

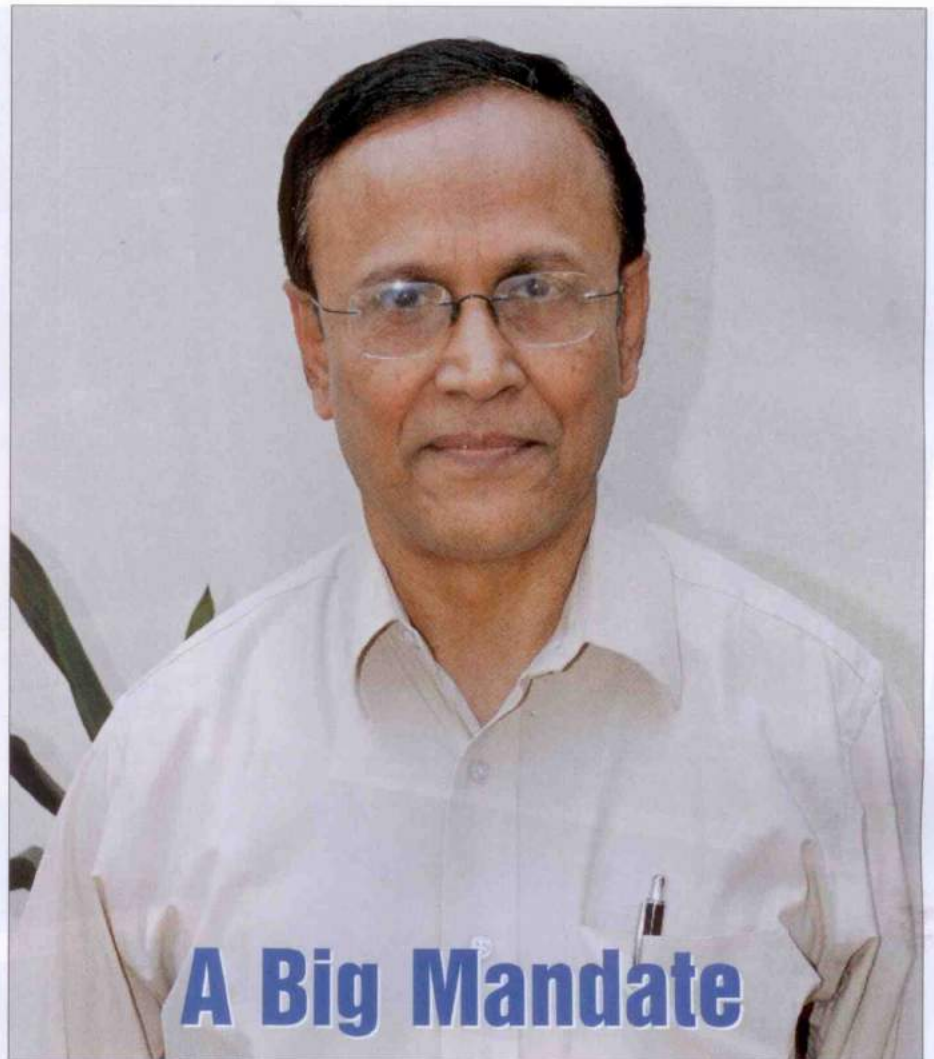
The office of the Telecom Equipment & Services Export Promotion Council (TEPC) is a tiny space tucked away off Janpath in Eastern Court in New Delhi. It's here, with very little staff and resources, that its chairman, Shyamal Ghosh, who took up the job just a fortnight or so ago, has to work out strategies for exporting indigenously made telecom equipment. This is a paradox – that India has such a huge telecom market and industry, yet no exports of telecom equipment to speak of.

“We have some indigenous input in cables, optical fibre (Sterlite and a few other companies), some equipment in the wireless segment and solar-based operating systems for towers. And we have the technology coming out of C-DOT, which some countries have showed an interest in. But the first thing we have to do is promote the government's Make in India initiative, so that we have the wherewithal to go out and export,” says Ghosh.

But to do that, he needs resources, both human and financial. It's going to be a challenge to get the TEPC, a body set up by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and the Department of Commerce, and promoted by the Telecom Equipment Manufacturers Association, fully equipped to do its work. But Ghosh is used to challenges and team building. He is a veteran IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre, who has had a distinguished career and occupied many top posts at the centre and in Gujarat over many decades.

He has been chairman of the Telecom Commission and secretary, DoT, and has served in various capacities including secretary, Department of Electronics; director-general, Directorate General of Foreign Trade; administrator, Universal Service Obligation [USO] Fund; and secretary, textiles. He was also chairman of the Data Security Council of India, set up by NASSCOM, and of the India Broadband Forum.

Known as an immensely able administrator, Ghosh was responsible for the implementation of the New Telecom Policy, 1999, for taking the initiative in drafting the Information Technology Act, 2000, and proposing the creation of the information superhighway in India in 1997.



A Big Mandate

With rich experience in IT and foreign trade behind him, Shyamal Ghosh is looking forward to new challenges as chairman, Telecom Equipment & Services Export Promotion Council...

During his tenure as chairman, Telecom Commission, many major reforms were initiated and implemented, leading to the opening up of the sector for competitive private participation and the exponential growth in telecom penetration.

He is 75 now, but still active. He came out of retirement in 2002 because he believes that being mentally and physically active is the best way to slow down the ageing process. His first post-retirement job was as administrator of the USO Fund. Next was the Data Security Council of India where he was the first chairman and had to make industry understand the need for greater security of data. Side by side, he was on the boards of several compa-

nies, both IT and textiles though not telecom as he felt that that would be “a conflict of interest”.

When the TEPC offer was first made to him, his initial thought was, why me? He was told that the job required both telecom and IT experience along with knowledge of foreign trade. Given that he had been director-general of foreign trade at one time, Ghosh was the perfect match.

One of the first things he wants to do at the council is to work more closely with the industry and involve more industrial players as well as working with government agencies to get Make in India going. “We have to strengthen the organisation, strengthen the council's structure base, and get more

players involved and interested," he says.

Ghosh has a degree in economics from Scottish Church College, Kolkata, where he secured first position. He also has a master's degree in economics from Calcutta University where he secured second position.

His decision to switch from science to economics was not approved of by his father, who thought engineering was a better option. Ghosh ignored the parental pressure – to the point where his father almost wrote him off. Unfortunately, his father passed away in 1963 before he appeared for the civil services exam. "The first few years in civil service were really exciting. At least in Gujarat, you are soon disabused of any illusions of being a great man. Because of Gujarat's Gandhian traditions, you are treated as a servant of the state, literally. People expect you to serve them, not lord over them," he says.

Ghosh recalls how, in 1966, as a young officer, he used to travel by bus across his sub-divisional jurisdiction. "We got a jeep only if there was a drought in our area. There was also a rule that we had to spend 20 days every month out in the field, in villages, in rural areas to understand what life was like for most people, and to resolve their problems," he says.

He loved being in the field. In particular, he enjoyed seeing panchayati raj at work in Gujarat where it was just taking shape. Under panchayati raj, he worked as the district development officer and had the good fortune of working under a president of the panchayat who was a Gandhian. "The first thing he said to me was that while I had to follow rules and regulations, I had to appreciate that he had a constituency to deal with and so, in working together, I had to keep in mind the human perspective and needs. That vision of his humbled me and gave me the right approach," he says.

In 1970, Ghosh went to the centre, where, as undersecretary, he learnt the ropes of bureaucracy – how things work at the centre and how they relate to what is being done at the lower levels. Four years later, he was posted in Surat district around the time of the Navnirman movement. He also worked as a municipal com-

missioner of the city for a while, much before the transformation of Surat city.

While in Surat, he was awarded the Parvin Fellowship by Princeton University for the MPA programme of Woodrow Wilson School. After completing this, he returned to Gujarat where he looked after petroleum and energy, including the issue of the alignment of the main gas pipeline used to get offshore gas from the Bombay High field. Later, in Delhi, when he was working in chemicals and fertilisers, a huge challenge landed on his desk: the gas disaster at the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal. In handling the numerous and taxing aspects of this disaster, he came to spend so much time in the city that his friends called him a "Bhopali". He had to coordinate, simultaneously, the job of neutralising the toxic chemical that was still in the Carbide tanks at the plant, deal with immediate and massive relief and rehabilitation work involving a large number of agencies and departments both at the centre and in the state.

"One difficulty we had was that everyone all over India started smelling gas leaks and we had to investigate them all. Every complaint landed on my desk. It was mind-boggling," he says.

There was also the complex task of handling the legal case against Union Carbide, particularly in establishing the US-based parent company's culpability for the gas leak. "We were advised by the lawyers to settle out of court because if we waited 20 years for adjudication in different jurisdictions, so many people's immediate needs would not have been met. Maybe we didn't get as much as expected, though there is no monetary value to life, so the challenge was to get that money," he says.

Before he left the ministry, he had set up a system for processing all the claims for compensation. This was not as simple as it might seem. The claims ran into around

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800,000; the population of Bhopal at that time was estimated at around 500,000. It was difficult to go through all the claims to sift the genuine from the false.

Asked to recall some of the highlights of his career, Ghosh says that winning the rights to operate the Hazira gas field in Gujarat was memorable since it was the first major success for GSPCL, of which he was then the managing director. So was being director-general of foreign trade where he left a satisfying legacy by streamlining the policies and procedures by using IT and by laying down the framework for all exports to be promoted in line with the World Trade Organization regulations.

The bulk of his career has been spent in Delhi, with about a third in Gujarat. Working at the state and national levels has its own distinctive challenges and satisfactions. "I loved doing district assignments because you are not reducing animate people into inanimate files. You cannot dispose of a person standing in front of you and has a problem. Your impact is tangible and direct. However, when you work at the centre, you have to deal with macro issues, including policy initiatives and their implementation. Each has its own charm," he says.

Ghosh is a self-confessed fitness freak. Before retiring, cricket was his passion. He played until he was 60 and still has two dislocated shoulders to show for it. He also played badminton, soccer, hockey and squash. After retirement, he and his wife Saha took up swimming. "When you exercise, your body feels better. When you sit around, you can feel all sorts of aches and pains and lethargy," he says.

Even now he tries to swim at the Delhi Gymkhana Club about five times a week. Apart from swimming, he and Saha love watching movies. Recently, they indulged themselves by watching two movies back to back – *Lion* and *Hidden Figures*.

"I will work for as long as I am fit. The people who join the IAS now are more knowledgeable than we were. We were fresh from university. Nowadays people often join after doing professional post-graduate courses and are much more enabled and mature. But we were young and unmarried and had a lot of fire in our bellies," he says. ▲