

2014: With the Benefit of Hindsight

Another year, more reflections, some good, some other could and / or should better be avoided. Overall, I believe the world has become more uncertain, even if more prosperous; we are more scared even while pretending to be more confident. Be it as it may, much as we should, there is not much that we, with our little might, can really influence except managing the unavoidable and avoiding the unmanageable. While 2014 could genuinely be termed as year of paradox, here is my take on major events that shaped my thoughts.

On a good note as starting point, thanks to the medical advances, more children are seeing their 5th Birthdays than ever before, infant mortality rate is falling faster and across the globe and more people are getting AIDS treatment than those getting infected. Technologically, Indian MOM is being quoted across the world on how the passion and pride can bring excellence even on a shoe string budget. Both in Hollywood as well as Bollywood, more movies grossed more revenue than ever before and it should please whole lot of people directly or indirectly, legally or even illegally, fairly or unfairly related with the industry. Schumacher and his family, not to talk of his fans, are more hopeful today than they were last year at this time and closer home Dhoni did drop the bomb, and did so in his trademark style while increasing focus on things that matter, economically at least. Obama found liberation in defeat at home by engaging with Cuba politically and China economically, sustainability (renewable energy and immigration) being the icing on the cake, and this should be a good news for most of the world, except, perhaps Putin. At home, Modi achieved unachievable as well as unimaginable, and here both his supports as well as detractors were unanimous, for a change. With continued success across the country, Modi has become an icon to look up to for an average and apolitical Indian and if the events of last week are any indication, better, if not good, days are really round the corner.

Like every year, 2014 had its share of misfortunes and here are some of the events that must not have happened at all as these have shaken the conscience and faith of the people beyond immediate repair and have attracted shock and condemnation from one and all (here my definition of *all* includes human and not *every* men / women) irrespective of their political, social, moral, geographical, historical and personal beliefs. Not even in the war times, any single civil airport had to hold three press conferences for three different disasters in less than nine months and KL is definitely not amused to earn such a dubious distinction. While recovery of some bodies of passengers from ill-fated QZ8501 should bring little relief to their nears and dears, it has raised serious questions on air traffic control mechanism, particularly its emergency response. Without any doubt, passengers of MH17 & MH 370 have done absolutely nothing to deserve such a tragic end. If any, little positive of MH370 is revelation that Indian Ocean is terribly mapped inspite of our technological advancements. If this was not enough, massacre of innocent kids in Peshawar or mass abduction of girls in Chibok must unite the “civilized” world, more than ever, to fight against the menace of terrorism. Pity, we see lots of lip service but little action. “Since it has not hurt me individually as yet, I couldn’t care less” attitude is directly encouraging the rogues and our silence is our own contribution in their mushrooming in hitherto unknown territories, else how would one justify Indians joining IS (or ISIL or ISIL or whatever one calls it).

Putin’s adventure in annexing Crimea might have contributed him earning the title of “Most Powerful Person”, stains of blood (MH17) and Rubble Trouble (32 to 72) comes as part of the

package. Personally I am happy that "Occupy Central" did not turn out to be another "Tiananmen Square" on its 25th anniversary even if the result remained the same. Much as distinct the events might appear, I am sure Scottish Vote on independence from Britain (*307 years union!*) must have influenced the response of both China & HK SAR. If this has brought cheers to Cameron, even if expensive ones as he now has to fulfil his commitments made to Scots and may have to extend to Wales and Ireland as well, it brought some degree of disappointment to Catalans whose hopes of independence must be somewhat dashed, irrespective of difference between the economic might of UK and lack of it in Spain.

Facebook paying \$19 Billion for WhatsApp, GE acquiring part of ALSTOM for more than \$13 Billion, Halliburton buying Baker Hughes for \$35 Billion & AMEC taking over FW for \$4Billion did make me recount zeros in a billion, particularly in the uncertain world that we live in today & likely to live in foreseeable future. Closer home, Flipkart raised almost \$2 Billion while Mahindra become the largest automaker in country, outsmarting the Tata & Maruti (Sorry, Suzuki) & Hyundai.

US Economy growing 5% in last quarter must bring cheer to policymakers and statisticians there but they should know that it is jobless and consumption led growth riding on, once again, cheap credit and they need to do more to make it sustainable. Except the exporters, everybody in the emerging economies should be a worried lot with this number as more and more US and world money will now be ploughed back in US Manufacturing leaving shores of emerging markets. While there are many positive sides of this, the brightest is low price and reliable availability of energy in North America, thanks to Fracking at home and crude oil price free fall globally. To some extent, energy importing nations like Japan, Korea and India should be celebrating the party, KSA's unparalleled decision not to cut the OPEC production and maintain their market share, and that too reasonably profitably, would result in Nigeria, Russia, Venezuela, Iran etc. ending up as collateral damage. Similarly, not many in Texas, Alaska and North Dakota would be pleased to slow down, if not halt, further investment on expensive shale gas projects leading to job cuts and consumption slow down. At home, inspite of many positive sentiments and good political reasons, the power and banking sectors continue to be in mess. Inflation may be down, but so is growth and so is action on the ground. I understand that it is little to early still to actually see the measurable progress on large projects, the patience and hope of ordinary businessman are thinning fast. While low oil price should bring cheer to Indians, infrastructure development, smart connectivity and non-availability of reliable energy continue to plague the real push that is long overdue. There could and actually are multiple reasons for slow take off but I would blame technical, financial and moral bankruptcy of all stakeholders, consumers and government included, at the core of most of the roadblocks that we face today. As always, Sensex is reflecting the sentiments of small but powerful minority without resulting in any fundamental augmentation of economic or industrial strengths.

Some interesting, and positive developments on home political front as well. Modi becoming a phenomenon not only at home but in China, Japan & US as well, inviting SAARC leaders for oath taking & Obama for Republic Day augurs well for the country. While transmitting strong signals on national security (no white flag 17th time, to meet or not to meet Sharif at SAARC Summit, registering protest against state terrorism at various forums), he was among the first to console Nawaz and condemn TTP post Peshawar. His focus on "minimum government and maximum governance" and 5Ts & 3Ss are rays of hope for over a billion people.

Some Chutzpah (remember Haider... Bas ek sawaal uthata hai, sirf ek. Hum hai, ya ham nahi. Hum hai to kahan hain , aur nahi hain to kahan gaye ? Hum hain to kisliye aur kahan to kab? Janaaaaab... Hum thay bi, ya hum thay hi nahi? CHUTZPAH ho gaya hamare sath!) to end such a long note.

It happens only in India:

Most controversial man became PM, Most honest CM ran away, either from politics (AK) or from State (MP), Worst floods and best turn out in polls in J&K, Most popular CM goes to jail and state has business as usual (TN), KS remain anonymous even to his neighbours till he is rewarded by Noble Foundation, Vivek Murthy becoming Surgeon General in US while Doctor / Patient ratio as well as Indian Ranking in HDI remain pathetic even while launching successful MOM at shoe string budget.

Year of political satire: One Life is Not Enough, Not Just An Accountant, Accidental Prime Minister, Crusader or Conspirator? Coalgate and Other Truths, 2014: The Election That Changed India 2014

Tony Blair remained controversial for all wrong reasons.

Tom Friedman declaring *average, local, later* and *privacy* as *obsolete* words.

Hope Modi will be more forthcoming on taming the colleagues who are too eager for "*Rastra ke naam sandesh*", not me but *Arun Jaitley's* description.

State Elections once again proving that Modi does not need BJP as much as other way round.

While BJP does not matter for Modi, Rahul does not matter in Congress, nor does Congress matter to India.

RSS influence on Government, why not? We are from RSS, not me but *Rajnath Singh*.

No F1, Indian cricket losing its cricketing as well as moral shine fast, irrespective of Rohit slamming 264 and Kohli scoring three successive tons overseas.

So here comes 2014 to THE END. My prayers with victims of terror and passengers of QZ8501, heart with under privileged braving extreme cold in North India and the very best wishes to you all who have endured this looonng note. Stay blessed; be happy and proud of what you have achieved and how much you have positively influenced many like me. I am indebted in all humility and *by the power vested in me; I now pronounce* the very best for each and every one of you for 2015 and beyond.