

A smart partner

Singapore can partner India in the development of smart cities

The BJP-led government has clearly indicated its emphasis on creating 100 smart cities in the country. These would be like satellite townships next to metros, with many along the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), which is expected to run over 1,000 km between these two cities and garner over \$90 billion of overseas investments for developing manufacturing zones, business parks and smart cities along a dedicated rail freight corridor.

India is expected to see substantial urbanisation on a scale similar to China, where the urbanised population crossed 50 per cent last year and is projected to exceed 75 per cent over the next five years. Statistically, across the globe, more people live in cities than rural areas.

In India, urban residents account for one-third of the population, but this trend will accelerate as the economy grows and the need for skilled labour expands. Simultaneously there is a greater need to improve agricultural productivity by reducing manpower in this sector, and transferring surplus labour to industry, which has higher productivity. This, in turn would help the economy grow at a quicker rate.

Multi-dimensional planning & organising

Smart cities need multi-dimensional planning and organising, which would be accomplished by a central planning authority. And without any state level intervention, existing cities will become unliveable and chaotic, given the scale of migration expected. As a result, new cities have to be set up as satellite towns and around existing urban areas. This would also permit clustering and the economies of scale needed to develop the infrastructure.

The creation of such satellite cities needs to be closely linked to sustainability, in terms of low carbon emission, large green spaces and well planned infrastructure. As a result, in these smart cities, a new form of transportation system needs to be developed, to help eliminate congestions. Apart from that, the homes constructed in these cities need to use low energy materials as well as the widespread use of water harvesting techniques and the provision of cloud-based IT systems for delivering e-government services for citizens. Moreover, such cities need to be self-sufficient, in terms of being able to create gainful employment for residents and reducing



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the need for large scale commuting.

Lessons from Singapore

Smart cities are being developed across the globe and Singapore has successfully created several smart green corridors/urban townships within its limited land area of nearly 700 sq km. As part of the strategy, this city-state's transportation and water management systems extensively utilise IT and land-use planning is world-class, which has resulted in several accolades over the years.

In addition, the density of population in Singapore is one of the highest in the world, but the local administration has created a suitable living ambience with parks located close to concentrated mini townships, which are connected to a metro system, substantially reducing road congestion.

It's no surprise that the Chinese government has extensively utilised Singapore's expertise in urban planning. And a model business park-cum-city in Suzhou was created in a joint venture with Singapore in the mid-1990s, which became a model for similar developments in this rapidly expanding country.

Thereafter, joint ventures were created via Singbridge (a consortium of key Singapore-based companies) for an eco city in Tianjin, and a knowledge city in Guangzhou. These smart cities, which were created as satellite towns in highly urbanised areas, provide employment as well as being sustainable.

In India, too, Singapore-based companies have been at the forefront of creating state-of-the-art IT and business parks since the mid-1990s, which have often been regarded as the benchmark and there is a need to leverage this experience further.

I do believe that the planning and construction of smart cities in India could be fast-tracked by including the private sector within the policy framework of the government. And the required activities for creating smart cities could be undertaken by an approved consortium consisting of experts in planning, urban developers and IT experts, which would also help to overcome any obstacles in development of such clusters.

The potential for partnership between India and Singapore for creating smart cities just can't be ignored. ♦

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