

## EDITORIAL: Science friction [Hindustan Times, New Delhi]

Nov. 5--Oh these talented, naive NRIs roaming about the motherland! Don't they know that when in Rome they should wear their togas tight? Indian-American scientist-entrepreneur Shiva Ayyadurai may be the best thing for Indian science and innovation since sliced idlis, but he decided to take on the Brahmins of the Indian science establishment. He had to pay the price.

Mr Ayyadurai was hired to work for the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) with the single task: of creating a new centre of excellence. His job was also to maximise the talent and research in India -- that he found to be world-class -- and make CSIR the next Bell Lab or CERN. Now, as all of us conversant with the quantum dynamics of Indian scientific excellence know, the way of building a world-class institution is to start with the premise that it's already a world-class institution with no blemishes at all -- you know, the 'We invented the zero so everything else is a cakewalk' principle. Mr Ayyadurai tapped the wrong button. In a chapter of a report he submitted to the CSIR top brass, he made the fatal error of pointing out 'challenges'. Now if he was a thoroughbred desi, our man from MIT would have realised that keeping the 'challenges' in the airy-fairy domain would have sufficed. But no. He had to go on record about "lack of professionalism" and how some CSIR scientists felt a "loss of faith in leadership". Hmm, Houston, we have a problem.

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In a hierarchy-obsessed culture like ours, Mr Ayyadurai's candid feedback amounted to making a lunch pack out of the hand that feeds you. Thus, a termination of his services ensued citing the NRI's demand for what serves as Mammon for all NRIs: more money. CSIR scientists supposedly crossed their fingers and hoped that Mr Ayyadurai's quantum leap in pay would create a domino effect in salary slips across the Indian scientific firmament. No such luck. In any case, Indian scientists don't need the money; they work to make their country proud. Right? Right.

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