

## SUNDAY POUCH

## The dark night of genocide

### A supreme sacrifice writ in blood

TONIGHT we remember a night which came steeped in murder and mayhem forty one years ago in this land. On this night in March 1971, the Pakistan army launched Operation Searchlight to put an end to the democratic aspirations of the people of Bangladesh. Despite the rising demand for a transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people, despite the concerted civil disobedience movement launched by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the beginning of the month in order for the state of Pakistan to transit peacefully to democracy following the general elections of three months earlier, the military junta led by General Yahya Khan opted to ride roughshod over popular aspirations through injecting fear into the heart of every Bangali. On the evening of March 25, Yahya Khan stole away to Rawalpindi, but not before he had issued the orders for a sweeping military operation.

On the night of March 25, 1971, the Pakistan army killed thousands of people in Dhaka. The brutality was unprecedented as academics, students, policemen, East Pakistan Rifles personnel and sleeping rickshaw pullers were put to the gun and the bayonet. The ferocity with which the Shaheed Minar and the Kali Mandir were destroyed in the early hours of what was to be a genocide over the next nine months has rarely been matched in the annals of modern history. Eminent academics, among whom were the venerable GC Dev and the scholar Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta, were shot. Students of Dhaka University were lined up, shot and then dumped into hastily dug mass graves. The home of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came under assault and sometime after midnight the undisputed leader of the Bangali nation was taken into custody by the army, to be soon transported to what was then West Pakistan. Across the city, newspaper offices were put to the torch.

The action by the Pakistan army made things unambiguously clear for the people of this country. That a war had been imposed on them was no more in doubt. That they would need to wage a long twilight struggle to earn their political freedom as a nation was the truth which dawned on them even as the army went on brutalising lives.

This morning, in profound tribute, we recall the men and women who died at the hands of the Pakistan occupation army on March 25. They did not die in vain. It is their cause we must uphold today, all these years after the mediaeval barbarity let loose by the Pakistan army.

## Initiative to stop illegal parking

### First create adequate parking lots

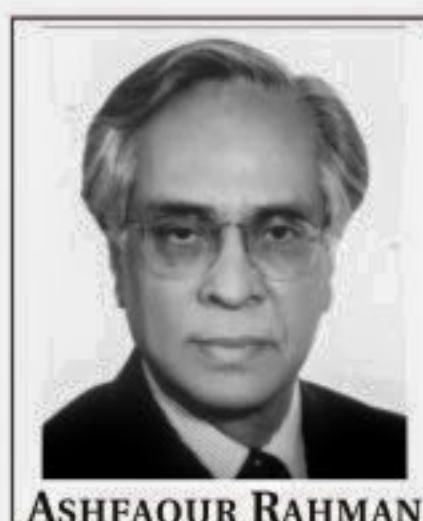
DHAKA Metropolitan Police (DMP) has initiated a new move in the city to use wheel clamps for locking illegally parked vehicles so that those can be towed away. This is understandably to discourage people from parking their vehicles just about anywhere. But it can create more problem than solve in terms of enforcement. Even this could lead to compounding traffic jam. Besides, more importantly, it is going to be fringe-touching as it does not the root causes of illegal parking.

The main problem is acute dearth of parking space. High-rise buildings, shopping malls, business and academic institutions, government and non-government organisations mostly have inadequate parking spaces, which is why cars spill out on to the streets. Moreover, unscheduled stoppages of public buses at undesignated places often create traffic snarls.

A few months ago, an initiative was taken to recover parking spaces lost to shops and other business outfits. Since it was a half-hearted move it ended in a fiasco. In this case too, we'd urge the DCC and Rajuk to address the real problems and exercise their authority in making sure that all buildings allot adequate parking space in the first place.

We have long been suggesting that the city be divided into zones to have clusters of high-rise parking lots in each zone. We also feel that private sector should be encouraged to bankroll the projects and turn them into commercial enterprises. It is only after we have adequate parking spaces that we can move to apply traffic rules with a new vigour. This is not to say though, that delinquent vehicle operators should escape the long arm of law.

# Defeat can only lead to success



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

**S**O last week, Bangladesh lost the Asia Cup Cricket final. Nothing could have been more heart rending than losing to Pakistan by

only two measly runs. Pakistan was not the world cricket champion nor was it the Asian champion. Our team had slowly but surely defeated India, the world champions and Sri Lanka, a major cricketing power. But in the final match, we the dragon slayers who were supposed to make mince-meat of Pakistan were unable to snatch away the Asia Cup. We lost to them and they took away the Cup which was deservedly ours.

The whole nation seemed to be in a state of shock. There was a case of a boy committing suicide and another person dying of a heart attack on hearing the news. The Mirpur stadium where the game was played was filled with grief stricken men and women who thought that Bangladesh did not deserve to be defeated. It was the best team ever assembled with lot of team play and gumption. It seemed almost cruel and even unjust to see it lose the Asia Cup in this glorious month of March.

But let us not get carried away. Everyone suffers from defeat now and again. But it is what you do or think when you are defeated that makes the difference. Leaders always look at defeats as lessons and take away what they learn and put them into action. This is also the way we should look at this defeat.

Let us focus at some worthwhile lessons we can all take away. We must be able to make that defeat the beginning of victories to come from now on and turn it around into something positive.

So what are some of the lessons learnt? Let us look back and find out



*It is said that "being defeated is a temporary condition. Giving up is what it makes it permanent." Let us therefore not take this two run defeat seriously. It is just a lesson to do better in the future. It is the progress we have made that can give us inspiration and opportunity to do more. You cannot have a better tomorrow if you are thinking of yesterday all the time.*

what went wrong. Why did Shahadat give away 19 critical runs to Pakistan by his insipid bowling? Why did Nasir wait at the crease to hit boundaries knowing fully well that the Pakistanis were deliberately bowling slow balls? He could have played the balls and got singles or twos and piled up the score in Bangladesh's favour. Our captain Mushfiqur Rahim tried to hit a sixer off the first ball he faced and was caught and bowled.

Why did we use the wrong tactics when Pakistan made use of slow balls to restrict us from scoring quickly. We should have made use of these balls to increase our score in short and steady bursts. Our captain and our

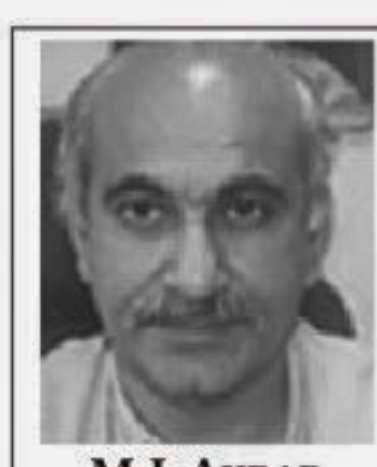
coach should have so advised our batsmen.

So we must seek out our weaknesses, note them and look at how we can correct them. Self-development, more understanding of one's self, can go a long way to improving our team's outlook on things.

We should stop blaming others or even luck. Was our strategy wrong in the first place? Was this the right way in responding to Pakistan's bowling? They used a time tested tactic to restrain us from scoring. What was the option left to us to respond? We had such a good line up of batsmen who could easily

## BYLINE

# Mamata Banerjee's Mamata Banerjee



M.J. AKBAR

**T**HE two popular draws at any country fair are that of the fire-eater and the juggler. The biggest fair in our democratic country is obviously politics, and it should

be no surprise therefore when big crowds, led by an inexhaustible media, gather around any spectacle of fire-eating.

To watch one is always fascinating. To see two in competitive action is absolutely gripping. This political game is not simply about "my fire is bigger than yours." At its best, the competition also hinges around a moral axis: my fire is holier than yours. It will not only cook a much finer repast for the masses but, if you get the right Brahmins for the incantation, also put you in touch with the gods of electoral victory.

Mamata Banerjee has been playing with fire ever since she stepped into public space. Her inborn skills have been honed by experience. She knows the innumerable intricacies of this inflammable art. At her best, she can leave scorched earth in her wake, denying fodder to the armies she has devastated -- as the Marxists discovered at Nandigram. She has patience. Over the last decade she lit one small bonfire after another all over Bengal and then waited as they, at their own pace and sometimes fanned by their own will, linked up to become a historic conflagration. The achievement was phenomenal, the applause inter-

national.

Then she became custodian of the House of Bengal. As any exhibitionist will tell you, fire-eating is best done out in open space, on soil and grass, under the sky. A fire-eater does not attempt this diet in his kitchen. The hatch is in danger. But Mamata has found it difficult to change her habits; she finds fire irresistible.

Mamata Banerjee is not a fool; and please underline

not. She has learnt politics in the tough school of experience in a land where opposition seemed particularly hopeless. She rarely does anything that she cannot explain to the voter who put her in office. But she is getting disconcerted by the instruments of public life that have shifted the angle of their mirror now that she is in power.

Media, both symbol and reality of a contemporary crowd, lives by its own drugs. Complexity is of little use to television, which wanders across its firmament with a label in search of a fixture. Television survives on simplicity. Heroes and villains. Cops and robbers. Certainty is its strength. It does not much matter whether truth agrees with such certainty; it

might, or it might not. This is one of the many reasons why government-owned television is so boring. It is trapped between the glare of obedience and the fog of qualifications. Private television, responding to the needs of market stimulation, switches from hero to villain with the instant ease of electricity.

Mamata Banerjee is used to antagonists. She thrives on them.

Sometimes she even makes an effort to create them, even when others are not particularly antagonistic, or at least would like to postpone a confrontation. But she has suddenly been outflanked by some heavy fire-eating, not to say fire-breathing, from behind her back, from among her own

troops. Dinesh Trivedi has done a Mamata Banerjee on Mamata Banerjee.

I have no idea whether Dinesh Trivedi planned his strategy carefully, or whether he had reached that point of exhausted frustration with his leader, where you cannot care less about consequences. Perhaps it was 25% of the former and 75% of the latter. We shall have to await his autobiography before we know the full

truth, since while he has turned candour into a successful weapon he cannot take it too far. What is certain is that Mamata Banerjee, concentrating as she has been on Marxists from the Left and Congress on the Right, has been completely flummoxed by this assault from the rear. Worse, Dinesh Trivedi has, quite astutely, coated his assault with just the kind of morality that Mamata Banerjee keeps in her arsenal. He says, from every platform, that he is doing nothing for himself; that he has everything to lose from this confrontation; but he is fighting the good fight because it is the Right Thing To Do. Touché.

Perhaps Mamata Banerjee forgot two things about Trivedi. He was a member of V.P. Singh's bandwagon in the late 1980s, and that wagon was fuelled solely by the gas of public morality as it challenged the steel of Rajiv Gandhi's government. Second, Dinesh Trivedi plays bridge. He knows how to finesse.

Mamata Banerjee will not lose the game so easily; she still holds far more cards, including a range of trumps. She retains the populist card on fares. Trivedi's constituency is the middle class, hers the poor. The Left, which understands, has supported her. But something of the élan that Mamata Banerjee possessed is gone. She still holds Bengal, but she has probably lost a chunk of Kolkata.

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Shabash Bangladesh!

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 25

1802

The Treaty of Amiens is signed as a "Definitive Treaty of Peace" between France and the United Kingdom.

1811

Percy Bysshe Shelley is expelled from the University of Oxford for publishing the pamphlet The Necessity of Atheism.

1918

The Belarusian People's Republic is established.

1941

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia joins the Axis powers with the signing of the Tripartite Pact.

1957

The European Economic Community is established (West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg).

1971

Bangladesh Liberation War: Beginning of Operation Searchlight by the Pakistani Armed Forces against East Pakistani civilians.

1975

Faisal of Saudi Arabia is shot and killed by a mentally ill nephew.