

Hot issue

IT infrastructure offers great potential for cooperation among Belt and Road countries.

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Silk Road

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IT infrastructure offers great potential for cooperation among Belt and Road countries

Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized the role of informatization in promoting the development of the countries along the route of the Belt and Road Initiative in his keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation last year. We should pursue innovation-driven development and intensify cooperation in frontier areas such as digital economy, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and quantum computing, and advance the development of big data, cloud computing and smart cities so as to turn them into a digital silk road of the 21st century, Xi said.



Informatization will facilitate the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Informatization is a fundamental project and an indispensable driving factor for the Initiative. Developing the digital Silk Road will promote the digital economy of the countries involved, narrow the digital gap and boost the digitalization of their economies and societies.



The development of informatization among these countries is uneven and closely related to their level of economic development.

Eastern Asian, Southeastern Asian and Central and Eastern European countries hold a leading position while countries in Central Asia, South Asia and Africa are relatively backward in the field. Besides uneven regional development, there are also significant differences in indexes for measuring informatization development, another area for possibly extensive cooperation.



There is a huge potential for cooperation in information infrastructure.

In recent years, the Belt and Road countries have been actively developing and accelerating the development of fixed-line broadband businesses. The infrastructure of some countries in Central Asia, South Asia and Africa is relatively backward, and these countries urgently need to carry out the fiber-to-home plan. Information infrastructure construction is a booster for economic and social development in the Belt and Road countries. China has formed globally cutting-edge products and services in optical fiber communication facilities and server manufacturing for online communication, which enable it to be the backbone of the information infrastructure of those countries.



There is still space for the rapid popularization of mobile broadband.

The penetration rate of broadband in some of the Belt and Road countries such as Myanmar, Laos, India and Bangladesh has not yet reached 10 percent. These countries can improve that rate since accessing mobile broadband cannot be limited by time and space, and the price of smart terminal devices has dropped significantly. China has advantages in 4G mobile network construction and developing 5G network standards. It has been the largest producer of smart phones in the world in recent years.



Industrial technology innovation can help countries share complementary advantages.

The Belt and Road countries are fully aware of the significance of innovation to the development of the state and are sparing no effort to improve their innovation capacity. Israel, Singapore and South Korea have strong technological innovation and are increasing investment in that area. China is working on the research and development as well as application of key technologies related to cyber security, such as indigenous chips, operation systems and databases. It has also developed a series of solutions for informatization. The Belt and Road countries can deepen their cooperation in advancing innovative information technology and transformation and upgrading industrial structure.



There is a broad prospect for the development of digital economy.

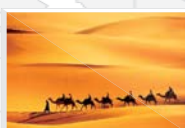
The achievements of China's digital economy have attracted global attention, focused especially on the country's rapid growth and innovations in the mobile internet sector that have greatly influenced industrial development, commercial applications, social services and improvements in people's lives. All these experiences and practices will be good references for the Belt and Road countries. In addition, China has initiated a series of explorations in e-commerce, mobile payments, internet financing, and online entertainment, all cross-border forces that are helpful for removing the geographical barriers between countries and provide convenient integrated logistics, information flow and capital flow. Since mobile internet in some countries is just in the initial stage, China can share its best practices to promote digital economy, cooperation and innovation.



There is an urgent need for multilateral cooperation on cyberspace governance.

The Belt and Road countries should strengthen cooperation in that area and enhance policy collaboration on informatization to solve the problems in the Internet sector, which include unbalanced development, incomplete rules and unreasonable orders. They should join in promoting the construction of a community of common destiny in cyberspace. Countries like China and Russia have rolled out laws and regulations on fighting against cyber attacks and other illegal acts. Especially in such an era of big data and cloud computing, cyber security is facing more challenges, which calls for multilateral cooperation to deal with cross-border data flows and realize win-win results. Coordinated development of informatization, professional services, resources, technologies and capital is a path forward towards peace and prosperity.

Digital Silk Road construction achieves preliminary results



1. The China-ASEAN Information Port and the China-Arabia National Silk Road are the first two projects involving the Digital Silk Road construction of the countries along the route of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The State Council approved the China-ASEAN Information Port Construction Plan in April 2016. The Information Port is intended to better develop the Internet economy by deepening interoperability and technical cooperation, and by forming a Guangxi-based information harbor that promotes economic and trade services and cultural exchange.

Key projects involving infrastructure facilities and e-commerce have now been launched to boost the economy of Guangxi and its neighboring areas as well as those of the ASEAN countries. In December 2016, the China-Arab States Online Silk Road Economic Cooperation Ningxia Pivotal Project got the official nod and has since become an online platform for high-level dialogue, trade cooperation and cultural exchange between China and Arab countries.

2. Cooperation in multilateral regional information and communication technology has been improved.

Based on Belt and Road multilateral frameworks with European, African, ASEAN and Arab countries, China has signed a memorandum of understanding on satellite navigation with Arab countries and an MOU on information and communication infrastructure cooperation with East Africa. It has set up cooperation procedures for the 2017-2021 Action Plan for Deepening the China-ASEAN Information and Communication Partnership for Mutual Development and the Lancang-Mekong River cooperation mechanism. As these resources develop, China will further promote exchange and cooperation on the top-level design of information and communication technology, IT infrastructure interoperability, online public services and collaborative innovation with other countries along the Belt and Road so as to explore a path for further development.

3. Interoperability of information infrastructure is steadily progressing.

The China-Pakistan cross-border cable project under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been under construction since May of 2016, and the first phase of construction of the Greater Mekong Subregion Information Highway has been completed. Furthermore, the China-East Africa Information Highway has had positive responses from countries in the East African Community.

Negotiations on a Silk Road cable project involving China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan are progressing as are talks on the Faizabad - Wakhan corridor - Kashgar cable network project. The China-Myanmar International (CMI) cable has docked with the Asia-Africa-Europe-1 (AAE-1), a submarine cable system linking nations and regions across Asia, Africa and Europe. Communication satellites projects between China and Laos, China and Arab countries and the Beidou Satellite cooperation between China and ASEAN states is developing in an orderly way.

4. Significant progress has been made in international cooperation in information and communication services.

A group of competitive Internet and IT enterprises are actively going global, taking Chinese capital, technology and talents to Belt and Road countries and facilitating their digital economy. Chinese tech company Huawei has set up more than half of the wireless base stations in 50 plus African countries, and installed over 70 percent of their LTE high-speed mobile broadband networks. The company has created a network of over 50,000 kilometers of communication optical fiber. E-commerce giant Alibaba has built a cloud data center in Dubai to provide high performance and low-cost cloud computing services for the Middle East, helping with local digital transformation. Tencent and other Internet companies have expanded "WeChat" and other information services to most of the countries along the route.

The Belt and Road Digital Economy International Cooperation Initiative

China and six other Belt and Road countries --Thailand, Laos, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates -- launched an initiative to strengthen cooperation on digital economy at the Fourth World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, east China's Zhejiang province on Dec 3, 2017.

The initiative includes:

- Expanding broadband access and improving its quality
- Promoting digital transformation
- Boosting e-commerce cooperation
- Supporting Internet start-ups and innovation

- Facilitating the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
- Improving training on digital skills
- Promoting investment on information and communication technology
- Boosting cooperation on digital economy between cities
- Improving digital inclusiveness
- Promoting transparent digital economy policies
- Advancing international standardization cooperation
- Strengthening confidence and trust
- Encouraging cooperation and respecting the path of independent development
- Encouraging construction of a peaceful, safe, open, cooperative and orderly cyberspace
- Supporting the establishment of a multilayer communication mechanism

Belt & Road boosts telecom- munication and e-commerce

Optical network and communications infrastructure is an important part of any country's economic and social development; but especially so for countries along the Belt and Road. Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has built cross-border overland cable system with 12 of its neighboring countries, and four international marine cables. In addition, construction of cross-border cable systems between China and Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan have been promoted, and an international communication transmission network has been built. China's telecom operators are devoted to the cables' construction as a win-win outcome for all countries



Shayaan Tahir, Founder & CEO of Home Shopping Network Pakistan (PVT) LTD

Evenings are the busiest periods for Tahir because they're delivery time for his online shop. Within the next 40 hours, each day's parcels will be delivered all across Pakistan.

In 2007, Tahir bought an electronic device on Amazon, but he was told the product could not be delivered to Pakistan. He was upset about that, and decided to establish the country's first e-commerce website.

"The first transaction happened with one lady who spent most of her time in Canada and she was traveling to Pakistan. She is a Pakistani, and we have a lot of Pakistanis who live abroad. She was used to shopping online and she ordered a Chinese MP3 player from me, which I imported from China through a website. I was able to sell that for twice the price," Tahir recalled.

At the same time, a Chinese telecommunication operator had just entered Pakistan, and in 2014 got the rights to 3G and 4G channels. With the construction of telecom services, Pakistan now enjoys more convenient services and has greater space for e-commerce.

"We have seen our traffic doubled since the 4G launch happened without marketing our product. Like people have done across the world, we will definitely be developing a much stronger e-commerce market."

Although Pakistan has enjoyed more convenient online shopping services since the China telecom operator arrived and popularized 4G, Tahir trusts that his golden age has not yet come.

"We feel that in the years ahead we need to realize that 70 percent of the population is below the age of 30, so we are a young nation. Being a young nation, people are very eager to adopt new technology. As this group of people become richer with maturity, they will play very active parts in the world of e-commerce in Pakistan."