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## Business leader of many parts

Hari Shankar Singhania was, like several of his contemporaries, a man of many parts, straddling the domestic and international business scene. With his passing, almost all business leaders of his generation, barring a very few, are gone.

He was an outspoken advocate for policy change and deregulation in the 1980s but, when these came in the 90s, was part of the Bombay Club leadership, seeking a level field for Indian Industry. He was not for protection but pushed for phasing out the liberalisation process so that Indian companies had time to restructure and become competitive.

He became an icon with his presidency of the Paris-headquartered International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). This came to him after many years of hard work and steady contribution to the ICC system and organisation. His ICC leadership was a huge recognition, globally, of his exceptional qualities as a business leader. He touched global trade and industry, engaging on all issues of concern to the corporate sector.

Another major event which marked him out was his walkout from the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci) with several business leaders because serious differences had developed. They moved to Assocham (Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India), bolstering that organisation.

He pushed hard for closer cooperation between CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) and Assocham at the time. Over several years, however, his relations with Ficci softened and he was a great believer in the coordinated and cooperative working of chambers of commerce and business associations. He constantly brought his persuasive powers to bear on all bodies to work together.

Presiding over a large family business group which restructured, with independence for different family members, he was one of the most articulate and thoughtful business leaders of his time. As a result, he was extremely influential and effective. He was respected by successive leaders of the government, as well as many foreign ones.

Indians are individualistic and not easily institutional in culture. Negotiation, give and take, compromise, solutions do not come easily. But Harishankarji, as he was called by most, was deeply involved in and committed to building strong institutions, be it ICC, Ficci, Assocham or CII (a little known fact is that he was a member of CII's founding council after the two engineering associations merged in 1974).

In his passing, a great leader and supporter and builder of institutions has been lost, at a time when industry is in dire need of such leadership to deal with complex challenges.

The author is former CII chief mentor