraq, is strong enough to frighten small countries. But on that basis it would be ridiculous to claim to be a Superpower. By refusing to invite Chirac to his Texas ranch, President Bush exhibits his petulance.

By advocating in favour of a unipolar world Tony Blair appears to be backing a losing horse. The world has moved inexorably towards multipolarity, and it is not Europe alone who will call all the shots. Great powers are emerging in Asia and new alignments are daily appearing. The world will breathe more easily if the US comes to terms with her new situation, without causing further hurt.

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THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

By advocating in favour of a unipolar world Tony Blair appears to be backing a losing horse. The world has moved inexorably towards multipolarity, and it is not Europe alone who will call all the shots. Great powers are emerging in Asia and new alignments are daily appearing. The world will breathe more easily if the US comes to terms with her new situation, without causing further hurt.

peting claims within Iraq, is anybody's guess. In any case unlike the British they have very little experience in managing empires.

Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister finds himself almost forced to choose between the longtime ally, the US and the uncomfortable European partners. Geographically the pull of the EU is daily increasing. The EU is steadily gaining in number and has now reached the figure of 25. These are all industrialized states and economically the EU is a force to reckon with. Its political structure is slowly emerging. It is worthwhile to recall that the origin of the EU is the decision of the leadership of France and Germany to bury the hatchet after the Second World War. In its nearly half a century of

not yet joined the powerful European currency, the Euro. The problem for Britain is that the leadership role of the EU has been effectively taken over by the Franco-German entente. Regrettably, with the US, Britain can at best play second fiddle. It became crystal clear during the Iraq crisis, when even a large number of Labour MPs of Prime Minister Blair revolted.

The US is going through convulsions since September 11, 2001, when she was brutally attacked from within in front of the gaze of the whole world. On that day the US formally lost her Superpower status. As the Twin Towers collapsed like a house of cards, Fortress America lay in ruins in front of our eyes. Indeed US reached the apogee of

No time to hibernate



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

BETWEEN 11 and 11-30am on August 17 Bangladesh trembled with a series of bomb blasts at different strategic points across 63 districts. The most synchronised blasts, numbering about 500, without any shadow of doubt were orchestrated by groups inimical to the interest of the country. Those who tried and nearly succeeded in shaking Bangladesh had got their target symbolism right and strength tested. Now it is for the government in the country to comprehend the enormity of the danger: the nation is in the line of fire.

This is not the moment of finger pointing, recriminations and blame game -- familiar traits of our political culture. The blasts on strategic points have exposed the possible vulnerabilities especially at a time when the country is passing through an economic down turn. It is the moment for shedding the legendary Bangladeshi type complacency.

What the moment calls for is: wake up and defend, for someone is out there to deform you, to break you down. Precisely true, the enemies have nothing to lose but themselves for their act is born out of blind fanaticism, but the country has a lot to preserve -- the national will, its honour and freedom, characteristics and culture.

Sure enough, the adversaries of democracy have crossed the threshold. The intimations have been there in varying degrees of terror. Today as 8/21 of the past year rhymes with 8/17 of this year, the day of infamy should be a day of awakening as well. The blast was a message to the law makers, law enforcers and civil population that in an environment of high political stakes, bickering and heightened anxiety, no one was safe. The consequences are too frightening to comprehend. The blasts neatly organised and synchronised reminded us what an ominous storm Bangladesh is about to face from zealots in hiding.

From the very moment evidences started surfacing, the administration sidelined the issue. The coalition government's soft attitude or rather inaction to arrest growing militancy in the country may have inspired the "holy warriors" consumed by hate and revenge to wage war against the rule they call man-made. In the case of carnage and murder of intellectuals, politicians and journalists working to establish a just society, based on religious harmony through promotion of liberal education and mutual partnership of all sections of people in the society, by a group determined to establish a quaint system divorced from the realities of the world, it must be said that an ideologue with a closed mind kills one with an open mind. Precisely speaking, it is the desire to know that has been murdered by the 'need not to know'. If there was any lingering doubt that the militant groups have graduated from

poorly armed to the most threatening insurgents, that notion died on the 17th August.

Questions that we are not asking is because we are afraid of hurting radical beliefs and sentiments, so afraid that even after Pakistan's President General Pervez Musharraf admitted that such radicalism was causing a problem in Pakistan, we have not dared admit that we face a similar problem here. Being a moderate Muslim country, as we prefer to call ourselves although things have often gone at variance with our claim, we need to take note of the effects of radical sentiment among the lower middle classes and the semi-literate and illiterate, but we continue to pretend that we have nothing to worry about. There are two reasons for this and the first has to do with the fact

will find that all they teach is Islam and Arabic. There is nothing wrong in knowing Islam and Arabic rather it should be mandatory for Muslim children to know Arabic and the essence of Islam. But polarised education is bad. It has been widely acknowledged that unchecked mushrooming of such schools -- often affiliated to hardline organisations and jihadi groups -- has been the major factor in the spread of the culture of militancy. Children taught to look at the world through a religious prism will always see it divided into believers and infidels.

Undeniably true, institutions imparting religious education at day and militancy training at night to the children of the poorest section of the Muslim populace at no cost basis as reported in the media and confirmed

growth rates. They have understood that being illiberal means doom. And why should Islam be illiberal? At bottom, the Prophet Muhammad's (SM) revealed word is among the most egalitarian of religions. Certainly one of Islam's strongest appeals down the centuries was to people who felt victimised and deprived of worth in Allah's eyes, under the social hierarchies sanctified by some other faiths. In theory, with an ethic that allows merit to be rewarded, Islam ought to serve as a solid platform for political flexibility and economic growth.

Abdelwahab Belwahi, a Tunisian lawyer and a great scholar of Islamic studies sounds the same theme as he says, "Islamic militancy is entirely political." Algerian-born Mohammad Arkoun, professor of Islamic thought at the Sorbonne in Paris and one of the most penetrating analysts of the Islamising movement, underlines the extent to which social dislocations in the Muslim world have created a yearning for dignity. He hastens to add "Fundamentalist activism is nothing, if not youthful, and its young disciples are mostly urban, unemployed and profoundly unhappy with the politics they have known". In fact Islam is as universalist and as generous a consolation when it comes to finding a purpose, a guide for the soul, in a confusing world.

Imtiaz Ahmed, at New Delhi's Jawaharal Nehru University, attributes the more literalistic, even punitive and belligerent readings of the faith today to Islam's sense of being surrounded by threats. He says, "There are two views of Islamic law. They correspond to two portions of the Quran revealed in Mecca and Medina". In Mecca, where the Prophet's religion was fighting for survival, the precepts were "more militant", he says, while in Medina, where Islam ruled, the messages became more tolerant of minority views and other faiths. Medina may be the Islamists' ideal state but the stricter codes of Mecca are what they tend to consult for inspiration. So the practices followed in Medina by the Holy Prophet of Islam should perhaps guide our religious teachers and proponents of Islamic faith in establishing a cohesive society based on justice and fair play.

How could one find solace and comfort in a society with AK-47, AK-56 rifles and time device detonators in clandestine hands? How could the government close its eyes to such horrific things going inside the country? The government has failed to comprehend or rather underplayed the media reports without checking the authenticity and now when the country trembled with synchronised serial blasts skilfully organised and meticulously monitored, the whole administration was running helter-skelter for clues as well as identification of the evil gangs. True, we are living in an era of new terrorism. The lack of all intelligence agencies has stunned the nation. It is now clear that the merchants of death have the capacity to aim at dramatic attacks at strategic points that may shake the foundations of society and undermine the confidence of the people.

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Shab-e-Miraj

SYED ASHRAF ALI

IT will perhaps be no exaggeration if it is claimed that Lailat-ul-Miraj is the most momentous occasion in the annals of not only the entire human race but of all creations. It was on this glorious Night of Ascension that a creation was permitted to cross for the first time the "Ultimate Boundary", symbolically represented by a Lote-tree named Sidratul Muntaha, beyond which none, not even the archangel Jibrail (AS) favoured by or "brought near" Allah (mukarrabun), had ever been allowed to pass. It was on this auspicious night that the Creator, in His infinite mercy, enabled a creation to reach, through a long journey immeasurable by mortal reckoning, the "Sublime Throne", achieve the closest proximity to Him, and "see of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest" in full bloom.

The Holy Quran testifies: "Glory to God Who did take His Servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque, whose precincts We did bless -- in order that We might show him some of Our Signs; for He is the One Who heareth and seeth." (Chapter XVII, Verse 1).

The Journey mentioned above refers to the Glorious Ascension (Miraj) of the holy Prophet (pbuh), testifying so eloquently to the divine eminence which he was to achieve and to the unsurpassable greatness to which Islam was to rise.

It was a Monday on the 27 of Rajab, one year and five months before the Emigration (Hijrat) to the holy Medina that the holy Prophet (pbuh) was first transported through a unique Journey from the holy Makkah to he seat of the earlier revelations in Jerusalem, and then taken through the Seven Heavens, and blessed with the unique opportunity to meet the Most Gracious and Most Merciful Rabbul Alameen.

On that sacred Night of Ascension, Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) was at Makkah in the house of his cousin Bibi Ummahani (RA), sister of Hazrat Ali Murtaza (RA). Having said his night prayers the holy Prophet (pbuh) was asleep with "closed eyes but a wakeful Kalb". It was Jibrail (AS) who roused him from 'sleep' and said, "Allah sends you greetings and invites you, and I have come to take you to Him. Allah desires to show the Wonders and to dignify you in a manner as He has not done with anybody else before. No one ever heard this nor could anybody ever conceive of it."

Accompanied by Jibrail (AS), the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) went to the holy Ka'ba, performed the circumambulation of Ka'ba (Tawaf) seven times, and sat for a while at the Hatim of the Holy House. Mounted on the Buraq, he then set forth toward the Great Unknown. He was first carried to Masjid-ul-Aqsa in Jerusalem. It is said that an assembly of angels received the holy Prophet (pbuh) with the ovation: "Salam be on you, O the First (Ya Awwalu); Salam be on you, O the Last (Ya Akheru); Salam be on you, O the Saviour (Ya Hasheru)." The Apostle of Allah (pbuh) objected that the terms were applicable to Allah alone. But the angels explained that the holy Prophet (pbuh) was the First because Benign Providence created his Noor before anything else was created; he was the Last because he had come to the world as the last Messenger of Allah; he was the Saviour because only his intercession (Shafa'at) as the saviour of sinners would be accepted by God on the Day of Judgement.

After leading a two-rakat prayer at Baitul-Mukaddas in which all the one lac and twenty-four thousand Prophets participated, the Apostle of Allah set out for the Seven Heavens so

Muhammad (pbuh), the Last and the Greatest of all the Prophets, had indeed seen the Greatest Signs of Allah. According to Tirmizi, the holy Prophet said: "I saw my Rab with my eyes and Kalb". The Miskat also testifies: "I saw my Rab in His best appearance ... I was endowed with knowledge of whatever is in the Heavens and on the Earths." And the Holy Quran further adds: "The (Prophet's) heart in no way falsified that which he saw."

clearly mentioned in the Sura Talaq: "It is Allah Who created the Seven Heavens and as many Earths."

As he passed through various Heavens, he had the unique privilege to see Allah's "Signs" in various shapes and forms. It is claimed that he saw with his own eyes Bahrn Naqam, the Great Sea the waves of which wrought Great Deluge inundating the whole world of the Prophet Noah (pbuh). He also had the unique distinction of seeing during his lifetime Hazrat Azrail (AS) in the fourth Heaven, Hazrat Michayeel (AS) with the Great Scale (Mizan) in the sixth Heaven, and Hazrat Israfil (AS) with his Great Horn (Soor) in the seventh Heaven.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also met a good number of his predecessors during his Journey through the Heavens. He met Prophet Adam (AS) in the first Heaven, Prophets Isa and Yahya in the second, Yusuf, Dawood and Sulaiman in the third, Musa, Marium and Asiya in the fourth, Ibrahim, Ismail, Yaqub and Lut in the fifth, Noah and Idris in the sixth, and the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be on all the Prophets) once again in the seventh Heaven.

In the seventh Heaven the holy Prophet (pbuh) again led a two-rakat prayer at the Baitul Mamur mosque in which all the angels of the seventh Heaven participated. As he advanced further, he reached Sidratul Muntaha, the Lote-tree, which has been specifically mentioned in the Holy Quran: "Near Sidratul Muntaha beyond which none may pass: Near it is Garden of Behold! the Lote-tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable). His Sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong.

For truly did he see of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest." (Chapter LIII, Verses 16-18).

It is indeed remarkable that even at this stage where the spiritual knowledge of man could reach no higher, the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) remained unperurbed. The Sufis interpret the Lote-tree in Islam to be what the Burning Bush in the valley of Wata was to Moses (AS). Only, in the case of Moses (AS) it was but a prefigurement of the divine effulgence of this earth: in the case of Muhammad (pbuh) it was the Divine Glory in Heaven itself, and it was "shrouded in mystery unspeakable". This was indeed "the Greatest of the Signs of the Lord".

The holy Prophet (pbuh) advanced further and reached Hijabe Zarbati where Jibrail informed him that he (Jibrail) was unable to proceed any further. According to the Tafsir Ruhul Bayan, however, Jibrail (AS) halted at Sidratul Muntaha.

What followed indeed is unique in the annals of creation. For the first time since the birth of the universe was a creation allowed to proceed beyond Sidratul Muntaha and approach the "Sublime Arsh". The holy Prophet (pbuh) passed through many a screen of Noor and Zulomat and ultimately reached, in the words of the Holy Quran, "the highest part of the horizon". Then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of two bow-lengths or (even) nearer." (Chapter LIII, Verses 7-8).

Two bow-shots (counting 100 to 150 yards to a bow-shot) would be a clearly visible distance. But Sufi mysticism would interpret: "two drawn bows, with their chords touching", making a complete circle of

union. Muhammad (pbuh), the Last and the Greatest of all the Prophets, had indeed seen the Greatest Signs of Allah. According to Tirmizi, the holy Prophet said: "I saw my Rab with my eyes and Kalb". The Miskat also testifies: "I saw my Rab in His best appearance ... I was endowed with knowledge of whatever is in the Heavens and on the Earths." And the Holy Quran further adds: "The (Prophet's) heart in no way falsified that which he saw." The renowned exegetist Abdullah Yusuf Ali points out that the "heart" in Arabic includes the faculty of intelligence as well as the faculty of feeling. The impression conveyed was pure truth; there was no illusion in it."

The holy Prophet (pbuh) then visited Jannat (the Paradise) and Jahannam (the Hell) and returned to Makkah.

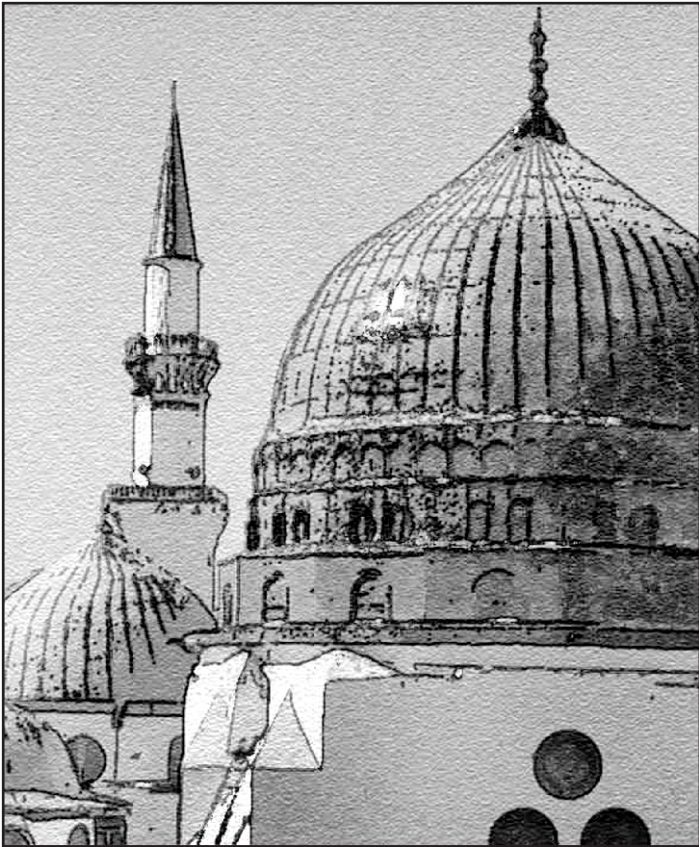
It may be mentioned in this connection that it was during this nocturnal journey on the Lailat-ul-Miraj that Allah had imposed upon the holy Prophet (pbuh) 50 salats a day as obligatory prayers for the faithful. On the Prophet Musa's (pbuh) advice, Muhammad (pbuh) asked several times for an alleviation and each time Allah, in His infinite Mercy, granted it. But when Musa (pbuh) said five salats are still too many, the holy Prophet (pbuh) refused to ask for less. In response to Musa's (AS) request, Muhammad (pbuh) replied very politely, "I have asked my Lord till I am ashamed, but now I am satisfied and I submit!" (Bukhari and Muslim). These obligatory prayers, to be performed five times a day, form one of the pillars of Islam. And the five prayers so enjoined equals fifty in worth and reward. The holy Prophet (pbuh) testifies: "I went back to Him (Allah) and He said, 'They are five and at the same time fifty. What has been said is not changed with Me' (Bukhari and Muslim).

The astounding feat surprised many. The non-Muslims refused to accept it. Even a few Muslims went to the extent of claiming that the Journey was performed through a Vision. The holy Prophet (pbuh) himself silenced the Quraish who were questioning him about his night journey. Jabir told that he heard God's Messenger say, "When Quraish accused me of falsehood I stood up in al-Hijr, then God made Jerusalem clear to me, and I informed them of its distinguishing marks while I was looking at it." (Bukhari and Muslim).

And the handling of Muslims who unfortunately doubt the physical ascension of the holy Prophet (pbuh) perhaps forget that Allah can do and undo anything and everything. Nothing is impossible on His part. "He is the Best of the planners and when He hath decreed a Plan, He but saith to it, 'Be' and it is" (Chapter III, Verse 47).

And if the Prophet Abraham (pbuh) could remain unhurt in the midst of the blazing fire kindled by Namrood, if the Prophet Yunus (AS) could survive in the stomach of a whale for several days, if the Magic-Stick of Moses (AS) could turn into a huge and fearful snake, if Adam and Eve could be created without any father or mother almost out of nothing, if Jesus (push) could see the light of day without the help of any father, if the Nile could be split to enable Moses (AS) and his followers to escape to safety, why should it not be possible for Allah to enable His best Servant to Ascend to the Heavens in person to meet his Creator?

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Masjid ul Nabvi, Madinah

The miraculous night journey

In the same way when the holy through 70,000 veils of Allah's

And here in the August Presence of Merciful Allah the holy Prophet (pbuh) experienced the "thrill of witnessing the Divine Glory and Manifestation at closest propinquity". While in the Divine Presence Merciful Allah was graciously pleased to offer the Messenger of Allah (SM) a very valuable gift "Salat", that is, 5-times daily prayer for him and for his followers.

Prophet (pbuh) reached the sixth heaven he met Prophet Hazrat Musa (A) and similarly he exchanged greetings with him and in the same way he (Hazrat Musa) too expressed his faith in the Prophethood of Muhammad (SM). Here something unusual happened. When the holy Prophet (pbuh) was bidding adieu to Hazrat Musa he found him weeping, and when he was asked the reason of his weeping he said he was weeping because he saw Muhammad (SM) was able to lead greater number of his followers to Paradise than his.

Then the Messenger of Allah (SM) reached the seventh heaven and here he met Prophet Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah (Friend of Allah) and in the same way they exchanged greetings and similarly Hazrat Ibrahim expressed his faith in the Prophethood of Muhammad (SM). After leaving the seventh heaven the holy Prophet (pbuh) was taken to a wonderful tree called "Lot" tree and he was also shown there "Al Baitul Mamur" the much frequented House which is encompassed like the Holy Ka'ba by the Lord Creator's 70,000 angels.

After witnessing the aforesaid House and Tree the holy Prophet (pbuh) was taken to the Divine Presence by a special transport called "Raf Raf" after passing

"Noor". And here in the August Presence of Merciful Allah the holy Prophet (pbuh) experienced the "thrill of witnessing the Divine Glory and Manifestation at closest propinquity". While in the Divine Presence Merciful Allah was graciously pleased to offer the Messenger of Allah (SM) a very valuable gift "Salat", that is, 5-times daily prayer for him and for his followers.

At first, however Almighty Allah ordained obligatory 50-times daily prayers for him as well for his followers and on his return journey when he met Prophet Hazrat Musa (A) he expressed his apprehension and told Muhammad (SM) that as his followers would not be able to offer prayer 50 times daily it would be better to go back and appeal Merciful Allah for reduction of the total number of daily prayers. Then the holy Prophet (SM) again ascended and prayed for reduction of the total number of daily prayers and the number was reduced to forty and when he again met Hazrat Musa (A) on his way back he once again requested him to approach Lord Creator Almighty Allah to reduce the number further in view of his followers' inability to perform prayer so many times daily. It may mentioned here that such process of ascension and

descending from the Presence of Almighty Allah continued till the number of daily prayer was reduced to five only.

Salat is one of the five strong pillars of Islam on which the grand edifice of Islam stands. There are numerous Suras in which Merciful Allah has asked His Bandas (servants) to offer Salat regularly. Sura Al-Baqara says, "Establish regular prayer for prayer restrains from shameful and evil deeds, and Remembrance of Allah is the greatest thing in life."

As Muslims we do believe the miraculous Night Journey of the holy Prophet (SM) and his conversation with Lord Creator. About the holy Prophet's Ascension there should not be any misgiving or there is anything unusual for the true Muslims for they thought if Almighty Allah is powerful enough to have created all the heavens and earth by an act of His Will as clearly indicated in Ayat (Verse) 58 of Sura (Chapter) Ya Sin of the Holy Qur-an, then He is certainly capable of taking His Friend (Habib) Muhammad (SM) across all the seven spheres of heaven and show him some of His wonderful Signs on the said Auspicious night.

As this is the holy month of Rajab and since the Muslims all over the world are celebrating the auspicious occasion of the holy Prophet's momentous Night -- Journey Shab-e-Miraj on the 27th night of this month, we in Bangladesh should also avail this opportunity to celebrate this occasion with due solemnity and fervour and pray for Merciful Allah's forgiveness.

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