Dubai - the first smart city in the region

Innovation and entrepreneurship are key driving forces

Apart from transforming the landscape with excellent progress in infrastructure, Dubai has embarked on the journey of being the first smart city in the region by introducing the Smart City platform.

This is one of the key steps towards making a city smart. The platform will be bridging the diverse ecosystems ranging from the smallest of the sensors to government entities to provide digital transformation, according to Dilip Rahulan, Executive Chairman and CEO of the Pacific Controls.

Dubai is one of the few cities in the world which has adopted a unique approach to evolve into a smart city, according to a paper published by KMPG. This aspiration, the paper notes, is underpinned by three themes of communication, integration and cooperation. It is this integrated approach that will bear fruit and help it achieve its aspiration of becoming the first truly global smart city.

In a move towards the goal of Smart City, Dubai launched Dubai Data Law in October 2015 to allow the sharing of government data with the private sector. While announcing the new law through his Twitter account, His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, had said that Dubai Data Law will create opportunities for collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship between government and non-government entities.

"The Dubai Data Law is a huge step towards creating a smart city. Dubai is proud to have such a visionary leader who has taken the Emirate to new heights and have taken excellent initiatives to facilitate the smart city concept," Rahulan told Khaleej Times. He added: "Entities such as Dubai Civil Defence, Dubai Airports, RTA, DSOA, to name a few have also taken initiatives to become smart."

Pacific Controls has been working with many Dubai government entities providing them end-to-end managed application services and solutions for machine-to-machine (M2M) and Internet of Things applications. Dubai aims to become a smart city by 2021. Work is being done to integrate Dubai's online services with the Dubai Smart City initiative, launched in February 2015.

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Dilip Rahulan
Executive Chairman & CEO
Pacific Controls

"To understand and appreciate smart cities, the focus has to be on people. Cities are about people, and particularly about bringing people together. We are a social species, and cities serve to create the physical venues for interaction that generate innovation, art, culture, and economic activity," Rahulan said.
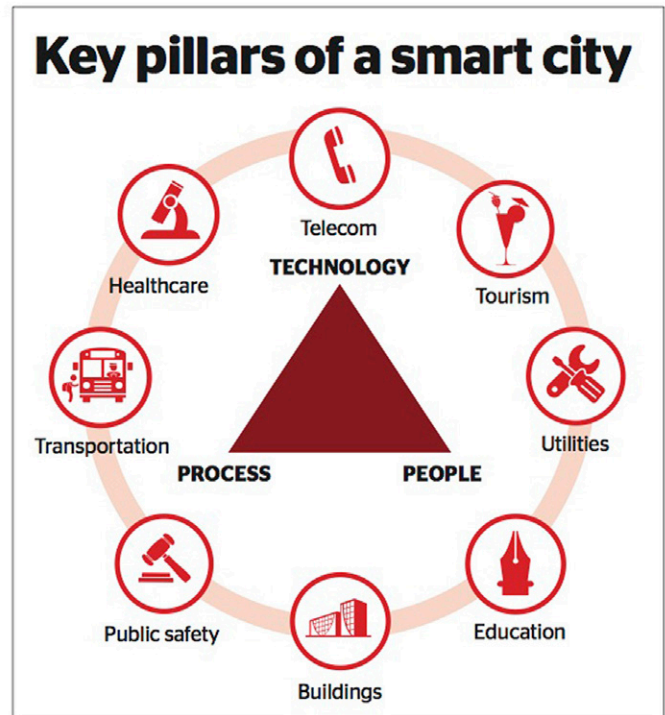
"Hence for a resident it's all about digital transformation, ready accessibility of important resources, high level of safety and security, all in all a happy life. Possibility of people's participation to make information travelled faster to respective government authority and respective government authority can respond and act dynamically is one of such elements. An individual is empowered to become part of ecosystem to make Happiness Index keep going higher," he added.

Dubai's smart city project involves eight key pillars - telecoms, tourism, utilities, education, buildings, public safety, transportation and healthcare - all of which are based on, and facilitated by, technology. Telecom connectivity lies at the core - and forms the backbone - of every smart city and seamless, end-to-end connectivity is a key enabler.

Dubai's transformation into a smart city will happen in three phases: Smart Life, Smart Economy, and Smart Tourism. Smart Life is to do with services - education, health care, telecom, transportation, telecommunication, utilities, and energy. Smart Economy is related to ports, airports, smart bourses, and smart jobs, efforts to support the economy, while Smart Tourism will deal with services including that related to visas, aviation, smart gates, hotels and restaurants.

According to Rahulan, digital transformation of people's lifestyle is the ultimate result of a city being smart. He lists out the major factors that make a city smart. First, implementing Smart Cities require a platform and data. Information about the characteristics of the city will be acquired through billions of sensors, their aggregation, analytics and meaningful visualisation. All these aspects are fundamentals of IoT and would also bring over a major change in the way Smart Cities are conceptualised, designed and implemented.

Second, data and analytics are going to be the key drivers. Simply connecting multitude of systems and aggregating data does not help to make a city smart.

Source: KPMG

Humongous study of the behavioural pattern of such data is required. Such study has to be done through intelligent and selective processing of the data and then analysing them to derive meaningful output. Hence Analytics, be it machine learning or other forms is the key to any Smart City.

Third, opening up of the government data. A city is very much about sensing various forms of data, however it is not only restricted to that. A city has diverse government entities ranging from Police to healthcare to road and transport to municipalities and many more.

In a Smart City all these departments need to seamlessly share data and make decisions. Such data needs to be dovetailed to sensor data, mobile data and other forms of data towards making meaningful and smart decisions. The effective use of government data can precipitate the smart evolution of cities, creating national competitive advantage. In addition to the above, e-governance, efficient utility management, safety and security and financial stability are some other factors, Rahulan added.

- sandhya@khaleejtimes.com