

# Lailat-ul-Qadr

**But it is not the worldly pleasures and physical comforts that one should ask for on this blessed night is forgiveness and Allah's forgiveness alone. Nothing can be more pleasant, nothing can be more beneficial, nothing can be sweeter than the glorious mercy of the most gracious and the most merciful Allah.**

SYED ASHRAF ALI

It was on the auspicious Lailat-ul-Qadr, the Night of Power or the Night of 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 first revelation because the Holy Quran was revealed in portions during a total period of twenty-three years.

It was this blessed Night of Majesty, which first witnessed the shining of the divine light which was destined to illumine the whole universe.

Lailat-ul-Qadr occupies a unique position in the Islamic calendar. The word "lailat" in Arabic means night and "qadr" stands for power or honour or majesty. The real merit of this glorious night has been clearly expounded in the Holy Quran. Allah has emphatically and in unambiguous terms declared in Sura Qadr:

"We have indeed revealed this (message) in the night of power. And what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is? / The Night of Power is better than a thousand months." (97:1-2)

The glorious 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." (97:4)

Nobody knows exactly on which particular night in the holy month of Ramadan did the great Revelation come down to the benighted world, transformed the conflict of wrong-

doing into peace and harmony through the agency of the angelic host, representing the merciful powers of the mercy of Allah.

Although it has been clearly laid down in Sura Baqara: "Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and judgement between right and wrong" (2:185), nobody knows definitely which particular night is the auspicious night of power or the night of honour.

The precise date of Lailat-ul-Qadr is said to have been known to the Holy Prophet (SM) and a few of his companions. Literalists sometimes refer to some particular night in the calendar, but there is no agreement of consensus as to which it is. The divine night has been variously fixed as the 12th, 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th, or the 29th night of Ramadan, or more probably one of the last three nights mentioned above.

Even some other nights in the month of Ramadan are claimed to be Lailat-ul-Qadr. But it is generally supposed to be a night occurring on any night in the last third portion of Ramadan.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) reported God's Messenger as saying: "Seek Lailat-ul-Qadr on an odd number night among the last ten in Ramadan." (Bukhari)

Ibn Umar (RA) said that some of the Prophet's companions had a dream that Lailat-ul-Qadr was among the last seven nights, so the Apostle of Allah (SM) said: "I see that your dreams agree regarding the last seven night, so if any one asks he should do so during the last seven

night." (Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn Abbas (RA) 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." (Bukhari)

Abu Said al-Khudri said that God's Messenger (SM) spent the first ten nights of Ramadan in devotion, and spent the middle ten nights in a round Turkish tent, after which he raised his head and said: "I have spent the first ten nights in devotion 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 has 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 been 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 (SM) 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. In the version of Abdullah bin Unais (RA), he said it was the twenty-third night. Muslim transmitted it.

According to Ibn Hanbal, a Hadith narrated by Ibn Umar (RA) claimed that the Holy Prophet (SM) said: "Whoever seeks the Night, let

him seek it on the 27th."

It is not perhaps necessary to fix the night literally by the calendar. The night on which divine message descends from Allah is undoubtedly a blessed night for mankind, like a much-awaited day of rain for a parched land. It is for this that the 'it'ikaf, the attending of the mosques or retiring for contemplation during Ramadan as a form of devotion or meditation, is fixed for the last ten days of the month of Ramadan.

The Holy Prophet (SM) 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 'it'ikaf.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) said that God's Messenger (SM) used to exert himself in devotion during the last ten nights to a greater extent than at any other time. (Muslim transmitted it). She said that when the last ten nights began Allah's Apostle (SM) prepared himself for religious exercises, stayed awake at night and awakened his family (Bukhari and Muslim).

"A thousand months" may also be taken in a mystic or indefinite sense as denoting a very long period of time. It is not necessarily 83 years and 4 months. It may not even refer to ordinary human conception of time. On the contrary, it might very well refer to "timeless time."

In the words of Abdullah Yusuf Ali: "It transcends time; for it is God's power dispelling the darkness of ignorance by His revelation in every kind of affair. One moment of enlightenment under God'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."

Lailat-ul-Qadr, popularly known as Shab-e-Qadr on this continent, indeed occupies a very important place in the life of a devoted Muslim. "The descent of the angels and the spirit by Allah's permission" also testifies to the 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 for 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 morn!"

Peace, indeed, is the chief distinction of Lailat-ul-Qadr. This "peace" comes to the hearts of the devotees in the form of a tranquility 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 jarrings are stilled in the reign supreme of peace.

"And this lasts," in the words of Allama Abdullah 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 on which thirteen hundred and ninety two years ago 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 Moulvi Mohammed Ali states: "The time during which a Prophet appears is usually a time of darkness and as such is often 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 a 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 excellence of Lailat-ul-Qadr are said to be innumerable, and it is believed that during its solemn hours the whole animal and vegetable creation bows down in humble adoration to the Almighty." (Dictionary of Islam, 1988 edition). The divine importance of this Night of Grandeur is so great that the Holy Prophet (SM) himself declared: "He who spends the Lailat-ul-Qadr through prayers, in full faith, shall have all his previous sins and guilt forgiven." As none can afford to miss this glorious and unique opportunity, Muslims all over the world eagerly await this auspicious night and try their level best to pass this night through prayers, Quranic recitations, and deep meditation with all possible sincerity and devotion.

As this night provides them with the coveted opportunity to receive Allah's blessings, Muslims in every nook and corner of the world rise to the occasion to avail this glorious opportunity and pray with a sincere and cherished hope to be blessed with Allah's forgiveness and mercy. It is this mercy of Allah which breaks

through the darkness of the human soul on this blessed night. "All the powers of the world divine speed on their mystic Message of Mercy by Allah's Command and bless every nook and corner of the heart."

But it is not the worldly pleasures and physical comforts that one should ask for on this holy night. What a man should pray for on this blessed night is forgiveness and Allah's forgiveness alone. Nothing can be more pleasant, nothing can be more beneficial, nothing can be sweeter than the glorious mercy of the most gracious and the most merciful Allah.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) said: "I asked the Holy Prophet (SM) what to say on Lailat-ul-Qadr on the assumption that I knew it was the Night." The Holy Prophet (SM) replied: "One should say: Oh Lord! Thou art forgiving and lovest forgiveness, so forgive me." (Ahmed, Ibn Majah and Tirmizi)

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# Official Secrets Act in Raktokarobi

**The wire net behind which the king always lived has two imports: one, it denotes the barrier of power, information, and all else between the ruler and the ruled, and two, the prison for a seemingly all-powerful king. The culture of secrecy and the art of hiding vital information taught to the bureaucracy is only one aspect of this great play, but quite an important one, especially when put in the present time and context.**

ALAMGIR KHAN

RABINDRANATH Tagore wrote Raktokarobi in 1923 in Shillong. The Official Secrets Act, that barred government officials from giving out information to people, was passed in India in 1923, and still exists in Bangladesh as a colonial inheritance. Why invoke the name of Tagore in this context? Is the year 1923 a mere coincidence?

It might be, also might not. But it is not surprising that nothing passed unnoticed before the eyes of the great seer during his time.

There was an Official Secrets Act in Jhokhpur, the mining-dependent capitalist state in his play Raktokarobi (Red Oleanders).

When Nandinee, the protagonist, asked people about the whereabouts of Ranjan, her fiancé, they denied of any knowledge of him. Each evaded answering, and requested her to ask someone else he named. The worshippers, the wine bearers, the decorators, the artillery carriers, all closely linked to the king and the bureaucracy, told her that it was someone else who could give her the information about Ranjan.

One said that what entered their ears should not come out of their mouths so that they could stay alive. Another said that they knew the beginning but not the end. And the end is known to most readers of Tagore, the state-sponsored murder of the rebellious young man, Ranjan.

Without at all offending Tagore, but making him more relevant and contextual to the present time, we can easily substitute various government offices and ministries for worshippers, wine bearers, decorators, and artillery carriers in this beautiful play. Yes, there existed an official secrecy act in Jhokhpuri, even if not a legislation with such an exact title as this; a culture of secrecy was entrenched in that oppressive state. In Tagore's play, not only Nandinee and others like her, but the king, Raja, was in the dark.

Raja was surprised to see the body of the always vibrant hero now still and calm in the embrace of cold death which had been brought about by the torturing machine of the state. He admitted they had deliberately cheated him. They often do, yes.

So, in this state of Jhokhpuri, not only Nandinee and others like her, but the king, too, had no right to receive necessary information. The wire net behind which the king

always lived has two imports: one, it denotes the barrier of power, information, and all else between the ruler and the ruled, and two, the prison for a seemingly all-powerful king. The culture of secrecy and the art of hiding vital information taught to the bureaucracy is only one aspect of this great play, but quite an important one, especially when put in the present time and context.

Was 1923 a mere coincidence, or did Rabindranath have an inkling of the culture of secrecy and obscuring of the truth for safeguarding the interests of the oppressive ruling classes of the state? Let's quote from the poet himself about this play (Red Oleanders: Author's interpretation published in the Visva Bharati Quarterly, October 1925):

"Once our people had either an Akbar or an Aurangzeb to deal with; now we have an organised avarice - frightfully simple in its purpose, mechanically complicated in its process. Its messengers who come to us -- be they Lord Birkenhead or Lord Curzon -- are never for us our fellow beings in flesh and blood, as were Julius Caesar and Anthony who could easily find their immortal places in Shakespeare's drama. They are abstractions at once far and near and therefore awful; they are obscure to us in the dark secrecy of their political laboratory, and yet grimly concrete in their grasp upon our vitals."

A lot of changes notwithstanding, the curtain of secrecy that fell in 1923 in India is still in place in Bangladesh.

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# It's not the Asian century

**With the exception of China and India, then, the other large to midsize economies of Asia are acting as a drag on the continent's growth. Meanwhile, the newly emerging markets of Eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa and even parts of Latin America are expanding at above 5 percent. And Europe and the United States are continuing to outpace Japan. The result is a growth story that doesn't quite live up to the conventional wisdom that this is "Asia's century."**

RUCHIR SHARMA

IN economic and financial circles, the mere mention of Asia these days typically conjures up images of booming growth, surging consumer spending, rapidly modernising cities and buzzing entrepreneurial energy.

However, the reality is that beyond the sensational growth stories of China and India, many other parts of the continent are struggling to regain lost glory and are under-performing their global peers. The most obvious case of disappointment is Japan.

While it's popular to associate China's rise with a decline in US economic power, America's share in the global economy has remained stable this decade at just under 30 percent. Japan's share, on the other hand, has fallen to less than 10 percent from more than 15 percent a decade ago. In statistical terms, China is barely making up for Japan's decline in the growth league tables, with Japanese growth averaging a measly 1 percent this decade compared with the global average of 3.5 percent over the same period.

The fundamental reasons for the Japanese decline are all too familiar -- poor demographics, stagnant wages, anemic consumer spending and dismal policy responses (com-

pounded by a closed corporate culture and banking system).

But while investors are getting increasingly accustomed to the notion of a secular decline in Japan's economic might, it is the relative underperformance of Asia's many developing countries that's truly surprising them.

Outside of China, growth in East Asia has averaged 5 percent over the past three years, which is well below the global emerging-market average of 6.5 percent and a distant cry from the 8 to 9 percent growth rates that were commonplace in many of these countries before the Asian financial crisis in 1997-98. From South Korea to Thailand, domestic demand in much of the region has been rather moribund during the current global expansion.

Popular talk revolves around how Asia is decoupling from the United States in economic terms. But the "Asia is coming into its own" construct is undermined by the lack of significant domestic demand drivers in the erstwhile East Asian tigers. To be sure, the share of exports headed to the United States from these economies has been reduced in recent years, but only to be redirected to China, leaving them as dependent as ever on export-led growth.

Following the Asian financial

crisis, many of the countries in the region focused on fortifying themselves against any external shock by building up massive foreign-exchange reserves and running large current-account surpluses. But in doing so, they seem to have forgotten what it takes to be growth stars.

Companies and consumers in economies from Taiwan to Malaysia have been keen to pay down debt and stay away from any form of leverage, resulting in record-low loan-deposit ratios in the banking system. Historically, in strong growth phases, loan growth usually increases as people feel more inclined to borrow and banks become more willing to lend, signalling higher confidence.

While the deep psychological scars from the East Asian crisis have been an important reason for keeping a lid on domestic demand, policy sclerosis and the inability to reinvent economic models have also played major roles in undermining growth prospects. Indonesia, for example, should aim to grow 8 to 9 percent in the current global environment, given its large exposure to commodities and a low per capita income of \$1,700 that provides ample scope for "catch-up."

Instead, its growth rate has barely

averaged 6 percent during the past few years, with the government balking at carrying out key reforms - particularly in the labor sector, where highly restrictive laws result in only one of every three Indonesians holding a full-time job.

Malaysia hasn't fully capitalised on strong global growth, either, despite its exports exceeding the size of its economy. Malaysia continues to mainly manufacture electronic goods that are now increasingly produced in lower-cost countries, such as China and Vietnam.

Meanwhile, the larger and more advanced economies of Korea and Taiwan have been unable to shift to a service-sector-oriented model that would have allowed them to grow at a faster rate. Admittedly, Singapore has had some success by aggressively pushing growth in the financial-services sector. But with an economy only \$130 billion in size, there's a limit to how much Singapore can change Asia's fortunes.

With the exception of China and India, then, the other large to midsize economies of Asia are acting as a drag on the continent's growth. Meanwhile, the newly emerging markets of Eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa and even parts of Latin America are expanding at above 5 percent. And Europe and the United States are continuing to outpace Japan. The result is a growth story that doesn't quite live up to the conventional wisdom that this is "Asia's century."

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# Separating tax formulating body from NBR

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I am very happy to learn that the government is going to give the responsibility of tax policy formulation to a body separate from NBR. In fact, due to my regular communication with NBR since 1998 pleading for correcting tax inversions existing between the import of finished products and raw materials of electronic items, this very aspect appeared very strongly to me and I have been arguing for the separation of tax policy formulating

body from NBR for quite some time.

Even if the proposal comes from IMF, I think we should hail this decision. However, I would like to put forward some suggestions to the government before giving a final shape to the proposed body.

- Tax policies are of paramount importance to the economy and overall development of the country, and therefore this new body should be headed by a secretary, not by

a joint secretary as proposed by the government. NBR is headed by a secretary, so should this proposed organ of the government.

- The body should have in its membership not only government officials, but civil society experts in relevant fields, particularly from the public universities, lawyers and journalists with relevant expertise, and representatives from associations of different manufacturers, traders and

importers (not only the prominent business chambers). They can be grouped into branches and sub-branches depending on the sectors involved.

- This body should have its own archival library for data and information related to taxes, and which should be made open to the public. This should also contain relevant information from other countries.
- The body should have its own

research cell for carrying out sample surveys, and to gather and analyse information of interest, particularly on industry and other business in Bangladesh and abroad. The tax policy formulation should be made a technical exercise based on facts (of course with judicial decision making) rather than one based on personal perception and whims of its officers as was the trend before, and that often led to

policies serving individual interests. All the findings of the research cell should be made available in the library and on a web-site.

- All proposed tax policies should be made open to public discussion and modification at least one month before preparing the final version for presenting in the parliament.
- Many changes to the tax policies are usually brought about through SROs at other

times citing urgency of the matter. These sometimes open up opportunities for vested interests to override national interest. All such proposals should be made public through newspapers and web-site for public discussions at least one month before taking the decisions. After signing up the SROs the final versions should also be made public through the above means, not only through government gazette which often go unnoticed.

Transparency and civil society participation is very important in governance, which we are learning the hard way. Left to itself, secrecy and control will automatically creep in any conventionally formed government body, and, once in place, it becomes almost impossible to change. Therefore we should bring in transparency and participation of civil society in this newly formed body before opportunity seekers get the upper hand.

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