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More emphasis needed on merit

Irrational BCS quota system

QUESTIONS are constantly raised about our civil bureaucracy's efficiency. It is only natural for quality to suffer when only 44 percent of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) entrants are selected based on merit alone. The rest 56 percent come from the various quotas. The net effect of keeping more than half the seats, in what is supposed to be a competitive examination that recruits people to run the wheels of the government, apart from quality, is that the number of vacancies keep growing also.

Under this condition, when the number of aspirants is ten times the vacancy, we are left with the impossible scenario of 194 candidates vying for each seat on merit as opposed to 23 candidates for each seat under the quota system. Ironically, the reserved-seat quota remains unfulfilled since there is no system that allows for these to be opened up for merit-based competition.

Other countries have quota system too, which allows people from backward segments of society to get extra points at the beginning, but then they have to compete with the rest to qualify for a position based on merit. The "merit" part is sadly missing from our system, and that needs to be rationalised.

The Public Service Commission has over the years made recommendations to reform the current system of intake that leaves the bureaucracy stuck with people below par qualification while the vast majority of qualified candidates are left with impossible odds to ever enter the service. Sadly, the political will to change this outdated method of recruitment has been lacking, but ultimately, it is the nation that loses out because it is not recruiting the best our society has to offer.

UNSC must visit Myanmar, too

It's long overdue

EARLIER this month Myanmar had asked the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to not visit the Rakhine State. On the other hand, Bangladesh on Tuesday called on UNSC to undertake visits to Bangladesh and Myanmar to witness the humanitarian situation that erupted from the latest crisis. We fully endorse it.

United Nations is not unaware of what has been happening in Rakhine. In fact, UNHCR termed the ongoing violence in the state as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing." However, UN's statements alone would not deliver a successful Rohingya repatriation, under which the refugees will be guaranteed complete safety and have all their basic rights after return.

Recently, the British foreign minister visited both the countries and reiterated Britain's position that Rohingyas must be allowed to return to their homes. As preparations for the repatriation process is going on, a visit by UNSC member states to both countries would certainly add momentum to the repatriation process. In fact, such a visit sooner could have prevented worsening of the situation. Therefore, the UNSC must prevail upon Myanmar and hold it responsible for the crimes of its forces.

For Bangladesh, the situation in Cox's Bazar is increasingly unbearable. Rohingyas constitute many times the number of local people, risking the creation of a complex socio-economic problem. In this context, the reports that donor agencies are losing interest in providing food assistance to Rohingyas refugees are highly disturbing and unacceptable.

We urge the UNSC, as we did earlier this month, to visit both countries immediately. Such a visit would certainly exert pressure on Myanmar to create conducive conditions for the repatriation.

If not now, then when?



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NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

RUPA KHATUN was raped and murdered on a bus near the Tangail-Mymensingh road in Tangail's Madhupur upazila last August. This past week, four of the

men who raped and subsequently killed her were sentenced to death.

Over in the US, Muhiyidin Moye, a leader of the Black Lives Matter movement in Charleston, South Carolina, was shot dead in New Orleans on February 6. In response, the media highlighted that "he had stolen a Confederate flag." As if that act of protest, as it were, somehow justified his death. (Also, he had only attempted to snatch a Confederate flag from a protester, he didn't actually steal anything.) We know nothing about who shot Moye.

A Bangladeshi chemist living in the US for 30 years, Syed Ahmed Jamal, was arrested by ICE on January 24 as he was preparing to take his daughter to school. Scores of comments on social media said that his arrest was justified, as he should have known better than to not apply for citizenship on time. As if he didn't. On Wednesday, we learnt that Jamal, who was put on a flight to Bangladesh by immigration authorities, was allowed to remain on US soil during a layover in Hawaii after an immigration appeals court granted another stay of his deportation mid-flight.

These stories bring to the fore two related problems: the disparity in sentencing laws and our collective search for the perfect victim.

When it comes to supporting victims of any form of injustice, we like to dwell on what is popularly known as "the other side." That there is another side is not really the issue at hand when someone is killed, abused, or violated. The "other side" is merely justification for oppression. We know this well. Yet, when Rupa travelled by herself on public transportation, we talked about why she didn't know better, but not about the culture of rape on public transportation in South Asia. When Moye was killed, we resorted to vilifying the entire BLM movement as a "terrorist organisation." When Jamal was set to be deported, we talked about him violating US laws.

But, these cases are not all alike, nor are they black and white. Let me highlight the nuances.

Unlike Moye, Jamal had popular support. In supporting Jamal for being "perfect" in all other ways, we participated in propagating the model-minority myth, while espousing the notion that only certain kinds of immigrants are welcome in the land of the free. If Jamal had ever been arrested, or had been found self-medicating because he did not have health insurance, we would have withdrawn that support. We made clear that we only support people who are pristine, almost like children. Indeed, Jamal's three

commissioner allegedly tried helping the rich men responsible. Their parents tried helping them. Even certain news media supported them, blaming the victims for their own rape. And there's always us—unknown, unnamed members of the citizenry, actively shaming women, particularly on social media. Because, why didn't they know what to expect at a birthday party? In this day and age, they expected cake? Nope, they, too, "had it coming."

Let's go back to Rupa Khatun. We know about Rupa Khatun and her rape, but the nameless women who are also raped on a regular basis remain unknown. Why?

perpetrators of sexual violence (should) look like. Poor, uneducated, working class.

Not even for a second do we question where they learned to "rape." Because rape and violence are learned behaviours. You have to know what to "do," after all, when you rape someone. You have to know what hurts. You have to know where to hit. You have to know what kills. The Raintree Hotel rapists and Rupa's rapists learned it all, but the only ones to get a death sentence are the transport workers. Because certain lives are dispensable.

My editor likes me to end with at least one ray of hope. So, here goes:



A perpetrator who belongs to the "right" social and economic class has many privileges. The Raintree Hotel rape case is an excellent example.

PHOTO: STAR

children helped his case, it appealed to our paternal and maternal instincts.

We made clear that those who dare to defy social norms or take part in protests are not worthy of support. Instead, they "have it coming." They are doubly unworthy if they don't look a certain way, if they belong to a particular social class.

But this works the other way too. If you are a perpetrator who belongs to the right social and economic class, we have your back, we keep reiterating, ad nauseam. The multi-party rape that occurred at Raintree Hotel in Dhaka is an excellent example. The police

For one, we know about Rupa Khatun because she's dead.

But we also know about Rupa Khatun because she fits into our imaginary picture of what a perfect victim must look like—attractive, fighting the good fight, studying law, looking for employment, without romantic entanglements that tarnish her image of being a virgin. All of these allow us to view her as worthy of our collective pity, even angst.

So when the four men were sentenced to death, certain quarters of the country lit up in celebration. For those men also fit into our imagination of what

That we see reports of oppression (including rape) almost on a daily basis should give us pause. While we're pausing, let us find hope in the fact that we are made aware of the oppression around us, that it is being reported more than it used to be. Because this gives us an opportunity to examine our social environment, our biases, and raise our collective voices against oppression. In the words of Jewish scholar of the first century, Hillel, "If not now, when?"

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BJP's coalition pangs and opposition's search for unity

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

COALITION pangs and stuttering unity efforts are staring at India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and opposition parties as they brace for fresh national elections due early next year. Less than two months into 2018, election fever in India has begun showing signs. Prime Minister Narendra Modi sounded the poll bugle with a stirring speech in parliament on February 7 and two days later former Congress Party Chief Sonia Gandhi told her party lawmakers to be ready for the national elections which she said might well be called earlier than schedule.

But both BJP and Congress are facing challenges typical of India's coalition politics. While the saffron party is trying

parts, the Hindutva party counts only on the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh. But even there, the strains are beginning to show on the alliance between BJP and TDP on the issue of allocation of federal funds. BJP today finds itself having to deal with a combative TDP which is facing the political heat to get the best financial deal for the state from the Modi government.

What has further complicated the scenario for BJP-TDP friendship is that a key plank that has bound the two parties together in the past—anti-Congressism—is being eroded because after the carving out of the new state of Telangana, Congress is no longer TDP's main political rival in Andhra Pradesh where YSR Congress Party (YSRCP)

twice made a strong pitch for like-minded parties to sink differences and join hands against BJP. It all began on January 26, India's Republic Day, when Nationalist Congress Party head Sharad Pawar led a street march of opposition parties in India's financial capital Mumbai. The event was attended among others by senior leaders of Congress, top leaders of the two Communist parties, National Conference leader Omar Abdullah and a representative of Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress. This was followed up by a meeting of 17 parties on February 1 after Sonia Gandhi stressed on the need for opposition unity. On February 7, Sonia, addressing a meeting of Congress parliamentary party, reiterated her party's desire to work with

Secondly, the opposition camp is divided on who will anchor the alliance given that various parties in the camp have divergent political agendas and local interests across 29 states of India. This was most tellingly brought out when Janata Dal (United) leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar broke ranks with the opposition and joined hands with BJP.

Thirdly, many senior leaders in the opposition camp like Pawar, Mamata Banerjee, Samajwadi Party's Mulayam Singh Yadav and Janata Dal (United) breakaway faction chief Sharad Yadav are not comfortable with or under the leadership of a much younger Rahul Gandhi who took over as president of Congress after his mother Sonia.

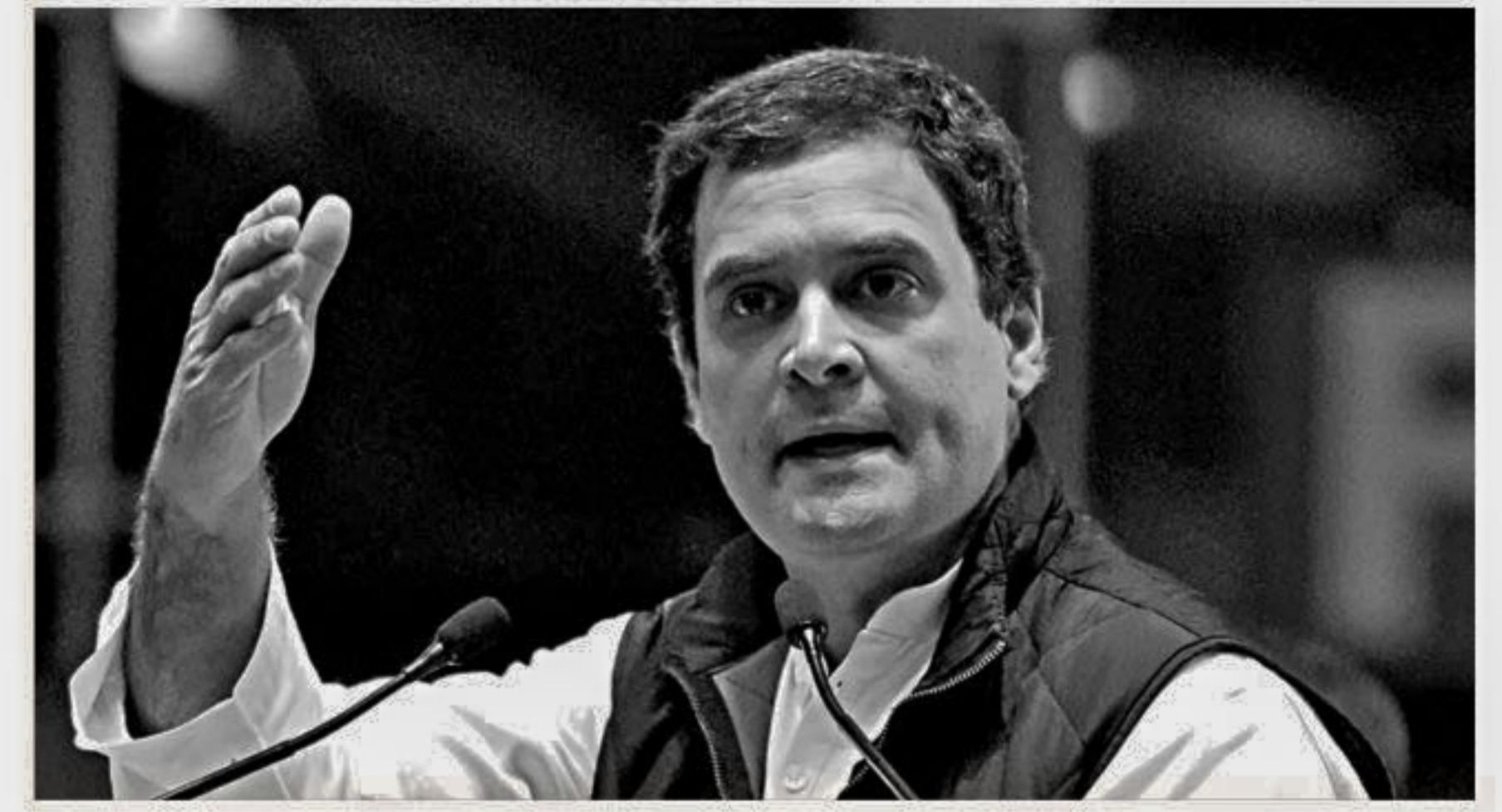
It was Sonia's stewardship as the head of United Progressive Alliance that had kept the coalition glued to rule India for a decade since 2004. Mamata has conveyed to Congress leadership that she was ready to accept Sonia as the anchor of opposition unity but is loath to the idea of Rahul at the helm of an opposition alliance.

In fact, ever since Rahul became the president of Congress in December last year, the opposition parties have had difficulty in putting together a united face whether it came to aligning the strategy in parliament or holding joint protests outside. After Sonia stepped down as party chief and retreated for a few weeks from the forefront, senior opposition leaders had become hesitant to deal with Rahul. It is for this reason that Sonia made it clear that she would remain engaged with opposition parties in the run-up to the national elections.

That Sonia continues as the leader of Congress parliamentary party allows her to play a role in engaging other opposition parties. She convened a meeting of 17 opposition parties to push for opposition unity on issues of national importance in and outside parliament. That was the first time Sonia spearheaded a joint opposition meeting since handing over the reins of Congress to her son. At the same time, she also sent a signal to other opposition leaders that they will have to deal with Rahul at some stage and declared that her son is now her "boss" by virtue of being the party president.

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent of The Daily Star.

In the space of six days from February 2 this year, Sonia Gandhi twice made a strong pitch for like-minded parties to sink differences and join hands against BJP.



Ever since Rahul Gandhi became the president of Congress in December last year, the opposition parties have had difficulty in putting together a united face.

to keep its National Democratic Alliance intact, Congress is struggling to bring major opposition parties on one platform to take on BJP in the electoral battle.

Although BJP is not dependent on the support of any alliance partner for its survival in government at the Centre, it could still need all the help it can get from its allies for the next Lok Sabha election. 2018 began on a sour note for BJP when its oldest right-wing ally Shiv Sena announced its decision to contest the coming poll without a tie-up with the former. Shiv Sena has been on a collision course with BJP for the last several months. In the southern region of India where BJP requires electoral partners the most because of its weak presence in most

under the leadership of YS Jaganmohan Reddy has emerged as a powerful political force. TDP is also aware that BJP could find in YSRCP a potential ally if the circumstances so demand. TDP chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has not taken kindly the criticism of his state government by state BJP leaders. While BJP may not need to rethink all its alliances, it must have a fresh look at the relationships with its allies if it intends to lead a powerful political umbrella in 2019. Keeping its NDA flock together is proving to be quite a task for BJP.

The task is more arduous for the opposition parties. In the space of six days from February 2 this year, Sonia Gandhi

"like-minded" parties to ensure the defeat of BJP in parliamentary elections.

The two planks of opposition unity are: retaining the "secular" vote base and "threat" to the Constitution. Both Sonia and Pawar have stressed on these planks.

However, the opposition camp too has its own set of problems in putting up a united front against BJP. First, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is split down the middle on the issue of alliance with Congress to counter BJP. The party general secretary Sitaram Yechury, a champion of alliance with Congress, has been defeated convincingly in the party's powerful central committee which shot down any tie-up with Rahul Gandhi-led Congress.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Third country resettlement not an option

A recent letter titled Resettle Rohingyas in a third country was published by this newspaper on February 8. In my opinion, the suggestion made in the letter is unrealistic. Firstly, if Rohingyas are settled in a third country, it will set a bad precedent. In such a case, they will never be able to return to their homeland—a goal that Myanmar's army wants to achieve. Every human being has an inherent right to live in their motherland. Blocking that path would be tantamount to a violation of human rights.

Moreover, not many countries will be willing to take a million refugees. Instead of thinking about resettling these Rohingyas in other countries, the world should exert pressure on Myanmar repatriate the Rohingyas, with their full rights guaranteed.

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By e-mail

