

Symbol of progress

For many in Nepal who haven't been exposed to a Western-style city transportation system, the Metro in Delhi offers a huge culture shock



DINESH WAGLE

Two reasons prompted me to take a ride on New Delhi's Metro train this month. First, it was one of the easiest means of transportation from Dwarka to Central Secretariat from where I could take a bus to Jangpura Extension where I live. Second, I wanted to see the famed Metro that has been widely described as one of the world's best city transportation facilities. No doubt, the coolest train system of Delhi is also one of the top tourist attractions in the Indian capital. While travelling about 30 kilometres of distance I not only enjoyed the aura of the fancy compartments but also got to see the city from the height of a three-storey building. The elevated train track runs over the road where ever growing number of vehicles fight for the road space and get stuck in red signals. Up in the air-conditioned metro compartments passengers don't face traffic jams. Instead they are treated with a good view of the cityscape.

A train arrives at the station every four minutes which means people can actually believe the time on their watches. There is no infamous India Stretchable Time (or IST, the Indian counterpart of 'Nepali Time' according to which everything is late by at least half an hour) in the Metro. The ticket system is largely automated. Pay the fare at the counter for your destination, get a token, swipe it at the Ticket Gate to open the doors, go to the platform and wait for the train. When it comes, enter. The whole process seemed so easy and orderly that I was urged to compare it with Microsoft Windows. Just as dummies with no real knowledge of computer can open MS Word files and type a letter (unlike during the DOS days), people with no prior experience of trains can board into Metros and travel.

It was not really like that when the Metro was inaugurated six years ago in Delhi. While naming Elattuvalapil Sreedharan, the man behind the Delhi Metro, one of its Asian Heroes, Time Magazine in 2003 described the first day of operation for the sleek rail service in December 2002 as 'chaotic'. More than a million people showed up to ride the South Korean-made trains, and they urinated on platforms, pushed emergency-stop buttons for a lark and filched 30,000 train tokens. That prompted the Metro authorities to run local-radio ads laying out the rules. "No drunkenness," they intoned, "no abusive language, no milk cans and pets allowed. No tampering with switches and gadgets."

Today, as I mentioned earlier, all that feels like the story of another era. The order has been restored

though there are still problems and an initiation was announced earlier this month to instil civic sense in the Metro. Citizen's Volunteer Forum was created to tame undisciplined commuters and check nuisances. "The volunteers would be self-driven, there is no financial incentive -- they will act as wardens and look into various issues such as providing seats to women and the elderly, prevent squatting and playing loud music -- basically ensure more discipline and curb nuisance," said Anuj Dayal, spokesperson of the Metro. The Metro invited applications from interested citizens and the response was overwhelming. It seemed everyone wanted to volunteer.

"[Metro] has changed the lifestyle of the people, how they travel," said Sreedharan in an interview. "It is changing the social attitude, people have become more disciplined. They have started respecting a public asset."

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Even in India, which has the world's largest rail network, Metro is an entirely new and cool concept

We don't have trains in Nepal except a relic that snails between our Janakpur and India's Jaynagar. Even in India, which has the world's largest rail network, Metro is an entirely new and cool concept. Not only is it beautiful and clean but the whole travelling experience is efficient, easy, cheap and to a large extent quick. The beautiful appearance of the trains, lavish stations with organized information system and the track that goes under and above the ground makes the Metro one of the most prominent landmarks of Delhi.

The Metro runs in three routes covering the combined distance of 68 kilometres and goes through places like Central Secretariat, our

equivalent of Singha Durbar where India's key governmental offices are located, Chandani Chowk, the heart of Old Delhi, Delhi University and Dwarka, a city within the city of Delhi that is divided into several sectors. The Metro completed six years of operations Wednesday and the average number of commuters now stands at 729,000 every day according to Dayal. It recorded its highest single-day ridership of 951,000 on November 24, 2008. The first 8.5 km section of the Metro between Shahdara and Tis Hazari was inaugurated on 24 December 2002. The project that is mostly financed by the Japanese soft loan is jointly run by India's central and Delhi government.

The current distance covered by the Metro doesn't really sound impressive given the mammoth size and population of Delhi. That is why the Metro is in expansion drive all over Delhi. One can see almost everywhere signboards put up by the Metro that read "Work in Progress". Targets have been set and they have been met impressive-

ly. All the credit goes to E. Sreedharan who in turn gives credit to the team. Not just the city of Delhi but the whole of India will show the world its sleek metro system when the Indian capital hosts the Commonwealth Games in 2010. After all, the Metro has become the pride of India and every major city wants to copy it.

"More than anything else," said Sreedharan in an interview, "the Delhi Metro has become the symbol of India's progress today to the whole world. It has brought so much attention to our country and our economic and technological leap forward."

With prestige comes the threat to its existence. In these times when India is facing terrorist assaults every now and then, this marvellous train operation has become one of the possible targets. Which terrorist wouldn't want to hit the Metro that has become the symbol of Indian prosperity? Thus, stringent security measures have been put in place. Everyone must go through frisking and metal detectors before entering the compartments.

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Viagra in Afghanistan

In their efforts to win over notoriously fickle warlords and chieftains CIA operatives have used a variety of personal services

JOBY WARRICK

The Afghan chieftain looked older than his 60-odd years, and his bearded face bore the creases of a man burdened with duties as tribal patriarch and husband to four younger women. His visitor, a CIA officer, saw an opportunity, and reached in his bag for a small gift. Four blue pills. Viagra.

"Take one of these. You'll love it," the officer said. Compliments of Uncle Sam.

The enticement worked. The officer, who described the encounter, returned four days later to an enthusiastic reception. The grinning chief offered up a bonanza of information about Taliban movements and supply routes -- followed by a request for more pills.

For U.S. intelligence officials, this is how some crucial battles in Afghanistan are fought and won. While the CIA has a long history buying information with cash, the growing Taliban insurgency has prompted the use of novel incentives and creative bargaining to gain support in some of the country's roughest neighborhoods, according to officials directly involved in such operations.

In their efforts to win over notoriously fickle warlords and chieftains, the officials say, the agency's operatives have used a variety of personal services. These include pocket knives and tools, medicine or surgeries for ailing family members, toys and school equipment, tooth extractions, travel visas and, occasionally, pharmaceutical enhancements for aging patriarchs with slumping libidos, the officials said.

"Whatever it takes to make friends and influence people -- whether it's building a school or handing out Viagra," said one longtime agency operative and veteran of several Afghanistan tours. Like other field officers interviewed for the story, he spoke on the condition of anonymity when describing tactics and operations that are largely classified.

Officials say these inducements are necessary in Afghanistan, a country where warlords and tribal leaders expect to be paid for their cooperation, and where, for some, switching sides can be as easy as changing tunics. If the Americans don't offer incentives, there are others who will, including Taliban commanders, drug dealers and even Iranian agents in the region.

The usual bribes of choice -- cash and weapons -- aren't always the best options, Afghanistan veterans say. Guns too often fall into the wrong hands, they say, and showy gifts such as money, jewelry and cars tend to draw unwanted attention.

"If you give an asset \$1,000, he'll go out and buy the shiniest junk he can find, and it will be apparent that he has suddenly come into a lot of money from someone," said Jamie Smith, a veteran of CIA covert operations in Afghanistan and now chief executive officer of SCG International, a private security and intelligence company. "Even if he doesn't get killed, he becomes ineffective as an informant because everyone knows where he got it."

The key, Smith said, is to meet the informant's personal needs in a way that keeps him firmly on your side but leaves little or no visible trace. "You're trying to bridge a gap between people living in the 18th century and people coming in from the 21st century," Smith said, "so you look for those common things in the form of material aid that motivate people everywhere."

Among the world's intelligence agencies, there's a long tradition of using sex as a motivator. Robert Baer, a retired CIA officer and author of several books on intelligence, noted that the Soviet spy service was notorious for using attractive women as bait when seeking to turn foreign diplomats into informants.

"The KGB has always used 'honey traps,' and it works," Baer said. For American officers, a more common practice was to offer medical care for potential

informants and their loved ones, he said. "I remember one guy we offered an option on a heart bypass," Baer said.

For some U.S. operatives in Afghanistan, Western drugs such as Viagra were just one of a long list of enticements available for use in special cases. Two veteran officers familiar with such practices said Viagra was offered rarely, and only to older tribal officials for whom the drug would hold special appeal. While such sexual performance drugs are generally unavailable in the remote areas where the agency's teams operated, they have been sold in some Kabul street markets since at least 2003, and were known by reputation elsewhere.

"You didn't hand it out to younger guys, but it could be a silver bullet to make connections to the older ones," said one retired operative familiar with the drug's use in Afghanistan. Afghan tribal leaders often had four wives -- the maximum number allowed by the Koran -- and aging village patriarchs were easily sold on the utility of a pill that could "put them back in an authoritative position," the official said.

Both officials who described the use of Viagra declined to discuss details such as dates and locations, citing both safety and classification concerns.

The CIA declined to comment on methods used in clandestine operations. One senior U.S. intelligence official familiar with the agency's work in Afghanistan said the clandestine teams were trained to be "resourceful and agile" and to use tactics "consistent with the laws of our country."

"They learn the landscape, get to know the players,



and adjust to the operating environment, no matter where it is," the official said. "They think out of the box, take risks, and do what's necessary to get the job done."

Not everyone in Afghanistan's hinterlands had heard of the drug, leading to some awkward encounters when Americans delicately attempted to explain its effects, taking care not to offend their hosts' religious sensitivities.

Such was the case with the 60-year-old chieftain who received the four pills from a U.S. operative. According to the retired operative who was there, the man was a clan leader in southern Afghanistan who had been wary of Americans -- neither supportive nor actively opposed. The man had extensive knowledge of the region and his village controlled key passages through the area. U.S. forces needed his cooperation and worked hard to win it, the retired operative said.

After a long conversation through an interpreter, the retired operator began to probe for ways to win the man's loyalty. A discussion of the man's family and many wives provided inspiration. Once it was established that the man was in good health, the pills were offered and accepted.

Four days later, when the Americans returned, the gift had worked its magic, the operative recalled.

"He came up to us beaming," the official said. "He said, 'You are a great man.'"

"And after that we could do whatever we wanted in his area."

LA TIMES-WASHINGTON POST

Dark days



It is really sad that the government is going to announce load shedding for more than 13 hours a day ("13-hour-day outage to greet nation", Dec. 26, Page 1). The government needs to work out some short-term measures to provide relief to the public. Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) should explore other possibilities of producing electricity. The excuses that the level of the rivers is low and Kulekhani reservoir is receding against the demand for power are not enough. It should try to meet the minimum demand of power supply so that day-to-day affairs are not severely affected. The NEA could coordinate with alternative energy promotion centre (AEP) for the purpose.

Sanjay Poudyal

Chandol

The gap between the demand and supply of

power has led the NEA to announce a daily load-shedding of 13 hours across the country. Such long-hour power cuts are affecting individuals, industrial sectors and hotel businesses that are crucial for the economy of the country. If such acute power crisis persists, Nepali industrial sectors will incur more losses putting the country on the brink of collapse.

Nirmal Ale

Syangja

These days Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is making headlines in the media for its decision to increase the load shedding. But we do not find any attempt on the part of NEA to inform the consumers about measures needed for saving energy. Information should be disseminated to the public on the usage of Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFL), LED, Thin FTL, Electronic Ballast and other bulbs. Such initiatives must be

undertaken quickly to address the energy crisis facing the country.

Prakash Poudyal

KU, Dhulikhel

Third alliance

I was impressed by Sumit Sharma's article "The third alliance" (Dec. 25, Page 4). He rightly points out the need for a citizen's alliance for development. The idea of forming a democratic or republican alliance by political parties is nothing more than a gimmick. History is testimony to the fact that political alliances have been formed only as a means of gaining power. Therefore the new non-political alliance may offer a solution to our problems. I therefore request the civil society to form the alliance keeping in mind the larger interests of the country.

Dakkal Pandit

Tinhana-6 Kathmandu

Baffling



It is baffling to hear that Mr Pushpa Kamal Dahal is going to hire more guys for PLA if the government recruits some for the Nepal Army ("PLA recruitment drive on the cards", Dec. 23, Page 1). But he is the head of government. Isn't the national army already under him? What is he trying to do? Is he okay? People trust him because there was no else to be trusted anymore, so if he does what the old governments did, then he will also be deleted from history. Mr Dahal, please correct your ways. Nepali people are not

as stupid as those who lead their country. I wanna see my country going in the right direction.

Sujan

Texas, USA

Army integration

This is in reference to your article "Demobbed" (Dec. 26, Page 5). I had a good laugh over their suggestion on army integration. Disband the Maoist army first? If there is an army that needs disbanding, it is perhaps the Nepal Army. The number of people killed by NA far exceeds the number killed by Maoists. The recent OHCHR report on conflict-related disappearances in Bardiya is a brutal and irrefutable testament to this. Everyone must read the report to realize the extent of violations carried out by state security forces. And all those who think Nepal is a nice, happy, united country should know how Tharus suffered from being Tharus. But alas, who will talk about these things?

S Gurung

Kathmandu

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