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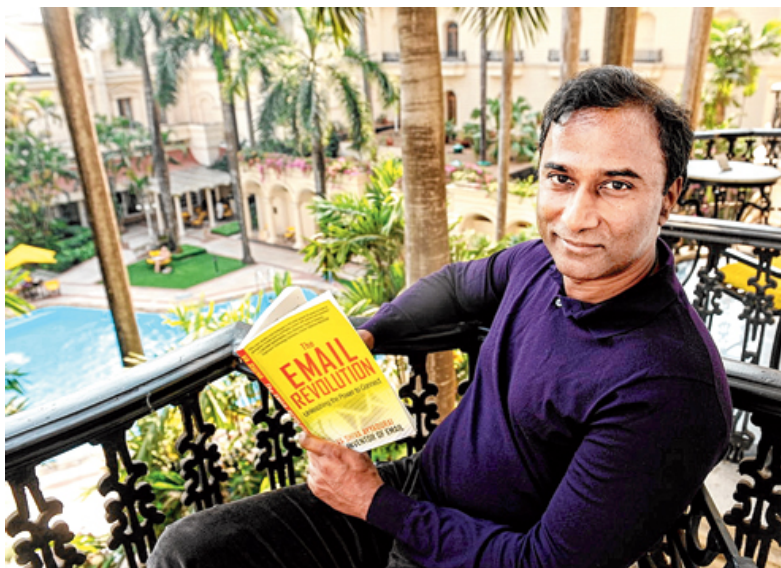
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Innovate message from Mr Email

MATHURES PAUL



V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai at The Oberoi Grand on Monday. Picture by Rashbehari Das

The man who invented email will take back a shawl from New Market and, if schedule permits, memories of the Indian Museum and Victoria Memorial.

Bombay-born V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai created the world's first email system in 1978, a few years after his family moved to America.

Today, the 50-year-old supports various arts and non-profit organisations, including the Guggenheim Museum, besides nurturing his new company, CytoSolve, which makes models of the human cell for research. This cheaper alternative helps produce new medicines without killing animals.

"Innovation can really take place anytime, anywhere and anyplace. There is a narrative that has been built that innovation can only take place in big centres. As an insider I know that's not the case. It just can't take place only at MIT or Silicon Valley or even the IITs or big government institutions. When you look at the last two big communication inventions... at least the one I was involved with, the email, the other one was TV, they were both done by 14-year-old kids in relatively unknown places. And the conditions in which those took place show that you don't need too much money," the MIT systems scientist, technologist, entrepreneur and educator told **Metro**. (Philo Farnsworth is considered the inventor of modern television.)

In 1978, Ayyadurai was any other teenager. A New York Yankees fan, his heroes were Chris Chambliss and Graig Nettles. Baseball and soccer were his two loves but his passion was mathematics. Around that time he got an opportunity to learn computer programming and met the person who turned out to be a lifelong support and friend, Leslie P. Michelson.

Michelson was a teacher at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark.

The 14-year-old was given the task of finding a solution to an office technology problem — invent the electronic version of the paper-based interoffice mail system. What he came up with was a programme called "email". It had all the features we now take for granted in an email service.

On August 30, 1982, the US government awarded the first US Copyright for "Email", a "Computer Program for Electronic Mail System".

Several articles have been written over the years to rob him of the title of "inventor". The discovery of a December 1977 document, stating that "no attempt is being made to emulate



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the full-scale, inter-organisation mail system", silenced the critics for good. Prof. Noam Chomsky reflected: "The efforts to belittle the innovation of a 14-year-old child should lead to reflection on the larger story of how power is gained, maintained, and expanded."

Ayyadurai, vindicated and his honour restored, has moved on and so has email.

In 1993, he helped the Bill Clinton government identify topics that were top priority to the American public.

He feels that Indian politicians too can use the email to their advantage. "In an email people share what they are actually thinking and when you analyse, you can get the pulse of the constituency. Now some politicians are afraid of that because they have to act on that. Politicians want to say 'we didn't know'. I think Modi's party is doing a lot of data analytics and it should work," he said.

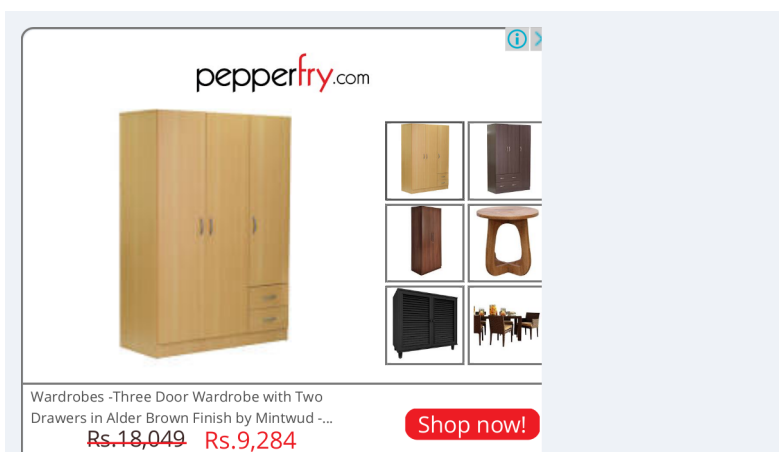
The MIT man met Narendra Modi on March 14 in New Delhi. "Around six months ago when he was launching his campaign, he said at a meeting that the inventor of email is an Indian. So a friend set up a meeting with him and we talked for 20-30 minutes."

Ayyadurai always keeps an eye open for young innovators. "I have founded an organisation called Innovation Corps. We want to identify six students in the 14-20 age group in the US and an equal number here. We want to show that we can take these 12 students through the process of taking ideas to the next stage where it becomes viable as a business."

He was planning to share his ideas at a seminar organised by the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science on Tuesday. But the meet got postponed and he now plans to visit the Indian Museum and Victoria Memorial to learn more about Indian history.

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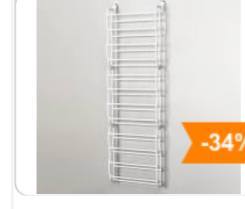
    



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