

Padamjeet Singh's Mission: Prevent Pollution: Save Money

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Sr. Padamjit cycles to office in Patiala and takes rickety buses when he has to travel longer distances. When he takes the train, it's usually sleeper class. "It doesn't add to my efficiency," says technocrat Padamjit Singh (62), who is simplicity personified. After graduating in electrical engineering from IIT Delhi in 1967, he chose to devote his life to public service. Many credit him as the man who 'unbundled' Punjab's power blues but the praise sits lightly on his shoulders. Seeing his two-room rented house in Patiala, it is easy to see why he never availed of the 6,750 sq.ft bungalow, official car or servants he was entitled to as chief engineer of the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB). "I am single and I really don't need a big place to stay. I think a car and air-conditioner would hinder more than help. My cycle keeps me healthy," he says. Punjab's finance minister, Manpreet Badal hails what Padamjit has done for the state. "*Rahnumai kar sake jo kafila ke be-garaz, is jahan main aisa koi rahnuma nahi milta,*" he says. ("There are those who lead without greed for position or self-interest, but in this world it is hard to find such a leader.") "He has saved us a large amount of money and done enormous good to the state. We salute a man like him. He is one of Punjab's assets," he adds. At a time when the state was tottering under a huge power shortage, he led the PSEB to go in aggressively for power banking and 'gaming'. Using the concept of power banking judiciously, he gave electricity to states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Orissa and Maharashtra during winter when Punjab least uses power — as major consumption is during the paddy season and summer. When these states returned the favour, they did so at 10% interest. For gaming, he kept a close watch on states that had unscheduled demand crash, like in the western grid during monsoons, and bought electricity for as little as *Rs 2.2 per unit from Maharashtra last year when the bidding price was Rs 7.2 per unit*. PSEB experts guesstimate Padamjit saved cash-strapped Punjab about Rs 1,000 crore. Retained by PSEB as **advisor** after his retirement in 2003, Punjab's 'power man' is as hungry now for doing things as he was as a young IITian. "*I have only one aim, to get power for my state at cheaper cost,*" he said. "Madness or mission, you decide," he quips.

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