ISLAM

The moment of truth

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

The power-supply used to be plentiful in the Ivory Coast. The country had at one time been called the "Showcase of Africa" due to its glittering array of houses and shops.

In December 1983, everything suddenly changed. People were forced to eat by candlelight in luxury hotels, while houses and offices were lit by lanterns. Hydro-electric stations which had supplied ninety two percent of the Ivory Coast's electricity were brought to a standstill by a severe drought which reduced the water flowing through the dams to a trickle. The turbines simply stopped running, and the electricity supply fell so low that at times there would be no power for up to 18 hours. Industrial production was reduced by 65%. Computers, electric typewriters, refrigerators and other gadgets ceased to operate.

For fear of being caught in the lift, many businessmen gave up going to their offices. One commuter explained his situation to a New York Times correspondent:

"For years I had gone from my air-conditioned villa to my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office. I never realized how hot it really is here." This business-man, dwelling in air-conditioned surroundings in the heart of Africa, was living in an artificial world. When the electricity failed him, he realized that in reality things were very different from what he had supposed.

The same is true, on a larger scale, of all mankind. People considersthemselves free in the present world. They thinks of everything they have as their own property. But when death comes, it will dawn on an individual, all of a sudden, that he had just been fooling himself: he had been given freedom as a test whereas he had thought it was his right; he had taken what was God's to be his own; he was responsible to God for his actions, but he lived under the misapprehension that, whatever he did, he would never be taken to task for it.