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NRI ACHIEVERS

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**AND THE WINNER
TAKES IT ALL
MOHD. ASLAM KAZI**

**A GOOD SAMARITAN
& HIS DEDICATED LIFE
RAJ LOOMBA**

**"CHALLENGE
IS MY ADRENALINE"
PARAS SHAHDADPURI**

**DRIVEN BY GENIUS
TO ASPIRE & ACHIEVE
DR. ROBINDER SINGH**

"It is time for us all to stand and cheer for the doer, the achiever - the one who recognizes the challenge and does something about it."

- Vince Lombardi

Paras Shahdhpuri deserves all the accolades and praise for being that one man who imposed great challenges upon himself and embraced them with the desire to unravel his own hidden virtues. Understanding the definite fact that each new challenge is the opportunity to earn success and also a way to estimate one's own self worth, Shahdhpuri, almost and in every way, allowed one challenge to take over from the other in his life and emerged victorious each time. "Challenge," this rare achiever says, "is my adrenaline." He further addresses it as, 'the juice of life and challenges alone,' he says, 'test one's abilities, capabilities, determination and strengths. Shahdhpuri further asserts that 'once one is able to cross over the challenge, the pleasure it gives, cannot be compared with any money.' Booker T. Washington once said, "Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the challenges which one has overcome..." a saying, which Shahdhpuri virtually lives by. So, when the former Indian diplomat stepped into the domain of entrepreneurship and decided to take on the fiercely competitive world of business enterprise, it perhaps didn't seem ambiguous to people closely familiar with him. Someone who knew him always believed that the visionary diplomat-turned-entrepreneur... with an absolute obsession to chase challenges and beat them convincingly... was fated to do something more dynamic and risk-oriented. And the prolific achiever... proved them just right!

His famed Nikai Group of Companies today is a healthy conglomerate of an electronics division, Foodstuff and FMCG, Information Technology Division and Restaurants. While it's the consumer electronics segment that has truly catapulted Shahdhpuri to the heights of great recognition as a visionary businessman. His company

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in the segment offers Plasma Televisions, DVD, CD Players and Audio Systems, the entire range of Home Appliances, Air Conditioners, Refrigerators and Washing Machines, with over 380 household essentials and gadgets of comfort and entertainment. Nikai as a brand is widely available in all continents of the world and is one among the top five international brands in the Middle East. The Company here has a top quality range of products with cutting edge technology which has been sub-branded as Midas range to service the high and discerning consumers. The products in this range are p Excellence LCD TVs, Side-by-Side Refrigerators, Bio-rhythm Air conditioners, etc. Says an elated Shahdhpuri, "These are a few of the wonderful products which I as the Chairman of the Company, take special pride in."

The Nikai Group of Companies is today a product of Shahdhpuri's deeper inclination towards the greater challenges of professional life, which obviously, can only be attained through greater capability, a drive for better performance and inevitably... the hunger to surmount the impossible. Shahdhpuri here offers to explain. He says, "I quit the diplomatic career, honestly speaking, without any great charted out vision. I quit my diplomatic career not because I wanted to build up a Nikai Group," he states matter-of-factly, "I quit because I went through some bouts of frustration in the Government service and decided to do something on my own which could be more tangible and result-oriented." Nikai was conceived in the year 1995. It was a private label brand which steadily has grown to be a formidable brand in the consumer electronics segment in the Middle East vying for a

market share among the heavy-weight Japanese and Korean brands of the likes of Sony, Panasonic etc. The brand stands as a symbol of quality and unparalleled service. Although, when Paras Shahdhpuri aligned with the brand, things weren't as hunky dory as they seem today. Established in Japan, Nikai wallowed in the early 90s as it struggled to compete with major domestic and international consumer electronics rivals such as Panasonic, Sony and Philips. It was a time when the company was facing insolvency when the former Indian diplomat, stepped in and acquired the brand and its existing product

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range. Based at Dubai, Shahdhpuri quickly relocated Nikai's operations to the Emirate and set in place a strategy aimed at rapidly expanding its product range and retail presence in selected markets world over. It was Shahdhpuri's astute understanding and implementation of the revival strategy that enabled Nikai emerge as one of the leading players amongst the new breed of mostly Asian consumer electronics vendors... taking market share from their established rivals and this by way of providing some decent quality products at fractional prices. "Undoubtedly," informs the triumphant Chairman of the company, "it was a huge challenge to give birth to a new brand Nikai, incubate it, and nurture it as a robust leading brand." Having no experience in the corporate world and a business background...none what-so-ever, Shahdhpuri explains that he had nothing to fall back upon. "Only I had to invent the wheel at every stage of my business and I kept on consolidating my small gains and looked forward to newer challenges and God helped me wherever I stepped forward," he reveals in exultation. Shahdhpuri in his endeavours, did not follow any specific strategy but just kept seeking newer challenges while meeting and overcoming the older ones. Maintaining his cool during the tougher times, helped very much and also the fact that he admits to by saying... "I felt, honest conduct has been paramount in my business policy and I have hardly lost any contact or friend in my entire business or diplomatic career." Reflecting further, on his phenomenal journey, Shahdhpuri avers, "I consider the key reasons for my business have been, focus, dedication, commitment, careful planning and execution with deadlines. This has created confidence in the consumer and today, he trusts Nikai as Mr. Reliable." The latter is the title prudently earned by the brand... with Shahdhpuri at the helm.

Shahdhpuri believes that in the Middle East, Dubai is the most vibrant and growing city with a very investment-friendly environment and regulations. "For me," he informs, "coming from India in the year

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1988, it was a world of difference from controls driven regime in India to a place of ease and abundance in UAE. It took me only a few weeks

to set up the business with an amazing infrastructure." Although, the only constraint that the man now feels is the geographical smallness of the market and claims that after having realized his potential, he thinks he could have flourished better in a few other countries. "In hindsight," he states, "I think that had I started my business in U.K or USA, I could have grown multifold in these countries, simply given the geographical size and huge population and purchasing power of these markets." Consumer Electronics being an extremely competitive industry, surviving here means adhering to the imperatives such as consistent quality controls, high levels of service and honest conduct with both vendors and distributors while taking care of the employee partners. Things, which have kept Shahdadpuri's brand... ostensibly ahead of other brands. "Through our R&D and strategic tie-up with our manufacturing partners," he says by way of offering to explain the authority and reliability of his brand, "we have helped in providing cutting edge technology to the consumers in the very competitive pricing environment." This of course, has also led to a solid brand positioning of Nikai. The Group now plans to embark upon some new ventures apart from setting up a large distribution network in Saudi Arabia which is apparently the biggest market in the region. The Group also has eyes on entering the real estate and medical services fields, informs its ambitious and dynamic Chairman.

However, with technology advancing so quickly around the world, the scene in the world of electronics is changing ever more rapidly and it's not easy keeping pace with the technological advances. So, how does Paras Shahdadpuri meet this daunting challenge? The well informed and alert entrepreneur has the answer up his sleeve. He says, "There is no doubt that the technology is advancing at an extremely rapid pace and internet has only pushed this forward. We of course have to be on top of the things and watch and imbibe every new technological advance and translate it into our product range and use it for enhancing the growth of our group," he informs. "In fact, as we speak, my team has gone to Germany to visit the Electronics exhibition and factories," claims the progressive leader.

Paras Shahdadpuri sees business as a means to serve the community at large because he considers that making money is only one small

aspect of business but maintaining ethics and integrity and service to the community are equally important aspects of a successful business. Towards this end, his Group participates from time to time in various community welfare activities in the field of education and hopefully soon in the field of health hospitality.

Shahdadpuri is content operating from Dubai, he says, the country has a respectable and large NRI community and he did not experience any cultural shock coming from India and settling in the UAE. "The business environment is very supportive of entrepreneurs," he claims, "I honestly felt very comfortable coming as a new entrant in the business." But how did the journey from India to Dubai come around? Ask the big question and Shahdadpuri has an interesting tale to narrate. Says he, "This is a long story," and further sheds light on his fascinating geographical transition. Shahdadpuri reveals, "Having decided to start my business venture abroad and not in India, the only English speaking destination for business and my children's schooling I could think of was England. I set up a small trading company in U.K.

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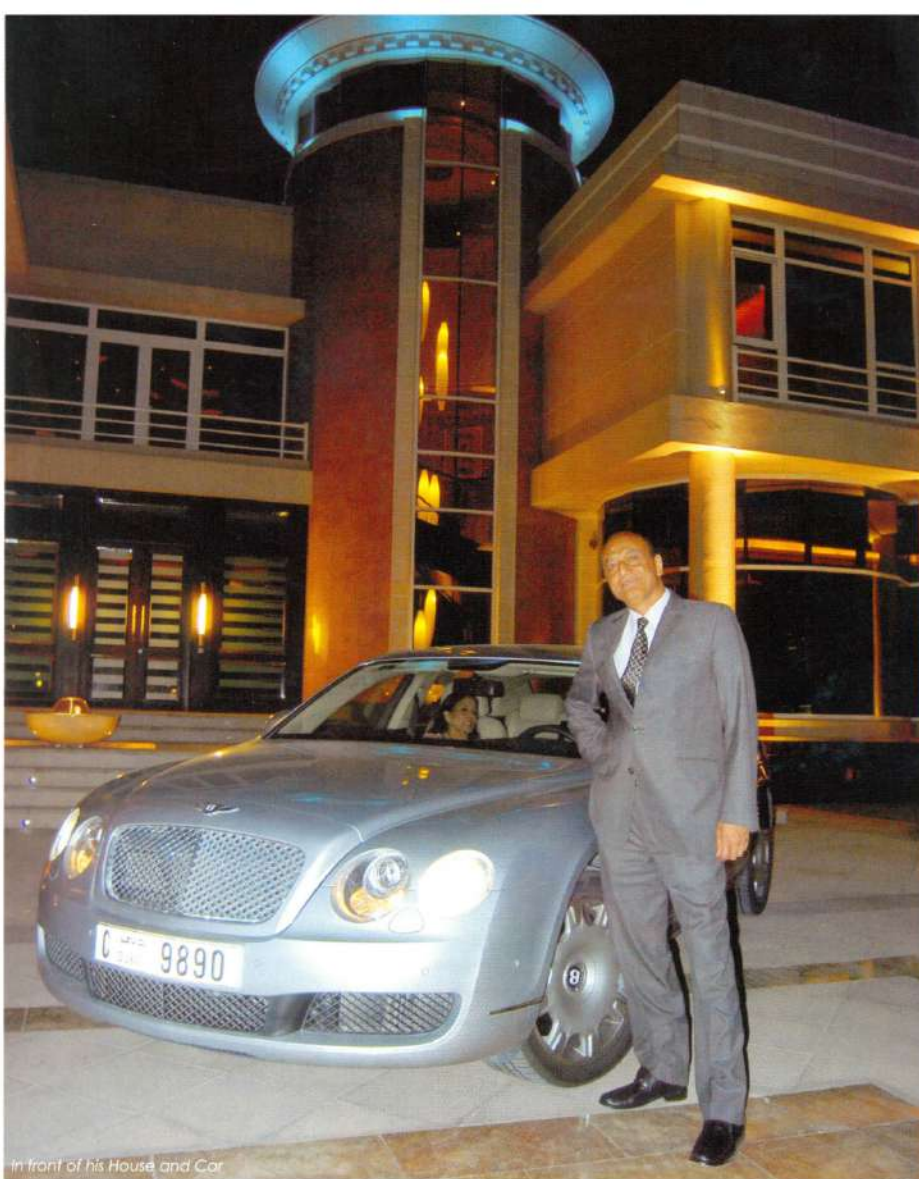
- PARAS SHAHDADPURI

On my second visit from India to UK, I travelled via Dubai, where I missed the flight connection and had to stay for 22 hours at the airport for next connection which was discomfoting to me." Shahdadpuri further reveals, "I approached one gentleman attired in a Arabian dress and tried to strike a conversation with him in my broken Arabic language in order to get a transit visa. Realising my handicap of Arabic language he spoke out in a very friendly Hindi: "bolo, bolo baba khyia mangta hai (Tell me what you want?)." Paras Shahdadpuri reminisces that the Samaritan's warm conduct and eagerness to come to his rescue, changed his career. Recalling that one decisive moment that transformed things for him forever, Shahdadpuri reveals, "He gave me a transit visa for a day and I saw then... the Dubai of 1987, which attracted me with its friendly and Asian culture and warmth of people and climate." "There were easy telephone connections; free foreign exchange," he gushes, "very good Indian schools, good cars, proximity to India, large number of Asian business houses, etc." "Then what else?" asks the man with a tell tale smile, and says, "It was an instant love for the city and therefore, my instant decision to shift from U.K. to UAE."

Paras Shahdadpuri has often been confronted with the complex challenge of making significant choices in his life. And one of these has been his transition from a diplomat to an entrepreneur which he claims... was not at all an easy experience. "Serving as an Indian diplomat," he tells you, "with a secure job and socially sought-after person, and going to an insecure business world and struggling to create my own identity was a huge challenge which required an entirely different mindset and courage... which did test my inherent strengths and weaknesses," confesses the intrepid go getter. Giving vent to his pre business anxieties, Shahdadpuri further explains, "With God's grace I was able to come out of various tough situations, underwent a change in my pattern of conduct and after a few years I was totally a different side of the hand." "Here was the person sitting in his cozy chair as a diplomat," he remembers, "secured of his job, conducting the business with a different air of authority... to an



With Wife Poonam



In front of his House and Car

entrepreneur looking forward to the help and support of the consumers and bankers to embark on the new career." "Of course," reveals Shahdadpuri, "it was a sea change but it has been a huge learning in life which I consider in itself a rich experience." It is believed that as a diplomat, it was Shahdadpuri's posting in Libya, which changed things for him and brought about the crucial decision of him quitting services. Shahdadpuri nods in approval and says, "Libya was my last diplomatic posting where I was given the charge of handling economic and commercial division of the embassy. Conducting differently from a bureaucrat to a business-oriented approach, I saw huge results coming in the economic and commercial relationship between Libya and India." "Honestly," he further suggests, "this was a turning point in my life. Here I realized that there was more to Paras Shahdadpuri than being a bureaucrat and a diplomat." So while Shahdadpuri kept on achieving greater results of his efforts in growing India-Libya economic relations and earned kudos from his Ambassador and the Headquarters, he concurrently realised that he was more cut out for commercial and economic activities than other departments of a diplomatic mission. The realization did make a profound impact on his sensibility and he went back to India on his

home posting for about two years, consulted his family and then, seizing the right opportunity he quit the diplomatic career and came to Dubai, a place... he was completely alien to, though a place... where he was meant to be. And the rest as he himself says is 'history.'

No doubt, quitting a secure government job and going into an un-chartered business environment was his most decisive moment. "Luckily," he affirms, "I was just inside the right age in early 40's, when I had the requisite maturity and courage to take on a newer challenge and the determination and good health to execute my plans." It was Shahdadpuri's family too that offered a huge moral support to help him pursuing this very unconventional route. Having never tasted business or entrepreneurship ever before and confessing to never even wishing to enter the domain at any previous occasion, Shahdadpuri enlightens that the outcome of the challenge undertaken... remained unpredictable and tentative at that point. Though he was somewhere bound to come out exultant as his gene pool ignited the fighter in him and it wasn't going to allow him to yield before the odds. Shahdadpuri's ancestors were refugees in India from Pakistan and had gone through some tough challenges of rehabilitating themselves, economically and socially

when India got divided. The 50s' and 60s' posed big challenges for his parents and that perhaps explains how hard work and uncertainties of the future, could never trouble the fearless man.

Today, despite many years of stupendous success as an NRI businessman, Shahdadpuri feels that there are many disadvantages for an Indian working abroad. "You are not a first class citizen in a foreign country," he recounts, "there are constraints at times of owning the business in your own name. Then, one has to make a space for himself in a newer social and business environment, challenges in hiring human resource talent, arranging finance from various sources where one has no assets or properties," grudges Shahdadpuri. The road to success as an NRI may not be easy but once the destination is reached, it gives an altogether different high and in Shahdadpuri's words, "To succeed as an NRI businessman is not an easy affair but once one is a successful NRI, it gives you a different type of pleasure and confidence that one has been successful in a foreign land despite all odds."

So, for a man who's head over heels in love with challenges... where

precisely did he discover the greater ones? "I must say," he admits, "it was a great honour for me to be in the Indian Foreign Service and serving the country which I did with utmost honesty and hard work." "It provided me enormous opportunity," he explains, "to get exposed to the varied culture, political and economic systems of different countries. The Indian Foreign Service taught me to deal with different nationalities, to understand their psyches, the local nuances, the working constraints etc," he acknowledges. Divulging more, Shahdadpuri emphatically states, "These perhaps trained me to face the challenges and successfully convert these challenges into opportunities. I always felt that harder the challenge better the opportunity and bigger the pleasure at the end of a hard struggle and to achieve the objective successfully." In the line of this thought, Shahdadpuri admits that for him, out of all his postings, the assignments in China and Libya were the most challenging and that's where he claims, he was emboldened to enter into un-attempted territories and take on the challenges. To answer the more specific question, Shahdadpuri suggests, "It is difficult to say which side of the hand is better," he admits and promptly adds, "but if I have really to choose between the two, I would like to be a businessman." "I feel," he suggests, "the opportunities in the business field are vast; there are tangible and short, medium and long term results." In defense of his inclination towards business, he further points out, "You are always in greater command of the affairs, there is hardly any political pressure or interferences, there is no age limit of retirement, there is both freedom and capacity to utilize the financial resources for the good of the downtrodden and the community at large, thus there is a huge opportunity to contribute to the economic, cultural and social polity of the country and society."

In Shahdadpuri's firm opinion, any business, arms a person to better perform his or her Corporate Social Responsibility. He states in a conspicuous tone... "After all, we made it from the society and we must give back to it in a variety of forms. I consider such a role to be more satisfying." However, in his own unambiguous way, Paras Shahdadpuri professes that if one wants to make a mark and stand out, be it in the government service or in business, there really are no short cuts. "One cannot sustain positions of leadership on shortcuts," he articulates, further claiming, "You have to be honest in your approach, have passion to fulfill your objectives, focus on what you have cut out to do and remain committed to that objective till it is achieved." Shahdadpuri suggests that to be counted in the top few, the path is not laid with roses, and there are always unmet challenges and obstacles that beset one's path. "However," he earnestly discloses, "I feel that business has its own insecurities, ups and downs, perhaps a bit higher than one would find in government services."

Shahdadpuri is resolute in his thinking that to be successful and be counted in the list of achievers... one needs to be sincere and focused towards one's goal in life. There is no magic wand that can do the trick for anyone, he states while dwelling in realism. And offering an explanation to his belief, Shahdadpuri suggests, "It is your own internal process. I strongly believe one needs to have strong fundamentals, conviction, passion to sustain the drive within you, undiluted sincerity in your conduct and dealings and commitment to achieve your objective, with full focus." Resorting to some further reality check, Shahdadpuri avows, "This may sound too much of a qualification, but honestly, ask any successful person, either he has all or most of it... otherwise to sustain success may be difficult."

One of the reasons why this pragmatic achiever sort early retirement from a government job, was, so that he could continue to work much longer. With a government job's retiring age then being 58 (the age of superannuation), Shahdadpuri quit with a plan to pursue his dreams in the direction of longevity at the work. Already past 60, Shahdadpuri still has some bigger dreams awaiting fulfillment. He says, "If God gives me good health, I propose to start a few more businesses and incubate them. I feel personally as though I have just started my



business career and have many more miles to go." The man's predilection for work and success may be discovered when he says, "I have always desired to die vertically in the chair and not horizontally on the bed. There are many wild desires somewhere in the mind... such as to fly... and I only hope the civil aviation authorities do not object to the age."

Paras Shahdadpuri's personal goal is to do something more perceptible for the society and make a distinct difference in the life of people. With this is juxtaposed his wish to be a happy family man... content with what God has bestowed upon him and the family. His personal proud moments have therefore come while attending the convocation ceremony of his children in USA. "I felt as a proud parent helping my children to achieve success in their chosen fields of education," he says.

On the inspiration bit... Shahdadpuri tries not to idolize anyone, though the big man certainly draws references, inferences and comparisons with various achievers and his two worthy mentions from India are Narayan Murthy of Infosys, and the TATA's who he believes have shown innovative thinking and have sustained the growth with social responsibility. And his personal inspiration? "I must admit with a pride," says Shahdadpuri, "that I have met a very senior member of Emirati Royalty, H.E. Sheikh Nahayan Bin Mubarak Al-Nahayan. He is an amazing person, beyond words..."

Paras Shahdadpuri's immaculate success story is more of passion than of good fortune or he prefers to consider good fortune only as one of the consequences. What's vital for him is that there is no fun if he doesn't enjoy a particular profile nor has passion for it. And without further ado, he tells you his *mantra* for success. "Before attempting any project," he avers, "I first understand and read into all implications and do SWOT analysis and turn threats into opportunities through diligent planning and then meticulous execution. Thus I try to minimize the failure rate to a negligible percentage that means a fairly fail-proof success. I may say in all humility that I always find it extremely difficult how one fails in any project that one takes up," he explains. There could be a number of obstacles while treading on the path of your objective, believes Shahdadpuri but one needs to be agile and correct the course from time to time and eventually he says, "Success must be achieved." Quiz him and he says he would like to be remembered as a humble man, a reliable friend and an energetic person ready to help others. On a more abundant note... a thorough job done with sincerity and dedication after due diligence, can possibly describe Shahdadpuri's definition of a true achiever.