

MAUR-E-BOOKS

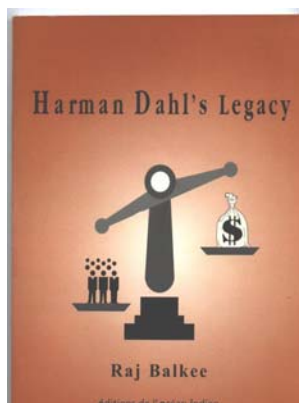
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Harman Dahl's Legacy

ONE

I

It was midnight on Friday 31, December 1999. Harman Dahl fell off his seat at the sound of all hell letting loose around him. He held on to the bench on which he had dozed off and wobbled onto his feet. His senses returned, even though he was still tipsy, under the influence of alcohol. He had been drinking with colleagues for most of the day.

Harman Dahl smiled to himself as fear subsided and he realised that he was far from the doomed battlefield in the Gulf war. Soon he recognised the all-too-familiar place, the Bay Louis Waterfront. The crackling of gunfire gave way to fire crackers filling the city night sky and the rampaging soldiers to the bursting, happy and noisy fellow citizens.

Like him, everybody, there, had come to celebrate the arrival of the New Millenium. But unlike them, Harman Dahl felt that he was the loneliest person in the world. The sound of "Happy New Year" and "Happy Millenium", echoed in his ears as friends and relatives greeted one another, and blared and resounded from loudspeakers, deafening Harman. He sat back on the bench, took out his flask of Green Island from his breast pocket, whispered "Happy New Year" to himself and took a long sip.

Bay Louis Waterfront was the new showpiece of Nautilian affluence. In the

thirty odd years of post-independence from the British, Nautilus had imported everything from the industrialised countries: textile, business, and all get-rich-quick know-how. Bay Louis Water Front was the latest addition in the Nautilian Businessmen's plan to extort the people of their earned surplus, by providing unusual nightlife. The government of the day was too willing to use this venue to organise the New Millenium celebration, in step with the world's richest countries.

Harman Dahl has been living alone for over a year now. Since the passing away of his wife, he has not been able to recoup himself. His children have not appreciated Harman's decision to leaving England and settling back in Nautilus.

"It's all a question of roots. My roots are in Nautilus, and that's where I have always belonged", Harman pointed to his children.

"But how could you manage in a country like Nautilus, after having lived in England for so long?" had asked Dan, his eldest son.

"With your mother by my side, I can manage anywhere in the world. In Nautilus, it will be sheer pleasure. It will be living back with my people and where everybody know my name. I shall be once again called Hareemun, the name my dear mother and father had given me."

Santa Dahl did not stay by her husband long, after settling back at Cape North, on their return to Nautilus. Her prolonged illness had put a premature end to her life, inspite of the dedicated love and care of her husband and unlimited costly medical treatment. The absence of the children had not helped Mrs. Dahl's recovery either. In the end, Harman Dahl was the only resident of the magnificent villa on the beach in the north of the island. The couple who took care of the villa lived in the out building at the end of the enclosed property, owned by Mr. Dahl.

II

Sheila Suckhee was waiting for Harman to pick her up for the "Reveillons" dinner and dance at the Maharaja Restaurant, for over two hours. She could not understand what was keeping Harman. She called him at Cape North.

"Mr. Dahl has not come home since this morning," answered Sophie, the maid.

Sheila tried to contact Harman on his cellphone, only to be told that it may be switched off. She felt disappointed. She was looking forward to celebrate the birth of the new millenium, the new beginning which she hoped might sway Harman into marrying her. They had spent the previous night together at the villa, having dinner, watching late movie on the television and cosy chat, hugging each other. When Harman left her at her house in Bay Louis that morning, on his way to his office, he promised to give her the best time of her life. Sheila has loved Harman since the first time they met at a mutual friend's party. She knew that Harman was not reciprocal. "Roshnee, if anyone phones, just say that I'm out, you don't know where," Mr. Dahl told his secretary, as he left the office with Kesh Lakhan.

"In my life-time, I've known many people, from all walks of life, but there is only one that I call my friend. That's Kesh Lakhan," Harman told his wife, months before she died.

Harman and Kesh spent two hours at the “Steer”, a chic pub downtown, chatting and drinking Green Island and Coke. They talked mostly about themselves, their college days in Nautilus and the long years in Europe and in England in particular. The reminiscing got hold of Harman and he began to feel the void in this life. It was not lack of companionship that was bugging him, though, not having Santa by his side, hurt him a lot. Lately Harman Dahl has been doing a lot of soul searching. He wondered what his true purpose in life.

At four o’clock in the afternoon, Harman had bidden farewell to Kesh at the Steer and took a stroll towards the Caudan Waterfront. Place Du Quai was the central attraction for the Nation that night, where the crowd was growing by the hour, coming to watch the spectacular millenium show on that New Year Eve. He was engrossed in thought and was walking aimlessly. He arrived on the seafront, not far from the huge podium in Bay Louis Waterfront, where the mega-show was to be held.

He chose a bench in the kiosk furthest from the podium and sat down facing the Bay Louis harbour. He continued his self-questioning and searching for the purpose that would fulfill his remaining life. He sat there for hours, while more people, men, women and children, whole families, and in groups, arrived to take their place to watch the show. The crowd had grown huge and noisy numbering several thousand. Deeply lost in thought in his own thoughts, Harman Dahl was oblivious to this surrounding. By and by the tiredness and drinking of the day made him doze off.

Asleep on a bench, right in the middle of a huge merry-making crowd, on the Bay Louis seafront, Harman seemed to have found what he was so sincerely looking for, his peace of mind. He did not mind to be brusquely awakened by the massive firework exploding to herald the New Millenium. In fact he was glad to be awakened. Moreover he was pleased to have sorted out his mental turmoil. He was not sorry to have forgotten to pick Sheila Suckhee earlier that night. As he walked to his car at Caudan car park, he felt a new man. The dawning of the New Millenium has changed Harman Dahl into a new man with a new vision, new devotion, and a new purpose in life.

Sheila Suckhee waited for Harman well pass midnight, following the Millenium Show live on Television. In the end she got too tired, gave up waiting and went to bed. She could not sleep easily. She tossed and turned in bed, She thought that it was quite unlike Harman to forget things. She feared that something unpleasant might have happened to him. She was worried because she really loved the man.

Sheila Suckhee was in her mid-thirties, a divorcee and lecturer at the University of Nautilus. She, too, had spent some years in England for her studies. She was of a liberal and logical mind, the thing she admired most in Harman. She had an air of fulfillment and contentment about her, but for the love for Harman. Born under the sign of Leo, she took herself for a fighter, and she was determined to get her man.

The new-year 2000 celebration was set to continue for almost a week. Sheila planned to use her remaining holidays to spend some time with Harman, and use anything to bait and entice Harman to marry her. The next morning, Sheila phoned Harman as soon as she got up. The maid at the villa answered the phone, only to announce that her master was still asleep, having returned home in the

early hours of the morning.

“Hareeman did come last night?” asked Mrs. Hulkoree, after wishing her daughter a happy new-year, with kisses on both cheeks.

“No Ma, and I’m very disappointed,” replied Sheila.

Mrs. Hulkoree noticed that her daughter was visibly agitated. She knew how much Sheila loved Harman and she, whole-heartedly approved her choice. She thought her daughter was such a beautiful and intelligent woman that it would be a shame to be deprived of a family life, a home, a husband, and children.

“And why not?” thought the mother, “many women of that age do conceive babies. And Harman is only in his late forties.”

“I’m sure Harman will drop by today,” she reassured Sheila.

“I can’t wait to see him,” said the young woman.

Harman Dahl woke up when rays from the nine o’clock sun were penetrating his bedroom through narrow gaps between curtains. It announced a beautiful first day of the new millenium. He could feel a distinct peace of mind and he was at ease with himself. After a light breakfast, he sat under a filao tree on the beach, and the Bay Louis Water Front scenes returned in his mind. He recalled everything vividly: the crowds, the faces, the illuminating flood lights, the firework display and his dreaming on the sea front. He could make sense of everything then. He knew he had now, a mission to fulfil, a final goal in life to achieve.

In his younger days, and during his newly married life, Harman Dahl always made new-years’ resolutions which gave him self-target to aim for. He could not remember since when exactly he had stopped making new-year wishes. But this New Millenium’s new-year has brought through his dream, his once-in-a-lifetime resolution. His new-year 2000 resolution was a crusade. He had yet to define, plan and execute his mission. But he had already found that revived vigour he had once had as a young man, to undertake his secret mission.

During the day Harman telephoned Sheila to wish her a happy New-year.

“I’m sorry for last night. I’ll try to make up for it later. Maybe tomorrow.”

“Come today,” pleaded Sheila.

“I can’t. I’ve some very important sorting and planning to do,” explained Harman

“How come you have to do such things on a New Year day?”

“I’ve got a project. I have to work fast on it.”

“But it can wait a day or two,” reiterated Sheila.

“No, it can’t. I have to work on it when the ideas are still fresh in my mind. Moreover, it’s good omen to begin a project with the beginning of a new era, a new century and a new millenium,” continued Harman.

“It’s not easy to understand you, Harman. But I’ve just this to say. I love you.

I'll wait for you for as long as you want." " Thank you Sheila."

III

Harman Dahl locked himself in his study and began his work on his new project and his lifetime mission. He had to make detailed analysis of the project. First, he thought of putting down the ideas on paper as they came to his head. He listed down everything that will be needed; men, money and machines, to bring his project to fruition.

Harman Dahl was a professional in his own right. He could have easily become a scientist, a lawyer, or a lecturer. By some uncanny turn of fate, he ended up with a career in top Management. After graduating in Mathematics, he started his first job with Barclays Bank in London. He had since occupied top positions in several International Companies, including five years at Unilever Corporation, before returning to Nautilus. His personal disposition, skills and foresight had earned him the nickname of "Sherlock Holmes" in his business circle.

Masterminding a project of such magnitude and national importance was never in Harman's wildest dream, not until the open-air midnight dreaming in the centre of Bay Louis. He would have to use all his business acumen, managerial expertise, and manoeuvring skill to steer his challenging political project to success. Harman Dahl worked throughout the day, verifying and verifying again every single aspects and moves of his plan. He checked and rechecked every facts and figures till there was not a single shadow of doubt in the success of his one and only political gamble.

" The final chess game is on, and the King is about to be toppled," Harman said to himself with an air of self-satisfaction, as he put all his workings in the drawers of his bureau.

Harman Dahl was a fast worker. He was analytical and methodical too in his conception, planning and execution. He liked working on his own, and was usually secretive. He would seek advice, comments or ideas from his friends and colleagues, by formulating general questions and never exposing his plans in full. He always wanted to show his plans and actions in fruition.

The next day Harman Dahl, the debonair widower, drove to Bay Louis, at ten in the morning. Mrs. Hulkoree was in the front garden, doing some weeding.

"A very happy new-year Mrs. Hulkoree," said Harman as he kissed the old lady.

" Happy new-year to you too, my boy. Sheila will be delighted to know you are here. I'll go and tell her"

The old woman hurried to the back of the house. Minutes later, Sheila appeared at the front door, all smiling.

" I've come to take you out for lunch. I've got something very important to discuss with you."

" Come on in, Harman," said Sheila

" For just a minute. Can't wait. We've got to go somewhere quiet to talk. It's absolutely important that I talked to you. So hurry up young woman," pleaded

Harman.

Mrs. Sheila Suckhee was overjoyed. She thought that time was nearing when she would become new Mrs. Dahl. She felt that the impatience that Harman was showing should have something to do with the good news she has been expecting for so long. They drove to the Choisy Public Beach and stopped the white Opel under a Banyan tree on the beach.

“Sheila, you are looking stunningly beautiful this morning,” said Harman.

Sheila blushed. She was certain that Harman was going to ask for her hand in marriage and name the day right there. Harman was being tactful with his dear female companion, before bringing forward the subject matter that was worrying him. However he was genuine in his compliment to his fair lady.

“Sheila, you know me very little. Listen carefully to what I’ve to say about me, my life and my future, before deciding about us,” started Harman.

Sheila listened in a subdued mood, sitting in the passenger seat of the Opel.

“All my life, I’ve tried to be good: a good child, a good man, a good worker, a good husband and a good father. I have always been careful of what people might think or say about me. I’m a self-made man, coming from the modest background on the Island. And I’m proud of it, “ continued Harman.

“ I’ve come to love you because of who you are. The rest doesn’t matter,” interrupted Sheila.

“Yes, I know. But I want to tell you all. Today I’m fairly well off, but that’s the result of my hard work, my sweat and tears. My dear-departed wife, Santa and I have earned every cent we’ve owned. I returned to Nautilus three years ago with a vision, a vision to help fight injustices, corruption and instill in our society a sense of fairness and meritocracy for one and all. It didn’t take me long to realise that the vision was one of utopia, too good to be true. Since my wife died, I felt bitter about my failure in doing anything about what I have felt so strongly.”

“ You should not feel bad. We are only human and we can only do that much,” sympathised Sheila.

“ No Sheila. I’ve found the answers I’ve been looking for, for so long. It’s a kind of self- revelation. I want to tell you that I am thinking of launching a personal crusade against corruption and injustices. I don’t know about other countries or the world, but as far as our island, Nautilus is concerned, the crusade will be final,” stressed Harman.

“Harman, what happened to you? Why should you be talking of such things at a time when everybody is thinking of nothing else than having a good time on these festive occasions?”

“ When you get a desire to do something, you just do it. You don’t waste time. For long I’ve been dying for some self-fulfillment. I’ve desired to do something good for posterity, society and my people before I leave this world. I never felt capable or ready to undertake anything of that nature, not until now. I believe that I have, at last, both the means and the desire to do something for this society and its attitude. I’m pledging myself to free our people from the grip of the

overpowering and self-perpetuating corruption.”

“ How can you control these corruption and injustices on your own? The task is daunting. It’s like trying to change the course of a rapid river upstream. I can see your concern. I agree with you that corruption, injustices, drug trafficking, and political influences are becoming an acceptable way of life. I believe that all these will only cease through some natural calamity. Just like the sexual depravity and abuse of all kinds, wife-swapping, sexual orgies, lesbians and gays have been accepted as normal as against all normal sexual relation, the killer disease Aids seems to be a natural check on the present society’s behaviour. It’s Nature’s way of preventing us from transforming into bestiality,” Sheila explained.

“Don’t you think that Darwin’s theory is coming alive. The fittest are ruling the world. Unlike Darwin’s ‘fittest’ which referred to individual muscle power, today’s fittest are those who wield money and political power,” continued Harman.

The conversation they started, sitting in their car at Choisy Beach, turned into a serious debate between two intellectuals. Harman and Sheila seemed to be one of a kind in their views, and were reinforcing each other’s convictions. Harman was pleased to see his girl friend was so understanding towards him, and was not trying to deter him from his self-inflicted predicament.

“ I appreciate having you by my side right now. It’s like having Santa back with me,” reflected Harman.

“ I always confided in my wife. There were never any secrets between us. She was a good listener and she backed me in all my ventures. That’s why I’ve always succeeded. My flourishing business today is due partly to the mutual confidence and trust we had,” Harman continued reflecting

“ Just allow me to be with you, Harman. I love you. I know I can’t replace wife, but I’ll try to be as good,” cut in Sheila.

“ I’ve already given you all my trust, just as I had given my wife. No wonder I’m by your side right now, pouring out my heart and soul, confiding in you on matters of such important and personal nature.”

“ I’m delighted you find me close enough for you trust. I shall always be with you in whatever you do and wherever you go. It will be new beginning for us,” reassured Sheila.

“ Then I’ll announce you my new-year’s resolution for this dawning new millenium. My wish is to help fight injustices and corruption wherever they are. The motto of my personal crusade will henceforth be- Live and let live in fairness and justice,” said Harman with satisfaction.

“ When do we begin with our crusade?” asked Sheila

“ I’m pleased to hear you say ‘our crusade’. But I can assure you that my crusade won’t need any weapons. Nobody, apart from me, you, kesh and the selected few, will ever knew of its existence, not until the final outcome. As to when we begin the crusade, we begin at the beginning and today is the beginning,” pointed Harman.

IV

Harman Dahl invited Kesh Lakhan to his villa the following weekend.

“What do you think of us going in politics?” asked Harman

“Us in politics. You are not serious,” said Kesh.

Kesh has known Harman during all his life. He always thought Harman to be the most apolitical person he ever known.

“What the hell you want to go into politics for. At our age, what we need is to enjoy ourselves, after having spent our younger days working hard.”

“No, I’m dead serious,” continued Harman. “I want to fight this year’s general election, and I want you to come with me.”

“Hareman, we’ve always supported each other, and as always you can count on me,” pointed out Kesh.

“I know we can both win if we go into the next general election.”

“You seem to be so confident, Hareman, that I think that you’ve been cooking up something.”

“Yes Kesh, I’ve been doing a lot of thinking. I’ve come to the conclusion that I should put my remaining life to the service of my people.”

“You can do that without going into politics. You can be a national social worker.”

“I’m going into politics with only one aim; that is get people rid of corruption. That can only be brought about by drastic political reform in the country. There’s no way we can reform our political system and laws of the land if we stay far from politics and out of the national parliament. Therefore going into the next general election is an absolute must for me.”

“The anticipated general election can be held at any time within the next twelve months. Do you think we can be ready for it before then? We have to think well on all that will be involved.”

“I’ve been thinking on all its implications for days now. I have drawn up well-researched and elaborated plan, with facts and figures. It’s a failsafe plan, Kesh. I’m sure if we follow the plan, we can be in parliament next time. We have more than six months, and its ample time to put through a plan.”

“Well, Hareman, you’ll have to tell me about your plan, now,” said Kesh impatiently.

“I’ll brief you in detail at a later stage. For now I can just tell you this: We will be sixty candidates in all, fighting for the whole sixty seats in parliament. We are forming a new national political party, which I hope, will form the next majority government of Nautilus. We will use the greatest, tried and tested weapons in this election fight: money and corrupt practices themselves. I am calling our new party the ‘New Millenium Party’ and I am having it registered only on the announcement of the dissolution of Parliament. That would be a

good strategy, won't it, Kesh?"

"It will certainly bring some element of surprise if it manifests itself on the eve of a general election," answered Kesh

"Recruitment of candidates of the NMP has already started, and you, Sheila and I are the first three. The rest of the candidates will be selected within a fortnight. Party funding will be my sole responsibility. I shall be investing my whole fortune on this year's general election," explained Harman Dahl.

"I have devised a system of adding multi-million rupees in the election fund within months. With that kind of money and a well-organised party, strategically managed, and a list of flawless candidates, we will take the nation by surprise. Our opponents will not suspect our strength. They will take us for fake party, out to be in a temporary limelight in national politics. They will not suspect a political party formed only a few months before polling day, resorting to any means, cloak and dagger stuff, to win a general election outright. Nobody in the country would ever expect sixty new comers in the political arena, to be so well prepared to win the electors' confidence on their first attempt. Our newness will be our trump card, because nobody will know our election campaign strategy. By the time they realise our manoeuvres, the polling will be over. How do all this sound? Can you follow what I'm getting at? Do you think we can form a political party of new comers and win the next general election," asked a resolute Harman Dahl.

"Hareeman, you are making everything sounds so easy. I, personally, don't think winning a general could be so easy."

"You see Kesh, what I'm preparing is a kind of democratic coup-d'etat, as the sixty-zero general election result of the nineties. You just wait and see."

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V

The island of Mauritius, in the year 2000, was a true global village. That was the point on the globe where people, cultures, and religions from east, west, north and south met and cohabited. It was a universal laboratory, where all human elements were present together in the same melting pot. Instead of the normal expectation of seeing these elements combining by fusion into an ideal Nautilian human species, a model for the new millenium, the melting pot was like a dormant volcano, likely to erupt into violent explosion at anytime.

Pressures of all kind, from all corners were threatening to disintegrate the Nautilian society and the society's fabric. Diversity was becoming more prominent day after day, and unity was just the bare common birthright of the people. On the religious divide, some Nautilians had become too moslems and arabesque in appearance, like those in Arabian States. Likewise some Nautilians had become too hindus and indian in mentality, like those in Indian sub-continent. Yet some Nautilians had become too chritians and budhists than those in their native countries. Some had fixed final objectives of making Nautilus an Islamic State by bullet and bloodshed if need be. Others had other secret plots against the will of the majority of the Nautilian people.

On the economic divide, the Nautilian Bill Gates, the Nautilian Sheiks, the Nautilian Nababs, the Nautilian Watergates, and the Nautilian mafiosi were

surfing on the crest of the information technology, and were self-piloting the country into a haven for people of their kind.

For the masses of the poor people, year 2000 was the beginning of their planned exodes to their promised land in Beira , Mozambique, or elsewhere in Africa, where they could dream of becoming the next sheik, or business prince, while toiling the mines infested fields. They had to make room in their paradise island of Nautilus for those who were fitter and richer to be there.

This was what Harman Dahl had vowed to challenge. The misinformation or the lack of information deliberately controlled by the State or other authorities, subjected the people to great disadvantages. The people were never told the truth. At best they were told only half-truth and a pack of lies. There were always sensational revelations by each incoming government on the outgoing governments' previous activities, while keeping the nation completely in the dark of what was actually going on then, during their own time in power. The nation had to wait the next five years to know all the ills, the frauds, the corruption the present government was responsible for, by which time gross damages to the nation might have been caused and it would be too late to take any corrective actions or sanctions. Harman Dahl was planning to change the rules of politics, to the advantage of the Nautilian people whose will should be supreme at all time, and not only on polling days every five years.

TWO

I

After his expose of his plan of his forthcoming political involvement, Harman Dahl thought about the procedures of having his newly formed New Millenium Party duly registered at the Registrar of Association's office. He decided that it was best to leave this till the end before the general election nomination day. During that weekend, all the newspapers of the island had carried news of the anticipated General Election, following an hour-long televised interview of the Prime Minister, Dharam Santilall, on the government-owned, national television.

“ Prime Minister Santilall confident of winning the next election,” was the headline in the front page of the tabloid, Nautilus Daily News.

“ The Nautilus Popular Party is the only party good for us, says PM Dharam Santilall,” reported the Eye-Witness.

During the televised interview, the Prime Minister had hinted that he could call the Nation to poll on the day set to commemorate the birth of the founding Father of the Nation. The Parliament was on vacation, and at the beginning of the next parliamentary session, he would finalised the polling day.

Time was against Harman Dahl. His success in winning in a political gamble of that magnitude, in which he was staking everything he had, including his life, depended on planning, and analysing every odds in minute details. Thorough analysis and planning, in turn, depended a lot on time.

“ One cannot launch an all-out war, unless one is hundred percent guaranteed of success in the end,” thought Harman.

“Otherwise it will be utter waste on all sides.” Harman Dahl continued his planning. He advertised in all the newspapers.

“Opportunities for graduates (all disciplines) for immediate employment. Needed disciplined, self-motivated, individuals of all ages, not afraid to take risk and willing to make fame and fortune. Contact Hareeman Dahl, Managing Director, New Millenium Enterprise, Coast Road, Cape North. Telephone (230) 46 11 27. Email address: nme@innet.mu”.

The next thing Harman did was to analyse his financial situation. He sold off all his business, his entire stocks and shares and closed off his office in Bay Louis.

He made his home at Cape North, the central office of his new venture. He asked Roshnee Atma, his secretary, to work for him at Cap Malheureus. She agreed.

Mr. Dahl’s entire fortune, after the sales of all his assets, amounted to well over one hundred million rupees, enough to keep a man happy to his dying day.

“ There are hundreds of men in Nautilus, much richer than me, but they are still greedy like dogs fighting for bones,” mused Harman.

He turned his large dining room into his war-office from where he planned to launch his new business cum political offensive. In the end this would be his central election campaign office.

Harman Dahl was an expert in Information Technology. His first job, after graduating at Keele University, was Head of Data Processing in a big manufacturing company in London. He had plans for installing a computerised communication network around all the constituencies of the island as soon as possible. He was recruiting paid fieldworkers in every town and village who would be assigned specific task daily, and whose progress would have to be monitored and guided towards the final target. Harman Dahl would be the commander-in-chief of a well-groomed army of field workers who would learn, only from him, their job and the art of confidence-trickstering and public relation.

II

Sheila Suckhee invited Harman for Sankranti on the fourteenth of January, being the New Year in the Hindu calender. Harman was happy with the invitation. It was a week since he had seen Sheila. Both had been busy in their own way. Sheila was back at work at the University of Nautilus, preparing for the new semestre.

“ You are doing too much, too quickly, Hareeman,” she said when he had explained to her, all that have been keeping him so busy.

“ Yes, I know. I have to move fast. I have given myself an almost impossible task. It’s like taking command of an ocean liner right in mid-ocean, without a crew and without bearing. I have vowed to steer it to port through the storm. I hope I can rely on my passengers, like you and Kesh to man my ship,” said Harman with a grin.

“ In that case, I may be tempted to urge you to abandon the ship.”

“ At fleeting moments, I do feel that I have embarked in a perilous journey to

nowhere. I get down-hearted then, you know, Sheila.”

“ No, I don’t think you should feel down-hearted. I was only joking about abandoning ship. I shall be by your side, come what may,” said Sheila.

“But again, my initial enthusiasm could slowly fizzed out. I am beginning to doubt if it is at all possible to launch a lone campaign against Corruption and the Establishment and win it in the end, inspite of the large vested corruptive interest,” conceded Harman.

“ Granted the task is colossal. But we can be guided by the fighting spirit of men and women, like Gandhi who fought colonialism with his unique weapon, non-violence and Mother Teresa, who fought for human-poverty and dignity, with her own motivated human compassion,” Sheila reassured Harman.

“ I don’t feel that there is any comparison between the humble me and these great persons. But I would give anything to succeed in eradicating the social evil that is corruption, from the life of my brothers and sisters, and thus assure that every single person in my country find an equal share and opportunity to progress in life.”

“There was one blatant example of corruptive practice in Nautilus and the world at large, known, approved and condoned by everyone. And that is the widely acclaimed ‘Democracy’, which some wise guy has said, is ‘ a government of the people, by the people and for the people.’”

Harman Dahl believed that democracy was in fact just for the rich and where money and power dwelled supreme.

“There was not a single political party who could win a general election without spending multi-million rupees, in election campaign, to trick the electors of their precious votes. Once elected, these same government ministers and members-of-parliament, would take themselves as overlords, of the country, doing whatever they like with the nation’s wealth, properties and institutions, fearing nobody, not even the Almighty. They will continue till they themselves would fix a day to be reprimanded by the electorate. The reprimands would return in the form of fresh general elections, which would approve the legalised looting of the people’s wealth, created by years of multi-source taxation of the people. There was always the same result between general elections because during these times the Prime Minister and his colleagues in government and parliamentarians as a whole were the rulers and deciders of the country and the majority of the people was destituted of their powers.”

Harman could not understand how a group of people who were given a job of managing the affairs of the nation and as such, were mere paid employees of the State, could be allowed to decide on whatever they would think fit. Even to the irreparable detriment of the interest of every citizen. The citizens happened to be, by their constitutional rights, equal share holders in the national estate. He saw this as a ridiculous situation and he compared this absurdity only to some servants being allowed to work in a family household and finally the servants turning masters and ruling over the family in their own household. Instead of the family giving orders to the servants, the democratic concept was mere paradoxal, because through it, servants got powers and gave orders to masters and householders. It was the servants who decided what was good and what was bad for their masters, who surrendered their power of decision on the day, the

servants entered their house. According to Harman Dahl, the above was example of corruption of power, the root cause of all corruption. He remembered distinctly cases of flagrant corrupt decisions taken recently by the Nation's servants, the members of Parliament. The government, soon after the last general election, voted for themselves a three-fold pay increase without remorse. These same people's servants would have not hesitated to lock up workers who would have fought for a few rupees more in their wages and who would have gone into strike to press their demand. The servants would have forgotten workers too are co-proprietors of the government's assets and funds. Harman thought that the corruption stank more. The same government members who helped themselves freely to undreamed-of pay increase from the national coffers, had, prior to and during the general election campaign, given solemn pledge to the Nation. Their priority on forming the new government would have been to stop and repeal the payment of king-sized pension, handouts voted in parliament, for parliamentarians in the previous legislative assembly.

Harman Dahl thought that the democratic process in Nautilus, as it stood on the threshold of the third millenium, was guilty of perpetuating corruption from one generation to the next. All that democracy did was to give people a chance to change corrupters and never helped them to get rid of corrupters. The essence of democracy was to surrender the Nation's absolute power to a handful of individuals. Absolute powers, left in a few hands, were breeding ground for corruption.

“Corruption abounds in Nautilus.

Harman kept thinking that the big companies and multinationals who donated multi-millions to political parties' funds, as recently agreed and confessed by an ex-prime minister, did not give that kind of money out of charity. The big businessmen, who greased the Ministers' palms, did not do it because they liked the Ministers' faces.

“Donne un oeuf pour un boeuf, as the local saying goes,” Harman thought to himself.

The aim of the benefactors was nothing but to corrupt decision-makers in their favours and hence, assured themselves a hundred times more in return. The returns on their political investment were in forms of juicy contracts for them, an unwarranted price-rise of their products or services or just a ministerial signature on some business deals.

Just like rivers, the flow of corruption ran downstream in the national and social hierarchy. So much so, according to Harman Dahl, 'largent dithe' had become the first consideration in any dealing with government officials. Furthermore, the trade of influence and favours had become an accepted way of life in modern Nautilus, newly industrialised country and would-be economic tiger of Africa.

Harman Dahl was sure that a situation like that could never be a win-win situation. There was bound to be losers. Harman was equally sure that the losers would be the majority of the economically weak and vulnerable people of the country, who would be permanently hard-pressed by the corrupt Rich.

Harman knew and had heard of many men getting rich, millionaires and multi-millionaires almost overnight. There were stories of an ordinary

policeman becoming a business tycoon within a few years in the police force. There were stories of an simple teacher who was elected to parliament, became a minister, left politics within a few years to become a property magnate. There were other stories of a multi-millionaire civil servant in whose residence, the police found hundreds of blank Nautilian passports and found no ground for an inquiry. Further stories were told in every household of Nautilus, and newer happenings of bribery and corruption were added to the list daily.

Harman was convinced that those stories were true, because he believed that there could never be smoke without fire. Thinking over all this had begun to diminish Harman's zeal for his lone all-out war against institutionalised corruption. What worried him more than anything else was the fear of his strategic-plan becoming known publicly. If that happened, he would be doomed to failure. To avoid this ever happening, Mr. Dahl decided to keep his plan to himself as far as possible; divulging only that part that would be necessary to get it working.

III

Harman Dahl reflected on Man for long, long time and wrote down the following verses in his book of poetry.

Man is a thinking creature,
With innate reasoning force.
And this theory to endorse,
Man walked with Time and Nature.
From their dawning days, Man learnt to survive,
Meant force be combined through unity,
Culture for family, society,
Communicating and debating live.
As Man's time and space increased gradually,
Men's converging and concerting became
Difficult and never again the same.
Leadership's concept evolved naturally.
Man spread everywhere and boundaries drawn
To mark territories, common ownership.
Leader of group leaders, concept of kingship
Evolved, giving men's power to one person.
Man found power, left in single hand, corrupt.
Kings turned despots and tyrants powerful,

Never equitable, never merciful.

Man reacted and change was fast and abrupt.

Man decided to take part in decisions,

His representatives, as kings' counsels, sent

As Man was many, time too long spent

To meet all in one place for consultation.

Man, at last, argued that Man's territory,

His will, wealth and welfare will be safeguarded,

By representatives formally voted,

By him in a system he called democracy.

Democracy as Man has known it yesterday,

Has again given power in single hands.

Just like in days of mighty kings and their bands,

Man's representatives, with Man's destiny, play.

IV

Harman drove Sheila to Independence Road in Bay Louis, in the evening of the same day. They were invited to spend a few hours with his younger brother and his family, in Tiolait.

“Hareemun, my little boy, you have forgotten your poor chachi,” said a thin, old woman, sitting on a sofa in front of the television .

“ No, my very dear chachi. How can I ever forget you, of all people. Whatever I am and whatever I have today are due to your kindness. I shall always remember all your help and care in my younger days,” said Harman.

Old Mrs. Bharatee Dahl, Harman's aunt, was eighty years old, but did not look her age. When Harman's parents had died in 1965, in a cyclone, as the roof of their house collapsed, it was their aunt Bharatee who had taken care of Harman and his brother Manish. Old Bharatee's husband was five years older than Harman's father. The Dahls came from a rich sugar cane cultivating family. Although Harman became an orphan at an early age, he was already owner of a huge fortune, including an estate. His aunt Bharatee had looked after him and guided him, just like a mother, during his school days and adolescence, until he left for England for further studies at the age of eighteen.

“Hareemun, it's a long time since I have seen you. It was at Santa's funeral ceremony,” said the aunt.

“ My life has changed completely since then, chachi. With Santa gone, and the children in England, I have become a lonely man,” said Harman.

“Beta, you should think of marrying again. Find yourself a good woman and she will keep you company.”

“Chachi, do you think it wise at this age?”

“What age? You are still young. I wouldn’t mind marrying again, myself, if I find the right man,” said old chachi Bharatee, laughing loudly.

Sheila Suckhee was a few feet away, talking to Manish and his wife, but her ears were glued to the conversation between Harman and his aunt.

“Hureemun, we can arrange that with old Hureea. Chachi and Hureea will make a good pair,” said Sheila

“Chachi, I forgot to present you my friend, Mrs. Sheila Suckhee, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hulkoree of Bay Louis,” said Harman.

“Sheila, now you know my chachi Bharatee. I’ve talked to you so often,” he continued.

“I’m pleased to meet you, chachi,” said Sheila, bending over and kissing the old lady on both cheeks.

“She is a darling, isn’t she, Hareemun?” asked Sheila.

“Oh yes, she is an angel,” agreed Harman.

“I didn’t need to tell you to find a woman. You seem to have already found one. How long have you two been seeing each other,” asked the old aunt.

“For some time now,” answered Sheila, smiling.

“Come here my good girl, come and sit near me, by my side and talk to me,” said the old woman.

Harman and Sheila were invited to stay in Tiolait for the night. After much hesitation, Sheila agreed.

“This will give us a chance to know your future wife,” said Aunt Bharatee.

In the following morning, Harman took a walk in his childhood village. He passed by the familiar places, the social welfare centre, the police station, and the old school. The buildings looked as if, for them, time had stood still. The showed little or no change.

“Bhai Hareemun, bhai Hareemun,” called out someone, as he passed a corner shop. Harman turned to see and was very pleased to find an old friend, of school days.

“Oh Raman! How are you my dear friend. It’s a long, long time since I’ve seen you,” said Harman, shaking hands and embracing him.

“Yes, Hareemun, It’s been a long, long time. We were very young then. Now we have met, when we have both aged considerably,” said Harman’s newly found friend, Raman.

“Bhai Raman, how are your family and your children? I hope you have

children.”

“ Yes, I have children, three girls. I lost my only son, my eldest child, in a road accident five years ago.”

“ I’m sorry to hear that. I, also, lost my wife recently. She died of prolonged illness. How did the road accident happened, Raman.”

“ It happened right in front of my eyes. It wasn’t an accident really. It was more an act of murder. My son was killed by a car driven by a drunken driver.”

“ What do you mean, killed?” inquired Harman.

“ It was a Sunday, early hours in the morning. My son and I and some others were returning from prayers. We were crossing the road at a traffic light. The pedestrian light was green. Out of nowhere, a car came very, very fast and didn’t stop, and didn’t even try to stop. In a fraction of a second it hit my son directly, moved to one side of the road by the impact and sped away. My son died on the spot, bled to death. It was a living nightmare for me. The police knew the owner and driver of the car, because we were able to get the car’s registration number.

There was never any arrest or any police case. You know why? Because the owner of the car was a Minister and a Muslim like me.”

“ I don’t believe it,” said Harman.

“ As if killing my boy was not sufficient. The police treated the case as another road traffic accident. Their report blamed my boy for running in front of the car when the traffic light was red. It was a blatant lie. It almost killed me too when I heard that huge sums of money to given to witnesses and policemen to say the contrary of what really happened.”

“ The Almighty above will do justice when time comes,” said Harman to console Raman.

“ I am really sorry to hear your misfortune. Tell me Raman, are any of our school friends around? There were Rohan, Darmen, Gaetan and the others.”

“ Poor Gaetan! He’s been very unlucky too. He is in prison, serving life sentence. He was found guilty of killing a political activist. But nobody around here believes that Gaetan committed the crime. Neither do I. There were persistent rumours that a top political leader and ex-minister was involved in this case,” continued Raman.

“ It really pains me to hear the misfortunes of my dear childhood friends.

“ Yes, we have been victims of injustice and corruption. And we’ve been to weak and helpless to defend ourselves.”

“Raman, my dear friend, things are bound to change some day. It’s a pity that we’ve not been in touch for so long. I’ve been in England for most of my life since I left college. I’m in Nautilus since five years and I’ve settled in Cape North. It’s only my second visit to Tiolait since my return on the Island. I’m delighted to have met you. You know Raman, since my wife passed away, I’m seriously thinking of going into politics.”

“Dear friend Hareeman! Please don’t go into politics. Politics is so dirty. It’s not a place for honest people,” advised Raman. “ But Raman, you must get into a dirty house to clean it,” pointed Harman.

V

After his return from Tiolait, Harman thought a lot of his two friends, Raman and Gaetan and he wished he could do something for them. When he had decided to go on a private war on corruption and to go on crusade to help victims of gross corruption and injustices, he hardly knew that his dear friends had already suffered from them. One thing he had to concede. Him, being, just one person, it would be practically impossible for him to look and help in every individual case of corruption and injustice personally. Therefore, if he were to succeed in his crusade, he would have to devise a system of control where any act of corruption would become public domain within a few days and the people involved, denounced straight away.

Devising a fair system of prevention of corruption of people in the country, would not be too difficult task for the brains of the country. It would take time for finding the right and just system and to implement the system. But it would not be impossible. According to Harman Dahl, what was really needed was the willpower to fight. Harman had the will to fight corruption in the whole of Nautilus, till the end, even if he might be completely ruined in the process. He had the will to stake everything he had, even his life if that came to it. His crusading spirit had given a new meaning to his life. He was pleased that the feeling of down-heartedness he had been having recently had been short-lived. His usual self-confidence had return in full.

What pleased him more was that, as the days passed, new ideas were flooding in his mind. Crystal-clear ideas were cramming his mind and he was having difficulty to keep tract of them and he jotted them down just in case he forgot them. It was more surprising to Harman that all the ideas that were flowing in his head, were falling into places in his overall plan. He had clear vision of all the details of how to proceed on his path to victory. He was getting keen to launch his plan further. But he could not because he had not yet set his men and machines in place.

The response from his advertisements in the newspapers began to arrive. There were responses by email mostly, few by letters and fewer by phone. Harman was happy to see that most applicants had replied by email which meant that they were all computer literate persons. That was what he needed as workforce in his new venture. Harman planned a series of interviews of candidates in the following weeks, which should keep him very busy. He had to interview literally hundreds of candidates. He had to make sure that his final choice of candidates were up to his expected standard, as it Would be these men that Harman would be using as pawns in his political game of chess.

During the first weeks of the New Millenium, the government of Nautilus was euphoric. They had absolutely no opposition in sight. They were completely ignorant of Harman Dahl and his unregistered New Millenium Party. They were starting a string of development projects in every sector they could think. Announcement were made on television that week by ministers of the start of their multi-million projects in their respective ministries. That was sure sign to Harman that the anticipated general election was on and the political campaign would be beginning sooner, in the whole island.

Harman had never heard of any country starting so many huge multi-million projects simultaneously on the eve of a general election. Harman thought that the men in government were making a clever ploy, so that whatever the result of the general election, they would come out winners. The ordinary electorate would view this massive investment in development projects as very good for the country and thus they would vote in block for the government, making them winner and stay in power for more years. Or else they would lose in the general election, but making sure of filling each and every pockets with funds reserved for the various and making last minute payments from government funds to every Tom, Dick and Harry. That would be like winning fortune, so to say.

Harman grinned to himself thinking of the political explosives he would be detonating after polling day, which would shake the political scene to bits and with it, corruption too. He was poised to recruit his elite personnel he would need around him in his new venture. Response from applicants was beautifully good. He had plenty of good elements to choose from. One particular application attracted Harman most. He read the application letter several times:

Dear Mr. Dahl,

I read your advertisement with utmost interest.

If the job is a real challenge, as one can read between the lines, where risk, fame and fortune are intermingled, I am your man. I am a 28 year-old graduate from University of Nautilus. I thrive on a good challenge and I am less than a kilometre from you.

I am attaching my curriculum vitae with my email. I, sincerely, hope to hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,

Gian Kala.

Three

I

On the appointed day for interviews, Gian Kala was the first to arrive at the villa at Cape North. George, the handy man, had been given the job to guide the interviewees through the side alleys to the veranda facing the sea, where they would wait for Mr. Dahl. Sophie, the maid, had laid a table in the veranda with tea, coffee, fruit juice, assorted cakes and sandwiches for the official guests. She told Mr. Kala, the first one to arrive, that it was free service and invited him to help himself.

Gian Kala lived in La Mare Street, not far from Harman Dahl's villa. He had heard of Mr. Dahl before, but the two men had never met. Gian Kala was in his late twenties, a graduate from the University of Nautilus, and was unemployed for over six months. He came from a modest family and his unemployment had made things very difficult for him, especially during the past festive month. Luckily for him, he was still a bachelor, without a wife or children, to support.

After leaving University with a degree in Engineering, he got his first job with an International Construction Company, working on a government-financed new container terminal at Mer Rouge. After four and a half year with the

construction firm and the completion of the container terminal, Gian was out of a job.

Gian Kala felt was a bit nervous, waiting alone in the veranda. He needed a job badly and so he was there earlier than expected. To make sure that he got the job with the New Millenium Enterprise, he decided that he would agree to all terms and conditions likely to be imposed with the job, provided he got it. He was pleased to learn that there were several vacancies, which made him a bit hopeful of being back in employment again soon.

Within half an hour of Gian's waiting, three persons arrived, two men and a young woman. Gian greeted them and started a conversation with them.

“ Would you like tea or coffee,” Gian asked them.

The two men opted for coffee.

“ I'll have some fruit juice.,” said the young woman.

Gian Kala served the coffee for the men and tea for himself in shining china cups.

“ Fruit juice for the lady,” said Gian handing the crystal glass to the young woman.

“ Do you work here?” asked the woman, displaying a gentle smile.

“ Oh no, I wish I did. I'm here for an interview for a job. I take it that you, too, are here for an interview, aren't you?”

The two men were drinking their coffee, quietly talking, seated on narrow armchairs next to Gian.

“Yes,” she said.

“ Well, in that case, we should introduce ourselves. I'm Gian Kala and I live very near here.”

“ My name is Asha Panee. I'm from Rose Hill. I met these two gentlemen in the bus. Mamood Ali, and Iswar Raja,” said the young woman.

“ Where are you from, Mamood?” asked Gian.

“ Iswar and I are old friends and we both come from Bay Louis. I'm from Plaine Verte and Iswar's from Tranquebar.”

They felt at ease conversing among them, and getting to know one another. All the while, other people arrived, alone or in small groups. There was a cordial and friendly atmosphere in the crowded veranda. Until the final candidate arrived, Sophie came once or twice to fresh tea and coffee.

At 9.30 Mr. Dahl's secretary, Roshnee Atma opened the door, nearest to them and came on the veranda. All the persons present, some seated, some standing, turned to look at her.

“ Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a good day. Thank you all for coming. I believe that you are all here for interviews for jobs with the New Millenium

Enterprise. On my list I have twenty candidates, five girls and fifteen boys, and from what I see, I think you are all present. Mr. Harman Dahl will start the interview soon.”

Gian Kala was first on the list of interviewees. As he followed Roshnee to Mr. Dahl’s office inside the Bungalow, Miss Asha Panee whispered good luck to him.

“ I’m Mr. Harman Dahl, Managing Director of New Millenium Enterprise. I thank you for your presence and welcome you at the New Millenium Enterprise.

Mr. Dahl’s first few words sounded very comforting, like sweet music.

“ Mr. Gian Kala, I’m pleased that you live not far from here. Please tell me about you, your experience and your expectations,” continued Harman.

“ Well Sir, I have to admit that my experience is not that good. I have only five years experience as assistant to project manager with Benelux International Construction, working at the Bay Louis Container Terminal. Unfortunately, as I explained in my application letter, the project was completed on time, and I found myself without a job. With Benelux International Construction, I gained first class working experience. I got the opportunity of being a useful member of an international team of experts. Mr. Marcel De Van Dyke, President Directeur Generale of Benelux has given me the best recommendation I could ever wish for. He was very satisfied with my work’s devotion. Likewise, I can assure you that I’ll give my complete devotion to the New Millenium Enterprise.”

“ Tell me a bit on your family background.”

“ I come from a very modest, working class family. I’m the eldest of three sons. I’ve many uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces. In fact there are quite a few Kalas spread round the country.”

Harman Dahl was already aware of Gian Kala’s family background. In truth he knew the family background of all those present there that morning. He needed his new recruits to be members of large families. This exercise was only to hear it from the interviewees themselves.

“Do you follow local politics? What do you think of Nautilian politics, and especially Nautilian politicians?”

“ Yes, I follow politics, but I’m apolitical. Like a good citizen, I take account of what’s going in the country. I’ve never followed any political parties. They are all the same here, there and everywhere. To me, they seem to do more harm than good to this country and the world at large.”

Harman Dahl was deeply impressed by Gian Kala’s frank reply.

“ What are you expecting as salary?”

“ Between ten to twelve thousand rupees per month,” answered Gian Kala.

“ I’ll do better than that. What I’m proposing to you is a place in my team of professionals. I’m giving you a chance to make a name and fortune, all by legal means. But for that, you’ll have to give me your trust. You’ll be paid handsomely: Twenty-five thousands rupees per months. Does that appeal to

you?”

“ I don’t know what to say, in fact. It’s too good to believe. It’s a lot more than I expected. What would be the job,” inquired Gian.

“ I cannot tell you all about the job right now. You will be told as the work progresses. In fact you will be assigned a mission within the New Millennium Enterprise, under my sole Directives. You will work from your home, at your pace and time. New Millennium Enterprise had set a difficult business objective for the current year and I, as Managing Director, have to attain that objective by any means. Money is no problem. Time is pressing and I can’t wait. Tell me now if you accept my proposition or not. If you accept we’ll sign the contract of employment and you will be officially employed by NME as from this hour.”

Gian Kala did not hesitate a second. He was so pleased to be getting a job.

“ I’ll accept. I hope you will be satisfied with my performance, Mr. Dahl.”

Harman Dahl took out a Contract of Employment duly prepared, from a folder, inserted Gian Kala’s name, signed it and handed to his first NME recruit to sign.

Gian Kala added his signature.

“ Welcome once again to New Millennium Enterprise, Mr. Kala.”

II

Miss Asha Panee was next on the list to be interviewed. She noticed a happy face as she passed Gian Kala on her way to the interview room.

“ Good Morning, Miss Panee. Before anything else, I would like to assure that New Millennium Enterprise is an equal opportunity company. We give everybody a fair and equal chance. That said, tell me, Miss Panee, What made you apply for job with us.”

Asha Panee was not nervous at all. She appreciated the way things have been done for the interview to make her feel at ease.

“ I’m in search of my first job. From what I gathered in the advertisement, it seems that it is going to be a challenging job. After four years spent at the University, I am looking forward to new challenges,” answered Asha.

“ That’s what I like to hear. I like people who thrive on challenges. Tell me Asha, do you believe in gambling? Would you stake your life for something you feel deeply about?” asked Harman Dahl.

“ That’s a difficult question to answer, Mr. Dahl. It all depends. I can gamble and take risk, if it is a calculated risk. As for risking my life over something, I will only consider it if some eternal good will come out in the end.”

The interview continued for about fifteen minutes. The questions related to academic achievement, social life and friends, family links, personal ambitions and of course, politics and politicians.

“ I like the way you answered my questions. Well, I’m pleased to offer a job as from today. You will be working from your domicile. I can’t tell you a lot about the job now. I’ll do that when I’ll get the whole team around me. One thing I can tell you is the job will involve working with the general public, a kind of

public relation job. I'm offering you twenty-five thousand rupees per months, to help New millenium Enterprise achieve its business objective this year. NME will be investing over hundred million rupees in this new national project. But more of this, we'll discuss later. Here is the contract of employment. You read carefully and sign it if you accept the terms and conditions. Just for your information, all those sitting outside, have been called here to be offered a job with NME."

Miss Asha Panee read the small print on the contract carefully, and found all the terms and conditions as being normal as in any similar job contract. She signed both copies and gave it to Mr. Dahl.

"Welcome to New Millenium Enterprise, Miss Panee," said Harman Dahl, giving her a copy of the contract.

Asha Panee found Gian Kala still there chatting to the group.

"I thought you would have gone by now," she said.

"No. I stayed a bit to talk to the others. In fact I was waiting for you. How did it go?"

"It went fine. I got the job. I'm so pleased. It's like a dream."

"I got a job too. You got a contract?" asked Gian

"Yes, here it is. What a pay! Twenty-five thousand rupees per months," she exclaimed all joyful.

"Fantastic! So we got the same pay and condition of work with New Millenium Enterprise. I think it calls for celebration, don't you."

"Yes, I think it does."

"Then we'll drive to Pereybere. I am inviting you to lunch. It will give us a chance to know each other a bit more. How about it?"

"That's ok. And I'm famished too. I skipped my breakfast worrying about this morning. You've got a car?"

"Yes, an old banger! It's a 1970 Ford Capri, and it's my mate. It never lets me down and takes me everywhere. Come on, it's in the front yard," said Gian

Gian Kala was a rather shy young man, not given to get easily with girls. It was on the spur of the moment, that he got courage to invite Asha for lunch. He was very pleased with himself for having managed it so casually. He was inwardly thanking his lucky stars for having bagged such a precious job, and a very beautiful girl to celebrate it with. His mother had asked him so many times to get married.

"Wait till I find me a job first. Then I'll find me a girl," he told his mother.

On that day, he found both, a job and a girl.

"The job is signed and sealed. The girl, could she be the one for me?" Gian thought.

They drove to the Tanjore Restaurant, on the coastal road not far from the public beach at Pereybere. Gian had been to the Tanjore before. The last time he came here, was over a year when his best friend gave a stag-night party, before his wedding.

“Asha, choose any dish for you. Never mind the bill. I’m so pleased. I want this day to my memorable day.”

“I shan’t forget this day either. My parents will be overwhelmed when they will hear the news of my getting my first job. I bet they will not believe me when I’ll tell them my pay-packet.”

“Yes, no doubt. The pay offer we’ve got is beyond our wildest dream.”

Both Gian And Asha chose the same dish: Bol renverse aux langoustes. For their first time together, the two were getting along very well.

“What do you think of Mr. Dahl, Asha?”

“Very handsome.”

“No. Not that way. As head of New Millenium Enterprise?”

“He gave me the impression of being a resolute man, very sure of himself.”

“Don’t you think he might be a fake?”

“No, Gian . I don’t think he is. What makes you say that?”

“Oh, I’m not sure. Maybe it’s his over-generous pay, his secret job and his immediate enrolment.”

“I grant you that his way of doing things is more than impressive. Not like that of some riff-raff that we see sometimes. But I could see genuineness in his eyes. The first impression I got of him is that of a good father-figure, even he doesn’t look that old.”

“I’ll agree with you. I think he’s got something very interesting. He’ll probably tell us more, only when he is ready. I’ve heard about Mr. Harman Dahl for some time now. One thing I know is that he is very rich.”

“I heard him distinctly say that New Millenium Enterprise is investing over one hundred rupees in his secret project. What’s more, he told me he is planning to recruit all those people present at the villa. I presume that they are all graduates like us. That will make a hefty wage bill at the end of each month. Surely Mr. Dahl knows what he is doing,” explained Asha Panee.

Harman Dahl continued his interviewing without stopping until he had seen and recruited all the twenty candidates present. All of them had been given identical contract of employment, effective from that very day. Harman Dahl had told them all to be present at the villa the next day to be briefed on their job. He was really pleased to have seen that all the candidates, whose application details, he had carefully analysed, had turned up and accepted his offers. He had purposely made the offers so attractive that none would have missed out, for anything.

Roshnee, the secretary had phoned Sheila Suckhee and Kesh Lakhan during the day, asking the to join Harman Dahl in the evening at the villa for some important discussion. Sheila arrived in her Suzuki at seven o'clock, at sundown.

“ How did your day go, Sheila,” asked Harman after welcoming Sheila on the doorstep.

“ Not bad. There was not really much to do at the University at this time of the year. How about you? Did you have a good day, Harman?”

“ A very busy day. I had to interview my new recruits, but more of this, later. Let's just relax for a few minutes first. What would you like for a drink?”

“ I'll have an avocado juice.” Harman gave Sheila her drink and poured himself a large Green Island and coke and sat next to his companion on the sofa in front of the television. It was news hour on the local channel. As usual the news was centred on political events, or governments image-building propaganda. Several Ministers were paraded on the television, each performing some grand function somewhere or launching something or other. That evening the big news was about the launching of the Midland Dam by the Minister.

“It is well timed with the anticipated general election lurking round the corner,” thought Harman Dahl.

“ Sheila, would you like to hear my latest piece of poetry? I wrote it down last night.”

“ Of course, my dearest Hareeman. Regardless of what others may think, your poems are all beautiful. You should think seriously of publishing them. Alright now, let me hear your new piece.”

Harman Dahl lowered the volume of the television with remote control, sat up straight, took a sip from his glass and began to read his latest poem, entitled
-The Boy.

The Boy

On that hazy, dazzling Sunday afternoon,
Turning into a hot and sweaty evening soon,
I saw a boy in clothes torn and tattered,
Barefoot in ankle-deep muddy water, unfettered,
Moving a rock, almost half his size
Catching an elusive crab from where it lies.
Watching that boy, reminded me of my own days,
When, like him, to live, I had to find my ways.
I knew the boy was out to find some protein free.
To change his meals of boiled leaves, he was at the sea.

My heart went out to this boy, poor mite,
With a wish of good of good luck, a prayer in his plight.
I was sure he would make it in the end.
Like many, humanity, he would surely defend.
He would grow into a man, wise, just and strong.
Poverty would flee from him, in the not-too-long.
As I approached him, dipping my shoes in the mud,
I could feel the warmth in his young blood.
He turned to me with a grin fading into a smile.
Smiling back to him, I said “God bless you, my child”

Harman Dahl’s voice and eyes were filled with emotion as he uttered the last words. Sheila stayed quiet, as if stunned.

“Hareemun, I like it. It’s beautiful. It’s so sentimental. I think you should write more. I think people will love to read your poem”

“Sheila, I honestly think that I don’t have what it takes to write poetry. Only now and again, I get the urge to express my feeling on certain matters. Only then that I try to put my feeling in some haphazard poetry. I have no pretention to seeing them published.

IV

Kesh Lakhan arrived about eight. Sophie served late dinner for three. They had chicken fried rice, followed by large helpings of vanilla ice-cream and coffee.

Once they were seated in the lounge, Harman brought up the subject that had been occupying his that evening.

“You know Sheila, Kesh. I have come to consider your advice beyond value, that is invaluable. And you both know that I’m a man who likes to make his own decisions.”

“That’s true!. I must that’s what I admire in Harman, Kesh,” remarked Sheila.

“You know him only a few years. I’ve known Hareemun all my life. I know him to be one of a kind.”

“Stop mortifying me, you two. You know well what I’m trying to do or at least what I’m fighting for. Well I’m pleased to announce to you this evening that I’ve completed recruiting my main personnel or, should I say, my project’s officers who are going to fight corruption on my behalf. All twenty of them, men and women who have agreed to work for me and follow my instructions to the letter, in return for a monthly salary of twenty five thousand rupees per month.”

“Twenty five thousand per month! That’s almost double of what I get as

lecturer at the University,” said Sheila.

“Harman I know you are an uncanny businessman but I think you are wasting your money,” said Kesh.

“Well, how else can I command the trust and loyalty of a band of strangers, when I’m so short of time.”

“Even then, you are paying too, too much,” added Kesh.

“One thing I know. With a pay packet like this, none of them will want to lose their job.”

“Do you really need so many people work for you?” asked Sheila.

“I’ve so far told you of my personal crusade to defeat corruption. I’ve not told you of how I plan to do this. Today I’ve called you both here, as my confidants, to share with you, not my plan, but the first actual move in my crusade. Today I’ve recruited twenty graduates, all professionals in their fields, specially chosen, one from each of the twenty political constituencies of Nautilus. For their twenty five thousand rupees per month, their works will only consist of getting them elected in the forthcoming general election. From this day, they’ll have every minute of their time to sell themselves to the electorate on an individual basis. No political party is involved at this moment.”

“So you crafty old bugger, you are planning to go into the general election in a big way. When you told me to take part in the next general election, I thought you meant just you and me and maybe Sheila. But now, it’s looking very interesting.”

“I like to show the cards in my hand slowly, one card at a time, to make it interesting. Otherwise it’s no fun.

“Fighting the general election as a group can force the government to pass anti-corruption laws. I can see it now,” said Sheila.

“That could be it or it could be something very unexpected that can take everybody by surprise. Anyhow, the engine of my war-machine against corruption has been turned on. Once the machine gets moving, I wonder what havoc it will play on the political scene,” concluded Harman.

Kesh bade goodnight to his friends and left at ten.

“I would like you to stay, Sheila,” said Harman

“I shouldn’t really. But in the end, who cares. I’m a liberated woman and a liberated woman can have some fun.”

Harman Dahl did not sleep well that night. While he lay in bed, by her side he was thinking of Sheila. She was a good woman. He said to himself that as soon as his job against corruption was won and his obsession against corruption was over, he would make a surprise to Sheila by proposing to marry her.

From their very first meeting, the very start, they hit it together. Him a suave, middle-aged widower, businessman, she, a jovial beautiful divorcee, they made a handsome pair. Both were accustomed and were well in their shoes at parties,

be they familial, friendly or official. Both were free and enjoyed each other's company.

"I've found a woman, with whom I'd like to spend the rest of my life," said Harman to his son during one of their many telephone conversations.

"I don't know how you and your sister would take the news of your father living with another woman."

"We'll be very happy to know that you have found somebody new to share your life with, Dad," answered Dan.

"We are old enough to know that life can be very lonely some times, when your dearest one has left you,"

Harman Dahl's relationship with Sheila Suckhee, flourished and was encouraged by his children's understanding. That night Harman was happy to have Sheila with him. He felt that Santa was back with him for a while. They were so much alike, except a few years difference in age.

Harman Dahl kept his thoughts occupied. Soon his mind roamed to that day's events, to his new recruits. He remembered their faces one by one. There was Gian Kala, Mamood Ali, Jean Pierre Jackson and all others. He was sure that the team he got was the best team he could find. Four I

The briefing on their first day with New Millenium Enterprise was due at ten o'clock in the morning. Gian Kala was up early, at sunrise. It promised to be a good day. Gian Kala was jovial. He was humming about the house.

"Gian, you look very happy this morning," said his father, as he passed him near the bathroom.

"Yes, Pa! I got a job yesterday. Today is my first day back at work, after so many months of staying idle."

"I'm glad for you, my son. The New Year is starting well for you. It has certainly brought you luck."

Gian Kala had his breakfast while looking at the morning newspapers. The headline on the front page of Lexpress read "The Opposition in complete disarray," that of Nation's simply, "Polling Day in August, says PM."

"The government is having too easy a time, with an Opposition plagued by perpetual internal bickering," thought Gian.

Gian had arranged to meet Asha Panee at nine at the bus-stop at Cape North. The bus arrived on time. They greeted each other with a smile.

"Are you ready for your first day at work," said Gian as they strolled on the grassy verge by the seaside.

"Yes, I'm as ready as ready can be. Do you have any clue of what kind of work we can be given today?"

"Absolutely none at all. We should not worry. Whatever be the job, I'm sure, we'll be up to it. I bet your parents are delighted to hear your having found

employment. Aren't they?"

"They are overjoyed. But I didn't tell them about my salary. They would have either not believed me or they would think the whole thing fishy."

"Do you think there's something fishy?" asked Gian.

"Anyway, we'll soon find out. The first official work's meeting is only minutes away. We'd better get there quick or else, we'll be late. We don't want to give a bad impression on the first day."

"O.k. Let's hurry up.

When they reached the villa, they found most of the people they saw the previous day, including Mamood Ali and Iswar Raja, all sprightly and chatting among themselves.

"Hello, young lady. It's nice to meet you again. Hello Gian, are we ready to start with NME," said Mamood when he saw Asha and Gian.

Just then, Mr. Dahl's secretary, Roshnee appeared at the far end of the veranda.

"Ladies and gentlemen, would you like to follow me. This way please," she said pointing to the doorway.

Gian Kala and Asha Panee, followed by Mamood Ali and Iswar Raja and the others, filed by the veranda door, in a short corridor and entered a very spacious, well furnished room, with wide-opened bay windows, overlooking the sea. There was a large rectangular table with matching high-back chairs. There were seats for everyone. On one wall hung a large map of Nautilus. Below the map, there was a long desk with the back against the wall. Several computers were arranged with other I.T stuffs in a row on top. At ten o'clock precise, Mr. Harman Dahl entered the room.

"I extend my welcome to you all once again. I'm glad to see you and I, sincerely, hope that we'll have a long and fruitful collaboration for our mutual interests. It will take some time to know you all closely, but I know I can rely on you all."

"I think, we are all here to work and do our best for New Millenium Enterprise. But we would like to know about our specific jobs within NME," said Gian.

"Before I briefed you on your specific jobs, I would like to tell you this: New Millenium Enterprise has been created with one and only one objective. This objective is not financial. This I stress. I own NME. As owner, it is I who has set the objective. It is I alone who knows that objective. Unfortunately, I'm not in a position to let you know what the objective is."

Everyone was listening to Harman Dahl attentively.

"Just because I'm keeping that a secret, doesn't imply that there's anything loose or illegitimate in it. Far from it. You have all seen your contract of employment you received from me yesterday. You'll agree with me that it is a genuine piece of legal document."

"According to me, the success of NME depends a lot on the ability to keep its

objective secret for as long as necessary. In the course of your employment with NME, if at any time, you feel that you are being asked to do anything illegal, you can refuse to do

it and resign your job. That will always be your prerogative. I sincerely hope that it will never come to that and we stay together till the end of the road, where I, personally, guarantee you all fame and fortune. I would like you to think of yourselves as a group of man on a secret mission with only your commander knowing the next action and the final target.”

“ I do concede that what I’m saying appear mysterious. You’ll have to live with it for a while. Now let me come to the point that matters more right now. May I remind you, at this stage, of the clause in the contract relating to the company’s information and secrecy etc. Make sure you abide by it and do not make information about or from the New Millenium Enterprise public.”

“ Here goes. Please take note of the following: You will be all working from your home, and you will be all given a multimedia computer linked with Internet. Please make sure that you all stay at home tomorrow to receive and have your computer installed. Your Internet bill will be paid the company. You will be all given an electoral list of your constituency. Look at this map of Nautilus on the wall here. You won’t be surprised if I told you that there twenty electoral constituencies in Nautilus and I have recruited twenty of you, one from each contituency.”

“ Your actual job for this week, is the start of public relation.(1) Open up files on the computer and enter all the names of all people from the electoral list you know personally well, excluding any relatives, together with all relevant details such as age, sex, family background, employment etc. (2) Make yourselves known to as many people as possible in the shortest possible time, and again keeping a computer list of all people you come across, with their details as above. (3) Email me the two lists of names and details by next Friday at the latest. (4) Find two persons from your constituency, who are graduates and professional like you, whom you can recommend for employment with us. The newcomers will form part of your team in your area and each team must consist of two men and a woman. All the instructions I have given must be completed by the weekend. We are meeting here again next Monday at ten in the morning. On that day we’ll monitor your work progress and take necessary decisions and actions as it dictates.”

When Harman Dahl had finished, he left quickly for Bay Louis. He had an appointment with the Director of Ace Computers Ltd. He had already placed an order for twenty computers, and he had to make sure deliveries and installations were made the next day to his personnel’s homes, around the island.

“ You have got the list of my personnel and their addresses?” asked Harman to the Director.

“ Yes, I have it here. And to make absolutely sure that the deliveries are made and the installation carried out and tested, I’ll be sending two delivery vans with technicians,” reassured the director.

II

After Mr. Dahl’s departure, Roshnee Atma handed the files she had prepared

previously to each one of the new employees. It contained a written copy of the week's work assignment, a list of work's meeting dates and time and a list of pay dates when they would get paid.

The new recruits came out of the villa looking happy. They were all unanimously satisfied and convinced that their jobs were genuine, even though the nature of the jobs was not all that clear. Yet, they all had been given work, albeit identical, to do. They have also been given deadlines.

Most of those who came by their own transport, either cars or motorcycles, left straight away. Except Gian Kala with his newly found group of friends, and a few others who waited at the bus-stop. The group of four, with Gian Kala as the head were conferring on their allotted tasks.

“Gian, Do you have a lot of friends and acquaintances, apart from your relatives,” asked Mamood Ali.

“Yes, I have quite a few, but I don't know if that will make a long list,” answered Gian. “Why does Mr. Dahl want us to give him a list of people we know,” inquired Asha. Iswar Raja was quick to answer.

“Maybe Mr. Dahl has come across a secret product that that he is planning to sell to everybody in the country. This was all part of his market survey.”

“No, Iswar, that cannot be it. Mr. Dahl made it clear and stressed on it that NME's objective is not financial, that is not money.” Said Gian.

“But he could be just kidding. Have you ever heard of a business enterprise having other motive than profit motive? Every private business exists solely to make money. I don't think NME is an exception,” added Mamood.

“I, personally think that Mr. Dahl is an exceptional man, and means everything he says,” rejoined Asha Panee.

“He seems to have made a very good impression on you by his paternal look,” said Gian, trying to tease Asha.

“But I would rather say that this young lady, Miss Asha Panee, who has made a better impression on you, my brother, Gian,” said Iswar Raja.

“Is that so easy to see, Iswar?”

“Having seen you two people meet only a few days earlier, I have no doubt, that you and Asha have a fondness for each other,” Mamood added.

Asha blushed.

“Enough of this talk. We'd better concentrate on our job at hand,” said Gian looking slightly annoyed.

“So, we are off now. We'll see you next Friday.”

Iswar and Mamood ran fast to the Bay Louis bus, which had just stopped.

“Come on Asha. I'll give a lift to Bay Louis.”

“You could have taken Iswar and Mamood too, couldn't you?”

“ No. I wanted to be with you alone. We’ll drive to Caudan Water Front, and go to see the afternoon movie show at Star One.”

“ No, I’d better get home and start checking on my friends. You know, as a girl, we don’t get a chance to make many friends. I’m worried about how many I might have on my list.”

“ We have four days to make our list. We can check on our old school friends, college friends and our university friends. That should make quite a few. We can start from tomorrow morning. But for this afternoon, let’s go and catch up with some movie. I think Shindler’s List is on at the Star One.” “ I’d like to see that film,” said Asha.

III

Miss Roshnee Atma was a slightly plump spinster in her early thirties. She was very efficient and she thrived on work. That was why Harman Dahl had offered her the chance to come to work for him at Cape North, when he closed his office in Bay Louis. As an appreciation for her work as his secretary, he had offered her a brand new Mini to solve her transport problem. Roshnee had thought that the offer of the Mini, may have something hidden in it. She had come to secretly fancy her boss, but regretted that Harman was too much of a gentleman.

Roshnee had completed her day’s work at the office at the villa, having sent Harman Dahl’s email to Dan Dahl in London. She was getting ready to leave when she heard Mr. Dahl’s car pulling in.

“ How are you Roshnee? Since New Year, I’ve had hardly time to talk to you, except about work.”

“ I know, you have been very busy. You have been working every day. I think you need a rest, Sir.”

“ Yes, I know. But it’s too early to rest. I’ve started this thing now, and I can’t rest till it’s finished.”

“ New Millenium Enterprise seemed to be taking all your time. But to tell you frankly Sir, I don’t understand what NME is really for.”

“ You are right Roshnee. NME is not like any of the other businesses I had. This one is a very special one. Maybe one day, looking from hindsight, you will understand why NME has been that way.”

“ I have always wished the best for you Sir. You are a good man.”

“ Thank you girl, for your good thought. By the way, how do you find working here at the villa?”

“ I like it very much Sir. It’s like working at home.”

“ I’m glad you’ve adapted to the work routine here. I hope that by the time NME reaps its final benefits, you will be proud to take a share in it.”

“ In that case, I’ll pray the Good Lord blesses you and NME with success.”

“ Roshnee you are looking slimmer a bit,” harman Dahl remarked as his

secretary was about to pass through the office door.

“ No Sir, I’m still too fat,” she said giggling as she went away.

Harman dined alone in the evening, in the veranda where his maid had laid a small table. Sophie and George had finished their work at the villa and had gone home in the little building at the far end. Harman felt the quietness about him, except for the strong breeze making whizzing sound on the filao leaves. To break the monotony, Harman switched on his favourite internet radio station, Classic Gold, in London, and listened to the golden oldies, the music he had always been in love with.

He rushed to turn the volume to full blast, just when Frank Sinatra came on to sing, ‘ I did it my way.’ Lying on the armchair, and sipping his Green Island and Coke, Harman slowly drifted to nostalgia. His early youth came back. In small clips, he saw momentous episodes passed: the people, the places and the happenings, all good souvenirs. Then the pictures blurred and Santa’s last days forced themselves in his mind.

Harman remembered that, their return to Nautilus was due to the fact that he always did things his way. He was still doing it his way with the NME project.

But this time, he was doing unselfishly, only to pay his tribute to Santa’s memories. As the thought of the New Millennium Enterprise returned, He began to analyse what had been done so far and took stock of his actions. He noted that his NME was in its second phase of its implementation and his expenditure was nearing its first million, the bulk of which being the purchase of computers for his new personnel.

III

“ Asha, aren’t you going to work this morning,” asked her mother.

“No, mama. I’m working at home.”

“ But you said you’ve got a job?”

“ Yes, mama. I’ve got a job. And the job is done mostly from home. Only once or twice a week I’ve to attend the Head Office. Now, it’s next Friday, that I’ll go.”

“ What kind of a job is that?” asked Mrs. Panee.

“ It’s a kind of public relation job, meeting people and knowing people,” answered Asha.

“ Girl, we didn’t send to University to do that kind of work. Let your father come and we’ll have a serious discussion.”

“ Mama, there’s hardly any job around and there’s literally hundreds of university graduates looking for jobs right now. I must consider myself lucky to be having a job. Any job is good depending on one’s situation, provided that it is not indecent or immoral,” said Asha.

“ Yes, my girl. I fear so much for the future. For us people today, it is not a question of who you are but whom you know. You only have to see how many relatives and political agents, without any adequate academic qualifications,

being given highly paid jobs in the civil service, just because they know ministers and top officials in the government. It is sheer corruption.”

“ All that will stop one day. Maybe not in our life-time, but I’m sure of it.”

“Maybe you better think of getting married, Asha.”

“ Oh, not that subject again, ma. I’ll get married when the time comes. First I have to look after my career. I’ve to think of you and dad who have given your all to allow to go to university. I’ve to make sure that I can look after you in your old days, before I can think of marriage.”

“ Your Dad and I are so please of your noble thought, my dear girl.”

While mother and daughter were engaged in their discussion, a white van stopped in front of their house and the driver knocked at their front door.

“ Miss Asha Panee lives here?”

“ Yes, why are looking for her,” asked Mrs. Panee coming out of the house first.

“ We have a delivery to make to Miss Panee, from Ace Computers Ltd.”

“ What delivery?” insisted the mother.

“ It’s a computer and accessories,” said the other man in a white overall.

“ Yes, I was waiting for it. Please bring them in here,” said Asha.

“ You didn’t tell me you have bought a computer, my girl.”

“ Oh, mother, I’ll explain later. Please bring the computer into this small room here.”

The driver and the technician carried the computer, the display monitor, and the printer and put them on a small desk by the window.

“ Is it o.k. to install the computer here,” asked the technician.

“ Yes, it will be fine by the window,” answered the girl.

“ Is this telephone line you are having connected to the computer.”

“ That’s the only line we have.”

Once the computer installed and tested and the internet accessed, the technician announced to Asha that she can use the computer at any time.

“ Would you like to sign here for the delivery, Miss Panee.”

“ Yes, Thank you. Have you made a similar delivery to Mr. Gian Kala?”

“ Mr. Gian Kala? Oh yes. He is on our list. We’ll be doing that late afternoon. Goodbye Miss.”

“ Who is Gian Kala?” the mother asked, as soon as the delivery man closed the door behind.

“ He is a young man I met at the interview.”

“ So, why do you inquire about him, Asha?”

“ We both work for the same firm. As such we are colleague.”

“ So, it’s with him that you’ve been going out these few days?”

“ Yes, mama. I think I like Gian very much. I’m so at ease with him.”

“ Do you love him?”

“ I don’t know if I love him. But I can say that I feel good when he is around.”

“ Asha, my girl, be careful. Don’t commit yourself without first knowing him well. His family and family background is important.”

“ There you go ma. You are already marrying me off,” said the daughter, happily.

“Now, tell me. Did you buy this computer.”

“ No, ma. It’s the company’s property, given to me to use for my work.”

“ Then that company must have trust in you to give you so expensive equipment to work at home.”

“ Yes, this is what has impressed me most. The trust Mr. Harman Dahl is showing us all without really knowing us. I think he deserves all our trust in return.”

“ Invite him, oh what’s his name, Gian home one day.” “ Don’t go imagining things ma.”

It was about noon, when the phone rang. Gian was busy with his work, in his tiny study office at the back of his house. He had seen something big coming along at the New Millenium Enterprise. He was determined to impress Mr. Dahl, by becoming his top employee. He was completing a long list names of people he knew, when he picked up the phone.

“ Gian Kala, here.”

“ Gian, it’s Asha. I just received my computer. I’m so happy, that I thought of phoning to tell you.”

“ I’m glad you did. It’s good to hear you. Have started some work yet?”

“ It’s not easy for me. I don’t know that many people. I’m afraid my list may be too short for Mr. Dahl’s liking,” moaned Asha.

“ Stop moaning and groaning on the phone. I’m certain you’ll do alright.”

“ Oh, I phoned to tell you that you’ll be receiving your computer late this afternoon”

“ How do you know?”

“ Father Christmas just told me.”

FIVE

I

Emails began To arrive from different employees of The New Millenium Enterprise, from around the country. This was indication that things were starting to move. Harman had checked personally with the Director of Aces Computers Ltd. to see whether his entire staff has been given their computers and that these were functioning satisfactorily. The Director had confirmed that all have been done as ordered. Roshnee Jagat was asked to keep all the information coming from different employees, including emails, faxes and reports in their individual work files.

Harman had a large melanin board, ten feet by five feet, fixed on one wall of the main office at the villa. He drew a monitoring chart on the board, with lines and columns, leaving spaces wide enough to write figures that should be visible from a distance in the room. There were more than twenty lines and twenty columns. At the top left hand corner, on the first line and first column, he wrote the word ‘ Area ‘, and below it he wrote the figure 1 and below that leaving two spaces, he wrote figure 2.

Following the same pattern, he entered consecutive numbers after two, on every line, till number twenty. On the second column, he wrote ‘Employee’s name’ on the first line, followed down the column by the actual names of the employees from area one to twenty. The next column he used to write the total number of people in the electoral list from each area. In the fourth column he put the number of persons from the electoral list already known by the employee. Harman Dahl used different coloured markers for each column to demarcate figures between columns. As the emails came, Harman wrote down the new figures, on the wall chart. He was inwardly pleased to see his plan taking shape.

Harman Dahl received a reply from Dan from London among his emails. Dan and his sister Artee were both well in their flat in Walthamstow. There was a fatherly urge to hear his children. He phoned them about eleven.

“ Hello dad! It’s good to hear you,” said Dan.

“ It’s good to hear you too my dear Dan. How are you and how’s your sister Artee?”

“ Artee is alright. She’s not woken up yet. How are you dad? You know we miss you dad.”

“ I also miss you two, my son. After your mother’s gone, my home is very lonely.”

“ Please come back to London. We want to have our Dad with us again.”

“ Not now Dan. I’ll probably visit you round about November-December time, if all goes well.”

“ What can hold you till then Dad? You can surely move out at any time you want.”

“ Dan, my son, I don’t know how to say this. My life has been so meaningless lately. In a bid to prevent me from dying from frustration, I have undertaken a very big gamble. I have taken a headlong dive in politics here.”

“I don’t believe it. My father, Mr. Harman Dahl, a politician?” It must be a joke, Dad.”

“ No, I’m serious. I’m taking an active part in the next general election in Nautilus.”

“ So, with a bit of luck, we’ll have a daddy as Member of Parliament.”

“ No, better than that. There’s a possibility of Prime Minister of Nautilus.”

“ Dad, I still don’t believe it. Are you really going into politics?”

“ I’m dead serious Dan. Tell me, how’s your studies going on?”

“ I’m completing my MSC this year Pa. After that I don’t know. I think I’ll get myself a job.”

“ Well, good luck my son. Pass me Artee. I’d like to speak a bit with her. Is she up yet.”

“ Artee, Artee, Dad is on the line.”

“ I’m coming,” came the voice from her bedroom.

“ O.k. Pa, I’m passing you Artee. Take care of you, Dad. Bye.”

“ Artee, How are you my little girl. Your brother tells me you’ve been working very hard.”

“ A little bit hard. And I fine. I miss you a lot daddy. Please come. I want to see you.”

“ My dear Artee, I can’t. I just explain to Dan how busy I am. Maybe in about seven months I’ll visit you. You too, you are taking part in your exams this year, aren’t you? I wish you all the good luck and the very best. I have to leave now. Do phone me now and again when you get time. I love you both. Bye.”

Harman Dahl was very proud of his children. He approved their independent nature. They reminded him of his youth. At their age, he was managing on his own, and he had not done badly at all. He expected his children, both of them doing as well or better than him. Even though they were born in a well-off family, they had inherited Harman’s sense of dedication and fighting spirit.

II

The following Thursday evening, Kesh Lakhan paid visit to Harman’s villa with his wife and some friends. Harman Dahl was delighted with Kesh’s gesture. He was looking forward to some company for casual chat. There were Mr. Silvio Depuis, his girlfriend, and Mr. And Mrs. Lebons.

“ Sophie, I’m feeling ravenous. I have six guests for late evening dinner. Please prepare something delicious with either mutton or fish.”

“ A spicy fish Kalia with pilao rice will be alright, Mr Hareemun?”

“ Oh yes, I would really like that. How long will it take?”

“Two hours at the most.”

“ O.k. then. We’ll wait for you my good girl.”

The guests were all seated in the large lounge.

“ Hareemun, why don’t you phone Sheila and ask her to come and join us,” said
Kesh

“ It’s almost eight at night. I don’t think Sheila will be willing to drive here at
this hour.”

“ Try to phone her anyway.”

Sheila took the phone only to excuse herself for not coming, as she had brought
a lot of paperwork from the university, which she had to complete during the
night to be able to hand back the next day.

“ Silvio, Marian, Harold and Louise, I have the pleasure to present to your host,
my best friend Hareemun Dahl, successful international businessman.
Hareemun, this is Mr. and Mrs. Lebons, just returned from Australia and this is
Mr. Silvio Dupuis, lawyer and ex-minister and his his girlfriend, Miss Anita
Perot,” said Kesh Lakhan. Drinks were served from the small bar; Martini for
the ladies, Whisky for Mr. Dupuis and Mr. Lebons. Harman took his usual
Green Island for himself and Kesh.

“ Mr and Mrs. Lebons have recently returned from Australia. They want to
invest in Nautilus, and are looking to buy off some existing business concern.
They were talking to me the other day and I thought of you. You mentioned that
you were selling your businesses. Your offer for sale is still on?” asked Kesh

“ I’m afraid you are a bit late, Mr. Lebons. I got buyers straight away and I was
in a hurry to sell.”

“ Well, I understand. But if you hear of something, please let me know.”

“ Mr. Lebons, you’ll have to be careful. The Nautilian economy is going
through a bad patch. I don’t think the time is good for major investment in the
commercial sector. But if you still want to go ahead with your investment plan,
try Mr. Hin Lin. He owns the Astoria, a 50-beds hotel at Anse Jonchees in the
South,” said Harman.

“ I’ll try to meet Mr. Hin Lin this week. But talking of economy, do you think it
is in a slump?”

“ Nautilus is definitely badly shaken by the series of major financial scandals
both in the public and private sectors,” said Kesh Lakhan.

“ Compared with the gravity of the scandals in Nautilus involving political
personalities, the recent Kohl scandal in Germany, looks negligible. Scandals
like politicians involved in international drug trafficking or massive government
contracts frauds can easily damage a small economy like ours.”

“Corruption of that nature happens all the time, in many countries,” commented Silvio Dupuis.

“It’s all a question of power, money and temptation. As far as I know, there’s hardly any Minister who can boast of clear conscience and clean hands,” he continued.

“I’m surprised to hear you say this. You, of all people, who have spent many years as Minister in the previous governments,” remarked Premila Lakhan.

“Yes, I made a fortune as Minister. Practically everyone did in the government. It was normal and was expected of you to being invited, given gifts, given properties, given money for nothing in return. Except for an approval here, an approval there, a license here, a license there, a signature here, a signature there. It was part and parcel of the ministerial job. I had to do it anyway,” said Silvio Dupuis, visibly drunk.

“It is sad that, in all this it is the mass of the people who lose out and has foot the bill,” joined Mrs. Lebons.

“What can one do? It’s the rotten system. Who can control the national expenses, the money that belongs to the nation, checking that every rupee and every cent is spent on behalf on the nation for the right cause. Again, as I said it’s a question of power, money, and temptation.”

“That is why, hundreds of millions of rupees, dirty money change hands during a general election. Millions of rupees are normally invested in political party funds. There is no surer investment than that,” said Harman.

“That’s true,” said Mr. Lebons. “By the way, the General Election is due some time this year, isn’t it.”

“Yes, it’s a certainty that the Prime Minister and his ruling party will be returned to power again,” said Silvio.

“Very likely, specially since the Opposition is reduced to non-existence,” added Kesh.

“Enough of the boring politics,” said Premila, his wife.

Sophie and George came in the lounge and announced that dinner was served.

III

Friday, the day of the New Millenium Enterprise meeting came. Harman woke up late. He had gone to bed late, because his guests did not leave well past midnight. He had to rush to get ready for the working session at ten. He did not have time for his usual breakfast. Instead he had just a cup of tea.

“Good morning everybody,” said Harman entering the room.

Everybody was present and on time. The group of four, Asha, Gian, Mamood, and Iswar were sitting in a row on one side of the large table. There was an air of contentment about. Everybody gave the impression of having done his homework and what was expected of him. But nobody knew what to expect next from the chief, Mr. Dahl. They had the easiest paid job in their life, the last

week. All the staff was thinking that their job could not stay that easy for too long.

“ Well ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate you all on your first week with the New Millenium Enterprise. You all have carried out your job so far to my satisfaction. Now before I give you your work assignment for this coming week, I would like to remind you of NME and its objective. What I expect from you is that you carry out my instruction without fail.”

“ You know that you represent NME nationwide. My first instruction for your current assignment is to make NME and yourselves known to every adult in your respective area, that is, to everybody of eighteen years and above. My second instruction is this. In order to help you carry out this new work assignment, I am allowing each of you to recruit immediately on behalf of NME, the nominee graduates whose names you have submitted to me this week. You are requested to take NME job contracts which I have already signed for each one of the nominees, from NME secretary, Miss Atma, and get them to works with you as from now. You will be all, from now on, responsible of your group of three staff and your activities.”

“ My next instruction is that in order to make NME, yourselves and your new area colleague known to the maximum of adults, males and females, in your area, you will have to devise methods and use your initiative. For example, you can attend all funeral vigils, every wedding, every sports events, bus-stops, shops, markets and in fact, anywhere where you or your colleague can make a personal contact and make acquaintance with people. I'll remind you that you have at a minimum of eight working hours a day, during which hundreds of contacts can be established. You can make contact with people with casual chats about this, that or the other, the weather, the queue at the bus-stop, the state of the roads, or politics.”

“ During your contact making, you have to be very observant. You will need to take note of the time, the date, the place, the subject matter of the conversation, and most of all, the name of the persons you have made new acquaintances with. You will have to feed these in your computer files, kept in alphabetical order. To maximise contact making, each staff from each area will make his round of public meeting exercise alone and keep his list of contacts separate. Each group will keep a combined list of persons contacted on the computer and this list must be sent by email here at the NME office by every Friday at the latest for monitoring purpose.”

“ Don't forget that the idea is to make yourselves and NME heard and known by as many adult people from your area. That's all for today. Till we meet again next Friday, I wish you good hunting.”

At the end of the meeting, all the participants stayed a while to talk to one another in small groups. They compared notes and the progress of their work in their respective area. There was general smiles and laughter in the office. They appreciated the huge wall chart and commented on the figures written on it.

They were also surprised but happy to be able to have two qualified persons whom they themselves have chosen to work with them. It would be fun working with old friends. They checked the job contracts to be given to the new recruits. Everything was the same as their own job contracts, except the pay for the new recruits was twenty thousand rupees per month.

“ I think that a slightly lesser pay is deliberate so as to give us a seniority in our regional groups,” remarked Gian Kala.

The group of four were again gathered together at the Villa Hope, and seated on a stone bench under a mango tree.

“ I’m absolutely delighted to be able to get two of my male university friends, working with me. You know, I was thinking that I was not going to be able to continue with the job, because of the nature of the job. All this, going out in the public to meet people is not easy for girls like me. It’s alright for you, fellows.

Now that I have two male colleagues with me, I think I can manage it,” explained Asha.

“ But we still don’t know what for all this public relation job is being done. I wonder if Mr. Dahl has indeed some product marketing and selling in mind,” said Mamood.

“ It could well be that he is planning to provide market surveys and national opinion poll to the business community at large and the government in particular,” pointed out Iswar.

“ Whatever he is planning, Mr. Dahl appear to be dead sure of it. There is not a single sign of hesitation in his moves. Things look quite slack for the time being, we shouldn’t be surprised if things hot up later,” said Gian.

IV

Asha Panee phoned her two nominees as soon as she got home. She was able to get them straight away by sheer luck. She was aware that if she was to consolidate herself in her job, she should get her male friends in the picture soonest. She invited them to her place that very day, after having announced to them that she had very good news for them. She advised them to hurry up and come.

“ Look what I’ve got for you,” said Asha giving the job contract to Harry Sewdin.

Asha Panee and Harry Sewdin have known each other for over ten years, from their student days at Rose Hill State Secondary School to the University of Nautilus. Harry Sewdin glanced at the paper in amazement.

“ How did you managed that, you crafty girl,” was all he said at first.

“ By sheer magic, Harry, by sheer magic. Didn’t you know that I was a magician.”

“Well, whatever means you’ve used to get me this job, I’ll always be indebted to you,

Asha. And What a fantastic salary. Twenty thousand rupees per month. I must be dreaming.

“ I’ll explain to you in details everything you need to know. But first I want to know if you are accepting it. If yes, do sign it here in both copies and I’ll return the duplicate to the New Millenium Enterprise Office.

Asha was about to begin explaining Harry, when the other friend arrived.

“ Sorry, I’m late,” said the newcomer.

“ It’s you Jay, Jay Lallsing. Fancy seeing you here.,” said Harry Sewdin.

“ Jay is the third member of our working team,” said Asha.

“ Did I hear correct? Working team. What work are we talking about,” Jay.

“ This,” said Asha

Jay took the copy of the contract. There was bewilderment on his face. He could believe his eyes and was completely lost for words.

“ It’s not April Fool’s Day, today, is it?” Jay said.

“ Well, Jay. Everything you see here is true. You have been offered a job with the New Millenium Enterprise, based at Cape North, with a basic salary of twenty thousand rupees per months. Come and sign the contract. You, Harry and I will be working together from now on.

“ But there is no job title in the contract,” pointed Jay.

“ There should have been the word ‘ representative’ in that place.

Asha Panee felt at ease with her work once she had Harry Sewdin and Jay Lallsing with her. She assumed the role of leader and organiser in her area and let the boys go round meeting the public. Harry and Jay showed keener interest in the job and were better suited to it.

“ Good morning madam,” said Jay to the woman standing alone at the bus-stop.

“ Good morning young man,” answered the woman.

“These buses are becoming very unreliable.”

“ Yes, my boy, sometimes you have to wait for hours, before they turn up.”

“ Do you live far, madam?”

“ No, Not far. In Atlas Road.”

“ Then you must know Arjoon, the electrician.”

“ He is my eldest son.”

“ I’m pleased to know you madam. I’m a friend of Arjoon. My name is Jay Lallsing. Convey my regards to him. I wish you good day, madam. I hope the bus does not come too late for you.”

“What a charming young man!” thought the woman.

Jay wrote down the details of this encounter with the woman in his pocket notebook. ‘ Mrs. Ramsoo- electrician Arjoon Ramsoo’s mother- Atlas Road, Plaisance- met bus-stop River Road- talked about buses, lateness and difficulties. Later he learnt her first name Lilawtee and added it to his record.

Another time, Jay saw an old man, sitting by the road's side. He asked a boy passing him on a bicycle if he knew the old man. The boy replied that he did and that the old man's name was Hassan. Jay went to the old man and started a conversation.

“ Hello Grand dad, you are taking a rest. It's not easy to walk far in this hot weather.”

“ You are right. It's not easy specially when you get old.”

Jay talked to the old man for some time and found out that the old man lived in Mosque Road, Rose Hill. He put down all the relevant details in his handy notebook. Getting to know members of the public, and making friends with them, became a kind of game. They got used to many ways of striking a conversation with strangers and got to know about them easily. The lists of contacts with the general public grew and grew. Harman Dahl was satisfied to see NME representative doing well.

V

During the following Friday's meeting Harman Dahl instructed his team of representatives to continue their adult community contact.

“ Now that you all have come to know many people in your area, you will have to build your image with that. You will have to maintain your contact at regular interval by a phone call, a letter in the post, or a small visit. You must endeavour at all time to make new contacts, and know more and more people. You have all the time to do it,” explained Harman.

“ Your group's target finally is to know personally between the three of you in each group more than half of the adult population in your area. That should make a few thousand individuals, in each region, for the three of you to contact. It makes less than seven thousand persons for each one of you to become friends with,” Harman stressed. “ Therefore your individual target is to know personally some seven thousand people in your area. And you all have twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, four weeks a month, and several months to do it in. So get going. That's your job for now at the NME. That's what your are being twenty five thousand rupees for.”

As he said that, Harman beckoned Roshnee Atma to hand over to each one present his pay cheque together with the cheques for the two regional colleagues.

“ This is the start of the fame and fortune I've been promising you. The fortune will come automatically. The chance of a life time is here. Grab it. Go and make friends with all the people and earn their respects. You are all professionals, you are all graduates, you are all working people and responsible people. Your full time job right now is try to help

everyone that needs help. Offer them sympathy, offer them advice, offer them food, offer them money, offer them anything to get their trust, all done on a personal basis. Show them that you are a self-financing social worker. Give them all a favour that they remember. Keep your notebook and record everything in it, for all expenses incurred.”

“ I am allowing each of the twenty areas, a sum of fifty thousand rupees for

petty cash expenses to be used in your public relation activities. You can use this money to give small donation or gift to individual or group of people, to religious societies, to social clubs, to parent-teachers association or any other association that, you think, need any help. Don't forget that you must keep an account and receipt of all your expenses that you must submit to NME every week."

The senior representatives of the New Millenium Enterprise met weekly at Villa Hope, Cape North. That gave them an opportunity to liaise with one another and share their opinion. They were all unanimous in thinking that NME was keeping its business target secret for too long.

"Why should we worry about NME's final objective?" said Gian Kala to his friends.

"Things are moving fast enough at NME. See its not yet the end of the month, and we have already been paid. This calls for celebration. What do you think Mamood?" continued Gian. "Yes, it certainly does. I think I'll treat my wife and children to a nice dinner out tonight," said Mamood. The group of four stayed a bit longer at Villa Hope, chatting and making plans for the weekend.

Gian Kala and Asha Panee agreed to meet at Le Gourmet on Sunday late afternoon for a meal, and later, on Sunday night movie at Cinemax, to watch the 'Titanic'. Iswar Raja and Mamood Ali decided to take their families together to spend Sunday at the seaside at Belle Mare.

VI

Harman Dahl was completing his five-kilometre morning jogging on the deserted Coastal Road when Sheila Suckhee drove to the villa that Sunday at ten. Harman had kept on his physical fitness exercises and his three-times-a-week jogging on the road. Only a couple of weeks ago, he had the great surprise to see an old acquaintance of his, an ex-police officer, confined to a wheel-chair because he had suffered a severe heart-attack. This had made Harman more vigilant towards his health and assured himself by regular medical checkups.

"Hello Sheila. Oh, am I pleased to see you. I was dying to be with for the past few days. I'm really delighted to see you this morning."

"My dear, dear Hareemun, from what I see, you must be the fittest man around here," said Sheila, smiling, as she hugged him with sweat and all.

"Sheila, it will be better in the garden, I think. Come on in. I'll ask Sophie and George to arrange the garden table and chairs for a late breakfast in the open. I won't be long. Just a quick shower and a shave."

The garden furniture was moved under the shade of the huge mango tree. George brought the cushions for the long metal three-seater armchair on which the master had the habit of lying down in the open. Sophie set the table for a big brunch. She had also put the Sunday newspapers.

Sheila Suckhee was deeply engrossed reading about the National Opposition Parties, pact. Harman joined her in the garden. The headline in Lexpress said it all: "Funeral tomorrow. The Opposition Parties pre-election pack died a premature death only months before election day."

“ It will be a walkover win for the Prime Minister’s ruling party in the forthcoming general election,” remarked Mrs. Suckhee.

“ Yes it looks like it,” said Harman.

“ Then, it would be absolutely foolish for you, me and Kesh to take part in the general election, as you suggested to us during new year.”

“ Oh, I know that it will be a Herculean task.”

“ Hareemun, we should think about it carefully.”

“ Yes, my dear Sheila. That we’ll do. I’ll take the opportunity of your presence here to do some thinking together with you. I look at you as my source of inspiration. I hope your enchanting presence today will help me recharge my battery.”

“ I too hope that we’ll have a good time together today.”

“ We’ll talk about politics later. I’ve invited Kesh and his wife for a drink in the evening, and I’ve made reservation for a table at Laguna Hotel for a late dinner out. For now, let’s just relax and have a lazy day.”

“ Mrs. Sheila looks very beautiful, doesn’t she, George?” asked Sophie.

“ She looks very beautiful, and she is very nice too. She always has something nice to say whenever she sees me,” said George.

“ I wish Mr. Dahl marries her and they live here together.”

“ I’m sure they will get married some day,” concluded George.

SIX

I

“ What do you think of the rumours that the Prime Minister is dissolving the Parliament this week?” began Kesh Lakhan as soon as he sat down cozily in the armchair in the lounge with the others.

“ There’s some truth in them,” said Sheila

“ There’s an article to that effect in the Sunday News this morning. According to that article, the PM has during a meeting with all his cabinet colleagues, and parliamentarians from his ruling party, had mentioned to them to watch out for some decisive announcement he would be making soon. There was definitive hint to the impending dissolution of the Parliament,” continued Sheila.

“ There is always suspense in politics. You cannot always expect the expected,” joined in Premila Lakhan.

“ Very well said, Premila,” Said Harman.

“ Well Hareemun, let’s have it. I’m sure you’ve something to tell us.” Kesh Lakhan was looking forward to some revelation on the part of Harman Dahl, who deliberately avoided to give a straight answer.

“ I can well imagine the possibility of a rogue political party working underground, taking the nation by surprise, taking over the government machinery and all this in strict compliance to the modern day democratic principles,” explained Harman.

“ Yes, Pal. Your idea can be in the realm of reality.”

“ A democratic take-over. That’s sound exciting, doesn’t it?” asked Harman.

“ Yes, probably the same excitement as in a military coup,” remarked Sheila.

“ No,” pointed out Harman, “ military coup has blood and death on its trail. A democratic is an end-product of an electorate giving a unanimous vote to one particular political party, in mass hysteria.”

On Friday fifteenth August, 2000 at 15.00 hours, the Nautilian Nation heard the news they all been expecting for sometime. The Parliament had been dissolved that afternoon. In the morning, following a lengthy Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Santilall gave a televised press conference to announce his decision for the dissolution of the National Assembly.

After going over the realisations of his government during the present mandate, the PM said that it was time to give back power to the electorate and go to the poll to seek a new mandate. The outgoing Prime Minister thanked the nation for the confidence they put in his government and him, and he hoped they would return to power again to serve the country.

Harman Dahl was there in front of the television, analysing every word the Prime Minister was saying. Harman was irritated at the cynical attitude of the PM. He damned the Prime Minister for failing to say the truth, the whole truth.

The Prime Minister had chosen the 26th August, 2000 for Nomination Day of candidates for the 2000 general election, and Polling Day for the eleventh of September, 2000 The Leader of the House had chosen a long political campaign before polling date.

Harman Dahl was happy with the general election time schedule. It suited him well. It was over eight months since he had decided to go on his personal crusade and take part in the general election with a brand new team. His team has been long since organised and as representative of NME, were doing very important electorate and candidate trust building jobs, even though unbeknown to them. The computer records and files at the NME head office were ample proof of the efficiency of his teamwork. There were thousands of electors from each constituency on a first-name term with the candidates of his political party-to-be. Harman thought that, at last, he could come out in the open and tell his sixty employees, the true purpose of their jobs and what he was expecting from them.

Harman was self-bound to take part in the forthcoming General Election battle. He had recruited his army of candidates on full-time pay, something unheard of. He had himself initiated their training and tactics on the field. He had an arsenal of weapons in terms of propaganda and political gimmicks at his secret disposal, ready to be used in the political battle. All Harman Dahl had to do from then on, was to proclaim publicly the existence of his political party and lead his men to fight the general election.

II

The first meeting of the NME at Villa Hope, after the announcement of the dissolution of Parliament, was very lively. The oncoming general election was the talk of the Nation. As such, the general election became the main topic of conversation among the NME employees before their meeting started officially.

“ You wouldn’t believe the number of persons from my area who have told me this week that they would like to see me or people like as candidates in the general election,” said Gian Kala.

“ What a coincidence,” said Asha Panee, “ I would have never thought that people will be telling me to look for an investiture in a political party. They are saying they’ll vote for me in block, because they say I’m an angel in disguise.”

The other members of the group, Mamood Ali and Iswar Raja, looked dumbfounded and stared at each other for a second. Then Mamood Ali burst into laughter, instantly followed by Iswar Raja.

“ It seems that we are all being asked to stand as candidates in the next election. What could be the possible reason for the simultaneous requests from our different areas?” asked Mamood Ali.

“ The answer is simple. It’s what we each represent and it’s what we’ve been doing these days. We are all acting as permanent Father Christmas and the good samaritan at all hours. No wonder all those people, whom we have given unsolicited help, solace, kindness and our precious time, think of us as God-sent and genuine good people. We have been so good in showing our goodness and professionalism that these people would not hesitate a moment to vote for us,” said Iswar.

“ The Idea of standing as candidate in a general election and becoming a member of Parliament is so attractive. But in order to get there, you must first adhere to a well-established national political party. And adhering to an existing party is a non-starter as it is a close-shop and none will ever have us. We are not just of their kind,” said Gian Kala.

“ I never knew that I could become so popular with my people just doing my job and getting paid for it. It has been so easy a job with plenty of time and plenty of money to do it with. Now its tempting to use that popularity for my personal gain,” added Mamood.

“ When you think of it, it’s a wonder that we’ve come into contact with thousands of people doing all kinds of contacts and chit-chats, in the past months,” said Asha Panee

The discussion was going on full swing. All the NME representatives were appraising their popularity and their chance in a general election. Many thought that it would be nice to try to get accepted by some party.

“ We would not make worse MPs than those lot we’ve had in parliament lately,” someone said.

The official meeting that Friday lasted only few minutes. Harman Dahl, the Managing Director, entered the large meeting room where the twenty reps were seated by then and greeted them as usual.

“ I shall give you a full rundown of NME’s new objectives next week. In the meantime keep contact with your old acquaintances by all established methods and keep meeting new ones with one and only one idea. That is to be of help of some kind and recording names, conversations and actions according. There is something more for you to do this week. You and your regional colleagues should send me an urgent report on your chance of being elected as MP should you stand as candidates in the next general election. That’s all for today. We’ll meet again next Friday,” concluded Harman Dahl.

“ Oh, Mr. Dahl is fantastic. He has read our mind,” said Gian Kala when Harman Dahl had left the room.

The conversation took a new, more excited turn among the NME staff. The moved out of the villa through the back garden in concentrated groups.

“ I don’t think that Mr. Dahl has been able to read our mind. On the contrary, I think he was aware of the situation developing this way. Else, how come he decides to tell us about the company’s raison-detre which he had promised to do when the time comes. This means then that the time has come. And since out of the blue, he asks us about our chances of going on to winning a seat each in parliament, he is certain that our answers will be positive,” explained Asha Panee.

“ That could well be the reason why we are working full time meeting people in our constituencies. Mr. Dahl probably knows from the start what he is planning for us. Have we not noticed that each of us comes from a different constituency. Right now, we are twenty NME representatives and we come from the twenty electoral constituencies of Nautilus.,” said Mamood.

“ Moreover he is giving us full pay, three candidates from each constituency, to get us accepted by the majority of the electorates, and win their hearts,” added Iswar Raja.

“ It’s becoming clear now. He is spending a fortune to make us a happy lot, keen to take a challenge. Just take me. Everyone I know thinks highly of me. Why? First because I’m an educated man, a graduate, and a professional. Secondly I’m in full time employment with a company that pays me, twenty five thousands rupees, a high salary by Nautilian standard. But the greatest reason why my people have high opinion of me is the freedom I have in my job to give them all my time for a chat, an advice, an understanding, a helping hand, even financial, and I’m never in a hurry. Mr. Dahl must have done a lot of thinking and planning before allowing us these facilities,” said Gian

III

Harman Dahl attended a function at Le Grand Gaube Hotel in the north one evening. It was the occasion of the prize giving ceremony of the Most Outstanding Personality of the Year. Harman Dahl found that the guests present were all from the so-called upper class of the Nautilian society. It was a lavish evening and lavish prizes were offered to the government’s near and dear. According to Harman, there was no transparency or meritocracy in this and stunk of partisanship. The function was full of Ministers, political agents, and businessmen, whose motto was one of ‘ You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours’.

“ We should be proud of the winner of the award this year,” said the man sitting on Harman’s right.

“ Oh, I see. By the look, you seem to be blood related to him. You resemble each other,” remarked Harman.

“ Yes, he is my brother’s son, married to the niece of the Prime Minister.”

“ What has done to deserve the title of the most outstanding personality of the year.”

“ Oh, he has done a lot of social work.”

“ Like what?”

“ He has given a lot of money to charity.”

“ His own money?”

“ No, money received from public collection.”

“ Does the public know how much money was collected? Is there any way of checking that figure?”

“ No, but he has given thousands of rupees to many charitable organisations.”

“ Who is paying for today’s function, the food, the drinks and the prizes?”

“ My nephew’s organisation, the National Helping Hands, of which he is the founder and President. They are pleased with his winning the award.”

“Your name is?”

“ Chand Darasing. You, you are Mr. Hareemun Dahl?”

“ That’s right. And you, Mr. Darasing, you are a distant relative of the Prime Minister.”

Normally Harman Dahl did not like attending this kind of functions. But in view of the fact that he was about to go it big in politics, he had to gather fresh adverse materials. That gave him new insight on how to reinforce his own political party’s campaign.

“ Hareemun, my dear old friend, I didn’t see in there,” said the Minister for Foreign Affairs, as Harman Dahl was about to get into his car in the hotel compound.

“ James Kaye, it’s you. I saw you in front up there in the hall with your ministerial colleagues. I didn’t feel like coming to meet you.”

“ You should have, Hareemun. I would have presented you to the PM. Now that the new general election is on, the PM would be pleased to meet new faces. Your name was mentioned once at the beginning of the year during a conversation in the PM’s office.”

“ Was it anything good about me?” asked Harman.

“ Yes, it was about your massive sell-out of shares at a time when the stock market was buoyant that intrigued the PM.”

“ That means that I’m on the Secret Service’s list?”

“ Just the usual checks,” answered Mr. Kaye.

“ What did they find then?”

“ Your New Millenium Enterprise. They think you’ve gone soft in your head after the death of your wife. You are spending your fortune on recruiting unemployed people to do nothing. You are far from getting the award of the personality of the year.”

James Kaye is an influential member of the other powerful political clan. Through the existing system, people like him and the Prime Minister and their offspring were assured leading roles in Nautilian politics, because they were supposed to be born with the political golden spoon in their mouth.

Harman Dahl had known James Kaye for many years in England. He remembered the first time he met James Kaye. It was one day in summer, during lunch break at his City job, that Harman went to the Nautilian High Commission in Trafalgar Square. There he met Mr. Kaye. The latter was a political family protégé being given a petty job at the High Commission to allow him to stay in London. Over the years, they met several times. But Harman has always known James Kaye as a petty and conniving person. That day James Kaye was a Minister for Foreign Affairs, representing Nautilus worldwide, but to Harman, James Kaye was a blatant product of political corruption.

IV

That kind of corruption that Harman Dahl was preparing to fight with all his means. The gang of political mafiosi were about to snatch power from the people, once again and to command the people of the nation to ‘do what we say and not what we do’. That command would last for another five years and history would repeat itself. Harman was pledged in his conscience to stop political history repeating this once.

Phenomenal as the task had looked, Harman Dahl was optimistic in his victory because he was leading an unselfish fight in his view. He was trying genuinely to make words like meritocracy, justice, fairness, equality and democracy not stay vain words.

Harman Dahl started the procedures to having his newly formed political party registered at the Registrar of Association. He put himself as President of the New Millenium Party, Sheila Suckhee as Secretary and Kesh Lakhan as Treasurer and a dozen of his staff as members. He waited for weeks for the registration to complete. He knew that it usually took that long for completion.

The reports from the regions kept coming on the NME Head Office. The records and data were analysed and Harman Dahl found a constant progression in the person to person contacts of his reps with their electorates. Harman was not surprised to see his future election candidates all giving themselves a good start to becoming MPs. It could not be otherwise after nine months of silent and subtle campaigning.

Contrary to all the previous meetings at Villa Hope, the meeting of the final disclosure by Harman Dahl on his New Millenium Enterprise started in all calmness. All the members kept absolutely quiet in expectation of some revelation they have half divined.

“ Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Today I’m indeed delighted to be addressing you. It’s been many months since we’ve been meeting weekly here. We’ve grown into a close-knit family like relations. All the while I’ve been employing you, I’ve spent millions and NME has not made a single cent in return. I’ve no regrets and I’m pleased with you all for having carried out my instructions as I expected.”

“ You remember when I addressed you at our first meeting of NME here, I told you that NME’s business objectives was not to make money. I also told you that I shall not do or ask any of you do any illegal action. I’ll vouch my life on that statement. The New Millenium Enterprise has been conceived, started and financed by me alone for one and only one objective.,” continued Harman Dahl.

There was a complete hush in the room. All eyes and ears were glued on Harman Dahl. He was all the time wondering the kind of reception he would get for his revelation.

“ NME’s objective is my dream I want to make true. And my dream is to prepare a complete new political team to win the next general election outright on the first go and form the next government. I’m sworn to that challenge. This is what I meant when I promised you all fame and fortune at our first meeting. It was with the greatest care that I had selected you to be part of the New Millenium Enterprise. You all have the prerequisite of a good candidate for becoming an MP. It is not for me to tell you this. You yourselves, I’ve no doubt, have felt it in you. What I’ve done so far is to bring you in the limelight for your electorate, not with fanfare but quietly by personal touch. I’ve closely monitored all your individual reports and I’m convinced that we are on the right tract. You have all done a marvelous job with your public. Now before I continue more with what I have to say today, I wish that at least some of you say something on what you’ve just heard.”

“ Mr. Dahl, I don’t know about my colleagues but I say this. I admire you Sir. You’ve got guts. Excuse me for the expression. You are a man of conviction and true grit,” said Gian Kala.

“ Mr. Dahl, you’ve made me have utter trust in you,” said Asha Panee.

“ It’s about time you all call me Hareemun. I’ll like that. But I would like your reaction to my plan of us all going to fight the next general election.”

“ Mr. Dahl, oh sorry, Hareemun, it will give us sheer pleasure to go on with you all the way. You are giving us a chance of a life-time. We should be proud of it and shouldn’t miss it. We lot are the luckiest persons around to be employed by a political party to stand as candidates in an election and get paid a handsome salary at the same time,” said Mamood Ali

“ Hareemun, we’ll be honoured to go into this election together,” said the rep from Souillac, a middle-aged man with a slightly greying hair.

“ I’m pleased to to hear you say that Christian Laman. Together we’ll present a true alternative to the Nautilian electorates.”

“ The work we’ve been doing since the beginning of the year will make many of our electorates happy to hear that we are standing for election.,” said the Flacq representative..

“ That’s what we are really aiming for, your endearment with the electorates,” pointed Harman.

“ Now I take it that you are all agreeable to our fighting the next election.. You will have to get your two regional colleagues with you in each constituency. Here’s my instruction for this week. Each constituency group of three reps must organise in the constituency, hundreds of prize competitions in all towns and villages. Cash prizes to be offered to winners of each competition by the three of you in your constituency. Of course you will claim all expenses from NME. The competition will consist of the electorates in the villages choosing the best man or woman among themselves from each walk of life. That is voting for the best teacher, the best policeman, the best labourer, the best driver, and so on and so on. You will offer prize to the best man from each trade and from each village or town-quarter. Moreover the names of all those persons voting for a particular winner will be submitted to a draw. And the winners of these lucky draws will receive some cash prizes too. You will print small voting forms which you will distribute at selective points where the public can collect and return after voting.”

“ You should placed posters everywhere to invite the public to take part in these competitions. The wordings of the posters should read something like this :- Time for Fun. Free Prize Competitions for all to play. Choose your best teacher, planter, mason...and win cash prizes...Those coming on top of their respective list will win cash prizes. There are many categories to win... These competitions are sponsored by your friends for life: Mr. A. First, Mr. B. Second and Mr. C. Third.. Now go on all of you, get these competitions organised and keep sending me your reports, by email as usual, before launching them.”

“ My second instruction for this week is that you go through your entire friends and contact persons list you have established from the beginning and you send each one on the list your hand written memo by post saying something like this:-My dearest friend. Just a note to say hello. I was just thinking of you the other day. I hope I’ll see you soon. Regards to your Family.”

“ Before I leave you today, I’ll make a plea to you all and to the other forty colleagues who are not here today. Believe in our action and work for it. We’ll make it through. God bless you all.”

Seven

I

With the announcement of the dissolution of Parliament, the bug of election fever was spreading in the population. The volume of election talk was gradually increasing. Political posters of every colour and every size were being plastered on every available wall, electric post, and trees on roadsides. It was the start on the national ‘ guerre des affiches’, an expression coined by the local press. All the streets of the towns, the roads of all residential areas and all villages, every roundabout on the motorways were festooned overhead with plastic ribbons of all colours of the rainbow.

The concentration of posters and ribbons of a particular colour in a certain area denoted to everybody, except an alien, the amount of activities of the supporters of a particular political party. Consequently, one could easily deduce the number of registered political parties fighting for seats in Parliament in the area. One could also deduce their likely strength in the campaign just by noting the extent of the political party's colour displayed.

The Nautilian public was not yet aware of the existence of the New Millenium Party. But there were a few posters in key places in all commercial and residential centres of the Island, about the Fun Competition Season organised and sponsored by the New Millenium Enterprise representatives. The whole nation was invited to take part in the free for all adults competitions and win cash prizes. Everyone of eighteen years and above was eligible to take part. This was the best ever social activities organised nationwide. The political leaders, the political parties and the political activists had not fully understood the implication and impact of these sidetracking-competitions.

Harman Dahl got daily reports from his candidates on the effects their regional competitions were having on the adult population. The reports talked about the people being interested much more in the competitions than in the election campaigns by the political parties. The psychology behind this, thought Harman, was very simple to understand. The ordinary people were most attracted to the prize-winning aspect of the competitions. They were all concerned with the chance of winning thousands of rupees for free.

Prime Minister Santilall was made aware of the multitude of competitions being organised all around the country. The press had mentioned it in passing at first., without any comment. Apparently, there was nothing illegal about it. They were genuine free participation competitions. What surprised the Prime Minister was the report that the people were delighted with the series of competitions. Many ordinary people were nominated as best in their own kinds: best in this trade, best in that trade and thousands of them were expecting to be winners and receive thousand rupees cash prizes. Moreover there would be hundreds of people, nominating the winners, winning themselves thousands of rupees in lucky draws.

“Free gambling organisers are the most popular,” was the front page headline in the daily Lexpression.

“Nation in gambling spree,” said the Daily News. “New Millenium Enterprise behind National Prize Competitions,” according to The Nautilus Weekly.

The national press was having a good time. The sales of newspapers had almost doubled in the past weeks. Normally during election time, sales of newspapers went up, but with the Nation gripped in a fever of prize-winning mania, the sales went up astronomically. The newspapers carried special competition pages daily. There were daily reports from each and every town and village on how the competitions were progressing, polls on likely winners, interviews of participants and NME organisers from each region.

“Mr. Gian Kala, you and your two colleagues have organised this incredible competitions all over the north of the island. Can you tell us if this was your idea?” asked the TV reporter.

“No. I have the greatest pleasure to tell the viewers that such an original idea of

making a whole nation happy, can come from just one person I know. That person, I'm happy to announce, is none other than the Managing Director of the New Millenium Enterprise, Mr. Hareemun Dahl.

“That many categories of competitions in one region, with three prizes per category and with so many regions, the total prize money can be millions of rupees. Where will this kind of money come from?”

“Mr. Hareemun Dahl has thought of sharing his fortune with the people of this country, who he thinks, deserve it. Funding this series of competitions is his way of doing it.”

“What do you think Mr. Dahl is doing all this for? What is he expecting in return?”

“Nothing. He is expecting absolutely nothing in return, if not just to see the ordinary people of Nautilus happy, getting for once something as a surprise, when they are least expecting it.”

“Why are these competitions starting at a time when the whole country is in the middle of a political campaign for the National Assembly?”

“Sheer coincidence. But then it's not too bad. Voting at a general election is a very crucial decision making exercise on the part of the electorate. The competitions, as they have been designed, can give the adult population a refresher-training on the intricacies of decision-making and voting for a candidate. The competitions allow every adult to make his choice of the best labourer and the best men or women from any trade, using his own judgement and criteria he recognises in them. After taking part in so many competitions of choosing the best candidate in a certain category, the participant will be in a position of appreciating the criteria for electing a candidate to parliament.”

II

Harman Dahl, Sheila Suckhee, Kesh Lakhan and his wife were all in the lounge at Villa Hope in front of the television watching news hour. They were all waiting to see Gian Kala's interview on the news.

“Now. That's him. That's Gian Kala,” said Harman when the young man appeared on the television.

“I know this face,” said Sheila They watched the two-minute interview with intense concentration.

“Oh, Gian Kala is fantastic. What a chap! His answers were perfect. I couldn't have done better myself,” said a delighted Harman.

“Yes, he's done extremely well. That's a national boost to your image,” said Mrs. Premila Lakhan.

“Yes, Hareemun, it's time to come out public with our New Millenium Party,” joined in Kesh.

“I remember your young man. Gian Kala was in his second year at the University of Nautilus, when I first came across him. Even at that time he showed promises,” said Sheila.

“ About our New Millenium Party. We won’t make it public yet. Let the press people take it themselves. Once all of our candidates have been registered on nomination day for the general election, the press will hit on the New Millenium Party and make a splash as a new national party. Till then we let things stay as they are,” Harman pointed out.

“ How are things moving in our organisation, Hareemun?”

“ To tell you the truth, Kesh, at first I was happy, but now, it’s going smoothly as a dream. All our boys and girls are doing exceptionally well. These competitions have started so well that they have dwarfed the political meetings of all political parties. Every one of our candidates is closest to the masses than any political candidates have ever been before. Our candidates are presently the darlings of the ordinary people. Once the public knows that we are standing as candidates in the 2000 general election, NMP will be set for winning.”

The outgoing Prime Minister, Dharam Santilall did not know what to make of this unprecedented phenomenon. Both the mind and the time of the public were occupied more by trying to find out who among them would be voted best. The Prime Minister had given specific instructions to his Head of the National Intelligence Unit to inquire fully into this public preoccupation. He was shown a detailed report from an NIU officer from the coastal village of Cape North. Report, from that village, was chosen to be shown to the Prime Minister by the Officer-in-charge of the NIU because that was where the New Millenium Enterprise’s head-office was located.

III

The report read as follows:

On Monday, 20th of August, 2000, at 07.00 hours, I was in Tambi’s Tabagie in Temple Road Cape North. Several customers were already there, discussing New Millenium Enterprise sponsored national competitions. They were consulting one another for the best labourer for their region, between a certain Mahen and a certain Dhookeea. It was surprising to see the friendliness, the zeal and the manner in which the discussion was taking place. At some moment, they praised Gian Kala, his friends and NME for these competitions and giving the ordinary people’s effort to be recognised by their peers and get recompensed for it.

At 08.30 hours, I was at Cape North fish-landing station. There were many fishermen on their morning round. They were engaged in a serious argument among themselves as to who should be voted the best fisherman for Cape North. I noted that Bayan Baboolall was issuing nomination coupons to people.

At 11.00 hours, I stopped at the Cape North Primary School. It was lunch break time, and some teachers chatted under a tree. One of them was a friend of mine. I joined them in their conversation and I was surprised to see that they were discussing the same subject I’ve been hearing elsewhere. I asked them why, as intellectuals, they should be wasting their time discussing such silly things.

“Kadress, have you ever heard of anybody organising any competition to find the best teacher anywhere before. This kind of free competitions makes every man proud of his trade and to look forward to be elected best in his job. This will encourage people to give the best of themselves knowing that they will be

recognised for it,” said my friend.

“ We have the best footballer, the best athlete, and the best actor everywhere and every year. Now for the first time, we will have our best teacher, our best labourer, our best machine operator, all voted by us. What’s more, both the voters and the nominees can win fabulous cash prizes. That’s pure fun for the people. People like Gian Kala and Hareemun Dahl of NME, is what we need as leaders in this country. They have innovative ideas and they know it’s the people who counts in this country,” said a teacher.

At 14.00 hours, I was at the community centre, where I saw an old man handing out voting coupons to his friends. Later I went to Cape North bus terminal. Some drivers were working out the merits of having all these regional competitions at a time when the country is preparing to go to the poll.

“ But these are two different things. We are all used to general election, and this year’s election is the same. But this series of community self-appraisal, voting games is revolutionising people’s mind to the concept of always selecting and electing the best of us for a particular job. This will definitely going to make electors rethink their voting habits,” explained a bus driver.

One thing I noticed everywhere I went. There was an air of contentment and an expectation by every second man to win cash prizes, offered. Voting coupons were being given freely to anyone at collection points in every village. Report submitted by NIU officer, Kadress Samu.

In his own report to Prime Minister Santilall, the Head of the National Intelligence Unit, pointed out that, from all around the country, he had received reports similar to officer Samu’s.

“More generally, the population is taking it as a season for fun and they want to make the most of it. What is attracting the population is the thousands of substantial cash prizes that could be won by anybody for free.”

The NIU boss stressed in his report that all the regional organisers were being hailed as heroes, and more so, Mr. Hareemun Dahl, Director of the New Millenium Enterprise. He confirmed to the Prime Minister that he has been investigating the whole thing and there was no cause for alarm. There was no sign of public disturbance, or anything of that sort. He concluded his report by saying that the NIU was keeping the organisers and Harman Dahl under surveillance

IV

The next Prime Minister Santilall’s Cabinet meeting was the highest place where the free gambling competitions were debated. The Prime Minister, acting as Home Minister, had brought the subject on the agenda. The NIU reports were circulated to all Cabinet Ministers.

It was unanimously agreed in Cabinet that Mr. Harman Dahl owner and Director of New Millenium Enterprise might be crazy but he was a person genuinely willing to do some tangible social work. The cabinet noted with satisfaction that all the members of the organising group in NME were non-political persons.

There was no cause for alarm, as the NIU report had said, with a group of unknowns.

The Opposition Union led by the ex-Prime Minister Mr. Vacchaan Walla did not, at first, know the impact of the widespread popular involvement in the free national lotteries. Not until it had become the talk of the towns, the talk of the villages and the talk of the whole country, for weeks on. They were too engulfed in their own petty problems of leadership and the dispute over tickets sharing between the two partners of the Union. The split of the Opposition Union came in the midst of the NME initiated public euphoria, which their leaders didn't stop to ponder.

The leaders of the two halves of the Union were with secret deals with the Nautilus Popular Party with a view to an eventual pre-electoral alliance for the general election. The outgoing Prime Minister was sure of winning a second mandate and staying in power with even more seats in Parliament than before. Yet he had agreed in a televised debate that he was open to talk alliance with any party.

Obviously these political players were experts in their political games, wheeling and dealing at will. They were completely unaware that there was another leading player in the year 2000 election game, who had all the trump cards, and was secretly bidding for a grand slam.

All through the pre-nomination days, Harman Dahl was confident that his New Millenium Party would make a clean sweep of all the sixty seats in Parliament. He was overjoyed that his plans were working to perfection. He was now looking forward to the day when he would close the lid on Corruption's coffin in Nautilus.

One week before Nomination Day, Harman Dahl had convened all the sixty representatives of NME for nomination briefing. Villa Hope was crowded with cars and people on that day. George, the handyman was given special charge of the villa gate with instruction to allow only NME reps inside.

"Are you a representative?" asked George to the driver who was trying to turn in the entrance.

"Representative? What representative?" asked back Kadress Samu.

"Do you work for Mr. Hareemun Dahl's enterprise?"

"No I don't. I'm just going in to see these people."

"I am sorry. You cannot go in. This is a private meeting for representatives."

The meeting was held in the open in the front of the veranda. The usual self-service facilities were provided on the veranda. Plastic armchairs were available for those who wished to sit. With all the sixty employees present, it was not easy to move about. When the meeting started most of those present were seated facing the veranda.

"Ladies and gentleman, welcome to this vital NME meeting or should I say NMP meeting. That is the New Millenium Party. As you already know from this morning newspaper reports, NMP is one of the forty -odd political parties registered at the Electoral Commission yesterday 26th October, 2000. You will be pleased to learn that we are all officially, as from today, in addition to being employees of NME, members of the New Millenium Party. We are taking, all together, our first step in national politics."

Harman Dahl was speaking from the slightly higher floor of the veranda. Standing besides him, were a radiant Mrs. Suckhee and a happy-looking Kesh Lakan.

“ Don’t worry if you are not formed in the art of Politics. I believe that you all excel in the art of Humanities. Keep that human warmth, human touch and human trust that you have all managed to cultivate with your respective regional electorate, especially since the beginning of this year. Don’t worry a bit about the political extravangas and political shows that we are already seeing and that, like previous election times, will increase to saturation, as polling day approaches. We will have to continue to work like moles in this present political wilderness.”

While Harman Dahl was speaking, the crowd of NMP members listened intently, lest they missed something important.

“ The 26th of this month is nomination day. All of you will have to see Roshnee today before you leave, to get all the nomination documents and procedures right for that day. We don’t want to have a hitch on the 26th.”

There was silence. Harman Dahl continued his address.

“ The next thing you will all have to do is to organize the final stages of the regional public competitions and prize-giving days. In view of the number of categories involved, the prize-giving ceremonies will have to be spread over two days. That should give the public and the electorate an opportunity that no government, no parties, no organisations, cultural, social or otherwise have ever given them. The Nautilians will have a chance for them to decide and marvel at all those who are best among them in their respective fields. We should turn this into a regional festivals week, to culminate before polling day. Our public will no doubt will be overwhelmed by this, and will find no other way to thank us than to vote for us on the 11th of September, for then the proof that we are their men of heart and mind and originality.”

“ You will have to arrange to get permission from the Police Authority to hold public gatherings during the week. You will arrange public announcement through the press and posters of the prize-giving programs and venues. You must also arrange for the one hundred cash prizes of a thousand rupees each in each of the twenty constituencies ready to be awarded during the week. On the day following Nomination Day, the image and strength of our New Millenium Party will be in the limelight. The media will not be able to stop themselves from focussing on us during the whole of the election period. That’s all for today. If you have any point to discuss or need any further clarification, you can see me later. We will meet here again on the 2nd September for a last strategic planning and advice before polling day. Oh, by the way, you all still remain full-time employees of NME, and I, your Managing Director. Good-bye for now.”

V

The political parties’ activities were increasing day by day. Political public meetings were succeeding one another fast in all regions, with orators attacking and counter-attacking opponents with usual vehemence. The outgoing ruling party and the main opposition party started their election-time mud-slinging match, denouncing each other of fraud, corruption and favouratism during their

rival's term of office. Press coverage bore witness, as always, to their allegations, threats and promises to set up Commission of Inquiries, to prove once for all how corrupt their rivals were, only to go into complete amnesia, of all accusations, after gaining power.

There was plenty of evidence to discerning readers like Harman Dahl. Newspaper reports, posters and announcement of major scandals and cases of blatant corruption were thrust on the public: the Moontrust House scandal, the CED scandal, La Vichy scandal, the Hospital-beds scandal, the Offshore company scandal and many others. Harman Dahl wondered if the electorate would ever know the millions and billions of the Nautilian people's money that could have been embezzled and stolen by some outgoing Ministers and their predecessors. The world notorious Nigerian Connection could be just a fiction, and a Nautilian Connection could be more real one.

Harman Dahl has vowed to see that every Nautilian benefitted from the country's wealth. He believed that every Nautilian, from the newborn to the oldest one, has equal share in the nation's fortune and the money the government spent, gave or stole was not government's money, but the people's money. He was sad to have to accept the short memory, the very short memory that the electorate had. Had not the electorate seen the making, breaking, remaking and rebreaking perpetually of political alliances between the same parties, same politicians and yet condoning them. These thoughts have made Harman often downhearted. He was wishing so much that he would see an end to these power-grabbing alliances sprouting on the eve of a general election.

Harman Dahl thought that the Nautilian electorate was fickle-minded. The fickle-mindedness of the electorate was the main cause for the state of affairs in politics and governments in Nautilus. He had tried to stimulate the selection process of their representatives to Parliament by devising, organising and funding of the prize competition nationwide. But he had some doubt as to whether it would work. He decided that he would have to find and devise other means to ascertain and help his NMP to win overall majority in Parliament. He was sure and confident of his own ability to find a way to succeed. He would force the electorate's hand into gambling on his term.

Between the last NME meeting and the nomination day, all NMP candidates had a hectic time in their areas. The prize-giving announcement posters were printed and posted and displayed regionally in all accessible places and many next to other political posters, including one with the portrait of the ex-Prime Minister in his pin-stripped suit and the words: The best Prime Minister- written across it.

Gian Kala and his colleagues, just like Asha Panee's team and the other NMP members, had a lot of helping hands from their numerous volunteers to the posters plastering around the island. The words of the posters read : "The New Millenium Enterprise has the pleasure to invite the public to the prize-giving ceremony to the many winners of the Regional Best worker-tradesman Competition which will be held at the local football ground on the 29th and 30th of November,2000 between two and five o'clock in the afternoon. Winners will be awarded cash prizes of a thousand rupees in each of the ninety categories, including blue-collar and white-collar workers and tradesmen. The ceremony will be presided, organised and funded by your three friends for life, your three local NME representatives. So don't miss this opportunity. Recognise your friends' and neighbours' talents and vote for them now!"

The next day, following the NME posters display, the local press carried the news on their front pages.

“ An eye-opener: NME shows the way,” according to the Daily News.

“ Lecons pour nos politiciens,” heralded La Tribune

“ The best amongst us: time to reckon,” splashed the Times.

What pleased the Nautilians with this seemingly improvised fun competition was the fact that it gave them, at long last, a chance of self-assessment of the nation, and a means to think sincerely who does what best among them. This assessing exercise if repeated often, Nautilus would become a nation of people who could recognise the true value of their fellow brothers and sisters. Such recognition would be the basis of national unity, according to Harman Dahl. The fakes would be gleaned out and discarded as eye sores. Hence would have emanated in the multi-cultural society of Nautilus, Harman Dahl’s cherished wish of meritocracy, which should prevail in the country.

The distribution and collection of nomination coupons continued during the week. Computer reports reaching the NME headquarters in Cap Malheureus were showing massive participation in the Fun Competition in all twenty regions. Winners were already showing up in different categories.

Harman Dahl analysed the incoming data and kept his head cool. He pondered over his ultimate plan to sway by force the electorate’s voting decision, in the forthcoming general election, in his party’s favour. Finally, after hours of head-searching, he was satisfied that he had found what he needed to get the voters’ favours. He planned to get personally involved with the group of NME computer programmers to set up a dot.com company as a lethal weapon to use in, a last resort, in the general election battle. He was pleased to see that, within two days, his new internet venture was tested and ready for operation , well before nomination day.

“ Until such time,” Harman thought, “ the political lions, tigers and hyenas can continue tearing one another, unaware that I, the hunter, am stalking them all for the kill. It is only after Nomination Day, that they will know that a hunter is tracking them and it will be surprisingly too late for them. They will concede defeat well before the first shot.”

Harman Dahl was alone at sunset, on the eve of Nomination Day, under the big filao tree, musing. New Millenium Celebration and Caudan Waterfront crossed his mind fleetingly. “I’ve raised the stake too high. I’ve staked everything I’ve got. Oh, Lord Krishna, let me be Dooriodhan just this once, in my final gamble.”

Eight

I

Well before the opening of the nomination centres, one in each of the twenty constituencies of the Island state, some political activists, agents, would-be nominees were arriving. Every political party candidates and independent candidates had the obligation of making sure of getting duly registered if they wanted to stand for election for the national assembly on the 11th September, 2000.

Media and press reporters were omnipresent round the nomination centres. They were there to catch the mood of the real-life actors of the day. There were signs that, unlike previous nomination days of the past decade, there was some apathy from the general public. Yet all Nautilians were keen to know the list of candidates standing in the election. Only then, would they acknowledge the start of the official debut of the political campaign of their parties.

As the morning hours passed, the number of candidates increased, amidst the applause of their supporters. The cortege of the Prime Minister, Shantilall arrived at the Tiolait Nomination Centre on the stroke of ten. The whole scene became more animated. People present in their hundreds, in the school compound serving as nomination centre for constituency no. 5, moved closer to the PM's Rolls Royce. Several plain-clothed bodyguards, hefty-looking men, spread around, as photographers clicked their cameras. Reporters followed the leader of the outgoing ruling party for his statement and comments. Political activists and supporters waited in expectation to be photographed with the Prime Minister. That would serve as evidence of their commitments in this election and would ensure their claims for future hand-outs.

The scene was repeated at one o'clock in the afternoon, at the Riviere Du Rempart, constituency no. 7 nomination centre. This time the main actor on the scene was the Opposition Alliance leader. The crowd gathered around him thought that this man could well be the next Prime Minister. Hence they had the same desire and reason to be photographed with him.

The crowds gathered in the nomination centres were mostly party agents and party supporters waiting to know the official list of candidates for the general election. Prime Minister Shantilall, who was also Interior Minister, was in constant touch with his Ministers and party agents to get reports on how nominations were proceeding. He had given cell phones to most of his men to help them get in touch with him. The cell phones had made communication so easy during this election and helped party members monitor election news and events.

Prime Minister Shantilall was in happy mood during the day. Reports from around the country confirmed that his intelligence unit's report on the nomination outcome had been correct. The main opposition party was aligning in the constituencies, just as it had been predicted. The smaller parties' nominees were also as per the National Intelligence Office. As for independent candidates, the Prime Minister could not care less.

Harman Dahl had made it clear to his members to follow his instructions closely. He had instructed them to arrive at the nomination centres at half past two, half hour before closing time. He had decided on this timing to make a last minute impact on the major political parties. He, himself, walked to the Morcellement St Andre nomination centre at the precise time, having left his car some hundred metres away. Gian Kala and the third NMP member for No. 6, Grand Baie- Poudre D'or constituency seats, met him at the gate. In Accordance to his wish, no NMP supporters were seen there.

Harman Dahl had asked all his sixty candidates, including himself, to stay at their place, and to confirm that nomination procedures went all right soon after returning. One by one, the calls arrived. Within a couple of hours the full New Millenium Party's participation in the 2000 general election was confirmed. That made Harman extremely happy.

“ So far, so good,” he said to himself, pouring himself a long glass of Green Island and coke.

“ It’s time to relax a bit,” he thought.

He switched on the audio player and laid back on the sofa, holding his drink in his hand. The music came softly. Harman sang along with Louis Armstrong just as he had done so many times before.

“ Oh, what a wonderful world.”

II

“ Damn it. Damn it,” Mr. Shantilall shouted, looking very agitated.

“ Why didn’t someone tell me of this happening? Where is that shit He’s the head of Intelligence, my arse. What the hell he really knows?” continued the Prime Minister.

“ Only when everything was looking so good, this shit party pops in from nowhere.”

“ Calm down, Lion. No need to go berserk,” said Chopra, calmly.

Pravin ‘Shark’ Chopra, the Finance Minister drove early to Clara House with copies of the morning newspapers.

“ Never seen before! New Millenium Party contesting all sixty seats in Parliament,” said the front of the Nautilus Daily News.

“ Sixty good Samaritans could upset political balance,” in Le Cerneen.

“ Surprise. Surprise! New political party bids for power,” said The Nation.

“ My dear Lion, what’s the use of worrying about a load of unknowns. They are nothing more than sixty fools about to lose their deposits,” continued Chopra.

“ But Chopra, why didn’t our men know about this before. How could, what’s his name?..oh, Dahl have the knack to put candidates everywhere?” raged the Prime Minister.

“ I know. It’s taken us by surprise. In fact it has surprised everybody, even the press. But mark my words. Their presence won’t affect this election.”

“ Chopra, if you really think that way, why did you have to rush in here with all that crap? Who are you kidding? Fielding sixty candidates, as a new-comer party, has never been done. That’s a feat in itself. Normally this kind of things is done with full publicity, trumpets and drum beating. But these fuckers kept it a secret till last. Why?” said Santilall, continuing to rage.

“ Maybe Dahl was lucky to have some worthless people to join him in his useless trial.”

“ Chopra, don’t irritate me. Stop playing the fool. This Dahl’s New Millenium Party and his men, aren’t they the same people who have made the whole country go crazy over their so-called fun competition? I tell you. This is a bad day for us. There’s something strange and fishy in all these.”

“Lion, I’ve to admit I’m worried too. I’m only trying to stop you from getting more upset. Anyhow, we should not worry unduly. At worst, we could lose a few votes. We will still win with a big majority. There’s no doubt about that. Besides that’s what the polls are showing,” said Pravin ‘Shark’ Chopra.

“The last NIC report I had on this Dahl’s organisation impressed me a lot. I was impressed with the things they were doing. I thought, what an easy way to make the people happy. Even then I was treating Dahl as a lunatic, spilling his fortune in a rubbish-bin, just to have a bunch of do-gooders. Now these same men are standing in the general election. I fear that this can constitute a threat to us.”

“Lion, I really think you are over-reacting,” pointed out the Finance Minister.

“Joe,” called the PM.

“Arrange an urgent meeting of our election committee here at four o’clock this afternoon to review our election campaign so far, and to decide on the implication of the New Millennium Party’s participation.”

“Straight away, sir,” replied Joe, the PM’s right-hand man.

“And get the CP to come to see me here at three o’clock sharp with his updated reports on the election. I want a special report on Dahl, the MNP, and all its members.”

III

Harman Dahl’s instruction to his NME employees cum NMP candidates for the post-nomination week was to get their area supporters on the fieldwork with them from day one. Soon the masses of electioneering posters plastered around the villages, towns and the City of Bay Louis, included the posters heralding the coming of the New Millennium Party into the 1st December, general election. Photo posters of Harman Dahl, Kesh Lakhani, Mrs. Suckhee, Gian Kala and all NMP candidates appeared on the walls along with the multitude of others from other parties.

Harman Dahl had not envisaged any special or national political meeting or rally. These, he left to the main political parties who always used these methods as a show of force. He was more than convinced that the prize-giving ceremonies his party had organised, all around the country, for the two days before polling day, would bring the electorates closest to them. It would be the climax of the long relationship between the thousands of electorates and NME/NMP candidates.

From the 27th August, onwards, every member of NMP, together with their most fervent supporters, walked door-to-door, for hours everyday, to meet and greet friends and acquaintance throughout their constituencies.

“Have you taken part in Fun Competition yet,” asked Harman, as he passed the village church at Cape North, with his two constituency colleagues by his side.

The Sunday mass had just finished. Karl, a local fisherman was a one of the churchgoers coming out of the church.

“Yes Hareemun. I’m taking part fully. I’ve already voted for Vishnu as the best labourer, Johnny, son of old Marvin, as the best bricklayer, Feroz as the best

fisherman, and Madame Kwan, over there, as the best shopkeeper. Oh, yes. I have voted for Mr. Legallant as the best teacher and Ramsingh as the best policeman. I've voted for some others, but the list is long. I hope that they will all win a prize."

"We want the best men to win, don't we Karl?"

"Oh yes Hareemun, that's what we all want. And before you mention it, I want you to know that everybody in this village are voting for you and Gian, all three of you on the 11th. For so long all you three have been helping us in this village in so many ways. You have shown us that you have the abilities and heart to do good work in parliament. After all you are professionals, as good or better than the others. We'll vote for in block. Won't we friends?"

"Yes, we will," answered the crowd of churchgoers.

"Karl is so right," continued the man standing a few steps behind.

"Voting for you and your team on the 1st next month is the only way we can show you all our gratitude for all the good things you've done for us. This is the first time that we, voters, have the change to choose a group of good men and women to work for us in Parliament. Men and women who have already given the nation the proof of their undeniable abilities, wisdom, foresight, goodness and friendship."

"NMP is our party and you are our men," said Karl.

Harman and his two colleagues walked slowly to Mme Kwan's shop, on the other side of the road. They continued their visit of the electors. One thing was very evident. They knew every grown-ups and every grown ups knew them and mostly in first name terms. Harman was delighted. This was the result of a whole year's full-time work.

About midday, the Trio reached Grand-Baie, meeting people. They were obviously well known in the village. The meeting, greeting and fussing were more now, because the public had already learnt of their participation in the general election. Everywhere the public showed the same enthusiastic approval of the New Millenium Party.

"What that's gathering there, on the beach," asked the tourist, holding the menu card in Sea Breeze Restaurant.

"It's election candidates meeting with people," replied the waiter.

"By the look of it, there must be celebrities and Ministers in the crowd," rejoined the tourist.

"No, there's no Ministers. These people are in a general election for the first time."

"How come they are so popular?"

"These people are all known in their respective villages and districts all their lives. They have been going all out helping they people everywhere. They help in finding jobs for some, giving financial help or any other gifts to needy, caring for health or education problems of some, and giving advice and help to anyone

with problems with the law and authorities. In fact, their doors are always open to anyone who knocks. Now this public is overjoyed to see these men and women standing as candidates in this year's general election," explained the waiter.

"With a record like this, who wouldn't be popular with his people," remarked the tourist.

After Nomination Day, the political parties started their all-out political campaign. On Sunday the outgoing governing party had organised a national meeting at Rempart, the Opposition Leader's constituency. The opposition Alliance Party had called the nation to their public meeting at Vacoas, their leader's home-town. That week-end, the election fever kept away from the nation, who for once showed little interest in displaying their commitment. In order to show their force, the political parties had to gather the largest crowd at their meetings. But they had not reckoned with the impact the NME's Fun-competition prize-giving organised in all the country's political constituencies.

Harman Dahl had done his strategic planning well. He had, together with his men, managed to focus the Nautilian nation's mind to their one-off dream competition for a few weeks. There were fame to be gained and money to be won for the mass of the ordinary people.

No wonder the nation was keyed to that event. Both major parties were thoroughly disappointed with their public turnouts, while the New Millenium Party members were overwhelmed by the crowds in the thousands.

"People were fed up with the same kind of political meeting year-in year-out, the same old politicians ranting over their same old unfulfilled promises," according to Harman.

From the very onset, Harman Dahl's strategy was to present the people with concrete evidence of the genuineness of his political party, if he were to rally the nation around him. Reports from around the country showed that Harman's plan was working.

IV

There was an air of happiness in the Cape North football ground. The local musical band had kept the audience entertained. On the makeshift podium, local representatives helped the three NMP members with the ceremony.

"Thank you. Thank you everybody. Thank you for your presence. Thank you for being here this afternoon."

Harman Dahl greeted. The loudspeakers resounded. The football ground reverberated.

"It's looks like a national day today. We are gathered here, just like our friends are gathered at this very moment in their own district, to acknowledge and honour our friends, men and women, who have given us their best of themselves. In our society, only men with money, millionaires and men with power are valued and honoured. Ordinary men and women who help to make this country prosper, while toiling for their daily needs, are taken for granted. So far we've marvelled at the wheel that turns, but ignored the spokes that give the

wheel its strength.”

The crowds, spreading beyond the football pitch, clapped and roared.

“ Hareemun! Hareemun!”

“ I believe in giving to Caesar what Caesar’s. Greedy and ruthless men have created so many anomalies that we fail to recognise the genuine from the fake. This is the first time in our country that we are having the opportunity to reward the genuine people among us, in a little way. I sincerely hope that in the near future, we shall begin to reward genuine good people all through their life. We shall do away with fakes, sharks, pests, and cling-ons for ever. Friends, you will choose genuine men and women to represent you in Parliament. I have, no doubt, that you all know your friends from the New Millenium Enterprise, like Gian Kala and myself, who are living amongst you all. You have seen our abilities, our experience, our integrity, and our commitments towards you. In order to help us continue our services to you, and the nation as a whole, we had to change from the New Millenium Enterprise to the New Millenium Party, to go into this year’s election. We can succeed in our mission only if you all vote for us. We can make this country a real paradise, where even the poor and the lowly can be happy.”

Some members of the audience in the front began chanting. “ Hareemun Dahl, Hareemun Dahl. NMP, NMP...”

“ Friends, I’m not here to make a long political speech. I had never thought that one day I would have to go into politics. But the master of all man-made evils, corruption, is threatening the very fabrics of our society. The river of corruption is spilling over and will sink the majority of poor and lowly to the abyss. I’ve come to help carry the torch of truth. That is why we have the New Millenium Party. A new millenium has just dawned, a new party just born, and a new social order is about to be born. We don’t have a party manifesto to give you. I believe in actions, not in words. You have ample proofs of our actions and intentions,” continued Harman.

“ Friends, as I said, I’m not going to make a long political speech. We are here today to thank, in a humble way, some of our friends, from all walks of life, for their efforts and contributions in our society. Straightaway I pass you Mr. Kala who will preside this prize-giving ceremony.”

Gian Kala came to the microphone, papers in hand. He looked at the massive crowd stretched in front of him. The crowd cheered.

“ I’m pleased to announce our first winner for today. He has been voted by you as the best labourer for this constituency, Grand Baie-Poudre D’or. All labourers deserve our reward, but the one you have voted is forty-seven years old man, married and father of four children. He is originally from Upper Vale, but at the age of six, after the death of his father, moved to live with his maternal grand-father in Belmont village. He had a difficult childhood, and was not able to attend school as he was forced to work from an early age. Yet he managed to read and write. Today after all these years of working as labourer at Belmont Sugar Estate, and for small planters in spare time, he has become owner of a small plot of land himself. All through his life, he has the esteem of this fellow labourers and the praise of this employers. In fact, he is a model in his category. The best labourer, our best labourer is Seeram Gangah, from Belmont.” Gian

Kala paused a little and then continued, amidst the cheering and clapping of hands.

“ I invite Mr. Seeram Gangah to come on the podium to receive his prize.”

A middle-aged man, looking fit and dressed for the occasion, climbed up onto the open stage. He was the first to receive his medal. Harman Dahl ceremoniously pinned the decorative gold medal, with its quadricolour ribbon, onto the winner’s lapel. Then Harman Dahl handed him a large certificate with gold lettering and a cheque for one thousand rupees.

“ Now I invite Mr. Gangah to say a few words,” said Gian Kala.

Seeram Gangah approached the microphone hesitatingly and visibly mustering his courage, he spoke to the people from the neighbouring villages.

“ Forgive me if I look nervous and out of place. It’s just that people like me are not used to this kind of things. I’ve never thought of ever winning any prize in my life. I’ve been a labourer and I’ve struggled all my life. Today when I know that you have all voted for me as the best labourer, I feel proud and dignified. Labouring is an honest job, where you earn only through the strength of your arms and legs. Chaque metier nourrie son maitre. Labouring has fed me and clothed me in the most honest way. Thank you all for thinking so good of me. I’ve known most of you all these years and I hope that I shall always merit your esteem. But I think that there are some people who deserve our esteem most. These people who have been like a breath of fresh air in our midst. These people who have given us examples by deeds and actions of how things should be. These people who are the torch bearers of our society. I’m talking of none other than Hareemun Dahl and his friends in the New Millenium Party. I think they are great. What do you think? Aren’t they great?”

“ Ouaie, Ouaie!” echoed the football ground.

“ Then we’ll all vote for the NMP. Yes?”

“ Yes, Yes!” The crowd roared.

“ Thank you Seeram. Thank you all of you,” said Gian Kala.

“ I shall call our second winner whom you have voted as the best female labourer. She is mother of two, and a widow from Roche Terre. She was unfortunate to lose her husband after only a few years of married life. She had to fend for herself and her two little boys. She joined the Mapou Sugar Estate some twenty years ago. Through her hard and dedicated work in the canefields, she was able to send her younger son to university. Her dedication to hard work is an example we can all follow. Our winner for the best woman labourer is Mrs. Goree Azad. Mrs. Goree Azad is asked to come on the stage,” said Gian Kala, above the applause of the crowd.

When Seeram Gangah returned to his family and friends in the football ground, he was almost mobbed by them, all trying to see his gold medal, his certificate and his prize-money.

“ I’m proud of you, Seeram,” said his wife.

“ I never thought I could see a day like this,” she continued.

“Neither did I,” said Seeram, chocking with emotion.

His friends and everybody he passed congratulated him and shook hands with him.

“Well done,” they said.

Mrs. Goree Azad walked on the stage, looking proud of herself. Even though she was not used to this kind of meeting, she was at complete ease, because she knew most persons present. She received her medal , pinned on her blouse by the local headmistress. Mrs. Azad was glowing with pride with her medal and prize.

“Merci, merci beaucoup, zotte tous,” she said.

“Thank you Mr. Dahal. Thank NMP people. Thank you for organising this unprecedented event. I am not thanking you only because I was voted best female labourer. I also want to thank you in front of the public to have done everything to get my boy qualify for a place at the university. Moreover you have given a chance to look at ourselves, our friends, and neighbours closely and appreciate our true values. And before I go, I want to say it here, loud and clear, and without fear that I see no better men than Mr. Dahl and his men and no better party in this year’s general election than the New Millenium Party. On the 1st I am voting for Hareemun Dahl and the NMP.”

“And we too,” yelled a group in front of the podium.

The prize giving and speeches continued. Gian Kala presented the winners, dwelled a little on their family histories, and achievements and invited each one to speak to the audience. There were winners from different professions and trades, who were present with their families and friends. On this first day of prize giving, Gian Kala announced forty-five winners. There were one more days organised for prize giving, on the eve of polling day.

Harman Dahl was aware of the amount of money he was giving away in prize money. He was spending one hundred thousand rupees per constituency, making a total well over two million rupees in the twenty constituencies.

The prize giving ceremonies organised by NMP local representatives in the other districts were identical in conformity with Harman Dahl’s instructions. There were same number of winners, identical categories. In the end, Harman Dahl felt that he had enough to be satisfied with his plan.

V

Press reporters were still present at Clara House in the late afternoon, to catch any news on the election. Ministers, Government Officials and party activists were arriving and disappearing behind closed doors. The meeting in the conference room had started.

“You have all seen the reports this afternoon. What have you to say?” asked Prime Minister Santilall.

Finance Minister Chopra was the first to answer.

“I’ve read the reports and I’ve spoken to the CP. I still think that the NMP is a

bunch of small-timers. As I've said earlier today, they can get a few votes, but not enough to worry us. Certainly not enough to change the result of the election."

"But the reports mention large crowds at their different meetings round the islands this afternoon," pointed the Prime Minister.

"They were giving money away. That's why they had so many people. In fact they are bribing the electorates openly," remarked Claude Prosper, Minister for Tourism.

"Harman Dahl has organised one more day, tomorrow, for his so called prize giving. We must stop this. We must stop this now and stop the NMP getting further grounds," exclaimed the Prime Minister.

"With due respect to you Sir, we cannot do this. There is nothing illegal in what NME and NMP is doing. They have genuinely organised fair competitions for the public to take part, and the prize giving form part of this. They have not infringed any law," said the CP.

"The CP is right. We cannot stop what looks like the nation's favourite past-time at this moment. Our attempt to stop the NMP's prize giving may have a boomerang effect on us. Especially we have invited international observers here for the occasion," added another Minister.

"It looks as though Harman Dahl had planned all this for a long time. His men are so close to the electorate. Only some major scandal on their part can change their popularity now," said the Minister for education.

"Robert, do we have something on them that we can expose? Something even trivial that we can use," asked the Prime Minister.

"Unfortunately, no. They are all clean professionals, with clean dossiers. They are all new in politics and it will be difficult to find something that will stick," said the CP.

"Damn it! In that case, get Harman Dahl to see me urgently tomorrow. Tell him I want to meet him at ten at night at Fazal Khan's seaside bungalow at Albion," concluded the Prime Minister.

The following morning, the Commissioner of Police came to Harman Dahl's Villa at Cape North. Harman received him on the veranda. The maid served coffee.

"What brings you here, Robert," asked Harman. The two men knew each other for some time in their young days.

"I'll come to the point of my visit straight away," said the CP.

"Well, What is it?"

"The PM wants to talk to you. He wants you to meet him tonight at Fazal Khan's bungalow at Albion."

"Do you know what he wants to talk about?"

“ No, I don't. But I guess he is a bit worried. You and your Millenium Party have made a tremendous impact on the electorate. Harman I think you have taken everybody by surprise.”

“ Robert, you know how time-consuming is this election business. I've so much to do and hardly anytime left, just over a day to polling day. Tell the PM that I'm deeply honoured to be invited to meet him. Tell him that I'll meet him as soon as I find some spare time. I think it will be most probably after the 1st of December.

Harman Dahl gave his final pre-polling day instruction to his NMP colleagues.

“ During tomorrow's prize-giving, you must give your words and pledge to our voting friends that once elected, we will be in constant touch with them just as before. That we will do nothing in Parliament without first talking to them and getting their views and approval and that we shall always be their servant, the servant of the nation. The next thing I want you to do is this. Let the electorate know that bookmakers are giving the government Alliance favourite at two to one to win the general election and quoting the main opposition Alliance at four to one to win. Tell them that NMP is currently quoted at fifty to one. Tell them to check this information on several websites. One such site is www.paradise.gambling.com. Advise them all to bet as much as they can spare and win a fortune. Tell them if they vote for us they can't lose.”

Once again, Harman Dahl's instructions were carried out to the strictest. His men were flabbergasted at Harman Dahl's ingenuity. They just marveled to be with him. NMP brought, through their next day grand public meeting, the election's result to a foregone conclusion. The two major, long established national alliances believed in their supremacy. They continued their charade, masquerade and political carnivals right up to polling day.

Nine

I

Year 2000 General Election finally turned into a three-cornered fight with the New Millenium Party as a strong outsider and the outgoing governing party slightly favourite. What surprised most political observers was the last minute challenge the new comer on the political scene, the New Millenium Party was making. As new comers, they were so sure of themselves. They went about their election campaign in their own specific way. They stayed away from the same beaten-tracks that all political parties eventually followed.

On the eve of polling day, candidates, from all other political parties, were still doing door-to-door campaigning, while NMP candidates had already done their man-to-man relationship with the electorate since a long time. Political reporters and observers failed to realise the close relationship that existed between the NMP candidates and the voters, on a person-to-person basis. Evidently their election forecast was quite the opposite of what Harman Dahl was predicting. The outgoing Prime Minister, Mr. Santilall was still confident that his party would win with a comfortable margin.

Polling Day passed quietly without any incident to the satisfaction of everybody concerned. Voting was evenly spread throughout the day, in all the voting centres around the country. On the closure of the voting centres in the late

afternoon of the 11th September, 2000, the rate of participation by the voting public was on the high-side, between eighty-five to ninety percent of the electorate.

On the following day, the Nautilus Radio and Television Corporation carried out live election coverage on both major channels all through the day. There was the panel of experts analysing the results and voting trends, as new voting figures came in. The panel of experts got their first surprise when the first computer figures reaching the national station showed that NMP was ahead in most constituencies. This trend continued and proved that the political pundits had got their sum wrong for once.

By midday, the trend was confirmed. The New Millenium Party was heading for an overall win. The analysts were lost for words to explain this never-before likelihood of a parliament full of only first-timers. By two o'clock, a dejected Mr. Santilall, the outgoing PM, conceded defeat sportingly, yet perplexed on how all this happened.

At SSS Adolphe de Plevitz, Grand Bay, the crowd of candidates, political agents, activists, supporters, policemen and the general public were gathered, waiting for the proclamation of the result of constituency no.6. On the stroke of four in the afternoon, the Returning Officer of the said constituency, appeared on the balcony of the college building, public speaking-system in hand, to announce the final result. Jubilant supporters, mostly NMP's by then, were waving NMP flags.

Harman Dahl and his two NMP colleagues and their agents were up there on the balcony. The Returning Officer, using the public speaking system, tried to appeal to the jubilant crowd to be quiet before he could proceed with the announcement of the poll's result. He announced the results in alphabetical order, just as the names of the candidates appeared on the ballot paper. There were twenty-six candidates on the list.

“Avar, Jocelyn Marie, nineteen votes. Bahar Amid Miah, twenty-four votes. Bijloll Kumar Singh, ten votes. Bolly Dharmendra, seven thousand five hundred and one votes. Corson Jean Louis, five votes. Dabeea, Anil Kumar, one thousand three hundred and nine votes. Daball, Nandkeswar, nine thousand and eight votes. Dahl, Hareemun, twenty thousand...”

The crowd went crazy.

“Premier Ministre! Premier Ministre! Premier Ministre!”

They were all hailing Harman Dahl as the Prime Minister and completely drowning the voice of the Returning Officer. The Latter waited for a lull in the crowd's enthusiasm to continue with the proclamation of the results. “Dahl, Hareemun, Twenty thousand three hundred and eighteen votes.” The roar increased. The Returning Officer continued with the list of results and finally he made his long awaited declaration.

“I declare duly elected to serve as representatives of the constituency of Grand Bay -Poudre D'or in the Legislative Assembly: One: Dahl, Hareemun.Two: Kala , Gian. Three: Laurent, Marie Louise.”

The crowd went hysteric. The unbelievable had happened.

“ Mr. Dahl, are you surprised with your Party winning this general election?”
asked the visibly surprised Television Reporter.

“ Surprised? Not in the least. This is what we have been forecasting all along the campaign, regardless of what you, people of the media, were saying. The NMP is in unison with the majority of the Nautilian public. We are in fact the silent majority. We are not a vociferous group.

“ Mr. Dahl, today you are to be our new Prime Minister elect. Yesterday, nobody, no newspaper talked about this possibility. Your comment?”

“ The newspapers were doing their routine analysis, unaware of the fact that we had worked silently and lengthily to awaken the reasoning process of the silent majority. I knew we were going to win. The NMP knew it. That’s why we came into this election. The people took us as their own ones. All we had to do was to be in the general election to win. It was as simple as that.”

The day-long election program on the television channel of the island continued. Reports from all the constituencies showed a mixture of shock and euphoria

“ At the end of the day, this New Millenium Party will have absolute majority in the House,” commented one analyst. Undoubtedly, this looks like a repeat of the 1982 general election results, the only other time when an alliance party had won all sixty seats in parliament,” pointed out another member of the TV panel.

“ The country survived that shock then. It will survive this shock too,” added yet another one.

“ We are having a new government but a government coming out from nowhere, without a program having been presented. Heaven knows what’s in store,” continued the TV presenter

The result-proclamation-day ended surprisingly quiet and sober. There was no all-night motor rallies, reveling, drinking and victory celebration parties as was customary. The big political parties had been swept clean.

II

The nation woke up with mixed feeling next morning. Their feeling was summed up by one newspaper headline.

“ A brand new broom. Will it sweep clean?”

On the day following the proclamation of the election results, the NME/NMP members, all sixty of them, newly elected to Parliament, met at Harman Dahl’s Villa at Cape North, in the early hours of the morning. The Press was present, but was not allowed in the villa compound. The Commissioner of Police had assigned a dozen police officers, under a Police Inspector, for the security of the Prime Minister-in-waiting.

Harman Dahl phoned the CP to thank him personally for his gesture, but requested that the police activities around Cape North to be discreet and to bare minimum. He pointed that the meeting at Cape North was a private party meeting. He issued a press communique to announce his party’s press conference at the Seafront Hotel at 11.00 hours that same day.

“ My dear ladies and gentlemen. Or more precisely, my dear, dear friends. I thank you for making a dream come true. I congratulate you all on your success. You all deserve it for all the long term dedicated and hard work you’ve done,” Harman started the NME meeting.

“ All the congratulation goes to you, Harman,” said Gian Kala.

“ Without you, none of this would have been possible, and none of us would have been where we are today,” said Sheila Panee.

“ Yeah, Yeah!” everybody joined in chorus.

“ During our first NME meeting, I had promised you fame and fortune. May be I had exaggerated. But you can see some truth is beginning to show. I want you all to remember one thing. The higher you rise, the harder you fall. Always be your humble selves. Always keep your self-esteem. Take it from me as a kind of fatherly advice.,” said Harman Dahl.

“ Today with the luck from Providence, it is us who are going to run the affairs of this country for some time. We happen to be a handful of powerful people today. But the power we have is not our power, but the power of the people.”

Members of the new legislative assembly were listening to Harman Dahl with the same intensity they have felt every time they have been to his place.

“We must exercise this power according to the wish of the people. You know that the New Millenium Enterprise Ltd. had been formed for a special mission. You were all selected and recruited especially to carry out that mission. You come from the grassroots of the nation, while amongst you, you represent all the major professions in the country. Most of all, you all excel in your individual profession. Some of you will be government Ministers, and all of you, members of Parliament, from now on. Do not think that this is the end of our mission. On the contrary, the hardest part is still to be done. We still have to show our greatness. We must pledge to do in this Parliament what no one has yet dared to do. I want you all to be the torchbearers in this country, to enlighten our people in this new millenium,” preached Harman Dahl.

“ Later, this morning we are holding our first press conference. I, as Prime Minister-elect, would like to give to our Nautilian public, bona fide confidence. Let us start by giving the public the right example of transparency. I propose that we make public declaration of our assets at the press conference.”

All sixty members of NMP were present at the Seafront Hotel conference room, in Bay Louis, making a wonderful collection of fresh faces in the national politics. Harman Dahl was sitting in the centre at the conference table, looking through and through a leader. He was flanked, on his right, by a dignified Kesh Lakhan,. And on his left, was a distinguished Mrs .Sheila Suckhee.

Cameras flashed.

“ We have been voted in by the wind of change,” Harman Dahl said after the normal presentation formalities were over.

“ They say that politics is dirty. That’s just an excuse, a self-perpetuating excuse. I, for one, I don’t believe in this. Politics is only what we make of it. Politics is wielding power. Present Day democracy concentrates power in a few

hands. Since absolute power corrupts absolutely, democracy as it is today reinforces corruption. That's why corruption plagues this country and the world at large."

That was the first time, Harman Dahl could say what he really thought to the Nation. He was pleased to have the whole nation as his captive listener.

"We have been voted as representatives and servant of the people and not as master of the people. We have been voted as guardians of the wealth of the nation and not as owners of the wealth of the Nation. We have been voted to uphold and fulfill the will of the people. We have not been voted to force our will on the people. This is what we intend and undertake to do during our term in office. In short, our mission is to modernise democracy and stop the power-group concept of -: a government of some people, by some people, for some people. We are committed to making sure that the will of the majority of the people prevail every minute of the day, everyday." Everybody at the press conference listened. The whole Nation listened.

"We are keeping this press conference brief. We shall be answering some of your questions, but before we come to that, we are circulating to the press and media, copies of our sworn declarations of assets by each member of NMP. We have been elected as sixty clean representatives in Parliament. As such, we are pledging to keep our accounts open to public scrutiny throughout our term in Parliament."

"Mr. Prime Minister, your government is about to be sworn in office, yet the public still do not know your programs and policies your government will follow during the next five years. Could you clarify this situation?" asked Gilbert Knead of Lexpression, the first reporter to question Harman Dahl.

"We are the first government pledging to uphold the will of the people. What could be a better program than this. This is wholesome program. What the use of having lengthily worded, elaborated programs with zero intention to abide by some or all of them. The would be sheer fooling and cheating the people. Have we not seen governments acting as overlords of the nation and doing what the hell they please and after five or ten years in power, leaving without any remorse and accountability for the countless damages they do to the nation."

Harman Dahl pressed on with his point.

"Have we not seen Ministers and Parliamentarians cheating the Nation legally by voting themselves hefty pay packets and pension funds, liberally filling in their pockets with all kinds of financial allowances and holiday perks all under the cover of going on foreign missions. On the other hand poor workers have not the slightest chance of the smallest pay increase before some remuneration board decide when it feels fit to recommend a token increase. Have we not seen Ministers giving away or selling public properties as if they own the country."

The audience at the press conference listened, utterly surprised that this man who himself would be occupying the Prime Minister's seat, should be talking in such manner. They did not know what to make out of this talk, but they admired his guts. The national audience watching their new leader on the television, were full of admiration for this man.

"Have we not seen opposition parties perpetually accusing the government of

the day of gross malpractice and when they accede to power in their turn, they do exactly what they opposed for so long. Our program is simply to safeguard the health, wealth and prosperity of our people. That would be the most daunting program for any government to execute,” concluded Harman Dahl.

“ Mr. Prime Minister, with due respect, none of the elected members of parliament has any ministerial experience, neither you, if I may be forgiven to say so. How do intend to govern this country?” asked the man from Nautilus Daily News, after Harman Dahl had announced that he was ready to answer their questions.

“Like any Prime Minister should. With the popular consent. Always with one point in mind: the interest of the nation as a whole.”

“ Mr. Dahl, Sir. What will be the priority of priorities of your new government,” asked Devanand Jokoo of The New Nation.

“ Eliminating corruption. Assuring the prosperity of the Nation, as I’ve said earlier. We shall have to amend the Constitution and other Acts to assure a fair and just and equitable Nautilian Society. I would like to stress that no amendment to the Constitution will take place without the consent of the nation. If we succeed in getting rid of corruption from the daily life of the people, everything else will fall into place: justice, meritocracy and the rest.”

III

The Swearing-in Ceremony of the new government Ministers took place at Le Reduit. Harman Dahl had instructed that all the winners of the Fun Competition be invited to attend the ceremony. He wanted the world to see that when such prestigious event took place, the cream of the nation from all walks of life should take part to bring national unity and integrity. Harman Dahl was adamant that the cream of the Nation was not found only in the upper strata of Society.

The Swearing-in- Ceremony was televised in full. The people were delighted to see amongst the numerous guests, from members of the Diplomatic Corps, top businessmen, top Civil Servants and religious leaders, at least one person from their midst. Digressing from established protocols, Harman Dahl wanted the ceremony to be performed in the open garden of Le Reduit. The ceremony went splendidly well, blessed by a warm, sunny December afternoon.

Harman Dahl’s government comprised of only ten Ministers. He had himself been sworn in as Prime Minister, responsible for Interior and Finance Ministries. Kesh Lakhan was Minister of Education, Youth and Sports. Mrs. Sookhee was Minister for Health, Social Security and Women’s Affairs. Gian Kala was responsible for Industries, Technology and Trade. Jean Petrin was responsible for Foreign Affairs and Tourism. Mamood Ali was given charge of Justice, Arts and Culture. Donald Cheung was Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Marine Resources. Mrs. Jane Contour was Minister for Labour and Co-operatives.

Given the competence of the technocrats, Harman Dahl was confident that his ten- member Ministerial Cabinet was more than enough to plan, supervise and control the affairs of the nation.

The first Cabinet meeting of the NMP government was on Friday 5 December, 2000.

Harman Dahl was running the show and was having his own way with the NMP. His colleagues were not complaining in the least, for they all admired his wisdom and ways of doing things. They knew that Harman Dahl was not interested in getting anything for himself in all this. Maybe just a name. Everyone was too happy to be with him.

After long discussions, suggestions and deliberations, the following decisions of the first NMP Cabinet meeting was recorded for the Hansard for posterity. Unanimous decision to reduce Ministers' salaries by 25% with immediate effect. All MPs will be subject to the Labour laws for their condition of employment. All MPs will be given office accomodation manned by two personnels in the constituency to help them carry out their job as MPs. MPs will be given their job description and they will have to perform a minimum of eight hours job a day, forty hours a week.

Harman Dahl and Gian Kala had become very close to each other, like father and son.

“Harman, I'm getting married..” announced Gian.

“Well, that's another piece of good news we are having. I'm very pleased to hear that. Who's the lucky girl?” asked Harman.

“It's Asha. I love her since the first time we met at the interview at the villa. We've been thinking of announcing this to you for quite some time. But with all of us busy with the general election and so on, we had to wait,” said Gian.

“Well, we've been really, really busy. But it pays to be patient in life. We have a lot to celebrate at this time. I have decided to restrain my appearance in public functions. It's part of the strategy to get public support in what I'm doing. But we can do with a bit of private celebration. Come by the Villa this evening. Bring Asha with you. I shall ask Mrs. Sookhee and the Lakhans to join us.”

They left the Cabinet room and made separate ways to their office.

“Hareemun, you must be a very happy man, I bet,” said Sheila Sookhee, as she hugged him unashamedly in the patio, in front of the servants.

“I don't know if I should be particularly happy. One thing I know definitely. That is I'm not entirely unhappy. How about you, Sheila? Are you happy?” asked Harman, holding and squeezing her hand gently.

“Well! Wouldn't any unattached woman be happy for being courted and pampered by a dashing unattached Prime Minister. Yes, I'm extremely happy.”

“I'm glad to hear that. I think that happiness is quite difficult to define. It is so personal. If I were to ask you who is the happiest man in the world, the richest on earth or the poorest tramp? Who would you say? It's not necessarily the richest. The former may regret his sexual inability and may yearn for a fleeting moment of orgasm while the tramp displays his sexual prowess in public. Happiness comes out of fulfilled desires. Some people have countless desires and they have cause to be unhappy because not all of their desires are fulfilled.”

“Come on now, Hareemun. Don't be so morbid. I know you have spent all your time and fortune to be where you are today. Still, I believe you have achieved what you desired, even though it has cost you over hundred million rupees.”

“ Oh, Sheila, my dear woman , don’t be so naïve. It’s not a question of money. Everybody knows that once you are in government, money just flows. My unhappiness, if any, is not because I have spent all my fortune to fulfill my desire. On the contrary I have already received donations ten times more than I have spent. Sheila, you may not believe this. This morning I received a special dispatch from the chairman of the multinational World Communication Corporation bidding for Nautilus Telecom. At the end of the letter, he announces a little provision of one million dollars he has made in my name at a Swiss Bank, as a present for being elected head of the New Nautilian Government.” “I have heard or read in newspapers such stories. This is the first time I am hearing it from a person as reliable as you,” remarked Sheila Sookhee.

“ You see, Sheila, politics has become gambling with the highest stake in the land, where only the rich, business tycoons and corporate bodies can play. I always knew that. That’s why I bid my whole fortune in the last election. I cheated with dummy trump cards. The Political Gamblers including Mr. Shantilall were not aware of my gambling strategies.”

IV

Even though she had her own car now, Asha Panee had asked Gian Kala to pick her up at her place. “I know I shouldn’t be telling you this to a lady who has just become the people’s representative but be careful my daughter. Don’t stay out too late,” said Mrs. Sookhee Senior.

“ Don’t worry Mama. What’s the safest place to be than in the arms of the man you love? More than that, what’s the safest place to be than the house of the most powerful man in the country, that the Prime Minister’s residence?

Gian and Asha drove down the coastal road to Cape North in a moonlit evening. The full moon had made visibility almost clear as daylight. It was some time since she last came this way and certainly the first time at night. But Miss Panee could recognise every tree on the roadside. She was expecting the Villa to be full of people, with security men, plain clothed bodyguards, and armed policemen. After all she was on her way to the Residence of the Prime Minister of the Country.

To her utter surprise, the Villa was just as quiet and familiar as Asha had known it always. The lack of security for a Prime Minister intrigued her. She could resist asking Harman Dahl the reason for this oversight in security provisions.

“ Hareemun, please forgive me for asking a question,” said Miss Panee, sitting by the side of Gian in the lounge after dinner.

“ I didn’t expect things to stay the same at the villa, after you became Prime Minister. I expected, at least, a descent security arrangement,” added Miss Panee.

“ My dear Asha . I would, first, like to congratulate you on your engagement to this young man on your right. Gian and Asha , I wish both a happy wedding soon. In fact, you both remind of my children in London, Dan, my son and Artee, my daughter. They are planning to come and stay with for a while. Probably round New Year.” Kesh Lakhan , his wife and Mrs. Sookhee joined in wishing the young couple an early wedding day.

“ To come back to your point, Asha, I’m deeply touched by your concern. But

no fear, there's no enemy as yet. Enmity springs from offence and threats either directly or indirectly towards someone. I've, as now, not yet offended or threatened anybody. But I don't think that the situation will stay the same. Sooner or later, I'm bound to have some enemies. But by then, I hope no one will try to get at me, because power will be in my hands no more. I would have passed power to it's rightful owner, the people. No one will get anything by threatening to hurt me or kill me."

"Hareemun, as my best friend, I must admit that you have always been a shrewd thinker. You have always left me miles behind with your thoughts. I don't mind that at all, because you are the only one friend to whom I can give my life for safekeeping. My trust in you is limitless," said Kesh Lakhan Mrs. Lakhan gave a smile and a nod.

"I always knew that you are not a man of politics. But I followed you through the political jungle. I never hesitated. With you in the lead, success was bound to be ours. Today, I'm at the pinnacle of my working life, as Minister of State. But Hareemun, knowing you as I do, I'm convinced that you won't stay as PM for long. So friend, tell me why you went through all that time-consuming hard work to become PM. Please Hareemun, what are you keeping from us."

"Kesh, Mrs. Lakhan, Sheila, Gian and Asha, one by one, you have all become my confidants. I want to take this opportunity to confide in you once more in the hope of redeeming from my actions which may have looked egoistical. There are some things in life that I have learnt to be self-evident truth. One of them is that action really speaks louder than words."

"For many years, like everyone living today, I have seen, heard and read, daily human ills in this world. I believe that all the ills in this world perpetuated by humans have as root cause the abuse of power. Abuse of muscle power, brainpower, economic power by individuals, groups, communities and nations. This wielding of power discriminates in the just distribution of rewards for the efforts. And in turn, people are being forced into perpetual rat-race, to keep up with the Jones and quickly learn to join in the power-game to win their fight."

"The fuel they use to keep the power-wielding machinery in perpetual motion is corruption. I believe that society is now morally sick. I had hoped, through the years, to see a change in the society's attitude to corruption. But wherever I asked the question, there was only one reply-"What can we do?" as if the mass of human beings have become less important. But when corruption was given legitimacy by some prominent personality of the country by his famous statement-"Morality does not keep a man alive", I went into reflexion. I decided that I should be one who was going to try to put the first grain of sand in the wheel of the corruption-fuelled power-wielding machinery to bring it to a halt. In order to do that, I realised that I needed to be powerful myself. Since the ultimate power game is politics, I had only one cause of action: To go into politics. Now that I am the most powerful man in this country, I have still my biggest problem. How and where do I put my first grain of sand."

Ten

I

Information technology was the craze in the year 2000. The whole world was being wind up to it. Nautilus was slow in homing in to information technology.

The outgoing government had pretended to make the nation an intelligent nation, through information technology. Yet the freedom of information was non-existent and information was state-controlled.

Harman Dahl himself was well versed in information technology. He was involved during his long career from his university days, right up to-date, with Computer Science. He was a prolific computer programmer as an undergraduate in England, working on Main Frame Computers. That was the days when he learnt that, chips were not only meant to be eaten, fried. Personal computers had yet to be invented,

Information technology was making great strides everyday for the benefit on mankind. That was the belief that was being marketed by Information Technology providers. Harman Dahl was sceptical about those so called I.T Salesmen. Nautilians were getting used to Internet and E-commerce was being initiated. Harman Dahl was dejected that Nautilians were mere copy-cats when considering reforms in their country. Two simple examples came readily to his mind when he thought about it.

“ The law passed in the Parliament to force motorcyclists to have their full headlights on even during hot blazing summer days is just too ridiculous. While the provisions of free internet facilities in schools is highly recommended, no one has cared to find ways to protect the Nautilian school children from the hoards of pornographic materials available on the internet. They have failed to recognise that all school teachers and employees are not saints.”

The speed at which information travelled in the year were unthinkable a decade earlier. Sights and sounds from remotest area of the globe could be flashed in every country within seconds. Gone were the days of smoke signals, drum-beating and morse codes for news transmission.

Harman Dahl thought that technology should be used to help mankind as a whole and not only a few men. He was hooked on the idea that Information Technology was the best tool available to help decision making. He had already made some use of Information Technology during his political campaign.

After a long and serious analysis of the situation, formally and informally with individual cabinet colleagues, Harman Dahl concluded that he should use Information Technology to combat corruption. He presided a committee himself to inquire the use of Information Technology by the population en masse with direct access to all government departments on the internet. He laid particular stress on means to prevent the corruption of the Nautilian Public by the use of Internet by scrupulous individuals or group of individuals. The committee also looked into software and secret codes systems available to allow the general public to access government departments. The security systems was to be fail-safe, like the Automatic Teller Machines used by the public at High Street Commercial banks or even better.

Before the 20th December, 2000, Harman Dahl's new government was ready with its first major project- The mass Public Access Project. The multi-million project was government funded and was to be carried out by the Nautilus Telecom, under the supervision of the Ministry of Information Technology. The Ministry of Technology was given the daunting task to putting every government departmental information on the Internet with online information exchange facilities. They were to design a prototype government department

site, which should be duplicated and modified to suit, all government departments individually. These web sites were to be operational and accessible to the Nautilian Internet Surfers by the beginning of December of the same year.

There were going to be a special site for the Legislative Assembly with special facilities for votes tallying, chat and legislative bills display. One local Television Station channel was to cover the legislative Assembly's work permanently, from start to finish, with clear sound facilities from every speaker in the Assembly and impartial video coverage of members of Parliament. The local Television on Station had to start forthwith a series of television programs to initiate the Nautilian Population to use Personal Computers and Internet. The whole mass Public Information Access Project had to be implanted jointly with the Nautilus Telecom Corp, the Nautilus Broadcasting Authority and Ministry of Information technology.

Harman Dahl wanted to install an open government in Nautilus. He used information Technology to succeed in his plan. He was determined to get rid of all dark corners in public information. He proved to his cabinet colleagues how corruption normally thrived on secrecy of decisions and actions. He initiated plans to curtail government departments secrecy and made way for full transparency in all Nautilus.

The websites of Ministerial Departments included organisational chart of each department showing the complete hierarchy from top to bottom. Complete lists of all departmental employees, their official job designations, their salaries and dates of entries in the government service were included on the web site. Harman Dahl argued the implementation of these policies during his first press conference after becoming Prime Minister. The televised press conference was widely publicised by television spots and newspaper advertisement. The nation was eager to learn which direction the new government would take.

“This country does not belong to me. It does not belong to you. Neither does it belong to him or them. This country belongs to us; all of us, every single one of us, from the last new born to the oldest living Nautilian.”

These were the first words that Harman Dahl, Prime Minister of Nautilus, uttered in public since taking office.

“What I have inherited and what I have earned through honest labour is mine. What every man has inherited and earned through honest work is his. Every man and woman can own as much wealth in his country. This is a free country. But Nautilus and what Nautilus owns belongs to every Nautilians. This is what our government is going to safeguard. Health and wealth of the nation.” There was complete hush in the conference hall at government house. All cabinet ministers were present and sign of happiness was bearing on their faces. “Every Nautilians has equal share in the wealth and stakes of the country. this is their birth right. This is God given and no human can deny that. We are living in the year 2000. We are wise and modern people. We want justice. We make laws to uphold justice. We make company's laws to safeguard investors and shareholders' interest in companies. We give right to shareholders in companies to company's information on company's activities, company's personnel, company's finance etc. Any loose activity by company personnel is liable to prosecution. Now what about us. We too are shareholders. We hold shares of the nation's wealth. Our nation's wealth is spent every minute, every hour, every day, in hundreds thousand millions and billions of rupees. So be it. Life and the

country have to move forward and expense has to be increased. But what of our right as shareholders of the nation and information. As shareholders in business companies we are entitled to know all about an employee's name, salary etc. government employees are public employees paid by public funds and as such they are our employee. Yes, I, Harman Dahl, Prime Minister of Nautilus, I am an employee of the State. I am paid for the job I am doing and the public has the right to know not in five years time now how much money I am taking from the public fund each time and why. Well to sum up to what our government current project is, I would like to announce that we are passing our first bill in Parliament next week. It is the Public's Right to Information bill. This will require all ministries, government departments,

Bodies, government owned companies to open up every single file and documents on the Web for free public access. Works on the project has already started, and Web pages are already under construction. The Nautilus News Cooperation, the Nautilus Broadcasting Authority, the Ministry for Interior and the Ministry of Information Technology are working in concertation to complete their work by beginning of December. Now, I invite gentlemen of the press to ask any question."

II

Harman Dahl waited. His colleagues smiled at him approvingly. The hush of the conference hall continued for some time, and was broken by a reporter lifting his arm.

"We have a first question.," said Harman Dahl and signaled to the reporter that he could go ahead.

"Mr. Prime Minister. The project seems to be full of implication. For instance, the Public's right to Information Bill will be in direct conflict with the Official Secret Act. Would you elaborate on how they will work together?" asked the reporter from the daily news."

"The is no doubt that the two laws cannot be applied at the same time. It goes with not saying that the Official Secret Act will be abolished. We do not need the Official Secret Act. What secret? Why secret? Secret form whom? I can well imagine a government keeping its national defence strategy secret, its latest technological invention, its arm arsenal a secret from potential enemy states," explained Harman Dahl.

"We in Nautilus, we have no neighbouring enemy states eyeing us to invade. Neither are we in a position to ever invade any country ourselves. Nor is any super power going to crush us to bondage. We are not worth it. So what secret can a Nautilian government have to keep for the welfare of its people. On the contrary, the Official Secret Act is the large dark cover, under which massive financial frauds are committed by government some Ministers and government officials; of which only the tip of the iceberg, ever came to light. Next question."

"The Public's Right to information Bill can be abused. Will there be any provision against abuse," asked the man from the New Nation

"Yes, the PRIB can be abused. We know that some people will try to abuse any system for their personal gain. The PRIB will deal and make accessible to the

public information and data that are public domain. For example the name, date of entry of a Prime Minister, who is after all a public servant, is public domain. News of his expenses and donation of public funds and public properties to individuals, groups or charities is public domain. There should be no secret about this kind of information.”

Prime Minister Dahl elaborated further on the subject.

“Let’s us imagine for one moment the case of a Nautilian citizen, having to appear in front of some board. What will happen? He will appear in front of a group of men and women whom he had never seen in his life. He does not know their names, their status, in what official capacity they are quizzing him? While, on the other hand, members of the board have complete file, in front of them, on the citizen. This is absolutely an unfair situation. The reaction and behaviour of the citizens will not be normal. If the citizen can check by himself on the board’s Web site, prior to its appearance, information on the board, its composition, its attribution, the name of the chairman, and members of the board, their age and qualification, their salaries, their duties, then the board meeting will be held at par. Moreover, the citizen, having learnt about the board and its members, will have more respectful and trustful of the board, and will cooperate fully. And the board members knowing that the citizen can check on the personal files and know all the details on them, will respect the citizen.”

The Prime Minister continued.

“Now, if I come back to your original question of abuse. We have already thought about it. Abuse in this context will definitely have implication for some financial gain for somebody. We are preparing other legislation to close all loopholes on abuse. We will have to amend the Banking Act in due course.”

“Jean Poumont from Le Cerneen. Mr. Prime Minister, your government has not yet given any indication of its Economic Policies. Could you explain what you are doing on the economic side.”

“First of all, I would like to point out that I have never used the term- my government. This government belongs to all the nation. It is our government. And now to your question. We are lucky to have in Nautilus a cosmopolitan citizen, well geared to modern economy. Nautilian businessmen are given a free economic playing field. Our government will only have to ensure that the Economy is not unsettled unduly. We will maintain status quo in all economic sectors. That is no new financial burden will be added on any sector for at least one year. No rise in bank rate, no wage-rise, no rise in bus ticket, no devaluation or otherwise. The economy is free to expand.

The next day, the general public reaction to the Prime Minister’s presentation of the PRIB was summed up by the Daily News front page headlines: “No more State secrets-majority for PRIB.”

Harman Dahl was, at least having some self-satisfaction. He had ‘started’ taking action to eliminate corruption from Nautilian life. He still had a long way to go to make Nautilus a country free of corruption. He had set himself a last target: to do everything in this power to remove corruption within three months. In other words, he had set his deadline for the 31st December 2000.

Within a few weeks, before the end of the September, the Parliament Web site

was operational. Hundreds of the centres with free Internet Facilities were set up all around the Island. The discerning public was already getting familiar with the Public Right's to Informational Bill. There was an open public debate on the Bill and the nation was given formal guaranty by the government that the nation would have the final say when the Bill would go on to vote in Parliament.

Harman Dahl soon moved on the next stage of his plan; which had still to do with Public Rights. Harman Dahl had investigated corruption very seriously on the why and how corruption takes place. He, together with his team, came to the conclusion that all corruption had always some financial implication and transaction where money either in cash or some kind is given by the corrupter to the corrupted.

Harman Dahl thought that financial transaction resulting from any corrupt practice should be detected at source. In the year 2000, all money existing in the country, passes through the Banking System, at some time, from old people's pension, wages and salaries of work, telephone bills' payment, company's money and government's money. Any financial exchange from one source to another, even sales of drugs, embezzlement, and any other illegal means, the money would always, at some stage, return in the banking system.

III

Harman Dahl remembered the famous maxim that Justice should be done and must be seen to be done. He extrapolated this idea and came up with a new one:

Money must be earned and must be seen to be earned. He instituted a committee, made up with the members of the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Nautilus and the law office to look at ways and means of detecting dirty money in the Nautilian Banking System. He chaired the committee himself as Finance Minister.

The committee's finding recommended the Amendment of the Banking Act and the Finance Act. These amendments were put on the Parliament Web site for public debate. This time Harman Dahl did not give a press conference. Instead the Ministry of Finance issued a press communique to announce the proposed amendments.

Harman Dahl was delighted to see for himself the public response to the government's initiatives to open up the Parliament to the public on the Internet. Officials at Parliament Information Centre were given the task of going through the hundreds of email coming daily and keeping a continuous poll of public's opinion.

The Nautilian public, above eighteen years old, could access the Parliamentary Web site by using their national identity number to log in and were invited to vote for the bills by clicking either for or against the bills. The changing votes count was displayed on the huge screen in Parliament. There was no possibility to use the same national identity number to vote twice for the same bill.

The Nautilians were overwhelmingly voting in favour of the Public's Right to Information Bill and Banking Act Amendment Bill. The use of Internet to have a permanent liaison between the general public, government and Parliament was setting up quickly the base of what Harman Dahl had planned ultimately. He was hurriedly bringing his dream to reality, an open government in Nautilus.

There were only two clauses in the Banking Act Amendment Bill and they delighted the public. The first clause dealt about the obligation by the bank customers to declare on the bank deposit form, the name and address of the person from whom he had received the money and the reason for receiving the money. Any contravention of this clause would automatically entail the confiscation by the Treasury the amount deposited in totality and criminal proceedings against the culprit. The second clause was in line with the PRIB. It made it an obligation for banks to put all their clients' accounts on the Internet.

These should be accessible for viewing only by the general public. Any contravention to this clause would automatically entail withdrawal of the Banking License.

The lucidity with which the bills were presented to the public on the Internet in clear laymen's language must have been the reason why the vote have gone massively in favour. The comments and email messages reaching Parliament Office showed that the public was not worried about the possibility of any threat to the banks or the clients. The government's view on this matter was explained on the Internet very clearly.

“ The free viewing of people's bank accounts on the Internet would surely tempt some potential criminals to blackmail wealthy clients. But money from blackmail or other economic crimes always end up as money on some other accounts which can be viewed by the public at any time. We will have, by implementing the amendments to the Banking Act, a self-checking of all fraud in banking transaction. The possibility of fraud through cash transaction is there, but this will be taken care of by the Amendments to the Finance Act, that our government will be proposing to the nation shortly.”

There were two remaining legislations that Harman Dahl had cherished to pass in the Legislative Assembly ever since he dreamt of changing Nautilian Politics. With a view of rooting out corruption from the daily eye of Nautilians, Harman Dahl envisaged amending the Finance Act and finally the constitution of Nautilus.

A parliamentary committee was set up under Harman Dahl's chairmanship to look at proposals, recommended a change in the direct taxation system. Both individual taxpayers and corporate bodies would have to present their profit and loss format of account to determine the chargeable income. To help taxpayers present true figures of their receipt and expenditures during the financial year, the proposal included the obligation to issue official payment receipts for all business transactions involving any amount. Every annual Tax return had to be accompanied by all the official receipts and payment documents to back the figures in the Tax form.. Without these substantiating documents, the figures would be declared null and void. Profit figures on the individual or corporate accounts would be their chargeable incomes.

Other proposal of amendment to the Finance Act to make it an obligation on all government departments and parastatal bodies to enter on the Web site all payments to be effected by them, of, whatever amount, big or small, for public scrutiny. Details of payments should include names of beneficiaries, the paying official and the reasons for payment. Payments by governmental departments and parastatal bodies of any amount could be legally done only after the payment information have been displayed on the Internet for a minimum of seven days.

The last proposal to amend the Financial Act consisted of a clause requiring all government purchases to be done by Public Tender. All tenders should be processed by the Tender Board, who would have, as task, to display on their Web site, after official opening of tenders, all relevant information on tenders received and the tenderers. The General Public would be choosing the successful tenderer by voting for or against a tender. A successful tender would be the one which gets the majority votes. Henceforth all government tenders would have to be approved by the voting public first.

All the amendments to the Finance Act thus proposed carried heavy penalties, including terms of imprisonment of any one contravening these legislations. As it was becoming customary, all the proposals were on the Internet, open to public debate and the voting public was required to choose their options to vote for or against.

The final proposal was an amendment of the constitution of Nautilus. This proposal entailed the inclusion, in the Constitution of the State of Nautilus, one clause which stipulated that all future legislation passed in Parliament should have a majority votes of all votes cast by the Nautilian electorates, in a natural referendum, before they could become law.

Harman Dahl was pleased that within a couple of months in power, he had managed to push through his ideas of an uncorrupt Nautilus.

Eleven

I

The ex-Prime Minister Santilall was not happy, at all, with what the new government was doing. He had never, through his long career in politics and two decades as Prime Minister of the Country, seen such drastic legislation in such numbers being passed in Parliament in such short time. He cursed the electorate for having thrown him out of power so easily in the last general election. He had vowed to return to power soon, as he was convinced that the group of novice politicians with Harman Dahl, a man from nowhere, would not stay afloat for long, in the rise and fall of the political tide.

Ever since his defeat in the election, Santilall and his party members had planned to disrupt, by whatever means, the new government works. But Harman Dahl's government had not done anything so far to allow the extra-parliamentary opposition to manipulate public opinion.

"This group in government are just fools," exclaimed Santilall.

"But I promise you there will be no problem with your Balaclava Project. I give you my guarantee."

The man from International Investment Corporation was doubtful. He did not like what he was reading on the Internet. The new Nautilian government was publicising its policies world wide on the Internet, and financiers like the International Investment Corporation, were worried that they would not be able to exercise their economic power easily.

There were, at least three multi-nations, which were lining up to make acquisition of Nautilians properties outright. Negotiations had started with the previous government Ministers, who confident to win the last general elections,

had already accepted the deals in principle. Billions of dollars were involved in the deals.

The first of these deals was the taking over of the majority of shares in the Nautilus Telecom Company, the fastest growing company in Africa, with the profit of two and a half billion Nautilian rupees for the last Finance. The World Communication Corporation was looking forward to owning a gold mine in Paradise Nautilus by investing in Nautilus Telecom already had strategic plans to expand in the whole of Africa.

The second large deal that the outgoing of the finance minister had already agreed to and signed the preliminary documents where the sales of government-owned assets of the Water Authority. Again this deal would be a gold mine to the International Water Resources Management Company. This foreign company was set to taking over, the distribution and commercialisation of water, the most precious resource of the nation.

The third and juiciest deal that the ex-Prime Minister Santilall's government had committed itself to was to authorise the sale of the bulk of agricultural land of the country owned by Sugar Estates Companies at hundred times their present value to Multi-national properties developers. These would amount of to gains of billions of rupees, as easy money.

“Harman Dahl has spoiled our games completely. If we don't do anything, our financial backers are going to turn on us,” warned Santilall to his etat-major.

“Unfortunately, Harman Dahl has the support of the nation. There's no way we can create public discontentment. We must try to get Harman Dahl's own men to turn the screw from inside and split the government. There's must be some valuable, ambitious and dissatisfied among them. Go and work on them. Get them on our side at once. Promise them anything, just to get them with us,” retorted Santilall

The opposition party's top officials were relieved at last to see some moves on their part after three months of stagnation.

“Shark, arrange a secret meeting with Gian Kala. I think he can be the man we want. He is the closest man to Harman Dahl. If we can have him away, we can split the New Millenium party right in halves.”

“We can promise him our party's support, if he takes the lead of the New Millenium Party,” said Shark.

“Yes, that's right. Try to make contact with him today. We must not lose time,” said Santilall.

II

The proposed legislation that the NMP government had put for public debate an the Internet, was worrying several other groups of people who were used to making easy money. Smugglers, drug dealers, tax evaders, dirty money launderers had to show their source of their bank deposits, regardless of the amount. These people did not want to abrupt stoppage of their transaction. Therefore, they tried to team up to stop the legislation going through Parliament.

Harman Dahl had calculated his moves well. He was aware that some

extra-parliamentary opposition by those people likely to be affected directly by his legislation would soon appear. He was also aware that attempts would be made to destabilise this party as he knew that beaten political beasts never lie down for long and try to resuscitate by any means. As a shrewd chess player, his moves were meticulously planned.

Harman Dahl and the NMP government were riding the crest of Popularity. By the end of November 2000, all the proposed bills had already been presented in Parliament. Harman Dahl, himself, had presented the bills and in two consecutive parliamentary sessions, the bills had passed through the first and second reading stages. The third and final readings of all the bills was due in the second week of December, just before the Parliament would go onto recess for New Year holidays.

“Harman, I have to confide something to you,” said Gian Kala into the Prime Minister’s office. Santilall has sent emissaries to me, to arrange a meeting with him. I don’t know what these buggers want to see me about. I’ve have absolutely nothing to do with them.”

“Gian, my boy. Don’t get worked up. Go and see Shantilall. You won’t know what he wants, until you see him. But I have an idea of what he would be asking you,” said Harman Dahl.

“Shantilall has sent words to others in NMP to meet them secretly,” said Gian.

“I’ve been expecting that for some time. What suprise me is that they have taken so long,” said Harman.

“Hareemun, you are intriguing me with your talk. What’s all this? What does he want to talk to me? Tell me please,” pleaded Gian. “Gian, Gian, my boy, I don’t know what he will say to you. I only think I know what he’ll say. But whatever he would say, I fully trust you, whatever the outcome of the meeting. You have to go and see him.”

Gian Kala had been extremely busy in December. With his ministerial commitments, Parliamentary sessions, constituency obligations and arrangements for his forthcoming wedding to Asha Panee on Sunday the 10th of December 2000, he had hardly any time for himself. Nevertheless, he listened to Harman Dahl’s advice and met Santilall.

One Tuesday night, at 10 o’clock, accompanied by a plain clothed bodyguard, he drove to Santilall’s seaside bungalow on the West Coast.

“Mr. Kala, you must be the brightest young minister that I have ever met in my thirty years of Political Career. This is no small compliment, when you realise that I have travelled around the world many times and met politicians and ministers from all the five continents. You will agree with me when I tell you that you have the brightest future in Politics. I see in you the greatest future Prime Minister of Nautilus,” started Santilall.

“Thank you Mr. Shantilall for your compliments. But tell me, why you have so much insisted to see me,” asked Gian Kala.

“This is exactly what I am trying to tell you. Have you ever seen a young talented Maestro playing the second fiddle in an orchestra, while an old lousy fiddler taking the baton. This would be a completely ridiculous situation. And

this is exactly what is happening in our country. When we are lucky to have such a super, talented Parliamentarian like Gian Kala around, should we have a good-for-nothing, demented fool as Prime Minister. Harman Dahl has lost his head. Instead of doing something concrete for this country, he is wasting time, passing stupid laws. Can you imagine one million people in this country having to explain to every Tom, Dick or Harry where they got their money from everyday and why. This will bring bureaucracy to extreme and the system will break down. Have you ever heard anything more maddening than to force government officials to wait for public's approval before any payment can be made, be it just civil servants' salaries, old people's pensions, a Prime Minister's travel allowance,

the purchase of an aircraft, or foreign contractors on National Projects. This is ridiculous. This would grind the country to a halt," continued Santilall.

"Yes Mr. Santilall, I still don't understand why you are telling me all these."

"Gian, listen to me carefully. If tomorrow a businessman gives you one million rupees. Do you have to tell every member of the public that someone has given you one million. Moreover, do you have to explain to everybody why he has given you the money. No, that's none of their business. It is your private affairs. With all the legislation that Harman Dahl has cooked up, we will have no private life anymore. We will, maybe, have to tell publicly what we eat everyday and who we sleep with everyday. And the public will tell us what we can do or can't do,"

"Gian, enough is enough. All this has to stop. We must stop these legislations going through their final stages in Parliament. My party and I think that you are the only one who can stop this madness. We know you can do it. You are the most popular member of your party. You will have no problem of taking over the leadership and the Prime Minister's job. We will make sure that the whole country support your action.. You have to stop this giving back of power to the people. The majority of the people are fools, have very short memories, and don't know right from wrong. You will do them a favour by withdrawing all the bills from Parliament. In return, I have friends overseas, who will see that you will leave as a Prince, with billions in your bank account."

"All you are saying seem very interesting. I'll have to think about it ," answered Gian Kala.

"There's no time for thinking. You must act quickly. Just to make you believe my party's commitment to make you the next Prime Minister, take this. This is a small token, a small gift from me and my friends."

Santilall handed an unsealed envelope. Gian Kala opened it and found a cheque drawn from a foreign bank on his name. The amount on the cheque almost made him giddy. The sum of one million dollars was on the bank draft, payable of sight at the bank in a European City.

"No, I won't take that," said Gian after a long pause.

"Why not? It's yours. With your name on it, it cannot be else's. And this is only for starters," laughed Santilall.

"O.K then. But I still don't know what to do."

“We’ll wait. We give you two days to think it over. I know you will do it. It’s a chance of a lifetime.”

III

After returning from Santilall’s place, Gian Kala was lost in thought. Santilall’s offer was so enticing, that he thought hard of the subject for days. Even though, he had become a bit absentminded, forgetting important engagements like meeting the Priest a few days before his wedding, he had talked Santilall’s proposal discreetly with a few close friends in Parliament. He had chosen to speak to those in his inner circle who he could trust and was pleased to know their response to cooperate. But he still had to find out the views of other members of his inner political circle that he cherished most. That was his wife-to-be Asha Panee. There was only two days to their wedding day and Gian Kala could not afford risk spoiling his wedding day. He preferred to wait till after the wedding.

“Gian, you are not looking well,” said Asha Panee when they met on the eve of their wedding day.

“It seems that something bothering you. What is it?” she asked.

“Oh, its nothing. Its just pressure of work,” answered Gian.

“Even then, I wish that you look a bit more cheerful.”

“I know, Asha darling. I’ll be alright by tomorrow,” reassured Gian.

The wedding of Gian Kala and Asha Panee was the first major social meeting for the New Millenium Party members. Every single one was present and it was time to reminiscent on their time together from the first time they met at Harman’s villa. It was only one year ago, but both the time and road to Parliament seemed so long and so full of events.

Harman Dahl had given a big reception at the villa to celebrate Gian and Asha’s wedding. He had looked forward for the reception evening himself, to have a real good time. First he had felt the wedding of Gian and Asha as that of his own children back in London. He had grown a fatherly affection for both. He had planned another big reception in the next January when he would have his son, Dan, and his daughter

Artee with him after many years. It would be a belated New Year family gathering.

It was a long time since Harman Dahl had a long drinking session. During the reception, he let himself go and had quite a few of his favourite drink- Green Island and Coke. He had a feeling of elation as he stood aloof for a while sipping his drink and observing the happy gatherings of his Parliamentary colleagues and their wives. He could help thinking of how all this started. He remembered that 31st December, last year, when he had one drink too many. Then he gloated inwardly, knowing that his whole personal crusade against all the prevailing corruption in all walks of Nautilian life was coming to an end shortly. At last the laws of the Land will be changed. And corruption henceforth could happen in broad bright light or even in the dark of the night.. Corrupters and

Corruptees would be unmasked sooner following their wilful actions, by the ever-vigilant public, who would take on them to safeguard their national wealth.

However Harman Dahl did feel disturbed to notice that some of his male guests were in groups, taking in whispers. There seemed to be some earnest discussions, but he had no chance of getting a gist of their conversation. Soon he forgot about that. He walked to the middle of the room, and was joined Gian and Asha.

“I propose another toast,” said Harman Dahl. Everybody turned to him and paid attention. “Let’s us drink to the health of the newly wedded couple, Gian and Asha. Let us also raise our glass to the New Millenium Party.”

Everybody cheered.

Mr. and Mrs. Kala did not go away for their honeymoon. With heavy parliamentary work ahead and the bills to attend to, they preferred to delay their honeymoon to New Year. One late night, the phone at the Kala’s residence rang.

“Who could that be at this time of the night,” asked Asha Kala.

“Oh, Mr. Santilall, it’s you. Any problem?” asked Gian Kala.

“Oh yes. I did not get your phone call yesterday, as you promised. I guess there is no hitch in our plan. You assured us that at least seventeen of your colleagues are going to vote against the amendments to the constitution. Harman Dahl must not get three quarter votes in the Parliament bill. That’s a must. You are committed to it. You stop the bills going through, and you are the next Prime Minister of Nautilus,”

“O.K, O.K, I heard you. You did not have to ring me to remind me of it at this time of the night.”

Gian Kala had not mentioned his meeting with Santilall to his wife yet. He did not know how to break the news to her. He felt awful to be keeping something so important secret from his wife with whom he had only a week earlier vowed to stay truthful all his life. What was tormenting him, inside was the fact that Asha, too, will be voting in Parliament.

“She would be definitely voting for the bills,” he thought.

“More than that she would be expecting everybody including me to be voting for the bills. How could she expect anything otherwise.”

IV

Weekly reports from the Bank of Nautilus showed that bank deposits from the public in Commercial banks increased by two-folds in the last week. Analysts argued this phenomenon to the result of the drastic steps that the government was taking to control the flow of client money in the banking system. Rumours were circulating that the new legislations would be ready and applicable from the first of January 2001.

The Nautilus Daily News carried a lengthy report on the business underworld and

mafia who were agitated. It mentioned secret plan of sabotage of the passing of

the bills in Parliament from undisclosed source. The newspaper report also mentioned of possible reprisal if the legislation went through.

Harman Dahl was not worried about the newspaper reports. He was so near to realising his dream that all he could think was the voting in the Parliament. He had given one whole year of his life, thinking, planning selflessly, praying the Lord that he may fulfill his New Millenium wish. He was only days away from it.

Harman Dahl felt for some days that disruptive force was active. In fact, his logic had told him that some resistance was inevitable. But he relied on the goodness of mankind, his fellowmen to help him sail through the storm that would be brewing in his passage.

The Chief Executive officer, Mr. Arnold Craze, the World Communication Corporation, phoned Dharam Santilall from Miami. Arnold Craze was world famous for his supposed business acumen that lead him to become one of the richest men on this planet within a decade. He had managed to implant his business consortium in every second country of the world including most third world countries. He had planned to take over the Nautilus Telecom, the fastest growing company in the Southern African countries that year. He had gone wild when he had learnt from his local representative that his Nautilian deal had got some hitch.

“Mr. Santilall, what’s that I’m hearing? Is there any problem with our Nautilian project going through,” asked Mr. Arnold Craze.

“Yes, there’s some unforeseen problem here. But we are confident that we shall be in control of the situation soon.”

“I was unaware of the political upset that happened in the last General Election. It’s only when I received a complete report from Olivier Antoine, in France, on your Party’s complete defeat and the drastic legislation that are going through in Parliament, that I learnt the extent of damage that could be done to our plan. The boys from the other groups of Financiers, the Parkers of Global Entertainment PLC, Luis Fereira of Finenza Mundial and others are worried,” exclaimed Arnold Craze.

“Mr. Craze, when the proposal to make Nautilus the Mecca of the super rich tycoons with the amenities of Acapulco, Bahamas, Las Vegas and St Tropez brought in one place on our island, I thought that it would be the event of the century. I am overwhelmed of being part of the greatest World Financial Syndicate that exists. I assure that I won’t lose my billion dollars shares,” added Daram Santilall. “I hear the series of legislation being passed in Parliament that will give constitutional powers to electorate as a whole to give majority approval of all decisions however small or big taken by the government, government ministers, and government officials before they can be legally applied. That would be public control at the extreme. Mr. Santilall, we mustn’t let this ever happen. Splash out money! Buy them all! The whole cabinet if need be! Don’t worry about funds. We’ll let you have as much as you want.”

“I’ve already started. The government will need three quarter majority vote out of sixty to allow the bills to pass. I know they won’t get that. We are working relentlessly to make the proposed amendments to the constitution a non-starter.”

“Okay then,. The Nautilus Paradise Project goes on. There are quite some of our people who have already acquired large estates around the island, haven’t they?”

“Yes our policy for citizenship in exchange of investment was the start.”

“What about the mass exode of Nautilian manual workers to Mozambique, Swaziland and Madagascar? I believe the plan was enticing enough for them.”

“The ground work has already been done. Some Nautilian families from the working class have already moved to Mozambique. But this chap, Harman Dahl has taken us all by surprise. But we will get him soon, one way or another.”

“Before I leave Mr. Santilall, I have just this to say. Don’t let us down,” warned Arnold Craze.

Harman Dahl was reviewing the public responses to the proposed legislation on the Internet daily. He was satisfied with the security conscious online voting by the electorate onto the Parliament web site. The programmers and web site designers had done an excellent job. The special server that have been used by the government agencies were the fastest and latest available. Every single government departments and parastatal bodies had their web sites operational. The general public was spoiled by this innovation. One member of the Public sent a very passionate email to the Prime Minister. “Mr. Prime Minister, even though I may be the only on to say this, I would like to thank you a hundred times for making it possible for people like me to sit down at ease at home, and know so much about our country, our government, and ourselves. What an eye-opener! As we all know, crime rates are ever on the increase. I spend hours going through the Police Department Web site. What surprises! I never knew there were so many man and women on the police force. What a waste of public money. The academic qualifications of most policemen remain to be desired. In a world of professional criminals, what we need is some top academic and brains in our police force.”

“From the complete list of the police force, I personally could hardly see anyone who would detect, let alone investigate any massive fraud in a computerised accounting system of any government department. The monthly list of civil servants salaries may include hundred of abnormal figures and fictitious salaries. I don’t think we can rely on our police force to elucidate on crimes of this nature. In the end, I hope that this open system of information that you are implementing will help the public be more aware of what is really happening in our country. You have my full support.”

Another email was short but to the point. “Mr. Prime Minister, kindly check this, Mr. Zeb Lissa is currently a senior Health officer on the Ministry of health web site; earning twenty thousand rupees per month. If you looked on the previous criminal files on the Police Web Site, you see that Mr. Zeb Lissa was found guilty of prescribing morphine and other drugs to drug addicts eleven years ago. It was by sheer chance that I found this information.”

V

The following cabinet meeting was rather subdued. The Participants were not talkative and gave Harman Dahl the impression that some of them were mentally occupied elsewhere and were not interested on the day’s agenda. He

was deliberately keeping the cabinet agenda usually short to two or three items. He was hoping that once the proposed legislation were passed for government actions and decisions at Cabinet level would resume normally.

“How did your meeting with Mr. Santilall go the other day,” Harman Dahl asked Gian Kala.

“Alright,” replied Gian Kala.

“Just O.K, or you do not want to talk to me about what he had to say.”

“No, it’s not that,” answered Gian Kala, “Mr. Santilall asked me if I could help him with a particular problem. I told him that I’m not in a mood to help him in anyway.”

“Did he say how you were to help him.”

“I told you. I did not want to know.”

“What’s the matter; you are looking upset.”

“Oh Harman, I’m not feeling well for some time now. I’ve got a splitting headache.”

“Gian, my boy. You must take care of yourself. You are newly married. You must be fit. Hey,” Harman Dahl smiled.

Gian Kala did not show any appreciation for Harman’s remark. He knew that the real cause of his miseries, his mental turmoil was the struggle going on in mind between his loyalty to Harman Dahl and his accepting Dharam Santilall’s proposal.

“One has brought me from nowhere to become a Cabinet Minister and the other would take me here to younger Prime Minister,” he thought.

For days now, even he had agreed with sixteen M.P colleagues, to vote against the bills, he had not told his wife, Asha, anything. Harman Dahl was too intelligent not to guess the real purpose of Dharam Santilall’s desire to meet with Harman’s own young right hand man.

“What would an old political rogue want from a young presumably inexperience Minister. Emphatically it must be a political deal,” thought Harman.

“I know what I am proposing to the nation must be a hard hit back to those who are used to taking everything to granted: money and power, many, with unquenchable greed for themselves. But the dice will be tossed and the Nautilian public will be the winner. Let anyone get rich if he can, but not by cheating, stealing, blackmailing, hurting and killing his friends, neighbours, his workers or the public at large. This is what Harman Dahl want. This is what Harman Dahl will do- Stop corruption in any form,” Harman said to himself.

Harman Dahl was lying awake on his bed, thinking. Since he became Prime Minister, he was not spending much time with Mrs. Sookhee privately. The last time they spent the night together at the Villa was on the Sunday before Gian and Asha’s wedding. Harman Dahl was inwardly excited about how things were turning out and he did not miss Sheila’s companionship.

The phone at the Villa rang. It was nine o'clock in the morning.

“Mr. Dahl, telephone for you. The man did not give his name, but he says it's urgent and it concerns national security,” said his longtime secretary, Roshnee Atma.

“Who would call me on a Sunday morning to talk about national security,” thought Harman Dahl.

“The Prime Minister here. Who is calling?” asked Harman. “Prime Minister my shit. Just listen to me Dahl. You think you can play the righteous and change things at will. Nobody complained before. Everybody was just happy. So Dahl, why do you go upsetting the whole playing field. Some are winners, some are losers. We are members of the winning clan. You want to change the rules to stop us winning. We like to keep our things secret. You want everybody to know what we do. Dahl, this is our one and only warning to you. Stop your bills go through or else the Justiciers will take care of you, as Prime Minister.” The phone clicked and the line went dead. Harman Dahl put the phone down, and was not impressed by the caller.

“Anonymous caller are the most despicable people. They must be cowards and be despised as such,” Harman told himself.

He phoned his friend, the Commissioner of Police and asked him to check on the origin of the morning telephone call. As he suspected the call originated overseas from an unknown country, probably from a coin box. The caller had a Nautilian accent and the threat was of Nautilian origin. Harman Dahl took the phone call as a hoax and forgot all about it. He was not to be deterred in any circumstances, being so near in achieving his public salvation.

Twelve

I

Finally the day that Harman Dahl, Prime Minister of Nautilus was waiting for eagerly arrived. The nineteenth of December 2000 dawned slowly as Harman Dahl stood on the beach watching the sun coming out of the sea in the horizon. It was five o'clock in the morning. The sun was already on the horizon. He had his usual morning swim in the sea, and he was serene and calm. His mind was at peace with nature, as he sat down on the wooden bench, under the filao tree. Harman Dahl took out a piece of paper from his shirt's pocket, and looked at it. He read the poem he had written the previous night, before going to bed.

The man came amongst us through no prophecy.

His rising, shining and dawning in life,

Lived in full awareness of our human strife,

Made him surpass all, at the Human Academy.

The man, to some, might have flaws.

To some, he might not have been sincere.

But he knew, he had always a conscience clear,

Guided always by prevailing Human Laws.

The man, did not, for greatness clamour.

His achievements and failures, if any, he accepted.

In no circumstances, he ever retaliated,

Armed with courage, wit and humour.

The man's life has left traces on time,

The fruits of his labour, for all, as Legacy.

A goal in life, attained in supremacy,

For comers to follow, an example, sublime.

The man, now dawned away from this land,

Or has he? For his deeds, amongst us, radiate still,

His memories linger, translucent and always will

Remind us that he was, indeed, a man.

“ Mr Dahl, your son is on the line from London”, said George, his gardener
between huffs running towards him.

Harman Dahl made a dash from the beach through tiny alleys to the villa. He
was so fit that he paused only for a few seconds to regain his breath.

“ Hello Dan, thank you for calling my son. I have been thinking of you and your
sister a lot lately. I am beginning to miss you both”, said Harman Dahl.

“We miss you too, dad. How are you?”

“Extremely fit. I've just taken my morning swim before you phoned. When are
you coming to Nautilus.”

“Artee and I have decided to be with you for Christmas. You'll like that, won't
you dad?” ,asked Dan.

“Very much. We'll have a good time together. Your studies are over now. What
are you planning to do?”

“Dad, we'll talk about all this when we meet. It's the big day for you today, dad.
You have taken a giant step, a futuristic step to give the day-to-day decision
making power back to the electorate. Modern mass communication technologies
for year 2000 and beyond automatically dictates this revolution. It's a shame
that no other countries has adopted the growing Information Technologies to
open up egalitarian society, an open Democracy Government system. Dad, you
are making Nautilus a world leader. You have not only thought about it. You
are actually doing it. I'm proud of you. The whole Nautilian community in
London, the United Kingdom and Europe are delighted with your government's
move. We are all following the public debates on the Internet. After today,
power and money talks will cease to exist in Nautilus. The power of people will

prevail”.

“I’m happy to know you think that way. If only man will take only what is his, our world could be a good place for everyone to live.”

“Yes dad, I think even sida, the scourge disease of modern time, is taking the daily death toll to million of poor souls round the planet just because the all prevailing money corruption is making them slave to sexual abuse.”

“We must stop philosophising on the phone. We shall have plenty of time to do it later. I must leave you now. Till new year.”

“Bye dad. Look after yourself.”

Harman Dahl was in his Prime Minister’s office early that day. He had got confirmed report that a major parliamentary opposition has been constituted among his men to oppose him that afternoon. In order to assure himself that no unforeseen surprise was going to jeopardise his whole plan, he had asked Kesh Lakhan, Sheila Sookhee and Gian Kala to meet for discussion in his office.

Kesh Lakhan and Sheila Sookhee arrived together. They were late and they rushed to the PM’s office.

“Where is Gian Kala?” asked Harman Dahl.

“Don’t know, we haven’t seen him for two days,” answered Sheila Sookhee.

“Well Kesh, what have you found out about this group of supposed deserters? Who are they?”

“You won’t like what I’ve to say, Hareemun. It’s really bad news.”

“Kesh, don’t worry about me. Let’s just have it. What have you learnt?”

“Hareemun, I’m not sure how many of NMP members have been contacted but I am told some fifteen have accepted to vote against the Amendment Bills this afternoon. I don’t believe it but I am told that Gian Kala is the leader of this group. That could account for his absence here today. There is evidence that Dharam Santilall is involved with our men. There has been mention of many millions being offered in order to make some NMP members to change their mind on how they should vote.”

“To tell you frankly, Kesh, Sheila, I always knew how Politics is done here in Nautilus and elsewhere too. It is always like this. Money always has the final say. I tried to break the back of money power but I think I’m about to be beaten.

I had masterminded a plan for a personal crusade against drug trafficking, tycoons and corrupt business magnates,” said a dejected Harman Dahl.

“My plans were working as long as I was in control of how much I should divulge to the public in order to have minimum opposition to any plans. Now that the very last act of the crusade has come, passing those vital legislations to force corruptions out of the Nautilian public life once for all, corrupters are fighting back for their survival of their business. What is hurting me most is the fact that the young man I have trusted as my own blood should be so easily tempted to sabotage my whole dream”, said Harman.

“Hareemun, I’m indeed sorry to hear all this”, said Sheila Sookhee. “I’ve known from the very beginning, you’re your total commitment to changing to a fair, just and compassionate society, where the weak will be helped to grow and the strong can get stronger only on efforts and merits. This is a wish that any good man would cherish. But very few would dedicate their life to achieving it. Hareemun, all is not over yet. The situation can still turn in our favour,” she continued.

“I admire women. Even if their world is crumbling, they keep their faith alive. They are indeed god-sent bearer of hope for humanity. But Sheila, honestly, can I expect things to go as I want. We are only hours away from Voting in Parliament. There are sixteen or more of our own people who are going to vote against the bills. What could possibly happen between now and then that could see the bills going through”, argued Harman Dahl.

“Talk to them, Hareemun. If you can’t talk to them all, talk to just one or two. They will need to rally a minimum sixteen votes against to stop the bills. Don’t give up in the last minute. You have to keep fighting to the dying seconds,” advised Sheila.

‘Yes Hareemun, it would be a shame to lose with your arms down. Unfortunately, I have not seen any of the Gian’s group in the corridors of the house yet. I fear that they might be turning up only at Voting time, which would make discussing with them difficult.

“If only Gian Kala were here. I could talk to him to throw me a life-line.”

II

While Harman Dahl, Kesh Lakhan and Mrs Sookhee were discussing in the Prime Minister’s office, Gian Kala and his wife, Asha were having a terrible row. Gian had finally told Asha, about the mental turmoil he was going through, since his meeting with Dharam Santillal. He had shown the million dollar bank-draft which had not been appeased Asha’s anger ever since she left the breakfast table. This was the first clash they were having since they know each other.

“I am disgusted with you, Gian. I never knew that you can sell your soul to the devil.”, raged Mrs Kala.

“But Asha, darling think of what this kind of money can do to us. We shall be rich. We can have a large family and still can give our children anything they will need.”

“I would rather have no children, than to think to rearing my children with money received from drug dealers and public cheaters. Heaven knows how many children have died due to shortage of funds in hospital, due to lack of medical care. Heaven knows how many men and women have succumbed to drug abuse, made available by heartless drug dealers. No, I’d rather die poor than have anything remorse on my conscience, which will nag me to my dying day,” said Asha.

“In that case, you do what you want. But I, for one, I am not renouncing my good fortune.”

Even though they continued quarelling, they still left for Parliament together.

Kesh Lakhan and Mrs Sookhee left Harman Dahl's office to wait for Gian Kala's arriving at the main gate. Soon after they had left, the phone rang in the Prime Minister's private line.

"Yes", answered Harman Dahl.

"It's Santillal here." announced the caller. "Yes, Dharam Shantillal! Your voice has changed over the years." Harman Dahl behaved as if he was not aware of Dharam Santillal's involvement with his MPS.

"Yes Dharam, what can this public servant do for you."

"Hareemun Dahl, you amaze me. You occupy the seat of the Prime Minister, the most powerful place to be on this country, and you go about calling yourself servant. Wake up Hareemun, and do as people expect you to do."

"Dharam, it is possibly the wrong time to go on this debate. We'll keep it for another time. What the purpose of your call."

"This is where exactly I'm coming too. Your bills you are proposing are going to bring down the financial system in the country. The financial system is working perfectly well. The businessmen are happy with it. We mustn't forget that it is businessman and investors that make our economy grow. And when the economy flourishes, everyone gets something. Everybody knows this."

"But it is also true that many of us do not survive as the floodgate of the economy is left open uncontrolled. Some have lifejackets, other have none."

"Well let me come to the point now. During my last term of office as PM, I had worked on the concept of free economy part of the globalisation plan. The government overall plan then was to allow multi-national investors free access in the Nautilian economy. This new influx of Finance would be channeled to some African countries like Mozambic and Madagascar where the bulk of Nautilian labour force would be too willing to go to work. The one hundred years lease of thousands prime agricultural land in Mozambic is just one small part of the Government-Investors overall plan. The sale of sugar estates was on the government agenda and International Investors are lining up with property development projects in Nautilus for rich overseas clients. We had a plan to turn Nautilus into a fiscal paradise, until you and your men just popped in from nowhere. Today powerful men are angry that you are trying to sweep everything from under their feet. You cannot have one million mostly fools deciding day in day out what's good for the country. Decision making is an art best left to experts." Explained Dharam Santillal.

"But my experience says, one is happier with the outcome of a decision when one is involved in the decision-making," remarked Harman Dahl.

"Hareemun, I think I am wasting my time talking to you. In a nutshell, too much has already been involved in stake in private property speculation that, simply turning the wheel back or just bringing it to a halt, will prove chaotic. Mr Dahl just make sure that your bills do not get voted this afternoon. Else, I'm sorry to say that I cannot prevent some people getting at you."

"Is that a threat?", inquired Hareemun.

"No, not from me. But I'm sure some people who stand to lose most by your

new measures will go any length to get his revenge on you. So for God's sake, forget the bills." Implored Dharam Santillal.

"So be it," concluded Harman Dahl.

Kesh Lakhan and Sheila Sookhee were waiting for the arrival of Gian Kala. They saw him coming past the Police Security, at the main-gate, following his wife a step behind.

"We've been waiting for you anxiously," said Mrs Sookhee.

"It would be better if he did not come at all," joined Mrs Kala.

"Don't you listen to her," said Gian Kala.

"We must rush to the PM's office. Hareemun is waiting to see you for hours now. I believe something funny is going on," said Mr Lakhan.

"Gian, what's all this I'm hearing about voting against the bills," asked Harman.

"I'm sorry Hareemun. I meant to tell you this a long time ago, but I wasn't sure of what I wanted..."

"Are you sure now," cut in Asha. "Yes, I'm sure now. Hareemun, you are like a father to me. I don't want to hurt your feeling. I know what the passing of the legislations mean to you. It's your life. But what about me? I don't have a dream of mine to fulfill. Voting for or against the bill did not, at first, mean anything special to me. But now it has a special meaning to me. A simple "no" of my part gives me a million dollars of happiness, something, unlike you, I never dreamt of. All my life, I have been fending for myself. I have seen my parents sacrifice themselves for years to allow me get a decent education. I am sorry, I have become too weak, after a lengthy search for my basic needs, that I cannot pretend to be saintly. I've come to learn what money really means in life, and money from whatever source you get, it is still money."

"Gian, you disappoint me. You are sold out. As from today, we part our way. I shall not be returning with you this afternoon."

"Asha, don't rush things. Don't let yourself get carried away by events! No need to disrupt your married life," said Harman Dahl

"Gian, you will remember that I have always told you that I will never force you to do anything that you don't want to do. I have also said that I shall never ask you to do anything illegal or immoral. I shall always maintain this. You are free to choose what is best for you. I was only hoping that I could give everyone in this country the same freedom of choice. Unfortunately, a powerful few will continue to dictate a weak majority. In the end, I have only this to say. Do as your conscience dictates, I'll do as mine dictates," continued Prime Minister Dahl.

III

The Parliamentary session of the nineteen of December, 2000, was a major event on the Parliamentary calender of the new government. The Nautilian public was in front of the television sets in their households, watching the history making live on the Parliamentary channel direct from the Legislative

Assembly. The television presenter announced the mood in Parliament as being subdued. All sixty members of Parliament were present. It was an NMP Government with no opposition. But Harman Dahl was fearing the extent of unofficial opponent from his own party members.

The first bill to go to vote was the Nautilus Constitution amendment bill. The vote was to be done by show of hands. The wide TV screen of the right hand side of the speaker, showed the general public votes on the bill as registered on the Internet: The total national votes cast is 412 576. The total number of votes for the bill is 400 343. The total number of votes against the bill is 12 233.

Percentage majority of public votes for the bill is 93%. The Nautilian public watched their Members of Parliament vote in the House. Breakdown of votes by constituency electorates, was displayed in large figure on the screen. All twenty constituencies percentage majority were above ninety percent for the bill.

The speaker counted the raised arms and noted down the M.P's names for the 'Ayes'. Harman Dahl with his arm raised turned around to count the number of M.Ps with raised arms. He was happy to see Mrs Kala as one of them. He then turned to look at Gian Kala. Gian saw Harman looking at him. He felt uneasy.

Gian turned to count for himself how the vote was going.

He surmised that the pros were not going to get the three-quarter votes. This was exactly what he had planned. He felt an ache in the stomach. He was feeling sick. He glanced on the screen. He saw his electorates of constituency no.6 have voted for the bill. His arm went up mechanically. Asha saw this. She smiled.

Gian smiled back. The speaker then asked those who want to vote against the Nautilus Constitution Amendment bill to raise their arms. Harman Dahl looked round again. There was not a single arm raised. In the fleeting seconds that Gian Kala raised his arm, all his companions who were to vote with him against the bill instantly raised their arms following his example. The speaker announced to the House and the public at large that the Nautilus amendment bill has been voted unanimously by the House. The other legislations passing were now just a formality. He announced that the bills would become laws on the 1st January, 2001. When the House rose to see the Speaker leave, Harman Dahl rushed to Gian Kala, gave him a fatherly hug.

“You have made me the happiest man on Earth today, Gian. Come with me, you and Asha. We'll ride together today.”

As the Prime Minister's car left the underground car park and emerged on Parliament square, flanked by two police-outriders, and two riders were sitting on a powerful motorcycle, at rest but with engine on. The man on the back of the motorcycle, picked up his submachine gun from a concealed position on his right side, aimed at the car, and fired.

The motorcycle roared and reeled off at full speed, towards Chaussee Street. The car swerved, hit the left kerb, turned right, climbed on the pavement and crashed directly against the stone pedestal where stood the statue of Mahe de la Bourdonnais. The driver of the Prime Minister's car was killed outright. Gian and Asha had only bruises from splitting glass. The Prime Minister was hit.

“ Carry on the good work.”

Those were Harman Dahl's last words before he collapsed on the backseat, riddled with bullets.

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