

## A Biased, Bold, Brave & Beautiful World

***“Will our actions echo across the centuries? Will strangers hear our names long after we are gone, and wonder who we were, how bravely we fought, how fiercely we loved.” Sean Bean as Odysseus, Troy 2004***

In a world characterised by coexistence of contradictions, it is high time we pause, reflect and carefully decide what impression & legacy we would like to leave for the next generations. In the age of Machine Learning, Virtual Reality & Artificial Intelligence, pausing the brain shall restart and course-correct our ethical learning, actual reality and natural intelligence for the common & larger good.

We are living amidst *contradictions, challenges and conflicts that are complex, complicated and confusing*:

- Edelman confirms that [Trust](#) (in all four segments – business, government, NGO & media) is in crisis whereas IMF projects [global growth rate](#) @3.6% – highest since the Financial Crisis.
- Mohammad bin Salman is modernizing Saudi while Donald Trump is backing out of Paris Accord, NAFTA and TPP. Xi Jinping is establishing himself as statesman whereas his neighbour Kim Jong-un continues to threaten the world.
- If 2017 was a challenging year for Theresa May, 2018 is going to be more trying and tiring since there is little likelihood of an acceptable deal on Brexit till March 29, 2019.
- Artificial Intelligence & Augmented Reality have arrived with significant depletion of Natural Intelligence and ballooning illusion about Actual Reality.

Given that managing contradictions and navigating conflicts shall continue to occupy the top priority for the people who influence and shape our ecosystem, I believe following skills would be critical imperatives:

- Anticipating & acting on the future, **now**: identifying patterns where none exist and preparing to shape & leverage them.
- Being *Thoughtfully Bold, Flexibly Consistent & Eternally Optimistic*.
- Patience, Perseverance, Persistence & Pursuance are new Ps of Leadership (with apologies to Philip Kotler).
- Speed is not irrelevant yet, but it is velocity that matters now. In a data driven world, PPT must make way for XLS.

### **What I wish would/should not have happened in 2017:**

- **Immigrants Crisis:**  
It shames me as a human, claiming to live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when an entire tribe (Rohingya) is being wiped out from the earth and the Noble Laurette for peace – who happens to be from the same region – does not take a position that is morally correct and just. Immigrants might have helped May to retain Downing Street and Trump to occupy White House but how can we, as a society, be so selfish and afford to ignore the miseries of hundreds of thousands fellow human beings – irrespective of their cast, class, colour, costume, creed, cuisine or custom? How long can and why should we lose more people in Gibraltar & Gilgit-Baltistan than those killed by epidemics and terrorists combined?
- **Catalonia-Madrid Showdown:**  
It was difficult for me to imagine a democratically elected regime preventing people to vote. That crisis is fully blown is reflected from the just concluded election that is won, albeit narrowly, by Carles Puigdemont. As an outsider, I fully appreciate why Catalonians want to move away from Spain, particularly after the 2008 crisis wherein they believe to have contributed more than their fair share in bailing Madrid out of the mess and got less than their fair share in reaping benefits & privileges. Europe already has a chequered history and any instability in the region creates a fertile ground for non-social elements, extremists and terrorists that none of the players want.  
Europe is too important for the world, barely coming out of long recession. It is only logical that neighbours & leaders in the region are doing all they can, and beyond, to settle this within the ambit of Spanish Constitution & European Laws. I wish them nothing but all the very best.



- **The Silence Breakers: Weinstein Effect & #MeToo**

When [Time](#) chooses to name a title or a hashtag as Person of the Year, you can be sure it is a culmination of events that should not have happened in this case and have gone on for years, decades, perhaps centuries...

While I am happy that Silence was finally broken and continue to respect their professional competence, I have no sympathy for Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, Charlie Rose and their tribe – many more still unnamed & unidentified. I also salute Ashley Judd, Susan Fowler, Tarana Burke and their community that is spread across class, colour and geography.

Rose aptly summed up the societal attitude at [#HTLeadershipSummit](#) when she said, *“It breaks my heart that we have to teach girls how to walk safely to school instead of teaching boys not to rape.”*

How long & why should we tolerate this menace and what are we doing, if at all we are doing anything, to ensure this doesn't continue? To tweak George W Bush, *“Whether we bring our enemies(perpetrators) to justice, or bring justice to our enemies(perpetrators), justice will be done.”* and in this fight, *“Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists(perpetrators).”*

- **Crime Without Criminals**

When no person worth a mention was jailed for the 2008 Crisis, we took solace by terming it “Systematic Failure”, “Collective Greed” & “Unprecedented & therefore Unprepared”. Pity, in the process we have created a precedent and a world where there is a lot of crime but no criminals, and the phenomenon is truly global: from Mugabe to Kim Jong-un; from Talwar to Pandher/Koli; from WannaCry Ransomware to HBO Hack; from Freedom251 to 2G; from Trump to Putin.

While security agencies are in a continuous ‘catch-up mode’, ordinary vehicles have found popularity with terrorists with at least 12 documented vehicular terrorist attacks in 2017. With technology betting on driverless vehicles, machine learning and miniature drones, we have to be more vigilant, smart and responsible than ever to defeat their nefarious plans. We shamefully draw comfort in blaming the psychological disorders of mass shooters, tourist killers & slaughterers of innocent without bothering to assess & address what caused these disorders in the first place.

## Moving into 2018, what I would bet on.

- **Technology**

Technology has already influenced *how* we think, act & behave in our daily lives and has encompassed every dimension. Going forward this will continue with more ferocity, potency & consequences at higher speed and include *what* we do / should think & act upon. With Alexa, SIRI & Cortana getting more and more powerful & invasive, including creating their own ecosystem based on IoT, our behaviour shall be determined by Machine Learning, Deep Learning, Artificial Intelligence & Virtual Reality even if it means poor Human Learning, Distorted Learning, Retarded Actual Intelligence & Illusive Factual Reality.

Breakthroughs in Electromobility, Blockchain, Voice & Image Recognition and Natural Language Processing are actual and factual with voice typing, voice and image compression being applied in areas as sensitive as security and defence applications and as redundant as ambushed marketing. Bitcoin may be a bubble and cryptocurrency may have its own flaws & limitations (Transparency, Scalability) but Blockchain is here to stay & expand(BIoT).

With [Soul Machines](#) claiming to Humanize Computing through digital employees and [ignio](#) cognitively automating enterprise IT, the revolution is maturing fast and is ready to move into next orbit. The future appears fast & furious and continued revalidation, upgrading, learning & unlearning are no longer choices. When he advocated [Personal Renewal](#), John Gardner was ahead of his time with a vision that is a reality now.

- **Growth**

For a change, IMF Economists, Goldman Sachs Analysts, Indian Politicians & Korean Students have converged on one agreement – The World Economy has entered the longest Growth Phase in this century and is expected to stay on course. In spite of much criticism of Increasing Inequality & Jobless Growth, the world is healthier, more prosperous and more optimistic than ever in recent memory, even with occasional disruptions by cyber



criminals, terrorists and crazy politicians who continue to feel threatened and therefore threaten the world by their misguided beliefs and opinions.

Notwithstanding the challenges of Brexit to May or domestic compulsions of Merkel & Macron or Catalanian Crisis in Spain, European scene is getting economically brighter and America, rather entire world, & Trump are getting reconciled with each other, leading to a healthier, hopefully inclusive and diversified, growth. That inspite of initial hiccups of Demonetization / Remonetisation, Indian Government has rolled out Goods & Service Tax Regime and Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code is getting teeth & acceptability, inevitable FRDI and there is a law / bill against Instant Triple Talaq are the indications that government is getting comfortable in being thoughtfully bold and decisive. While one may, and should, debate on actual growth numbers, India, together with China, shall continue to be engines of growth. Few pleasant and welcome additions to this club are Russia that is experiencing sustained optimism inspite of relatively low oil prices, Saudi Arabia that is looking to expand beyond crude oil and Sub Saharan Countries like Liberia & Zimbabwe that are finally getting geopolitical stability. That MENA, North Korea & Afghanistan continue to create ripples with Israel hitting headlines on Jerusalem for [wrong reasons](#) only proves that we better be cautious, careful and not get complacent in our endeavour to nurture a sustainably better world for next generations.

- **Ethics**

If miseries of political & corporate leaders on ethical governance & [conscious capitalism last year](#) were not enough to mend their ways, 2017 had its own casualties ranging from McKinsey & KPMG in South Africa to Jeff Immelt & Travis Kalanick in United States. Memories may be shortening but people are neither forgetting nor forgiving and are becoming ruthless in holding people in responsible positions accountable. Ms. May might have extended her stay in Downing Street by compromising on core values; Mr. Mugabe was not that lucky.

First time in its glorious history, [Apple had to apologise](#) for unethical – camouflaged as unintentional & collateral – business practice of deliberately slowing down the performance of earlier models of iPhone. It was soothing to note that they are claiming to address customers' concerns, recognize their loyalty, regain their trust that means everything. Neither arrogance nor denial nor cooperation nor admittance on [#Dieselgate](#) could help Martin Winterkorn save his chair, nor make life easy for Matthias Mueller: the damage is real, expensive ([\\$30B & counting](#)) and [unending](#). Similar has been the case for John Stumpf at [Wells Fargo](#).

Closer home, with the implementation of [IBC](#) and inevitable introduction of [FRDI](#), business promoters and corporate captains would find it more difficult to flout the norms of prudent and responsible business practices and thankfully there are no sacred cows. While Saharashri is finding it difficult to buy his freedom, Vijay Mallya has to mortgage his to avoid the inevitable. Mr Raja & Ms Kanimozhi might breathe easy for now; Ruias and Chandra have not been lucky so far.

Going forward, I believe businesses that focus on "WHY" shall have more reasons to exist, sustain & thrive than the rest. Ethical business could & should be a competitive advantage best exploited NOW with little competition & crowd.

- **Basic Science**

Inspite of all advancements in technology & applications, many of them being really good, I believe future is in going back to the past and yesterday will reinvent tomorrow.

Investments in basic & fundamental sciences, from stem cell research in healthcare to graphene in material science, shall determine where we would land. I believe the cost of 2D material will borrow the curves from photovoltaic energy & microprocessor and its application will invade our privacy forever – be it through its application in AI or improving universal health or business analytics to decipher/anticipate upcoming trends in consumer behaviour. While the understanding of genome, connectome and microbiome is helping professionals redefine health & wellness, the horizon & application of 2D material is expanding into space research, solar storage & corrosion prevention – and this is just the beginning. With people having might like Mukesh Ambani & Richard Branson behind them, one could be sure of revolutionary breakthrough, be it in the area of agriculture (Data is not only new oil but new soil) or [how we move in future](#) (maglev). For Elon Musk's spaceshot or Jack Ma's blockchain projects to realize, basic scientists have a bigger role to play than engineers. With more prosperity shall come more demand for better products & services and increased focus on Life Sciences, Bio Technologies, Genome Research etc. and future looks brighter for physicists, chemists & mathematicians.

## And the challenges:

- **Inclusive Diversity**

In spite of renewed commitment and genuine awareness, we are still far from where we could and should be in terms of bridging inequality, inclusive growth & improved diversity in all spheres of life: from formal workforce to professional practitioners; from media moguls to politics; from sportspersons to NGOs. We are getting good acceleration but not absolute speed and spread to achieve SDGs & MDGs in a reasonable time in a responsible manner.

I believe the fundamental flaw lies in fundamentals. Unless we focus and deliver on the basic needs of underprivileged and underserved, we shall always be found wanting. It is in this context that I genuinely appreciate campaigns like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, *Jan Dhan Yojana* and *AADHAR* in India.

- **Start-Ups Sustainability**

I find it difficult to comprehend how & why a ride sharing company that doesn't make money buys a food service company that doesn't make money either.

With B2C now reversing the direction to C2B where Customer determine what Business should be engaged in, Start Ups should focus on addressing fundamental problems, the primary being making money for the stakeholders. In this context, the arrival of Venture Debtors replacing some load on and reducing some greed of Venture Capitalists is a welcome sign. Today, solid founders have options of raising long term fixed return debt like their established counterparts without diluting their equity for pittance and this is a welcome development.

For sustainability to sustain and system to improve, founders in education start-ups must send their own children to public schools whereas policymakers must use public healthcare facilities. I am convinced that data shall be humanised not because we want but because the disruptors must focus at the bottom of the pyramid, the seekers, the value creators for the superset, the champions, and those with an eye for detail, to succeed and sustain.

- **Nuclear / Cyber Threats**

The rise of inequality and democratization of data has led to some unfortunate & negative developments as well. North Korea, Haqqanni Network, ISIS, Boko Haram etc. would continue to surprise us, reaching to hitherto safer places and attacking soft targets. Unless we bring the youth into mainstream with decent opportunities, Hafiz Saeed & Abu Bakr will continue to attract and exploit them. While the biggest & most sophisticated security organizations are centralized with SOPs & Manuals, terrorists and rogues are cashing on the element of surprise leaving little trails. While the world was preparing to avoid another [Chibok](#), they started using simple [vehicles to inflict serious damage](#).

Similarly, the push for digitization in emerging world with less educated and lesser aware population combined with least prepared back up infrastructure & regulatory agencies has led to unprecedented growth in cyber-attacks. While WannaCry or NASA or GoI hacks get attention and addressed, for every reported attack there are thousands that go unreported & unattended. Pity, the most vulnerable at the bottom of pyramid are being hacked and they have little awareness or few avenues for redressal.

Cyber Security & Regulatory Compliance are going to be bigger, scarier and highly rewarding businesses in times ahead. With all simplification intended, [US Tax Reforms](#), [GST](#) etc are still nightmares for most of the experts and huge opportunities for [Big Four](#).

- **Global Weirding**

While carbon emissions are growing at smaller pace, the fact that it is still growing continues to attract priorities of policymakers across the globe because [evidence](#) is real and that warmer oceans cause stronger hurricanes is elementary physics.

The prices for solar panels & storage batteries have dropped to one-fifth of the levels witnessed few years ago – this implies that the world is investing and consuming more in renewables and this is a good sign. In spite of technological limitations on Lithium mining & logistics and lack of Hydrogen infrastructure, the direction is rightfully set, and every automobile company is heavily betting on future of green mobility. Fortunately, for every Trump backing out of Paris Accord, there is a Musk betting on Electric Vehicles.



That India has surpassed China as largest LNG importer does neither diminish former's resolve to build 75GW of Solar Energy nor latter's might in phasing out dependence on fossil power with [Jinan, Shandong opening world's first photovoltaic highway](#).

With Cryptocurrency gaining currency, inspite of Bitcoin [bubble & correction](#), and corresponding [energy demand](#) that is only going to [increase](#), [investing](#) in [Quantum Computing](#) is now getting more [lucrative and incentivised](#).

Popularity of [Electric](#) & [Driverless](#) Vehicles aiming for Zero Emission, ridesharing and programs like [ZED](#) reaffirms that investing in the segment is not only responsible & sustainable but also good economics for business.

How quickly the future arrives is less a matter of technological limitation and more of regulations and enabling infrastructure. I am sure both the issues would be resolved sooner than we might be prepared for.

In a world full of uncertainty of unprecedented frequency & potency, only one thing is certain – times ahead will be dramatically different than those gone by, and whether drama that unfolds is tragedy or comedy or romance would depend entirely on our collective conscience, wisdom, action and aspiration.

Let me close this rather long note with Alexander Graham Bell – *“Sometimes we stare so long at a door that is closing that we see too late the one that is open.”* As we bid farewell to 2017, let's welcome 2018 trusting our mind and soul. Let's be thankful for what we have and strive to achieve what we aim for – trying to be better, do better and serve better. I just cannot thank you & God enough in making me who I am. Special thanks to those who brought forward challenge & ridicule that enabled me to become a more humble, stronger and better person.

Stay happy & healthy. Challenge but don't be too hard or harsh to yourself. Do more good and continue spreading happiness. Enjoy the peace that you have earned.