Introduction of Mr. N. Chandrasekaran, Chairman, Tata Sons, by Mr. Bharat Doshi on the occasion of the Twenty-sixth Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture on 4th August 2020

Good evening friends,

I should also say good morning friends and good afternoon friends, as today, for this virtual lecture, we have audience from Australia in the east to U.S. in the west. We also have some of the past speakers with us. Mr. Julio Rebeiro, Mr. Deepak Parekh, Dr. Rakesh Mohan, Mr. Damodaran, Mr. Vijay Nambiar, Mr. U.K. Sinha have honoured us by their presence today. This live webcast today has given us an opportunity to remember Lalit on 4th August, his birthday.

It is my privilege and honour this evening to introduce Mr. N. Chandrasekaran, Chairman, Tata Sons on the occasion of the 26th Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture. One more star will join this evening in the galaxy of speakers who have delivered the past lectures in the Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture series.

I have known Mr. Chandrasekaran for many years and during the period 2016 to 2020, I was a colleague of his on the Central Board of the Reserve Bank of India. Interaction during this period brought us closer as friends (luckily there was no social distancing at that time). During those four years I had a close view of his leadership qualities, his ability to convince others, his unassuming nature and above all, I was struck by his humility.

Chandra, therefore, with your permission I will take the liberty to switch between Mr. N. Chandrasekaran and just Chandra as appropriate.

On the side-lines of one of these RBI board meetings, early this year, I requested Chandra to deliver the 26th Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture this year and he very readily and graciously agreed.

You all have the brief CV of Chandra as a part of the invitation card. It is my normal practice therefore to narrate the lesser known personal aspects about the speaker based on net search and my personal interaction.

Chandra was born in an agricultural family in the village of Mohanur in Namakkal district of Tamil Nadu.

As a child, Chandra and his brothers would walk 3 km every day to their Tamil-medium government school. For his senior secondary exams, he switched to an English-medium school.

After earning a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in Applied Sciences from the Coimbatore Institute of Technology, Chandra returned home and contemplated taking up agriculture as a profession.

After four or five months he realised that he was not cut out for agriculture and considered becoming a chartered accountant. Unfortunately, by then, he had missed the CA admissions for the academic year and therefore he decided to apply for a Master's in Computer Applications from the Regional Engineering College of Trichy in 1986. Little did he suspect that this decision would go on to change his life. In the final year of his Master's programme, he took up a project with Tata Consulting Services (TCS), and never looked back—starting off as a software programmer and rising to the helm of the company where he learnt the ropes of the IT business.

It was here that Chandra was groomed under the watchful eyes of his mentor, Mr. S. Ramadorai (the then-CEO of TCS). With his mentor's guidance and his innate business acumen, Chandra's journey in TCS was on the fast track.

In September 2007, he was co-opted on the TCS board and named the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the company and soon thereafter in October 2009, he succeeded Mr. Ramadorai as CEO and Managing Director of TCS at the age of 46, becoming one of the youngest CEOs in the Tata group.

He joined the board of Tata Sons in October 2016 and was appointed Chairman in January 2017 and for Chandra the track now was not for a sprint, but it was for a marathon. Many of you may be aware that Chandra enjoys participating in marathons. He has run 12 full marathons and more than 20 half marathons as running is his passion. Often, he has mentioned how running has made him calmer, more observant and taught him to persevere.

Interestingly the marathon runner Chandra is also a cricket fan and often uses cricketing terms and metaphors while setting targets for the teams working with him.

He learnt about team building and customer management without attending any management school and achieved that entirely through his work that took him to different places for different projects.

An affable, unassuming and approachable leader, he has a phenomenal capacity for remembering people and their names. With this personal touch he remains connected with employees. His mentor, Mr. Ramadorai once said that "the ability to build world-class teams and value systems" was Chandrasekaran's biggest strength.

To complete my introduction, I asked Chandra about the several awards he has won and requested him to name one or two which he would like to be mentioned. Humble as he is, he said "Bharat, each of these awards has its own context and all awards are equal and they signify recognition". He, very gently, declined to give a ranking in his long list of awards. Friends, this is Chandra.

In 2019, Chandra co-authored a book, with Ms. Roopa Purushothaman, chief economist and head of policy advocacy, Tata Sons, titled "BRIDGITAL NATION" – Solving Technology's People Problem. The book addresses the aspect of transformation to a digital world in meeting India's challenges, with several anecdotal references.

Chandra, a few months after your book was published came the pandemic which no one could have visualised. By choosing the topic "India's opportunities in the Decade of 2020s", you have chosen the period beginning with crisis of the pandemic and you are looking ahead at the next decade. In a way, what you visualised in your book "Bridgital Nation" will now get accelerated if we can get our act right.

I am tempted here to share one of the excellent quotes about Chandra which is from his eldest brother N Srinivasan, "He will invest commitment and time to achieve anything that he sets out to do." Today Chandra has set out to deliver the 26th Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture and we know that with his commitment the best is ahead of us this evening.

Chandra, we now look forward to your lecture on "India's Opportunities in the Decade of 2020s".

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