

SYED ASHRAF ALI

NIGHT and day has each its own beauty and utility for men as has been frequently pointed out in the Holy Quran and Hadith. If the growing hours of morning light are true types of the growth of spiritual life and work, the majestic beauty and serene quietness of the dark night are only a preparation for it. Of the nights in a year there are six which may safely be marked out for their grandeur and majesty, serenity and sacredness. These are Lailat-ul-Qadr, Lailat-ul-Mi'raj, the nights of two Eids, the Night of Arafat and Lailat-ul-Baraat. On these auspicious occasions are a person's prayers, his or her outpourings of the heart's sentiments, the reverential expression of the soul's sincerest desires before its Maker, never fail to evoke the most covered response from Benign Providence. No wonder, Lailat-ul-Baraat is celebrated as an auspicious night in every nook and corner of the subcontinent and in various other Muslim countries.

Unfortunately, however, there are some who inadvertently claim that Lailat-ul-Baraat has no religious significance in the eyes of Islam. Nothing can be farther from the truth. It is true that Lailat-ul-Baraat has not been specifically mentioned in the Holy Quran (although mention is there of Lailat-ul-Mubarakatun), but there are numerous authentic Ahadith and historical evidence which testify so eloquently to the fact that the holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself used to attach great importance to this extraordinary night. He not only said special prayers in this sacred night but also visited graveyards and prayed for the departed souls on this holy occasion.

Lailat-ul-Baraat, the glorious night on the 15th of Shaban, is popularly known as Shab-e-

Barat in this subcontinent. Both the words Shab in Persian (and Urdu as well) and Lailat in Arabic mean "night," and Bara'at stands for Salvation or Privilege. (Some, however, inadvertently think that the word is Barat, which means "Fortune," and the auspicious night is the Night of Fortune). Lailat-ul-Baraat is the Night of Salvation or the Night of Privilege. It is on this Night of Privilege that Rabbul Alameen, in His infinite Rahmat, blesses each and every person with a unique opportunity to receive the most coveted Divine Mercy. Acclaimed traditionalist Ibn Maja (his Sunan is universally accepted as one of the Sihah Sitta, the six authentic traditional works) reported on the authority of no less a person than Sher-e-Khuda Hazrat Ali ibn Abu Talib (RA) that the holy Prophet (pbuh) said, "On this Night from the moment the sun sets, Allah descends on the firmament of this earth and goes on asking till sunrise: 'Is there no one who asks forgiveness so that I may forgive him? Is there no one who asks provision so that I may provide him? Is there no one afflicted so that I may relieve him? Is there not such and such? Is there not such and such?' till the dawn comes."

The Encyclopaedia of Islam, published in Leiden, Netherlands, corroborates this claim when it says, "In Hadith it is said that in this Night Allah descends to the lowest heaven, from there He calls mortals in order to grant them forgiveness of sins." (Tirmidhi, Sunan, B.39).

Records are there that on one occasion the holy Prophet (pbuh) spent half of this auspicious Night of Salvation through a Nafl prayer



of two rakat and the rest of the Night through a long Sijdah or prostration. What is more, he (pbuh) used to offer this prayer with inimitable dedication and unfathomable concentration. Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) reported that on one such occasion the holy Prophet (pbuh) was so deeply absorbed in his meditation and remained so long in prostration that she became awfully nervous and thought that he (pbuh) had shuffled off the mortal coil.

On another occasion, according to Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA), the Apostle of Allah (pbuh) said his prayers in this Night with such unparalleled devotion and dedication that his feet got swollen.

Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) also said, "I missed Allah's Messenger (pbuh) one night and found him at al-Baqi (Jannatul Baqi). He (pbuh) said, 'Were you afraid that Allah and His Messenger would act wrongly towards you?' I replied, 'Messenger of Allah, I thought you had gone to one of your wives.' He said, 'On the middle night of Sha'ban Allah Most High descends to the lowest heaven and forgives more sins than the hairs of the goats of Kalb.' (According to an estimation, the tribe of Kalb during that period had more than 20,000 goats). Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah transmitted it.

According to another tradition, Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) reported the holy Prophet (pbuh) as saying, "Do you know what happens this night?" meaning the middle night of Sha'ban. She asked, "What happens in it, Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "In it record is made of every human being who will be born and of every human being who will die this year; in it their actions are taken up to heaven and in it their provisions are sent down." Baihaqi transmitted it.

"According to popular belief," corroborates the Encyclopaedia of Islam, "in the night preceding the 15th of Sha'ban the tree of life, on whose leaves are written the names of the living, is shaken to decide who is going to die in the coming year." It is claimed by some that it is the Sidratul

Muntaha, "the Lote-tree of the extremity", a tree in the seventh heaven having its root in the sixth, which is shaken to decide who is going to die. (Sidratul Muntaha has been mentioned twice in the Holy Quran).

There are some who think that crackers and candles are part and parcel of Shab-e-Baraat. Nothing can be more misleading. This awful custom, introduced by the Barmecides in Baghdad, simply because they were fire-worshippers and loved fire even after they accepted Islam, not only disturbs the namazis and meditators on this auspicious night but also leads to unnecessary wastage and prodigality which are forbidden in Islam.

There are also some who try to equate halwas and rotis with the sacred Night of Privilege, claiming that the holy Prophet (pbuh) lost a few teeth at the Battle of Uhud on the 15th of Sha'ban and hence people should not cook anything hard as a mark of respect to that historic incident. Some also claim that Hazrat Amir Hamza (RA) embraced martyrdom on the 15th of Sha'ban. Both these claims are totally baseless as both the incidents occurred in the month of Shawal and had simply nothing to do with the 15th or any other day of Sha'ban. There is no harm if halwas and other sweetmeats are cooked on this occasion, but let these be prepared only to be shared with the poor and the have-nots.

And lastly, let all of us pray with all the earnestness the following Dua which the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself said: "O Allah, I seek refuge in Thy Good Pleasure from Thine Anger, and in Thy Forgiveness from Thy Punishment, and I seek refuge 'in Thee from Thee' from Thy wrath. I cannot reckon the praise due to Thee. Thou art as Thou hast glorified Thyself."

The writer is a former Director General, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh.

Always right

AKHTAR SHAH

A good friend of mine once said to me: "I was looking for 'Miss right' for a life partner. After a long search, I thought I had found one! Little did I know that her first name was 'always.' Alas, in the absence of decent dialogue and an acceptance on her part that no one has the monopoly on good ideas, after a while whole saga took a dive and fractured."

21st century modern democracies run governments based on consensus not diktats. It's inclusive not dictatorial. Opposing views find commonality of purpose and have no hesitation in accepting ideas and policies mooted by 'ardent political enemies.' It is thus so, as it is the best solution for the citizens. Politicians don't in general agree to these steps to get medals and certificates.

In Britain today, some ideological differences are getting thinner by the day. An example here, shadow chancellor Ed Ball has made public announcements stating that "he would continue with most of the austerity and social security cost reduction measures implemented by the Tory Chancellor George Osborne. The reason is simple, The Labour party has realised that without creating wealth (there are differences as to how to achieve this between Tories and the Labour), one cannot spend unearned revenue just to buy votes!

We have seen the result of Labour's vast borrowing and spending money to "get out of trouble" policy. It created Britain's biggest debt burden crippling the country and having to endure a triple dip recession.

This just shows how important it is for the political leaders to bury the hatchet once and for all, not to continually discuss and repeat past misdeeds and have a broad-brush agreement on major issues of national interest.

It appears that, from time to time political leaders take it upon themselves to be the sole authority on issues of national interest. Just because one holds a ministerial or a top civil servants position it could not reasonably justify bulldozing, denying and spinning for the cause of an individual or a party. It appears that transparency and accountability have gone on a permanent holiday!

What does this do? People with good ideas, some may be with ulterior motive, simply shut up and one gets a one dimensional solution to a problem. Also, since the "Supreme being" is judge and the jury, no objective "post match review" can take place, therefore mistakes and sometimes disastrous results are shoved under the carpet.

This practice of monologues and diktats are unhelpful in a democracy. An environment should be created for a free flow of ideas and opinions. These then may be debated and a transparent decision is then taken by a leader, which is in the national interest and includes opinions and views of the most ardent critic of a decision maker. This shows strength of character of the democratically elected decision makers and also shows open mindedness to an extent that actually upholds the person's stature as a leader.

A leader is for all citizens not just party followers. They should enquire and inspire, be informative and yet informal. The current stalemate and inward looking stance may spiral into a pit of dread. Hard working citizens surely deserve better.

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The RMG sector and external links

KAZI NIAZ AHMED

THE institution-based view is an important theory in the study of economics, international business, and management. The external business environment of firms operating in an industry can have great effects on them. Policies taken by macro-level players and institutions like individual countries or regional economic blocs e.g. the EU, Asean, Nafta, etc. can have enormous influence on the fate of foreign industries like the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

Institutions are formal and informal rules, regulations and organisations, which give certainty in the conduct and transactions of business and economic activities. G.A. Akerlof, in his famous article The Market for "Lemons": Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism, cites one common example of institution - 'guarantee' by the seller against risk of 'quality uncertainties' for goods bought. Brand-names, licensing, certificates etc. are all forms of institutions for ensuring trust in business transactions. Likewise, governments, intergovernmental and multilateral organisations like the World Bank, WTO, and regional economic arrangements all act as formal institutions serving and affecting business, both regionally and worldwide, with their rules and policies.

Institutions are a major reason for business and firm strategies to differ from region to region and from country to country. Many scholars argue that when crafting and implementing business strategy, firms need to take into account influences from 'institutional frameworks' like the state, the wider society and the international environment, since there is no way firms can escape from their embedded environment. If Bangladesh is to do business internationally, it cannot ignore the political and economic order that is in place globally.

The international business scene has changed immensely over the last few decades with the emergence of far-reaching and influential regional arrangements. These kinds of economic blocs offer opportunities and also pose some operational problems for firms. In order to benefit from lower barriers to trade, like duty-free or quota-free access, some companies invest in or outsource manufacturing and supplying orders to a given country. This is exactly the case when EU retail companies place orders to Bangladeshi apparel factories for reaping the benefits of the special GSP scheme by importing finished garments from an LDC.

On the other hand, one of the key challenges for businesses in utilising such opportunities is to act in accordance with regulations. One of the focuses should be on reducing the 'institutional distances' with buyer countries and blocs. Concerns over workplace safety and labour rights must be addressed by local firms

immediately, as these issues are embedded into the various legal and ethical institutions of foreign buying nations and regional entities. Therefore, the managers of both, the foreign buying firms and Bangladeshi selling firms, need to be very particular to ensure they comply with the various rules and regulations of the buying country.

Many customers of the retail outlets in Europe and North America are becoming more conscious about the workplace safety situation in Bangladesh. If they decide to boycott Bangladeshi RMG, that can have severe effects on the sector. Concerns of these customers are now pushing the big international buyers like Wal-Mart, H&M, Inditex, etc. to consider enforcing stricter industrial safety control on Bangladeshi garments

able level.

Internationally accepted norms and practices of allowing the workers the right to form trade unions to voice their demands; giving them a minimum wage for a reasonable living; and a workplace which is not life threatening or hazardous are the basic requirements on the part of the international community for sustaining long-term business and trade ties with Bangladesh. For this, they are pressurising the international buyers, in whatever way they can, to compel their Bangladeshi suppliers to yield to these prerequisites.

The UK government has announced a plan to disburse a fund of £18 million for working towards better building and fire safety standards; effective building inspection systems; improved skills of the workers; and



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manufacturers. Many of the international buyers have recently come together for signing a legal commitment to ensure workers' safety and security.

The US is seriously considering a "suspension, reduction, or withdrawal" of its GSP facilities for Bangladesh, citing the violation of workers' rights that GSP demands. If that happens, it will send a torrent of negative images around the world for all sorts of products of Bangladeshi origin. If the EU imitates the US, that could be a fatal blow for our RMG sector, as the EU-GSP is like the lifeblood of the Bangladeshi RMG industry. The US, the EU, and rest of the international community, basically want the institutional gaps in the business culture, ethics, and environment between Bangladesh and the former to close down to an accept-

for enacting a common compliance standard in Bangladesh; all of which could be seen as efforts to reduce the existing institutional distances.

Now, it is the task of Bangladesh government, BGMEA, and the industry owners to understand the formal and informal institutional position of destination countries and their societies. In doing so, they must readjust their institutional practices by official and unofficial means to continue enjoying the fruitful economic relations that they have, which is an imperative for the Bangladeshi economy.

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ACROSS

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6 Things

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7 Sea bird

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9 He-men

10 George

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13 English
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23 Banquet

25 Scale
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27 Part
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Dept.

29 Cronkite,
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et al.

31 Work
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32 Doubt-
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33 Neighbor
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34 Female
deer

36 Risk

37 Cheers
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38 Some
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(berate)

41 Comic
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45 Nap

48 Body art,
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short

50 Calendar
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Solution time: 27 mins.

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Yesterday's answer 5-18

CRYPTOQUIP

DCLGY HVCR KXA SXVU LUV

CESLTXULIG RXUC L KIHMR

VXA UJC VUHPPGLY JCTD

KXV X TLSC IMR VXYC

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN FOLKS LOVETO

FILL EVERY OLD CREVICE WITH CAULKING,

YOU COULD SAY THEY ARE SEA/OMG FANS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals T

BEETLE BAILY

by Mort Walker

BEETLE'S OVER
THERE UNDER
THAT TREE

I SENT HIM BACK
TO CAMP TO GET
SUPPLIES HOURS
AGO!

11-14

HENRY

by Don Trachte

Henry is running and jumping.

Henry is running and jumping.

Henry is running and jumping.

Henry is running and jumping.

11-14

QUOTABLE
Quotes

"We vote?
What does that
mean? It means
that we choose
between two
bodies of real,
though not
avowed,
autocrats. We
choose between
Tweedledum
and
Tweedledee."

HELEN
KELLER