

Annulling lease on Khaleda Zia's residence

It will likely make politics volatile

THE government's sudden action in cancelling the lease on Begum Khaleda Zia's cantonment residence took us by surprise as it did everyone else. Coming only a few days after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appealed to the Leader of the Opposition, in the Jatiyo Sangsad, to vacate her home, which was gifted by the Sattar government in 1981, the move was truly precipitate. And it was because the authorities do not appear to have waited for a response from Begum Zia to the appeal. Are we now to believe that the decision to have the former prime minister evicted from her house had already been taken and the appeal to her actually amounted to little? Even if the government had legal rights to take such action, there are standard procedures that need to be employed in handling such situations. The most basic one is for the government, through the appropriate department (in this case the cantonment board), to have served notice upon Begum Zia and given her time to respond. Had there been no response, the authorities could have gone ahead with appropriate action, including the one it has taken now.

The government has been stating that Begum Zia and her family have been violating the provisions of the lease agreement reached in the early 1980s. If so, they should have been apprised, in proper fashion, of the specific violations of rules that they have allegedly committed. If Begum Zia has been carrying on politics from her residence, which is in a sensitive area as the cantonment, and if her activities have been posing a threat to the security of the cantonment, she ought to have been apprised of such details formally. Clearly, however, no such intimation was made to her. The fact that the Leader of the Opposition, like every other citizen of Bangladesh, is entitled to due process, has conveniently been overlooked. In this context, the circumstances in which the residence was allotted to Begum Zia are to be recalled. They were not exactly defensible circumstances. Neither is the step now being taken to get it back from her. In our view, both the moves were made on dubious premises. One may note that this newspaper had appealed to Begum Zia after she served her first term as PM to vacate the house, and return it to the State, now that her two sons were adults and she herself was no more a helpless widow needing to live on state's dole. That appeal was ignored.

While on the subject, we must ask if the cabinet has nothing more serious than spending time on whether the Leader of the Opposition can or cannot stay in the house that has to all intents and purposes been hers for twenty-eight years. Do the Prime Minister and her colleagues honestly think that it is an issue before which all other issues -- national security, the economy, politics -- dwindle in significance? Judging by the way this issue has been handled, we unfortunately cannot but conclude that it was guided by narrow political considerations laced with feelings of the personal. Legalities notwithstanding, the move points to the malafide intentions of those behind it. It denigrates the interests of the country and harms its image. It definitely belies the Prime Minister's promise of a change in our political culture.

Let this practice of giving away state property come to an end. And let it be a lesson for everyone that such favours in the end cause much humiliation for those who hold on to them. We fear that the latest action can only exacerbate our already volatile politics.

New upazila law

It whips up further controversy

NOT even four-day old, the enactment of the Upazila Parishad Bill is being assailed in such a convincing manner with such outpourings of arguments that it is easily the ruling party's most controversial legislation to-date. This has already driven a wedge between the large community of elected Upazila Parishad office bearers and the large body of MPs giving rise to a conflict of stakes issue. The very working of the Upazila Parishad may have got off to an inauspicious start.

Through the battle that has ensued, detractors are coming out with new ammunition: the amended Upazila Parishad Act militates with the AL's election manifesto. The relevant portion of the manifesto reads, "Local governments of districts and upazilas will be made self-reliant and autonomous and they will play pivotal roles in local development". But the provisions of the new law stop the elected parishads from being self-reliant and autonomous in functioning as the lawmakers have a controlling role over them. It is actually a sad commentary on the government's failure to defend a cabinet decision that sought to keep the MPs from taking a role in the Upazila Parishad. The ruling party leadership should have held its ground against the pressure of MPs.

The second incongruity as far as the application of the law goes relates to the fact that more than hundred upazilas comprising areas falling in two parliamentary constituencies, such upazilas might get two lawmakers as advisers with a greater degree of conflict of interests being presaged.

The fallout should force an introspection into the ruling party leadership so that it takes a pause and think of putting the law on test. It needs to be reviewed, if not immediately, at least in the near future, on the basis of how it has worked. For, we are certain that with the veto power vesting in the MPs there is bound to be a debilitating conflict between the two sets of elected public representatives with both lawmaking and local government functioning suffering in the process.

R-e-s-p-e-c-t

But they are very far from that. They only appear trivial to us because we take them for granted. Being able to walk down the street without being harassed is only a trivial concern for someone who does not have to suffer it.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

MEN in Bangladesh take an awful lot for granted. We take it for granted that we can walk down the street without harassment. We take it for granted that we can come and go late into the night. We take it for granted that we can dress pretty much as we please. We take it for granted that we can travel alone without fear for our safety.

Most men never think for a moment what it must be like to not be able to take such simple freedoms for granted, and what it must be like to have to negotiate, every minute of every single day, the boundaries of what one is able to do or say, to constantly negotiate the very parameters of one's existence.

When we talk about women's rights and women's equality, it is not merely a question of women's education, women's employment, women's health, etc.

These are all, without doubt, absolutely crucial issues, and the advances made in these areas stand as an achievement the nation can rightfully be proud of, even though there remains so much room for improvement.

But more than these macro-issues, what I would like to focus on today is, for want of a better word, the micro-issues. These are the issues that too many men dismiss as somehow trivial or unimportant.

But they are very far from that. They only appear trivial to us because we take them for granted. Being able to walk down the street without being harassed is only a trivial concern for someone who does not

have to suffer it.

What each one of us needs to look at very critically is his (or, for that matter, her) own complicity in the hostile environment that exists for women and what steps each one of us can take to make things better.

Ultimately, it comes down to us, to society, to our attitudes and assumptions. The attitude that accepts that it is appropriate to have dress codes for women, but not for men. The attitude that accepts that it is inappropriate for women to smoke in public, but not for men. The attitude that accepts that it is considered impermissible for women to live alone, but not for men.

These double standards and unspoken assumptions and prejudices that permeate our society are the problems, and a national conversation on the issue is long overdue.

Our entire society is saturated, from top to bottom, with corrosive and toxic attitudes that we need to examine and discuss and question and ultimately move beyond.

We may say: I don't think that way. But perhaps unwittingly we do contribute to the perpetuation of such attitudes. We need to stand up. We need to challenge others. It is not enough to not harass, we need to stand up and challenge those who do or those who condone it. It is not enough to say that we believe in women's rights and equality and empowerment. When we hear a comment or see someone do something that demeans women or dismisses them, we need to challenge it.

Because unspoken complicity is how attitudes and assumptions are formed and harden into conventional wisdom and



Our society has double standards for men and women.

culture. And that is the problem: the attitudes, the assumptions, the culture we have created.

This is why I think that the *Ey Poth Amadero* (The Road is Also Ours) walk tomorrow is such a good idea. It focuses on one very simple right, but the implications of that one right and what the denial of it means for our society and the women who live in it are immense.

It is not just about employment and education. It is about simple respect and dignity. If we were to acknowledge the dignity deficit that exists in our society for women, and ensure that women are

afforded the same respect and dignity that men are, then everything else would fall into place.

We like to think that in our culture we do respect women, but the simple truth of the matter is that, as a society, we do not. The evidence of this disrespect is all around us, but one way we can work to change things is by extending to women the simple freedom to walk the streets without harassment. It's a worthy goal and I hope that you will all support it.

Zafar Sobhan is Editor, Editorial & Op-Ed, The Daily Star. Please come join the Orishipal-organised Ey Poth Amadero walk starting at 4 pm in front of the National Museum on April 11.

An eviction with conviction

Whether Khaleda Zia stays in that house or gets thrown out of it won't add a kilowatt of electricity to the national grid. It won't bring fresh and clean water to the taps in our kitchens and bathrooms.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

I was writing about the Truth Commission this week until I saw the breaking news on television. The cabinet, in a momentous decision on Wednesday, cancelled the lease of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's cantonment residence. Politics is drifting again.

Frankly, nobody should get any abrupt value in this bankrupt decision. By no means could this be the most important thing for this country right now. We are still reeling from the tragedy of BDR massacre and the shockwaves of the global economic catastrophe. We are still eagerly waiting for the report of BDR investigation and keeping our fingers crossed that the garments industry and our workers abroad are spared by the brunt of financial meltdown.

It's late in the day in terms of history that the cabinet should find the lease of Khaleda's house illegal at this point of time. Perhaps it's early in the term of this government that it should take that finding to its

logical conclusion. It could wait for some more time. What is the big deal if 28 years went on 29? At least that could have given us some respite to

cut through the clutter and get ready for a showdown.

Whether Khaleda Zia stays in that house or gets thrown out of it won't add a kilowatt of electricity to the national grid. It won't bring fresh and clean water to the taps in our kitchens and bathrooms. The problem is whether it will get the leader out of her house or not, it will surely bring her supporters out of their homes to take to the streets in protest.

If we go by history, then a spark becomes flame and a voice becomes chorus too soon in politics. Not to say that this country can't afford a confrontation right now. Understood, the ruling party is buoyant after its landslide victory. After all, a three-fourth majority isn't a joke.

But how does it help to start a new controversy on the heels of another? Yes, we want to give homes to the families of our

fallen heroes. But why do we have to evict someone from her home to make space for others? Couldn't we find another vacant lot anywhere in this town to build houses on so that those families could be accommodated?

Not to say that Khaleda Zia shouldn't be evicted if her stay is illegal. Not to say that the cabinet of one regime can't override the executive order of another. I am sure there will be a prolonged legal battle where legal minds are going to do threadbare analysis of this case. The cabinet decision is unlikely to go unchallenged.

Meanwhile, it's likely to give BNP a rallying cry, maybe public sympathy to some extent. Politics will heat up, and we would see some clashes on the streets as precursor to wider protests. Instead of healing old wounds, it's likely to open fresh ones.

One remembers how BNP had reacted when the parliament allotted houses to the present prime minister and her sister in 2001. One remembers the brutal attack on her rally on August 21, 2004, which killed many party workers although she narrowly escaped. The fruit of revenge is always sweet, but, as one American politician said, we can't go ahead if we are getting even.

Still, politics in this country is all about getting even. And I can understand it. Tit for tat is the name of the game. Not a problem,

passion runs on passion if that's what it takes to bring satisfaction. If one is tormented, it's only natural that one would look for one's chance to torment the tormentor. It takes a very large person to resist the temptation of revenge.

But the timing is of essence here. A lot of people on both sides of the political divide are going to scratch their heads if the misery of the bereaved families has been used for political gain. Khaleda Zia may or may not lose that house on 6, Shaheed Mainul Road. If she does and when apartments are built on that land, will the new owners feel settled down?

Not if they think they are going to get their apartments under the same consideration, which got Khaleda the house. Should they choose to enter politics, another cabinet can always meet to cancel the allotment and ask them to vacate their apartments. The families of martyred officers will go to a shelter, not to a home. If Khaleda is thrown out of that house, these families should be twice warned.

Confucius has cautioned that 'before someone embarks on a journey of revenge, he should dig two graves. It's just a matter of time, five years to be precise in political rotation.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a columnist for The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

The message of the resurrection

The incarnation of Jesus had in view both his cross and the resurrection. Without bearing the cross he could not have the glory of the resurrection. We, as his followers, also need to bear our own crosses so that we may enjoy a glorious life.

MARTIN ADHIKARY

GOD showed His love for mankind in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Bible declares: "God is love" (1 John 4:16). Apostle John also wrote: "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (The Gospel According to John 3:16).

God manifested His unfolding and outreaching love to Mankind, who fell short of His standard because of sin in His Son, Jesus Christ, who, in his grace gave up his sinless life as the ransom-price. He sacrificed his righteous and sinless life on the Cross; that was how he fulfilled the demand of God on the issue of sin.

Christ paid the price for our salvation from the bondage of sin so that we may be closer to God and other people. Evangelist

John challenged followers of Christ: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16).

Christ died the death of great ignominy, pain and humiliation. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed ..." These are eloquent words from God's wordsmith Isaiah, prophesying about the kind of death Jesus as God's Righteous Servant would endure in the fullness of time.

The Mosaic Law for Levitical sacrifice in the Old Testament had it that animals had to be without any blemish in order to be sacrificed. Jesus, being born of the Virgin Mary and the sinless Son of God, fulfilled that condition and as such he bore the punishment that was due for man.

As we meditate upon the Cross of Calvary on Good Friday we need to understand the spiritual implication of Christ's suffering and death for us in our day-to-day lives. We are to believe in Christ and follow his footsteps and serve others in love.

Christ is a supreme example and the greatest teacher for this. We cannot avoid our responsibilities to other people. The very fact of Christ's incarnation and unjust sufferings for our salvation points us to a spirituality that is deeply related to our real life issues, a holistic spirituality touching every aspect of our lives.

In him, the eternal divine Word became flesh and dwelt among us and gave a new and dignifying meaning of human life as created in the likeness of God. We are challenged to bear our own crosses, which we do for serving others in humility and selfless love and compassion.

We live in a world full of people giving lip-service to religious instructions and of commercialisation and political use of religions that render people into forces of hatred and jealousy. We have many religious faiths and traditions, but not enough love; many preachers of doctrines but no practitioners of the teachings.

This was the situation when Jesus lived. All that he said and did disturbed the status

quo and the selfish peace of the people who ruled, led, taught and exploited others.

Almighty God raised his Son from the dead. This was to vindicate him, who was innocent yet killed by unrighteous men, and to show that he was God's Son. The apostle Paul said: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Christ paid the penalty for human sin and man was acquitted. This new life is to be lived in faith and trust in his transforming power and spirit. Without the belief in Christ's resurrection there is no Christianity.

The incarnation of Jesus had in view both his cross and the resurrection. Without bearing the cross he could not have the glory of the resurrection. We, as his followers, also need to bear our own crosses so that we may enjoy a glorious life. In resurrection, Christ has destroyed the power of sin and death.

The more we can internalise the message of the cross and resurrection of Christ the more we can become true to ourselves as God's supreme creation.

Reverend Martin Adhikary is a Christian theology teacher.