

## Spirit of Lailatul Qadr

*Living by it is the real test*

THE night of 27th Ramadan stands out with luminous significance as the Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on this night. In the Holy Quran this night is described as the 'Night of Power' as well as a night that is 'better than a thousand months.' --Sura 97 (Al-Qadr).

Lailatul Qadr is also the night of Divine Destiny when Almighty Allah decides the fate of every individual.

Given the great value Islam attaches to this night, the believer in addition to observing fasting by day, also spends the whole night praying and reciting from the Quran for the Almighty's blessing.

The Muslims everywhere observe this night with due solemnity and fervour and pray to the Creator for His mercy and spiritual guidance. They also implore Him to protect them from all kinds of troubles and difficulties and reward them with good fortune. The belief in Divine Destiny is also one of the six articles of faith in Islam which includes belief in one Creator, the Angels, the Books revealed by Almighty, especially the al-Quran, Prophets of God, particularly his last Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the Day of Judgement and the Supremacy of the Almighty's Will, or Divine Destiny. That is why belief in Divine Destiny is the crucial element of faith in Islam.

Praying and reciting from the Holy Quran is undoubtedly a test of the true Muslim's faith in the Almighty. But does the believer's duty finish with only saying prayers and reading from the Holy Quran on this holy night? Many a faithful thinks that the Almighty will reward them only seeing how meticulously they could say their prayers, oblivious that practice in real life of what the Almighty has enjoined is the acid test of one's belief system. Virtues like truthfulness, honesty, kindness to one's fellow beings constitute these tests in real life.

So, to observe the Lailatul Qadr in its pristine spirit, a true Muslim needs to pray to the Almighty as well as practise the virtues of honesty and truthfulness in everyday life.

## Corruption in CAG office

*Gatekeeper-turned-poacher story!*

UNUSUALLY, Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) has detected some 23 instances of corruption in the Comptroller & Auditor General's office. This statutory body is entrusted with a pivotal task of auditing and accounting of all government expenditures. As such, it has a crucial oversight role in terms of enforcing financial discipline. Because it is concerned with post-auditing and accounting and hardly consulted before making an expenditure in terms of its conformity with financial manual and rules, the CAG acts as the terminal point in what should have been an elaborate check and balance system.

To find instances of graft in such an oversight organisation as detailed by TIB makes a dismal reading of an entrenched corruption culture. It is not only institutional corruption but also abetting institutionalisation of graft.

The bribes taken range from petty to big cuts. For instance, promotion to higher scale, drawing of first salary and bonus and authorisation of vehicle maintenance, internet, telephone and contingency bills, delivery of cheques -- nothing is spared the palm greasing. More importantly, bribes for contractors' bills and clearance of pension cases are pretty much routine. The method is sitting on files until graft is signaled by a harassed bunch of preys and received not under but sometimes over the table.

Talk vociferously as you might about such incidence of corruption, any strategy for reform will be far from effective if the government has not filled the void of 37 percent understaffing of CAG. Severely short-handed government organisation is a sure fire way of inducing mismanagement and corruption.

The suggestions being aired include one-step complaints redress mechanism and staggered presentation of bills over a period of time rather than stuffing the CAG with stacks of bills towards the end of the budget year.

It is primarily a question of budget implementation! The culture is characterised by flawed and long drawn-out decision-making which gets reflected on delayed utilisation of money, billing and accounting exercises. The issues are fundamental in nature and cannot simply be wished away without carrying out reform of financial governance backed up by strong political will of the gov-

# Further amendment to constitution is an imperative

MD. ATAUR RAHMAN

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina said that the next JS election would be held as per parliamentary democratic system prevailing in other countries. One would have thought this was an obvious statement to make, so what is so special about this remark made in London recently?

This is where the catch is. The 15th Amendment to the Constitution made last year incorporated a very strange provision that parliamentary polls will be held within 90 days prior to the expiry of parliament's tenure. As per this provision, the sitting MPs will be able to seek re-election in the next parliamentary election. As such, there would not be a level playing field during the next parliamentary election because the sitting MPs would enjoy the existing facilities while the intending MPs would not get the same facilities.

In democratic countries like the UK, India, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, etc., parliaments are invariably dissolved before elections for making a level playing field. So, the prime minister's remark that the next JS election will be held as per parliamentary democratic system prevailing in other countries is not vindicated.

As per the 15th Amendment, the next parliamentary election will be held within 90 days prior to the expiry of parliament's tenure under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the existing cabinet ministers. On the other hand, she said while talking to BBC recently in London that the upcoming parliamentary election may be held under an interim government, where opposition MPs may also be inducted if they wanted. But the present constitution does not permit that. Her remark indirectly indicates that she will lead the interim government. But the leader of the opposition Begum Khaleda Zia rejected the proposal

outright and again firmly declared that the next parliamentary election must be held under a non-partisan government.

Begum Zia rejected the proposal because the present constitution entrusted all executive powers to the prime minister and because, during the tenure of the present government, the administration, law enforcing agencies and the courts have been politicised very blatantly as viewed by the opposition political parties.

launches and trains by the administration and law enforcing agencies at the instruction of the government. An unofficial hartal was observed throughout the country. Live telecasting of the speech of the leader of the opposition by 3 private TV channels was also suddenly stopped. The government did the same thing to foil the grand rally held in Dhaka by BNP-led opposition parties on June 11.

Moreover, some government officers/officials attended the political

politicised administration and law enforcing agencies.

Moreover, the majority of the people also want the next parliament election to be held under a non-partisan, neutral interim government. In this context, it may be mentioned here that out of 13 Amici Curiae invited by the Supreme Court to give their opinions, 12 advocated in favour of a non-partisan, neutral caretaker government. Of course, they opined that the judiciary should not be involved in the process. Many eminent citizens of the country also opined in favour of a non-partisan, neutral caretaker government while discussing with the Committee for Reforms and Amendment of the Constitution. As per survey reports conducted by some newspapers, more than 90% people of the country are in favour of a caretaker government.

In view of the facts stated above, a non-partisan, neutral interim government is needed for conducting the next parliament election in a free, fair, impartial and transparent environment that would be acceptable both at home and abroad. I would like to suggest the following formula for formation of the government: BNP will propose 5 names of non-partisan, neutral persons acceptable to Awami League, while Awami League will propose 5 names of non-partisan, neutral persons acceptable to BNP, who will act as advisers of the interim government, and these 10 persons will propose the name of 1 non-partisan, neutral person acceptable to both BNP and Awami League, who will act as chief adviser of the interim government.

Given the present context, further amendment to the constitution is, in my view, imperative for conducting the next parliamentary election in a free, fair, impartial and transparent environment that would be acceptable both at home and abroad.

The writer is an occasional contributor.



*Further amendment to the constitution is, in my view, imperative for conducting the next parliamentary election in a free, fair, impartial and transparent environment that would be acceptable both at home and abroad.*

We have seen how the present government raised barricades by using the administration, law enforcing agencies and Awami League cadres to foil the grand rally held in Dhaka by BNP-led opposition parties on March 12. Dhaka was totally isolated from other parts of the country for 3 days through stopping of buses, steamers,

rallies, human chains and grand rallies of the ruling party with banners on March 7, 11 and 14, respectively, which were telecast live by the TV channels. As such, it has been clearly proved by the above instances that a fair, neutral, transparent and acceptable parliament election is not possible under this government with the

# Green-on-blue incidents

NAJMUDDIN A. SHAIKH

THE most recent instances of "green-on-blue" attacks in Afghanistan came in rapid succession last week on Tuesday (one US soldier killed in eastern Afghanistan), Thursday (three US soldiers killed after being invited to dinner by an Afghan soldier in Sangin district in Helmand) and Friday (three US soldiers killed in Garmsir district in Helmand).

According to one count the number of Nato soldiers, most of them Americans, killed in green-on-blue incidents has risen to 37 in 26 incidents this year as against 35 in 21 incidents in all of 2011.

These official figures, grim as they are, do not really represent the reality since it has long been Nato practice to acknowledge such incidents only if they result in fatalities. A careful perusal of reports would suggest that the number of incidents, where only injury has been caused, could be at least as high as those acknowledged by Nato.

Saturday was also the day on which an Afghan police officer killed 10 of his colleagues in Nimruz province before making his escape. This was only the latest grisly example of Afghan police officers and soldiers turning their guns on their own colleagues.

A detailed count of such incidents would also show that there have been dozens of such incidents in this year with total fatalities being more than a couple of hundred.

Speaking after the Sangin incident, Isaf spokesman Brig Gen Gunter Katz called the incident tragic but maintained that it was an "isolated incident" that "doesn't reflect the security situation." And according to the same CBS news story, "White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said he didn't want to "diminish at all the seriousness of the attack" but "it is important within the context here to recognise that missions ... are being conducted every day, every hour involving US

forces and the 330,000 Afghan forces." He added that the US military "believes that the operational impact [of the attacks] has been negligible."

There is no doubt that many such incidents may relate, as Nato spokespersons maintain, to personal grievances or personal hostility, but there is equally no doubt that in many cases the perpetrators are Taliban planted in the rapidly expanded Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). It is also certain that every such incident will create turmoil in the village of the perpetrator since two notables from the village are required to certify the bona fides of each potential recruit and implicitly

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the whole village comes under suspicion after an attack of this nature.

While the ethnicity of the perpetrator is rarely mentioned, most if not all the attackers are Pakhtun. Already the representation of Pakhtuns from the troubled Taliban-dominated provinces in the south and east is about three percent in the ANSF. Such incidents are likely to inhibit further the recruitment from these areas, exacerbating the ethnic imbalance in the ANSF.

I had noted in earlier articles that these incidents, which have prompted such decisions as the stationing of "guardian angel" sentries to watch over American soldiers while they interact with their Afghan counterparts and the disarming of Afghan and most American soldiers when important visitors come to training sites, will call into question the willingness of the American armed forces

to contemplate a residual presence after the Nato force withdrawal is completed in 2014.

While an agreement has not yet been reached between the Afghans and Americans on the conditions for such deployment, it has already been stated that the Americans would not have independent bases but would be stationed at Afghan bases, which would be under Afghan administrative control. They would therefore have to depend on the Afghans for security.

Would the Americans be prepared to accept this now? It is likely that in the difficult negotiations that lie ahead the Americans will want assurances that they could themselves

provide security for their base presence and, equally importantly, for the intelligence-gathering units that would be an integral part of the residual presence. Would the Afghans agree? This is another question that will assume fundamental importance if the green-on-blue incidents continue at their present pace.

Much has been appearing about the signals from the Taliban that they are prepared for reconciliation. The most recent is a three-page letter in Pushto believed by some to be authentic and obtained by The Sunday Times which states that the Taliban are prepared to denounce al-Qaeda, permit education for girls and visualise participation in elections. Read in conjunction with Anatol Lieven's revelations of his talks with Taliban leaders and the earlier Michael Semple interview of the man he called Mawlvi, it does seem that at

least one section of the Taliban is prepared for peace talks on acceptable terms. The fly in the ointment is that in none of these seemingly positive indications is there a Taliban willingness to talk to the Karzai administration.

The revelation by Karzai's national security adviser, though later denied by Islamabad, that Pakistan had facilitated a meeting of Afghan officials with Abdul Ghani Baradar some two months ago is significant. One does not know how influential Baradar remains in Taliban circles, but if he does have influence he has clearly refused to exercise it in these two months to facilitate a Taliban-Karzai dialogue. How should Pakistan view this?

The reconciliation process, if it is to be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, will include both the Karzai regime, which includes not only moderate Pakhtuns but also significant representatives from the ethnic minorities, and the opposition, comprising largely those identified in the past as the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. If the Taliban stay with the current demand of talking only to the Americans then it would become a question of the Americans brokering talks between the opposition and the Taliban.

This is clearly not in Pakistan's interest, nor is it in the interest of the goal of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

We should be making every effort to get the Taliban to talk to Karzai and to persuade Karzai to include the opposition in his negotiating team. It will be difficult. There will be spoilers galore -- warlords, narcotics dealers and other power brokers who thrive on instability -- but we must try because the alternative, given the questionable prospect of a residual American presence, is a descent into civil war, the disastrous consequences of which Pakistan will have to bear.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

August 16

1929

The 1929 Palestine riots break out in the British Mandate of Palestine between Arabs and Jews and continue until the end of the month. In total, 133 Jews and 116 Arabs are killed.

1946

Mass riots in Kolkata begin, in which more than 4,000 would be killed in 72 hours.

1962

Eight years after the remaining French India territories were handed to India, the ratifications of the treaty are exchanged to make the transfer official.