

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 17, 2016

Workers Welfare Associations

Keep ILO Convention in mind

THE government's approval of a draft law that allows workers to form a 'Workers Welfare Association' in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) would be laudable but for the confusion associated with the move. While the government's stance is that such an association would work like a trade union, labour rights leaders are of a different opinion. As far as workers are concerned, these two are not the same thing, and to say so would be misleading.

It seems that the draft law is a compromise to cater to the needs of the rights groups as well as the investors who have resisted such provisions. According to the Bangladesh EPZ Act 2010, trade unions are not allowed in EPZs which is possibly why the government has chosen to approve of a 'workers welfare association' that it says will incorporate the rights guaranteed in a trade union and will work as the central bargaining agent for the workers.

However, we feel that such an arrangement related to the welfare of the workers should have been in place long before now. It is important that we fulfill all the conditions stipulated by international convention, including ensuring the rights of workers as stipulated by the ILO Convention which Bangladesh has signed. This includes the freedom of association and right to collective bargaining which are the basic tenets of a trade union.

There is no doubt that the workers welfare association will bring a big improvement in working conditions and workers benefits. The fear expressed by worker rights activists, however, that the current draft law provisions will be passed off as the right to form trade unions, should be allayed by the government.

ATM fraud alarming

Install safety measures

ACCORDING to information released by affected banks and the probe committee of the central bank, a cyber crime ring has successfully collected information of 200 card holders and skimmed off Tk 2.5 million from four booths over the last one week. Tracking down the criminals, which include foreigners, is the job of law enforcers, but we are more concerned with why banks have not taken measures to protect their clients from such fraudulent practices. This is more so since most account holders in the urban centres now use ATM facilities to make withdrawals and with about 15 to 20 crore transactions per day using debit and credit cards, it is high time banks install countermeasures to protect against such financial crimes. As per a directive of the Bangladesh Bank (BB), all banks are subject to installing anti-skimming devices in their ATM booths over the next one month.

The use of smart cards (debit & credit) is now a way of life for urban citizens. Given the ease of use and convenience, we simply cannot afford to have any lapses in security. There are some 8.5 million such cards in circulation and some banks have already introduced microchip based cards which acts to protect card holders from precisely this sort of cyber crime. As the technology is there to protect against skimming, there is no excuse not to use it. Now that a circular has been issued by the BB, it is up to the banking sector to respond swiftly to protect their clients from financial scams within the stipulated timeframe.

COMMENTS

"5 of a family killed in Mymensingh road crash"

(February 15, 2016)

Fahim Rahman Tonmy

It's a matter of great sorrow that every day so many people die in road crashes but the government is doing very little about this issue.

Mustaqeem Asad

Poorly trained and unlicensed drivers kill people on the road. It has to stop.

It's time for others to own up

C R ABRAR

IT all began with the candid self-criticism of the editor of an English daily that was celebrating its silver jubilee. Reflecting on his own experiences as the editor, at one point he regretted his decision in no uncertain terms to publish without independent verification reports on political leaders based on information provided by the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) following the 1/11 political changeover in 2007.

This rare feat of introspection is most welcomed. However, some, linked with the ruling party, have been up in arms. Effigies of the editor were burnt, defamation and sedition cases were filed in different parts of the country, and some members of the ruling party and its alliance partners launched virulent assaults against him on the floors of the National Parliament. One is baffled at this turn of events. The editor's statement was indeed inspirational in a political culture where critical self-assessment of actions by public figures and institutions is virtually non-existent. In this context, the reaction of the critics raises some interesting points.

Firstly, the detractors have claimed that the editor was in league with the military junta that ended the controversial Iajuddin chapter of the caretaker government (CTG). They may wish to look into the news reports to identify the political parties that welcomed the new government, the political dignitaries who extended their blessings to the regime by attending its swearing-in ceremony and the leaders who promised to indemnify all decisions and actions of that government now being presented

as "illegal".

Secondly, the editor has been charged for publishing unsubstantiated reports. So far there has not been any proof that substantiate whether the misdemeanours reported were genuine or not. After assuming power, instead of contesting the charges following due legal process, the AL government, through an executive decision, decided to drop charges against its leaders and activists. This was in contrast to cases

why the outraged members and supporters of the ruling alliance have not uttered a single word against the source - the DGFI. Should not the question be asked if the DGFI is at all legally mandated to meddle in civil-political matters, and if so, did the agency act under the purview of the law to pass on selected information on political leaders that were extracted through 'confessions' under dubious circumstances? Moreover, no quarter has

positions, perks and privileges for a long time, after the AL assumed power. The question as to why a government that came into power through such massive popular mandate in 2011 shied away in prosecuting members of the military junta and their civilian associates who caused so much hardship for so many people also remains unanswered.

Mahfuz Anam had the forthrightness to own his editorial misjudgment and appears to be paying an undue price for it. The editor has set a rare example of what we expect of a person holding such a position. It takes immense courage to admit one's shortcomings in public, particularly in a divided polity where partisan passion rules over reason. The fierce reaction that his 'admission' generated among the ruling quarters and their intellectual bandwagon gives the impression that the latter stands on a higher moral ground, one that Anam has failed to match. However, if one delves deep into the conduct of the major political parties and public intellectuals, umpteen number of cases can be cited of their betrayal of public trust and undermining of the spirit of the War of Liberation.

The Daily Star saga has once again laid bare the intolerance that exists among the ruling elite about freedom of expression and the tenuous nature of fundamental freedoms that the people of Bangladesh enjoy. One hopes that public figures and entities have a better appreciation of the need for explaining their conduct to the masses, and also have the courage to own up to the policies they pursue.

The writer teaches International Relations at the University of Dhaka. He writes and researches on migration and rights issues.

Mahfuz Anam had the forthrightness to own his editorial misjudgment and appears to be paying an undue price for it. The editor has set a rare example of what we expect of a person holding such a position. It takes immense courage to admit one's shortcomings in public, particularly in a divided polity where partisan passion rules over reason.

lodged against the BNP and its allies. Thus, one may surmise that in the eyes of the present government, the charges of corruption - at least those laid against its opponents - by the military-led government, were genuine. In public perception, such double standards have been nothing less than brazen abuse of executive power.

Thirdly, while the editor has been made a target for being the conduit of 'mis-information', there is no outcry against those who generated and fed the media such information. One wonders

raised any voice regarding how some media - both print and electronic - continue to carry reports fed by the RAB, police and other agencies based on 'confessions' of alleged criminals without giving any opportunity to the victims or their family members to narrate their version of the story.

Fourthly, perhaps the time has come to not only ask the ruling alliance why they have shunned the demand to put the perpetrators of 1/11 on the dock, but also question why a few of its principal protagonists were rewarded with

US politics at a crossroads

The real political challenge: Congress at a standstill

ASHAQUE SWAPAN

THE US Congress, made up of the Senate and the House, is where the real power lies. It controls the government's purse-strings and makes the laws.

Congress has never been a haven of congeniality. Different parties, constituencies and interests have always slugged it out, using means both fair and foul. But in the end, lawmakers found a way to work out their differences and pass laws to govern the nation.

The past few years have been a different story. The government was shut down in October 2013 for two weeks over Conservative anger at Obamacare. Raising the debt ceiling, a routine measure to pay government bills, has become a political football, with House conservatives threatening to refuse to allow it if their demands are not met. In 2011, their threat led credit-rating agency Standard & Poor's to downgrade the credit rating of the United States government for the first time in the country's history.

For the outgoing speaker of the US House of Representatives, it was a nightmare.

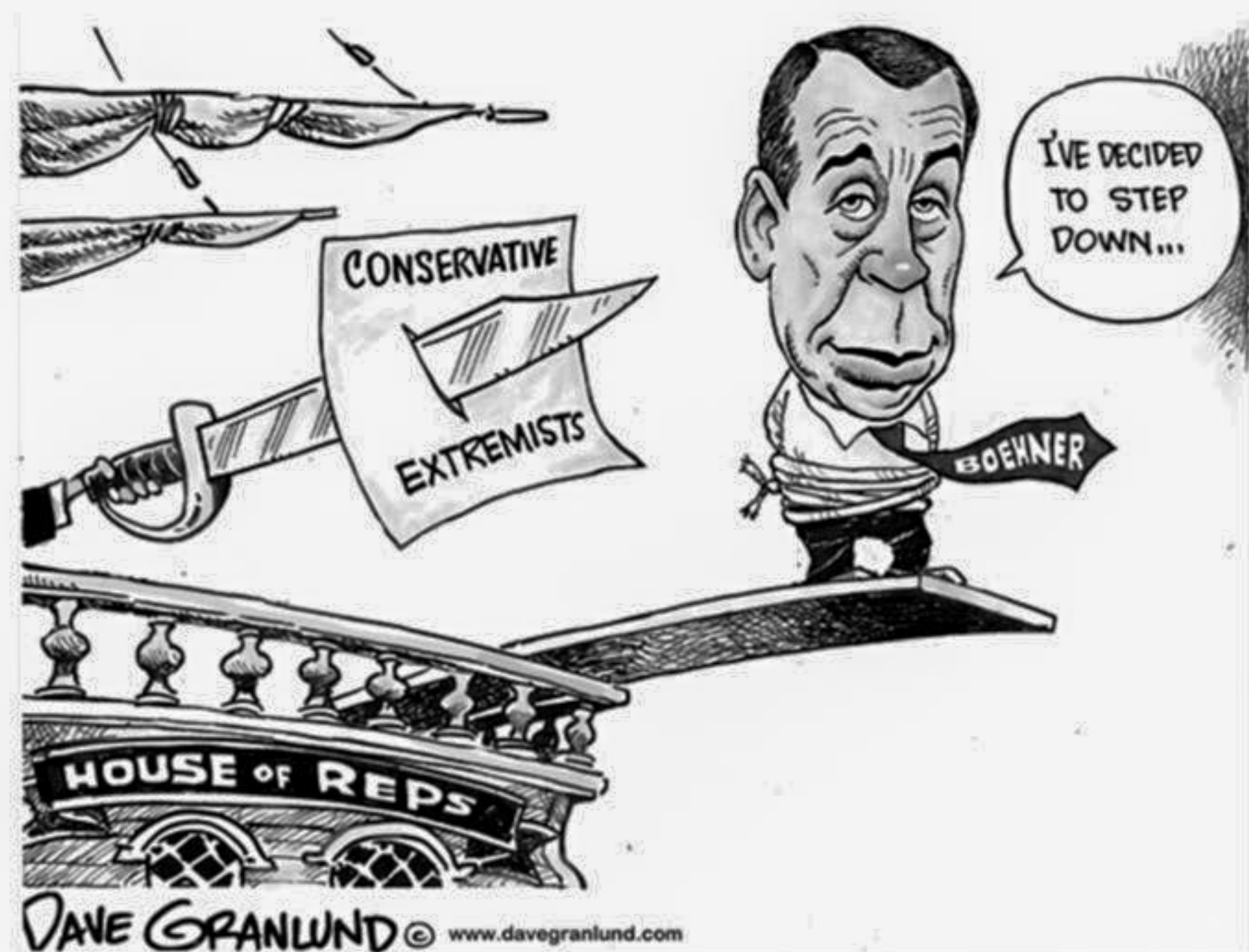
John Boehner, an Ohio Republican, has impeccable Conservative credentials. He was a lieutenant of Newt Gingrich, the firebrand Republican who led his party to a House majority for the first time in four decades, in 1995.

Boehner became House Speaker following the Republican takeover of the House in 2010.

This was a perfect perch, you would think, for Boehner to crown his tenure with grand legislative success. Instead, his spell as Speaker was one of almost unmitigated misery.

But here's the curious thing. Boehner's enemies were not Democrats in the House. In fact, in a bizarre twist of fate, he was obliged to seek Democratic support repeatedly to pass important legislation because he couldn't muster enough Republican votes.

Boehner's enemies were hard-line



Conservatives who see any attempt to compromise as heresy, whose ideological litmus tests are impossible to reconcile with governance at a national level where both Democratic and Republican interests must be accommodated.

This year, in October, he quit in disgust. Something has happened to the Republican Party that has brought Congress to a standstill.

Political scientists Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein say that the Republican Party has made an extreme turn to the Right.

"We have been studying Washington politics and Congress for more than 40 years, and never have we seen them this dysfunctional," Mann and Ornstein wrote in The Washington Post in 2012. "In our past writings, we have criticized both parties when we believed it was warranted. Today, however, we have no choice but to acknowledge that the core of the problem lies with the Republican Party."

"The GOP has become an insurgent outlier in American politics. It is ideologically extreme; scornful of

conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

The analysts point out to several factors as leading to Republican radicalisation over the decades, but single out firebrand Republican leader Newt Gingrich for playing a key role.

Ever since he was elected to Congress in 1979, Gingrich built his campaign for Republican ascendancy on a strident message of Washington corruption and a take-no-prisoners attitude of Conservative ideological purity. The strategy paid handsome dividends over the years, leading to his spectacular rise as Speaker of the House in 1995.

But in retrospect, it may have worked a little too well.

The anti-establishment fury in the grassroots that Gingrich and his fellow-travellers unleashed has turned inward. Yesterday's anti-establishment heroes can become today's villains.

Take the case of Eric Cantor, the second-ranked Republican in the House

until his departure in 2014.

In 2009, when grassroots (and overwhelmingly non-college white) anger against Obama exploded into the Tea Party movement, Cantor was one of its heroes, and Republicans rode on its wave to win the House in 2010.

In 2011, in keeping with his Tea Party persona, Cantor scuttled a budget deal worked out by Boehner and Obama.

"Cantor, more than any other politician, helped create the series of fiscal crises that have gripped Washington since Election Day (in 2012)," Ryan Lizza wrote in a profile of Cantor in The New Yorker.

Yet by 2014, Cantor was forced out of Congress, ironically enough, for not being Conservative enough. He was handed a shock defeat in a Republican primary by a virtual unknown, David Brat, whom he outspent \$5 million to \$122,000, Reuters said in a report.

The Republican Party in Congress is now effectively divided into two camps. There is the party establishment and then there is the camp that is fuelled by an angry grassroots group that wants its demands met, especially after 2014, when Republicans gained control of both houses.

"Even with the GOP controlling the House and Senate, Conservative activists fume at the perceived failure of Republican leaders in Washington to achieve their list of demands, from a full repeal of the president's 2010 health-care law to blocking the nuclear deal with Iran and the elimination of federal funding for Planned Parenthood," The Wall Street Journal reports.

The irony for Republicans is that the source of their solid majority in the House is also the reason why they find it so hard to govern, making them vulnerable in the presidential race of 2016: It depends on a seething grassroots base of non-college whites whose demands are too extreme to be accommodated in divided government, yet who get angrier as their demands continue to be unfulfilled.

The writer is an Atlanta (US) based freelance journalist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Bangladesh supports Palestine's just cause

On February 14, 2016, the honourable president of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas along with his delegation made a two-hour stopover in Bangladesh on his tour of three other Asian countries. He expressed his gratitude to Bangladesh for its continued support for Palestine and termed it an unflinching proponent of his people's just cause. Our message to Mr Abbas is that the freedom loving people of Bangladesh will always support the Palestinian cause.

Hashem Mia
Barisal

Please stop the maniacs

The government must take necessary steps to curb the number of road accidents in the country so that the citizens can roam around the country without the fear of being killed by reckless driving. The authorities must follow proper procedures and rules before issuing driving licenses to bus and truck drivers. And the government must not bow down to the illegal demands of the truck and bus owners' unions in order to enact and execute tougher traffic laws.

The law enforcement agencies must nab the drivers who leave the scene of accidents and punish them under the prevailing laws. If the current traffic laws are inadequate or outdated, the government must enact new laws to punish the negligent and careless drivers. We do not want to see any more deaths due to "road accidents".

Nawfal Taulkdhur
USA

"Let the truth speak for itself"

Congratulations to Mr. Mozammel H. Khan for his well-written and timely piece under the above caption published in The Daily Star on February 6, 2016. During the last caretaker government, The Daily Star was courageous enough to criticise the political speech delivered by the former Chief of Army Staff. Recently, The Daily Star editor Mr Mahfuz Anam also showed extraordinary courage by admitting that it was his "biggest mistake" as an editor to run corruption stories against Sheikh Hasina on the basis of unsubstantiated information. Mr. Anam deserves our appreciation and respect for his boldness. It is very sad that he is being subjected to harassment.

M. Mufakharul Islam
Dhaka University

