



BIGGEST STARTUP EVER

By Timothy Lesle

HOTMAIL CO-FOUNDER Sabeer Bhatia is working on a new startup. While software is hot these days, Bhatia's new venture will be all hardware—metal, cement, asphalt—the stuff that goes into buildings and roads. Bhatia's startup is a brand new city. In India.

Bhatia, 39, was born and raised in India. After studying at Caltech and Stanford, he started Hotmail, then sold it to Microsoft for \$400 million. Today Bhatia travels between the Bay Area and India, watching over his half-dozen companies.

But his ambitions have outgrown the Internet. He wants his new metropolis, dubbed Nanocity, to be the Silicon Valley of India. He's aiming for an 11,000-acre site in the Himalayan foot-



Courtesy of Berkeley Group for Architecture and Planning

hills, near his birthplace of Chandigarh, and is working with the state government to implement his multi-billion-dollar plan.

Bhatia envisions Nanocity as a hub of high tech—software, biotechnology and nanotechnology—fueled by the vast and still-growing white-collar talent pool in India. There will be skyscrapers, an ambitious university and idyllic public spaces. All of it green, clean and orderly.

This is a tall order in India, where cities are overcrowded and chaotic, with poor infrastructure and rampant pollution. Even Chandigarh, which was the poster child of modern planned cities in India, has become overrun by traffic and, in Bhatia's

estimation, “hasn't kept up with the times.”

But Bhatia sees Chandigarh's plight as an opportunity for Nanocity. “India is a democracy,” he told a group of business students last fall. “You cannot fix the infrastructure in any city of India by forcing people out of their homes, then widening the roads, putting in new freeways, new transportation networks and new pipes.” Instead, says Bhatia, if you want a modern city, you've got to build it from scratch. And that's just what he plans to do. **B**

Timothy Lesle ('08) reported on an eco-village in China this year for Frontline World.