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**ECONOMIST & SUN (905) 294-8244**

# Author's real-life story fills book with intrigue

BY HANNELORE VOLPE  
 Staff Writer

Soft-spoken Leo Teohari has lived through more action and intrigue than a couple of good spy novels.

That's what makes his first book, *Hawala*, so compelling.

It appeared on the New York Times best seller list last month. Based on the Stouffville resident's own story, *Hawala* tells the story of a lawyer, Alec Popescu, who defects from Romania after the assassination of Nicolae Ceausescu in December 1989.

Those who deposed the dictator promise a better lives for Romanians. In reality, they created situations to take the attention of the populace off their own crimes: selling arms, housing terrorist training camps, laundering money, selling children for sex and stealing the country's assets.

This is *Hawala*, an Arab word for moving money around without a trace.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the book's protagonist returns to his birth country with millions in investments from around the world to inject into the economy of what appears to be a new, democratic Romania.

But the political elite, who are the same old regime with a new face, eventually try to undermine him. Warrants are issued for his arrest and Interpol alerted to look for him. Mr. Popescu finds himself a fugitive from the country he tried to help.

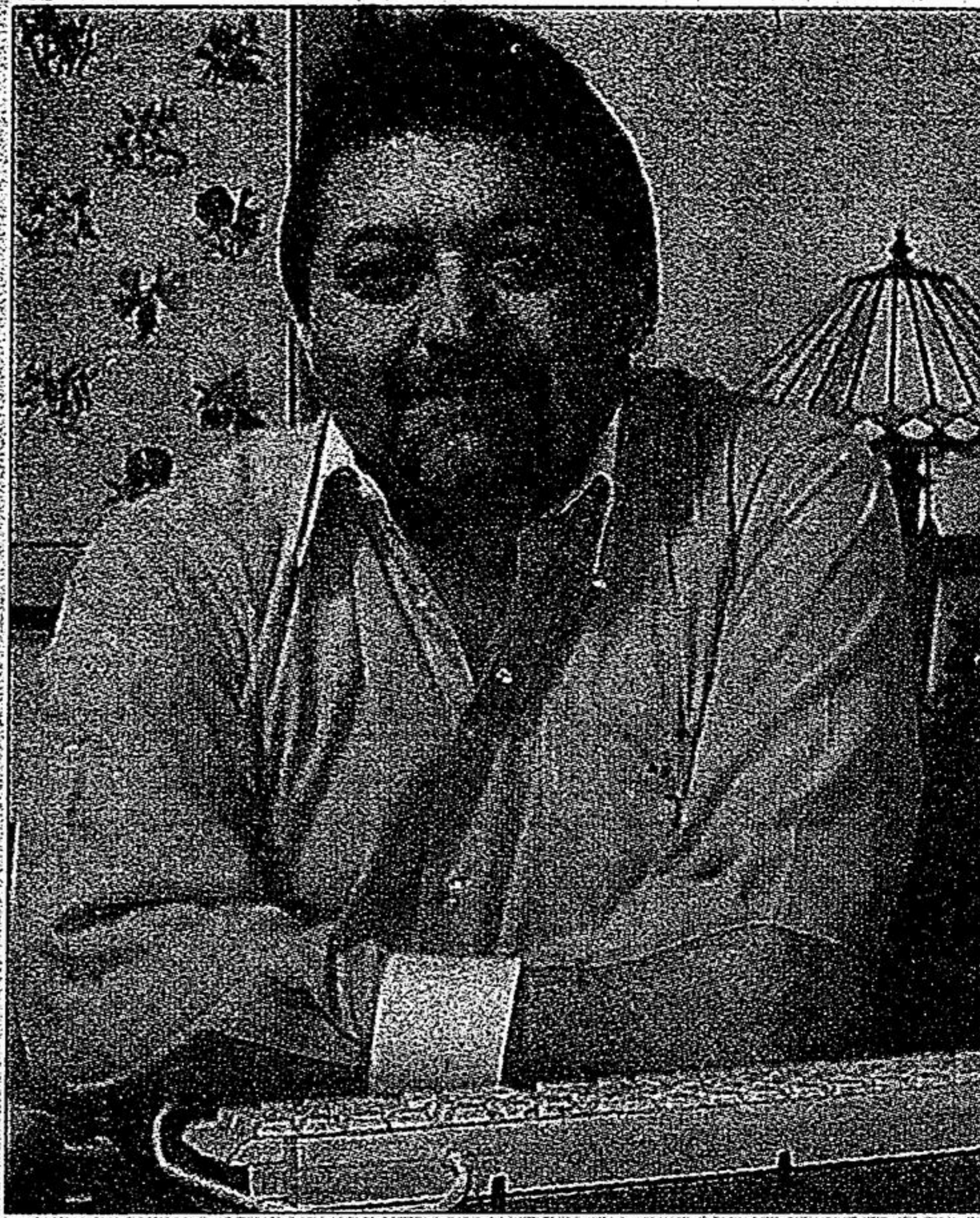
In real life, Mr. Teohari — never a part of Romania's communist party or its secret police — defected in 1980 after becoming fed up with the Ceausescu regime. He took along his wife and his father, leaving children Darius, 9, Ana, 4, and his mother.

For 18 agonizing months, the Teoharis were apart. Finally, some high-level negotiations, which ended up in then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau's office, led to the freeing of six Romanians.

"Three of them were mine," Mr. Teohari, 56, said.

They were exchanged for a loan of \$350,000 to operate a Canadian Candu reactor sold to Romania.

During his years working as a



Stouffville author Leo Teohari escaped from Romania in 1980 but left two children and his mother behind. They were later allowed to come to Canada in a deal that involved the Prime Minister's Office. His first book is semi-autobiographical.

lawyer and in international trade for the Romanian government, Mr. Teohari formed important contacts in Canada.

*Finally, some high-level negotiations, which ended up in then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau's office, led to the freeing of six Romanians.*

That helped him get started here. After a few sales jobs, he established Darianne International Inc. of Canada, which began as an equipment consulting business to the food industry. It branched out to importing Romanian specialty foods such as rose petal jams, kapia peppers and red cabbage in vinegar for the Canadian market. In

1994, the company's sales, with locations in Canada and Romania, reached close to \$25 million.

Mr. Teohari returned to Romania from 1990 to 1997. Believing a democratic country needed a stable economic foundation, Mr. Teohari developed an agricultural program in Romania that became the largest in eastern Europe. However, he soon became disillusioned with those in power.

"When you are building a free economy," Mr. Teohari said, "you cannot politically control people."

He noted Prime Minister Paul Martin supported his efforts in Romania.

Writing the book is something he needed to do, Mr. Teohari said. "I hope it will wake up some people."

Mr. Teohari's book is available in major book stores including Indigo, Chapters and Coles.

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