

# The cool hot news: 70-yr-old builds 'ice cooler' at home

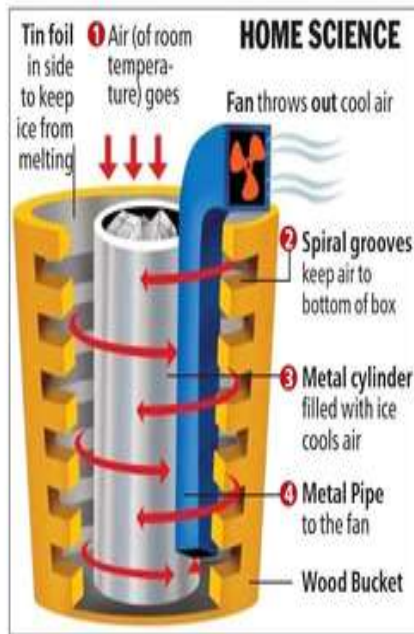
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IT WAS a hot summer day this June, the electricity had gone off at M B Lal's Saket home and, sweating profusely, the septuagenarian thought up his first 'invention': an ice-cooler.

"The electricity department said it would take four or five hours to restore power; I thought I was going to melt," says Lal. At 78, with large spectacles, and a frail frame, Lal doesn't look like the mad inventor that movies and cartoon would like us to believe. Yet, he has devised this way to keep his room cool, even when the rest of the city seethes under the post-summer heat and humidity. Tying with the idea since that June day, Lal invented his ice-cooled air-conditioner over the past fortnight.

"I can't take the Delhi heat any more," he says. "That day, I asked my



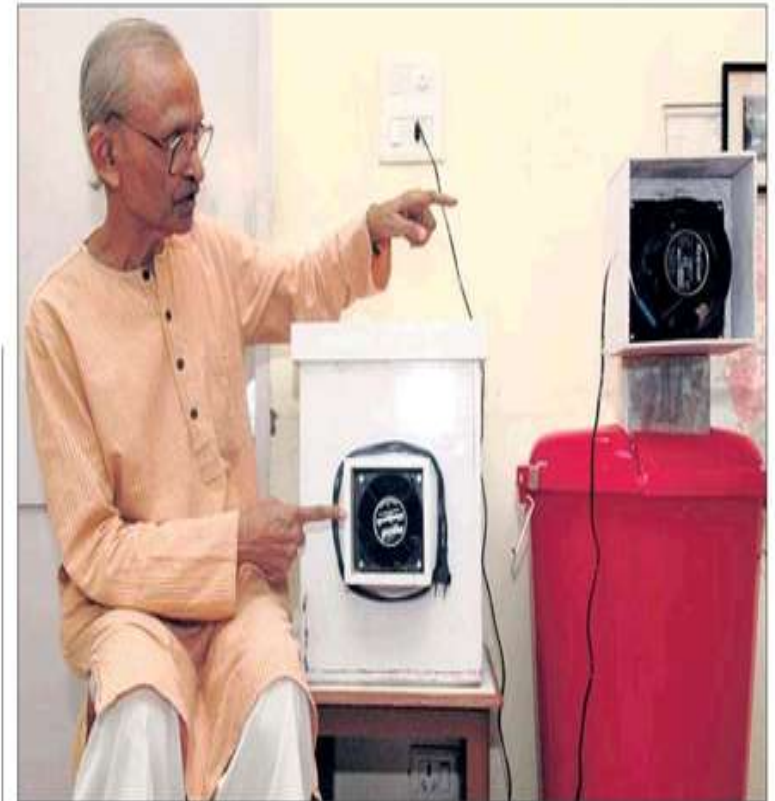
wife to bring me a tub of water but, instead, she brought all the ice from the fridge. And the entire room cooled down."

It was then, Lal says, that he decided to harness ice as a cooling agent. A retired journalist who worked with *The Statesman* in Delhi for 31 years, Lal has no experience in engineering or manufacturing,

yet he had to think of a way in which air could be optimally cooled without melting all the ice at once. "At that time I was thinking about desert coolers, so I decided to create a method by which air would be forced through ice and cool it down."

That's when the neighbourhood carpenter stepped in. "We took a wooden box and created spiral grooves in it," Lal says. "We later put metal foil on them and placed a metal box full of ice in it." With the help of a small but powerful fan, the air was forced to move around the cold metal box, in a spiral dictated by the grooves. "By the time the fan pushed out the air it was actually cold."

But his experimenting didn't stop there, for Lal wanted to make his contraption even more efficient. So, with further assistance from the carpenter, Lal was able to change the ice-cooler to fit it snugly into a large plastic drum. Today, it stands proudly in his



A retired journalist and a Gandhian, M B Lal does not want to patent his 'invention'. Photo by Vikram Sharma

room, blowing cold air with a reassuring hum.

"Everything I used was locally available. Even the fan, which is very powerful, uses less than half the energy of a 60-watt bulb." Put together, the ice cooler is able to quickly bring down temperature by around seven degrees centigrade, for Lal that difference is a lifesaver.

"Getting the ice is also not a problem. If you can't freeze it yourself, you

can buy it from vendors; there are plentiful of those everywhere."

Although 'snow breeze', as he has dubbed the ice-cooler, can chill a room for almost six hours on eight kilogrammes of ice, Lal says it can be used all over the country with minimal electricity. A Gandhian, Lal doesn't want to patent his 'snow breeze'. "Anyone can make one of these coolers, and only if they do will we know how to improve it."