

## No Easy Answers to Energy Questions

ONE US Senator once said, "Everybody's ignorant — only about different things." Most Americans, according to him, were blissfully ignorant about what lay behind their gallon of gasoline or oil because it had always been abundant and cheap. There had been little reason to ask any question until the scenario dramatically changed in the mid-1970s.

Complexity of the oil industry is such that there are no quick and easy answers to many of the questions we want answered now. It is also why there are so many misconceptions.

Our most difficult problem is to try and understand the role that prices and profits play in providing incentives and capital to accomplish new exploration targets on the scale necessary to obtain further hydrocarbon prospects.

When the prices of oil soared in the mid-1970s, due to OPEC, major international oil companies announced record net profit increases in 1974. While oil-producing countries made billions of dollars between 1974 and 75, oil companies' profits also soared. Losers were the consuming nations. Tidal waves of capital for exploration and development of gas fields also became too strong to breast.

When the energy crisis hit the front page of the leading newspapers in the industrially developed world, it became obvious that we, too, needed to know a few things: the size of IOCs' business, their way of working and its impact on our economy. The first and foremost task was to address these issues in a comprehensive manner. So, in 1974, the government initiated an Energy Study with the assistance of the ADB and UNDP. An energy strategy for implementation of projects was formulated. But, the planners found out soon, for a workable energy policy and legislation to implement it, understanding its economics as well as certain controversial issues related to it was crucial. The process, unfortunately, lost its way in the political turmoil brought about by the military coup of August 15, 1975.

Quite a few reasons stand in the way of resolution of our energy problems in the near future. We do not do our homework right and, therefore, rely on the foolhardy advice and recommendations from the foreign consultants. Our own professionals, engaged in different organisations, prefer to

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by Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal

spend most of their time and talent to please their bosses, who, in their turn, are driven by the fear of losing their positions acquired with political blessings. Professionalism is on the wane. Worse still, objectivity is becoming irrelevant. Consequently, many of us tend to embroider the past that seldom makes meaningful impact in building a forward-looking society.

Many professionals, I am certain, can thoroughly define our energy problems, but due to undue influence of foreign consultants, under donor-funded studies, the inevitable continued to happen. There is also no denying the fact that our experts know that we are not so lucky even amongst developing countries in this region. Natural gas, that too in abundance, is the only available commercial energy resource and the hydro-potential is very limited. The technological and economic problems related to exploration for and exploitation of new energy sources such as solar and wind power have not yet been solved in our country mainly because there is no institutional support from the government for development of new and renewable resources. Our real energy problem, I dare say, is immediate and short-term now, without undermining the long-term goals. Moreover, the issues related to energy face undue interference, particularly in the decision-making process. The major problem lies there. Indeed our energy problems did not develop overnight and I presume there were no conspiracies to create shortages. In fact, our project implementation activities have been very slow and the processes are being complicated by the transaction costs and the bureaucratic tangles.

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Bangladesh been compelled to import primary energy (like oil and coal) for generation of electricity, the country's balance of payments would have been disastrous by now. Of the present per day generation of electricity about 2400-2500 megawatt (on average, the highest so far being only 2650 Megawatt against an installed capacity of about 3680 Megawatt), almost 85 per cent or over 200 MW is gas fed. The contribution by gas has led to huge saving brought about in the country's oil import bill. Without gas, the oil import bill would have been at least four times higher than it is today.

It must also be noted with caution that natural gas, when entirely depleted, would lead the country to a serious energy supply problem. In 1971, consumption of gas was hardly 50 million cubic feet (MMCF) per day. Now it is almost 950 MMCF, i.e. roughly 18 times higher. Projection for gas use is even higher. So, the country's natural gas has been and will continue to be of enormous development value. The international oil companies (IOCs) are now operating alongside Petrobangla/BAPEX and investing in exploration and development of gas in the country.

But the IOCs cost, both capital and operating, has so far been exceedingly high. It is not unlikely to presume that instead of cost-cutting and cost control, IOC expenditures are being inflated as has already been observed while scrutinising the claims of Scimitar's Jalalabad exploration. Cairn's (now Shell) Sangu exploration and development, and Occidental's (now UNOCAL) exploration accounts. Unfortunately, Petrobangla does not possess the capability to monitor expenditures being incurred by the IOCs. It simply does not have adequate know-how, either financial or technical, nor are making any serious effort to improve its in-house capability, nor even hiring specialist companies to monitor and audit the ledgers, bills and books of accounts. Consequently, the IOCs are merrily continuing to gild their expenditures, much to

the discomfort of Petrobangla and the government.

Today, some of the senior-most bureaucrats would hopefully recollect the influx of Arab students in the mid-1970s in the US educational institutions. Those trained personnel from the Arab countries, Malaysia and Indonesia occupied the driving seat of energy-related organisations, even private companies in the Middle East and South East Asian countries respectively. The first six production sharing contracts (PSCs) in the mid 1970s for off-shore oil exploration in six blocks provided an annual budget of one million US dollars by each IOC for training of Petrobangla and government officials connected even remotely with the country's energy sector. Yet, it is alleged that, full advantage of the non-refundable training fund under PSC was not fully availed then and is not being availed even now, rather the officials use this fund for frequent visits abroad. It is also deplorable that Petrobangla's recruitment of fresh graduates from the universities have almost come to a standstill over the previous several years, let alone training them. Unless some serious effort is made to upgrade the capacity of personnel involved in the energy fields, the political and economic targets of the country would remain unfulfilled.

Sometimes back, in the early 1990s, I read a story that illustrates an important point about the present day energy problem in our country. Creator of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, while in Paris, one day called a taxi, threw in his suitcase and got in. Before he could say a word the driver asked, "Where to, Mr Conan Doyle?" The surprised author said, "You recognised me?" "No," the driver replied, "I've never seen you or your photograph."

Then how do you know I'm Conan Doyle?" "Well," the driver said, "I read in the paper that you were vacationing in the south. I noticed you arrived on a train from Marseilles; you have a tan that comes from spending a week or more in the sun; from the inkspot on your middle finger I deduced you were a writer; you have the keen look of a medical man; and the cut of your clothes is English. Putting all together, I felt surely you must be Sir Arthur Conan Doyle."

Sir Doyle was amazed. "From the way you recognised me from all these small observations, you yourself are the equal to Sherlock Holmes."

"There is one more thing," said the driver.

"What is that?" Conan Doyle asked.

"Your name is printed on your suitcase."

As regards our energy problems, unless they are clearly spelled out, we don't see them coming, even if there are definitive clues. In retrospect, we can see now what should have been deduced earlier. We now have to think, plan and act to avert more serious consequences. One of our greatest weaknesses is complacency. Once the headlines and the A-B gas pipeline problems were over in Petrobangla in 1998, and some new power plants came into operation, there has been a growing tendency to believe that we don't have gas supply problem or electricity problem — that the name on the suitcase is somebody else's!

There may be no such thing as a crisis to end all crisis, but at least the dropping of the energy bomb has opened our eyes to see how connected everything is from the ankle to the neck. Unfortunately, we have not been able to secure the correct roadmap as yet. Nonetheless, there are always stories behind the scenes. The situations that led to the dropping of energy bomb passed through crisis, intrigues and dramatic incidents where allegedly the international oil companies were involved.

For instance, soon after Iran's Prime Minister Dr Mosaddegh nationalised oil operations, in came back-door intrigues, riots, bloodships by a

group of wrestlers and butchers with open sword in the streets of Tehran that eventually led to his ouster. The king, Reza Shah Pahlavi, had already fled the country. Much later it became a public knowledge that CIA had been directly involved in the machination (*The Invisible Government* by David Wiser).

Meanwhile, the major oil companies suffered a setback in Iraq, the fourth largest Middle East oil producing country. General Abdul Karim Kassem took over the government through a military coup and he reversed the pro-western policy in oil production and marketing. He wanted the Iraq Petroleum Company, with its British, French and American ownership to relinquish the majority of the area of its monopoly oil concession. But, that began the longest deadlock in the history of the oil industry. The oil companies and their governments were not sitting idle. Soon the scenario changed. This time the casualty was General Kassem. He was overthrown and brutally killed.

On the Far East, in Indonesia, President Sukarno passed an Oil and Gas Law in 1960, which, in effect, nationalised the oil industry, providing that only state enterprises could develop hydrocarbons and foreign companies could work as contractors. This posed a serious problem to the concession owners — Caltex, Shell and Exxon etc. They were not ready to give up both management control and the exclusive right to set oil prices. Then came a deadlock for long time years. In 1963 President Sukarno issued an ultimatum which came as a bombshell to the oil companies. They hatched a new conspiracy. President Kennedy and President Sukarno finally settled the three-year controversy in three days but the nationalist leader of Indonesia was overthrown shortly afterwards and in came, through the kitchen door, General Suharto.

The OPEC, which was created in 1960, was still struggling to assert itself. Sheikh Fariqi, the Saudi Oil Minister, the man who organised OPEC and was too much of a firebrand, was dismissed by the King reportedly on the advice from external powers. Dr Zakir Yamani was inducted as the new oil minister of Saudi Arabia. He provided the OPEC prudent leadership before he, too, disappeared in the desert of Arabia one fine morning.

The writer is a retired Additional Secretary and former Chairman, PDB

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## The Gift of the Gab

by Alif Zabr

It is claimed officially that the figure of literacy has reached 60 per cent. If that be so, the voters would be more critical and discriminating, and can make up their minds better, than when the literacy rate was half of this figure. Literacy is a tool and a weapon, and it hits suddenly, where and when least expected.

THE DS editorial of June 24 ("Oh, Those Wagging Tongues") hit the nail on the head. But the head (of the Bengalee) is missing! Most of the input, processing, and output comes from the heart (note that the heart of a lower gravitational level than the brain) there is congestion and traffic jam (as in Dhaka) between the head and the heart. This highway must be clear, well maintained, and critically monitored. We are good in loitering, but not monitoring.

In the field of art and literature, the mind and the imagination play key roles. But if this principle is misapplied to the sensitive field of politics, we get what we have now — the deplorable condition of the nation, thanks to the gift of the gab of our politicians, led by, not the head, but the tail of the political leaders. The monkey business continues merrily, amidst the gentlemen and the ladies. No hard feelings — we are exposing our weaknesses, and having a critical look at the shortcomings.

The honourable politicians have sadly, but unwittingly, betrayed the nation, as being not yet fit for the national responsibility of governing this poor nation, for which they were bred and brought up (we voters did a poor job of it, we must admit). This (political) culture cannot be imported, as it must be 100 per cent *deshi* (local) and *khanti* (pure). It is available (not freely, but for a price) in *bhejal* (adulterated) form; and this contamination is giving the society the gripes, since independence (1971), or even earlier (1947). Our probationary period is being extended again and again, and we have failed so far in transferring the incumbents from ad hoc to regular posts.

Who were the baby-sitters or nannies who brought up the OGL (open general licence) politicians? The general masses are too impoverished to take care even of themselves. This default advantage is being exploited by the political community, to the disadvantage of the country. The situation has

now reached a crisis on the eve of the general election next year. A drastic change in approach is called for, but how to bring it about?

One remedy is to replace complacency with surprise. When you take something for granted, it is a shock when things happen otherwise. The Awami League presumed and assumed it would win the general elections held in 1990; but it missed the bus. What did not take? This is an issue of endless debate in the non-political drawing rooms. The outcome of the next general election cannot be taken for granted. In fact, it may be a turning point in the way politics is being currently cultivated.

Good politics cannot survive without a change in the present political culture and approach. The politicians cannot bring it about with internal forces; as external influence is necessary, to create the leverage or fulcrum effect. The new political weather is building up, waiting for a catalyst to trigger the whole operation, cascading into a shower of surprises (non-violently, it is hoped). The time for reckoning has arrived, because the load is in a state of disequilibrium. Nature has its own way of cleansing things up, and this political problem in Bangladesh is no exception. We are on the take-off point, and all obstacles can be bypassed.

It is claimed officially that the figure of literacy has reached 60 per cent. If that be so, the voters would be more critical and discriminating, and can make up their minds better, than when the literacy rate was half of this figure. Literacy is a tool and a weapon, and it hits suddenly, where and when least expected. It is said that it is not possible to surprise the overconfident politicians. What if they cannot? Vote bank and vote power are different issues, when empowered vote banks are considered. The political poverty in the LDCs have to be empowered in the right direction. Watch the coming Election-2001.

The author is Research Associate, BIIS.

## The Concept of Self-determination: A Threat to World Peace and Stability?

NEW tensions began to get out of the ground in the international scene of the post-Cold War era as some peoples in different parts of the world raised their voice to establish their just right to self-determination, as can be exemplified by the secessionist movements in Chechnya, Bosnia, Kosovo, Ethiopia, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and other countries. As the states, from which these people struggling for self-determination would like to secede in order to form their own states, cannot allow these movements for the sake of the concept of sovereignty, they must use their military and other means to check or eliminate those movements of self-determination. However, this very concept of self-determination is closely linked with terms like nationalism, nation-state, nation etc. As the world is moving fast toward the path of globalisation and thus its regions are getting interdependent, the question now arises how much viable and justifiable it would be to draw the boundary lines of the world territory into micro-states by following the spawning demands of self-determination.

Deep down the history of self-determination, it can be learnt that this concept was devised to stop ethnic violence and to give due honour to the aspirations of different ethnicities by allowing them to establish their own independent homelands. Strobe Talbott, US Deputy Secretary of State, wrote an article "Self-Determination in an Interdependent World" in an American journal *Foreign Policy*, in which he argued that the policy of self-determination could not be a viable mechanism to root out the ethnic problems sweeping all over the world. In his opinion, other mechanisms should be devised in order to redress the dilemma and, among the options, democracy can be considered the most enduring means to bring forth redress to this ongoing problem. Whether the concept of self-determination, termed by some as "simply loaded with dynamite," can really act to address the ethnic and nationalistic problems and

whether democracy can be an alternative way to bring a solution to this problem will be taken into account in this article.

### Concepts of Nationalism and Self-determination

The concepts of self-determination and nationalism are often interchangeably used. One of the most dynamic forces for political change and action in the modern world is nationalism. A dominant factor in past centuries in shaping the nations of Europe and America, and at the root of many wars, nationalism has now become the most important, in which great empires have disintegrated and in which the long-oppressed peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America have awakened to claim the right to sovereign independence. Taking into consideration the problems pertaining to nationalism, James Anderson thinks that nationalism is one of the most powerful forces in the modern world and one of the most problematic. He further adds that like a chameleon it changes its complexion to blend with different political environments and yet it has firmly stamped its mark on the political map. Despite different colours of nationalism its focal point is always political. Indeed, nationalism as a political doctrine holds that humanity is naturally divided into culturally distinct nations, and that only legitimate form of government is national self-government within the nation state. Nationalism is a mixture of two elements: an ideology centralized about the idea of nationality, and the political institutionalization of that ideology into the national state. Theories relating to modern state demand that a state can be strongly cemented and integrated only when the people comprising the state belong to the commonalities of ethnicity, language, religion, culture, that is, belong to the same nationality.

The ideal of the state and the nation coinciding geographically in the nation-state derives from several sources. These are democratic aspirations of na-

Guaranteeing equal treatment of all citizens can be an effective antidote to the upsurge of ethnic and other types of nationalist violence. If democracy is so restructured that all the ethnic groups are equally treated and the national facilities and resources are evenly distributed as far as possible among different groups, then addressing the ethnic problem can be possible under a democratic system without resorting to the principle of self-determination.

by Sheikh Abu Faisal Md. Murad

tions and nationalists to achieve states of their own and the wish to reform or democratise existing states. Conversely, the achievement of statehood, or of greater access to state power, however limited, makes it possible for at least some classes or factions of the nation to fulfil aims which would otherwise be unattainable. In the twentieth century, Europe discovered that the matter of nationalism was not so simple. The empires were not destroyed, but in their wake came not few but many claims to sovereignty, claims that were both overlapping and conflicting. How were they to be adjudicated? First Europe and then the world embraced two rules for deciding the location of borders. One is the principle of self-determination and the other is the principle that the existing borders are sacrosanct and should not be altered. The two are not always compatible. Often they are in conflict. In the conflict over whose national demands are lawful and legitimate, one side went to war to change borders in order to make them conform more closely to the principle of national self-determination, while the other fought to retain existing borders. The problem remains that both are rooted in history and logic and neither can be eliminated. Resolving the anomalies depends on finding a compromise between the two. The Paris Peace Conference that convened in 1919 proclaimed that the allocation of sovereignty would be apportioned on justice, defined as the fulfilment of national aspirations. Borders were to be drawn so as to put people of the same nationality in a single sovereign political unit. But this requirement was not fully

applied, nor could it have been. The norm of inviolability of borders was bolstered by the Cold War as both the United States and the Soviet Union worried that trying to change existing borders had the potential for creating conflicts into which they could be dragged, with enormously disastrous consequences. With the re-demarcation of borders based on national aspirations in the post-Cold War era, for example, in the case of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the problem was that peoples who had been part of a great nation, minorities and vice versa, leading in some places to violence on a large scale. During the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, wrote of self-determination in his diary:

"The phrase is loaded with dynamite. It will raise hopes which can never be realised. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives." Nationalism defines people primarily in terms of belonging (or not belonging) to a particular country and culture which it designates as a 'nation'. Nationalism is simultaneously backward-looking and forward-looking in the sense that a remote past, typically a concocted heroic version of it, is used to highlight the inadequacies of the recent past and the present with a view to pointing towards and mobilising support for progress to a future thoughtfully better constructed. The question of the use of different forms of nationalism depends on the distinctiveness and diversity of environments and scenarios under which such nationalist or secessionist movements foment up. As under no adverse situa-

tion a man has been able to have his right implemented unhindered, he has to take off and on the path of violence. As Buchheit said: "If history were a chronicle of the voluntary association and disassociation of groups, there would be no need for a doctrine of self-determination. It is the distinct absence of such a peaceful evolution of mankind's social organization which ultimately gave rise to the principle of self-determination as the twentieth century's primary expression of disapproval of involuntary political association." In fact, people claiming to be united under the banner of some type of nationalism are willing to be governed under the government made by themselves, not imposed by others upon them. As John Stuart Mill has argued: "Where the sentiment of nationality exists in any force, there is a prima facie case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart. This is merely saying that the question of government ought to be decided by the governed. One hardly knows what any division of the human race should be free to do not to determine with which of the various collective bodies of human beings they choose to associate themselves."

So a group of human beings gets united on the basis of a number of commonalities in order to form a state with the government that would serve their interests. Again, if a small group from within the larger group even thinks of getting oppressed and alienated under the existing state mechanism, they can demand secession from it in order to make a state which would serve this group's interests. In order to legitimise

their demand, they can evoke the principle of self-determination.

### Can Democracy Act as an Alternative?

In democratic societies, only objectives that are hopelessly extreme force their proponents to desperate strategies. Adoption of extreme goals, or lack of alternative means, or a combination of the two, can result in terrorism. Ted Robert Gurr in *Why Men Rebel* has argued that political violence is a consequence of a significant gap developing between the value expectations of a given group of people and the value capabilities of the group. He argues that there remain three possible patterns of relative deprivation: decremental deprivation, aspirational deprivation and progressive deprivation. Decremental deprivation occurs when the value capabilities of a given population decline drastically because of one or several national disasters. Aspirational deprivation occurs when the value capabilities of a group remain constant while its value expectations are on increase. Progressive deprivation occurs when value capabilities stabilise or decline after a period in which value capabilities and value expectations have increased together. Sigmund Freud in his article *Why Men Wage War* has shown that war originated when man finds his respected values and culture threatened and trampled by others. Harold Laski has said: "no doctrine, however evil, moves to the use of force unless it is rooted in profound grievance which it sees no other way to remedy." He also adds that violence comes when the facts persuade men to believe that the bona-fides of their

rulers is no longer to be trusted.

Armed separatism is a process whereby an ethnic group defined as collectivities of individuals who feel a sense of belonging based on cultural traits — usually, language, and social mores — and notions of common ancestry, seeks to secede or gain autonomy from the control, de facto and de jure, of a given state, through an organised and purposeful use of force, alone or in combination with other means. Separatist movements can be considered to be attempts by ethnic minorities on the periphery of state power to attain political autonomy from the governing power of the centre. The fragmentation of values within the body politic not only implies an absence of a mechanism to mitigate any conflict that may arise, but also increase the potential for conflict and conflict escalation. Furthermore, a divergence of interests, as each ethnic group puts forward its case for rightful share of scarce resources, increases the plausibility for conflict and conflict escalation within the body politic. It is mainly the feeling of deprivation and alienation that drives a people to secede from a territory under whose rule their sought-for goals have been trampled.

If an ethnically diverse, geographically sprawling state wants to protect itself against separatism, protecting the rights of minorities and far-flung communities can best do this. When a government system has been so structured that the interests of all the people living under it have been duly honoured without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, colour, language, ethnic origin and so on, there is little chance for the rise of ethnic violence. This being the age of globalisation, which demands the inactivation of the highly criss-crossed borders of micro-states and the revitalisation of greater states so that the flow of capital, goods and people can be facilitated, the people all over the world desirous of reaping benefits from this process of globalisation would rather like

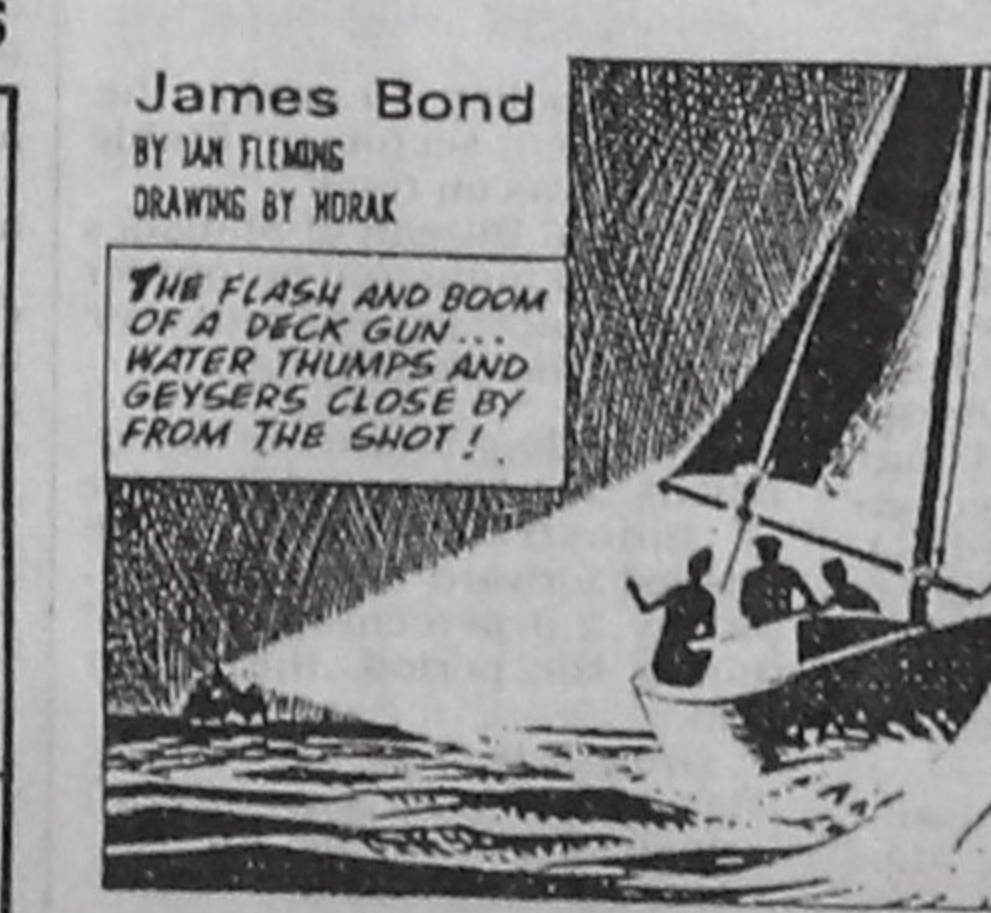
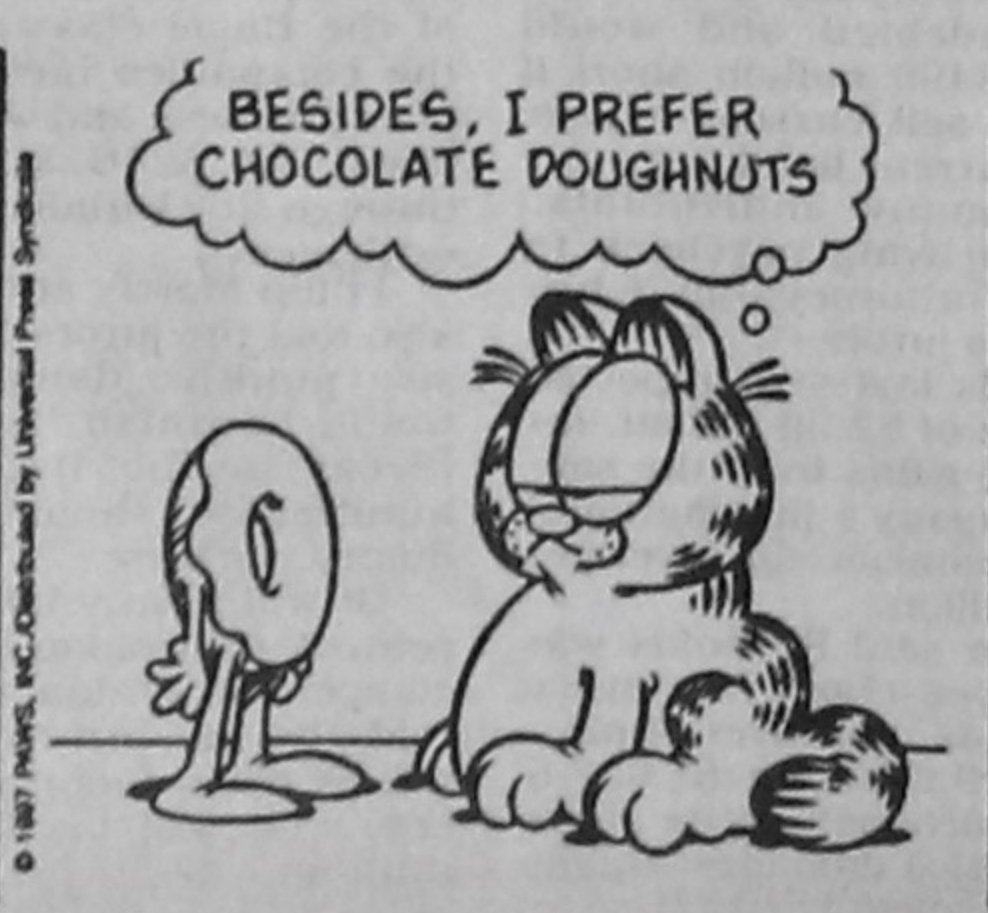
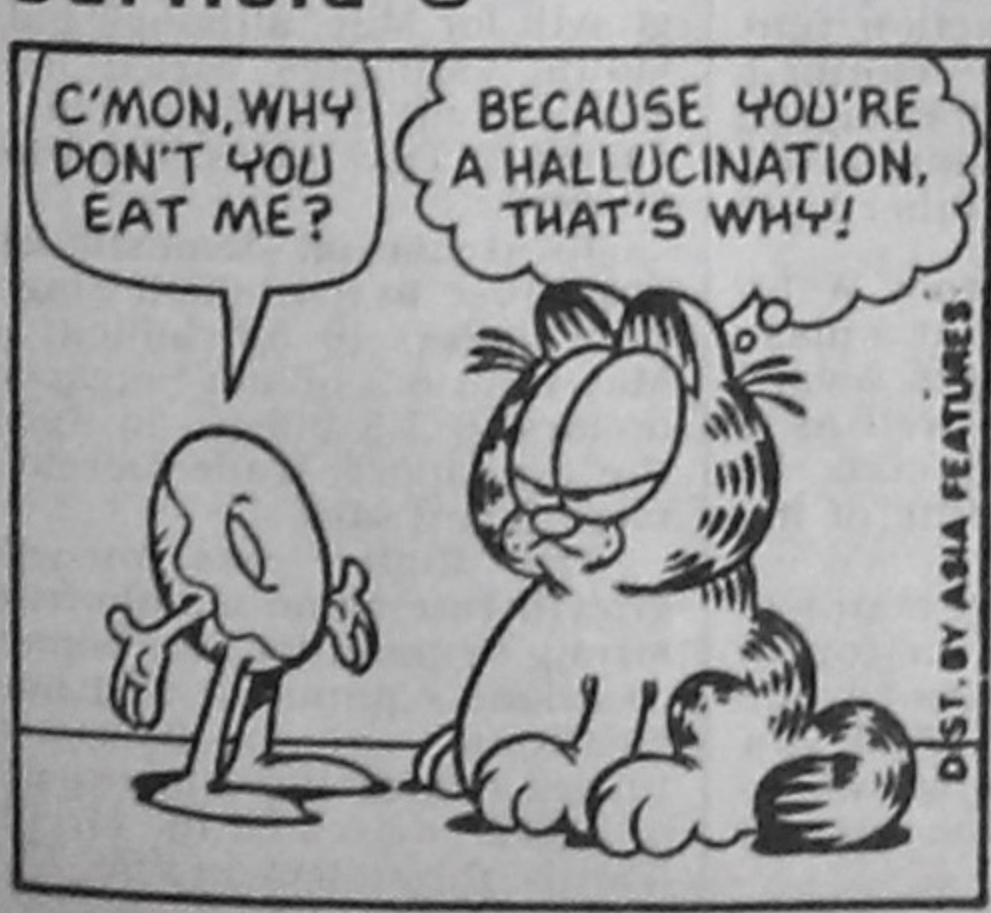
to live under a bigger state. In a democratic political setting, a government is formed on the basis of the consent of the people and is expected to rule with an eye to the aspirations and interests of its governed. Democracy is the political system outstandingly structured to ensure self-determination. It can be a mechanism for peaceful secession. Again, it can act as the best antidote to secessionism and civil war. For, in a truly democratic state, citizens who seek to run their own lives have peaceful alternatives to taking arms against their government. But if the democratic system is formed on the policy of the winner-takes-all-seats, then the interests of the minority will not be properly implemented. So there should be a mechanism in the constitution so that the basic interests of the minority, especially the vulnerable groups, can be guaranteed even in the case of a change in the government.

### Concluding Remarks

When a people feel alienated, deprived and discriminated against under a particular state, they try to evoke the policy of self-determination in order to legitimise their demands of building a separate homeland. The problem with the policy of self-determination is that a state can keep on disintegrating with demands of making new states from within it whenever different groups make their new demands of secession in different atmospheres and times. So the principle itself is not a means to international peace and security. It only begets new demands for creating states to a smaller extent, thus making the functioning of the international organisations more complicated as then they have to deal with a colossal number of smaller states. Only guaranteeing equal treatment of all citizens can be an effective antidote to the upsurge of ethnic and other types of nationalist violence.

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