

Bangladesh on EIU democracy index

Our placing must spur us into a deepening of pluralism

WE in Bangladesh cannot but feel happy at the placing the country has been given on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2010. We have advanced to 83rd position from our earlier placing at 91st (which was back in 2008). We certainly feel encouraged but at the same time we might as well remind ourselves that this new report comes against a background of elected, democratic government in Bangladesh at this point of time. The 2008 report was prepared in light of the country being under emergency caretaker rule. Naturally, therefore, the general feeling is that in the current democratic dispensation we should be finding and indeed do find our state of politics at an elevated level. That said, it must also be noted that the EIU survey is a comparative study which even includes countries where not even a semblance of democracy is to be spotted. Even so, it feels good to know that we are better off than many other nations that profess to practise democracy.

In this context, it must be said that despite the EIU rating, we certainly cannot rest on our laurels. Indeed, there is little room for complacency here given the fact that there are yet wide gaps which need filling in if democracy is to be a substantive affair for Bangladesh. While the state of democratic governance here may not exactly be in a parlous state, there are still areas where sufficiently more transparency and accountability are called for. We cannot overlook the truth that parliament remains pretty dysfunctional owing to the opposition boycott of it. Adversarial politics has prevented a full, constructive debate on core issues in the Jatiyo Sangsad. Besides, the state of law and order, especially in relation to such matters as extra-judicial killings and disappearances (about which this newspaper has consistently commented) leaves a whole lot to be desired. Where strengthening the structure of democracy is concerned, the issue of devolution through setting up a strong local government system is yet to be in place. All these and other concerns are not, however, any indication that democracy in Bangladesh is not on track. It is. It only has to dig deeper roots.

So what the EIU findings should now be helping us do is egg us further toward a consolidation of pluralism in national politics. Our political classes and policy makers should be taking a long, hard look at the state of the nation today through re-evaluating the state of governance and the functioning of the institutions which underpin democracy. Our history bears proof that despite the periodic onslaughts made on our democratic aspirations, we have had the resilience to come back for a renewed struggle in defence of democracy. There is surely the potential in us to give democracy a deeper meaning and state of being. What we are in huge need of, however, is political will among our leaders, a fair degree of national consensus on core issues of collective interest and a bipartisan approach to legislation and policy-making in order to convince us that government by the consent of the governed is safe, secure and able to ward off any challenges to it.

The EIU's Index of Democracy 2010, let us say once more, is encouraging for the country. Let it now be a spur for Bangladesh's politicians and others, indeed for citizens across the board, to drive the nation's democracy train a good many, and more, cheering miles ahead.

Efficiently utilizing adaptation fund

Performance should be verifiable as well as measurable

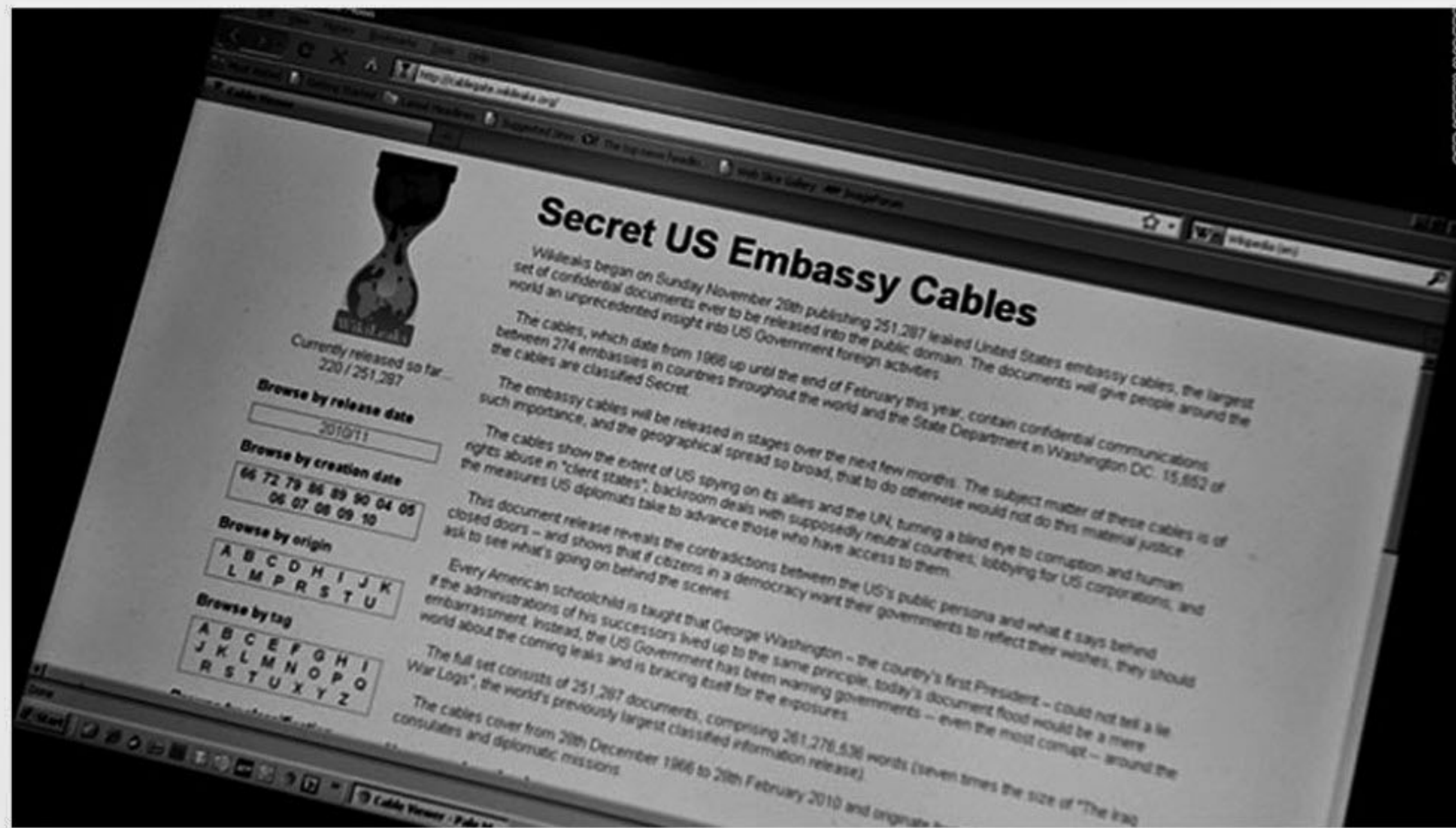
BANGLADESH'S extreme vulnerability to climate change has been well recognized by the developed nations and especially by the relevant international forums. So, it is only expected that Bangladesh is a strong candidate to draw the Green Climate Fund pledged by the rich countries at the recently held Cancun Climate Summit.

But once the country begins to receive such fund, the question that would naturally arise is how best we are able to utilize it. So, it will be necessary to mark out the areas where the fund would go. Then comes the question of strengthening of the institutions through which the fund would be channeled to its ultimate beneficiaries. But do the institutions such as the local government bodies, the various government and non-government bodies have the necessary preparedness to utilize the fund? How are the communities to be addressed with the fund might be mobilized efficiently? How are the exact needs of the beneficiaries at the grass-roots identified? And how would the involvement of the target group members in the climate adaptation and mitigation activities be ensured? Will they also be engaged in the decision-making process and if that is the case, then how? These questions are pertinent because here we are talking about a non-conventional kind of fund for an objective that, too, is quite new. That means the task before us is one of huge capacity building work for the relevant institutions. Such activities will necessarily involve training adequate manpower with the knowledge about adaptation and mitigation measures in response to climate change.

Secondly, the tasks of community mobilization and strengthening of the implementing agencies would entail fund use. And as with all funds, maintenance of transparency and accountability will be a sine qua non for the work to succeed. Again, as we would be getting into uncharted waters, it will also be necessary to develop a fail-safe mechanism for fund utilization. Such a mechanism should be in place in order to make the implementation outputs measurable as well as verifiable.

One suggestion, on this score, might be the creation of a nodal agency comprising representatives of the government, local government bodies, Non-government Organisations (NGOs) as well as community representatives. That will function mainly as an oversight body to monitor efficient use of fund. These steps are crucial for sustainable use of the climate fund.

"Leaks-ing" light on Bangladesh!!



We in Bangladesh have so far looked upon the entire episode with good deal of amusement till the recent leaks regarding our own country which have generated good deal of alarm. What we knew for certain has been reconfirmed.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

WIKILEAKS rendering of commandeered official communications between the US State Department and its embassies world-over in their website will be viewed in different ways depending on which side of the fence one is on. Although most of the cables deal with analyses, some based on assumptions, some on local assessments, and yet many on shared information of diplomats of other countries on similar errands, some indeed have helped to reconfirm the geo-strategic aspirations of the only superpower on earth. No wonder the US government has given Mr. Assange the new appellation "high-tech terrorist."

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We are not complete masters of our fate, that the path of politics in Bangladesh is not entirely for Bangladeshis to define, that there are others who, for their own interest, and what they call the interest of the region and the world, would do anything to influence our internal politics in their favour.

What has caused many to raise their eyebrows is the purported role of an intelligence agency to directly influence politics in Bangladesh during the caretaker interregnum, by contemplating to allow a proscribed Islamic terrorist organisation to involve in platform politics by floating a new party.

So far only a few cables have been released. Interestingly, none of these cables had been initiated by the US Mission in Dhaka. And of these, there are perhaps only a few that should be a cause of concern for us. And instead of being overwhelmed by their contents, the prudent step would be to assess the implications of two cables, one relating to the DGFI's role in politics and the other that calls for collection of data on

Bangladesh peacekeepers, particularly those deployed in Africa.

The apprehension expressed about the DGFI's plans to give political space to an extremist group must be of immediate concern to us. It is not only because of the issue itself but on the larger context it is the way that the military intelligence agency has been utilised by the powers that be for political mileage, and in some cases arrogating to itself roles and tasks which was not its mandate, to influence not only internal politics but also the regional strategic scenario. And I am loathed to think that these had been done without the knowledge of its political masters.

It is a matter of regret that the intelligence agencies in Bangladesh become the limelight of the media more often than one can be comfortable with. Regrettably, as of now heads of both the top two intelligence agencies of the state are in custody, answering for their suspected role in the 2004 Chittagong arms haul.

It is unfortunate but true that while we blame only the military rulers for involving the military intelligence in dirty political work, we all too often forget that a great degree of reliance was also placed on the DGFI by the political leaders even before military takeover in 1975. This was evident

Leave them alone

If the politicians are listening, they should spare the two leaders and keep them above controversy. It's not their fault that we assassinated them and are haunted by the specters of our own guilt. Each political camp may rejoice over spitting at the enemy. It's a shame for us as nation because that very spit blows back on our face.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE recent exchange of invectives between two major political camps targeting each other's patriarchs is an ominous sign of acerbic politics corroding into its foundations. If Awami League is trying to vilify Ziaur Rahman and BNP is trying to undermine Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it only shows that our bankrupt politics has nothing left to do but abuse its own stalwarts. Even a better analogy: a prodigal son having spent all his money is going after family treasure.

No matter how upset the parties may be, we are talking about two supreme leaders who may not be equal in stature but nonetheless are the best in the country. They are both icons of our independence, one for rousing the aspirations of people and another for initiating the military struggle to take that aspiration to its logical conclusion.

These two supreme leaders were charismatic and decisive. Both of them have large followings in this country and their names till today send their followers into frenzy. People are ready to do anything in their names. Even though they have been long since dead, people are willing to die for them. Their names still work magic on crowds.

Above all, those two leaders were personally clean. For many years after their deaths, we haven't been able to point fingers at the moral integrity of either man. Of course, we have criticised them for their strategic

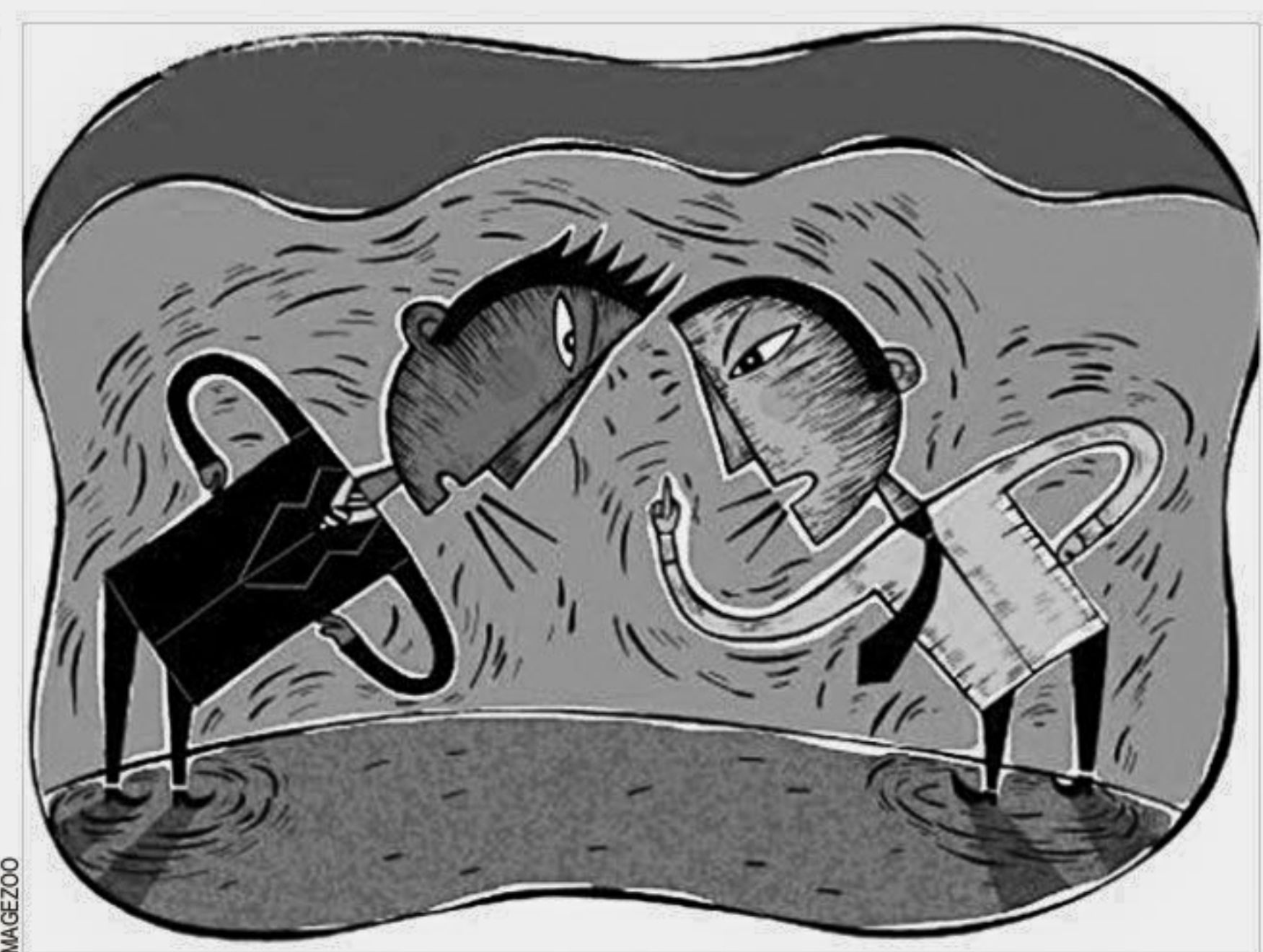
decisions. We have even castigated them for their political judgments. But we haven't been able to say until now that either of them was vulnerable to creature comforts or material gains.

What about those who are using the names of these two leaders to abuse their enemies? What about them, who believe in minimising others to magnify themselves? What about their brand of politics that is being churned out in the names of these leaders? How do their intentions compare to what their leaders had originally cherished?

The main focus of those two leaders was the people and the country, whereas current politics swirls around the cadres and the party. The two leaders had their visions whetted by their ideologies. No matter how rudely the supporters of one leader should choose to deprecate the other leader, both leaders have raised the bar, which no politician has yet reached in this country.

If we start from there then the picture looks gloomy. Those leaders had character, charisma, commitment and courage. Those who are criticising them have got greed, gesticulations, grievances and grudges. If anything, the politicians who claim to be the rightful successors of their leaders may have inherited their shadows but not their spirits.

So what about the politicians who are busy excoriating the top two leaders of this country? What are they trying to prove but their own inani-



ties? It's shocking they don't realise that by ridiculing the opponent's leader they are also subjecting the memories of their own leader to fire returned by the enemy.

British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge has quipped that we should not forget that only dead fish swim with the stream. We may have diehard followers, who are dying to follow their leaders only in slogans and rhetorics. These followers are only adept at recreating the political fury of their leaders without ingesting their essential qualities.

Hence, the recent trend to berate the two great leaders is pathetic. It's a clear indication that our politics has become morally exhausted, and it feeds itself on the past because it cannot be forward looking. We should have more debates on national issues. We should have more discussions on more vital subjects. Instead, we are indulging in diatribes, which should have been buried in the past and enshrined in history.

Tom Peters is an American business guru who says that leaders don't create followers, but they create

from the fact that the head of the agency was invariably a part of the PM's entourage on all internal trips. And post 1991, even with the revival of democracy the same tendency was seen to prevail in the minds of the party in power, only more so.

While for the military rulers after 1975 it was a handy tool to serve their political purpose, to form a new political party for example, it is unfortunate that the DGFI has been made to do similar jobs even after the changeover in 1991 with new political dispensation emerging after the end of the Ershad regime. Therefore, the public perception that the agency has been overstepping its terms of reference was not misplaced, and the fault is not of the agency's alone.

However, the two-year CTG interregnum was a different ball game. It was the DGFI that was calling the shots. And to be only fair to the caretaker government, its writ did not even reach the doors of the DGFI. On the contrary, the agency assumed the status of a state within a state, and it would not be remiss to suggest that the government felt beholden to it for its survival.

It is difficult to assess the reliability of the information contained in the relevant cable. However, even if there is a grain of truth, the political rehabilitation of a banned militant organisation would have severely jeopardised our national interest; and the argument that giving space to militants, although being contemplated in the case of Afghanistan, would move them away from the path of extremism, is a complete non-starter for us. A detailed investigation in this regard is in order, but even more is the need to redefine the role of the DGFI.

The second exposes US apprehensions that the Bangladeshi peacekeepers in Africa, among others, are doing much more than just keeping peace there. It has therefore sought detail information on our peacekeepers under the cable entitled, "Efforts to gain influence in Africa via UN peace operations. Countries: Bangladesh [and others]." Make whatever you will of that.

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