

Search Committee's onerous responsibility

We hope it will live up to expectations

THE Search Committee formed under the orders of the Hon'ble President to recommend names for the new Election Commission, has started its work on the right note. It has sought suggestions in this regard from the 31 political parties that the Hon'ble President had met to discuss the most topical issue of the time – formation of the election commission. It also has plans to meet 12 eminent persons to solicit their views and opinions in this regard today.

We are sure that the Committee members are fully aware of the historic nature of their assignment. Reactions of some of the political parties to the composition of the Committee had been, not unpredictably, negative. However, it is for them to prove the detractors wrong and come up with names of such persons to fill the posts of the commission members who would not only be acceptable to all parties across the board, but will also be able to hold elections at all levels in a manner that would not call to question either their integrity or their capability.

Admittedly, nobody can be entirely neutral in his or her political disposition or ideological leanings. However, when one is propelled to a body of the status, significance and great importance, such as the Search Committee, one is expected to rise above his or her personal and political predilections and deliver to the people what his or her office demands of them to deliver. The tenure of the Search Committee is short. But its contributions will have tremendous impact that will outlast not only the Committee but also the Election Commission that will be composed of people that it suggests.

School torched in Gaibandha

Find and punish the perpetrators immediately

WE condemn in the strongest terms the burning down of Gono Unnayan Academy High School by some miscreants. Anyone who has seen the tears of the grieving students at this loss cannot help but wonder what the perpetrators are made of. What kind of human beings set a school on fire? Where will the 600 students of the school study now? Why haven't the police been able to arrest anyone for this horrible and cowardly crime despite the reported trace of flammable liquid like petrol at the spot which undeniably indicates foul play?

Established by an NGO, the lone educational institution in the remote char of Kundepara in Gaibandha stood as a ray of hope for some of the most deprived members of our society who are sometimes left behind by ambitious government projects and programmes. It was shocking to see the school, once brimming with children's activities, being reduced to ashes. But it was also encouraging to witness their love for education-a love strong enough to bring tears to their eyes at the destruction of the school. This, we believe, was the greatest achievement of Gono Unnayan Academy High School. That they continue to attend classes in a flood shelter on the premises of the school also proves that they are indomitable.

Bank Asia has spontaneously committed to repair and rebuild the school and we commend it for this gracious act. Other banks may take a cue from this. The ministry of education and NGOs in the area should also extend all cooperation in this regard. The police should catch the criminals immediately and ensure exemplary punishment.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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An appeal to the Honourable Prime Minister

Wards No. 12 to 15 under the Dhaka City Corporation are densely populated with shops, schools, and colleges. Building the 100 feet road from Ansar Camp to Kachukhet, a project that was planned by RAJUK 30 years ago, will improve communication channels for civilians travelling through those areas.

The narrow lanes make it impossible for ambulances and fire brigade vehicles to enter in case of emergencies. The area has also been a shelter for terrorists, militants, and drug traders. Constructing the 100 feet road will not only allow ambulances and the fire brigade easy access to accidents, but also prevent terrorist practices.

The road will also be connected with the National Cricket Stadium through Rokeya Sarani, Agargaon and Shishu Mela. This will allow cricket teams and others affiliated with the matches to travel to the stadium without causing inconvenience to other commuters, especially when national and international cricket tournaments block roads from Mirpur to Darussalam and Rokeya Sarani.

Construction of the road will attract businesses to these areas. Increase in the price of land, along with civilians' increased income tax, tax on land and land registration fees will mean higher revenues for the government.

The present government is leaving no stone unturned to mould Bangladesh into a mid-developed country by 2021. This road will accelerate that process. We earnestly request the Prime Minister to take effective and immediate steps to construct this road.

Musleh Uddin Ahmed and Abdul Majid

Samamana Samaj Kallayan Somity

When children resort to crime

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

IT could be over who gets to play in the field that day or who should be occupying the alleys to intimidate passersby. It could be because the harassment of a girl was protested. Or because a 'proposal' was rejected. It could be just about anything that can trigger brutality in a youngster.

According to news reports, there is a rise in criminal behaviour among teenagers and young adults. The latest report cites 15-year-old Hridoy from Barisal being hacked to death by a group of teenagers. Two of his friends were also attacked though they survived. Only a few weeks ago, we read a chilling story of how gang fights between two rival groups ended in the murder of a Class nine student Adnan Kabir. The fight was over 'supremacy' over an area in Uttara and the 'gangs' comprised of teenaged school boys from middle class families.

Killing is not the only crime young boys are committing. A report in *Prothom Alo* published on Saturday paints a grim picture of our youth. According to reports from two government-run juvenile crime centres sent to the Social Welfare Ministry last December, there were 120 youngsters who were accused of murders while 142 of them had been charged under the Women and Children Repression Act. Many of the teenagers charged under this Act have been accused of rape.

The idea that a large number of our youth are engaged in violent crimes may shock and terrify adults but it gives an idea of how our society has failed those members we consider to be our demographic dividend. Teenage boys are now part of gangs, their activities concentrating on getting the upper hand over another gang. The concepts of 'supremacy' and 'respect' are an important element in this gang culture that advocates brutality and defiance of law.

The *Prothom Alo* investigation has found that youngsters, predominantly boys, who commit crime, come from all backgrounds. They are from slums, from middle class families and from wealthy backgrounds too. It is the last two categories that are the most baffling. Poverty and crime often go together – hardly a surprise and something that



every society that has such glaring inequality as ours is familiar with. But when school going kids who do not have to worry about their basic needs and often enjoy considerable luxury, resort to violent crimes, there has to be something grossly wrong with the environment they are growing up in.

An obscene rise in consumerism with people being valued for what new gadget, car or how many pieces of property they own, has seeped into the psyche of the youth making them competitive in the worst possible sense. It's no longer about who got the highest grade in a math exam but more about who managed to buy the latest model motorcycle (or car) to show off among peers.

But where is all this coming from, we are forced to ask ourselves. Who are these teenagers emulating? What kind of examples are the 'Boro Bhais' (Big Brothers) setting? Almost every day there is news of murders or some other brutal crime (such as rape) being committed by young men from the political elite. More often than not these individuals get away with murder, literally, because they have their own 'Boro Bhais' in the right places and the right amount of cash to buy silence from victims' families. The message that permeates through society

is that no crime is punishable if you can pull the right strings. Not only that, the idea that it is okay to bully people, disrespect elders, even the headmaster of a school, to harass girls or even rape them, has been transmitted from delinquent adults to the youth. There are no heroes to worship only daredevil delinquents who defy the law and all rules of decency in their bid to consolidate their undeserved power.

Parents, meanwhile, are bewildered by their sons' actions with little realisation of their own contribution to the destruction of their child's morals. Many parents give their kids inordinate amounts of cash, gadgets and cars in lieu of their time, guidance and affection. Others think religious education is the only way to keep them on track, forgetting the dangers of distorted notions of religion that have given rise to militancy. Still others allow their children to stay hours on the internet, not knowing what kind of content they are exposed to. Pornography, brutality, propaganda and lies are the unsavoury sides of the World Wide Web that most teenagers and young children are confronted by, with no proper knowledge as to how to process the information.

It is clear that we adults have little

clue about how to handle this phenomenon of children turning to crime. But what we do know is that children are impressionable individuals and they need to be guided at every stage of their growing up and even beyond that. Children, moreover, tend to consciously or unconsciously follow what their elders do. If a child sees his father increasing his bank balance by accepting bribes or cheating those who are less weak, if he sees his 'older' brother getting involved in criminal activities, getting away with it and even showing off about it, if he sees his parents evaluating others based on their material wealth or social status instead of how good they are as human beings, if he sees his father beating his mother with no one protesting, if he sees his sister being treated with disrespect in his family, this will set the tone of his own behaviour in the wider society. And when he will see that those who commit crimes being revered for their machismo and ability to circumvent the law through their connections and wads of cash, it will be all the more attractive for him to follow suit.

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PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Theresa May's Trump Card



GUY VERHOFSTADT

IN the same week that British Prime Minister Theresa May outlined her vision for a 'hard' Brexit from the European Union – withdrawing from the single market and the customs union – incoming US President Donald Trump met with Michael Gove, a leading Tory Eurosceptic. Gove was on hand for Trump's public announcement that the United States would move "very quickly" to reach a post-Brexit trade deal with the

behaviour suggests that it is putting the new US administration's interests before those of the EU and the rest of the world. This approach was on full display in December, when May criticised then-US Secretary of State John Kerry's condemnation of Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank. But perhaps May's unorthodox intervention should not have come as a surprise, given that Trump tends to reward such disruptive behaviour.

A second episode occurred earlier this month at a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, where British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson vetoed an EU statement of support for an ongoing

influencing May's Brexit strategy. Johnson met with key members of Trump's administration just prior to May's recent speech, and we can safely assume that they discussed the UK's path out of the EU. Trump administration officials, for their part, have since suggested that they helped convince May to roll the dice on a hard Brexit.

This represents not only an astonishing reversal of US policy toward Europe – which has, for seven decades, unwaveringly supported European integration – but also a dramatic shift in the UK's external stance. May is apparently willing to gamble her own country's future on an alliance with an unpopular,



US President Donald Trump greets Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May on January 27 2017.

PHOTO: AFP

United Kingdom.

Not surprisingly, the UK's Brexiteers are now touting a hypothetical trade deal with the US as a way to fill Britain's post-EU trade vacuum. But this could prove to be a hollow solution, given that the UK maintains a trade surplus with the US, and Trump is a vocal critic of American trade deficits. Meanwhile, many observers in continental Europe are wondering if the UK's pursuit of a bilateral deal with the US is just about economics, or if it implies a broader shift in British foreign policy.

The May government's recent

Middle East peace effort. The British government then refused to send a high-level delegation to a Middle East peace conference organised by the French government, arguing that it would send the wrong signal just four days before Trump took office. It is no secret where Trump stands with respect to the Israel-Palestine conflict: throughout his campaign, he promised to move the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem – in clear violation of international law.

Meanwhile, there is some evidence to suggest that Trump's Eurosceptic team is

untested, and mendacious American president.

By courting Trump, White House Chief Strategist Stephen Bannon, and other Eurosceptic figures in the US administration, May's government is playing a dangerous and shortsighted game. In her recent speech, May claimed that "the UK is leaving the European Union, not Europe." But she would do well to remember that Britain's security and prosperity is primarily linked to the EU, not to an isolationist, "America first" US. The vast majority of the UK's trade is with the EU, not with the US; and this

like the UK's geographical location and security environment, is not going to change.

By seeking a close relationship with both the Trump administration and the EU, May is trying to ride two horses at once. Trump has already questioned the EU's *raison d'être*, and suggested that the UK will not be the last country to exit the bloc. And Bannon has been a cheerleader for far-right European nationalist parties, promising to help National Front leader Marine Le Pen in her campaign for the French presidency this spring.

If Trump continues to view NATO as "obsolete," or starts to tear down the pillars of the international order and the supranational organisations that have maintained global stability since 1945, he will undermine British, European, and US security. It is hard to see how a weakened EU, NATO, or United Nations could possibly be in anyone's interest.

Trump's inaugural address suggested that the rest of the world has thrived at ordinary Americans' expense. He promised to "make America great again" by isolating it from all negative influences, limiting trade, and supporting "American-made" products. But if Trump goes down this path, he will make all countries, including the US, much poorer. And May, for her part, should realise that there isn't much room for the UK in an "America first" world.

Instead of pandering to the Trump administration, British and European leaders should be pointing out that American "greatness" rests on the strong multilateral institutions, close partnerships, and international rules that have long maintained global peace and stability. And leaders from both the UK and the EU should be forging a strategic partnership to ensure European security, now that Trump's presidency has cast US security guarantees into doubt.

Lastly, UK and EU leaders should follow German Chancellor Angela Merkel's lead and make it clear to Trump that their cooperation is conditioned on shared values. Now, more than ever, Britain and the EU must defend and promote liberal democratic norms, not embrace populists' narcissistic nationalism.

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