

LS SPECIAL

Auspicious Shab-e-barat

Shab-e-barat is approaching and your neighbourhood grocery stores are already stocked up with ghee and spices. The fish and bhortas of the last week are well behind, and rich sweet and savoury recipes are being dusted out.

Every Shab-e-barat comes with a spiritual cleansing, and also makes way for preparing myriad halwas, rotis, meat dishes — beef or duck. Some even go all out with a Mughlai feast of polao, korma or roast; many serve tehari while others experiment with dishes from faraway lands. You can almost equate this as a 'coming soon' sign for the feast that's one and a half month away!

As this summer rolls out, Star Lifestyle has a spread all ready for you to try out for Shab-e-barat. From sweets to breads, and all that is savoury. For an added twist, we have Thai recipes for rubs and sauces from culinary curator Shaheda Yesmin to go with your regular spread.

Indulge yourself and your family and friends with these dishes as you await the glorious Shab-e-barat.

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Where have all the lamps gone?

As the evening gradually flowed into the night, earthen lamps were burned and fairy lights bedecked buildings just like stars adorn the night sky. As the flames flickered in the wind, echoes of laughter and excited voices filled the air already laden with the smell of freshly made halwa-roti. The streets of Dhaka were getting ready to celebrate Shab-e-barat, the fabled night of fortune and forgiveness.

Nausheen Rahman, a sexagenarian, now a resident of Baridhara, reminisces about how she celebrated Shab-e-barat in Dhaka as a child.

"In those days my entire family used to live in four houses within a compound. As children my cousins and I were always very excited about Shab-e-barat. Each of us used to get new clothes for that day. We would wear them and gather in the compound, and we would gorge down as much halwa-roti as our tummies allowed.

I remember the Puran Dhaka roti as being the high point for us. These rotis came in different shapes and sizes. The

one that excited me the most was the fish-shaped with coloured eyes. Shab-e-barat used to be a well observed function in those days."

As socially relevant Shab-e-barats of her memory were, she remembers it as religiously important too. "My grandmother used to tell us to behave well on Shab-e-barat so that our destiny remained good the rest of the year. We used to visit the graveyard believing that souls descended on earth on this day. Our elders would fast during the day and say special prayers. Once every one broke their fast, around 15-20 street children used to line up in our compound and we used to distribute halwa-roti to them."

Another vivid memory of Shab-e-barat that she recalled is that of playing with fire crackers.

"We had a very nice terrace, so once the moon was up we would run up to see the new moon and then light fireworks and play with tarabati. Relatives would come over with tasty food and we would all celebrate together. It used

to be like a mini-Eid for us."

Until it stopped being one.

Nausheen Rahman says Shab-e-barat is now a mellowed affair in the family where they fast during the day and make halwa-roti to distribute to a few neighbours. The excitement and festivities of her growing years are lost forever. This sentiment holds true for the rest of the country too.

The 15th night of Shabaaan i.e. Shab-e-barat is plagued with a huge difference of opinion about whether or not it should be celebrated as it has been in the sub-continent traditionally. The primary reason because of which the tradition of fireworks and festivities on Shab-e-barat is tapering to an end is the school of thought that says there is no proof in the Hadith of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) or in the Quran of the existence of Shab-e-barat, hence celebrating it is a "Bidah" or an innovation.

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