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I, Vikram Chowdury, am a well-known and successful person in my country. I have been in fund-raising, gala dinners with the Prime Ministers of India, of the UK and of France. I have worked pro-bono for Mother Theresa (God bless her soul) and helped her in court to resist prosecution from rich landowners. I have sat at round tables with some of the world's most eminent philosophers and discussed with no shame nor reservation the most cutting edge of academic concepts. I have been asked for my opinions in major corporate takeovers crossing the bridge between the economies of East and West. I have travelled all over the world, smooched with the rich and famous, the influential and the culture-shapers. All of this, and I could not get a meeting with Virender Bahtti.

Initially, I had my own assistants try to set it up. They were calling, faxing and emailing Mr Bahtti's offices throughout the day, but to no avail. It seemed like a lost cause. Even my good name was not enough to open the doors that would lead me to a hopefully useful conversation with the oligarch. To be honest, I did not even know the right person to talk to as Mr Bahtti is very reserved and access to a time on his appointment book is controlled by personal secretaries and assistants whose name is not revealed to the general public.

I berated my staff for their failures. Virender Bahtti is one of the richest men in the world, constantly hovering in the top 10

and even cracking the top 5 last year, but it cannot be impossible to arrange an interview? Tim Miller, a nobody, managed that.

Besides, I did not need that much time to be honest, and this matter could be cleared up quite quickly. I just had to meet him, ask him about this crazy Englishman who had shown him a business proposal a year or so ago, and ask if he had any samples from that meeting. These I could then take to a laboratory to be analysed and, with the mundane results back, the case could be made that there never was such thing as a hallucinogenic, addictive paan.

After a full week of frustration and hair-pulling, I finally decided to pick up the phone myself and call my highest-ranked contact at Bahtti Industries. He explained it was pointless to try and reach Virender as he was constantly rushing all over India for both business and personal interests. I asked, "Doesn't he have a mobile number?"

Apparently he doesn't. Imagine that. The leader of the most technologically advanced company in India and he doesn't carry a mobile phone with him.

"How about his assistants?"

And then the door opened... or at least was left slightly ajar, for my contact had the number for Mr Bahtti's personal assistant, a young girl called Miraya Sinha.

Even Mrs Sinha was hard to reach. One could imagine unavailability spreading through the ranks, cascading downwards from Bahtti

himself at the top so that the higher one got in the hierarchy, the more the company, a chronophage of unstoppable appetite, had access to that particular employee. Mrs Sinha, being with Bahtti for most of the day and week, would have an agenda that matched her master. Regardless, on Friday of last week, I managed to talk to Mrs Sinha.

She was an extremely cold young woman. I had never seen her at that point, but it was easy to imagine someone with constantly crossed arms, impenetrable eyes shielded by thick glasses and a suit that revealed no personality or taste. Her tone was dismissive, bordering on rude. Her intentions were clear, trying her best to determine the nature of my call, the logical reasons that would warrant someone the right to partake the presence of her lord. I went straight to the point and mentioned Tim Miller, the paan and the business proposal. She was silent for a few seconds, and I could overhear her talking to someone - was it Mr Bahtti? She wanted an appointment immediately. I explained it was late in the day already and it would be best to resume this conversation on the following week, maybe Monday? She was having none of it and instructed me to meet Mr Bahtti that very evening at his house.

"Can you please tell me his address?"

"Mr Chowdury, we have no time for this, have a good day."

And with that she hung up.

As I stood on the street outside Mr Bahtti's house, I understood why my interlocutor in the previous conversation had felt insulted. The house was not a house at all, but an entire 27-story apartment building constructed from the ground up according to Mr Bahtti's specifications.

I must admit, sometimes I get a bit caught up in my academic studies. And also a bit caught up in my work and in my multiple hobbies, which range from numismatics to philately, and of course, caught up in my budding family, of which I am a particularly fond of following my daughter's progress in school. But no matter. All these distractions meant I had been completely oblivious to the construction of Mr Bahtti's building even though the newspapers were crammed with pictures, reports and floorplans related to it.

To call it a pharaonic project would be to state the obvious.

Three years ago Mr Bahtti had grown tired of living in rented accommodation on the outskirts of Mumbai. He was constantly moving from one luxury villa to another, never finding a place to settle down. So he decided to create his ideal home right in the middle of the city. And of course, not just a home, rather an environment to live in.

The first 6 floors are taken by the reception (with a ceiling 3 stories high) and the multiple levels of the car park. These look like solid concrete from the outside, with the curving ramps

marking each of the four corners of the building. They can hold 160 cars and one of the levels is reserved for car maintenance. I should also note that the maintenance area was installed and customized by engineers brought in from BMW, Mercedes and Ferrari. No expenses spared for Bahtti's fleet of vehicles.

Above that are 4 stories dedicated to an arena. This can host up to 300 spectators and has a complex arrangement of lights and stage options. It can do operas, stage plays, show Bollywood's latest blockbusters, etc. In fact, this space is so versatile that last year, when the Kazakh circus was in Mumbai, it actually performed in Mr Bahtti's arena, horses and all. It is, of course, invitation-only, and these invitations are reserved for India's and the world's finest.

Sitting on top of the arena, and possibly to cool it down when it is full, are the 3 stories of a greenhouse. This is not a homogeneous space. Instead, it has different areas, each with its own temperature, humidity and amounts of sunlight. It is said one can experience the flora of every corner of the world in this place. From the large, hard trees of the Americas, to the delicate, soft flowers of sophisticated Europe. It can all be found here. There are also rumours that some of the crops grown in this enormous greenhouse are not entirely legal, but the police will never investigate such petty claims.

Keeping with the healthy theme, the next couple of floors are

reserved for the swimming pool and the gymnasium. If I may be permitted, Mr Bahtti is not a thin and fit man. From the pictures I have seen, he is in fact quite obese and has a wheezing tone to his speech - something which would denote a smoking habit combined with perhaps some asthma. Why he would then need this sort of sporting facilities is beyond me. May I also point out that this is the only Olympic-sized swimming pool in all of Mumbai? And Mumbai is not a small city...

Finally, some room for people to live. Three stories of luxury suites for whatever guests Mr Bahtti has at any given time. These have been classified as being as luxurious as 7 star hotels like the Burj Al Arab in Dubai, but of course anyone with money can get into the Burj, whereas there are other criteria for sleeping in Mr Bahtti's house.

The rest of the floors are reserved for Mr Bahtti and his family: wife, children and mother. At the apex of the pyramid, sorry, building, rests the penthouse. It is said this area is off limits even for Mr Bahtti's family, only his assistants and most trusted advisers being permitted to visit him there. Oh, and did I mention the helipad on the top, with its complement of 3 Eurocopters?

The £500 million colossal tower was now calling its faithful - night shift was about to begin. Around me, people swarmed to and from the marble gates of the reception. These were cleaners, cooks, electricians, repairmen, gardeners, managers, drivers,

mechanics, receptionists, etc. All these people (600 according to my research) are employed by a single man in a single home. They come from the less affluent parts of the city and some might even come from the slums. No matter where they come from, here they feel part of something better, bigger, more important and more valid than their lives elsewhere. They will come into the building in torn jeans and faded t-shirts and put on pristine, colourful uniforms with gold buttons and polished shoes they will never afford by themselves. Once outside, they will brag about their association with Bahtti, claiming to have exchanged a few words with him on the cricketing performance of his namesake the night before or other trivial issue.

Joining these people I advanced towards the brightly-lit reception.