

Law triumphs

Blot on our conscience removed

WITH the third judge bench of the High Court pronouncing verdict on split judgement in the Bangabandhu murder case on Tuesday, death sentences against 12 out of the originally accused 15 stood resoundingly upheld. The addition of two to the list of ten earlier convicted by HC full bench with capital punishment signified a greater reach of the dragnet of law as well as an extended vindication of the due process of law. It is a big relief and a matter of profound satisfaction to the nation that a shame and a blot on our conscience, rule of law and national history is nearing the end of its obliteration through what must be regarded as the substantive penultimate to whatever is left by way of the convicts' right to appeal before the Supreme Court. Those who are fugitives from law will have to surrender before being entitled to appeal at all. It is laudable that the trial has been held without giving in to the temptation of forming a special tribunal for instituting it. It was conducted under the ordinary law of the land with full transparency and openness maintained all the way. The process ran its course taking time to deliver the judgement with the defence having got due opportunity to state its case. All of this built a certain credibility into the dispensation of justice. For over two decades of altogether twenty-six years since the dastardly serial killing of Bangabandhu and the members of his family took place, the matter had been put on the cold storage, all because it was taken politically and not as a criminal act of mediaeval savagery. Nor did it cross the mind of those who let it go unpunished that indulgence to it meant courting repetition of it in some form or shape. We condemn that muted response to the demands of rule of law, justice and fair-play for long twenty-one years. What we want to see now is an expeditious implementation of the verdict on completion of whatever remains in terms of the convicted persons' exercise of the right to appeal. The nation is definitely keen on putting the whole episode behind and moving energetically forward, unstuck from a huge burden of the past.

Learning from the Test series

We commend our boys

AS our boys come back from their first away Test series in Zimbabwe, we applaud their efforts, even as we urge them to learn from their mistakes. We lost both Tests, the first by an innings and 32 runs and the second by 8 wickets. The One-Day encounters, too, went 3-0 to Zimbabwe. But given that Bangladesh has been a Test side for less than a year and that greater Test sides, such as India, have taken decades to come of age, we must take pride in our side for improving, even as the series progressed. The second Test saw Bangladesh take the match into the fifth day, for the first time, and almost hold the possibility of a draw within reach. Individual performances demonstrated that there is immense talent in the side. We can reflect on an outstanding second innings knock by Javed Omar who at 85 not out in the first Test, became the first debutant in more than 100 years to carry his bat through an entire innings, after making 62 in the first innings. There were other shining moments from Aminul Islam, Habibul Bashar, Mehrab Hossain and Al Shabir. The tail, however, crumbled under Zimbabwe's pace attack, showing up a weakness that should now be seriously addressed. It is crucial to work on our bowling. Apart from seamer Monjurul Islam with 6/81, there were few performances to write home about. Medium pacer Mohammed Sharif showed promise, as did left arm spinner Enamul Hoque. But compounding the absence of a truly penetrative attack, our bowlers failed to be consistent with line and length. Another, more critical lapse that marred our side's performance was caving in to pressure in the field. Dropped catches and fumbles must be banished through dogged application. The experience in Zimbabwe has kindled hopes of a bright future for our fledgling side in Test cricket. Opportunities for international fixtures abound, but we can only make our mark if we continue to learn from our mistakes.

For India there are only two neighbours, and Bangladesh is not one of them

MAHEFUZ ANAM

(This article was written for The Sunday Times, the weekend issue of the Times of India, and published on April 29, 2001.)

WHAT are the Indians and Bangladeshis fighting over? Territory, resources, ideology, principles, religions? None of it. We are fighting over a mess that has been created due to long and persistent neglect of our bilateral issues. The loss of 16 BSF lives and two BDR lives would perhaps never have occurred had the Indian side moved fast enough to resolve the long standing border issues.

Soon after the birth of Bangladesh the famous Indira-Mujib Accord was signed, clearing the path for the resolution of all our border disputes and exchange of lands falling in each others territory. The accord was ratified by our Parliament within months, following which we returned the Indian enclave of Berubari. The corridor to Debagram and Angorapota (parts of our land within India) which was to be given in exchange came about nearly 20 years later and that too with severe restrictions. As for ratification of the Accord, the Indian Parliament has not done it till today.

There are two issues here. One of border demarcation, and the other of return of the enclaves. Out of the 4,095-km long border only 6.5 km remains to be demarcated, which includes areas of Duikhata, Muhuri Char and Lathitilla. As for the enclaves, there are 111 Indian ones inside Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshis ones inside India.

Any of the above areas can lead to

the type of outbreak of hostilities that we have just seen. Why then have the Indians neglected to address these issues? The answer is what I had written in The Sunday Times on August 3, 2000: "For India there are only two neighbours - China and Pakistan. The rest of us are just geographic entities to be patronised when we are good boys,

dent to further entrench our long-held prejudices. Padua (called Pyrdihah in India) is a Bangladeshi territory under Indian occupation. We lived with the status quo for the last 30 years. Why was it being changed by making a permanent road linking Padua with India, which triggered the BDR action? What needs to be underscored here

reports and comments. For the other side it was an outrage with a sense of blasphemy. How dare a puny Bangladesh do this to us. But as time passed both sides got sober and some excellent and constructive reports and comments were written in the quality Indian and Bangladeshi Press.

The electronic media's role is

Padua within a day after capturing it from the BSF. It was a bold gesture risking considerable domestic backlash but she did it to assuage India's feelings.

It is unclear whether all this will have any impact on the coming elections scheduled for early October. The Opposition tried to paint a pious picture of the Awami League

waving of the ungrateful Bangladesh flag will not get India anywhere. We are grateful to the Indian government and the people for their assistance in our Liberation War. But in safeguarding our national interest we are second to none. It has nothing to do with being ungrateful but only with patriotism. After the signing of the Water Treaty and the Chittagong Hill Tracks Accord and restoration of democracy within Bangladesh there is nothing of substance that obstructs making our bilateral relations among the best in the world, except for India's Big Brother attitude of superiority and arrogance. This is also true for the India media whose basic attitude is to ignore us. But when they do write it is mainly in reference to the insurgency in the north east, religious fundamentalism or the so-called ISI activities. Seldom, if ever, about our achievements, aspirations and the fact that we are a \$3 billion market for Indian goods and services, the single biggest trading partner in the developing world. Bangladesh is no enemy of India but a friend waiting to be understood and treated with respect.

For us the question was how could this happen. For Indian media it was how dare this happen. A sense of giving India a fitting reply permeated through our reports and comments. For the other side it was an outrage with a sense of blasphemy: How dare a puny Bangladesh do this to us? But as time passed both sides got sober and some excellent and constructive reports and comments were written in the quality Indian and Bangladeshi Press... Bangladesh is no enemy of India but a friend waiting to be understood and treated with respect.

cajoled when we show signs of disobedience, lectured upon when we think differently, bullied when we choose 'wrong' friends, and even punished when - God forbid - we act independently. Seldom, if ever, to be respected for what we are, with our limitations and our dreams. The 'two neighbours', especially Pakistan, have so thoroughly and obsessively occupied the Indian mind over the last five decades that the rest of the smaller neighbours have figured as no more than mere appendages in the overall policy formulations. Their 'does not matter' status has prevented India from developing a comprehensive policy in dealing with its smaller neighbours leading to extremely short-sighted and counterproductive policies in many instances." India really has no time for its smaller neighbours. Neither does the Indian media.

There is a lot to learn from the recent border clashes, that is if we want to learn and not use this inci-

dent to further entrench our long-held prejudices. Padua (called Pyrdihah in India) is a Bangladeshi territory under Indian occupation. We lived with the status quo for the last 30 years. Why was it being changed by making a permanent road linking Padua with India, which triggered the BDR action? What needs to be underscored here

is that not a single shot was fired during this night-morning operation. Given the complex nature of our 4,000-km border and the fact that exchange of firing is a regular feature, the totally peaceful operation in Padua must be considered quite an achievement. A good two days after Padua, on April 18, BSI in a retaliatory move entered Bangladesh territory in Roumari, in Kurigram district, more than 200 kilometres to the north, and came under attack, resulting in the unfortunate death of 16 BSF and 2 BDR soldiers. We deeply regret these deaths. But would the BSF have done anything different if the BDR had gone inside India for aggressive patrolling?

The media on both sides were

epitomised by a Star Plus programme in which J N Dixit and Gen Shankar R Chowdhury were being interviewed along with Bangladeshi Ambassador Mustafa Faruk. At one stage when Mr Dixit was explaining that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina might not have known about the movement of BDR troops, the woman anchor of the programme suddenly interjected: "Should India then keep Sheikh Hasina as the prime minister?" Mr Dixit quickly corrected and said that it was not India's business to do any such thing.

As we saw it from here, the two governments did their utmost to keep the situation under control. Most senior Indian leaders, especially Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, home minister L K Advani and foreign minister Jaswant Singh were all extremely circumspect. The harsh utterances were clearly made for the domestic audience. The Bangladeshi prime minister expressed her anguish and regret. Her most conciliatory gesture was withdrawing the BDR forces from

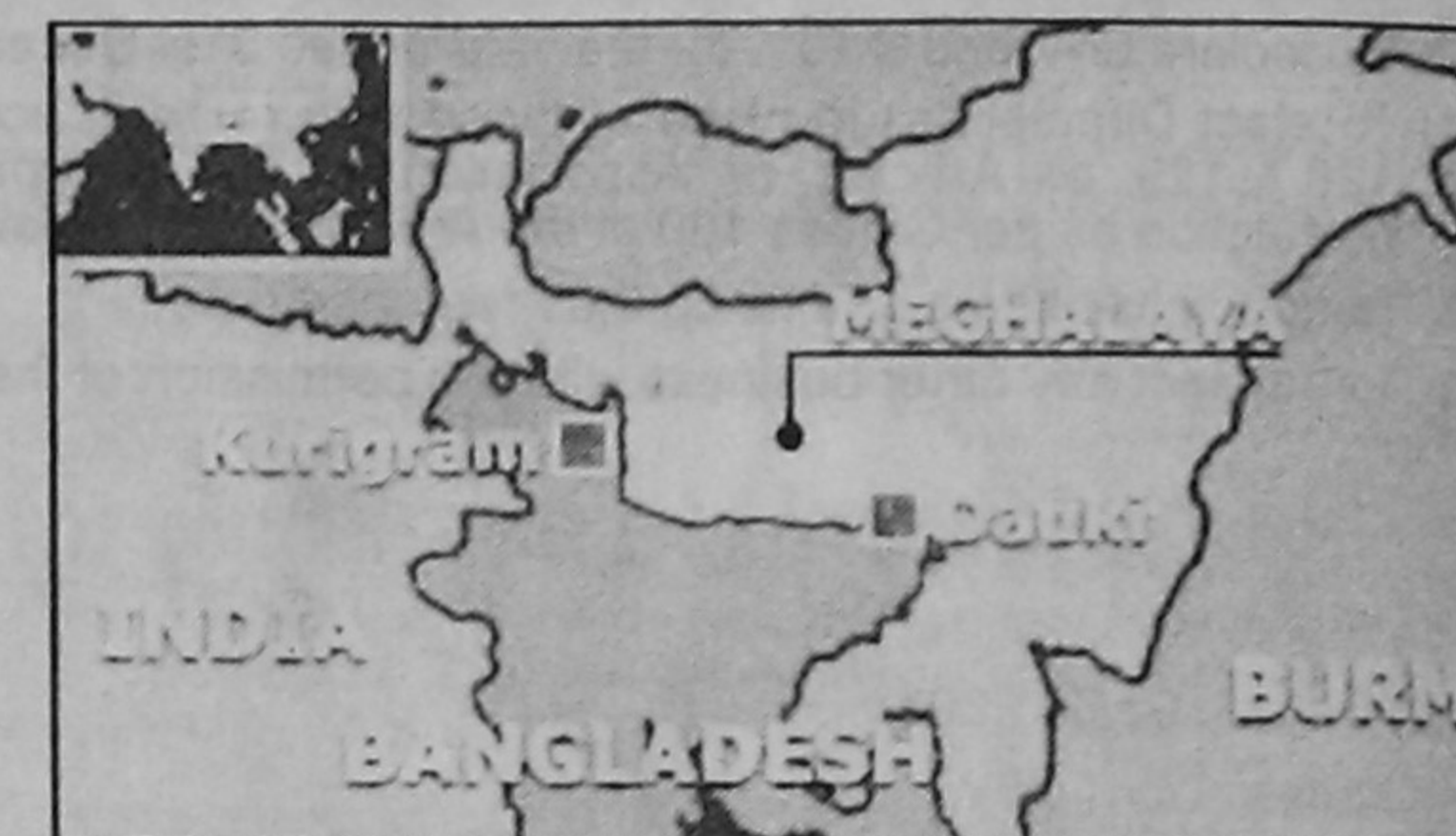
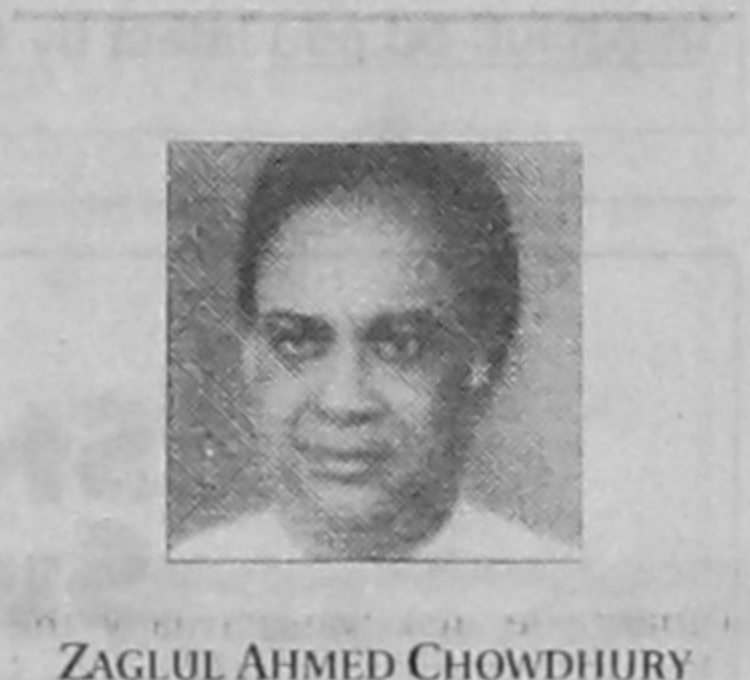


PHOTO COURTESY BBC WEBSITE

Investigations into Tehelka disclosures to be conducted



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE opposition in the Indian parliament agreed to allow the normal functioning of two houses of the parliament following assurances from the government that it would conduct a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) investigation into sensational disclosures made by an internet news agency on corruption by the higher echelons of the government and ruling alliance politicians in the sensitive defence purchase. The opposition had been creating pandemonium in both upper house (Rajya Sabha) and lower house (Lok Sabha) on the scandal demanding resignation of the government and, more importantly, JPC investigations into the allegations that have shaken India of late.

The government earlier formed an enquiry committee with a retired judge of the supreme court but the opposition led by the Congress said it was not enough and demanded parliamentary investigation. As the government did not succumb to this demand, the opposition forced

adjournment of proceedings of the two houses of parliament for several days. Prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on his return from a visit to Iran called the opposition parties to a discussion on smooth functioning of the parliament but the Congress headed by Sonia Gandhi stayed away from the meeting. As a result, when the current session began, opposition once again continued to disrupt the proceedings. Finally, the

layalalitha of southern Tamil Nadu state, revolted and quit the coalition. In the snap elections that followed the coalition returned to power with a bigger margin and as such it did not have to walk through a tight rope as far as the majority in the parliament is concerned. As the main Congress led by Sonia Gandhi and other smaller opposition groups failed to mount any effective resistance to the government on any

two businessmen to procure deals in the defence ministry without knowing that the phony businessmen were actually newsmen belonging to "Tehelka dot com" who were hell-bent on exposing corruption in the higher echelons of the government. Persons including a major general and brigadier in the army and several top officials of the defence ministry including the director of procurement landed in the trap laid

dently serious. The opposition stalled proceedings in both houses of parliament charging the government as corrupt and asking for its resignation. The government took action against a major general and some senior officials shown in the film. Prime minister initially rejected the resignation of defence minister but later accepted it. The ruling NDA coalition received a big jolt as Mamta Banerjee of ally

majority to survive. But more such defections by smaller allies can put the government in real trouble. Some of these smaller parties are sitting on the fence and watching the developments. If the outcome of the coming elections in five states Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal, Kerala and Pondicherry reflect anti-BJP or pro-poll sentiments amongst its allies. Smaller partners of the tri-party NDA alliance may feel encouraged to quit and that may put the Vajpayee government on a real slippery ground.

The "Tehelka" newsmen Tarun Tejpal and Aniruddh Behl through their bold and investigative journalism not only have added a chapter of courage to the profession but also done a good job for their country and society. Although the ruling BJP has reservations about the JPC investigations into the "Tehelka" allegations, it has assured the opposition of it. The parliamentary investigations are expected to be effective in unearthing the whole thing since the government is still sceptical about the full authenticity of the "Tehelka" disclosures. At the moment, however, the Vajpayee government is certainly engrossed to an extent with the problems stemming from Bangladesh-India border skirmishes which is the most talked about topic now in both the countries and has relegated the "Tehelka" issue to somewhat less important position for the time being.

MATTERS AROUND US

The "Tehelka" newsmen Tarun Tejpal and Aniruddh Behl through their bold and investigative journalism not only have added a chapter of courage to the profession but also done a good job for their country and society.

treasury bench and the opposition reached an understanding brokered by Speaker G M Balajougi following assurance from the government on the JPC investigation.

It was a sort of blot from the blue. The multi-party national democratic alliance (NDA) government of prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was sailing rather smoothly with no major problem confronting it. The opposition could not mount any resistance against the government which is in power for more than one and a half years in the current spell. The previous NDA government with the same prime minister from the dominant Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of the coalition ruled the country for a similar period before it lost power when some allies, notably the AIMDK of Jayaram

issue, it appeared set to rule the country for a longer time if not the full term.

At this point of time rather unexpectedly the "Tehelka" bomb exploded with such magnitude that it not only shook the government but brought into sharp question its longevity. The scam involving purchase of materials for the defence ministry included key figures like the president of BJP, other politicians of repute and several officials who matter in defence deals in the scandal. The BJP chief Bangaru Laxman quit and also defence minister George Fernandes. His Samata party chief and state minister Jaya Jeitly is also at the centre of the controversy as she has been seen taking two lakh rupees in exchange of assurance that she would help

by the newsmen. Entire conversations with all these people were recorded by secret video camera including the handing over of money to some of the persons.

It made all sit up rubbing their eyes in utter disbelief. How could one believe that Bangaru Laxman could take bribe to influence the deal as the leader of the ruling party when he is known for 'leading an honest life' and the BJP too boasts of being transparent? He did not deny taking the money as he has been seen in the video taking it. However, while resigning from his post, he said money was taken for the party which few believed. Defence Minister Fernandes denied any wrong doings himself when he resigned. But Jaya Jeitly?

The fallout of the scam is evi-

"Trinamul Congress" in West Bengal resigned as railway minister and quit the coalition. Clearly, she could not take this burden of being an associate of the blemished Vajpayee government when elections in West Bengal are due on May 10.

The defence ministry scams are obviously more dangerous than corruptions in other areas. Hence, the adverse effects of such scandals on any government are generally severe. Late Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had to pay for the alleged "Bofors" arms scam as he lost power in the following election.

The parting of ways by the "Trinamul Congress" from the ruling NDA has not however jeopardised the existence of the NDA government as it still has enough

from roots of racial discrimination, distortion of historical facts and the ageless feeling of Western white supremacy over non-white races.

We are disturbed by injustice anywhere in the world.

The state of Bangladesh is precipitating with accelerated speed towards the edge. The fate of the nation is in the hands of missionaries and visionaries. 'Power -ful vision and 'mission-to-kill' But their rhetoric (crude on one side of the scale and ignorant on the other) is in line with their purpose: they are here to save us and take us on the path of salvation.

I am asking you all a question from a play performed by a local school some years ago, from Ali Baba. Is it Time? It is time to show that we are united as people of this country. We will not be at the mercy of a handful of M&V people with vested interests, preying on helpless millions, a crime against humanity. We can no longer wait for things to get better what can we do? At my wit's end.

Concerned
Dhaka

TO THE EDITOR

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



THIS PHOTOGRAPH HAS BEEN CONTRIBUTED BY FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER TAREQ HADI DHAKA

Dumping zone!

This open mound of garbage and refuse is on the banks of our precious river Buriganga. The lifeline of Dhaka is being choked by a callous population. We are killing the river and ourselves in the bargain. The authorities are failing in their duty to stop pollution of the river, but we are also to blame. Community action is needed to stop the wilful extinction of this waterway.

Border tension

The lands that India claims to be its sovereign territory in this conflict do not belong to it. During the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a land swap deal between the two governments was concluded. India never ratified the agreement, yet kept the lands given to it. The government of Bangladesh should not talk with India since there is nothing to talk about. The land belongs to Bangladesh.

AM Rahman
Maryland, USA

investigation and solve this dispute. We demand that the UN undertake a neutral investigation and solves the dispute.

Nokibul Islam
Auburn, USA

What is the big deal?

In the last few weeks I have read several letters in your daily regarding Bangladesh Biman's allegedly rude behaviour towards a passenger who had the audacity to protest a flight delay. I fail to see why people are trying to make a big deal out of it. This is nothing new or unheard of in our society. I mean, isn't rudeness inherent to our culture? We face rudeness everyday, everywhere in Bangladesh. Does the person at the post office counter or the teller at the bank window ever smile at you and greet you? Does any business in Bangladesh follow the concept of "customer comes first", or do they even know the meaning of the word "customer service"? Have you ever been to the T&T office, or the power supply office or the gas company office to fix a billing-error and wonder if courtesy was a thing of the past?

So let's wake up. Let's stop com-

plaining about petty things and talk about serious problems like crime and corruption that politicians claim do not exist.

K. Rashid
Houston, Texas

Operation Sea Angel

The local press covered the recent visit of Lieutenant General (Retired) Henry C Stackpole, president of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies, and former commander of the Joint Task Force Sea Angel, on the 10th anniversary of the devastating cyclone. The task force that General Stackpole commanded was called Operation Sea Angel and not Operation Sea Angels, as reported in a number of dailies. And it was a joint US military force, not a US Marine operation, headed by a US Marine. The US forces include US Navy, US Army, US Air Force and US Marines, as well as civilian (non-uniform) personnel of their services.

I remember being in Dhaka and Chittagong while relief operations were ongoing and meeting with members of all the US services. Also remember the outstanding service that was provided by the two US Army members whose names I

me but who were assigned to the US Embassy in Dhaka. They were recognised by the same award and military ribbon that our troops received for participation in cyclone relief operation. It would have been appropriate if they were also invited to take part in remembering the good work Lieutenant General Henry C Stackpole (Retired) and they did.

M.M. Haque
Gulshan, Dhaka

Unbearable

We, the residents of Arambag area, Mirpur have been suffering from frequent load shedding, causing much havoc to our everyday life. Power goes out five/six times a day and there is no time-table as to when it will go and how long it will take to come back. Water cannot be stored in the tank, food items become rotten as the refrigerator fails, electric appliances go out of order. The HSC examinations are knocking at the door and life has become unbearable for the examinees with such frequent load shedding.

It is the same situation in other parts of Mirpur. We know that power consumption increases during

summer. But illegal connections intensify the power shortages. We hope PDB and DLSCO will take necessary steps to reduce load shedding or at least ensure that power will not be interrupted at night. Besides, stern action should be taken against those who have illegal connections.

S.M. Enayetur Raheem
Mirpur, Dhaka

Is it Time?

I wish to express my feelings on the current political scenario through this poem.

"We wake up to each new day to a crisp fresh newspaper. The world news is not all fresh since we have been watching the late-night news, and not much of the local news is palatable.

News of the world is unsettling, the motto 'Might is Right' is the order of the day. Palestine, Muslim tolerance to Jews and Christians, who showed violent intolerance of each others' faith, has been repaid by combined violence against Muslims. Islam is merely a progression of the same faith. There is a campaign against Islam stemming