

ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

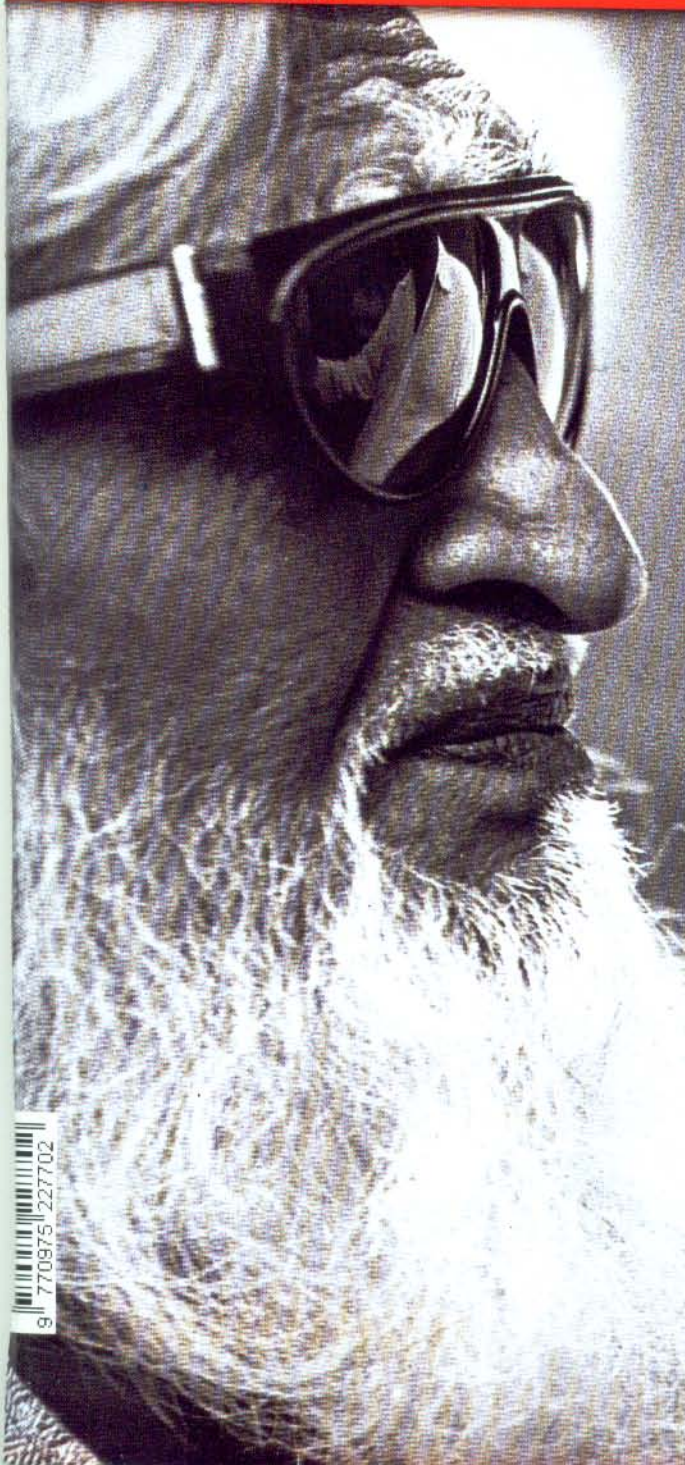
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THE WEEK

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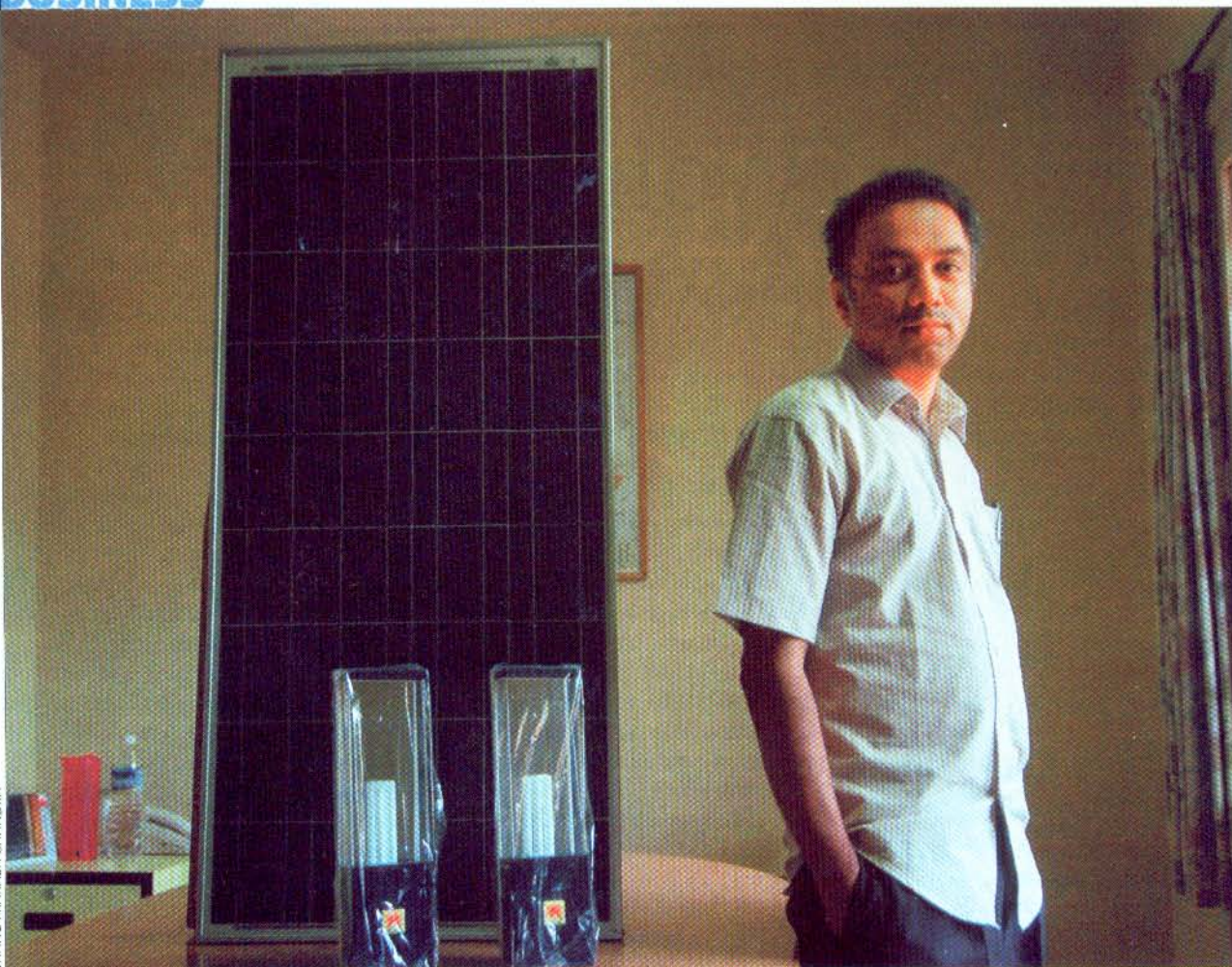


25 MOST CONTROVERSIAL PEOPLE



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BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA



MASTER OF LIGHTS: Harish Hande with solar lamps at his office

Bright mind

**H. HARISH HANDE,
MANAGING DIRECTOR, SELCO**

Having spent considerable time in rural Sri Lanka and India for his Ph.D in rural electrification, H. Harish Hande wondered why the rural poor could not rely on solar power. The managing director of SELCO had a sustainable model in mind, which could solve the problem of providing electricity in rural areas. "I wanted to destroy the myth that the poor cannot afford technology, maintain it and that you

cannot run a commercially viable business with a social goal," he says.

His idea was to instal solar lights in the houses of the poor. This would indirectly enhance their productivity as most of them also worked at home. He chose his home state of Karnataka for experimenting with the idea. With just Rs 1,000 in hand, he set out on his mission. It was very difficult to promote the

idea initially.

"The solar lantern scheme of the government had failed and people had lost faith in the solar concept," Harish says. But, he was not discouraged. Addressing people in every panchayat, he got them to adopt the scheme. Another challenge was to get them a loan for buying the lights. "There was no such loan available and banks did not believe that solar could be self-sustainable," he says. After a long struggle, he succeeded in convincing banks to finance the villagers.

Since solar lights needed regular maintenance, he established service centres, too. Currently, he lights households that earn a minimum of Rs 3,500 per month. By 2012, he hopes to reach out to families whose monthly earning is less than Rs 3,000. ■

NO MEAN TASK

Harish personally installed 300 solar lights in the houses of the poor in villages in Karnataka. He succeeded in convincing banks to finance the villagers. By 2012, he hopes to reach out to families whose monthly earning is less than Rs 3,000.