



Thailand Can Be Smart-City Flagship For China's Belt And Road

Asian cities and nations are racing toward Technocracy, following in China's vision to establish a digital silk road. China's President Xi Jinping says that a city which is not green is not smart. China is already home to 277 smart cities. □ TN Editor

At a recent Asean and China mayoral conference held in Nanning, Guangxi province, one of us (LHM) presented the concept of smart cities and its importance for Asean.

It generated much interest from the audience, among which was former Thai deputy prime minister Korn Dabbaransi. Korn noted the significance of smart-city thinking for Thailand's burgeoning urban areas, such as Chiang Mai.

The UN projects that by 2050, the world's urban population will reach an astounding 5.3 billion, or 70 per cent of the global population.

It is now obvious that making cities “smart” and eco-friendly is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

A smart city is one that integrates the Internet and communication technology with the Internet of Things (IoT).

The result is what we term the “omnipresent economy”.

President Xi Jinping laid out China’s vision for smart cities at the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) Forum for International Cooperation on May 14-15: “We should advance the development of big data, cloud computing and smart cities to transform them into a 21st-century digital silk road. It is also fundamental for humanity that the development must incorporate ‘green’ development, which includes ... low-carbon, circular and sustainable ways and means.”

What Xi is saying is very clear: A city which is not green is not smart.

The smart-cities concept emerged with the rapid development of the “information trinity” - network, computer and data storage - two decades ago.

E-government and e-society quickly became hot topics, spurred by early initiatives like the “EZ-pass” for vehicles on superhighways in the United States.

Now, the boom in IoT, telecom, wireless networks and cloud computing has placed smart government, lifestyles and industry at the centre stage of urban development.

Mega-cities such as New York, London, Tokyo and Paris already boast blueprints for smart development.

Yet nowhere is this trend more evident than in China, which is home to 277 smart cities with three more in the works. Under the BRI, China and its companies can now join with cities abroad as equal partners to also render them “smart”.

This effort can be boosted by Chinese tech giants like Alibaba and Tencent, but also by lesser-known innovators such as the Beijing-based

“Carsmart”. This company provides high-tech services ranging from public safety to “smart” systems for parking, sanitation, logistics, usage-based insurance, and transportation.

Deep understanding of local lifestyles and needs has enabled Carsmart to spread from Chinese cities to aid development of smart cities in Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Britain.

These cities all have certain features in common.

The first is public safety, underpinned by the idea that only under smart governance can safe and smart cities exist.

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