

LIVING

King of Flavours

by Shahid A Makhfi

SALT has been a major item of commerce for millennia. It's the perfect business: the raw material and the energy supply are both free, and almost infinitely abundant. There is something holy about salt, wrote Nathaniel Hawthorne and certainly it contains an indisputable truth — sodium chloride may seem the most mundane of substances, yet throughout history it has been accorded a special reverence.

Salt's healing, restorative and antiseptic properties led to religious and social significance being attributed to it by early people and hence it has been valued. In the ancient Semitic culture, salt symbolised trust and friendship and among the Jews all pacts and treaties were negotiated at a table displaying a ceremonial container of the compound, originating the term 'Covenant of salt' — the eternal bond between God and Israel. Bedouins still use the phrase 'there is salt between us' as an expression of affection and Roman Catholic priests ritually sprinkle salt to

exorcise dwellings inhabited by spirits.

Like any other essentials, salt was thought to have a super natural origin and its place in religion and civilization varies. In ancient Greek and Roman cultures it was used as a part of offering that were made to their gods. Mexicans considered it so valuable that people even worshipped a salt god!

Salt was not only valued exclusively for its spiritual virtues. It had other properties as well: curing of leather, glazing of pottery, restorative and antiseptic uses, dyeing of fabrics, preservation of meat and scores of other utilitarian tasks, salt thus became the first commodity of world trade.

One of the most interesting salt trades can be traced in the history of Gold Coast (Ghana), where gold was bartered for salt. The Arab merchants trav-

elled across the desert with enough salt to trade with, together with drummers and carriers. On reaching the Gold Coast, they banked by the river and conveyed their arrival through the drum beaters. The Ghanians took notice of this and prepared themselves to exchange their gold with salt, without seeing or talking to their trading partners. The natives would sail across the river with gold dust packed in their bags. Reaching ashore they would find no men but piles of salt well spread over the area. The Ghanians would not trade if anyone was there.

Next, they would neatly stack the gold dust, proportionally to the salt piles, and return back. The Arab traders would come back and shake their heads (there is not enough gold) and once again return back to a hiding place. The natives would arrive with more gold to

please their partners. The Arabs would return only when the Ghanians had left the scene and would nod their heads and smile as if there was enough gold to their satisfaction. The drums once again echoed the air and it symbolised the departure of the Arabs. Later the natives would come back and pack off with the precious salt. On returning to the village they celebrated a feast to mark their success in trade.

Salt came to be used as a currency in landlocked kingdoms as Tibet and Ethiopia. And when Roman chronicler Petronius complained that a man 'wasn't worth his salt' he was speaking literally. Roman soldiers during the time of Julius Caesar received a quota of salt as part of their wages, thus providing the root of the English word — SALARY. A Sanskrit proverb suggests that

Beijing's Dog Days Are Over

The Year of the Dog ends early for canines in the Chinese capital. Rajiv Chandra of Inter Press Service reports from Beijing.



Inter Press Service

BEIJING was nowhere to be seen, and Wang Long was beside herself with worry.

It had been a year since Wang, an elderly Beijing widow, had bought the large hound for more than US\$200, treated it like a child and fed it sweets and expensive meat.

But the dog, whose name means baby, had been missing for a month. Given a new Beijing ordinance that bans large dogs, Wang feared that Beibei had already been picked up by the authorities.

"What will I do if she doesn't return?" said Wang Wofufully. "I have no one in the world but Beibei."

In late November, the Beijing municipal government implemented a new dog-keeping law aimed at putting an abrupt stop to what had literally been turning out to be the Year of the Dog in China.

Since economic reforms began 15 years ago and brought new prosperity to many middle-class Chinese, pet dogs have come to symbolise China's new consumerism and indulgence.

Previously, dogs were banned as bourgeois during the Cultural Revolution or were served sweet and sour in some gourmet restaurants.

But this year, which the Chinese astrological calendar had marked as the Year of the Dog, pet markets where dogs are purchased at hefty prices

have thrived while pet shops, veterinary hospitals and even dog massage and beauty parlors for pooches have boomed.

The law has enraged Beijing's growing number of dog-lovers but, according to official press reports, has struck a chord with many residents who fear dogs and resent their presence on the city's increasingly crowded streets.

The new ordinance allows only small dogs in many city neighborhoods and require dog-owners to pay a US\$700 registration fee, take out insurance against dog-biting, display a special dog sign to warn visitors and walk their dogs between eight at night and six in the morning.

"It's just not fair," says a resident who babies his white poodle, but is starting to worry about the money he now has to shell out to keep his pet. "Every day, I give my dog a bath and comb his hair."

Beijingers had been arguing for weeks on end over whether or not the law should push through. But city officials have put their foot down because they say Beijing, a city of more than ten million people, is already grappling with an exodus of humans from the countryside and has no room for a fast-growing dog population as well.

The state-owned China Daily newspaper has reported that Beijing has more than 200,000 dogs or just about one

to every 50 residents. That is three times the number eight years ago.

China has about 100 million dogs or near ten percent of the country's burgeoning human population of 1.2 billion people.

Officials justify the stiff new regulation by claiming rabies is on the upswing and has caused more than 60,000 deaths in the country, and 89 in Beijing during the five-year period from 1988 to 1993.

They claim that public opinion, as evidenced in more than 1,000 letters or phone calls received at municipal offices, overwhelmingly favours the new curbs on dog ownership.

An irate reader of the China Daily, for instance, wrote earlier this year: "Each year, these dogs consume as much grain as 40 million people. The cost of keeping a dog is higher than a Chinese citizen's average living expenses."

Adds a Beijing resident: "Old people say they want to have a dog to ease their loneliness and boredom. In such a crowded city, I don't understand why they can't find people to be friends with."

Some say the lavish care and attention that many people showered on their dogs proved to be too much for officials and Beijing's poorer residents.

Indeed, in a country where the premier of the land gets only US\$80 each month including subsidies and bonuses, some people had been spending US\$16 for foam baths for their pets or even US\$120 for full-scale cosmetic services.

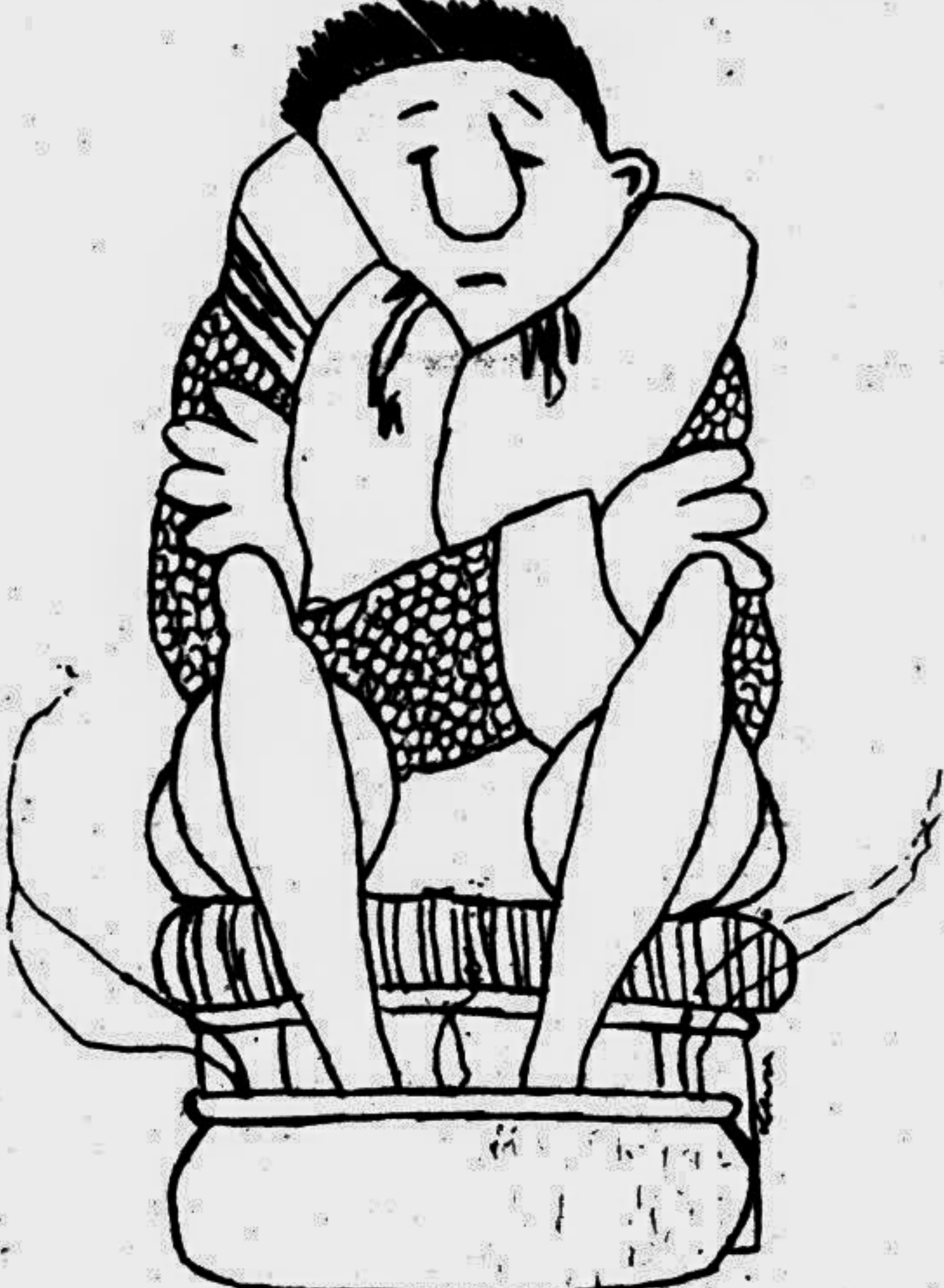
Commented the China Daily in January: "It is a social phenomenon out of harmony with a China that is still poor and that is trying to ensure a better standard of living for all."

The law has already had an impact on the revenues of the city's dog sellers. Once having no trouble finding homes for the cute puffed-up puppies peeping out of their coat-pockets, Beijing's dog hawkers now say there are few takers even if they try giving the canines away, because of the high fees and numerous rules.

But many residents say the new law is unjust and only another way for officials to make money. The widow Wang says she worries about living alone without Beibei for protection, and hopes the authorities would reconsider the ban. She says sadly, "This dog is my only family."

Common Cure for the Common Cold

by Farhana Ahmad



glycol aerosol but none has been effective.

It has been claimed that vitamin C in doses of 1-2 gm daily or even more, will prevent the common cold. But in controlled trials, large prophylactic oral doses of vitamin C have not altered the frequency of acquisition of common colds or the amount of virus shedding. However, some studies have shown a reduction in duration of disability among persons who took as much as 8 gm/day, on the first day of the disease, though it is inadvisable for people to dose themselves with large quantities of vitamin C as this favours the formation of oxalate stones in the urinary tract.

Handwashing and perhaps use of disinfectant may be beneficial in an infectious household, where most viral respiratory infections are spread.

What is the Treatment?

A warm comfortable environment and measures to prevent direct spread of infection is recommended for all persons. Those with fever or acute symptoms of infection should rest in bed. In most cases of common cold symptoms are mild and do not require treatment. "Paracetamol" [5 to 1] gm every 4 to 6 hours can be used to relieve systemic symptoms. Nasal decongestants such as oxymetazoline hydrochloride are of value when nasal obstruction is troublesome but such preparations should only be used for short periods. Steam inhalations mobilize secretions and help relieve chest tightness. Cough, sometimes severe in the common cold, is treated symptomatically. Most cough medicines are grouped into the categories of antitussives and expectorants. Antihistamines reduce rhinorrhoea in persons with nasal allergy, but they are of no use in other people. Vitamin C or high doses of citrus fruit juices are a

thick and purulent and impedes nasal breathing. Hacking cough with scanty sputum often lasts into the second week. When no complications occur symptoms resolve in 4 to 10 days.

Can Common Cold be Prevented?

Many means of preventing acquisition and spread of common cold, have been tried including polyvalent bacterial vaccines, alkalis, citrus-fruit, vitamins, ultraviolet light, and

popular remedy, mostly on the recommendation of layman, but no scientific data confirm any benefit. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses and are not recommended unless a specific bacterial complication develops.

How Do You Cope?

As you see, nothing you can take will make your cold go away. Medicines may make it less uncomfortable for a time but your symptoms could come back as bad or worse than ever when you stop taking them. If your cold shows no sign of getting better after a week then go to a doctor. Otherwise, stay home and while the cold is at its worst take "Paracetamol" if you get aches and pains. If you want to be comforted take hot drinks, eat citrus fruits, drink fruit juices, and take inhalations. A home cure for common colds is, boiling two small pieces of ginger in tea water and drinking the tea without milk. Another household remedy to clear a blocked up nose is, take a bowl of lukewarm water, put half a teaspoon of salt in it and stir. Then put your nose in the water, inhale and take the water in and the exhale. This way the blocked up nose, and the paranasal sinuses get cleared. A word of caution. Be brave and grin and bear your common cold the best you can.

Why Don't You Think You're Fabulous?

by Cynthia Heimel

LOW self-esteem was the inferiority complex of the Eighties and it looks like it could be even higher on the agenda in the Nineties. The phrase is off everyone's lips and has become common currency in these insecure times. It is what you might call a "happening concept". And all it means is that, contrary to the data and the evidence, you think you're useless.

But it never turns out that way. If you for your "friend" think you are useless, 100 times out of 10, you are not.

Did Adolf Hitler think he was hopeless? No. He thought he was fabulous.

If you think you are beyond hope because you... well, you have had thoughts sometimes, and you think you are not very good looking, and your could do with losing a couple of pounds... a couple of pounds? Who are you fooling? You think that clothes are becoming? You believe that nobody will notice that gray stain? People are smarter than you think. People are smarter than you. Everybody is smarter than you. You are just beyond cure.

If you find your thoughts are running along these lines, then you seriously suffer from low self-esteem.

"I do not have low self-esteem. But if I did, where would it have come from? What is the cause?"

Television, of course. Everybody on television is both beautiful and skinny. Everybody has a fresh outfit, perfect white teeth, gorgeous hair and witty repartee to meet every situation. When they wake up

in the morning, they are gorgeous. (Correct, not everybody. There are the slobs, the reprobates, the criminals. But nobody wants to be like them. That's the message of television.)

"Okay, maybe I do have low self-esteem. I probably do not. But say I do. What is the 'big deal'? How can it hurt me?"

If it goes undetected, then low self-esteem will make your life a living, raging hell. And even if you know about it, you will probably still be a miserable "crud".

Here is how it works. Objectively speaking, you are a fine, human being. You pay most of your taxes. You are decent, well spoken, hard-working enough, attractive and pleasant. You deserve a life that is commensurate with those qualities: a faithful, loving husband; an interesting and rewarding job; a lovely home. A Porsche.

Yet because you are crippled by the heartbreak of low self-esteem, you think you deserve none of that. You think

you deserve a foul, mean-spirited, husband who fools around with anyone in a skirt. Or maybe even no husband at all; maybe you think you deserve a string of half-baked losers, who dream of becoming successful but it is up to you to look after them and support them until they are. You think you deserve a job where they treat you like an unpleasant and incapable moron with bad breath. And a hovel with a "loo" in the garden and a banger parked outside.

"Do women have low self-esteem?"

Oh, please. Women wrote the book. All women, except six-foot, blonde, eight-stone, 19-year-old models, are victims of low self-esteem.

First of all, they are not men. Women cannot help but notice this. That is why they formed consciousness-raising groups and burned their bras and became art historians specialising in finding lost women artists. Because everything in society tells them that men are the subjects, women are the objects.

Secondly, they do not have the same body as the model on the cover of "Penthouse." This makes a woman feel apologetic.

"If woman are so susceptible to low self-esteem, if men have it so 'great', then why on earth do men bother having low self-esteem at all?"

It is no picnic being of the exalted sex. So much is expected, there is so far to fall. The exalted sex is supposed to be fearless, sure-footed, perfectly formed, a devastating "love machine" that lasts forever. He should pack a crippling right hook, win the London Marathon, Pearls of wit should trip incessantly off his tongue. At the very least he must be a millionaire.

No, men, not even 19-year-old blond male models, are actually like that.

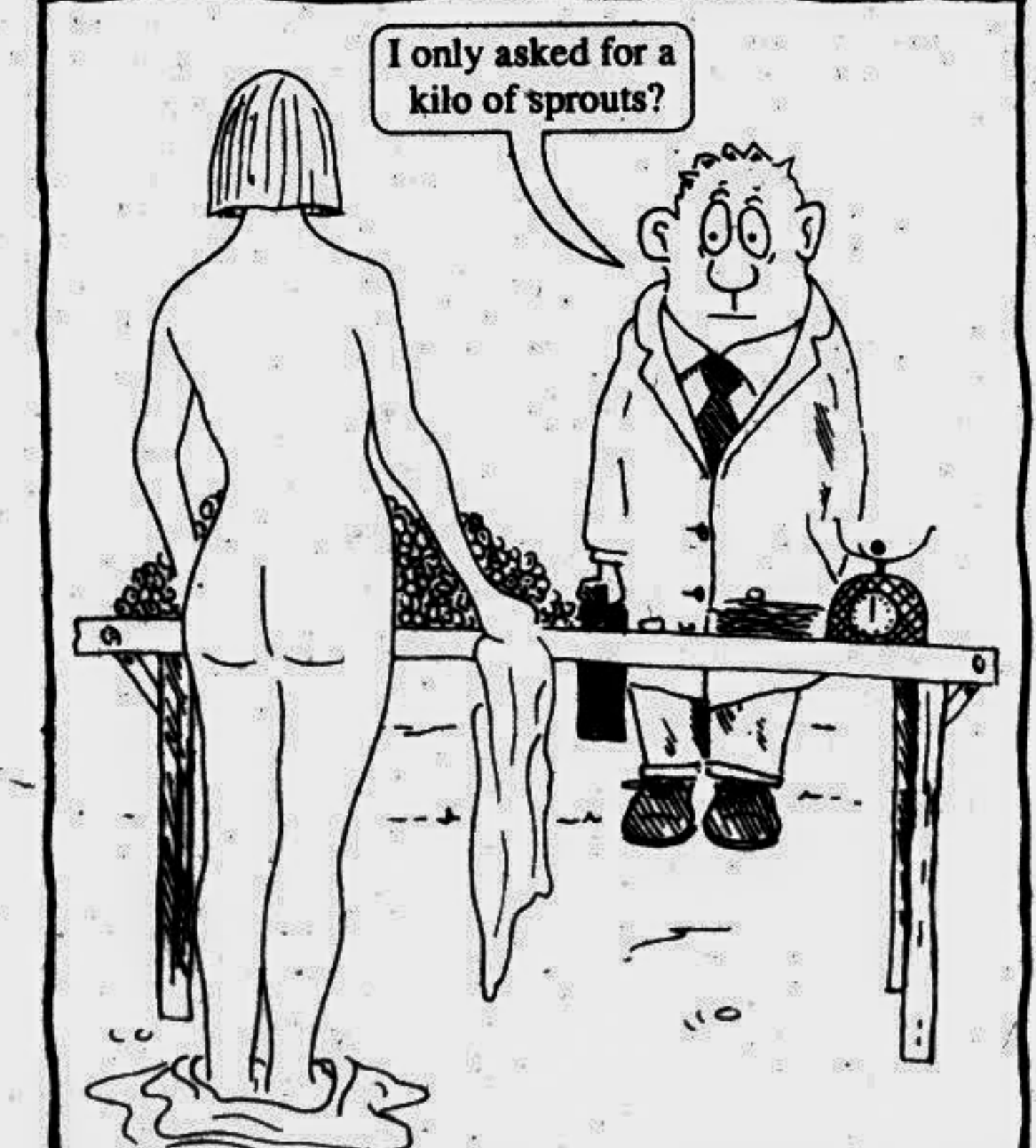
All right, you win. I do have low self-esteem. What can I do about it?"

If I had the answer, I would stop seeing a therapist stop taking tranquillizers and stop dating society's misfits

"I Love You" or "I'm Going to Eat You"?

by Dr Sanjiva Wijesinha

Foreigners flock to Hong Kong in search of fast money. Many find it very difficult to learn the Chinese language with thousands of characters, each representing a single sound of one syllable. Unfamiliarity with subtleties of tone can create many misunderstandings.



Now one might think that this should present little difficulty for anyone with a modicum of intelligence and a convenient phrase-book.

Unfortunately, mastering the language spoken in Hong Kong proves, for the majority of non-Chinese, a fruitless and frustrating task.

To begin with, the regions of China do not all speak the same "Chinese" language. They all utilise the same script, certainly — a script consisting of a few thousand separate characters, each representing a single sound of one syllable — but the similarity ends there.

For example, the identical character that depicts the sound WU in Mandarin (the dialect spoken in north China), happens to be pronounced NG in Cantonese, the language favoured by the southerners. Just to even things out, the Cantonese character for YOW is correctly pronounced as KHOO in Fukienses!

To confound this confusion further, Chinese words that sound virtually the same to a foreigner are often found to have entirely different meanings. The word SEKH, for example, can be pronounced in a variety of tones — to mean entirely different things. If one says "Ngaw sekh nei" it means "I know you" — while "Ngaw sekh net," said with just that little extra stress on

the intonation of the SEKH means "I eat you".

Since Cantonese lacks tones, the last sentence could equally well be taken to mean "I am going to eat you" — which expression could, even if uttered in all innocence, lead to disastrous consequences. Perhaps the best policy, as long as one is in Hong Kong, is to avoid SEKHS completely if one is not Chinese.

This "similar sound/different meanings" situation is, as one might imagine, pregnant with the possibility of causing total chaos in intercultural communication.

The subtle difference between Sirkay Yuhth (Sunday) and Sirkay Yuhth (Monday) can create havoc of the act of making an appointment over the phone — while mispronouncing Choi Sum (the name of a common Brussels sprout-like vegetable) as Chot Sahn (meaning "Take you clothes off") can create an embarrassing incident if you are trying to make your purchases from a young salesgirl at the local vegetable market.

Learning to recognise the subtle distinctions between high-pitched and low-pitched words comes, as you might guess, with time.

To the native Cantonese, however, the subtleties of tone in the Chinese language present absolutely no problem — what presents them with a problem is understanding why all these foreigners find it so difficult to speak Cantonese!



Courtesy: Cosmopolitan

To most of the world, the image conjured up by the name of Hong Kong is of a glittering land of opportunity. Enterprising expatriates come here to make as much money as they can in the shortest possible time, unhampered by such undesirable impediments as an over-zealous Department of Inland Revenue.

The presence of a large number of foreigners in the banks, businesses, night clubs and even hospitals of Hong Kong exemplify the initiative and the greed of all those, who, over the years, have made their marks (and their dollars) in this intriguing free port.

Despite the fact that the British have been here for 150 years, and that the place still is (at least until 1997) a Crown Colony, this territory somehow is different.

Unlike virtually every other past or present British colony from Antigua to Zambia, the language of the colonial rulers is not widely used here for day-to-day activities outside the administration and business world.

The five million or so Chinese here continue to go about their daily business — living, loving, laughing and crying, just as they have been doing for thousands of years — in Chinese.

This means anybody (whether housemaid, hotelier, hospital worker or high-powered businessman) who wants to start making his or her quota of fast bucks in Hong Kong, must first learn to communicate in the local language.