

## How did TONU die?

*A farce in the name of investigation*

THREE agonizing months have passed for the parents of TONU and they still have not been able to find out how she died. This despite a second autopsy was done after the first one proved to be inconclusive. Meanwhile DNA tests, after the second autopsy, found enough evidence to conclude that she had been raped, doctors who conducted the second autopsy are confirming sexual intercourse but not rape.

The opacity with which this case has been handled has produced more questions than answers. Why did the first autopsy not reveal the cause of death or find any indication of rape? If DNA tests have established that she had been raped why is this reluctance to say so? Why is this hesitation to even call it a murder when her body was found in the bushes with visible marks of injury?

It is unacceptable that despite the statements of TONU's father and the DNA test results, the investigation has not found under what circumstances this bright young woman died. We can only conclude that there is a deliberate move to bury the evidence and protect the perpetrators of a horrible crime. If this is the case it would be a travesty of justice and will give out an ominous message: that it is possible to get away with crimes as diabolical as rape and murder if one has the influence or protection from powerful quarters.

The farcical conclusions as made public by officials in charge of the autopsies have made a mockery of the rule of law and have allowed criminals to remain unscathed. Meanwhile even in death TONU must face the onslaught of unsavoury innuendos from careless gossipmongers.

In such a scenario we urge the government to ensure a fair investigation into this crime so that the murderers do not get a chance to escape from justice.

## Orlando attack

*Unite to fight this menace*

WE condemn in the strongest possible terms the barbaric terror attack on a nightclub in Orlando that has claimed the lives of 50 and has injured an equal number of people. The attack, the sheer barbarity of which was calculated to strike fear, is the worst of its kind on American soil after the September 11 attacks.

No doubt it was an act of terror and an act of hate as President Obama put it. But what is intriguing is the influence that has led Omar Mateen, the attacker, to choose the path of bigotry and hate.

His dastardly actions and those of the other radical groups like IS do not reflect Islam, and we strongly believe that when it comes to fighting the growing menace of these elements, the Muslims must take the lead in projecting a coordinated front to counter the deranged interpretation of the Islamic scripture.

Countries and nations, political borders and beliefs must be cut across to fight this monster that has spread its tentacles beyond the confines of nation states and their boundaries. Deradicalising them is the key and Islamic scholars must rise to the occasion and spread the real message of Islam. Also, there is no denying that the spread of fear and panic has given birth to xenophobia in a part of the western world which must be curbed.

MUSTAFAZUR RAHMAN

THE FY2017 budget has been announced in the backdrop of the manifold challenges carried over from the past years, but also by taking advantage of the comfort zone provided by the relative macroeconomic stability experienced in recent years. In this backdrop, the key challenge for FY2017 will be to attain the envisaged GDP growth rate of 7.2 percent by translating the stability into higher investment that spurs growth, generates additional employment opportunities in the economy and raises living standards of the common people. Higher growth rate and a move from factor-driven to efficiency and productivity-driven pathways of development will call for greater strategic role of the public sector, both in terms of resource deployment as well as policy and reform initiatives. Bangladesh's budget size, at about 17 percent of the GDP, is still low when compared to many other developing countries, not to speak of some of the developed countries such as the UK, in which case this is equivalent to about 42 percent of the GDP. Thus, per se, the size of the budget is not the issue. What is, however, of concern is the implementation capacity of the Bangladesh state, both in terms of mobilising the needed resources by raising tax effort, broadening the tax base and maintaining distributive justice, and using the mobilized resources appropriately by ensuring allocative efficiency and by raising the efficacy of resource-use. It is reckoned mitigating these concerns will entail addressing formidable challenges in five key areas.

Firstly, as is known, resource mobilisation targets have once again been set at rates which are unlikely to be attained under the business as usual scenario. One would recall that revenue mobilisation target for FY2016 was revised downward in April this year by about Tk. 31 thousand crore (14.9 percent of the original budget). It may be pertinent to mention here that when the FY2016 budget was announced, CPD drew attention to the weaknesses in the fiscal framework and observed that there would be a likely revenue shortfall of about Tk. 40 thousand crore. Indeed, the realised budget for FY2016 will likely be lower than the revised one. In this backdrop, the revenue growth rate planned for FY2017, set at 33 percent higher than the revised budget for FY2016, will turn up to be even higher if compared to the likely actual revenue collection in FY2016. Attaining the ambition of mobilising the significant additional resources will call for more emphasis on direct tax, further broadening of the tax net, raising tax effort, strengthening of the NBR capacity, a more revamped transfer pricing cell and closer coordination involving the central bank, commercial banks and the tax authorities to address issues

of tax avoidance and tax evasion. From the medium-term perspective, adequate preparations will need to be undertaken, both on the part of the demand side (relevant government institutions) and supply side (entrepreneurs, business and commercial entities), for implementation of the VAT and SD Act 2012, in a manner that addresses genuine concerns of small businesses but also enables to move gradually towards implementation of this modern and progressive taxation tool.

The second challenge concerns attracting adequate private investment to attain the GDP growth target. Both additionality and productivity will be the key issues here. Whilst commercial banks are saddled with excess liquidity, it will not be easy to translate this fund into the additional Tk. 80 thousand crore of private sector investment to take the private investment-GDP ratio to the planned 23.5 percent. FY2017 is likely to experience negative real interest rate on savings if nominal interest rate trends and prevailing downward-sliding inflationary trends persist. Attracting savings to capital markets through appropriate

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incentivisation will assume greater importance in view of this. More concrete budgetary measures were expected in this regard, particularly to attract good companies and large institutional investors to the share market. Availability of unencumbered land, quality electricity and gas will be crucially important to attract investment, both domestic and foreign. Speedy setting up of special economic zones (SEZs) will be important in this connection. The budget has rightly put emphasis on technology upgradation and skills enhancement; these are critical to raising productivity and reducing the incremental capital-output ratio. Strengthening technical education and incentivising the vocational stream in education will be needed to this effect. One hopes that the welcome emphasis on public sector expenditure on education in FY2017 budget will be tuned towards addressing these needs. There is also a need to incentivise entrepreneurs to invest in R&D and replenish skills endowment at the enterprise level. In the backdrop of some of the signals transmitted by the recently conducted labour force survey

(July-September, 2015), showing a declining labour force participation in the manufacturing sector, the twin challenges of raising productivity and avoiding job-less growth have assumed heightened urgency for Bangladesh.

The third challenge concerns weak implementation record of the ADP where emphasis tends to be put more on monetary expenditure rather than quality aspects, outputs and impacts. Time and cost escalation in implementing public sector projects have been appropriately identified through diagnostic studies carried out by the IMED of the Planning Commission. It was found that average implementation time for projects was about 75 percent higher than is originally envisaged; average project cost ended up being higher by about 51 percent. Projects earmarked for completion in FY2017 ought to receive priority attention. It needs to be ensured that adequate budgetary allocations have been made in the FY2017 budget towards this. The aforesaid review's recommendations as regards parallel initiatives (particularly with respect to land acquisition), appropriate sequencing of implementation

plans and right placement and incentivisation of project directors ought to be followed up with concrete measures. In view of the large number of infrastructure projects being implemented at present, issues of good governance, timely completion and cost-effective implementation demands urgent attention. There should be adequate allocation in the budget for maintenance of the implemented infrastructure projects in the coming years.

Fourthly, the issue of financing of the budget deficit should receive due attention of policymakers. Debt as percentage of GDP (33.9 percent) and debt-servicing as percentage of total public expenditure (11.7 percent) is not as yet a major concern for Bangladesh. However, what is of concern is that an increasingly larger part of deficit financing is being incurred at present on account of the high interest-paying domestic financing sources, and not through low-cost foreign financing. Domestic debt-servicing now accounts for 19.2 percent of the revenue budget; in contrast, foreign debt servicing accounts for only about 3.4 percent of earnings from export of goods. For this

desirable shift to take place, more emphasis should be put on negotiating soft-loans, particularly for capital intensive investment projects. Keeping budget deficit within stipulated limits (of less than 5 percent of GDP) through scaling down of public expenditure has now emerged as the new normal. This practice undermines fiscal-budgetary discipline, weakens fiscal framework and speaks of the weak capacity of the GoB, both to earn as also to spend. The issue of greater use of foreign loans is also gaining increasing relevance in view of the fact that in future Bangladesh will have to go more for blended financing as distinct from soft loan since she has now been graduated to lower-middle income status and will likely reach the threshold for IDA (soft-window) financing in near-term future.

Last but not the least, one should not forget that a key objective of the government budget is to ensure distributive justice favouring the relatively less-endowed citizens. Both fiscal measures and resource allocation should be geared to ensure this. The proposal in FY2017 Budget to allocate proportionately higher amount of resources in favour of education, health and social safety net programmes is thus welcome. However, it will be important to ensure that the allocations are spent appropriately so that marginalized households could benefit from quality education that will ensure social mobility of their children and common citizens have access to health services provided by community health clinics. Social safety-net programmes need to be appropriately targeted and should be able to address the strategies and priorities articulated in the National Social Safety Strategies (NSSS).

One observes that the government's appetite for taking the needed reforms, urgency of which was recognised earlier, has weakened over time, although these are critically important from the perspective of enforcing good governance, accountability, transparency and for raising institutional performance capacity. Successive CPD reviews have highlighted the need for public services reform, public expenditure reforms and financial and banking sector reforms that are long overdue; there is also an urgent need to setup a permanent agriculture price commission and undertake a review of incentive and subsidy structure, to name only a few. Institutional and policy reforms will be key to enhancing public sector capacity to address many of the challenges noted earlier. What will not help attain FY2017 budget targets, one can justifiably foretell, is conducting the business of development under the business as usual scenario. Time has come to walk the talk.

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## ORLANDO SHOOTING:

# The four words we don't hear enough

DOMINIC KNIGHT

WHEN random violence is visited on innocent people, we try to find the right words to respond.

Reporters breaking the news try to offer something more compassionate than just the brutal, horrible fact of 50-odd people being gunned down because they were attending a dance party.

Our leaders have to find words too - and CBS's Mark Knoller calculated that president Barack Obama has had to deliver an address to the nation after a shooting on at least 20 occasions.

Finding words has become a task for many of us, courtesy of social media. We try to find the right thing to say, the right point to make. And people like me who write for a living go further, pumping out a hasty opinion piece trying to make sense of events that are still extremely raw.

But in the outpouring of words of concern and condemnation that we've already heard, and will hear much more of in the days ahead, there are four words we will not hear nearly enough: "We don't know yet."

We don't yet know whether the perpetrator, Omar Mateen, was an Islamic terrorist or just a disturbed person with a gun - and no, his name and religion aren't sufficient to answer the question. We don't know whether he was a member of Islamic State, or whether that group was involved in planning this crime, or is just trying to take credit.

We don't yet know whether tighter gun laws would have stopped him in this particular instance, no matter how much we might believe they're appropriate in general. Nor have we yet understood his ex-wife's allegations of abuse and mental instability.

America's legal system, like ours, treats crimes resulting from mental instability differently - we don't yet know whether that's a factor here.

Nor do we know the significance of Mateen's choice of a gay nightclub. It certainly bears the appearance of a homophobic hate crime, but we simply don't know why he



targeted Pulse in particular.

We will come to know all of these things in the days and weeks ahead, while investigators do their job and reporters follow up leads. Already, the picture is far clearer now than when the news broke. But so many of us don't bother waiting for the spaces in these stories to be filled in with facts, and instead fill them in with assumptions.

Most prominently, Donald Trump followed what has become a familiar pattern of making other people's tragedies about him: Well, he's certainly right that we must be smart. And the smarter choice was to say what president Obama did: "We are still learning all the facts. This is

an open investigation. We've reached no definitive judgment on the precise motivations of the killer."

Trump has condemned this response as weakness - but a Commander-in-Chief who rushes to judgement and stirs up division is infinitely more dangerous than gasbags on Twitter doing the same thing.

That said, even president Obama couldn't resist tying the story into his broader campaign for tougher gun laws, saying that:

"This massacre is therefore a further reminder of how easy it is for someone to get their hands on a weapon that lets them shoot people ... We have to decide if that's the kind of country we want to be. And to actively do

nothing is a decision as well."

I was guilty of making this link too, assuming (admittedly with no little justification, since there have been 133 mass shootings in the US this year already) while tweeting about Orlando that this was another story about lax gun laws. I would have done well to remember that France has far tougher gun laws, but that this hasn't prevented several mass shootings with confirmed terrorist motives in the past 18 months.

I'm not arguing that we should not reach judgements and conclusions on stories like Orlando. We should, and we should be unsparing in punishing those who deserve it, and ever more vigilant in an attempt to pre-

vent future attacks like this, as difficult as that currently seems to be.

But amid all the rhetoric about keeping us safe and protecting our way of life and how this is an attack on all of us, it needs to be remembered that in order to protect ourselves, we need to properly understand what we need to be protected from, and how such protection can be achieved.

We need to protect ourselves from real threats, not politically or ideologically convenient bogeymen. The most telling conclusion from this tragedy may end up being entirely unrelated to terrorism or Islam, but instead relate to Mateen's domestic abuse, and the red flag that this should have constituted.

We should be particularly aware of this issue in Australia, where the Sydney siege showed us that what initially can seem like a carefully-planned terrorist conspiracy can ultimately be the actions of a disturbed "lone wolf". The same issues of an IS wannabe, mental health, domestic abuse and how law enforcement agencies deal with someone who's already on their books have also been important in drawing conclusions from that tragedy.

But while we wait to understand the hideous crime that's been committed in Orlando, there is one area where we should not hesitate to rush in. Expressing sympathy for the victims and their families, and for the broader LGBTI community that feels less safe today, are where our immediate reactions can appropriately be directed.

We should also spare a thought for the countless millions of Muslims who will feel sympathy for the victims of this horrific crime, and who may themselves have been made less safe by this man's actions.

But while we can all share in the sentiment that this must not happen again, we need to remember that we don't yet entirely understand what has happened, or why. Preventing another Orlando requires us to wait for the answers to those questions.

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