

# Party dysfunction and homeostasis in Bangladesh: The old disorder restored (or not)<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

After years of political instability caused largely by intransigent political party leadership, Bangladesh had developed a set of “Rules of the Game” which facilitated a kind of homeostasis, allowing a dysfunctional polity to continue in place despite occasional jolts temporarily displacing it. The country underwent a new displacement during the military-backed Caretaker regime of 2007-08, which included a concerted attempt at reform, then emerging once more as a parliamentary system at the beginning of 2009. Hopes ran high that the dysfunctional politics of the past could be laid to rest and that this time, finally, the country could establish and sustain a Westminster-style democracy. Almost immediately, however, the new order began to unravel, and within a few months the old counterproductive politics of irreconcilable party leaders had reasserted itself as the dominant theme of political life. This paper explores the background to this pattern, its persistence as a homeostatic condition, and future prospects for the country’s political life.

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The politics of Bangladesh are often perceived as dysfunctional, disruptive, hovering just on (and sometimes over) the edge of serious instability, which is forestalled temporarily by caretaker governments, military rule or (most recently) a combination of the two. A different approach, however, would hold that over the past two decades this seeming dysfunctional instability has become in fact a kind of stable system with a structure and rules of its own, which its actors follow. This system exhibits a kind of homeostasis, in that it contains an inherent tendency to

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<sup>1</sup> This paper reflects my experiences in and ruminations on Bangladesh over the four decades and more than 20 visits to the country since my first trip there in 1973 to the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development at Comilla.

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recover from perturbations and return to its former state, which it then maintains. The system also exhibits contradictions, however, in that it gives its principal actors incentives to break the rules. Thus far, rule-breaking efforts have been frustrated and the system has returned to norm, but this self-correcting tendency may not last indefinitely. Eventually all social systems give way to new dispensations.

“Homeostasis” has long been a powerful concept in the biological sciences including medicine. It denotes the property of a system to react to external changes with self-correcting mechanisms. In the human organism, common examples are body temperature and blood glucose; external agents may cause either to go beyond the normal range, but protective mechanisms will generally return either measure to its norm. With most infections or diseases, the body likewise takes action to rid itself of the invading pathogens to restore a healthy stability. The concept can also be employed as an historical metaphor, for instance in considering the European upheavals of 1848, when democratic insurgencies threatened to overturn autocratic rule but national systems soon returned to their previous condition. The Paris commune of 1870 provides another good example here. Eventually virtually all the Western and Central European countries moved to democratic systems, but authoritarian rule in its many variations was for centuries the homeostatic condition. And for most of capitalism’s history as well, economic panics and recessions have tended to dissipate as demand and supply gradually recovered.

For Bangladesh over the last two decades, homeostasis has consisted of a volatile two-party system which has drawn a large portion of society and bureaucracy into its maelstrom, fueled massive corruption and disrupted the economy, but which has nonetheless persisted, resisting all attempts to change it.<sup>2</sup> As with any system that lasts over time, this one has had a certain structure with a set of “Rules of the Game” that facilitated its continuance. At times key actors have attempted to break the Rules and change the Game, with the latest attempt being the Caretaker Government (CTG) of 2007-2008, but so far the old system has reestablished itself in essentially the same form each time. What is it that enables the polity to endure in this fashion,

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<sup>2</sup> My use of homeostasis as a metaphor is imperfect, in that in medicine it denotes a self-healing quality, whereas I am employing it to analyze a political system that has managed to restore itself to a condition of poor health and in addition has generally needed some exogenous factor to promote the process. Even so, the concept of self-restoration (if not exactly self-healing) provides a great deal of mileage in explaining the recent politics of Bangladesh.

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and what are the chances that it may evolve into something different? These two questions comprise the central focus of this paper.

This paper offers a continuation and updating of an analysis I published in 2010,<sup>3</sup> which endeavored to explain the dysfunctional political system of the 1991-2007 period and the caretaker regime of 2007-08. The present offering begins with a brief reprise of that analysis, looks briefly at the December 2008 election, and then goes on to look at subsequent political events and their debilitating impact on the political system. The paper concludes with some speculation on how developments in these areas collectively might affect the future of politics in Bangladesh.

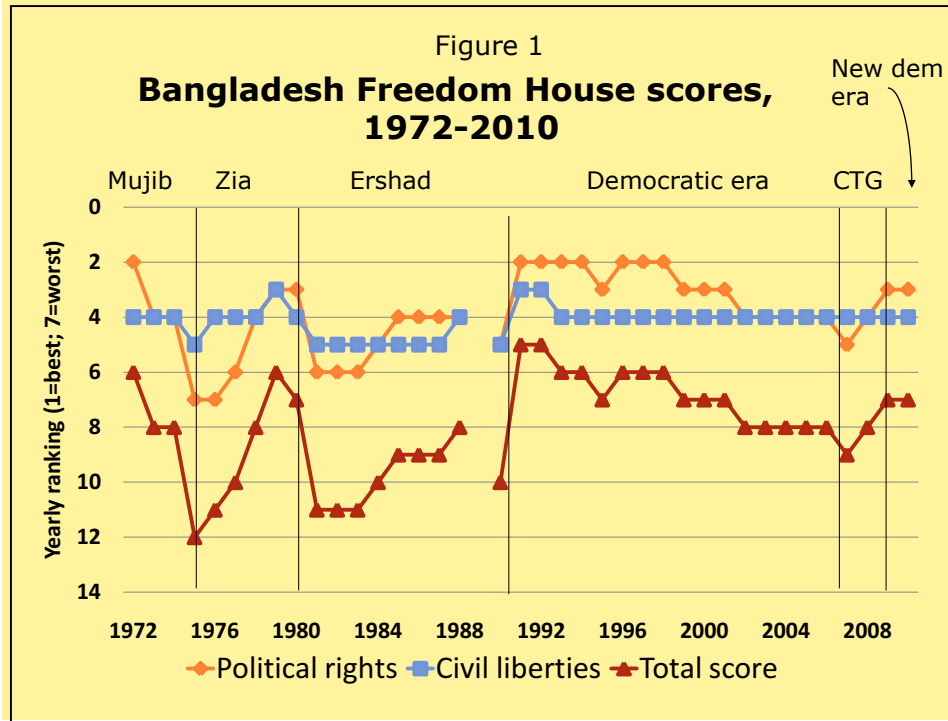
#### **Democracy's trajectory in Bangladesh**

By coincidence, Freedom House started compiling its Freedom in the World index in 1972, just after Bangladesh had achieved its independence in December 1971, so it is possible to chart the country's democratization trajectory virtually from its beginning. Figure 1 shows the Political Rights and Civil Liberties scores individually and then added together for the entire 1972-2010 period.<sup>4</sup> The first two decades saw a series of wild gyrations with the successive democracy-dictatorship fluctuations during the country's first three leaders' regimes.

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<sup>3</sup> See Blair (2010). Parts of the present paper appeared in a presentation (Blair 2011) at a conference in Seattle honoring the work of Paul Brass, on 4 September 2011, and an earlier version formed part of Blair et al. (2004).

<sup>4</sup> The Political Rights measure focuses mainly on political participation, including parties, elections, civil society, and accountability of state officials to the citizenry, while Civil Liberties centers on freedom of speech, religion, assembly, rule of law, and human rights. Both indices are scored 1 (best) to 7 (worst), with the combined score ranging between 2 and 14. For a full explanation of the Freedom House methodology, see the website at [http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=351&ana\\_page=374&year=2011](http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=351&ana_page=374&year=2011).



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman began as the hugely popular father of his country (*Bangabondhu* or Friend of Bengal, the title bequeathed on him posthumously) but then turned authoritarian after a couple of years and was assassinated in August 1975. Ziaur Rahman opened his rule with a military coup in late 1975 but within a couple of years transformed himself into a genuinely popular elected leader, as is reflected in the Freedom House scores for the latter part of his era. He was assassinated in 1981, however, and within a year H. M. Ershad seized power in another military coup. He attempted to replicate Zia’s self-reinvention as a popular elected leader, but succeeded only partially, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Over the course of the Ershad years, the two opposition parties recovered themselves to form a formidable opposition to his government. Both parties were legacies of previous leaders, the Awami League (AL) headed by Mujib’s daughter Sheikh Hasina Wajid, and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), led by Zia’s widow Khalida Zia. By the end of the 1980s, the two parties had crafted a “politics of the street” consisting of mass rallies, marches, and most effectively *hartals* (strikes) that could essentially bring economic and administrative activity in the major cities to a halt for days at a time – all tactics that set the tone for political life during the next two decades.

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Responding to the orchestrated protests with a mixture of guile and repression, governance under the Ershad regime began to deteriorate,<sup>5</sup> reaching a low point at the end of 1990, when finally the army responded to a presidential command to impose martial law by instead directing Ershad to resign office immediately, which he did.

A “free and fair” national election in early 1991 set into place what might be called a “two-party-plus” system, with the AL and the BNP as the major players, dividing between them the overwhelming majority of votes and seats, as shown in Table 1. Minor parties were drawn into electoral alliances but after the first two elections were not needed to form majorities in the *Jatiyo Sangsad* (parliament). Thus the main political drama has been played out between the two major parties, with the lesser groups being largely shoved to the sidelines over time.

Table 1  
**Vote & seat shares 1991-2008**  
(figures in percentages)

		1991	1996	2001	2008
AL + BNP	Votes	61	71	83	81
	Seats	76	87	85	86
All others	Votes	39	29	17	19
	Seats	24	13	15	14
Totals	Votes	100	100	100	100
	Seats	100	100	100	100

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After an initial burst of democratic enthusiasm at the beginning of the 1990s, the system settled into kind of routine momentum, which appears clearly in Figure 1. Civil Liberties continued from year to year at a steady score of 4 on the Freedom House scale, while Political Rights

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<sup>5</sup> Freedom House did not publish its annual survey for 1989, which accounts for the gap in Figure 6’s graphs. Had the scores been tallied, they would have shown a decline from 1988.

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ranked somewhat better at a 2 during most of the 1990s and then gradually worsening to a 4 in the following decade. During most of this time, however, the country was consumed by what seemed to be a highly dysfunctional politics of instability verging on chaos, in which neither the party in power nor the opposition observed the basic conventions of a Westminster parliamentary system. The ruling party totally excluded the opposition from any meaningful role, routinely using state power – especially the police – to harass and intimidate it, while the opposition appeared to take every opportunity to disrupt normal life and cause sufficient turmoil that the army would find it necessary to intervene once again and eventually give it a chance to come to power through new elections.

The polity suffered a near-death experience in 1996 when the ruling party engineered a blatantly rigged election, which the opposition boycotted, but a combination of public repugnance, international outrage and donor pressure forced an electoral rerun under a nonparty Caretaker Government (CTG), during which a non-partisan administration managed the country for a 90-day period running through the national election. The system had been subjected to the first serious attempt to break out of the Rules of the Game, but it righted itself and used the CTG system again successfully for the 2001 election.

During what I have labeled the “Democratic Era” in Figure 1, Bangladesh did pass the Huntington “two turnover test” – that the ruling party be turned over through elections at least twice<sup>6</sup> – but otherwise the dysfunctional polity went on, continually seeming to approach the edge of a total breakdown. Opposition-led *hartals* closed down the urban areas for days on end; gangs of *mastaans* (small-time thugs under the direction mafia-style patrons) disrupted normal life, often with police connivance; institutions like universities, professional associations, and even NGOs were colonized by the parties and became divided into “panels” affiliated with them; the lower judiciary was used as an enforcer for the ruling party; and the list goes on.

#### **Rules of the Dysfunctional Game**

But despite the appearance of breakdown and chaos, a quite well-defined set of Rules of the Game for public politics emerged during the 1990s, understood and observed by the parties, their

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<sup>6</sup> See Huntington (1991: 266 &ff).

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leaders, the bureaucracy including the police, and most of the general populace. This set of Rules was never publicly articulated as such, but it was followed almost all the time. A seemingly dysfunctional system had become *institutionalized*.

These were the essential elements of the Rules:

- **Electoral democracy:** “free & fair” elections are held on time with a Caretaker Government in charge for a 90-day period.
- **All power to election winners:** the ruling party shuts out the opposition from any meaningful role in parliament and takes over the state bureaucracy, operating a patronage-fueled, rent-seeking regime.
- **Local governance as patronage mechanism:** union parishads are subordinated to ruling party control, constitutional requirements for elected upazila and district councils are ignored.
- **Opposition to the barricades:** the past election is denounced as fraudulent, parliament is boycotted, *hartals* (general strikes aiming to shut down urban life) become the norm BUT violence is bounded, not insurrectionary.
- **Gangsterism in public life:** party-based *mastaan* networks with police collusion intimidate opposition, operate extortion rackets, enjoy virtual impunity.
- **Organized life commandeered:** “panels” allied to particular parties infest institutions everywhere, forcing students, professionals, even non-governmental organizations to choose sides.
- **Relative print media freedom:** Marcusean “repressive tolerance” is permitted for elites,<sup>7</sup> though some self-censorship is exercised, and journalists are subjected to significant harassment. Broadcast media are more closely monitored and pressured.

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<sup>7</sup> See Marcuse (1969).

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- **Two-track judiciary:** High Court and Supreme Court enjoy autonomy, while the lower court system is controlled by the Executive and used to support the ruling party.
- **Electoral renewal:** a new cycle begins with each election.
- **A safety mechanism:** should a party in power try to break out of these Rules by fixing an election, some combination of national and international outrage, donor pressure, and possible military intervention will ensure that the dysfunctional homeostasis continues in place.

The single most important word in the list just above is “BUT” within the third bullet point. The opposition party postures and fulminates, organizes huge processions (generally with truckloads of paid demonstrators brought into Dhaka for the purpose, buttressed by the opposition party’s student wings), compels businesses to shut down for the duration of its *hartals*, forces public transport off the roads (thus closing government operations), and in general threatens to create such chaos that organized life will break down altogether. But after 12 or 24 (or 36 or 48 or more) hours, the *hartal* winds down, demonstrators return to their everyday activities, work resumes, and life comes back to normal. Some less well disciplined demonstrators may have provoked the police into a firing (or the police may have created an incident that fomented the provocation), and a small number of people have been injured or even killed. But there is never any actual threat of insurrection or even serious damage to public or private property.

The real purpose of the *hartal* is not to overthrow the state or even to force the imposition of martial law that will lead to a new election, but rather to provide a strong reminder that the opposition is alive and well, and stands ready to take power after the next election, whenever it comes. In a true Westminster system, a “Loyal Opposition” takes a full part in the cut and thrust of debate, subjects government proposals to strong scrutiny, acts as a watchdog to detect government malfeasance and abuse, offers alternatives to policies in place, and in general endeavors to present itself in parliament through these methods as a viable alternative to the party in power. But by denying any meaningful role for the opposition, the ruling party in Bangladesh prevents the opposition from employing any of these avenues to making itself heard. Through its constant boycotts, of course, the opposition cuts itself off from the opportunity to



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become a Loyal Opposition, but it is I think fair to say that the basic hostility begins when the winning party assumes state power after an election and a new parliament begins business.

This system survived several jolts, including assassinations of several leading AL politicians and numerous murders of lower-level party functionaries on both sides, a brief reign of terror in part of the country led by a fundamentalist Islamist, a set of simultaneous bombings in 63 of the country's 64 districts, and a short wave of suicide attacks on courthouses. But none of these shocks had any real lasting effect on public life. Things went on within the set of Rules I have outlined.

In the run-up to elections scheduled for the beginning of 2007, however, the system began to unravel along several lines:

- The ruling party (the BNP) was widely believed to be arranging the appointment of a party sympathizer to the post of Chief Advisor (i.e., administrator) to the Caretaker regime that would guide the country through the election period.
- The new Election Commissioner and his deputies were thought to be BNP partisans, a concern that intensified when it was discovered that millions of bogus names had been added to the electoral rolls.
- The opposition Awami League (AL) announced it would boycott not just parliamentary sessions, but the actual upcoming elections.

These efforts on the part of the BNP formed the second serious attempt to break out from the Rules of the Game, and they encountered the much the same response from the opposition AL as had been the case in 1996.

#### **The Caretaker interregnum and the elections of 2008**

Foreign donors reacted with public dismay, and the United Nations threatened to cease recruiting Bangladeshi troops as peacekeepers if the military supported a biased election.<sup>8</sup> Almost immediately, the military took steps to replace the Chief Advisor, and the new CTG – under civilian management but clearly operating with military guidance – put elections on hold and shut down party activity for the indefinite future. The CTG extended its time in office to almost two years and undertook a number of serious reforms.

The most important effort was to expel the two party leaders from the political scene and from the country as well: the “minus two” solution. As was rumored at the time and corroborated just recently by newspaper reports quoting the Wikileaks cables from the American embassy in Dhaka,<sup>9</sup> the military behind the CTG worked diligently during its first six months to promote the “minus two” plan, taking a page from the playbook Parvez Musharraf used a few years earlier to press Pakistan’s two party leaders toward exile and trying to entice leaders from both major parties to form a “king’s party” to form a government of national unity. Initially the plan seemed to be succeeding, as the two begums appeared to accept exile and defectors from the BNP<sup>10</sup> responded favorably to the unity government idea, bringing forth various proposals for internal party reform toward increased democratization. General Moeen Uddin Ahmed, the Army chief of staff and senior military leader behind the CTG talked of a “new brand of democracy” in April. Senior AL officials also proposed reforms, but apparently did not follow through by agreeing to support a unity government. Lacking sufficient traction, the unity strategy as well as movement toward party reform eroded and within a few months had stalled out altogether.

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<sup>8</sup> Bangladesh had been a major supplier of such troops, who for several years amounted to around 12 percent of active duty army strength. The UN payroll for the peacekeepers formed a major component of army income.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that, to the extent that Wikileaks accurately reproduced these cables, their contents reflect only what various people in the American Embassy wrote, which is not necessarily what actually happened in any given case. September 2011 saw a spate of newspaper articles based on the leaked cables (all of which had been made available through Wikileaks on 30 August 2011). This paragraph and the following one in the present paper are based largely on several of these articles (especially Liton and Ashraf 2011, Star Reports 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, all in the *Daily Star*; and Staff Correspondent 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, all in the *New Age*).

<sup>10</sup> Most prominent among them was the BNP’s Secretary General, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

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A good part of the reason for the unity government idea's collapse was that the “minus 2” strategy had unraveled by May 2007. Sheikh Hasina (who had already left the country) returned unexpectedly in May, which led Khaleda Zia to change her decision to depart. The CTG's fallback strategy was to press criminal cases against both leaders. Hasina was arrested in July 2007 on corruption charges, and Khaleda a few months later on similar grounds. Trials were initiated but dragged on, and eventually were essentially abandoned as the CTG realized that the two leaders continued to hold sufficient grip on their respective parties that it would be impossible to hold the promised national election to restore democratic governance by the end of 2008 without their cooperation. Needless to say, the price of that cooperation included putting aside the trials.

In sum, CTG efforts to reform the political system failed. The December 2008 national election did take place with the begum-led parties intact (minus the defectors). Thus the third effort to break the dysfunctional system — albeit an attempt to break it in a positive direction in contrast with the first two attempts of 1996 and 2006 — also fell short.

But the CTG was not a complete failure. It did undertake a number of serious political reforms through promulgating ordinances (which as an interim governing authority it was allowed to do in lieu of legislation). Among the most important ones were:

- A computerized national voter ID system was put into effect, which greatly reduced the potential for fraud.
- The lower judiciary was finally separated from the executive branch after decades of promises from both parties and demands from the Supreme Court.
- An Upazila Parishad<sup>11</sup> council was reinstated with a directly elected chairperson after a lapse of two decades and more unfulfilled promises from both parties to restore it.

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<sup>11</sup> Upazilas were essentially the erstwhile thanas renamed, analogous to taluks and tehsils in India. Thus the upazila parishad is similar to the panchayat samiti in India. Despite constitutional requirements, Bangladesh has never set up an elected zila (district) council system.

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- The Anti-Corruption Commission, which had languished during the democratic era, was strengthened and set to work looking into corrupt activities over previous years.
- A Right to Information ordinance in 2008 gave legal status to an idea that had been mooted several times over the years but never actually put into place.

National Elections were duly held in late December 2008 and were pronounced “free and fair” by various teams of outside observers.<sup>12</sup> Although the AL was expected to win, following the pattern of ruling parties getting replaced in successive elections, everyone was completely surprised at the result,<sup>13</sup> which gave the AL just over 48 percent of the valid vote – more than any party had won since Ershad’s faux victory in 1988 – and over three-quarters of the seats in the Jatiyo Sangsad. The BNP was reduced to less than 10 percent of the seats, an all-time low for the leading opposition party in the history of Bangladesh.

In early 2009, then, the major questions facing the Bangladesh polity were:

- Would the AL’s huge majority give it sufficient comfort that it could govern like a Westminster system party in power and grant the opposition a share in the structure of governance?
- After licking its electoral wounds, would the BNP conclude that the route back to power lay in becoming a loyal opposition that would participate in parliament, responsibly lay out an alternative agenda, work on rebuilding its constituency base, and bide its time until the next national election?

To put it a different way, could the BNP emulate the Canadian Tories, who in the 1993 election went from being the governing party to losing all save two seats, but in the ensuing years pulled themselves back together and returned to power in 2006, winning the next two national elections as well? Similar examples are offered by British Labour coming to power in 1997 after successive drubbings at Conservative hands, followed by a reverse sequence of three decisive

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<sup>12</sup> See for example, Eicher et al. 2010, EU 2009, NDI 2009.

<sup>13</sup> “Everyone” included me as a member of the National Democratic Institute’s observer team (cf. NDI 2009).

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Labour victories and then a Tory return to power in 2009. Or would things in Bangladesh return to the old dysfunctional pattern?

#### **The old (dis)order restored**

The Ninth Parliament started off well enough in January 2009, as the much-reduced BNP delegation did attend the opening session. Among the first orders of business were to “ratify” (i.e., confirm) the ordinances that had been promulgated by the CTG. The new parliament did ratify a large number of these ordinances, including those dealing with re-establishing the upazila parishads, separating the judiciary from the executive, and strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). In addition, it passed a new Right to Information law, thereby emulating India, where such a law had been passed in 2005 and had become a powerful instrument for improving state transparency.

But even as these favorable events were occurring, other much less auspicious developments were also taking place, beginning to belie the hopes that followed upon the December 2008 election. Indeed, some of the critical CTG ordinances were severely undercut in the very process of getting ratified. In short, the promised new dispensation began to unravel almost at once. In what follows, I will endeavor to trace the most important threads that started to come undone.

**Parliamentary boycotts.** Almost immediately after the Ninth Parliament’s opening, the BNP and its allies began to boycott its sessions. By the end of the first year it had skipped 65 or 76% of its 86 meetings – the highest rate of boycotting since electoral democracy was restored in 1991. In the succeeding 14 months, the party improved just a bit, missing 91 of 121 sittings for a boycott level of 75%.<sup>14</sup> Actually absenteeism might well have been higher, but for the rule requiring MPs to show up at least once every 90 session days to retain their seats and receive their salaries and benefits.

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<sup>14</sup> Data from Liton (2010 and 2011). In March 2011, it was proposed in the parliament to change the rule for ouster from 90 sitting days to 90 calendar days, which would cut down somewhat on the boycotting, as the body generally meets for no more than 90 sittings in a calendar year (Liton 2011). But the proposal appears to have languished, as it did not make the list of amendments to the Constitution passed in June 2011 (Staff Correspondent 2011a).

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**Civic disruption.** Large scale opposition-led *hartals* did not re-emerge as quickly as the boycotts, but by summer 2010 the BNP was launching and enforcing 36-hour citywide strikes in Dhaka and other urban centers. The pace picked up, and by a year later a 48-hour *hartal* shut down the major cities altogether, in the process almost completely dominating the news. *Hartal*-related stories and photographs took up seven of the nine news items on the front page of the *Daily Star's* edition on July 10<sup>th</sup>, for example. The *hartal* was largely non-violent, certainly by the standards set in the previous decade, but given the rhetoric employed by the BNP, it seemed more than likely that agitation would escalate to less peaceful tactics before long.

Along these same lines, the university student fronts for the parties resumed their campus disruption that had hobbled the academic enterprise so severely ever since the Ershad days but had been brought under control during the CTG. And while I'm not sure that professional and civil society organizations have as yet come under severe pressure to form "panels" aligned with one party or another, it is probably a safe bet to assume that this process is well under way.

**Upazila parishads (UZPs).** These bodies, enshrined in the 1972 Constitution as the middle (thana, as they were called at the time) level of elected local governance between the zila (district) and union (multi-village) councils were never actually created until the Ershad government put its plan into place in the 1980s. After first launching the scheme in 1982, the Ershad regime held direct elections for council chairs in 1985 on a nonpartisan basis, with the idea that those elected could be co-opted into supporting a government political party, a move which evidently proved largely successful. Elections were held again in 1990, but the Ershad government itself collapsed by the end of that year, and along with it the UZPs. Despite pre-election promises, neither the BNP nor the AL reinstated this middle tier of governance, principally because of opposition from the Members of Parliament (MPs).

Their hostility is not hard to grasp when one realizes that the country has 300 MP constituencies and around 485 upazilas, meaning that the average MP riding contains one or two UZPs, which would likely serve as bases for serious rivals to challenge sitting MPs and in any event would surely compete with MPs in controlling and dispensing government development funds. Thus while the AL government did reintroduce the UZP system in 1998, it appointed the sitting MP within whose constituency any given UZP lay as its advisor (and in any event the AL never

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implemented the scheme, most likely in order to make sure the MPs would have no rivals at local level).

The CTG revived the UZPs in an ordinance, dropping the MP advisory role, and was ready to conduct a UZP election in 2008 before the parliamentary poll, but it acceded to demands by both parties to run the latter contest first. Faithful to its promise, the new AL government did conduct a UZP election in January 2009 and the UZP chairmen were sworn into office. But the new parliament then had to ratify the CTG's ordinance on UZPs, which it did in March 2009 but in the process stipulated that each UZP would have to follow advice from the MP within whose territory it lay, that it would have to consult the local MP about any development work it wished to propose, and that it must send minutes of all meetings to the MP concerned within 14 days. The bill passed unanimously, accompanied by a "thumping of desks" in the legislative chamber, indicating the MPs' enthusiastic approval of the measure.<sup>15</sup> In this way, control over the UZP system was handed over to the MPs. UZP associations have tried to lobby against this development, even bringing a constitutional lawsuit at one point, but have had no success.

It is also worth noting that the AL government has followed its predecessors by giving the party's secretary general (its chief operating officer) the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives as his portfolio, thus making official the partisan control of local governance.

To sum up, the ruling party has at its command a powerful mechanism to steer development spending at local levels in ways that will lubricate its own political networks.

**Constituency development funds.** Adding to what the new UZP scheme offered to the MPs, the AL government also created a constituency development fund that would grant Tk. 15 crores to each sitting MP over the 5-year parliamentary cycle, to be spent at the latter's discretion on infrastructural projects within his constituency. Such funds are not uncommon within the Commonwealth, as a number of countries have initiated them recently, while India has had one in place since the early 1990s. India's Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) has over the past decade allocated Rs 2 crores annually (about US\$ 400,000) per

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<sup>15</sup> Suman (2009); also Staff Correspondent (2009).

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MP, where the average constituency size is roughly two million people. In Bangladesh, Tk 3 crores per year comes to about the same thing for constituencies averaging about 500,000 inhabitants. This amounts to somewhat more than 80 US cents per head for the Bangladeshi MP to spend, against about 20 US cents per head for his Indian counterpart – a dramatic difference.<sup>16</sup>

The avenues for mischief will be similar, no doubt – where will the MP want to allocate the projects and, more importantly in many and perhaps most cases, who will get the contracts to undertake the construction with its inevitable scope for corruption? When one adds together the Bangladeshi MP's control over the upazila parishads and the Tk 15 crore development funds, his ability to direct patronage to his own political networks will be hugely enhanced. And given that over 76% of the current Parliament consists of Awami Leaguers (with another 9% from the AL's allied Jatiyo Party), the ruling party will be well placed indeed to lubricate the party machinery it will want to mobilize for the next election.

**Caretaker government.** On 10 May 2011, the Supreme Court overturned the country's 13<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment that had created the Caretaker Government system, which had successfully steered the country through its last three national elections. Under the CTG, a small group of non-partisan advisors headed by a Chief Advisor had managed the country for a 90-day period (actually a two-year period for the 2007-08 CTG) after the parliament had been dissolved and had been able to superintend an election that virtually all observers and critics (save for the losing political party) found to be “free and fair.” In May 2011, however, the Supreme Court declared the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to be “prospectively void and *ultra vires* of the Constitution,” i.e., unconstitutional and henceforth invalid. At the same time, however, it said that the next two national elections “may be held under the provisions of the above-mentioned

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<sup>16</sup> For a study of the Indian program, see Blair (2011). It should be noted that in 2011 the Indian program expanded to Tk 5 crores per MP, which will mean roughly US\$ 0.50 per inhabitant, now about five-eighths of what will be available to each Bangladeshi MP. I am indebted to Prof. Nizam Ahmed of the University of Chittagong for details on the Tk 15 crore fund.



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Thirteenth Amendment.”<sup>17</sup> A few days later, the Chief Justice explained this added provision as being necessary for the safety of the people and the safety of the state.<sup>18</sup>

The AL government wasted no time reacting to the Supreme Court’s decision. On 30 June it utilized its more-than-two-thirds majority in the Parliament to pass the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, calling for future national elections to take place within 90 days prior to the dissolution of Parliament (i.e., before the end of its five-year term), during which the cabinet would remain in power without restrictions to manage the state, but the Parliament itself would not meet.<sup>19</sup> In short, the sitting cabinet would itself superintend the election of the next parliament – the very situation that precipitated the bogus election of February 1996, which in turn led to the creation of the caretaker system in the first place. Needless to say, the BNP reacted by saying that it would not participate in any such election, and it has evidently made opposition to the caretaker abolition the centerpiece of its campaign to bolster its cause.<sup>20</sup> The situation presented a nice symmetry in that this time it was the AL setting itself up to manipulate the next election, whereas in 1996 and 2006 it was the BNP that took the initiative to do so. The AL government’s action constituted the fourth attempt to break out of the Rules of the Game that had been in place since 1991.

**Anti-Corruption Commission.** While still in power, the BNP government passed an act in 2004 upgrading the ineffective Bureau of Anti-Corruption to an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), but the new body did not accomplish anything of note before the CTG took over in late 2006. The CTG in turn strengthened the ACC, which instituted cases against leaders in both parties including the two former prime ministers after the CTG’s move to exile them failed, as recounted above.

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<sup>17</sup> See Sarkar (2011a, 2011b).

<sup>18</sup> See Sarkar and Liton (2011). The 10 May verdict was little more than a brief statement of the court’s decision. The full version of the Court’s decision had still not appeared at the end of December 2011, despite earlier promises (Sarkar 2011b).

<sup>19</sup> See Liton and Hasan (2011). Such a plan would put Bangladesh at odds with the general Commonwealth practice, under which elections are held after the dissolution of the sitting parliament (Latif Mondal 2011).

<sup>20</sup> In October 2011, the BNP used the caretaker issue to launch a series of large demonstrations around the country. See Suman (2011) and Juberee (2011) for examples from Sylhet and Bogra.

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The new AL government did ratify the CTG ordinances regarding the ACC, but then in February 2011 amended the 2004 Act by stipulating that the ACC must get government permission to begin any inquiry against a public servant, to include judicial officials and MPs as well as bureaucrats. In a word, the new move effectively hobbled the ACC from taking any effective action against corruption. Meanwhile, the AL government has dropped the cases earlier launched during the CTG regime against its own officials while pursuing those initiated against BNP leaders. After first filing charges in October 2009, finally in September 2011 began the trial of Tarique Rahman, Khaleda Zia's son and alleged head of an extensive extortion and money-laundering enterprise under her prime ministership.<sup>21</sup>

**Judicial separation.** Though the 1972 Constitution in Article 22 proclaimed a separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary,<sup>22</sup> vesting control of the lower judiciary (i.e., all courts below the High Court and Supreme Court) in the Supreme Court, the executive took over this control in 1972 and with some small modifications has retained it ever since. The Supreme Court had ordered a separation on Constitutional grounds, but throughout the 1991-2006 democratic era it continued to allow the executive extensions in complying.<sup>23</sup> The AL and BNP continued to include a promise to separate in their election manifestoes, but once in power each new government somehow forgot about implementation. It was too convenient to keep the lower judiciary within the law ministry so as to be able to control it from the prime minister's office.

Finally in November 2007, the CTG did implement a separation with an ordinance, and a new lower judiciary was set up with its own judges. The new AL government ratified the ordinance, but added a significant change: district magistrates (deputy commissioners) would retain the power "to take cognizance of offences," meaning they would have the prerogative to initiate criminal cases, though they would not try them. This power to launch criminal cases at the behest of the executive has been the source of considerable manipulation and mischief previously, and of course the danger is that the practice will continue.

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<sup>21</sup> See Liton and Ashraf (2011), also Court Correspondent (2011).

<sup>22</sup> The demand for such a separation had been around for a long time. The Awami League had promised a separation ever since its 1949 draft constitution, and in 1957 the East Pakistan provincial legislature passed an act to that effect, but it was never implemented.

<sup>23</sup> In October 2005, for example, the Supreme Court granted the 21<sup>st</sup> such extension.

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In addition, as of summer 2011, the judiciary still lacked control over postings, promotions and disciplining judges. Such powers were lodged in the judiciary according to the Constitution's Articles 115 and 116 but were abrogated in 1975 and have never been restored. They remain with the executive. To sum up, a partial separation of the judiciary from the executive has been achieved, but a high degree of control remains under the control of the prime minister and the executive. As of today, the judiciary in Bangladesh can scarcely be said to be independent.

**Right to Information.** One last development appears to have not only promise but also some actual hope of realization. In the spring of 2009, the parliament also ratified the Caretaker Government's Right to Information (RTI) ordinance in the form of the Right to Information Act 2009, which mandated citizen access not only to government organizations but also NGOs operating with state-provided or foreign funds. The Act required government bodies to appoint Designated Offices to respond to RTI requests and also set up an Information Commission with some punitive powers to deal with complaints. Two years later, as of April 2011, it was reported that more than a thousand government bodies had appointed Designated Officers, as well as 201 NGOs. So far, the media appear to have made relatively little use of the RTI (perhaps because of the 20-day period allowed for responses to RTI queries, a constraint making use of the act difficult for journalists with deadlines), but several NGOs have provided training programs to enable citizens to utilize the RTI provisions,<sup>24</sup> while some others have taken advantage of it to demand information about state activities.<sup>25</sup> The Information Commission has also been active in answering complaints.

#### **Breaking away from homeostasis**

To sum up, over its first two years in office, the Awami League has moved on a number of fronts to restore the dysfunctional polity of the 1991-2006 period, thus dismantling the CTG's accomplishments during the 2007-2008 interregnum.

- In local governance, the AL ministry has turned over the renewed upazila parishad system to the mercies of the MPs by giving them a veto power over all parishad

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<sup>24</sup> An example here is Nijera Kori (2011). For a collection of short case studies, see World Bank Institute (2011).

<sup>25</sup> See Halim (2011), Khan (2011), and Sobhan (2011).

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activities, and it added even more to their ability to dominate the local scene by awarding each MP a US\$ 2 million discretionary fund for local expenditure.

- To deal with corruption, the ministry defanged the Anti-Corruption Commission by requiring it to take government permission before investigating any government official, including MPs.
- The AL ministry has severely compromised the long-awaited separation of the judiciary by retaining control over initiating criminal cases and over posting, promoting and disciplining judicial officers.
- In a move to undermine the dysfunctional polity altogether, for future elections the AL government has abolished the highly successful Caretaker Government system that had managed the last three elections and has put itself in sole charge of the upcoming 2013 poll.

Quite understandably, the opposition has responded by declaring the 2008 election a fraud (despite all evidence to the contrary), boycotting the parliament, and taking to the streets with *hartals* closing down the major cities for days at a time.

It might seem that the negative homeostasis of 1991-2006 has returned, but a closer look invites the very strong suspicion that we are instead looking at a fourth attempt to break out of the homeostatic pattern. The first two attempted breakouts aimed to move the system toward an even more negative trajectory. But the BNP effort to manipulate the first 1996 election and its later exertions to tilt the 2007 election in its favor were turned back, and the political system was righted. The third attempted breakout came with the CTG's efforts to establish a more accountable and less corrupt polity in 2007-08, but these efforts were also turned back for the most part by the incoming AL ministry in 2009.

The question facing Bangladesh today is whether the AL's maneuvers are serving only to restore the old dysfunctional but sustainable (at least in the short and perhaps middle term) homeostasis, or do they actually represent a new breakout effort, once again in a negative direction designed to ensure a ruling party's return to power in a rigged election.

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#### **Misperceived homeostasis?**

It is certainly possible to perceive homeostasis reasserting itself when in fact an abrupt and sweeping change is about to occur. An excellent example for Bangladesh can be seen in the political crises of 1969 and 1971.<sup>26</sup> In both cases a popular movement against a dictator paralyzed the state and the economy. As government authority came to a halt, a de facto parallel polity organized by the Awami League arose to keep vital services going throughout East Bengal. The military mobilized additional troops from the West and declared martial law. Political leaders called for more autonomy, while student networks and huge demonstrations demanded bolder steps.

In the 1969 case, there were a number of skirmishes between army/police and unruly crowds, a few of which culminated in firings. At the macro level, the incumbent dictator was shown the door, and soon martial law excesses were terminated, life returned to normal, and political prospects improved in the form of a national election that promised to give real power to elected representatives. Many activists wanted to press for outright independence, but AL leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's goal continued to be a federation of the two wings, with the AL's six points as the foundation. Two years later, it was not surprising that the same regional leader who had rejected the insurrectionary impulse in the first crisis should prove reluctant to declare independence in the second one.

In his speech of 7 March 1971, subsequently hailed as the definitive call to independence, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did in fact say that "This struggle is for independence," but then he also met with General Yahya Khan on 16 March and for several days afterward (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came in from West Pakistan to join the talks on 21 March) to discuss possible federal solutions that would keep Pakistan together, even as student groups and party leaders tried to organize for violent struggle. Today we still don't have all the details of those macro-level discussions, but at that late date it appeared there was still some hope for a peaceful resolution. But by the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, when the Pakistan Day holiday turned into People's Independence Day, the die was

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<sup>26</sup> This and the next two paragraphs are based on one early and premature assessment of the two crises (Blair 1971) and one much more recent review (Ludden 2011). Both arrive at a similar conclusion. There are many other analyses of the 1971 events, of course. Two that affirm the account given here are Blood (1986) and most recently Bose (2011).

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effectively cast, and two days later the Pakistan Army unleashed its brutal repression on the populace. The outcome of the second crisis was the opposite of homeostasis, but at the time and on the ground, some very important actors thought that things would return to some kind of normality, as they had before. As we know, however, homeostasis was not in the cards in March 1971, and instead of a return to the *status quo ante* the armed struggle for independence began.

#### **Prognosis**

Judging on the basis of the AL's first two years in office, two plausible scenarios would seem to emerge, which could be called less pessimistic and more pessimistic, with the Caretaker issue as the crucial factor. The less pessimistic one would see reactions to the AL's attempt to break the Rules of the Game as bringing sufficient pressure to effect a homeostatic return to them. The BNP has made the caretaker issue the centerpiece of its agitational efforts, and international concern can be expected to grow as the anticipated 2014 election approaches. And of course giving MPs control over the upazila parishads, defanging the Anti-Corruption Commission, and undermining judicial separation all conform to the homeostatic model, simply restoring the structure that had been in place during the 1991-2006 era. The Tk 15 crore constituency development fund for each MP is something new, but certainly fits in with the other aspects of that period. If the AL can be persuaded to go back to the neutral caretaker system, as the Supreme Court has urged,<sup>27</sup> the basic Rules can be put back in place, and a general dysfunctional politics can be resumed, at least until the next attempt to break out of the Rules occurs from either the AL or the BNP.

The more pessimistic scenario contemplates the AL holding firm on its resolve to dismantle the caretaker system, ignoring all pleas domestic and foreign to restore it. The BNP would surely boycott the 2014 election, and the situation would be back to where it was in January 2007. Would the military intervene again? If the country appeared to be headed toward a genuine breakdown, it probably would. But would it do so with the intent of returning the country to civilian management after seeing virtually all its attempts to bring about political reform collapse

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<sup>27</sup> The release of the Court's full decision may well accelerate pressure to restore the Caretaker system for the 2014 election.

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in the previous round? Or would it conclude that the two-party system's dysfunctionality was just too endemic, that political morbidity was the inherent accompaniment to political democracy in Bangladesh, and that therefore it should maintain direct control of the country indefinitely?

#### **A third scenario**

In contrast with the bleak and bleaker pictures offered just above, a more optimistic scenario can also be sketched out. There are several reasons to think that the political system can change course to a more positive trajectory which, while it won't resolve all the dysfunctionality at macro-level, could at least set some aspects of the polity in a better direction.

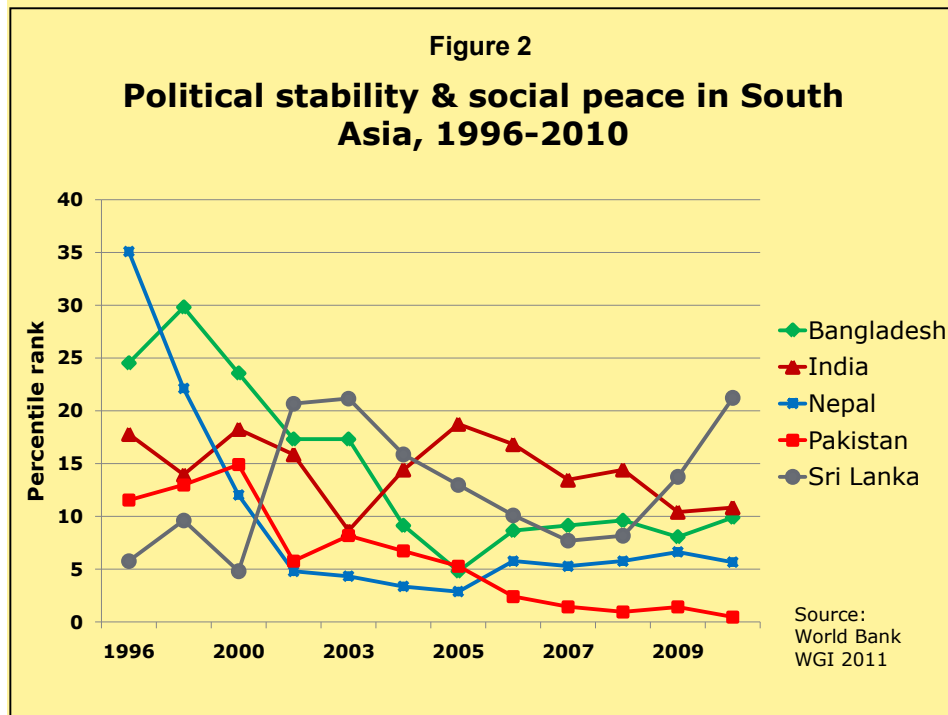
**The general economy.** For some years now, in spite of the dysfunctional political system (or perhaps in part because of it, in that the very intensity of the interparty political struggle so preoccupied the leadership of both parties that it was possible for economic policy decision makers to operate without much interference from above), the country's economy has done quite well, especially more recently. According to the World Bank, gross domestic product per capita grew at an average of 2.7% during 1991-2001 (the first two democratic governments), then 4.1% during the last BNP regime, 5.2% during the CTG era, and finally at 4.7% during the current AL ministry. To be sure, economic growth per se is no guarantee against social and political turmoil, but a healthy growth rate does allow both leaders and citizens to breathe a bit easier than when times are tight and the economy is declining.

**Political stability in the neighborhood.** Certainly political instability has been a serious problem for Bangladesh, a fact reflected in the World Bank's ranking the country very low in its annual World Governance Indicators (WGI) report. The Bank uses its "Political Stability & Absence of Violence" indicator to measure "perceptions of the likelihood that a government will be destabilized or over-thrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including domestic violence and terrorism." Since 2004, the WGI has put Bangladesh in the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile or lower each year, ranging down to the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile in 2005.

Such a ranking is discouraging, sure enough, but it is not uncharacteristic of the South Asian region overall, as is evident from Figure 2, which shows the WGI rankings for all the principal

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countries of the area over the entire WGI coverage.<sup>28</sup> The comparisons will be cold comfort for Bangladeshis at first glance, but when one reflects that democratic India has done scarcely better on the WGI index over the time period, and that other countries (Sri Lanka, Nepal) regarded as reasonable prospects for democratic governance have done much worse in many years, the picture does not look so bad. If India got through its bad chapters and Sri Lanka shows promise of doing so today, then surely Bangladesh can as well.



#### Civil society and the Right to Information Law

It is well known that civil society organizations in general, and externally supported NGOs in particular, have been chary about advocacy at the national level ever since the late 1970s, when it became clear that policy advocacy was not likely to succeed and was very likely to lead to state repression. There were occasions when the NGO community did involve itself in macro policy issues, as when the government NGO Affairs Bureau showed signs of trying to control NGOs in the late 1980s or toward the end of the Ershad regime in 1990 when virtually the entire society

<sup>28</sup> The WGI began its coverage for the year 1996, then published every two years until 2002, after which it has appeared for every year.



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was turning against the isolated dictator, but these instances were rare indeed. Then in the early 2000s when several large NGOs did slip into political involvement, the NGO apex organization split, and the community felt itself getting drawn into the polarization then intensifying between the two major parties, it became even more clear that national advocacy on policy issues would be a mistake.

But advocacy that can avoid challenging the political parties at national level has been quite a different story for a number of NGOs and CSOs. For some years now, NGOs like Nijera Kori have fostered local-level advocacy and others like the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association and Bangladesh Legal Aid Society Trust have taken up public interest lawsuits. In the short time since the passage of the Right to Information Law in 2009 (it took effect in July of that year), quite a few groups have begun to empower individuals and local CSOs inter alia to gain access to public services, enforce environmental regulations, and make official land records available.<sup>29</sup> As expected, the RTI Law has faced problems with uncooperative (as well as uninformed) officials, lack of follow-up by petitioners, and so on, but it does appear to have made a good start.<sup>30</sup>

Critical to its success will be the media, for unless awareness of RTI's potential becomes widespread and large numbers of citizens learn how to use the new law, it will make little difference in how the state conducts its business. Fortunately, media conditions have improved significantly in Bangladesh over the past several years, as illustrated in Figure 3. The Freedom House press freedom survey rated the country in the mid- to upper-60s (where 0 is the best score and 100 the worst) up through 2007, but then shows an improvement for the last three years, finishing at 54 in 2010, which is shown in the bottom line of Figure 3. The significance of this comes out when the media score's components are separated, as in the top three lines of the Figure. Here the Economic Environment (ownership concentration, corruption impact on content) remains essentially the same over the period, while Legal Environment (state regulation) improves only slightly. The major change occurred in the Political Environment,

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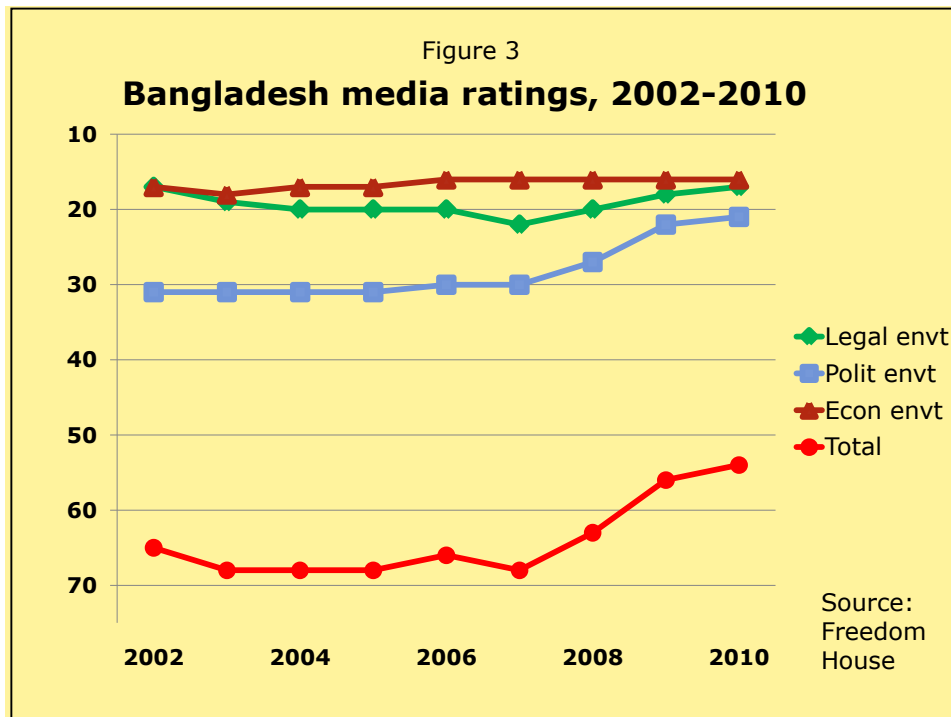
<sup>29</sup> World Bank Institute (2011) provides a good sampling of case studies involving use of the RTI.

<sup>30</sup> India faced many difficulties in implementing its RTI Act passed in 2005 (see e.g., Kulkarni 2008), but over time it became increasingly effective (see Roberts 2010).

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which gauges access to information, editorial independence, censorship and self-censorship, and harassment/intimidation of journalists. The rating here improved from 30 points (out of 40 in a scoring system where lower scores are better) in 2007 to 21 in 2010 and accounts for most of the shift in the Total measure at the bottom of the Figure.

In a parallel survey, Rapporteurs Sans Frontiers, an international watchdog organization focusing more on individual journalists than media organizations, ranked Bangladesh at 151<sup>st</sup> out of 167 countries in the mid-2000s, but by 2009 upgraded it to 121<sup>st</sup> out of 175, a distinct improvement.<sup>31</sup>



Taken together, these two surveys offer strong evidence that the media have become significantly more able to find out about state activities at all levels and to publicize them. This progress scarcely indicates that Bangladesh has become a paragon of media freedom, for journalists continue to be harassed and arrested, but the general environment for journalism does appear considerably improved over a few years ago.

<sup>31</sup> Accessed on 24 October 2011 respectively at << <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=16>>> and << [http://en.rsfr.org/spip.php?page=classement&id\\_rubrique=1034](http://en.rsfr.org/spip.php?page=classement&id_rubrique=1034)>>.

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What all this means is that it is more possible today for CSOs/NGOs or individuals to gain access to state information and for the media to publicize what they have uncovered – in short to exercise a kind of accountability over the state that was simply not possible in an earlier era.

#### **Conclusion**

In the short run, it appears clear that Bangladesh's systemically dysfunctional polity of the 1991-2006 era has come a long way toward restoration. The two major parties have resumed their duet of excluding the opposition from any meaningful role on the one side and combining parliamentary boycotts with civic disruption on the other side. Anti-corruption efforts and judicial separation remain largely dead letters. The promise of a revitalized upazila parishad structure has been effectively strangled in favor of the MPs, whose domination of local governance has been aggrandized with additional constituency development funds placed at their discretion. And finally, the one saving quality of democracy that lies in the ability of the citizenry to recover from their mistakes by changing their rulers appears to be severely compromised by the abolition of caretaker governments superintending future elections. The overall outlook appears to offer a choice between a bad homeostasis and a decline from that condition.

But Bangladesh does remain a country observing the Rule of Law at the upper end of its judicial system (High Court and Supreme Court), allowing a great deal of freedom to civil society (so long as it steers clear of party politics at the macro level), becoming significantly more transparent with the implementation of the Right to Information Law, and maintaining a reasonably free media. Collectively, these factors present a fair chance for the system to avoid a collapse of the present dysfunctional homeostasis and hopefully even to ameliorate it in the years to come.

#### **Postscript**

More than four years after this paper was written, the dysfunctional homeostasis model continues to hold though barely. Making a case for its validity is becoming ever more difficult, as one of

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the principal actors has continued to successfully flout its rules, perhaps just for the short term but quite possibly for a much longer duration.

As shown in the paper, the Awami League began dismantling the model shortly after its sweeping electoral victory in December 2008, most notably by abolishing the Caretaker Government. In response, the BNP adopted CTG restoration as the main theme of its protest marches and hartals, but the AL held fast, offering instead an “all-party cabinet” to manage the 2014 elections. The BNP rejected the offer, continuing its protests and then, playing the AL card from previous elections, called for an election boycott, hoping that as before international outrage, donor pressure and the threat of military intervention would force the AL’s hand. In the event, however, it became clear that the BNP had misplayed its own hand, for the AL went ahead with elections, ignoring objections from abroad and whatever concerns donors expressed in Dhaka, while the military, likely discouraged by its previous efforts to right the system, stayed clear of involvement this time around. Thus the AL won 234 of the Jatiyo Sangsad’s 300 directly elected seats and the BNP was entirely shut out.

Since the 2014 election, the AL has moved to consolidate its position on many fronts.<sup>32</sup> A national broadcast policy announced in 2014 called for banning any content demeaning the military or police or “contrary to the public interest,” newspaper editors are facing criminal charges, and hundreds of citizens have been charged for online postings under in an Information and Communication Technology Act passed in 2013. Not surprisingly, in its annual Freedom of the Press report for 2016, Freedom House downgraded the country from “partly free” to “not free,” and by 2016 Rapporteurs sans Frontieres had lowered its press freedom ranking from 121<sup>st</sup> out of 175 in 2009 to 144<sup>th</sup> out of 180 in 2016.

State use of the constabulary to harass and repress opposition advocates – always a problem under dysfunctional homeostasis in Bangladesh – has increased, especially with the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) created in 2004 as an anti-terrorist unit with special powers and strengthened under the AL, leading to more arrests, charges, and reports of torture, extrajudicial killings and disappearances. The Anti-Corruption Commission remains toothless, unable to bring cases against officials without government permission. Executive interference with the

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<sup>32</sup> For two excellent accounts events and trends after the 2014 election, see ICG (2015 and 2016).

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Meanwhile, the BNP has continued to demand a restitution of the CTG and fresh polls, following its strategy of protest and hartal just as in the past, but with no effect.

By way of backdrop, economic growth continues to provide a buffer against popular discontent, with an average 4.8% GDP per capita growth rate during 2011-2015 according to the World Bank (and predicted by the Economist Intelligence Unit in June 2016 to continue growing at a similar rate over the next several years). Accordingly, economic distress appears to be unlikely to fuel opposition to the incumbent government.

**Conclusion.** As of mid-2016, if the present trajectory continues, it may well show that the dysfunctional homeostasis model has run its course. The CTG safety mechanism is unlikely to be restored for the election due in 2019, and the AL government will have sufficiently solidified its dominance of the constabulary and bureaucracy, as well as the judiciary and media in all probability, so as to ensure a favorable election result, whatever the BNP is able to muster in the way of protest and complaint. A new model would then become necessary to explain the more authoritarian polity that Bangladesh will have moved into.

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