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AI-Powered Future-Ready Governance: A Journey

What does Future-Ready Governance (FRG) mean in the context of the technological storms sweeping the world today, providing the means to deal with humanity's grand challenges, as also creating the specter of existential and other threats Artificial Intelligence (AI) may pose? Some people think of FRG in terms of application of technologies like AI to solve current problems, and providing quality services to the citizens. Others tend to build further on the traditional paradigms/ concepts of rule of law, equity, ethics, inclusiveness, efficiency, transparency etc. This thought paper attempts to add the additional critical elements of visualizing/ anticipating the future, proactively dealing with technology-driven disruptions, and having inbuilt institutionalized systems, structures and processes for tapping the power of emerging exponential technologies, to ensure quality services and security. It views FRG as an evolving process, with clear direction determined by the people's aspirations, powered by technology, which is dynamically agile to deal with this fast-paced 'Era of Disruption', and respond effectively to emerging challenges and opportunities. The author shares part of his journey towards FRG, feels that the time has come to think of new paradigms for governance, and suggests adoption of the mantra "Reimagine, Redesign, Recreate", to explore/ experiment-with new ideas, including through pilot projects.

Introduction

Yuval Noah Harari, the famous historian, author and futurist, sees history of the universe as comprising basically two stops: first, 4 billion years ago when organic life (amoeba) emerged on earth, second now with beginning of the inorganic evolution. He talks of the tension between the organic entities (like humans) and the

inorganic digital systems (like AI, computers) which are shaping the world, and says we will have to adapt to them. He says that people like Bill Gates, Sam Altman are afraid of what they are doing; and views ChatGPT etc. as the mere amoeba of AI evolution, wondering what the dinosaurs of AI will look like. (Interview by Andrew Ross Sorkin on 1st November, 2024).

We are living in an exciting, challenging “Era of Disruption”, with technology as a key driver, and opportunities galore. The ever-accelerating pace of change is fast exceeding the limits of change humans and organizations can absorb, multiplying Alvin Toffler’s “Future Shock”. Governments will be required to deal with disruption of the existing institutional structures in industry, academia, healthcare, work/ jobs etc., and design new ones. The world/ society @2035 will be incredibly different from today. This **Thought Paper** seeks to present elements for visualization of the future, with a possible approach to governance for/ in future, and is meant to be a catalyst for beginning wide-spread deliberations/ discussions on multiple possible/ plausible futures.

Yuval Noah Harari ... sees history of the universe as comprising basically two stops: first, 4 billion years ago when organic life (amoeba) emerged on earth, second now with beginning of the inorganic evolution.... calls ChatGPT the ‘amoeba’ of AI evolution, wondering what the dinosaurs of AI will look like.

The Future: World@2035

Eminent futurists and scientists world over recognize exponential technologies as one of the major forces shaping the future. Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), equal to human intelligence is round the corner, and immeasurably more powerful Artificial Super-intelligence (ASI) will follow sometime in 2030s. Ray Kurzweil, Google’s AI Visionary, talks of reaching the Singularity, leading to radical changes in medicine, longevity, and human capability—possibly enabling humans to merge with AI through brain-computer interfaces. Dr. Michio Kaku, another leading futurist, foresees breakthroughs in quantum computing, teleportation, nanotechnology, and brain augmentation, enabling us to cure diseases, upload consciousness,

and expand human lifespan dramatically. Both believe the future holds immense promise, but also unprecedented risks, and urge the society to ensure that these advancements are developed ethically and inclusively.

Let's try to visualize World@2035, a world in transition—deeply reshaped by technology, yet grappling with its human consequences. Artificial Intelligence, biotech, and automation have transformed how we live and work. Many routine jobs are gone, replaced by AI agents and autonomous systems, forcing societies to rethink education, employment, and meaning. Healthcare is personalized and predictive, cities are smarter, and daily life is powered by intelligent systems. Yet this progress comes at a cost—surveillance is widespread, privacy is fragile, and millions face job insecurity or struggle to adapt to new skill demands. At the same time, people increasingly live in virtual worlds, often isolated, seeking connection in digital spaces while real-world communities fray. Mental health issues and loneliness are rising, even as lifespans increase. Climate change is a visible, urgent crisis—bringing more extreme weather, displacement, and resource conflicts. Social and economic divides persist, with access to technology and opportunity uneven across the globe. And yet, within this complexity, new forms of resilience emerge: local movements, renewed interest in purpose and wellbeing, and growing calls for ethical governance of powerful technologies.

World@2035 is not a utopia or dystopia, but a fragile balancing point—between abundance and exclusion, innovation and disruption, control and freedom. It is a world where the next chapter of human history will be shaped not just by what technology can do, but by our values, choices and the action we take now.

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Strategic Foresight: A Virtual Time Machine

Any attempt to put Future-Ready Governance structures/ systems

in place, has to obviously start with having a sense of the future. It would be best to use future research methods for anticipating the likely developments. Strategic Foresight is one such tool, and helps capture the likely scenarios with high degree of probability. In today's context of ever accelerating pace of technology-driven disruption, many of the future situations can be visualized in advance and suitable adaptive strategies formulated. Strategic Foresight can be thought of as a virtual AI/ Big Data based time machine, which equips us to visualize the multiple possible, plausible, probable futures, decide our own desired future, and design backward to create it. It is the survival kit for governments in an AI-dominated future.

“Strategic Foresight is a virtual AI-powered time machine that enables governments to design backward from the future they desire.”

Exponential Technologies

Exponential technologies—those that double in power or capabilities every 12 to 24 months while often dropping in cost—are thus transforming societies by tackling grand challenges and enabling governments to accelerate growth and prosperity. However, they could also lead to dystopian scenarios. Dario Amodei assessed chances of extinction of homo sapiens by AI as 10-25%. In words of Sam Altman “The bad case.... is.... lights out for all of us”. Elon Musk says “AI doesn't have to be evil to destroy humanity. If AI has a goal, and humanity just happens to be in the way, it will destroy humanity as a matter of course, without even thinking. No hard feelings”. The need for effective regulation, as also development of ethical and responsible AI, is self-evident.

“AI doesn't have to be evil to destroy humanity... If humanity is in the way, AI will destroy us without even thinking—no hard feelings.” – Elon Musk.

AI, Metaverse, Biotechnology

Let's look a little more at three of the critical exponential technologies, namely AI, Metaverse and Biotechnology and their likely impact on the world, life and governance, before looking for a possible FRG Framework:

- i) **AI:** At the global level, AI will transform economies, disrupt jobs, power global competition, and accelerate innovation. In our lives, apart from being a personal assistant, it will help in health diagnostics, smart homes, and decision support in daily life. In governance, it will enable data-driven policymaking, predictive services, and AI-powered public service delivery. It is evident that AI will have to be deeply woven into the fabric of future-ready governance, even as we contain and control its potential to harm humanity and governance.
- ii) **Metaverse:** It is a technology which is creating new virtual worlds in which we can live as an avatar of our choice, transact business which can even be linked to physical world, be educated and entertained, and take up a large number of other human activities. Its convergence with AI and quantum computing can be a source of huge data and immense power. It will create a parallel digital economy with new industries, markets, and global interactions, provide opportunities for immersive socializing, learning, working, and entertainment in virtual environments. It may give rise to significant governance challenges, including those relating to legal systems, identity management, digital rights, digital currencies, and cross-border regulations.
- iii) **Biotechnology:** Biotechnology is giving increasing power to manage disease/ decay and modify our bodies in a variety of ways, including through gene-editing and 3 D printing of organs. MIT Professor Cordeiro and Cambridge Professor Wood claim in their book “The Death of Death”, that death will be optional by 2045. Biotechnology will redefine healthcare and agriculture, with gene editing and bio-manufacturing. It will provide huge opportunities for governments to improve lives of the citizens, but also raise ethical, safety, and regulatory challenges in genetics, privacy, and equity.

The Metaverse will create a parallel digital economy and immersive environments for learning, working, and socializing—raising complex governance challenges.

Future-Ready Governance: Are We Ready?

Governance is facing unprecedented challenges, with the world and societies changing exponentially. Future-Ready Governance must, therefore, go beyond solving today's problems—it must visualize the future, anticipate disruptions, and institutionalize mechanisms to harness the power of exponential technologies. Also, circumstances and aspirations being different in different places and times, there cannot be a single one-size-fits-all model. Given the kind of legacy and environmental uncertainties governments face today, it is advisable to experiment through a series of pilot projects, and develop a bouquet of FRG options. This will give adequate choice to everyone for adopting, modifying and developing them, without being constrained by any half-baked model. Let better insights, even a few models, evolve over a period of time. Then only will we be ready to truly usher in Future-Ready Governance.

“Transitioning to Future-Ready Governance requires a futurist mindset—unhindered by past paradigms, anchored in learning and experimentation.”

Transitioning to Future-Ready Governance requires a Futurist Mindset—unhindered by past paradigms and deeply anchored in learning and experimentation. A key lesson from Strategic Foresight, that projecting past into future is a sure recipe to failure, has to be internalized. As observed by Eric Hoffer “In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists”. Initial steps towards FRG may, therefore, be pilot projects designed as a quest to learn, as experiments of a civilization preparing for an AI-shaped tomorrow, to create new pathways.

“In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.” – Eric Hoffer

Dhruv Tara (North Star)

This quest must start with a North Star that leads to highly motivated alignment of personal and organizational goals, by individual dreams of people within an organization/ society coalescing

into a shared collective dream for the organization/ society. In his book “Ignited Minds - Unleashing the Power within India”, former President Hon’ble APJ Abdul Kalam says “I always tell the young to dream. Dreams transform into thoughts. Thoughts result in actions. If there are no dreams, there are no revolutionary thoughts; if there are no thoughts, no actions will emanate. This comes from the understanding that each one of us has within ourselves, the ability to create the circumstances for success – to attract, so to say, to ourselves what we desire”.

IC Centre for Governance has launched an initiative called “Making Dreams Come True”, to guide the journey for turning dreams into reality, with this as North Star. It combines latest developments in Future Literacy/ Foresight, AI/ exponential technologies and organizational innovations, with the traditional Indian value system and ethics (termed “inner governance “), to provide a “Future-Builder’s Kit to Dream Achievers”. Partnerships are being forged with like-minded people and organizations to develop, replicate and scale this initiative.

Principles of Future-Ready Governance

Future-Ready Governance (FRG) Framework may be developed around the principles of being “Future-Driven, Technology-Powered, Human-Centric, Sustainability-Conscious”:

i) Future-Driven (Proactive, Anticipatory, and Adaptable)

Visualize future scenarios and emerging challenges/ opportunities. Set up future-sensitive, agile, rapid response systems.

ii) Technology-Powered (AI-Driven, Data-Centric, Decentralized)

Harness the power of technology for quantum jump in institutional and process efficiency. For example, AI systems/ agents support policy formulation, implementation and public services; Blockchain based systems help transparent, decentralized functioning and tamper-proof records etc.

iii) Human-Centric (Inclusive, Ethical, People-First)

Governance to be human-centric for people, as also internally for governmental functionaries. People-first mindset, supported by technology-assisted policies/ programs, will help ensure ease of access and fair play, across all socioeconomic groups.

iv) Sustainability-Conscious (Resilient, Green, Long-Term)

Environmental, social, and economic sustainability to be at the core of all decision-making. Real-time monitoring of natural resources, pollution, and climate risks, will help ensure that development today does not compromise needs of future generations.

Managing Change/ Transformation: Reimagine, Redesign, Recreate

The FRG initiative will need to be led by people with a futuristic and moonshot mindset, knowledge of exponential technologies, and excellent inter-personal skills. They would need to understand the anatomy of disruption, and Reimagine every institution and sector. The existing institutions and systems will then need to be Redesigned to cater to the future Reimagined scenarios, followed by effective strategies and pragmatic action plans to Recreate them. A series of skilfully designed pilot projects, within this framework, will help develop prototypes and Proof of Concept (PoCs), which may be replicated and scaled to evolve a holistic, flexible strategic architecture. The change strategy would need to specifically address challenges arising from sabotage by vested interests and resistance due to insecurity/ ignorance, as also AI introduction related issues like bias in data labelling/ training as also manipulation, algorithms generating fake content, and legal issues about responsibility and liability.

The mantra for transformation: Reimagine. Redesign. Recreate..... Governance of the future needs to be Future-Driven, Technology-Powered, Human-Centric, and Sustainability-Conscious.

Exponential SDGs: Quality, Speed, Savings

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiative, for the period 2016-2030, is now fully embedded in governance systems, and has been implemented in many places

with whole-of-the-government approach. A quantum upgrade into what may be termed Exponential SDGs, by tapping the power of technology, can be a good beginning for the FRG initiative. This will significantly improve the quality and speed of SDGs implementation, at lower costs, through high-tech integration, reinventing internal systems and processes, and empowering/ enabling functionaries to deliver more with less effort, also leading to higher motivation and job-satisfaction.

Good Governance Dimension of FRG

Good governance, with emphasis on efficient institutional processes and ongoing application of exponential technologies, has to be the beginning of any initiative to usher in Future-Ready Governance. A series of AI-Assisted/ Powered Governance initiatives could be taken up, e.g. i) introduce AI-powered systems to help automate and verify various citizen-centric services for issuing caste/ income/ birth/ age/ academic credentials certificates immediately, ii) set up systems to control corruption, eg by analyzing patterns of wilful delays, deviations from rules, and procedural inconsistencies, and checking human bias, and iii) fast-track grievance redressal through integrated, blockchain based records and automated follow up systems.

Experience Sharing: Path To Future-Ready Governance

Collective dreams will require collective experience-sharing and thinking-together. This Paper invites thoughts and partnerships for the path-finding journey. The author's experiences over the last decade, are being touched upon in this context, as they have helped shape the evolution of ideas in this Paper:

- i) **World's First SDG Model:** The author developed in end 2015, the first Vision and Strategic Architecture in the world for SDG implementation, using futurism, technology, organizational development, and whole-of-the-government approach. This was adopted by Government of Assam, appreciated by the UN Secretary General himself, and drawn upon by NITI Aayog,

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other States for their own SDG policy/ strategy development.

- ii) **Formal Documents for Government of India (GoI):** The author developed a Strategy Paper on the National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) in 2018, at the behest of the then Cabinet Secretary, PK Sinha. This was followed by another document in July, 2019, again at the suggestion of Cabinet Secretary Sinha, titled “Futurism/ Foresight & Disruptive Technologies for Future-Ready Governance”.
- iii) **FRG model for Govt of Jammu & Kashmir:** In June, 2023, the author was invited by Sri Manoj Sinha, Lt Governor, Jammu & Kashmir to advise his Government for becoming Future-Ready. Four months of intensive work (pro bono), in close consultation at all levels, led to an FRG Model for J&K with the following key recommendations being approved by the Lt. Governor in October, 2023:
 - a) *Reimagine, Redesign, Recreate* Government by making it Future-Driven, Technology-Powered, Human-Centric, and Sustainability Conscious. Take up selected FRG Pilot Projects.
 - b) Set up a “*Centre for New Age Governance*”, for research, expertise and capacity building on Foresight and exponential technologies.
 - c) Adopt Kurt Lewis’s Change Management Model with “unfreeze, change, refreeze” as a three-stage process for effective management of change/ transformation.
- iv) **Web-Series 2025:** Author’s web-series titled “AI & Beyond: Humanity At Crossroads” for awareness-building about the potential and dangers of AI, helped underline the enormity of challenges in communicating on future, and mobilizing support for initiatives to shape the future.

“Future-Ready Governance must go beyond solving today’s problems—it must visualize the future, anticipate disruptions, and institutionalize mechanisms to harness exponential technologies.”

Next Steps on Future-Ready Governance Journey

The journey may begin with a series of pilot projects for experiential learning, hypothesis testing and proof-of-concept, using the principles and strategies for Future-Ready Governance suggested earlier. The outcomes can then be the building blocks for developing different FRG models. Following projects may be considered:

- i) **AI-Powered Viksit Bharat:** With Artificial General Intelligence expected to be available within this decade, and Artificial Super-Intelligence in the next, an AI boosted/ accelerated Viksit Bharat@2035 could be conceived and developed as a fast-tracked first phase step towards Viksit Bharat@2047. Strategic Foresight, and reimagined organizational structures and processes with embedded AI, may provide the foundation. A few Ministries and State Governments may take this up first on a pilot basis.
- ii) **Data-Driven Nation:** Reposition the current data-initiatives strategically as part of a “Data-Driven Nation” Mission, having people at the heart of governance, with data serving as the circulatory system, and artificial intelligence as the brain to support citizen-centric policy formulation and implementation. Further, in the AI era, data is not just an economic asset — it's a weapon of sovereignty, a lever of geopolitical power, and the new currency of governance. Those who command data will shape nations and lead civilizations. As Harari says, those who control the data, will control the future, humanity and life itself.
- iii) **Exponential SDGs:** GoI and State Governments may select a few SDGs as per their priorities, and revamp their implementation mechanisms for technology -powered, exponential SDGs. AI isn't just a tool — it's the force that will converge with other technologies, to redefine healthcare, education, administration and human well-being in the next decade.
- iv) **Reimagining District Administration:** District Administration occupies a pivotal position in India's governmental architecture. Districts, including Aspirational Districts, may be selected across States, for being reengineered as AI-Powered Districts, by further developing the concept initiated during Jammu & Kashmir FRG experiment.

AI will have to be deeply woven into the fabric of governance—even as we contain and control its potential to harm... AI isn't just a tool—it's the force that will converge with other technologies to redefine healthcare, education, administration and well-being.

v) **Virtual Universities, Transformed Schools:** The purpose, processes, pedagogy of the present education system have to be imagined afresh, redesigned and recreated, for the AI world of future. The new paradigms may include operationalizing the concept of AI-Powered students, teachers and institutions, setting up of virtual universities with AI-driven metaverse platforms, etc. Action for this is already in hand world over, including by some educational institutions/ experts with whom the author is working. Real impact would, however, happen only if governments encourage/ facilitate pilot projects, to be replicated and scaled later.

vi) **Paradigm Shift in Healthcare:** Power of AI can help us shift the present “sick-care of patients” paradigm to genuine healthcare. A major part of the new “personalized, preventive, predictive care” can be at home, supported by nearby healthcare/ diagnostic centres, with hospitals largely meant for “critical care”. New ideas for reimagining healthcare with AI-Powered patients, doctors, hospitals, diagnostics, medical education, research and pharmaceuticals, may be explored for initiating the pilot project.

vii) **Indian Institute of Foresight & New Age Technology (IIFNAT):** The initiatives mentioned above would require world class knowledge/ expertise in the areas of Foresight/ Futures-Thinking and New Age Science/ Technologies. Leading edge research and knowledge management, as also large-scale awareness and capacity building, would also be absolutely essential to respond to the challenges and opportunities offered by technology. Providing top-grade institutional support systems is essential. Creating an institution, which may be called the “Indian Institute of Foresight & New Age Technology (IIFNAT)”, may be considered.

Data is not just an economic asset—it is a weapon of sovereignty and the new currency of governance.... those who command data will shape nations and lead civilizations.

Conclusion

Above ideas need to be discussed and deliberated on by policymakers, thinkers, influencers and people across all sections of the society, to arrive at a shared understanding of the current technology-triggered era-of-disruption, and multiple possible/ plausible futures. A menu of options may then be developed for transforming today's governance to make it future-ready. The right AI Policy, Regulation and Development will obviously be of extreme importance, because AI will inevitably be interwoven into the very fabric of governance for/in the future, and there also seems to be a need to reimagine and redesign the regulators of the future.

This Paper touches on some of the AI related issues briefly, but a separate Paper would be required to deal with them holistically. The AI Paper would not only look at the current concerns about data privacy, identify thefts, deep fakes, cyber crimes, behavioural changes in users etc., but also on the danger of increasing reliance on AI in making decisions/ choices at the cost of individual /human intelligence, innovation and initiative, impact on social discourse/ norms and society (including the apprehension that individuals may start preferring virtual interactions to in-person meetings, and families may be replaced by corporate herds), possibility of AI becoming sentient, etc. It will also need to analyse the stage at which AI is today in Gartner Hype Cycle. For instance, recent papers on General Artificial Intelligence (GAI: ChatGPT etc.) have started talking of limitations of complexity that current GAI models can handle, instances of their lying, deceiving, blackmailing etc., as also refusal to obey commands to shut down; demonstrating some typically human characteristics, including the instinct for self-preservation. Some analysts feel that with AI having moved beyond the "Innovation Trigger" stage on Gartner Hype Cycle, different AI models/ usages are at different stages today; for example i) GAI is at the stage of "Peak of Inflated Expectations" moving towards the "Trough of Disillusionment", while ii) AI in healthcare is between "Slope of Enlightenment" and "Plateau of Productivity", etc.

Governance is a highly complex system/ subject, with multiple dimensions and responsibilities, like an over-arching political

system, external/ geopolitical environment, immigration, internal security, vested interests, religious beliefs, uncontrolled urbanization, pollution, poverty, inequality etc. The scope of this Thought Paper is limited only to articulate some ideas on Future-Ready Governance, looked at with the lens of Foresight and exponential technologies, to support possible quests towards FRG in any part of Bharat. The journey will need to be led by government, through a collage of initiatives and pilot projects, within a Mission Mode Public-Private-Partnership Architecture. Every institution and citizen has to play an active role for this to work, hopefully coalescing into a “Community for Future-Ready Governance”.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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He was Foreign Secretary from 2015-18, Ambassador to the United States, China and Czech Republic (2000-2004). He was High Commissioner to Singapore. He is a graduate of St. Stephen's College and has a Master's in political science and an M. Phil and Ph.D in International Relations from JNU-Delhi. He is a recipient of the Padma Shri award in 2019 and has written widely acclaimed best-selling books: *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*, which was published in 2020 and *Why Bharat Matters*, which was published in 2024.
