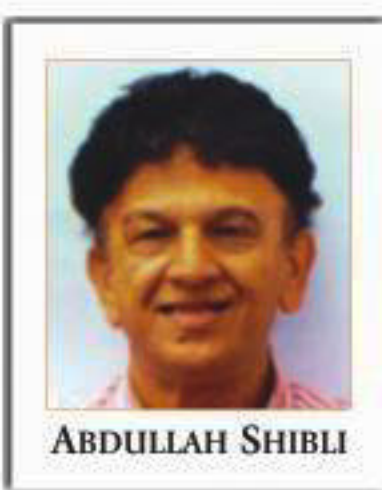


THE DEMOCRACY INDEX

What it means and what it doesn't



THE recent announcement by a German foundation that Bangladesh is no longer a democracy has caused a stir in national and international media.

The Bertelsmann Foundation, which tracks democracy around the globe, published its latest report showing that Bangladesh has slipped in its "democracy index" measurement and has joined four other countries, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Uganda in the category of "new" autocracies.

The 2018 Bertelsmann Transparency Index (BTI) considered Bangladesh lacking in five of the 15 areas that makes its indicators. More on these indicators later, but if one is looking for some consolation from the latest BTI, we are not alone or unique. Fifty-eight out of 129 developing nations have been rated as autocracies, and of the world's population of 7.5 billion, around 3.3 billion people were living under autocracy while another 4.2 billion lived in democracies.

So what does this censure by the Bertelsmann Foundation mean? First

of all, it is clear that if the forthcoming parliamentary elections are declared to be free and fair by the international community, Bangladesh's status as a democracy or its standing in the next BTI will bounce back. The same can be said about our standing in the other well-known democracy index, the EU's Democracy Index (DI), which earlier this year found Bangladesh had dropped slightly in its ranking and received a lower democracy score.

In recent years, the number of democracy indices which have gained headlines in the global media has multiplied. This is a result of a confluence of trends including globalisations, the ever-increasing reach of information and communication technology, and the role of foreign direct investment. A survey covering the vast majority of the world's citizens found that 79 percent of the global population wish to live in a country that is governed democratically.

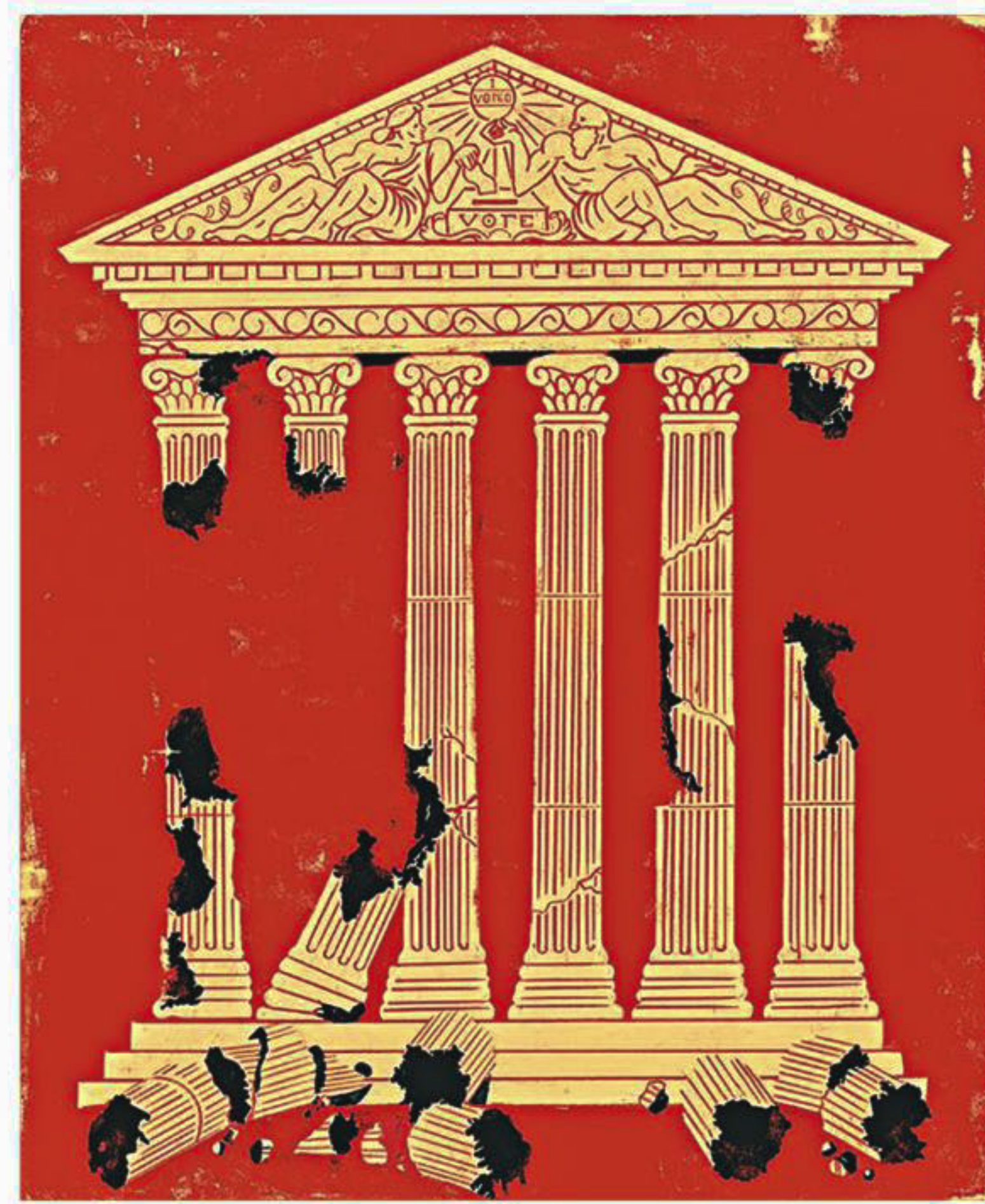


ILLUSTRATION: CURT MERLO/CREIGHTON MAGAZINE

way to create a democracy indicator follows three steps: First, it is necessary to choose a definition of democracy. Second, a number of instruments must be designed that are able to describe the properties of the theoretical concept.

and politics is measured by percentage of voters who turn up during an election. However, in case there are no national elections, a proxy is used. Finally, a suitable manner for combining the selected variables must be found for computation of the democracy index.

This is most often done using a statistical tool, an index number formula, to add up the various indicators or in other words, to add up the apples and oranges. A big problem that is inherent in the index number approach is finding a rational manner to aggregate various indicators and assign weights to their importance in a democratic process.

In practical applications, however, a large number of problems arise in each of these steps. According to a scientific paper on this topic, "The first issue concerns the nature of democracy. With no generally accepted definition at hand, the interpretations range from minimal approaches primarily focusing on the election process to concepts that additionally incorporate human rights and social inequality."

Coming finally to the question of why Bangladesh's ranking in BTI dropped in 2018 in comparison with 2016, it is clear that the non-participation of BNP in the 2014 Parliamentary election has skewed most of the democracy indices including the Democracy Index of EU and BTI's "Democracy Status".

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and a Senior Research Fellow at the International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think tank based in Boston, USA.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Breaking the Brexit stalemate



MARCH 29 marked exactly one year since British Prime Minister Theresa May invoked Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon, thus launching the

formal two-year legal process by which the United Kingdom will withdraw from the European Union. In the first year, it is fair to say that the Brexit negotiations have had their ups and downs. But, on a positive note, substantial progress has been made in recent weeks.

at all border crossings—the final Brexit treaty will have to include legal and political commitments from both sides. The European Commission's insistence on a "backstop option" would already ensure that a "common regulatory area" is maintained even after the UK formally withdraws.

British government envisions for Brexit and the future EU-UK relationship. Specifically, May has confirmed that Britain will be leaving both the EU single market and the customs union.

EU-UK relationship, which would take the form of an association agreement. For some, that term might call to mind the recent EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. But an EU association agreement with the UK need not resemble its arrangement with Ukraine.

Since the UK's general election last year, and following a series of political speeches by May, the EU has finally begun to understand what the current British government envisions for Brexit and the future EU-UK relationship.

For starters, a draft withdrawal treaty between the UK and the EU is now close to completion, though both sides have made clear that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Once finalised, this treaty will establish the rights and obligations of both parties on a range of issues, including the "Brexit bill"—that is, the UK's outstanding liabilities from its time as a member of the bloc—as well as the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and vice versa.

EU and UK negotiators have also agreed to a 21-month transition phase, from March 29, 2019, to December 31, 2020, during which time the UK will effectively remain an EU member state, albeit without representation in the European Parliament or any other EU decision-making bodies.

In order to avoid the establishment of a hard border—meaning a return to customs and police-inspection stations



British Prime Minister Theresa May signs Article 50.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Irish peace process. It would be far more preferable to find a solution based on the future EU-UK trading relationship.

Since the UK's general election last year, and following a series of political speeches by May, the EU has finally begun to understand what the current

first time in history that a trade negotiation results in additional barriers to commerce.

To be sure, it is the sovereign right of the British people and their government to leave the EU. But, as many are coming to realise, there is very little room to manoeuvre between

Norway." But if we are going to forge the close future relationship that both sides desire, we will have to move past such accusations.

The European Parliament, for its part, has adopted a more detailed conceptual framework for establishing the terms of the future

The inherent flexibility of EU association agreements should be familiar to Europeans and Britons alike. After all, the first-ever association agreement in 1954 was designed to foster cooperation between the European Coal and Steel Community and the United Kingdom, following the latter's retreat from formal treaty negotiations.

History repeats itself, but never in the same way. Ultimately, it would be preferable to develop one overarching EU-UK governance framework to cover defence, economics, internal security, and other areas. The alternative would be the Switzerland model: a nightmarish thicket of agreements comprising more than 100 bilateral treaties.

I have no doubt that the upcoming phases of the Brexit negotiations will be complicated. But I am confident that reprising an association-agreement model that has proved successful in the past would allow the EU and the UK to enjoy a deep special partnership well into the future.

Guy Verhofstadt, a former Belgian prime minister, is President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE) in the European Parliament.

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2018. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



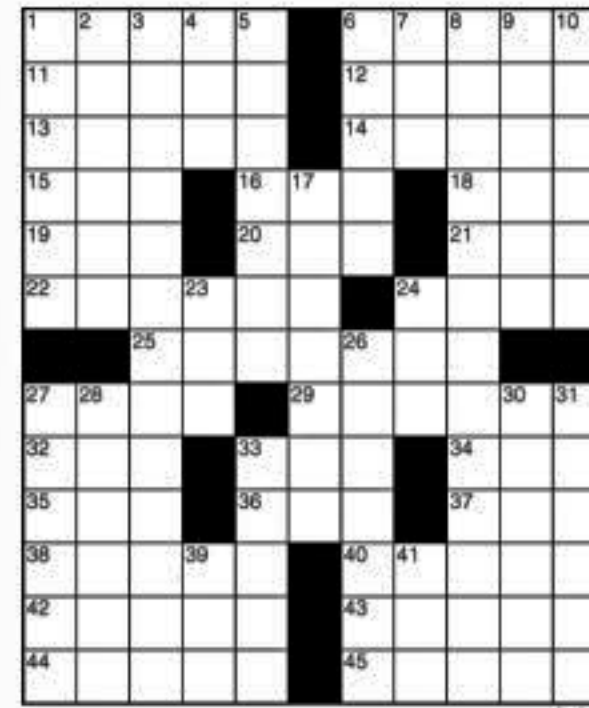
April 4, 1968

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR IS ASSASSINATED

The civil rights activist was killed by James Earl Ray in Memphis, Tennessee. Ray, a segregationist, received a 99-year prison sentence.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS: 1 Wrath, 6 Molten rock, 11 Cut with precision, 12 Cook's wear, 13 Move furtively, 14 Minute, 15 Not -- dare, 16 Lyric poem, 18 Previously, 19 Command to Spot, 20 Rocker Vicious, 21 Load unit, 22 Wine expert, 24 Skilled, 25 Lacking luxury, 27 Bouncy tune, 29 Unbroken, 32 Busy worker, 33 Put on the line, 34 Pi follower, 35 Suffering, 36 Goof, 37 Near the ground, 38 Hunt goddess, 40 Not napping, 42 Signed, as a contract, 43 Game of hands, 44 Is lacking, 45 Core feature, 6 Beat at the board, 7 Gibbon, e.g., 8 Northwest, 9 Kublai Khan, e.g., 10 Whatever person, 17 More under-handed, 23 Chiding sound, 24 Curator's concern, 26 Catches, 27 Stockpiled, 28 Queued up, 30 Couldn't handle the pressure, 31 Castle parts, 33 Abacus units, 39 Homer's neighbor, 41 Misery



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

JAFAR ATBAT, AGILE CHAIR, BONES RUDDY, EXCEED, SAT UPS NAP, ELUDES LIRA, VINERIPENED, EVEN LEGEND, RED FOR SAY, BONSAI, WAFER INDIA, EXIST STERN, TERSE TIDES

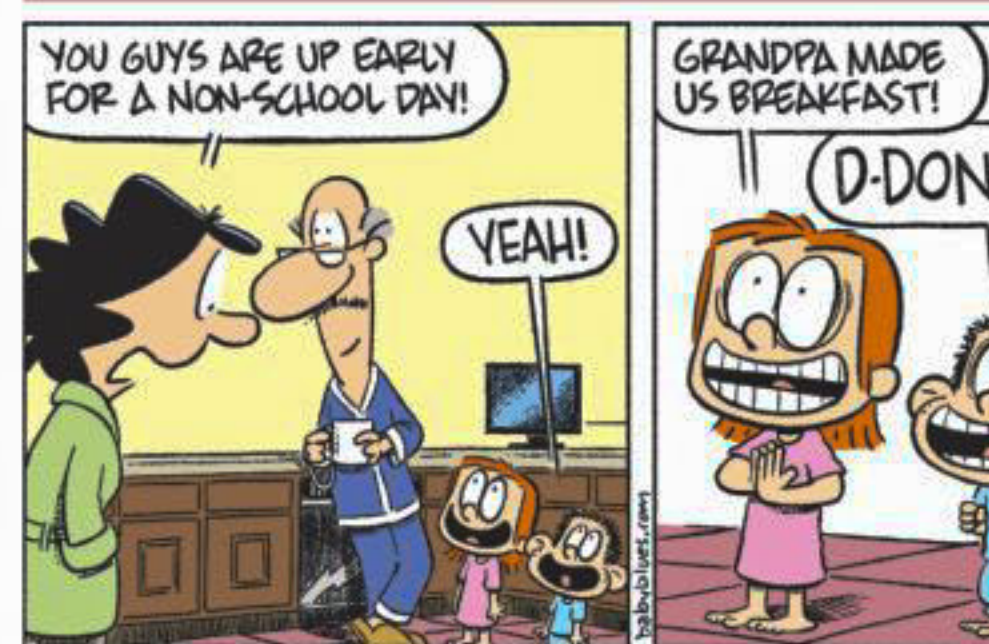
BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dspinion@gmail.com.