

Realty expected to contribute 5-6pc to Bahrain's GDP

Deputy Premier Shaikh Khalid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa opens BIPEX 2019

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● "Villamar" project may be resolved before the end of this year

● "Elegant City" development project has been referred to the Ministerial Committee

● The two-day conference includes seven in-depth sessions, panels and practical seminars

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's real estate sector's contribution to the GDP is expected to reach 5-6 per cent by the end this year, with the sector continuing to demonstrate its ability to attract investments, said Deputy Premier Shaikh Khalid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa.

Shaikh Khalid, who is also the Chairman of the Ministerial Committee for Development and Infrastructure Projects, said the sector is among the top non-oil sectors that contribute to the Kingdom's GDP.

The Deputy Premier also attributed the sector's growth to the progress march spearheaded by His Majesty King Hamad



Shaikh Khalid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa opening BIPEX 2019



During a conference session on the Future of Real Estate in Bahrain

bin Isa Al Khalifa, the sound policies of the government chaired by His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and the support of HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme

Commander and First Deputy Premier.

Shaikh Khalid was inaugurating the 12th edition of the Bahrain International Property Exhibition and Forum, BIPEX 2019, organised by the Bahrain Society of Engineers

(BSE).

Around 45 local and foreign exhibitors are participating in this year's expo which began on Saturday and concludes today. Around 1500 people visited BIPEX yesterday.

In his inaugural speech, Shaikh Khalid highlighted the regulatory and administrative stages undergone by the real estate sector in the kingdom, thanks to the establishment of the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) and Benyat system inaugurated by HRH the Crown Prince

in 2018 to issue construction permits.

Benyat, Shaikh Khalid said, has resulted in increasing the number of construction permits from 7092 in 2018 to 7465 in 2019, an increase of 5 per cent.

The Deputy Premier also renewed his call for authorised engineering firms to continue submitting their remarks to improve the system.

Regarding stalled projects, Shaikh Khalid indicated that the issue of the "Villamar" project may be resolved before the end of this year.

On "Elegant City" development project, he said that the Cabinet had referred it to the Ministerial Committee for Development and Infrastructure Projects for further study, due to its categorisation as a stalled real estate project.

Bahrain Society of Engineers President, Dr Dheya A. Aziz Towfiqi, expressed sincere thanks and appreciation to the Deputy Prime Minister for his unwavering support to the real estate sector.

BIPEX also hosts a two-day conference to address a broad range of conceptual and practical issues relating to residential and commercial real estate. The sessions will act as a channel to facilitate interactive dialogue amongst all stakeholders of the real estate industry in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The two-day conference includes seven in-depth sessions, panels and practical seminars.

US debate on internet liability spills over to global trade deals

Washington

US lawmakers seeking to rein in Big Tech have been stepping up efforts to limit legal immunity for online services, and now are taking that fight global.

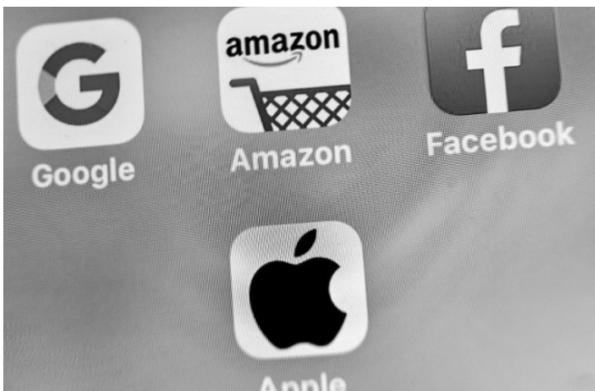
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi this week backed a move by fellow lawmakers to carve out the so-called Section 230 protection -- which some activists say is a cornerstone of the open internet -- from a North American trade pact with Canada and Mexico, known as USMCA.

"There are concerns in the House about enshrining the increasingly controversial Section 230 liability shield in our trade agreements, particularly at a time when Congress is considering whether changes need to be made in US law," Pelosi spokesman Henry Connelly said.

Debate on Section 230, a clause in the 1996 Communications Decency Act, has been raging for months amid rising concerns about the failure of tech platforms to curb hate speech, extremist content, copyright infringement and other abuses.

The effort to modify the law -- which immunizes online services from third-party content on their sites -- has drawn support from both Democrats and Republicans.

Republican Senator Josh Hawley proposed legislation earlier this year that would end the immunity unless companies submit to an "external audit" which shows they are acting in



Some analysts say that anger at Big Tech platforms is the reason for a push to limit their immunity, but that a stricter regulatory system could backfire



The deadly mosque attack in New Zealand livestreamed around the world raised concerns about the responsibility of online platforms to remove violent and abusive content

a "politically neutral" manner.

"With Section 230, tech companies get a sweetheart deal that no other industry enjoys: complete exemption from traditional publisher liability in exchange for providing a forum free of political censorship," Hawley said in introducing the legislation. "Unfortunately, and unsurprisingly, big tech has failed to hold up its end of the bargain."

'Proxy' for tech missteps

Civil liberties activists said Hawley's bill is unconstitutional and would put the government in charge of regulating speech. Other analysts point out that Section 230 has enabled the internet to thrive and that modifying it could be devastating for the internet and online speech.

"The services that we enjoy the most exist because of Section 230," said Eric Goldman, director of the High-Tech Law Institute at Santa Clara University.

Goldman said Section 230 has become a "proxy" for the frustrations with Facebook and Google but that "American consumers would be the losers" if the law is weakened.

Corynne McSherry of the Electronic Frontier Foundation told a congressional hearing in October that Section 230 protects not only major tech platforms, but any online activity -- from forwarding an email to commenting in a news forum to sharing pictures and videos of friends -- from "third party liability."

McSherry said that without Section 230, tech firms such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter would not exist in their current form because they would not be able to host user content without fear of a lawsuit.

She argued that eliminating Section 230 would "cement the dominance" of these firms, because it would mean higher costs to filter and moderate content that new startups could not afford.

According to Katherine Oyama, Google's head of intellectual property policy, the internet would be a far different experience without the liability shield.

"Without Section 230, platforms could face liability for decisions around removal of content from their platforms," she told lawmakers.

"Review sites like Yelp, TripAdvisor or Angie's List might be sued for defamation claims brought by a restaurant, hotel or an electrician trying to suppress their negative reviews."

Oyama said the current law encourages sites to filter content, but that without the legal protection they might stop all content moderation or simply block anything potentially harmful.

'Healthier' internet?

Danielle Citron, a Boston University law professor specializing in online speech, said Section 230 has failed to live up to its promise and that modifying it could lead to a "healthier"

internet.

"Section 230's overbroad interpretation means that platforms have little legal incentive to combat online abuse," Citron told the hearing.

She said that while it has allowed some platforms to moderate content, "they also have been shielded from responsibility even when they solicit illegal activities, deliberately leave up unambiguously illegal content that causes harm, and sell dangerous products."

Citron said the law should be revised "to condition the legal shield on reasonable content moderation practices."

It remains to be seen if lawmakers will move on the law, with a solid bloc of digital rights and industry groups opposing a change.

Ed Black of the Computer and Communications Industry Association, a trade group representing many tech firms, said that inserting these provisions in a North American trade pact "is critical to ensure that the agreement is updated to reflect the needs of the internet economy."

Goldman said the inclusion of the protection makes sense for both economics and free speech.

"Section 230 is not just about free speech, it's about improving information flows in the marketplace," he said.

"It creates new opportunities for entrepreneurs to build businesses and also creates opportunities for marketplaces to be more efficient."