

Ashlee Simpson, Ross share why daughter is best addition to tour

Singer Ashlee Simpson and husband Evan Ross, an actor and a musician, are gearing up to go on a tour together. The couple is looking forward to bring their three-year-old daughter, Jagger, along for the adventure. **P13**

THE DAILY **tribune**

Philippines wins fourth Miss Universe crown **13** SHOW

WORLD **6** Japan police investigate cause of blast in Sapporo

Bahrain backs Saudi Arabia
Manama

The Kingdom affirmed its full solidarity with Saudi Arabia's position regarding the recent resolution of the United States Senate.

It reiterated its sincere appreciation of the efforts of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, in maintaining peace and security and enhancing development in various countries of the world, hailing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's historic role at all Arab, Islamic and International levels under its wise leadership.

It stressed the political and economic importance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which made it an important pillar in the achievement of comprehensive regional and international stability as well as the main supporter of efforts that aim at combatting all forms of terrorism and its supporters.

It commended the responsible stances and initiatives of the President of the United States, Donald J Trump that combat terrorism and preserve peace and stability in the region.

It also highlighted President Trump's commitment to work collectively with allies, which reflects the strength of relations and mutual keenness to reinforce strategic alliance in order to overcome all challenges.

Salute to national heroes



His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa along with HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Premier, Royal Family members and senior BDF officials paid tribute to the brave martyrs who fell in the line of duty since the establishment of Bahrain, yesterday. "The martyrs sacrificed their lives for the sake of the homeland and fell in the line of duty as they were serving the nation," His Majesty said, saluting the national heroes who embody the value of courage and sacrifice, becoming a source of pride for Bahrain and role model for the coming generations. See Page 2



On an upswing

Moody's changes outlook on Bahrain's rating to stable, affirms B2 rating

Bahrain's B2 rating remains supported by the country's relatively diversified and dynamic economy.

Over the longer term, Bahrain's economic strength will benefit from the new hydrocarbon discovery announced in April 2018, the rating agency said.

Singapore

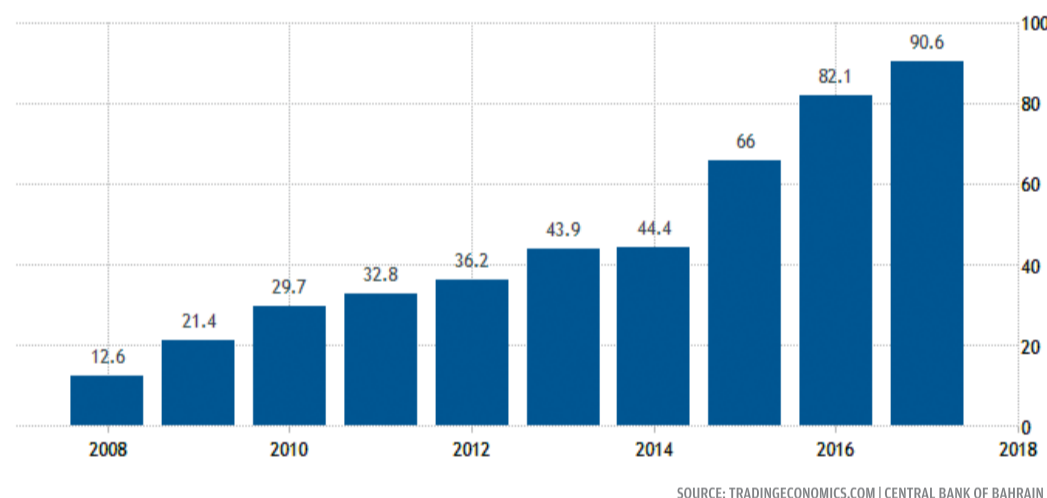
Moody's Investors Service yesterday changed the outlook to stable from negative on the Government of Bahrain's issuer ratings and affirmed the ratings at B2.

The key driver of the outlook change to stable is Moody's assessment that Bahrain's government and external liquidity risks have materially reduced, the rating agency said.

Financial support and the fiscal consolidation measures including the Fiscal Balance Programme (FBP) will support investors' confidence and help to reduce the government's financing needs, it pointed out.

Bahrain's long-term foreign-currency bond ceiling is

Bahrain Government debt to GDP ratio.



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | CENTRAL BANK OF BHRAIN

The fiscal reforms announced as part of the FBP would represent very significant fiscal consolidation.

MOODY'S

unchanged at Ba3. Its long-term foreign-currency bank deposit ceiling is unchanged at B3.

The short-term foreign-currency bond and bank deposits ceiling remain unchanged at Not Prime, while the long-term local currency country risk ceilings are unchanged at Ba2.

In addition, the long-term for-

eign-currency bond and bank deposit ceilings for Bahrain - Off Shore Banking Centre remain unchanged at Baa2, while the short-term foreign-currency bond and bank deposit ceilings remain unchanged at Prime-2.

Two months ago, Bahrain announced a \$10 billion (26 per cent of 2018 estimated GDP) financial support agreement signed with Saudi Arabia (A1 stable), UAE (Aa2 stable) and Kuwait (Aa2 stable), Moody's said.

Moody's anticipates that funds from the financial support package will be disbursed during 2018-22 in the form of long-term concessionary loans, more than covering the scheduled external debt payments (principal and interest) of the government

49,006
US dollars is the per capita GDP of the Kingdom calculated on a Purchase Power Parity basis.

(approximately \$9.4 billion, including the \$750 million sukuk that was repaid in late November 2018).

The disbursements will directly support Bahrain's government liquidity position and reduce the risk that the central bank foreign exchange reserves could be rap-

idly depleted. Importantly, Moody's estimates that Bahrain will be able to draw on additional extraordinary support from the GCC neighbours to support the stability of its exchange rate peg during the course of the FBP implementation.

Moody's also expects that the presence of the GCC backstop will allow the government and government-related entities to regain access to international capital markets, which had become compromised during much of 2018, further supporting liquidity.

The fiscal reforms announced by the government as part of the FBP would represent very significant fiscal consolidation.

The FBP targets a reduction in government spending relative to GDP to 19.5pc in four years from an estimated 26.6pc in 2018, with an increase in revenue to 19.3pc from 17.5pc, which would restore budget balance by 2022.

The measures include spending cuts from a voluntary retirement scheme for eligible civil servants, more targeted social transfers and increases in water and electricity tariffs, and savings from better spending efficiency and rationalisation; on the revenue side, the FBP plans the introduction of a 5pc value added tax, a review of existing government fees and services and the repricing of tariffs charged to domestic industrial consumers of natural gas.

TOUGH CHOICE

May sets January date for MPs' Brexit vote

London

MPs will vote on the UK's Brexit deal in the week beginning 14 January, Theresa May has told Parliament.

The vote was due to be held last week but was put on hold after Mrs May admitted she was set to lose.

Announcing a new date, she said the EU had made it clear the Irish backstop was "not a plot to trap the UK", and urged MPs to see Brexit through.

But Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said he would table a motion of no confidence in the PM for delaying the vote.

He told the Commons it was unacceptable that MPs had to wait another month



May speaks in British House of Commons.

before having their say on Mrs May's deal. He added the PM had "led the country into a national crisis".

Mr Corbyn's motion - due to be tabled on Tuesday - calls on MPs to declare they have "no confidence in the prime minister due to her failure to allow the House of Commons to have a meaningful vote straight away" on the Brexit deal.



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Tribute paid to martyrs of duty

His Majesty pays homage to fallen servicemen who sacrificed their lives in defence of nation

Manama

A tribute was paid to the brave martyrs who fell in the line of duty since the establishment of Bahrain, yesterday.

"The martyrs sacrificed their lives for the sake of the homeland and fell in the line of duty as they were serving the nation,"

said His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

He saluted the national heroes who embody the value of courage and sacrifice, becoming a source of pride for Bahrain and role model for the coming generations.

HM King Hamad, the Supreme Commander, paid homage to the martyrs of duty as he

patronised a ceremony marking the Commemoration Day.

His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Premier attended the commemorative event at the Al Sakhir Palace.

HM the King was received on arrival by BDF Command-



His Majesty

er-in-Chief Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, National Guard Commander Lieutenant-General Shaikh Mohammed bin Isa Al Khalifa and Interior Minister Lt Gen Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa.

"The 17th of December will always remain an honourable occasion in our national march, symbolising pride in those Bahrainis who fell in the line of duty, at home and abroad, for the sake of right and justice," he said.

He paid homage to the martyrs of duty who sacrificed their lives to defend national security and sovereignty, combat terrorism and extend a helping hand to those in dire need in a dedicated move stemming from the Islamic teachings and authentic Bahraini values, thus following the steps of fathers and forefathers.

HM the King paid tribute to the martyrs' families which are as brave as their beloved who fell in the line of duty, defending their homeland, hailing their courage, resilience and patriotism.

His Majesty commended loyal citizens who remained cohesive and showed sympathy and solidarity with the martyrs' of duty in closed-knit and united homeland.

His Majesty prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest the martyrs' souls in eternal peace, in vastest paradise, paying tribute to their families and relatives and wishing Bahrain further progress and prosperity.

HM the King, accompanied by HRH the Crown Prince, headed to the



The martyrs sacrificed their lives for the sake of the homeland and fell in the line of duty as they were serving the nation.

HIS MAJESTY

National Action Charter Monument where he shook hands with senior officers marking the Commemoration Day.

The senior officers expressed deepest congratulations to HM the King, the Supreme Commander, on the occasion of the Kingdom's National Day celebrations on 16 and 17 of December, marking the anniversary of the establishment of the modern state of Bahrain as an Arab and Muslim country in 1783 by its founder Ahmed Al Fateh, the 47th Anniversary of its accession to the UN as a full member and the 19th Anniversary of HM the King's Accession to the Throne.

HM the King then headed to the main platform and the national anthem - Al Salam Al Malaki - was played on the occasion of the Commemoration Day.

HM the King earlier watered the palm-tree, which is considered the symbol of eternal life. The artillery also fired one shot and a minute of silence was observed. A second artillery shot was then fired. Verses of the Holy Quran were also recited.

Court of Cassation Sharia Department chairman and Al Fateh Mosque Imam Shaikh Adnan bin Abdulla Al Qattan also delivered a speech paying homage to the martyrs of duty.

He praised HM King Hamad for dedicating the 17th of December to be marked every year as the Commemoration Day, in tribute to the martyrs of duty.

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His Majesty thanks citizens

● HM the King paid tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives and fell in the line of duty, thus embodying the spirit of belonging and patriotism at its best.

Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa expressed deepest thanks and appreciation to all those who attended and participated in the festivities on the occasion of Bahrain's National Day celebrations.

Under directives from HM the King, the Royal Court Minister extended thanks to members of the Royal Family, heads and members of all state entities, constitutions establishments, members of the diplomatic corps, heads and members of the municipal councils and private companies. HM the King also thanked citizens, at home and abroad, heads of political associations, public interest societies, heads and members of national clubs, sport federations, chief editors of local newspapers and various media outlets as well as residents in Bahrain.

His Majesty thanked them for their congratulations through cables, calls, press ads and street banners, celebrations, festivals and marches, poems, articles, radio and TV interviews, wishing Bahrain lasting security, stability and prosperity.

HM the King paid tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives and fell in the line of duty, thus embodying the spirit of belonging and patriotism at its best.

Christmas Tree Lighting event at LuLu Hypermarket



Shaikh Khalifa with Mr Martin, Mr Siberell and Mr Rupawala and other guests at the event.

TDT | Manama

More than 800 guests joined a Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony at the LuLu Hypermarket's latest store in Saar's Atrium Mall on December 15.

The festivities were attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Daij Al Khalifa, President of HRH the Crown Prince's Court Simon

Martin, the British Ambassador and Justin Siberell, the US ambassador and Juzer Rupawala, the Director of the LuLu Group. The evening also included carol singing and a Santa procession.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, there was a Christmas Tree decorating competition which was a big hit among the youngsters.



The singing of carols added special charm to the event.

Bahrain vows to join efforts against climate change

Katowice

The Kingdom of Bahrain, represented by the Supreme Council for Environment, participated in the high profile ministerial meeting for the UN framework agreement on climate change (COP24) which is being held in Katowice, Poland.

Bahrain's delegation was headed by Chief Executive of the Supreme Council for Environment Dr Mohammed Mubarak bin Dainah who gave a speech in which he asserted the need for concerted efforts to curb climate change.

He pointed out that Bahrain is one of the countries that are affected by climate change. Therefore, he noted, the kingdom has exerted tremendous efforts at the local and international level to handle climate change and reduce its negative impact.

Dr Dainah presented the audience with a comprehensive overview on the situation in Bahrain in light of climate change from which many island countries are suffering.

He also discussed procedures of implementing the Paris Agreement and other vital issues related to funding projects in developing countries.

A net-savvy populace

98pc of the Kingdom's population use Internet, reveals UNCTAD findings

The index also revealed the top countries for online shopping in which The Netherlands came first.

Compared to the 2017 index, Singapore has swapped ranks with the Republic of Korea as the top-ranked country in the list.

TDT | Manama
Mohammed Zafran

Close to 98 per cent of the population in the Kingdom use Internet, according to a report published by the United Nations organisation.

Almost everyone in the Kingdom has Internet access, says the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) Business-to-Consumer (B2C) E-commerce Index 2018.

Bahrain is one of the highest ranked countries in the index in terms of Internet access. Along with Bahrain, Iceland and Nor-

Iceland, ranked sixth, has near ubiquitous Internet access with 98pc of the population online, the highest in the world along with Bahrain and Norway.

THE REPORT



Among the developing economies in MENA region, Bahrain has only made it to the top ten list.

way are the two other countries with the highest Internet access.

However, Bahrain is ranked 62 in the index overall. In the Mena region, the Kingdom was ranked five in the index.

"Iceland, ranked sixth, has near ubiquitous Internet access with 98pc of the population online,

the highest in the world along with Bahrain and Norway," the report stated.

The index also revealed the top countries for online shopping. The Netherlands came on top of the report as the best country in the world for online commerce.

Europe has eight of the top ten countries in the index. Among the developing economies in MENA region, Bahrain has only made it to the top ten list.

Only one of the top ten developing countries in the B2C E-commerce Index 2018 are from East Asia or the Middle East.

Unlike the global top ten, the range of index values between developing countries is wide with a 26-point difference between first and tenth.

Compared to the 2017 index, Singapore has swapped ranks with the Republic of Korea as the top-ranked country in the list.

Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago have dropped out while Chile (the only non-Asian country in the list) and Turkey have entered.

Hong Kong (China) ranks second among developing economies and 15th in the world.

Like Singapore, it is a small economy with relatively high values on all indicators.

10 leading countries in the list are from Europe.

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Focus on enhancing arts scene by exploring latest technologies

Bahrain FinTech Bay plans to offer technical support for local artists

TDT | Manama
Mohammed Zafran

The Bahrain FinTech Bay could play a huge role in helping the art scene in Bahrain by aiding with the adoption of the latest technologies such as artificial intelligence in the field of art, according to its Chief Executive Officer.

As the global art movement embarks on a transformative process with the utilisation of technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, blockchain and big data, Bahrain could potentially gain a lead in the field if early adoption of such technologies is ensured for the local art scene, according to experts.

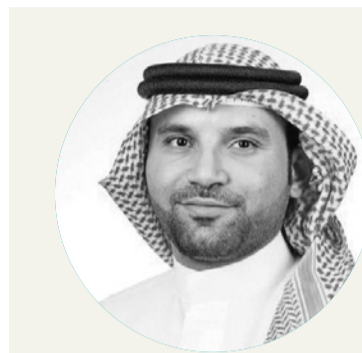
Chief Executive officer of Bahrain FinTech Bay ("BFB")

Khalid Esam Saad said that he believes Bahrain has the right ecosystem to support artists with the technical support.

He told Tribune that the FinTech Bay could play a role in supporting the art scene. "We are certainly open to it. The FinTech Bay is not constrained to the financial services industry, it has a wider remit.

"The financial service industry was a natural fit as it was the most advanced sector in the economy but we are open to exploring other sectors. A lot of the innovators that are part of the ecosystem can significantly help the art scene.

"The target clients for a lot of these companies is not just constrained to the financial service sector. Definitely, the art space is a developing sector and we



A lot of the innovators that are part of the ecosystem can significantly help the art scene.

MR SAAD

want to see how FinTech can also support the scene."

He added that local art scene now remains very traditional at the moment and that Bahrain stands to gain a lot from adopting the technologies.

Speaking about the use-cases for these technologies in the field of art, he said, "We have a

lot of cases where art, instead of being created by humans are being created by algorithms. To give another example, if you look at the art collectors space this is usually non-standardized and non-liquid.

"FinTech can help in making the asset class of art more standardised and more liquid."

"In terms of the blockchain, ownership of art pieces can be transferred through the blockchain and you can have a detailed record of who has owned it throughout its history. Crowdfunding is also made possible, so if a group of people wants to collectively buy an art piece it can be done."

"Another application for Artificial Intelligence would be that based on a user's past purchases and tastes, the AI could recommend art pieces or create new art pieces based on the individual's profile. The applications are endless when it comes to the intersection between art, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and technologies."

Mr Saad will be speaking during ArtBAB, giving talks on how such technologies can help the

art world.

The fourth edition of the art fair will take place from March 6 to 10, 2019 at the Bahrain Exhibitions and Convention Centre.

In-depth discussions on how technology is becoming transformative in the art movement will also feature during ArtBAB.

Middle East's first ever VR showcase of dslcollection, The Kremer Collection and Khora Contemporary will be featured in the event.

Industry leaders underpinning the conversation about the blockchain art market revolution to improve provenance and unlock digital trade routes will include Bahrain Fintech Bay, BlockchainHub, Artory, Verisart, Arius Technology, ID4ARTS and Dadiani Syndicate.

National Day observed



Senior executives and staff of LMC attended a special event held to mark the National Day.

Warm welcome accorded to Bahraini visitors to UAE



Bahraini passengers received a special welcome at the UAE airports.

Abu Dhabi

The United Arab Emirates has accorded a warm welcome to Bahraini visitors marking Bahrain's National Day and the Anniversary of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's Accession to the Throne.

According to the UAE news agency (WAM), the police of the Abu Dhabi International Airport and the Sharjah International Airport welcomed Bah-

rainis with flowers and the flags of the two brotherly countries.

Bahrainis were also welcomed by the two airports' officials, who congratulated them on the Kingdom's glorious National Day and the Anniversary of HM the King's Accession to the Throne, and presented them with gifts.

The Bahraini visitors to the UAE expressed their joy at the warm welcome accorded to them, which, they said, reflects the depth of the UAE's relations with its brotherly countries.

Ministry awarded contracts worth BD23.5m last November

Manama

The Ministry of Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning awarded 19 contracts worth BD23,479,681 last November.

"The approved projects cover the sectors of road construction, sanitary drainage construction and maintenance," said Under-

secretary Ahmed Abdulaziz Al Khayyat.

He underlined the ministry's drive to pursue infrastructure projects in towns and villages across Bahrain, to meet public needs, boost the economy and attract investments.

Ten contracts worth BD15,424,869 were awarded to carry out one road project, three sanitary ones, two oth-

ers in the construction sector and three related to technical services.

A contract worth BD14,480,000 was also awarded to construct an open stand with an overall capacity of 10,000 spectators at the Bahrain International Circuit (BIC).

The ministry has also allocated BD187,633 to conduct a strategic study on the impact of

the industrial zone on the environment in the area of Hidd, focusing on the quality of air, sea water, sediments, noise and soil pollution.

It has also earmarked BD278,896 to import and install measuring equipment, a control room and other equipment to monitor the triple processing unit at the Tubli used water recycling plant.

Volleyball tournament



A volleyball tournament for elders was inaugurated at the Isa Town Campus of Indian School Bahrain as part of its Mega Fair 2018. The event, which is getting enthusiastic response from people from all walks of life, will be held on December 20 and 21.

Project for digitising customer data verification to be implemented soon

The project will be first implemented in the financial industry, say sources

TDT | Manama
Mohammed Zafran

The first phase of the national eKYC project, a ground breaking initiative to digitise customer data verification, will be implemented next year.

The project, to create a 'Electronic Know Your Customer' (eKYC) database for Bahrain will be in place starting April next year, according to sources.

The project would pave way for the implementation of electronic methods to verify the identity of customers.

According to the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB), the eKYC serves to "streamline the customer on-boarding process and the on-going updates of

customer information undertaken by financial institutions in Bahrain".

The project will first be implemented in the financial industry and will later be implemented in other industries as well.

The Central Bank of Bahrain, The Information and eGovernment Authority (iGA), Economic Development Board, BAB and the BENEFIT company are the stakeholders of the project.

Hessa Ali Hussain, Head of Bahrain Credit Reference Bureau at The BENEFIT Company said that the eKYC will save customers a lot of time.

"If we look at the KYC process today, the main weakness is the slowness in customer onboarding. The customers need to wait in line before they can have ac-



The project is to establish a unified system for knowing the customers electronically as well as to identify the main requirements to satisfy the regulations related to financial industry.

MS HESSA

cess to a customer service agent to take care of their need.

"Besides, they may also need to wait days before certain fi-

ancial services are approved for them.

"The national eKYC project is being handled by multiple stake-

holders including the Central Bank, which is the regulator of the project and we have the iGA, EDB and BAB.

"The project is to establish a unified system for knowing the customers electronically as well as to identify the main requirements to satisfy the regulations related to financial industry," she told Tribune.

When asked about its viability outside the financial industry, she said, "It could be definitely expanded beyond the financial industry. The first use case is going to be implemented in the financial industry as a phase one.

"However, the platform, with the integration of blockchain, would be expanded beyond the financial industry to cover the entire nation."

In April, the Information and eGovernment Authority (iGA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with The BENEFIT Company (BENEFIT) to develop the ePayment services of government transactions and provide services that facilitate management of processes on banking and other entities in order to improve performance and reduce cost.

"Through this agreement, we aim to launch significant joint projects to cater to both public and private sectors; starting with the Electronically Know Your Customer (eKYC) initiative, in addition to providing credit reports via the national portal (Bahrain.bh) in co-operation with the Central Bank of Bahrain."

Showcasing the history of oil

● The Capital Governor lauded the efforts of the organising parties, stressing the importance of such events in attracting tourists and informing them about important historical phases.

Manama

Capital Governor Shaikh Hesham bin Abdulrahman Al Khalifa yesterday



Shaikh Hesham along with senior government officials tours the exhibition.

opened an exhibition on the history of oil in Bahrain which was organised by the Capital Governorate in co-operation with the Ministry of Oil and Bahrain Avenues.

The event was attended by the Capital Governorate's Social Programmes and Community Affairs Director Shaikh Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa and officials.

It was held in conjunction with Bahrain's celebration marking the anniversary of the establishment of the modern state of Bahrain as an Arab and Muslim country in 1783 by its founder Ahmed Al Fateh, the 47th Anniversary of its acces-

sion to the UN as a full member and the 19th Anniversary of HM the King's Accession to the Throne.

Many visitors attended the exhibition which showcased rare historical photos and oil collectibles which shed light on an important phase of the history of Bahrain since the inauguration of the first oil well in 1932 until the major oil discovery in Bahrain this year.

The Capital Governor lauded the efforts of the organising parties, stressing the importance of such events in attracting tourists and informing them about important historical phases.

Royal homage to martyrs of duty praised

Manama

Representatives Council Speaker Fawzia Zainal extended heartfelt thanks and respect to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa for his kind initiative to celebrate the Commemoration Day in conjunction with the kingdom's celebration of its national days.

This, she stressed, reflects HM the King's homage to the late servicemen who sacrificed their life for the sake of Bahrain's security and stability.

The Representatives Council Speaker affirmed that the Commemoration Day is a dear national occasion to reiterate pride in the sacrifices of the fallen servicemen to defend security, stability and territorial integrity of Bahrain.

She also paid homage to those who lost their life in the fields of honour, as part of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition, to defend legitimacy in Yemen.

New ambassador to Palestine takes charge



Mr Abbas with Mr Al Rowaie.

Amman

The President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, received the credentials of Ambassador Ahmed bin Yusuf Al Rowaie as Non-Resident Ambassador of the Kingdom to the State of Palestine.

President Abbas requested the Ambassador to convey his greetings to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, His Royal Highness the Prime Minister, Prince

Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister, Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

For his part, Ambassador Al Rowaie conveyed the greetings of His Majesty the King, His Royal Highness the Prime Minister and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince to President Mahmoud Abbas, and their wishes to him and all Palestinian people of abundant health.

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world

Japan police investigate cause of blast in Sapporo

● Large blast and fire wrecked a restaurant in Sapporo

● Officials warned that the number of injured could rise

AFP | Tokyo

Japanese police were investigating yesterday the cause of a powerful blast that ripped through a restaurant in the country's north overnight, injuring 42 people and damaging surrounding buildings.

The explosion in the city of Sapporo on Sunday night started fires and caused the partial collapse of some neighbouring buildings, forcing dozens of residents into shelters, officials said.

The cause of the blast was still under investigation, police said, but there were reports that it may have been a gas leak.

Some reports said fumes were leaking from spray cans that had been collected for disposal at a real estate company in the building.

But investigators were also looking into at least nine propane tanks installed in the building for the various businesses located inside.



Firefighters attend the scene in Sapporo

Numerous customers at the restaurant on the building's first floor said they smelled gas at the time of the explosion, Kyodo News agency reported.

The blast produced large flames and sent plumes of smoke rising in the night air, with witnesses describing a terrifying boom.

The two-story wooden building, which also housed a clinic, was seriously damaged, a Sapporo fire department official told AFP.

Police said 42 people had been injured, but there were no fatalities.

42
people were injured and surrounding buildings were damaged by the blast

Among the injured were several children, as well as a man who suffered burns and a woman who jumped from the building to escape, breaking her leg in the process.

"There was an enormous sound, 'bang', then when I looked up at the sky it was filled with plumes of smoke," an elderly woman said in footage on public broadcaster NHK.

"The ceiling fell, then the entire second floor collapsed and we were all stuck. We managed

to escape after everyone kicked through the wall," a person who was in the restaurant at the time told Kyodo.

The fire from the blast spread to neighbouring buildings, and debris blasted out by the explosion shattered the windows of nearby apartments and restaurants, according to local reports.

"We are investigating details about the damage together with police at the scene," the fire department official said.

The blast happened around 8.30 pm (1130 GMT), and the city government opened a shelter to house dozens of people whose homes were damaged.

The explosion also caused a temporary black-out, with 250 buildings losing electricity, but power was later restored, he said.

The three tenants in the building were poorly prepared for possible fires, Sapporo fire department official Takashi Shida told AFP.

"We instructed them to improve these points during an on-site inspection in October but they had not made progress," he said.

Many small and medium-sized older buildings in Japan are built partly or entirely from wood and are vulnerable to fires.

Erdogan vows to 'remove' Kurd militia east of Euphrates



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan addresses his supporters in Konya, Turkey
AFP | Ankara

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday vowed Turkey would remove a Kurdish militia viewed as terrorists by Ankara from northern Syria if the US failed to ensure fighters leave the east of the Euphrates.

The threat comes after Erdogan spoke on the phone with US President Donald Trump on Friday when the pair agreed to ensure "more effective coordination" between their countries' operations in Syria.

The conversation followed threats from Erdogan last week to launch an offensive against the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia east of the Euphrates River, where there are American troops, within the "next few days".

"I spoke with Trump. The terrorists must leave the east of the Euphrates. If they don't go, we will remove them," Erdogan promised during a televised speech in the central Turkish province of Konya.

Wife of detained China activist goes bald



Yuan Shanshan, left, Liu Ermin, Wang Qiaoling and Li Wenzu pose shaved their heads to protest the detention of their husbands, detained during the so-called 709 crackdown

AFP | Beijing

The wife of a detained Chinese lawyer and three supporters shaved their heads yesterday and attempted to submit to a Beijing court a petition protesting her husband's indefinite detention.

The four women went to the Hongsecur People's High Court in south Beijing in a symbolic protest against what they said highlighted the "lawlessness" of the country.

"We can go bald, but the country cannot be lawless," the four women shouted outside

the courthouse after they were prevented by police from entering the premises.

The Chinese words for being completely bald and having a state of lawlessness -- "wufa" -- are homonyms.

Their husbands were all targeted during a sweeping crackdown on activists and lawyers on July 9, 2015.

Attorney Wang Quanzhang, who defended political activists and victims of land seizures, disappeared in the sweep aimed at courtroom critics of Communist authorities.

Charged in January 2016 with

alleged "subversion of state power", Wang is the only one of over 200 lawyers and activists arrested in the so-called "709 crackdown" who is yet to be tried or released.

"My husband is being detained incommunicado without a proper explanation," his wife Li Wenzu told AFP.

"I want answers as to why the authorities aren't following due process. I want to know why they aren't allowing the family's lawyer to visit Wang," she said.

Li said over the past three years she has submitted over 30 freedom of information requests

to police, which have been sent back unanswered.

In April, Li attempted to march 100 kilometres (60 miles) to a detention facility in neighbouring Tianjin to highlight her husband's plight before she was thwarted by police.

"I want to urge the Supreme People's Court to perform its supervisory duties and investigate why the second intermediate court in Tianjin that is handling my husband's case is dragging its feet," Li said.

"The court has surpassed the time limit prescribed by law for dealing with such cases," she said.

Health concerns

Liu Ermin, wife of rights activist Zhai Yanmin, said she was protesting her husband's torture while in detention.

"His health has deteriorated and we are still under constant surveillance," she said.

The third woman was Yuan Shanshan, wife of lawyer Xie Yanyi.

Xie, who defended practitioners of the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement, was released on bail pending trial in January 2017. He has since shed light on the torture of detained lawyers.

Thailand seizes 18 million meth pills



Attempts to crack down the methamphetamine trade in Thailand have resulted in massive seizures and left at least 15 alleged smugglers shot dead in the country's north since the start of November

AFP | Bangkok

Thai authorities seized more than 18 million meth pills in the drug-riddled "Golden Triangle", a senior military official said yesterday, following deadly anti-trafficking operations in the border region.

The Golden Triangle -- a lawless wedge of land intersecting China, Myanmar, Thailand and Laos -- is the main base of operations for Southeast Asia's highly lucrative methamphetamine trade.

Attempts to crack down on the drug's influx into Thai-

land have resulted in massive seizures and left at least 15 alleged smugglers shot dead in the country's north since the start of November.

The latest bust occurred in Chiang Rai province on Sunday night after authorities received a tip-off that smugglers were active in the area, later pinpointing two suspicious cars.

"We found and seized bags... all were methamphetamine, about 18.76 million pills," commander Vichit Wongsang said in a press conference streamed live on Facebook.

Ukrainian arts enjoy surprise revival in conflict-riven east

While prospects for a political resolution look remote, a fragile lull allowed residents to think of something more than survival

● People in Mariupol continue to live their lives with poetry evenings, film screenings and concerts despite the ongoing conflict

● The GogolFest modern art festival in Mariupol hosted performances and art installations that drew some 30,000 spectators in May

AFP | Donetsk, Ukraine

In a grungy cellar bar, a young crowd sings along to a melancholy ballad in Ukrainian. Nothing unusual here -- except that the concert is taking place in the stronghold of Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The Ukrainian language has faced an unofficial ban here since war broke out between separatists and Kiev's forces more than four years ago.

"Promise me that tomorrow will come for sure," a female vocalist sings to acoustic guitar in the city of Donetsk, the rebels' de facto capital, with uniformed rebel supporters in the audience.

Ukrainian songs are very rarely heard in this region, where Russian is more widely spoken. "In 2014, when the war had just begun, such a concert would have been impossible," said guitarist Oleg, 20, who declined to give his full name.

But the concert of local musicians playing cover versions of hits by Ukrainian bands goes down well with the audience.

There is demand for such music, since it is difficult for people living in separatist-held areas to



Artists performing during a concert as part of the Gogol Fest in Azov Sea city of Mariupol

go to concerts on the other side of the front line.

Part of eastern Ukraine is still under the control of Russian-backed separatists in a war against government troops that has claimed more than 10,000 lives.

Kiev and the West accuse Russia of funnelling troops and arms across the border. Moscow denies the claims despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Martial law was imposed for a month in Ukraine's border regions after Russia's seizure of three of Kiev's navy vessels in the Azov Sea in November.

But the development had no particular effect on cultural life,

says Diana Berg, an artist from Mariupol.

People here have seen a lot since the beginning of the war and "went through all stages, from anger to denial", she said.

So now they accept the situation and continue to live their lives with poetry evenings, film screenings and concerts.

'Forget about the war'

While prospects for a political resolution look remote, a fragile lull has allowed local residents to think of something more than just survival.

"People are less afraid and are more likely to attend cultural events," said Pavel, co-founder of the Contraband Group event

The Ukrainians "have begun to realise that culture defines identity," said Vlad Troitsky, a renowned theatre director.

This year he organised the GogolFest modern art festival in Mariupol, the last major eastern city under Kiev control.

The port and industrial hub on the Sea of Azov in May hosted performances and art installations that drew some 30,000 spectators.

Troitsky says he wants to fight back against the "aggressive propaganda" of Russian culture and way of life.

'Fear still exists'

"The fear is still there, of course. We all know what is going on here," said Marko Galanevych, a musician with the Ukrainian ethno-style band Dakha Brakha that has performed in Mariupol.

"But it is important for us... to come and support the people who live here and want this city to remain Ukrainian."

Writer and poet Sergiy Zhadan, dubbed the "bard of eastern Ukraine" by The New Yorker magazine, agreed.

"Music and poetry are needed everywhere and especially in the Donbass," he said, using another name for the coal-rich region.

Originally from the region, Zhadan launched a project bringing literature and theatre to the area after being impressed by the audience numbers at his performances in towns affected by bombings.

Such cultural initiatives necessarily have a political element as many Ukrainians perceive the conflict in the East as a battle for "independence" from centuries of Russian political and cultural dominance.

"The culture wars are far from over," said Fozzey, a vocalist in the popular TNMK hip-hop band which regularly plays for Ukrainian soldiers on front line.



People are less afraid and are more likely to attend cultural events. Here, we forget about the military conflict and the politics and we just listen to good music

PAVEL, CO-FOUNDER OF THE CONTRABAND GROUP EVENT AGENCY

agency, which organises around 10 concerts by local musicians a month.

"Here, we forget about the military conflict and the politics and we just listen to good music," he said, also declining to be fully identified.

The revival of Ukrainian cultural events coincides with separatist authorities seeking to promote Russian culture by staging open-air concerts of Russian pop music.

On the other side of the front line in Kiev-controlled territory, Ukrainian artists and activists are also organising festivals, creating a cultural life of unprecedented vibrancy in the industrial region.



Artists performing during a concert in the frame of Gogol Fest in Azov Sea, Mariupol



People enjoying a concert during the Gogol Fest, in Mariupol, eastern Ukraine

Britain is at the cliff edge of global isolation

Crashing out of the EU without a comprehensive deal would throw Britain's economy into a chronic recession



BARIA ALAMUDDIN

Britain is hurtling toward the March 2019 deadline for crashing out of the EU. While the seemingly unresolvable issue of Northern Ireland's status dominates political attention, there has been less debate about how any possible deal would affect the global diplomatic role of an isolated and diminished UK.

Prime Minister Theresa May fought off a leadership challenge last week, yet both she and her Brexit plan remain on emergency life support. The challenge came after May finally acknowledged that the plan she had exhaustively negotiated with the EU had zero prospects of passing through Parliament. Yet exhausted and frustrated European leaders stress that they have no intention of unpicking the deal and starting again.

Parliament and May's Conservative Party are hopelessly divided. Any conceivable version of her plan would almost certainly be voted against, both by the "hard Brexit" camp and those who want to soften Brexit or thwart it altogether. If Britain's leaders cannot force a more palatable version through Parliament, this creates two scenarios: Either a disastrous no-deal scenario or a cancellation of Brexit altogether, possibly via a new referendum.

Experts caution that crashing out of the EU without a comprehensive deal would throw Britain's economy into a chronic recession. Britons have been warned that they may need to

hoard food and emergency supplies in the event of such a scenario. How could even the most blinkered Brexit nationalists embrace such a stupid act of self-harm?

As someone who for years has engaged with Britain's Foreign Office, I have been aghast at the way in which this esteemed department has shunned its traditional geopolitical mandate, focusing instead on forlorn efforts to persuade European diplomats to take them seriously.

After World War II, an exhausted and impoverished UK sent its diplomats out to wind down an unaffordable and ungovernable empire, a process that was cynically described as "managed decline." In the rush to leave locations such as Palestine, Iraq and Aden, many of the seeds of conflicts that have plagued the world in recent decades were sown. Today, it feels as if we are watching the next phase of Brexit Britain's "managed decline" play out.

In Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Libya, South Sudan, Afghanistan and elsewhere, geopolitical infernos of instability and chaos are raging. Yet British diplomats lack the capacity to do substantively more than issue formulaic statements that appear increasingly divorced from reality. This is a humiliating climb-down for a UN Security Council permanent member.

Britain used to be the respected European intermediary of choice for deploying its transatlantic influence to curb America's worst foreign policy instincts. In the age of Donald Trump, when such restraining influences are sorely needed, there has been a complete breakdown in European-American communication. On a vital issue such as containing Iran, the two sides are disastrously



Theresa May speaks during a media conference at an EU summit in Brussels.

pulling in opposite directions.

Britain bears a heavy responsibility for supporting Iraq's political process, given the roles of former Prime Minister Tony Blair and former US President George W Bush in tearing this nation apart. But where is Britain on the resurgence of Daesh, or efforts by Iran-backed paramilitaries to hijack Iraq's incoming government and entrench allies in key roles such as interior minister?

When I ask these questions, British diplomats ashamedly acknowledge that the attention of their political masters is diverted elsewhere, and privately express despair at the UK's growing international irrelevance and impotence.

On Palestine, Britain and Eu-

After the chaos and dysfunction of the Brexit negotiations, polling indicates a significant decline in the number of Britons who strongly support a decisive break from the EU.

rope once acted as an important counterweight to America's pro-Israel partisanship, never going as far as we would like them to, but still taking a valued

moral stance on settlement expansion, Jerusalem's status and violations against Palestinians. British diplomats frequently goaded their European counterparts to be more engaged in jointly lobbying Israel.

But with Israel's current leaders stealing Palestinian land at an unprecedented rate and agitating for war in Lebanon, Britain appears hardly aware of what is happening, and may henceforth lack the diplomatic clout to play a role even if it wanted to.

Alistair Burt has been an impressively energetic Middle East minister who spends much of his time traveling to engage with Arab leaders and interlocutors. Yet with the attention of Britain's foreign secretary and

prime minister focused on existential questions of national survival, Burt has been left to operate in a strategic vacuum.

After the chaos and dysfunction of the Brexit negotiations, polling indicates a significant decline in the number of Britons who strongly support a decisive break from the EU. There is growing momentum toward holding a second referendum. Meanwhile, we are poised for further weeks of dithering and indecisive talks with European negotiators, with few prospects for a formula that could be forced through Parliament.

Most nations take pride in the influence they wield on the world stage, going to immense lengths to protect and increase that influence. In previous centuries, Japan and China were rare cases of states that deliberately sought to cut themselves off from the world, promote self-sufficiency and focus their energies inward.

The result was stagnation. In consequence, they went from being among the world's most culturally advanced civilisations to finding themselves centuries behind upstart European states that gleefully exploited Asia's technological and economic backwardness at every turn.

In the next three months, we will discover whether the UK is poised to make the same geo-strategic error of disengaging from a globalised world and leaping off the cliff into a deluded nationalist utopia of splendid isolation, or whether its citizens will realise their mistake at the last minute and pull back from the brink.

(Baria Alamuddin is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster in the Middle East and the UK. She is editor of the Media Services Syndicate and has interviewed numerous heads of state.)

CIVILIAN'S TRIBUNE

Climate not changing itself, we are changing it!

I hear so much about the climate change. Yes it is changing as it has according to history of our planet.

I think we are helping it along with all the concrete and blacktop we are putting in for our roads, driveways and sidewalks.

We can walk on the dirt with our bare feet on a hot day and not burn our feet, but if we walk on the concrete and blacktop our feet would burn.

The heat from the sun can't get to the ground to absorb the heat, so it goes back into the air.

We are building more houses and very large buildings with roofs that reflect the heat back to the air so the building is well cooled.

Then we install air conditioning that puts hot air back into the air. Then we put acres and acres of solar panels that reflects the sun.

With all the concrete, blacktop, roads, driveways, sidewalks, roofs and solar panels, then when it rains the water can't get to the ground to get absorbed.

The rain water runs off the roofs onto the concrete and blacktop into concrete ditches and



into drain pipes that go to rivers.

There the water can't be absorbed into the ground to fill the aquifer (underground reservoirs) that cleans and purifies the water wells that pumps out for our drinking water and provides irrigation for fields.

We are building windmills to catch the wind to generate electricity and that slows down the winds that control the weather patterns. Then think about all the heat our light bulbs give off. Touch one and see.

T Raymond

1972

Vietnam War: President Richard Nixon announces that the United States will engage North Vietnam in Operation Linebacker II.



1973

Soviet Soyuz Programme: Soyuz 13, crewed by cosmonauts Valentin Lebedev and Pyotr Klimuk, is launched from Baikonur in the Soviet Union.

1981

First flight of the Russian heavy strategic bomber **Tu-160**, the world's largest combat aircraft, largest supersonic aircraft and largest variable-sweep wing aircraft built.

1999

NASA launches into orbit the Terra platform carrying five Earth Observation instruments, including ASTER, CERES, MISR, MODIS and MOPITT.

Caste problem faced by Twitter

Dalits and other Indian gender, religious, tribal and ethnic minorities are regularly harassed on Twitter by right-wing troll armies



Jack was photographed holding a poster that read "Smash Brahminical patriarchy".



THENMOZHI SOUNDARARAJAN

On Nov 13, Jack Dorsey, the chief executive of Twitter, met with several female journalists and activists in New Delhi to talk about online safety in India. Female journalists and activists from religious and cultural minorities face relentless harassment and abuse on Dorsey's platform. The meeting with Dorsey and other Twitter executives was aimed at helping them better understand the magnitude of the problem in India.

My colleague Sanghapali Aruna, who runs Project Mukti, an organisation that leverages technology to empower Dalits to fight caste prejudice, was among the attendees. "Dalit," which means "oppressed," refers to the caste of people who suffer the greatest violence, discrimination and disenfranchisement under India's caste apartheid that structures Hindu society.

When Aruna met Dorsey she had already left the platform, fearing for her safety following a Twitter doxing incident after which she was confronted and threatened. As she shared her experiences of discrimination and intimidation on Twitter, Vijaya Gadde, the company's head of legal, policy, trust and safety, openly wept. Dalits and other Indian minorities are regularly harassed on, if not forced off, Twitter by right-wing troll armies.

Twitter's position as a plat-

form for political discourse in India was cemented after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party famously used social media during his campaign in the 2014 national elections. Since Modi came to power, his followers have been conveying positive messages about his government, often using doctored images.

India has also seen an increase in the atrocities against minorities and incidents of religious and caste-based violence. Many blame Modi's followers, who have emerged as a majoritarian, casteist troll army for inciting hatred of India's caste and religious minorities.

While most of the world understands America's troll culture and its foundations in white supremacy, it is still learning about how caste is the bedrock for India's online troll ecosystems. Dalits need to be at the table during discussions of platform accountability because our stories carry the urgency of what our people face. Whether in the real or the online world, Dalits refuse to be the canary in the coal mine for caste atrocity any longer.

It was in this fraught context that I designed a series of political posters. One that Aruna gave to Dorsey featured a woman protesting and three words: Smash. Brahminical. Patriarchy. The Brahmins sit at the very top of the caste hierarchy and are long-standing gatekeepers of power. Their voices collectively dominate public debate and opinion in traditional and social media, extending their supremacy beyond traditional Indian institutions. The poster was a piece of

Dorsey and his colleagues also need to engage in broad consultations with governments and civil society groups, especially with representatives from gender, religious and cultural minorities.

Dalit resistance art, an artefact of solidarity and resilience.

After the meeting in New Delhi ended, Dorsey held my poster while posing with participants for a picture. The photograph was seen as Twitter endorsing our call to end caste and patriarchy.

A fierce backlash on Indian Twitter from India's caste elites, particularly the Brahmins, followed.

Dorsey and his team were relentlessly harassed. He was smeared as a racist and accused of disrupting Indian society in the run-up to the 2019 national elections.

A campaign for Brahmins to boycott Twitter trended on Twitter.

Dorsey has my empathy. He had a fleeting taste of what it is to be a Dalit woman on Twitter. But these attacks remind us of the pervasiveness of the problem that had prompted his New Delhi visit: online safety in India.

India, with almost eight million active Twitter users, is the platform's fastest growing market. An increasing number of

these users are Dalits or belong to other religious, cultural and gender minorities.

There are over 260 million Dalits in India, and for many, Twitter truly represented a platform where they could speak and be heard while offering an alternative to mainstream Indian media, which has scant Dalit representation.

But India's entrenched structures of caste privilege and power replicated on Twitter and forced caste-oppressed communities off the platform, traumatising many in the process.

Twitter executives quickly cowed before the oppressive power of caste. After the intense Brahmin outrage and calls for a boycott, Gadde apologised for the photograph of Dorsey with my poster, saying she and her colleagues should have been more thoughtful and, "Twitter strives to be an impartial platform for all."

The apology translated to an endorsement of deeply problematic power dynamics — an unacceptable position given the platform's positioning as a free and open space for discussion.

And given the magnitude of caste-based aggression and harassment on Twitter, its blindness to caste in India is alarming. The platform has a responsibility not to simply promote free speech but to also guarantee the freedom of expression and safety of its most vulnerable users. Coordinated attacks on vulnerable voices are shutting them out and turning Twitter into yet another tool of persecution.

In the light of Dorsey's encounter with the vitriol on Indian Twitter, I hope he and his

colleagues take a step back to assess, reflect and pivot. The platform urgently needs to make corrections to protect minorities in India and elsewhere in the world.

There are immediate, specific measures Twitter could take. It could introduce a formal option to report caste-related abuse and hate speech. It could commission an independent assessment of the human rights risks on the platform, with particular attention to the safety, freedom of expression and privacy and experience of its most vulnerable users, and create ways to mitigate those risks. And it should dedicate resources into investigating India troll networks and the growing cost of disinformation that results from their actions.

Dorsey and his colleagues also need to engage in broad consultations with governments and civil society groups, especially with representatives from gender, religious and cultural minorities. These difficult conversations will reflect a difficult reality, but they need to happen if Twitter wants to be a platform where marginalised voices can be visible and heard without fear.

As one of the first Dalit women on Twitter, I long for the time when the platform meant community and sharing, not endless casteist abuse, rape and death threats. It is time for executives like Dorsey to ensure that the trolls do not and will not own the virtual public sphere.

(Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a Dalit-American artist and activist, is the founder of Equality Labs, a human rights group fighting caste and religious intolerance.)



TOP
4
TWEETS

01



For 34 years, Congress & Gandhis protected Sajjan Kumar, Tytler and Kamalnath. Captain Amarinder too gave clean chits to killers of Sikhs. Finally the court exposed the cover-up. What do @RahulGandhi & @capt_amarinder have to say now? #1984SikhGenocide

@HarsimratBadal_

02



It's good to remember that other human beings are like us. We are born the same way; we die the same way. While we're alive it's better to be able to trust each other as friends. We earn other people's trust when we show a genuine concern for their well-being.

@DalaiLama

03



RT if you agree that our President is a hero of heroes for dealing with all the haters and still achieving one major accomplishment every 36 hours, keeping his promises, and when all is done, standing (Eph. 6:13 KJV).

@RealDrGina

04



Seven civilians including five teenagers were killed in J&K. What did they die for? Will those who advocate a muscular, militaristic approach to J&K, please answer the question?

@PChidambaram_IN

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

business

GFH named best investment bank in Middle East



Mohammed Abdulmalik, the Chief Placement Officer of GFH receives the award

TDI | Manama

GFH Financial Group (GFH) has been named the “Best Investment Bank- Middle East” and the “Best Islamic Bank – Bahrain” at the Islamic Business & Finance Awards - EMEA 2018 held in Dubai.

Mohammed Abdulmalik, the Chief Placement Officer of GFH accepted the awards on 6 December on behalf of the Group.

Among the industry’s most prestigious honours,

the awards cover a wide range of financial services categories and are determined through an online poll held on the magazine’s website with participation from nearly 10,000 readers and industry players and peers.

In its 13th year, the annual awards gathered together more than 200 Islamic bankers and financiers from across the Middle East and Africa to celebrate the industry’s best and brightest and their accomplishments over the past year.

StanChart to take \$160 million charge from private equity sale



People walk inside the main branch of Standard Chartered in Hong Kong, China

Reuters | London

Standard Chartered PLC has agreed terms for the sale of its private equity division, ending a more than two-year effort to shed a business the bank no longer deemed central to its strategy.

StanChart will sell a majority of the private equity arm’s investment portfolio to funds managed by Intermediate Capital Group Plc, the bank said yesterday, a deal first reported by Reuters in August.

The bank said it expected to take a restructuring charge of about \$160 million from the sale, but did not disclose the terms of the deal.

Reuters previously reported that the main real estate assets in the portfolio were worth around \$700 million.

The assets ICG is buying from StanChart will be directly managed by Affirma Capital, a newly-formed company consisting of the former Standard Chartered private equity team.

Google joins tech move east, to invest \$1 bn in New York campus

Google will be doubling the size of its workforce in the city to around 14,000

● Google is seeking to expand its headquarters campus in Mountain View, California, even as it grows outside Silicon Valley

AFP | New York

Google became the latest US tech giant to announce a major expansion plan, unveiling a \$1 billion investment yesterday to create a new campus that could double its New York City workforce to 14,000.

The move by Google comes following Amazon’s announcement of new headquarters sites in New York and suburban Washington DC worth some \$5 billion, and Apple’s \$1 billion expansion to Texas and other areas.

Google parent Alphabet’s chief financial officer Ruth Porat said it would lease large office buildings in lower Manhattan, which will become the centerpiece of a campus of more than 1.7 million square feet (160,000 square meters).

The new campus, which should be operational starting in 2020, will be known as Google Hudson Square and “will be the primary location for our New York-based Global Business Organization,” Porat wrote in a blog post.

“New York City continues to be a great source of diverse, world-class talent -- that’s what brought Google to the city in 2000 and that’s what keeps us here,” she said.

Alphabet earlier this year said



A view of Google’s New York office in Chelsea

it was buying the Manhattan Chelsea Market for \$2.4 billion, and planned to lease space at Pier 57 on the Hudson river. The company currently employs some 7,000 people in New York.

“With these most recent investments in Google Chelsea

and Google Hudson Square, we will have the capacity to more than double the number of Googlers in New York over the next 10 years,” Porat said.

She said the company’s “investment in New York is a huge part of our commitment to grow and invest in US facilities, offices and jobs.”

The new site is a former industrial area adjacent to the Greenwich Village and Soho districts.

The expansion would make California-based Alphabet one of the city’s largest commercial tenants, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Finding new workers

Alphabet, Amazon and Apple are three of the world’s most valuable corporations and have

been outgrowing their home bases even with new headquarters building.

Google this month released an updated plan for expanding its Mountain View, California, headquarters to create a new village-type campus with more than 6,000 new homes, some of which would be available to low-income residents.

Both Google and Apple handled their expansion plans quietly, while Amazon asked for municipalities across North America for proposals, prompting critics to call it a “Hunger Games” contest.

All three companies have been struggling to attract workers with technology skills, and that appears to have been a key factor in the three expansion moves.

“With these most recent investments in Google Chelsea and Google Hudson Square, we will have the capacity to more than double the number of Googlers in New York over next 10 years

RUTH PORAT



VIVA Bahrain welcoming STC Group Chairman of the Board HRH Prince Mohammed Khalid Al Faisal and members of the STC Group Board of Directors to celebrate VIVA’s continuous success in Bahrain. The delegates were welcomed by VIVA Bahrain Chairman, Abdulla Al Zimami, VIVA Bahrain CEO Ulaiyan Al Wetaid and members of VIVA Bahrain Board of Directors and senior management. HRH Prince Mohammed Khalid Al Faisal inaugurated VIVA Innovation Centre, a state-of-the-art facility aimed at showcasing the latest innovative technologies in the telecom industry



Gulf International Bank (GIB) employees during a celebration held at the bank’s Manama headquarters marking Bahrain National Day. GIB’s Chief Executive Officer, Abdulaziz Abdulrahman Al-Helaissi, extended his congratulations to employees on this auspicious occasion. The celebrations included a breakfast for the employees, and a folk dance reflecting genuine Bahraini culture. Tokens highlighting GIB’s interest in the environment were also distributed among the participants

Malaysia charges Goldman in 1MDB probe

Charges filed against US firm as part of corruption and money-laundering inquiry

● Goldman Sachs is accused of helping 'dishonestly misappropriate' \$2.7bn from bonds issued by 1MDB

● The US bank underwrote bonds issued by 1MDB on three occasions totalling \$6.5bn

AFP | Kuala Lumpur



A view of the Goldman Sachs stall on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York, US

Malaysia filed criminal charges yesterday against Goldman Sachs and two of its former employees over the alleged theft of billions of dollars, heaping fresh pressure on the Wall Street titan over the 1MDB scandal.

Goldman subsidiaries and ex-bankers Tim Leissner and Ng Chong Hwa are accused of misappropriating \$2.7 billion, bribing officials and giving false statements in relation to bond issues they arranged for state fund 1MDB.

Allegations that huge sums

were looted from the investment vehicle and used to buy everything from yachts to artwork, in a fraud that involved former Malaysian leader Najib Razak, contributed to the last government's shock defeat at May elections.

Both former Goldman employees had already been charged over the scandal in the US last month, with Leissner pleading guilty while Ng was arrested in Malaysia. Low Taek Jho, a fugitive Malaysian financier accused of masterminding the fraud, was also hit with new

charges.

The news represented a fresh blow to Goldman, whose corporate culture has come under scrutiny as a steady stream of accusations surrounding its involvement in the controversy have emerged.

"The highest standards are expected of Goldman Sachs," said Malaysian attorney-general Tommy Thomas, as he announced the charges. "They have fallen far short of any standard. In consequence, they have to be held accountable."

Goldman said in a statement the charges were "misdirected", adding: "We will vigorously defend them."

'Bribing officials'

The bank has come under fire for its role in underwriting bonds totalling \$6.5 billion on three occasions for 1MDB, for which they earned an eye-watering \$600 million in fees.

Thomas said Goldman and its former employees were accused of making false and misleading statements to misappropriate \$2.7 billion from the bond issuances, which took place in 2012 and 2013.

Leissner, who worked as Southeast Asia chairman and managing director at Goldman, and Ng, a managing director at the bank, conspired with Jho and others to bribe Malaysian officials to ensure that Goldman was selected to work on the bonds, Thomas said in a statement.

The money earned by Goldman for the work on the bonds was "several times higher than the prevailing market rates and industry norms", the statement said.

Hitachi to buy majority stake in ABB's power grid arm for \$6.4 billion



The planned buyout of ABB's power grid unit would reportedly make Hitachi the world's biggest player in the sector

AFP | Tokyo

Japan's Hitachi yesterday announced plans to buy a majority stake in the power grid business of Swiss-Swedish engineering giant ABB for \$6.4 billion, in what would be its biggest ever buyout.

The deal would make Hitachi the world's largest power grid company, local media said.

Under the plan, ABB will spin off its power grid unit, for which Hitachi will buy an 80.1 percent stake for 704 billion yen in early 2020, the Japanese company said in a statement.

"We plan to buy the remaining shares so that Hitachi can make the unit its wholly owned company," a spokesman said without disclosing, how much that would cost.

ABB's power grid unit makes and operates infrastructure

including power transmission equipment and control systems in numerous countries.

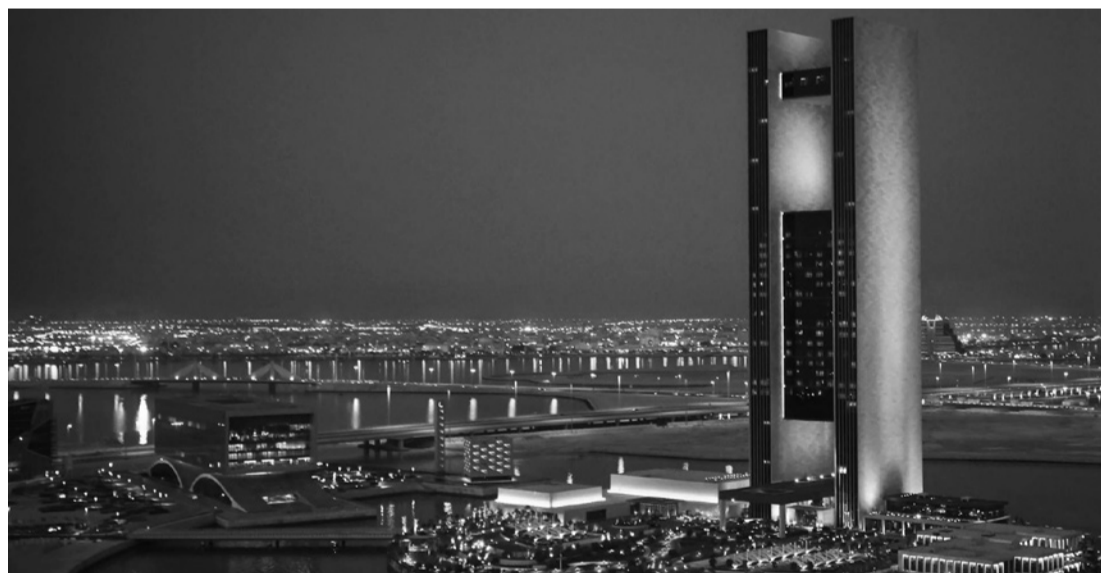
The deal would also make Hitachi the world's second-largest heavy electrical equipment maker by revenue, behind only General Electric, according to local media.

The Nikkei business daily first reported the planned deal last Thursday, but Hitachi shares have since dropped 2.5 percent.

Ratings agency Standard & Poor's said the power transmission and distribution business is growing globally, with service solutions a particularly promising field.

But "the business' profitability can be volatile, depending on how well a company manages projects related to equipment delivery", it added.

Make the holidays unforgettable at Four Seasons



Four Seasons Hotel



A chef arranges dishes in Four Seasons Hotel

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's island resort destination welcomes families and friends with a curated selection of dining and entertainment created with legendary Four Seasons finesse. This festive season, Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay offers something merry for everyone.

It's Festive Tea Time

Throughout the festive season, guests are invited to indulge in a perfectly festive afternoon by spoiling themselves with freshly prepared mince pies, caramel chocolate macaroons, cinnamon star cookies, praline Yule log, red velvet cupcake, and gingerbread scones.

Festive Afternoon Tea is served from December 5 to 28, every afternoon from 12:00 to 9:00 pm at Bay View Lounge and is priced at BHD 12/ BHD 22 for 2 people*

A Little Christmas Spirit for the Little Ones:

The Kids For All Seasons complimentary kids camp has an array of organized activities planned for Hotel guests throughout the festive season. From candy hunts to balloon art, face painting, writing letters to Santa or gingerbread house building, the KFAS team has a thoughtfully orchestrated schedule to provide fun for all ages. As 'icing on the festive cake', little guests can meet Santa on December 21, 24 and 25 for gift distribution during brunch at Bahrain Bay Kitchen.

Extend the Indulgence for Less in The Spa

Guests are invited to enjoy a personalized spa experience like no other. When purchasing a gift card for BHD 65 they receive a complimentary 30-minute back, neck and shoulder massage. When purchasing two gift cards of the same value, they receive

a 90-minute destress massage. The complimentary use of lockers, jacuzzi, steam and salt inhalation rooms adds to this festive spa experience.

Offer is valid through December 1 - 31. Savings can only be applied to one promotion at a time.

For reservations: 00973 1711 5000

Holiday Dining on Bahrain's Exclusive Island:

In the spirit of the season, the Hotel's restaurants and lounges will be offering special dinners. Christmas at Bahrain Bay Kitchen - Unwrap a Christmas feast this season at the Hotel's exquisite buffet restaurant.

• Christmas Eve Dinner - December 24, 7:00 to 12:00 pm, BHD 37 (with soft beverages included), BHD 47 (with full beverage package)*

• Christmas Day Musical Brunch - December 25, 1:00 to 4:30 pm, BHD 37 (with soft beverages included), BHD 47 (with

full beverage package)*

• Reservations: 00973 1711 5500

Christmas at CUT by Wolfgang Puck - Guests are invited to delight family and friends with a lavish Christmas dining at celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck's steak restaurant.

• Christmas Eve Four Course Dinner - December 24 and 25, 7:00 to 11:30 pm, BHD 45*

• Reservations: 00973 1711 5044

A Magnificent New Year's Eve For those preferring to ring in the New Year in Four Seasons style, the Hotel has created the following dinners and parties.

New Year's Eve 'Circus' Buffet at Bahrain Bay Kitchen

• December 31, 8:00 pm to 1:00 am, BHD 40 (with soft beverages), BHD 50 (including full beverage package) (prices include complimentary entrance into AZURE's exclusive New Year's Eve Circus Party with

entertainment)*

• Reservations: 00973 1711 5500

New Year's Day Jazz Brunch at Bahrain Bay Kitchen

• January 1, 2019, 1:00 to 4:30 pm, BHD 28 (with soft beverages), BHD 38 (including full beverage package)*

• Reservations: 00973 1711 5500

New Year's Eve Circus Party at AZURE

• December 31, 8:00 pm to 2:00 am, BHD 60 for non-hotel guests (price includes two drinks of choice and canapes), BHD 300 for table of 4 people including drinks and canapes

• Reservations: 00973 1711 5500

New Year's Eve Four Course Dinner at re/Asian Cuisine by Wolfgang Puck

• December 31, 7:00 pm to 1:00 am, BHD 45*, window tables minimum spend BHD 60 Reservations: 00973 1711 5046

New Year's Eve at CUT by Wolfgang Puck - Celebrate like a Hollywood celebrity at CUT this New Year's Eve with an exquisite four course menu.

• December 31, 7:00 pm to 1:00 am, BHD 45*

• Reservations: 00973 1711 5044

Get Away to Bahrain This Festive Season:

For guests' convenience, Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay now offers the Bahrain Getaway - 20% Off Package, including:

• 20 per cent savings on the room rate for two-night minimum and maximum stays

• Luxurious accommodations

• Complimentary use of Kids for All Seasons

• Complimentary use of the brand-new beach, pools and Spa facilities

For reservations: 00973 1711 5000

*All prices are subject to 10pc government levy and 10pc service charge.

Saudi's Falih discusses joint refining projects with Reliance

Reuters | London

India's Reliance, operator of the world's biggest refining complex, and top oil exporter Saudi Arabia will explore joint investments in refining and petrochemicals in the two countries, Saudi Arabian Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said.

Al-Falih tweeted that he met Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani and they discussed joint investment opportunities and cooperation in petrochemicals, refining and telecoms in their two countries.

Reliance's two oil refineries in western India have a combined capacity to process 1.4 million barrels per day of crude and the company has set a target to raise capacity by a further 600,000 bpd.

Italy optimistic savings will stop EU budget penalties

AFP | Rome

Italy has found four billion euros (\$4.5 billion) worth of savings to stop the European Union from opening disciplinary procedures, including possible fines, over its big-spending budget, the deputy prime minister said yesterday.

The coalition government has reached "an agreement on further fiscal reductions", Matteo Salvini said, as the clock ticks down on finalising the budget law, which must be passed by the end of the year.

Asked if the last-minute accord between the far-right League and anti-establishment Five Star Movement would be enough to appease Brussels, economy undersecretary Massimo Garavaglia said: "We are optimistic".

The savings come from cuts to the ruling parties' flagship reforms of income support for the poor and a lower retirement age.

EU blames US for 'deep crisis' at WTO, criticises US trade curbs

Reuters | Geneva

The European Union said yesterday the World Trade Organization (WTO) was mired in a "deep crisis and the United States is at its epicentre", and it called on the Trump administration to put forward concrete reform proposals.

EU Ambassador Mark Vanheukelen, speaking at a WTO review of US trade policies, also criticised limitations on the US procurement market, in particular through "Buy American" legislation, and its "heavy restrictions" on maritime transport.

Banks drive Egypt gain, petrochemicals boost Saudi

Saudi Telecom jumps on dividend, brokerage action

Reuters | Dubai

A rebound in bank shares lifted Egypt's blue-chip stock index yesterday, while petrochemicals boosted Saudi Arabia's index.

The Egyptian blue-chip index was up 1.7 per cent - about twice the rise of the broader EGX100 index - as the biggest bank, Commercial International Bank (COMI), increased 3.5pc.

The market has suffered sharp corrections since May and that has taken a lot of stocks to attractive entry points, said Radwa El-Swaify, head of research at Pharos Holding in Cairo.

COMI, along with other banks, had tumbled in recent weeks on concerns over an official proposal for higher taxation of their Treasury holdings. The final decision on the tax changes is not out yet and the proposal may be modified; this has allowed a recovery in bank stocks, though they have not returned to levels reached before news of the proposal, El-Swaify noted.



A Saudi trader monitors stocks at the Saudi Stock Exchange in Riyadh

The banks will probably pay an effective tax rate around 5-7pc higher than their current rate, she added.

Orascom Investment Holding gained 2.7pc after agreeing with the government to provide services to tourists at the Pyramids of Giza.

Telecom Egypt climbed 3.5pc after saying it expected revenue growth in the mid- to high

single digits in 2019. The firm expects its revenue for 2018 to beat guidance.

Ezz Steel gained for a third straight day, rising 4.8pc to 18.95 Egyptian pounds; brokerage CI Capital had raised its rating on the stock to "neutral" with a target of 19 pounds.

The Saudi Arabian index rose 0.8pc with top petrochemical maker Saudi Basic Industries

Closing Bell

SAUDI	▲ 0.8%	7,968
DUBAI	▲ 2,564	
ABU DHABI	▲ 0.7%	4,866
QATAR	■ 10,489	
EGYPT	▲ 1.7%	13,215
KUWAIT	■ 5,402	
BAHRAIN	■ 1,319	
OMAN	▼ 0.2%	4,408

adding 2.3pc and the largest lender, National Commercial Bank 1180.SE, gaining 2.0pc.

Saudi Telecom climbed 3.2pc to 90.5 riyals after it announced its dividend policy for the next three years; it will pay a minimum of 1 riyal per share each quarter, and an additional 2 riyals as an annual dividend for 2018.

Arqaam Capital rated the stock a "core buy" and raised its target price to 103 riyals.

But another telecommunications firm, Etihad Etisalat (Mobily), was down 4.3pc at 17.20

riyals, continuing to drop after disclosing a new system of royalty payments to the government on Sunday. Arqaam Capital downgraded the stock to "sell" from "hold" and cut its target to 16 riyals.

Al Khaleej Training and Education jumped 4.7pc after it was awarded a 42.2 million riyal (\$11.3 million) contract by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development.

The Abu Dhabi index rose 0.7pc with First Abu Dhabi Bank, United Arab Emirates' largest lender, increasing 1.2pc and energy firm Dana Gas DANA.AD climbing 2.3pc.

In Dubai, the index inched up 0.3pc after sliding 1.6pc in the last session, with DAMAC Properties gaining 4.8pc and blue chip Emaar Properties adding 2.4pc.

Qatar's index was flat with Middle East's largest lender, Qatar National Bank, rising 1.0pc. Recently listed Qatar Aluminiumlost 4.7pc to 12.40 riyals, a day after rising 29pc on its debut.

Oil rallies but oversupply, economic growth weigh

Reuters | London

Oil prices rose yesterday after a key Middle East oil minister suggested the market was rebalancing, but investor sentiment remained under pressure from oversupply and concern over the prospects for global economic growth and fuel demand.

Brent crude oil LCOc1 was up 30 cents a barrel at \$60.58 by 1430 GMT. US light crude CLc1 was 10 cents higher at \$51.30.

"Oil prices are regaining some ground on the back of bullish rhetoric from OPEC officials," said Stephen Brennock, analyst at London brokerage PVM Oil.

Both benchmarks fell more than 25 per cent through October and November as a supply glut inflated global inventories but have stabilized over the last three weeks, trading within fairly narrow ranges as oil producers have promised to cut production.

Some investors doubt planned supply cuts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other producers such as Russia will be enough to rebalance markets.

OPEC and its allies have agreed to reduce output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) from January, in a move to be reviewed at a meeting in April.



A gas station worker pumps fuel into a motorbike at a gas station of the Venezuelan state-owned oil company PDVSA in Caracas, Venezuela

UAE energy minister Suhail al-Mazrouei told reporters in Dubai yesterday that the global oil market was "correcting" and he expected "everyone" to cut oil supply under the agreement reached earlier this month in Vienna.

But OPEC and its allies have an uphill task.

US shale output is growing steadily, taking market share from the big Middle East oil producers in OPEC and making it harder for them to balance their budgets.

Russian oil output has been at a record high of 11.42 million barrels per day (bpd) in December so far, an industry source familiar with the data told Reuters.

Increasing concerns about weakening growth in major markets such as China and Europe have also dampened the mood in oil and other asset classes.

Chinese oil refinery throughput in November fell from October, suggesting an easing in oil demand, while the country's industrial output rose the least in nearly three years as the economy continued to lose momentum.

New Maldives leader secures \$1.4bn from 'closest friend' India

AFP | New Delhi

The new Maldives president, seen as closer to the West and India than his predecessor, secured \$1.4 billion from New Delhi yesterday in his first visit abroad to his country's "closest friend".

Ibrahim Mohamed Solih said after talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi that they would also "strengthen maritime security" through patrols, aerial surveillance and exchanging information.

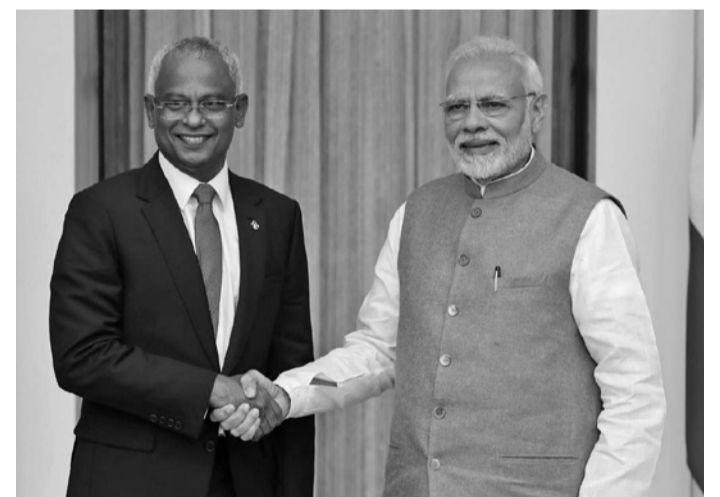
"India is our closest neighbour and our people are bound by ties of friendship and cultural affinity," Solih told reporters. "Within those close links, trade and commerce have flourished. India is not only our closest friend, it's also one of our largest trading partners," Solih said.

The package of financial assistance is in the form of budgetary support, currency swap agreements and credit lines, Modi said, after what he called "successful talks" to build upon the two countries' "deep-rooted" friendship.

"We want greater trade ties with Maldives. There are increasing opportunities for Indian companies in the island nation. This is beneficial for both the countries," Modi said. "Our security interests are interlinked. We will not allow our countries to be used for harmful activities against each other," he said.

Solih, 54, unexpectedly beat his predecessor Abdulla Yameen to the presidency of the Indian Ocean archipelago and upmarket honeymoon destination in elections in September.

Besides being accused by critics of corruption and muzzling



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) shakes hands with Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih

the media, Yameen was seen as close to China, borrowing from Beijing for infrastructure projects including a new bridge and an airport expansion.

China has also loaned billions to other countries around the Indian Ocean and beyond, stoking fears of a debt trap and riling both India -- which has traditionally held sway in the region -- and the United States.

“We want greater trade ties with Maldives. There are increasing opportunities for Indian companies in the island nation. This is beneficial for both the countries.”

NARENDRA MODI

Solih's party has called for a review of the projects bankrolled by China in the strategically placed Indian Ocean country.

Former president Mohamed Nasheed, now Solih's mentor, has accused China of a land grab and condemned a free-trade agreement signed by Beijing and Yameen as one-sided.

Nasheed told AFP in a recent interview that it would be "very difficult" for the Maldives to repay its Chinese debt, which he said was estimated to be at least \$3 billion.

But China's ambassador told the local Avas.mv website last month that only about half of the Maldives' external debt pile of \$1.2 billion was owed to Beijing.

Zhang Lizhong said the loans carried just a two-percent interest rate and a five-year grace period.

"We have nothing to gain if a friendly country falls into debt," he said. "There is no single (piece of) evidence to support the so-called debt trap claim."

\$60.58

was the price of Brent crude oil LCOc1 at 1430 GMT yesterday

show

Philippines wins fourth Miss Universe crown

Reuters | Bangkok

Catriona Gray from the Philippines was crowned Miss Universe yesterday, the fourth time the Southeast Asian country has won the international beauty pageant.

Gray, a 24-year-old Filipino-Australian model, won the title in the Thai capital Bangkok where the pageant included for the first time a transgender contestant.

"My heart is filled with so much gratitude. There were moments of doubt where I felt overwhelmed and I felt the pressure," said Gray, who wore a red and orange dress that was inspired by Mount Mayon, a volcano that erupted this year. Gray was asked during the contest about her views on legalizing marijuana and replied that she supported it for medical uses.

After she was crowned, Gray told reporters the question was "definitely relevant" and "an active topic", in an apparent reference to the war on



Miss Philippines Catriona Gray reacts after being crowned Miss Universe during the final round of the Miss Universe pageant in Bangkok, Thailand

drugs in the Philippines that has killed thousands of Filipinos and caused international alarm.

Gray said during the pageant that working in a Manila slum had taught her to find beauty in difficult situations.

"If I could teach people to

be grateful, we could have an amazing world where negativity could not grow and foster, and children would have a smile on their face," she said.

Miss South Africa, Tamaryn Green, 24 was the first runner-up, followed by Miss Venezuela, Sthefany Gutiérrez, 19.

Robert De Niro inspired Bradley Cooper to direct

PTI | Los Angeles

Hollywood star Bradley Cooper says veteran actor Robert De Niro motivated him to take the idea of directing a film seriously.

Cooper, who made his directorial debut with critically-acclaimed 'A Star Is Born', says De Niro urged him to turn director during their time on 'Limitless'.

"I tried to get him to do this movie, 'Limitless', and combine two characters. That was the first time I tried to cast a movie, even though I wasn't the director, and I went to see him in his hotel room.

"I was pitching him the whole thing and then he wound up saying yes, which blew my mind because he was my hero. After that movie, he said he thought I should direct," Cooper told a source.

'A Star Is Born' also features Lady Gaga.

Bradley Cooper

Ashlee Simpson, Ross share why daughter is best addition to tour



Evan Ross and Ashlee Simpson

IANS | Los Angeles

Singer Ashlee Simpson and husband Evan Ross, an actor and a musician, are gearing up to go on a tour together. The couple is looking forward to bring their three-year-old daughter, Jagger, along for the adventure.

"We've been in rehearsal, actually, (and) Jagger was at our rehearsal dancing it up!" Simpson said, referring to the couple's upcoming Ashlee+Evan Tour, reports online.com.

Ross added: "So we had the

best background dancer ever today! We just left rehearsal today, (and) we've got some rehearsals to do, but we're excited."

The couple doesn't have a whole lot of time before their North American tour officially kicks off on January 7, 2019 at the Bowery Ballroom in New York, and continues for a total of eight announced stops before wrapping up on January 18 here.

"We are bringing the (whole) family on the road," Ross shared. "Everybody's coming!"



Jason Momoa

No GoT reunion for Jason Momoa

IANS | Manila

Before opening the final chapter, "Game of Thrones" makers will be treating fans with a reunion episode. But actor Jason Momoa says he won't be a part of the special episode.

HBO channel confirmed the news of the special episode, but it won't air on the network. It will only be available as part of the complete series home video box set, which will package all eight seasons together.

Asked if he will make an appearance in the reunion episode, Momoa told IANS exclusively: "I don't think so."

Momoa played the role of warlord of the Dothraki people Khal Drogo in the series, which brings the story from George R.R. Martin's novels about the quest to claim the Iron Throne alive. The final season will arrive in April next year.

At the moment, Momoa is riding high on success of his superhero film Aquaman.

AQUAMAN

(PG-15) (ACTION/ADVENTURE) NEW

Ⓜ JASON MOMOA, AMBER HEARD, NICOLE KIDMAN

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT (ATMOS): 11.15 AM. + 2.15 + 5.15 + 8.15 + 11.15 PM.

DAILY AT (VIP): 10.30 AM. + 1.30 + 4.30 + 7.30 + 10.30 PM.

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT (ATMOS): 12.00 + 3.00 + 6.00 + 9.00 + 12.00 MN.

DAILY AT (IMAX 2D): 11.30 AM. + 2.30 + 5.30 + 8.30 + 11.30 PM.

DAILY AT 10.30 AM. + 1.00 + 4.00 + 7.00 + 10.00 + (1.00 AM. THURS./FRI.)

DAILY AT (VIP): 11.00 AM. + 2.00 + 5.00 + 8.00 + 11.00 PM.

DAILY AT (VIP): 12.30 + 3.30 + 6.30 + 9.30 + (12.30 MN. THURS./FRI.)

SEEF (II) DAILY AT 11.15 AM. + 12.45 + 2.15 + 3.45 + 5.15 + 6.45 + 8.15 + 9.45 + 11.15 PM. + (12.45 MN. THURS./FRI.)

SEEF (I) DAILY AT 11.45 AM. + 2.45 + 5.45 + 8.45 + 11.45 PM. SAAR DAILY AT 11.30 AM. + 2.30 + 5.30 + 8.30 + 11.30 PM. + (11.00 PM. THURS./FRI.)

WADI AL SAIL DAILY AT 10.45 AM. + 11.45 AM. + 1.45 + 2.45 + 4.45 + 5.45 + 7.45 + 8.45 + 10.45 PM. + 11.45 PM.

SPIDER MAN INTO THE SPIDER VERSE

(PG) (ANIMATION/ACTION/ADVENTURE) NEW

Ⓜ HAILEE STEINFELD, NICOLAS CAGE, MAHERSHALA ALI

OASIS JUFFAIR DUBBED (KIDS CINEMA) DUBBED IN ENGLISH: 10.30 AM + 8.00 PM.

OASIS JUFFAIR DUBBED (KIDS CINEMA) DUBBED IN ENGLISH (3D): 5.30 + 10.30 PM.

OASIS JUFFAIR DUBBED (KIDS CINEMA) IN ARABIC: 1.00 PM.

OASIS JUFFAIR DUBBED IN ENGLISH: 4.00 + 6.30 + 11.30 PM.

OASIS JUFFAIR DUBBED IN ENGLISH (3D): 1.30 PM.

OASIS JUFFAIR DUBBED: IN ARABIC: 9.00 PM.

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: DUBBED IN ENGLISH: 11.00 AM. + 1.30 + 4.00 + 6.30 + 9.00 + 11.30 PM.

DAILY AT: DUBBED IN ENGLISH (3D): 10.45 AM. + 1.15 + 3.45 + 6.15 + 8.45 + 11.15 PM.

DAILY AT: DUBBED IN ARABIC: 10.30 AM. + 1.00 + 3.30 + 6.00 + 8.30 + 11.00 PM.

SEEF (II) DAILY AT: DUBBED IN ENGLISH: 11.00 AM. + 1.30 + 4.00 + 6.30 + 9.00 + 11.30 PM.

DAILY AT: DUBBED IN ARABIC: 12.00 + 2.30 + 5.00 + 7.30 + 10.00 + (12.30 MN. THUR./FRI.)

SAAR DAILY AT: DUBBED IN ENGLISH: 12.30 + 3.00 + 5.30 PM.

DAILY AT: DUBBED IN ARABIC: 11.15 AM. + 1.45 + 4.15 + 6.45 PM.

WADI AL SAIL DUBBED IN ENGLISH: 11.00 AM. + 1.30 + 4.00 + 6.30 + 9.00 PM.

DUBBED IN ARABIC: 10.30 AM. + 1.00 + 3.30 + 6.00 + 8.30 PM.

SECOND ACT

(PG-15) (COMEDY) NEW

Ⓜ HJENNIFER LOPEZ, VANESSA HUDGENS, MILO VENTIMIGLIA

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 11.45 AM. + 2.00 + 4.15 + 6.30 + 8.45 + 11.00 PM.

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 12.30 + 2.45 + 5.00 + 7.15 + 9.30 + 11.45 PM.

SEEF (II) DAILY AT: 12.00 + 2.15 + 4.30 + 6.45 + 9.00 + 11.15 PM.

SAAR DAILY AT: 9.15 + (11.30 PM. THURS./FRI.)

WADI AL SAIL DAILY AT: 1.30 + 6.30 + 11.30 PM.

THREE WORDS OF FOREVER

(PG-15) (FILIPINO/ROMANTIC/DRAMA/COMEDY) NEW

Ⓜ HSHARON CUNETA, RICHARD GOMEZ, KATHRYN BERNARDO

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 11.45 AM. + 2.00 + 6.45 + 11.30 PM.

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 7.30 + 9.30 + 11.30 PM.

SEEF (I) DAILY AT: 11.45 AM. + 2.00 + 4.15 + 6.30 + 8.45 + 11.00 PM.

ELLIOT THE LITTLEST REINDEER

(PG) (ANIMATION/ADVENTURE/COMEDY) NEW

Ⓜ HMorena Baccarin, Josh Hutcherson, John Cleese

OASIS JUFFAIR (KIDS CINEMA): 3.30 PM.

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 11.30 AM

SEEF (I) DAILY AT: 11.15 AM. + 1.15 + 3.15 + 5.15 PM.

PINKY MEMSAAB: A DUBAI STORY

(PG-15) (URDU/ DRAMA) NEW

Ⓜ SUNNY HINDUJA, KIRAN MALIK, ADNAN JAFFAR

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 4.15 + 9.00 PM.

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 11.30 AM. + 1.30 + 3.30 + 5.30 PM.

SEEF (I) DAILY AT: 11.15 AM. + 1.45 + 4.15 + 6.45 + 9.15 + 11.45 PM.

RALPH BREAKS THE INTERNET

(PG) (ANIMATION/ADVENTURE/COMEDY)

Ⓜ JOHN C. REILLY, SARAH SILVERMAN, GAL GADOT

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 11.15 AM. + 4.00 + 8.45 PM.

CREED II

(PG-13) (DRAMA/ACTION/SPORT)

Ⓜ TESSA THOMPSON, MICHAEL B. JORDAN, SYLVESTER STALLONE

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 12.45 + 6.00 + 11.15 PM.

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 10.30 AM. + 1.00 + 3.45 + 6.30 + 9.15 + 12.00 MN.

WADI AL SAIL DAILY AT: 10.45 AM. + 3.45 + 8.45 PM

MORTAL ENGINES

(PG-13) (ACTION/ADVENTURE/THRILLER)

Ⓜ HUGO WEAVING, HERA HILMAR, ROBERT SHEEHAN

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 1.30 + 6.15 + 11.00 PM.

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 11.00 AM. + 1.30 + 4.00 + 6.30 + 9.00 + 11.30 PM.

SAAR DAILY AT: 8.30 + (11.00 PM THURS/FRI)

WADI AL SAIL DAILY AT: 2.15 + 7.00 + 11.45 PM.

ORU KUPRASIDHA PAYYAN

(PG-15) (MALAYALAM) NEW

Ⓜ TOVINO THOMAS, NIMISHA SAJAYAN, ANU SITHARA

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 12.00 + 2.45 + 5.30 + 8.15 + 11.00 PM.

SEEF (I) DAILY AT: 10.30 AM. + 1.00 + 3.45 + 6.30 + 9.15 + 12.00 MN.

AL HAMRA DAILY AT " 3.00 + 9.00 PM.

JOSEPH

(PG-15) (MALAYALAM) NEW

Ⓜ JOJU GEORGE, MALAVIKA MENON, JAMES ELIYA

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 11.45 AM. + 2.30 + 5.15 + 8.00 + 10.45 PM.

SEEF (I) DAILY AT: 12.45 + 3.30 + 6.15 + 9.00 + 11.45 PM.

AL HAMRA DAILY AT: 12.00 + 6.00 + (12.00 MN. THURS./FRI.)

KEDARNATH

(PG-15) (HINDI/DRAMA/ROMANTIC)

Ⓜ RAJINIKANTH, AKSHAY KUMAR, AMY JACKSON

OASIS JUFFAIR DAILY AT: 3.30 + 8.45 PM.

ODIYAN

(PG-13) (MALAYALAM) NEW

STARRING FRIDAY 14TH

Ⓜ HMOHANLAL, PRAKASH RAJ, MANJU WARRIER

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 10.30 AM. + 1.45 + 5.00 + 8.15 + 11.30 PM.

RALPH BREAKS THE INTERNET

(PG) (ANIMATION/ADVENTURE/COMEDY)

Ⓜ JOHN C. REILLY, SARAH SILVERMAN, GAL GADOT

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 11.45 AM. + 2.00 + 4.15 + 6.30 + 8.45 + 11.00 PM.

SAAR DAILY AT: 11.30 AM. + 1.45 + 4.00 + 6.15 PM.

SEEF (II) DAILY AT: 12.00 + 2.15 + 4.30 + 6.45 + 9.00 + 11.15 PM.

WADI AL SAIL DAILY AT: 12.00 + 4.45 + 9.30 PM.

ROBIN HOOD

(PG-15) (ACTION/ADVENTURE)

Ⓜ TARON EGERTON, EVE HEWSON, JAMIE FOXX

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 10.30 AM. + 12.45 + 3.00 + 5.15 + 7.30 + 9.45 + 12.00 MN.

INSTANT FAMILY

(PG-15) (COMEDY)

Ⓜ MARK WAHLBERG, ROSE BYRNER, OCTAVIA SPENCER

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 11.15 AM. + 1.45 + 4.15 + 6.45 + 9.15 + 11.45 PM.

WADI AL SAIL DAILY AT: 11.30 PM.

JOHNNY ENGLISH STRIKES AGAIN

(PG) (COMEDY/ACTION/ADVENTURE)

Ⓜ ROWAN ATKINSON, OLGA KURYLENKO, EMMA THOMPSON

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 12.00 + 2.00 + 4.00 + 6.00 + 8.00 + 10.00 + 12.00 MN.

HUNTER KILLER

(PG-15) (ACTION/THRILLER)

Ⓜ GERARD BUTLER, GARY OLDMAN, OMMON

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 10.30 AM. + 2.45 + 7.00 + 11.15 PM.

WIDOWS

(15+) (CRIME/THRILLER/DRAMA)

Ⓜ VIOLA DAVIS, MICHELLE RODRIGUEZ, ELIZABETH DEBICKI

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 11.30 AM. + 4.00 + 8.30 PM.

EL BADLAH

(PG-13) (ARABIC/COMEDY)

Ⓜ TAMER HOSNY, AKRAM HOSNI, MAJED EL MASRY, AMINA KHALIL

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 2.00 + 6.30 + 11.00 PM.

THE POSSESSION OF HANNAH GRACE

(18+) (THRILLER/HORROR)

Ⓜ SHAY MITCHELL, STANA KATIC, LOUIS HERTHUM

CITYCENTRE DAILY AT: 1.00 + 5.15 + 9.30 PM.

WADI AL SAIL DAILY AT: 11.00 PM.

CHRISTMAS BREAK IN

(PG) (COMEDY/FAMILY) NEW

Ⓜ DENISE RICHARDS, DANNY GLOVER, CAMERON SEELY

SEEF (II) DAILY AT: 11.15 AM. + 1.15 + 3.15 + 5.15 + 7.15 + 9.15 + 11.15 PM.

MALEVOLENT

(15+) (HORROR/THRILLER) NEW

Ⓜ FLORENCE PUGH, CELIA IMRIE, BEN LLOYD-HUGHES

SEEF (II) DAILY AT: 11.45 AM. + 1.45 + 5.45 + 9.45 + 11.45 PM.

THE BOMBING (AIR STRIKE)

(PG-15) (ACTION/DRAMA) NEW

Ⓜ BRUCE WILLIS, YE LIU, SEUNG-HEON SONG

SEEF (II) DAILY AT: 11.30 AM. + 1.30 + 3.30 + 5.30 + 7.30 + 9.30 + 11.30 PM.

11 DAYS

(PG-13) (DRAMA) NEW

Ⓜ HABEEB GHULOOM, OLIGYA, LITA TADPILITA

SEEF (II) DAILY AT: 3.45 + 7.45 PM.

THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS

(PG-13) (COMEDY/DRAMA/BIOGRAPHY) NEW

Ⓜ DAN STEVENS, CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER, JONATHAN PRYCE

SEEF (I) DAILY AT: 7.15 + 9.30 + 11.45 PM.

SPORTS

Brave CF secures major partnerships in India

TDT | Manama

Brave Combat Federation has announced that the Bahraini based global Mixed Martial Arts organization has secured major partnerships in India to host the twentieth edition of the event.

The organization found by HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa has an immensely successful year in 2018 hosting 12 International events in 12 nations around the world. The massive success of Brave Combat Federation has resulted in securing major partnerships to host the event.

The latest partnerships secured by Brave Combat Federation in India include Trident Hyderabad as the official hospitality partner, CallHealth as the Health and Wellness partner, Ambrosia Foods as the Dining partner, PVR Cinemas as the Multiplex Partner, MeraEvents as the ticketing partner alongside the global partners Greenhill Sports as the official merchandise partner and Abu Dhabi Sports as the official broadcast partner.

The network of business connectivity achieved by Brave Combat Federation is till date the largest in the Kingdom of Bahrain which enabled the initiative to become the fastest growing Mixed Martial Arts organization in the world.

Brave CF has confirmed to expand operations in 2019 with an aim to reach out to additional geographies and expand the scope of the organization further.

The initiatives will support to create a sustainable global eco-system for the sport of Mixed Martial Arts. The Kingdom of Bahrain is also confirmed as the venue for Brave International Combat Week 2019.

"Brave CF has opened sustainable business opportunities and has established a reliable global platform for athletes around the world in a very short time under the leadership of HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa. The growing partnerships from around the world is a testimony that highlights the commitment and progression that the initiative has achieved", said Mohammed Shahid, President of Brave CF.

Latham double ton buries SL

● **Imperious Latham strikes epic 264 as stuttering Sri Lanka face defeat**

● **Sri Lanka trail by 276 runs with 7 wickets remaining**

AFP | Wellington

New Zealand opener Tom Latham played Sri Lanka's bowlers with an unbeaten 264 yesterday before the tourists' top order failed again, leaving them on the verge of a heavy first Test defeat in Wellington.

Latham walked off to a standing ovation at the Basin Reserve after carrying his bat and helping New Zealand to 578, a commanding first-innings lead of 296.

Seamers Tim Southee and Trent Boult then combined to remove Sri Lanka's top order, reducing them to 20 for three at stumps on day three.

Boult dismissed Danushka Gunathilaka on three, while Southee snared Dimuth Karunaratne for 10 and Dhananjaya de Silva for a duck, taking his tally for the match to eight.

The pair, along with short-ball specialist Neil Wagner, will be relishing the prospect of having two full days to attack Sri Lanka's misfiring batting line-up.

But the day belonged to



Tom Latham of New Zealand plays a shot

Latham, who added steadily to his overnight total of 121, offering no chances to the frustrated Sri Lankans.

It was the sixth best Test score by a New Zealander and the highest this year by a batsman from any nation.

His innings, which lasted more than 11 hours, also continued a horror run at the Basin Reserve for Sri Lanka, where they have now conceded double centuries to four New Zealanders.

'Enjoy the moment'

Latham said he always believed he was capable of producing such a performance but it was pleasing to achieve it on the international stage.

"These innings don't come around too often, so you have to enjoy the moment when they do," he said.

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson helped the Black Caps reach their imposing total

**Sri Lanka, ranked sixth in the world, have lost their last five Tests against New Zealand**

with a sparkling 91, while Ross Taylor and Henry Nicholls both reached 50.

Lahiru Kumara was the pick of a Sri Lanka attack that struggled on a flat wicket, taking four for 127.

Taylor was dismissed for 50 in the first over of the day after failing to add to his overnight score, thanks to a sharp catch from Dimuth Karunaratne.

The ball was forcefully struck and initially bounced off Karunaratne's hand at silly mid-off before he recovered to grab it as he tumbled to the ground.

Henry Nicholls also went for 50 after lunch trying to take on spinner Dilruwan Perera.

BJ Watling followed without scoring when he tucked his bat awkwardly under his arm as he ducked a Kumara bouncer and the ball clipped it on the way through.

Colin de Grandhomme scored three sixes during an aggressive innings but fell on 49 attempting to bludgeon a fourth.

Sri Lanka, ranked sixth in the world, have lost their last five

Sri Lanka 1st innings 282 (A. Mathews 83, Dickwella 80; Southee 6-68)

2nd innings

M. Gunathilaka lbw Boult	3
F. Karunaratne c Boult b Southee	10
D. de Silva b Southee	0
K. Mendis not out	5
A Mathews not out	2
Extras	0
Total (three wickets, 12 overs)	20

New Zealand

1st innings (overnight 311 for two)

J. Raval c Dickwella b Kumara	43
T. Latham not out	264
K. Williamson c Rajitha b de Silva	91
R. Taylor c Karunaratne b Kumara	50
H. Nicholls c Rajitha b Perera	50
BJ Watling c Dickwella b Kumara	0
C. de Grandhomme c Rajitha b Silva	49
T. Southee run out (Chandimal)	6
N. Wagner c de Silva b Lakmal	0
A. Patel b Perera	6
T. Boult c Dickwella b Kumara	11
Extras (lb5, nb2, w1)	8
Total (all out, 157.3 overs)	578

Tests against New Zealand and suffered a 3-0 home Test series whitewash against England last month.

They have faced upheaval in their coaching and selection ranks in recent weeks and arrived in New Zealand low on confidence.

In contrast, the fourth-ranked Black Caps entered the two-match contest buoyed by their first away Test series win over Pakistan in 49 years.

The New Zealanders are looking for a fourth straight Test series win after also defeating England and the West Indies in the past 12 months.



Najam Khan

Najam Khan overcomes odds to fight his first bout overseas

TDT | Manama

Najam Khan made it to the headlines when he won an inspiring bout at Brave 17 hosted in Lahore, Pakistan in the final seconds of the final round. Najam Khan overcame polio at a very young age which made it hard for him to pursue his passion to be a martial artist.

Khan who worked as a gardener in his hometown in Pakistan overcame challenges he faced, physically, financially and socially in pursuit of his dream to become a professional Mixed Martial Artist.

By sheer willpower, not only did he overcome the challenges but also competed professionally

in the International level and bringing victory to Pakistan.

Khan trains at Team Fight Fortress and had won his professional debut in Brave Combat Federation to be elevated to the status of a national hero. He will return to action at the promotion's biggest Mixed Martial Arts event for the year 2018 in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The bout marks the first time Khan is competing outside Pakistan. It makes it even special as Khan is the only fighter from Pakistan to compete in the first Mixed Martial Arts event in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

"In life, there will be obstacles, but if you are determined and focused no goal is too far.

I have the support of my fight team and my nation. This motivates me to push the limits and to work hard to realize my dream. I am glad that there were many positive comments about my performance. Brave 17 created a change in my nation that Mixed Martial Arts is gaining immense popularity. I am glad to represent my nation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", said Najam Khan.

Khan will face Mostafa Rashed from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 28th December at the King Abdullah Sports City Indoor Sports Hall. Rashed has a professional record of 4-3-0 and trains out of MMA Jeddah Club in Saudi Arabia.

Kantaraj believes global attention will transform Indian MMA

TDT | Manama

Kantaraj Shankar will make his promotional debut at Brave Combat Federation on 22nd December in Hyderabad. Kantaraj Agasa hails from Karnataka and has won the national championship in Judo before he embarked on a career in Mixed Martial Arts.

The Indian fighter who com-

peted in the 2015 IMMAF World Championship will face Jalal Al Daaja from Jordan who is also a national Kickboxing Gold Medalist in Jordan.

The bout is one of the most crucial in the career of the undefeated Indian fighter who has a professional record of 10-0-0, which is till date the best in Indian Mixed Martial Arts.

"I come from a tradition-



Kantaraj Agasa

al wrestling background and adopted Judo in the past. In our tradition, we are taught to always respect our opponents", said Kantaraj.

Kantaraj comes from a family that produced some of the noted wrestlers in Karnataka. After embarking on a career in MMA, Kantaraj not only embraced his family legacy but was also hailed as a statewide hero.

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Cottrell, Hope guide Windies to victory

Cottrell and his fellow West Indies pacers bowled out Bangladesh for just 129 runs

AFP | Sylhet, Bangladesh

Left-arm pacer Sheldon Cottrell delivered a career best 4-28 before Shai Hope struck a half-century as West Indies crushed Bangladesh by eight wickets in their Twenty20 series opener yesterday.

West Indies raced to 130-2 in just 10.5 overs after Cottrell and his fellow pacers bowled out Bangladesh for 129 runs in Sylhet.

Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan scored 61 off 43 balls for the home side but could not stave off a thumping defeat.

Hope accelerated the West Indies' run chase with 55 off 23 balls that included six sixes and three fours.

Victory never looked in doubt as he struck spinner Mehidy Hasan for three sixes and a four in just the second over of the innings, yielding 23 runs.

Spinner Mahmudullah Riyad dismissed Hope after medium pacer Mohammad Saifuddin broke a 51-run opening stand with Evin Lewis, who fell for 18.

But Nicholas Pooran and Keemo Paul ensured West Indies cruised to their target, with quickfire innings of 23 and 28 respectively.

Cottrell and fellow pacer Oshane Thomas earlier choked



Bangladeshi cricketer Mohammad Mahmudullah plays a shot

Bangladesh, who opted to bat first, at the start of their innings.

Openers Tamim Iqbal and Liton Das, as well as Soumya Sarkar, all fell for single-figure scores to short-pitch deliveries.

In-form Mushfiqur Rahim was run out for five, leaving Bangladesh on 48-4 before six overs of batting power play had elapsed.

Shakib put on two small part-

nerships of 25 and 30 respectively with Mahmudullah Riyad and Ariful Haque to lift the side briefly.

"Everything (fell) apart from the toss. Batting failed and then the bowling also obviously went wrong," Shakib said after the match.

"Was a good pitch, should have probably got about 180 on the board."

Bangladesh	
Tamim Iqbal c Brathwaite b Cottrell	5
Liton Das c Brathwaite b Thomas	6
Soumya Sarkar c Powell b Cottrell	5
Shakib Al Hasan c&b Cottrell	61
Mushfiqur Rahim run out	5
Mahmudullah c Hope b Cottrell	12
Ariful Haque c Pooran b Allen	17
Mohammad c Pooran b Brathwaite	1
Mehidy Hasan c Hope b Paul	8
Abu Hider not out	1
Mustafizur Rahman b Paul	0
Extras (b4, lb2, w1, nb1)	8
Total (all out; 19 overs)	129
West Indies	
E. Lewis c Ariful b Saifuddin	18
S. Hope c Mustafizur b Mahmudullah	55
N. Pooran not out	23
K. Paul not out	28
Extras (lb 5, w1)	6
Total (two wickets; 10.5 overs)	130
Result: West Indies win by eight wickets	



The West Indies lost their Test and one-day international series 2-0 and 2-1 respectively against Bangladesh

Messi hat-trick restores Barcelona's La Liga lead



Levante's midfielder Enis Bardhi vies with Lionel Messi

AFP | Madrid

Lionel Messi continued his sublime form by netting his 31st La Liga hat-trick as Barcelona thrashed Levante 5-0 on Sunday to regain their three-point lead at the top of the table.

The 31-year-old Argentinian arrived in Valencia having scored two free-kicks in last weekend's derby thumping of Espanyol. He took his goals tally for the season to 20 after a virtuoso display, while also teeing up Luis Suarez's 35th-minute opener and Gerard Pique's late fifth.

Barca were under pressure after Atletico Madrid and second-placed Sevilla had both moved level on points with the Catalan giants.

But after resting his key stars for their final Champions League group-stage match against Tottenham in mid-week, coach Ernesto Valverde saw his refreshed side cruise to a third straight league win without conceding a goal.

"At the beginning it was difficult, they squeezed us

and had a chance that hit the woodwork," said Valverde.

Levante started the game brightly and visiting goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen was forced into an early save by Ghanaian Emmanuel Boateng. But Barca did not take long to start moving through the gears, with Messi curling wide from long range before testing Oier Olazabal in the Levante goal with a free-kick.

Just seconds after Boateng hammered a left-footed strike against the crossbar, the reigning Spanish champions broke the deadlock as Messi jinked through a mesmerised home defence and picked out Suarez who volleyed home.

But Levante, who had ended Barcelona's dreams of going through last season's La Liga campaign unbeaten with a remarkable 5-4 victory in the penultimate game, came close to a quick response as Jose Luis Morales fired over.

The match was all but ended as a contest when Messi bore down on goal two minutes before half-time and drilled low into the net.

Liverpool draw Bayern as United face PSG in Champions League last 16

AFP | Nyon, Switzerland

Liverpool will take on fellow five-time winners Bayern Munich in the last 16 of the Champions League, while Jose Mourinho's struggling Manchester United face French giants Paris Saint-Germain.

Holders Real Madrid were paired with Ajax in yesterday's draw in Nyon as the Spaniards attempt to lift the trophy for the fifth time in six seasons, while Lionel Messi and Barcelona will play Lyon.

Both Liverpool and Bayern have a rich tradition in the competition, each winning it five times and Liverpool were beaten finalists last season.

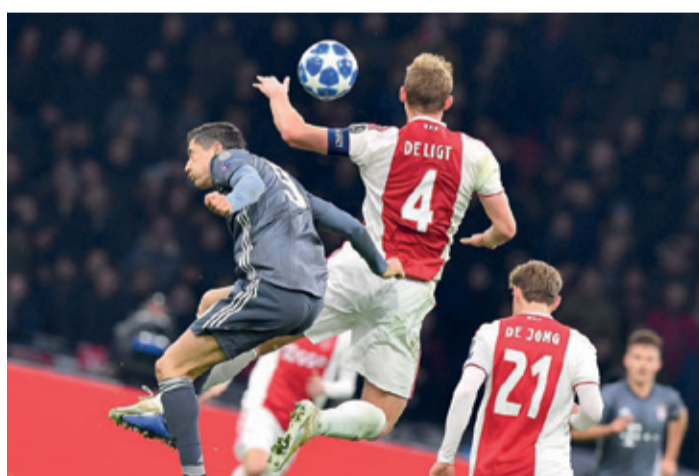
Liverpool are the current form side of the two and sit top of the Premier League while Bayern, under new coach Niko Kovac, have been far short of their own high standards in the Bundesliga this season.

"That's the team of the hour, the league leaders in England, they are playing really good football, very physical, really stepping it up. We are looking forward to it," Bayern sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic said of the tie with Liverpool.

"A tough cookie, but that's something to look forward to as a player."

Ronaldo awaits

Pep Guardiola's Manches-



Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (L) heads the ball with Ajax's Dutch defender Matthijs de Ligt (C) during a Champions League match (file photo)

ter City take on German side Schalke 04 while Atletico Madrid, beaten finalists in 2014 and 2016, come up against Cristiano Ronaldo and Italian heavyweights Juventus.

"A very difficult match, with few goals," Juve vice-president Pavel Nedved predicted.

"No doubt Cristiano is the man of the Champions League, he has always shown that, with goals and victories. Our team is very strong and we can be calm and confident."

Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund will meet Tottenham Hotspur for the second season in a row, having faced each other in last year's group stage, while Roma meet two-time former

champions Porto.

"We've already met them (Tottenham) twice. A strong opponent, the chances are at 50-50. The team has top players. We are also strong, it will be interesting," Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke told Sky. Meanwhile, United go into

a first ever meeting with PSG trailing Premier League leaders Liverpool by 19 points following Sunday's 3-1 defeat at Anfield, and face a formidable task against a side featuring Neymar and Kylian Mbappe -- the world's two most expensive players.

Lyon coach Bruno Genesio says his team can draw on their group stage displays against City -- a 2-1 win and 2-2 draw -- ahead of their clash with five-time European champions Barca.

"We'll need to pull off two big performances, in the first leg and in the return, but we can do it. We did it against City," said Genesio.

"It's tough. They are a team that Lyon has already played against but never beaten. Barca are more experienced and stronger but over two matches anything is possible," Gerard Houllier, who holds an advisory role at the French club, told RMC Sport.

Champions League last 16 draw

Schalke 04 v Manchester City
Atletico Madrid v Juventus
Manchester United v Paris Saint-Germain
Tottenham Hotspur v Borussia Dortmund
Lyon v Barcelona
Roma v Porto
Ajax v Real Madrid
Liverpool v Bayern Munich

Teams that finished in second place in group stage will host first legs on February 12/13 and 19/20 with return matches scheduled for March 5/6 and 12/13

Shaqiri revels in beautiful feeling in putting Man United to the sword

AFP | London

Xherdan Shaqiri says scoring a double in the 3-1 win over Manchester United on Sunday for Liverpool was a "beautiful feeling" and puts him on course for his most prolific Premier League campaign.

The 27-year-old Swiss international midfielder came off the bench to take his tally to five goals in 13 league appearances, meaning he is already just three shy of his best previous total in the Premier League for Stoke last season.

His double restored Liverpool to the top of the table, one point clear of champions Manchester City.

Shaqiri, who is seeking to prove he is up to playing for a big club having failed at Bayern Munich and Inter Milan, puts his good form down to Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp's philosophy in how to play the

game.

"Of course the style, how they play, it's for me too," he said.

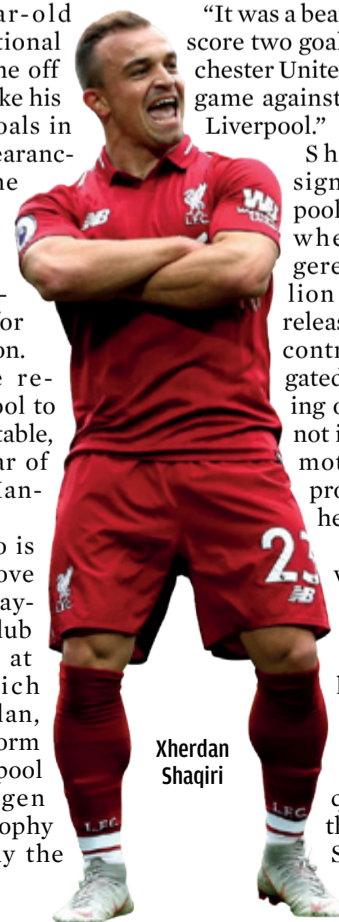
"I have to go on the pitch and perform and I have qualities to be in the team, to have an impact, to decide games.

"I'm very happy at the moment with my performances.

"It was a beautiful feeling to score two goals against Manchester United, an important game against a big rival for Liverpool."

Shaqiri, who signed for Liverpool in the summer when they triggered a £13.5 million (\$17 million) release clause in his contract with relegated Stoke, says being on the bench is not ideal but it only motivates him to prove himself like he did on Sunday.

"For me, I just want to improve, I'm 27, my best age to perform at a high level, so I hope the best times are coming," said Shaqiri, who spent three seasons at Stoke.



Xherdan Shaqiri

Lyon leave India in agony

● **Nathan Lyon dismisses Virat Kohli for 7th time to tilt Perth Test in Australia's favour**

● **India require another 175 runs with 5 wickets remaining**

AFP | Perth, Australia

Spinner Nathan Lyon claimed the prized wicket of Indian captain Virat Kohli as Australia closed in on victory in the second Test in Perth yesterday.

Set 287 to win on an unpredictable pitch, India were reduced to 112 for five at stumps on the fourth day.

Hanuma Vihari was 24 not out and Rishabh Pant was on nine.

The visitors still needed 175 to win with just five wickets in hand as Australia seek to level the four-Test series.

India lead 1-0 after victory in Adelaide, but have never won a Test series in Australia. The loss of Kohli appeared a fatal blow to their chances of a famous win.

Lyon dismissed Kohli for the seventh time in Test cricket, two more than any other bowler, when he had him caught at slip



KL Rahul of India is bowled by Mitchell Starc of Australia

by Usman Khawaja for 17.

Kohli was unable to repeat the heroics of his first innings century, the ball catching the outside edge as he probed forward defensively.

His departure was the cause of great delight for Australian captain Tim Paine, after the pair had exchanged words at the conclusion of the third day.

The Australian wicketkeeper,

looking for his first win as skipper in five Tests since taking over from the disgraced Steve Smith, celebrated the dismissal with a cheeky comment to not out batsman Murali Vijay.

"Murali, I know he's your captain, but you can't seriously like him as a bloke," Paine said, in comments picked up by microphone.

Just two overs later Vijay was

also on his way back to the pavilion, bowled off an inside edge by Lyon, who took two for 30.

The pair of wickets continued a fine match for Lyon, who picked up five in the Indian first innings to move into the top 25 all-time Test wicket-takers, currently on 333.

Disastrous start

After Australia lost their last six

wickets for 51 runs to be dismissed for 243, with Mohammed Shami claiming a career-best 6-56, India made a disastrous start to their run chase just before tea.

Opener KL Rahul didn't survive long, falling to the fourth ball of the innings from Mitchell Starc for a duck.

Rahul attempted to pull the bat away and only succeeded in getting an inside edge onto his stumps.

Cheteshwar Pujara then feathered a short delivery from Josh Hazlewood on four, as India slumped to 13 for two.

Across the two teams, eight wickets fell for 68 runs between lunch and tea, as batting appeared to become very difficult due to variable bounce.

Australian number eight Pat Cummins was the chief victim of the pitch gremlins after lunch, when he was clean bowled for one by a Jasprit Bumrah delivery that kept very low off the wicket.

The home team had resumed at 190 for four after lunch, but Shami cleaned up the tail, removing Khawaja for 72 and Paine, on 37, with sharply rising deliveries.

The action of the second session was a far cry from the start of the day, when overnight batsman Khawaja and Paine had kept the Indian pacemen at bay

Australia 1st innings 326 (M. Harris 70, T. Head 58; Sharma 4-41)
India 1st innings 283 (V Kohli 123, A Rahane 51; Lyon 5-67)

Australia 2nd innings (overnight 132-4)

M. Harris b Bumrah 20

A. Finch c Pant b Shami 25

U. Khawaja c Pant b Shami 72

S. Marsh c Pant b Shami 5

P. Handscomb lbw Sharma 13

T. Head c Sharma b Shami 19

T. Paine c Kohli b Shami 37

P. Cummins b Bumrah 1

M. Starc b Bumrah 14

N. Lyon c Vihari b Shami 5

J. Hazlewood not out 17

Extras (b8, lb3, w4) 15

Total (all out, 93.2 overs) 243

India 2nd innings

KL Rahul b Starc 0

M. Vijay b Lyon 20

C. Pujara c Paine b Hazlewood 4

V. Kohli c Khawaja b Lyon 17

A. Rahane c Head b Hazlewood 30

H. Vihari not out 24

R. Pant not out 9

Extras (b6, w2) 8

Total (five wickets; 41 overs) 112

until lunch.

Against some probing bowling from the Indian pace attack, the Australians played and missed regularly.

It was old-fashioned Test cricket and scoring was slow with just 58 runs for the first session, but India were unable to claim a wicket.

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