Facial recognition technology gains traction

BY BEIJING: Use of facial recognition technology in Chinese cities is increasingly common, giving residents a vision of how a person's face may one day be linked to bank cards and even an identity card. It may also serve as the ultimate tracking device. Coupled with a fast growing network, facial recognition technology has helped cities catch wanted criminals that have long eluded the law.

One instance was at the Qingdao beer festival in August, when 190 suspects were identified over the month-long event. Secondary checks confirmed that 25 of them had escaped from custody including a suspected murderer who was on the wanted list for a decade. The authorities are also using facial recognition to name-and-shame lawbreakers in cities from Guangzhou to Xi'an and even those caught on camera would have their faces – even their names and part of their address – flash back on giant LCD boards. The system can also specifically label repeat offenders.

"We use facial recognition in the area of public security is already a reality and is in Beijing today," said Li Rong, CEO of SenseTime, one of the leading Chinese firms in the field. A 40-day trial in Chengdu this year using the firm's technology led to arrest of 611 suspects. He said 14 of them were identified at the police station by the system.

Several other firms, which have already deployed Silicon Valley in related human filing last year, have two advantages in this field, said Dr Xu. "In China, we have already put this system into operation, this is the great advantage of new technology. Also, there's no big data security issue in this context." The technology could be used to identify criminals or those with a warrant. Some systems could also be used to verify identity, improve security, or to help in crowd control.