

THE STRAITS TIMES

Asia report

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- Kim Trump Summit II
- Fast train from Hong Kong to Beijing
- Bicentennial in Singapore

Race for 5G

America's ban on Huawei has stirred up the global market eyeing 5G services, with the promise of applications and opportunities weighing on decisions. Where's the race for 5G supremacy headed?



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5G rollout begins

This year and next year 5G will start rolling all over the world and consumers will soon be able to enjoy data speeds of up to 100 gigabits per second. That's 1,000 times faster than 4G, which entered the market in late 2000s and made mobile internet speeds up to 500 times faster than 3G. This allowed for HD video streaming, cloud services, high-quality video calls and faster Web browsing. Here's a look at what's happening around the world and the differences between 5G and 4G services.

5G ADOPTION AROUND THE WORLD

Canada

Canada's Telus Mobility has given 2020 as the year 5G will be available to its customers, but says people in the Vancouver area can expect early access.

Britain

Britain's largest network operator EE will roll out 5G in 16 cities this year.

China

China Mobile, China Unicom and China Telecom continue to run trials ahead of wide rollout of 5G from next year.

South Korea

Three major mobile operators – SK Telecom, Korea Telecom and LG Uplus – launched commercial 5G services late last year.

Japan

Three current telcos plan full-scale 5G launch next year in time for the Olympics.

United States

5G broadband Internet from Verizon and C Spire is currently available at a handful of locations, and AT&T has mobile 5G services available for select customers in a dozen cities. More areas will get at-home and mobile 5G this year, from those companies and others like T-Mobile.

Latin America

First 5G deployments in the 3.5GHz band are expected this year in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico.

France

France's telecoms regulator will auction off 5G spectrum late this year with 5G rollout planned for next year.

Australia

Optus has provided selected customers in Canberra access to 5G home broadband. 5G availability will be rolled out in more areas by March next year.

Singapore

StarHub announced last November that it completed its first outdoor pilot of 5G on the 3.5GHz frequency band in partnership with Nokia. However, there's no information on when StarHub will have a 5G network ready for Singaporean customers.

Singtel, Ericsson and Singapore Polytechnic launched Singapore's first live 5G test facility in January. The facility's objectives are to test and develop 5G capabilities.

The Straits Times understands that 5G mobile networks will be deployed in Singapore after 2020.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 5G AND 4G



Speed

5G can reach transfer speeds of up to 100 gigabits per second, which is as much as 1,000 times faster than 4G. A 20GB file can be downloaded in one second.



Supports more connections

5G uses a broad range of frequencies. The millimetre wave bands (30GHz to 300GHz range) are less cluttered with existing cellular data. 5G can support 1,000 devices per metre.



Smarter networks

5G can understand the type of data being requested and switch automatically to using the appropriate power mode to deliver that data. Higher-powered mode will be used for HD video streaming for example.



Latency

5G latency is much lower than 4G. Consumers can expect immediate response to video calling, streaming, online gaming and other mission-critical applications.



Less wireless interference

5G frequencies are highly directional. This means more strategically placed antennas are required to support 5G. Highly directional frequencies allow devices to be used next to other wireless signals without causing interference.



Challenges

As with any new technology, security has to be figured out to prevent spying. Government and Internet service providers must ensure sufficient levels of security are in place before 5G can be rolled out.

Source: JUST ASK GEMALTO, LIFEWIRE, HARDWAREZONE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

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Cover Story

Upgrading to 5G – Huawei or the highway for telcos?

In the race to 5G, the Chinese tech giant offers the cheaper and seamless option but the US is in its way



THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN ON A MISSION to prevent its allies from using 5G mobile systems supplied by Huawei Technologies, saying China could use its equipment for espionage.

Not conceding, the Chinese giant announced on March 7 plans to sue the US government, claiming that the restrictions targeting Huawei are “unconstitutional.” Huawei’s Rotating Chairman Mr Guo Ping said: “This ban not only is unlawful, but also restricts Huawei from engaging in fair competition, ultimately harming US consumers.”

Mr Guo had also taken a swipe at the Trump administration during February’s Mobile World Congress in Spain, the biggest trade show for mobile technology, when he asked the audience at the show to check with Edward Snowden if the US could be trusted.

Snowden, a former US National Security Agency (NSA) subcontractor, had in 2013 leaked documents showing the NSA’s use of US-made telecommunications equipment for spying.

Beijing has also rejected US allegations that Chinese laws require companies to help collect intelligence.

As it turns out, the geopolitical tug-of-war for influence in 5G technology buying goes far beyond national security issues. It also has implications for economic supremacy.

RACE FOR ECONOMIC SUPREMACY

Touting enhanced capacity and surfing speeds that are 10 times to 100 times faster than existing ones, 5G networks are said to be the prerequisite for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

This revolution could spawn significant competitive advantages for economies created by advances in technologies such as connected appliances, smart farming, telesurgery and unmanned vehicles.

Globally, 5G technologies are expected to generate some US\$12.3 trillion (\$16.7 trillion) in economic output across multiple sectors – including transport, manufacturing, communications and farming – by 2035, according to British research firm IHS Markit.

At US\$12.3 trillion, the amount is nearly what consumers in the US spent in 2016, and more than the combined spending of consumers in China, Japan, Germany, Britain and France that year.

With China’s plans to initiate large-scale use of 5G services next year, the country is likely to be among the first to explore and find business value, putting it one step ahead in 5G dominion. Huawei is leading such 5G trials in the country.

China’s earlier choice of wireless technology has given it a natural edge. It has been developing TDD (time division duplex) high-speed wireless transmission systems, which is better suited for 5G, as a matter of national policy since the 3G era.

The US, on the other hand, was saddled by delays in allocating airwaves for 5G trials. US telcos also need to switch away from their legacy FDD (frequency division duplex) high-speed wireless transmission systems that are not suited for 5G deployments.

It is no wonder that Huawei, in its counter-strikes, accused the US of protectionism.

In his opinion piece in The Financial Times on Feb 27, Huawei’s Mr Guo wrote: “If the US can keep Huawei out of the world’s 5G networks by portraying us as a security threat, it can retain its ability to spy on whomever it wants. America also directly benefits if it can quash a company that curtails its digital dominance. Hobbiling a leader in 5G technology would erode the economic and

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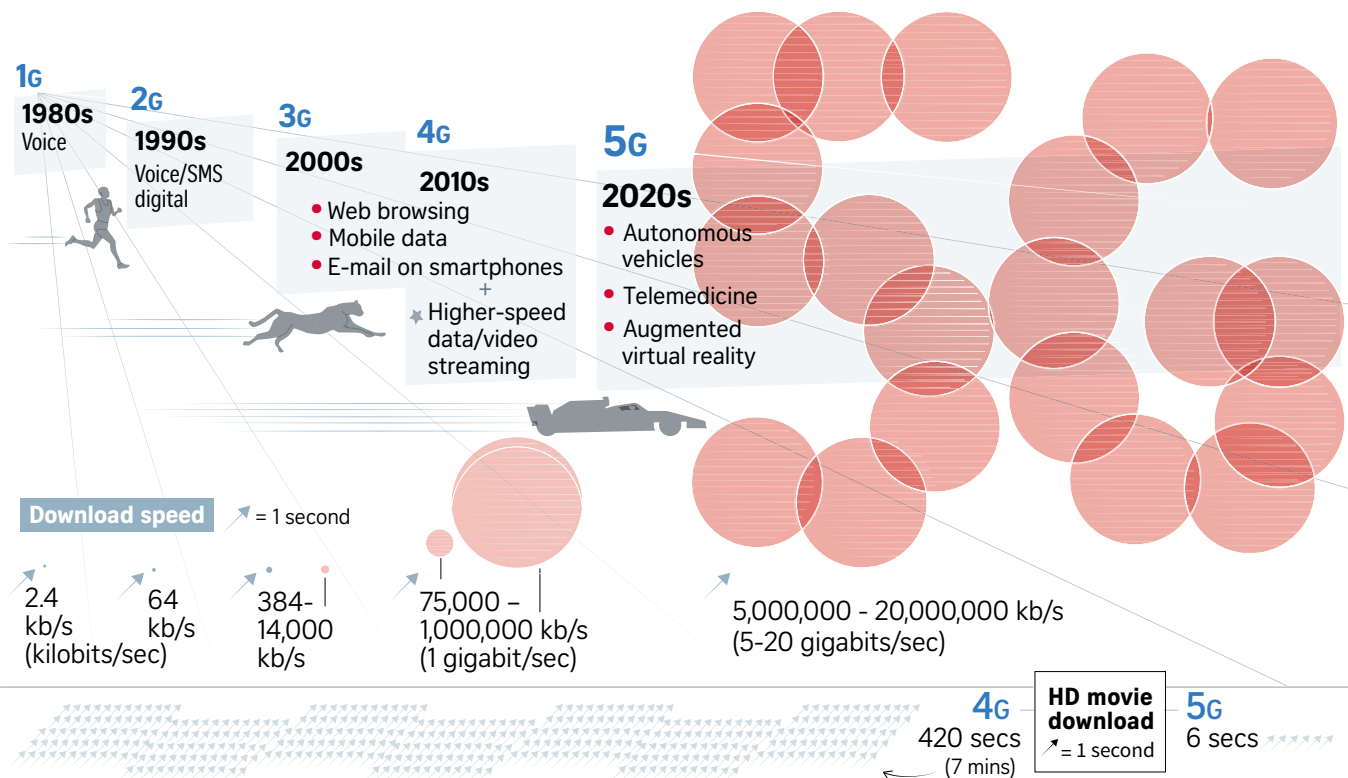


Visitors at the Huawei stand during the Mobile World Congress 2019, which showcases the latest advances in mobile technologies, in Barcelona in February. China plans to initiate large-scale use of 5G services and Huawei is leading 5G trials in the country.

PHOTO: EPA-EFE

The fifth generation (5G) wireless network

5G networks could be up to 20 times faster than current technologies



Source: EUROPEAN COMMISSION 5G OBSERVATORY (IDATE DIGIWORLD) MCKINSEY AFP GRAPHICS

A 5G-enabled photographic robot on display at the Huawei pavilion during the Mobile World Congress 2019 in Barcelona in February. Globally, 5G technologies are expected to generate some US\$12.3 trillion (\$16.7 trillion) in economic output across multiple sectors by 2035, according to British research firm IHS Markit. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

social benefits that would otherwise accrue to the countries that roll it out early.”

TELCO PUSHBACK

Telcos will feel the pinch from a Huawei ban, so some pushback is to be expected.

Huawei not only sells equipment said to be up to 30 per cent cheaper than its rivals’, but also has widespread “lock-in” to its technology for a cheap and quick migration to 5G.

For telcos already in such a “lock-in” arrangement, not using Huawei equipment essentially means tearing out their 4G networks, setting them back by up to two years – too long in the digital age.

In January, Australia’s TPG Telecom offered a glimpse of what such a lock-in arrangement – dubbed “non-standalone 5G” in tech parlance – looks like.

TPG said it chose Huawei as a supplier because the Chinese tech giant offered a simple upgrade path from the 4G network under construction to 5G.

Such an arrangement allows telcos like TPG to use existing 4G equipment to launch 5G services with minimal fuss – mostly software upgrades and a change in antennas.



So when 5G-compatible smartphones are launched this year, telcos will be ready to allow consumers to enjoy the advanced features of these new-fangled devices.

Conversely, telcos would be set back by up to two years if they are denied their fast-track upgrade path, and have to build new networks.

"It will be akin to rolling out a brand new network. And depending on the scale of the roll-out, it could take one to two years before telcos are able to launch commercial services on the new network," said a telco technologist, who spoke to The Straits Times on condition of anonymity.

Huawei is among the main providers of telecom equipment for operators conducting 5G trials in Britain, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Many are under the non-standalone 5G arrangement with Huawei.

In the case of TPG, investments in Huawei to supply its core 4G network started two years ago, with the telco having spent A\$100 million (S\$96 million) of the A\$600 million network construction cost.

"That upgrade path (to 5G) has now been blocked," said TPG in response to the Australian government's impending ban on Chinese equipment announced last August.

Because of this, TPG halted all mobile network construction in Australia, saying: "It does not make commercial sense to invest further shareholder funds."

CALIBRATED POSITION

Who blinks first in this contest between TPG and the Australian government could influence other countries' policies.

So far, only Australia and New Zealand have followed the US in banning Huawei from supplying 5G infrastructure, while Japan has banned only government purchases of Huawei equipment.

Other nations such as Britain and Poland have indicated their concerns over the Chinese tech giant but have not banned Huawei from supplying to their domestic markets.

In the latest update, The Telegraph newspaper reported, citing sources, that the British government is looking to impose a 50 per cent cap on the use of Huawei's equipment in the mobile networks, including 5G ones, of its four telcos.

It is a middle ground that does not side China or the US and looks to be an acceptable one in the short to medium term.

This position would limit the billions of dollars that could be wasted from a widespread ban that would inevitably result in the dismantling of Huawei equipment.

The wastage is real: Huawei is the world's leading supplier of telecom equipment, owning a market share of 28 per cent. Rivals Nokia, Ericsson, Cisco and ZTE each have less than 20 per cent market share.

Huawei's current entrenched position is linked to its success in locking in long-term contracts and

its willingness to provide aggressive financial help, such as allowing buyers to defer payment for up to three years. Some of these contracts were made as early as 2011.

For instance, Globe Telecoms in the Philippines has partnered Huawei since 2011 to keep its telecommunications network current. The telco plans to take the first 5G connections to homes in areas of Manila, where there is no Internet, later this year.

The Chinese giant is also known to have gone the extra mile to secure large markets in developing countries, including at least 40 African nations. For instance, it delivered mobile coverage to rural communities in areas of Ghana and Nigeria by rolling out low-cost, solar-powered base stations.

Huawei also reportedly invested more than US\$60 million in the telecoms network in Angola.

The US campaign against Huawei threatens to dethrone the Chinese firm from its leading position. It is a position that Huawei and telcos around the world will likely fight to defend. [ST](#)

Huawei rotating chairman Guo Ping delivering his keynote speech at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona in February. Huawei is the world's leading supplier of telecom equipment, owning a market share of 28 per cent. Rivals Nokia, Ericsson, Cisco and ZTE each have less than 20 per cent market share.
PHOTO: AFP



"If the US can keep Huawei out of the world's 5G networks by portraying us as a security threat, it can retain its ability to spy on whomever it wants. America also directly benefits if it can quash a company that curtails its digital dominance. Hobbiling a leader in 5G technology would erode the economic and social benefits that would otherwise accrue to the countries that roll it out early."



GUO PING, rotating chairman of Huawei Technologies Co

Will crackdown hit 5G rollout?

5G will soon be launched in Asia, promising a revolution in connectivity speeds, new entertainment options and new applications, such as driverless cars. Here's a look at how efforts to adopt 5G are progressing in different countries.

The Cloud Pepper robot stands at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, which focused on 5G networks. PHOTO: AFP



Diversity is the name of the game in Singapore

5G will soon be launched in Singapore, promising a revolution in connectivity speeds, new entertainment options and new applications, such as driverless cars. But the technology has proved to be controversial over fears of data security.

The pushback against Chinese telecoms equipment giant Huawei will have little impact on Singapore telcos, analysts say.

The three major telcos here – Singtel, StarHub and M1 – also said that they work with multiple vendors and not just Huawei in building their 5G networks.

Analyst Kenny Liew of Fitch Solutions, which offers credit and macro intelligence solutions, said in an e-mail that he believed that local telcos would

not be affected.

He noted that whether local telcos use Huawei equipment or not depends on the telcos themselves or the Government.

“Singapore is very close to China’s orbit, so it is unlikely to act on Huawei in order to avoid a potential backlash. While it also has to balance relations with the US, inaction on Huawei is the most likely outcome,” he said.

Mr Liew added that the allegations of cyber espionage by Huawei have yet to be substantiated.

Of the major telcos here, M1 has previously held trials using Huawei’s 5G equipment. It was reported in June last year that both companies intend to

Singapore Polytechnic students showcasing their SP Driverless and Electrifying Car project at January’s launch of 5G Garage – a facility set up at the polytechnic by Singtel and Ericsson to test and develop 5G projects. PHOTO: SINGTEL

Race for 5G domination in China

Despite its industry champions' legal woes in the West, China has exploded off the starting blocks in the race to be the world leader in next-generation 5G technology.

Last December, Beijing approved 5G test frequency licences for its three major telcos, setting the stage for large-scale 5G tests nationwide this year.

And state planners said Beijing will increase support for TV stations to push out ultra-high-definition (UHD) content, while subsidising virtual reality and augmented reality devices – areas that will drive 5G adoption.

Even before this, China's "big three" operators – China Mobile, China Telecom and China Unicom – had already launched 5G pilots and demonstration zones in 50 cities, while domestic network equipment providers Huawei and ZTE said they had completed final trials and were ready for scaling up and commercialisation.

Huawei and ZTE have been the target of American legal action in recent years, and a growing number of United States allies such as Australia and Japan have also banned the two companies from government contracts.

But the two Chinese technology giants are thriving at home, as the country zips ahead in 5G roll-out.

Huawei launched earlier this year what it billed as industry-leading 5G chips, both for commercial base stations and consumer products such as smartphones and routers. Its executives said then that Huawei's equipment is being used in more than 30 field trials across 17 provinces.

While 5G will not be directly available to most consumers in China for at least a year, China has been experimenting with the technology in different ways, such as with driverless vehicle trials



in Chongqing and remote surgery in Fujian province.

Industry experts have predicted that China will become the world's largest 5G market.

GSMA, an association of mobile operators worldwide, projected last year that China will account for 430 million 5G connections by 2025, one-third of the global total.

— Lim Yan Liang, China Correspondent in Beijing and
Claire Huang, Hong Kong Correspondent

A 5G service robot serving bottles of water to travellers at a Hangzhou railway station during the Spring Festival travel rush. PHOTO: AFP



hold more trials jointly in South-east Asia by the middle of this year.

M1 declined to comment when asked whether it is going ahead with the Huawei trials slated for this year. The telco said it had also embarked on early 5G trials with Nokia last year.

StarHub, which conducted 5G trials with Nokia last year, said that it is closely monitoring the developments related to Huawei's 5G equipment.

Singtel has partnered Ericsson for its 5G pilot network at one-north.

Australia's TPG Telecom – which won the licence to be Singapore's fourth telco in 2016 and launched a trial of its mobile service in Singapore this year – recently abandoned plans to build a mobile network in Australia using Huawei's equipment.

— Vincent Chang, Technology Reporter

Asia-Pacific on the 5G curve

Global rating agency Moody's expects 5G to gain some traction in these countries in 2019-2020



Sources: GSM ASSOCIATION (GSMA), MOODY'S INVESTORS SERVICE
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

(Right) Hanging cubes display 5G logo at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, February 26, 2019. PHOTO: REUTERS.

(Top right) Engineers from South Korean telco KT Corporation setting up a base station for an ultra-fast 5G network on the island of Dokdo, which is also claimed by Japan. PHOTO: KT CORPORATION DELHI



South Korean telcos make early strides

Last December, South Korea's three major telcos – SK Telecom, KT Corporation and LG Uplus – started offering what they claimed to be the world's first commercialised 5G service in Seoul and six other major cities, including Busan and Daejeon.

But 5G – offering 20 times faster data transmission speed than the current 4G LTE network and better support for artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality – does not benefit the public yet.

Currently, mobile routers work as Wi-Fi hot spots for the 5G network, which can be used only by corporate clients. The ultra-fast 5G network – which costs around 50,000 won (\$40) a month – promises download speeds of up to 20GB per second, which will allow a 2GB high-definition movie to be downloaded in less than a second (compared to 16 seconds on 4G LTE).

KT's first 5G subscriber is an AI robot named Lota, which guides visitors in an observatory in the country's tallest building, the Lotte World Tower in Seoul. Lota was jointly developed by KT and Lotte.

KT's 5G network also powers an automated coffee booth in Gangnam, where a "robot barista" makes beverages quickly, while transmitting closed-circuit television footage to the headquarters where managers can oversee the process.

Car parts manufacturer Myunghwa is using 5G and AI services offered by SK to screen for defects more efficiently, while machine developer LS Mtron has created a 5G remote-controlled tractor together with LG Uplus. Self-driving vehicles, which also use 5G, are being tested by various companies in K-City, an autonomous driving test zone in Hwa-seong, in Gyeonggi province.

South Korea places a lot of emphasis on 5G technology, which is expected to be a key driver of the fourth industrial revolution. .

According to the KT Economics and Management Research Institute, 5G can generate 42.3 trillion won worth of economic benefits by 2030 in 10 industries, including manufacturing, cars, finance, healthcare and transport. This would account for 2.08 per cent of that year's gross domestic product and create 337,000 jobs that same year.

— Chang May Choon, South Korea Correspondent In Seoul

Japanese telcos to roll out 5G services, but without Chinese tech

Japan's three mobile carriers are promising to launch limited 5G commercial services this year and a full-scale roll-out by the time Tokyo hosts the Olympics in July next year.

NTT Docomo, KDDI and Softbank are conducting 5G mobile communications trials, as is upcoming telco Rakuten Mobile, which will begin a 4G service in October and 5G roll-out next year.

All four have said that they will shun Chinese equipment in their 5G networks following a move by the Japanese government in December last year to block Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE from public procurement due to security concerns.

Their pledge comes even as NTT Docomo and Softbank had been partnering Huawei in their respective 5G trials. Of the three operators, only Softbank is using Chinese technology in the 4G network.

While the government ban does not extend to private companies, the Nikkei business daily suggested that the carriers may have been mindful of the risk of buying from companies that might



eventually be barred from the market.

Management consultancy McKinsey & Company, in a research report last year, said Japanese companies have committed to invest more than US\$45 billion (\$60.8 billion) in 5G deployment.

Japan's trials are focused on self-driving vehicles, robotics, high-definition video transmissions as well as intelligence services such as remote medicine and eldercare, among other things.

— Walter Sim, Japan Correspondent In Tokyo

A woman using a mobile phone in Tokyo's Asakusa district. Japan's three telcos are conducting 5G mobile communications trials. PHOTO: AFP

India gears up for widespread use amid security concerns

India might have missed the Industrial Revolution, but it has been a furious adopter of the digital one. The Indian government set for itself a "5G Vision" as early as in December 2017.

5G technologies are scheduled to enter commercial use next year and advance to a full range of services by 2024.

The cumulative economic impact of 5G on India, according to a government steering committee report, can exceed US\$1 trillion (\$1.35 trillion) by 2035.

A number of firms have already gone ahead with 5G tests.

Huawei Technologies, together with Bharti Airtel, an Indian telecom firm, conducted what was described as the country's first 5G trial in February last year. The test achieved a speed of more than 3GB per second, according to a media statement.

In July last year, Ericsson announced the creation of a Centre of Excellence and Innovation Lab for 5G at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi. The Swedish firm, later in October, partnered Reliance Jio Infocomm, another Indian telecom operator,



to use 5G technology to operate a driverless car that was developed in collaboration with IIT Delhi.

Because the scope of 5G technology goes far beyond just telecoms, it remains at the heart of the government's vision to rapidly expand the role of information technology across different sectors, such as manufacturing, security and education. It is this potential for widespread use that has also heightened concerns over technology theft and espionage.

Despite this concern, Minister of State for Telecommunications Manoj Sinha told the Upper House of Parliament in January that the government had no proposal to consider a ban on telecom equipment made by Huawei.

— Debarshi Dasgupta, India Correspondent In New Delhi

A 5G driverless car operated by Ericsson and Indian telco Reliance Jio that was developed in collaboration with IIT Delhi. PHOTO: ERICSSON

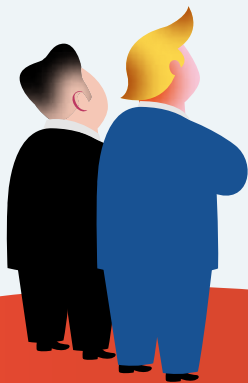
Trump, Kim at crossroads

United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un failed to reach a deal during their second summit held in Hanoi on Feb 27-28, due to differences over denuclearisation and lifting of sanctions on North Korea.

2018

June 12

• Mr Trump and Mr Kim, after months of trading fiery rhetoric and insults, sit down for their first summit in Singapore.



• They ink an agreement to establish new relations, build peace, work towards the "complete denuclearisation" of the Korean peninsula, and recover war remains. Mr Trump also suspends military drills with South Korea.

June 19

- Mr Kim makes his third visit to China.
- He briefs Chinese President Xi Jinping about his summit with Mr Trump.

June 21

• Mr Trump says at a Cabinet meeting that North Korea has already blown up four of its big test sites. "Total denuclearisation" has already started taking place, he adds.

June 27

• A website monitoring North Korea says the regime has continued to improve its main nuclear facility in Yongbyon "at a rapid pace", citing satellite imagery.

July 7

• US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, after a visit to Pyongyang, says both sides "made progress" in their talks.

• But North Korean officials accuse the US of making "gangster-like" demands and call the talks "extremely regrettable".

July 24

• Reports emerge that North Korea may have started dismantling parts of a key rocket launch site.

Aug 1

- Some remains of US soldiers who died in the Korean War are returned to the US.
- Fifty-five cases containing the remains are flown to Hawaii for identification.

Aug 4

• North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho says at a forum in Singapore that his country is committed to the June summit agreement, but criticises the US for undermining confidence in the process.

Aug 6

• North Korean state media urges the US to lift sanctions.



Special Report

North Korea must be serious about denuclearisation for talks to go on

Washington's discovery of hidden nuclear facilities other than those at Yongbyon, including a uranium enrichment plant, stalled talks

Aug 20

- The United Nations says North Korea's nuclear activities have not stopped.

Aug 24

- Mr Trump cancels a trip by Mr Pompeo to Pyongyang, citing a lack of progress in denuclearisation.
- He blames China for stalling the process. Beijing retaliates, calling US accusations "irresponsible" and "contrary to basic facts".

Sept 5

- Mr Kim reiterates his denuclearisation commitment to visiting South Korean officials, adding that his faith in Mr Trump remains unchanged.
- He also offers a possible timeline for dismantling his nuclear programme.

Sept 10

- Mr Kim sends a "very warm" letter to Mr Trump, asking for a second meeting.

Sept 29

- Mr Trump tells his supporters at a rally that he and Mr Kim "fell in love" over "great letters".

Sept 20

- Mr Kim welcomes South Korean President Moon Jae-in in Pyongyang.
- He reiterates a commitment to denuclearisation and expresses willingness to shut down the North's main nuclear facility if the US takes "corresponding measures". The two countries also sign an agreement to ease military tension.

Oct 1

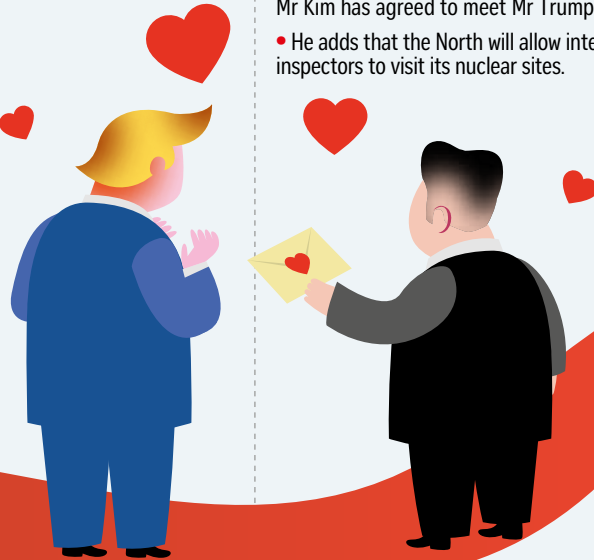
- The two Koreas begin to remove landmines along the Demilitarised Zone.

Oct 7

- Mr Pompeo, after a visit to Pyongyang, says Mr Kim has agreed to meet Mr Trump.
- He adds that the North will allow international inspectors to visit its nuclear sites.

Nov 2

- North Korean state media warns that the country will seriously consider a return to building nuclear weapons if the US does not lift sanctions.



AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE SUMMIT IN HANOI between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, there is likely to be a period of minimal engagement and of a contestation of will and resolve.

But things are not dire – yet – and are unlikely during this period to go back to the volatility of 2017, when each side was threatening the other with fire and fury, analysts said.

There are some optimists who believe that a third summit before Mr Trump's current term of office ends in January 2021 is possible.

But there are also those who think the differences between the two sides are unbridgeable, and that things are likely to fall back to the status quo where there is a great degree of uncertainty.

Things had looked promising in the run-up to the summit, even though there was no expectation of any major breakthrough in the negotiations for the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. The signing of an agreement was scheduled for the second day of the summit on Feb 28. This deal would

include, some reports said, the US agreeing to a partial lifting of sanctions in return for North Korea halting operations of nuclear facilities as well as a formal declaration of the end of the Korean War.

But it was not to be.

After their meetings in the morning, the two sides cancelled the other scheduled events, their working lunch and the agreement signing ceremony.

Instead, Mr Trump brought forward a press conference at which he said he had walked away from the summit because the North Koreans wanted sanctions lifted in their entirety in return for their dismantling of a large portion of their nuclear facilities at Yongbyon.

"We couldn't do that," he said. "We had to walk away from that."

North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho late that night refuted this, saying North Korea wanted the lifting of only sanctions that "hamper the civilian economy and the livelihood of the people."

He added that Pyongyang offered to dismantle all of its main nuclear site at Yongbyon, including plutonium

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2019

Jan 1

- Mr Kim renews his denuclearisation commitment but warns that he may have to “seek a new path” if the US keeps up pressure and sanctions.

Jan 8

- Mr Kim visits China to meet Mr Xi, in what is seen as a prelude to the second Trump-Kim summit.

Jan 28

- Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expresses willingness to meet Mr Kim and restore bilateral ties.

Feb 5

- Mr Trump says he will meet Mr Kim in Vietnam on Feb 27-28.



Feb 23

- Mr Kim embarks on an epic 60-hour, 3,000km journey by rail and car from Pyongyang to Hanoi, accompanied by top North Korean officials and sister Kim Yo Jong.

Feb 24

- North Korea warns Mr Trump not to listen to US critics who are disrupting efforts to improve ties.
- State media says such opposition is aimed at derailing the talks.



Feb 25

- South Korea's presidential office says the US and North Korea could agree to declare the end of the 1950-1953 Korean War at the summit.

Feb 26

- Both leaders arrive in Hanoi, with Mr Trump flying in on Air Force One in the evening.

and uranium facilities, and to permanently halt testing of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles.

In a background briefing, a US State Department official elaborated on this, saying what the North asked for was in effect the lifting of all sanctions except those related to weapons.

But what really was the game changer, said Associate Professor Li Mingjiang of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), was the Americans' discovery that there were other nuclear facilities apart from Yongbyon, which they brought up at the Hanoi meeting.

Mr Trump at his press conference said the US had found some hidden nuclear facilities including a uranium enrichment plant.

This new discovery, said Prof Li, “destroys the cautious, optimistic view among decision-makers in Washington that Kim is ultimately seriously committed to denuclearisation.”

It showed that while Pyongyang in the past year was making a commitment to denuclearise, it was also engaged in secret activity to hide its stockpile of nuclear weapons and relocate some of its nuclear

and missile development activities.

This indicated a lack of serious commitment to denuclearisation on the part of the North Koreans, so the whole process since the Singapore summit last June has come to nought and negotiations would have to start anew, said Prof Li.

Stanford University lecturer in international policy Daniel Sneider said the US was asking for things that were a “true test” of whether the North Koreans are serious about denuclearisation and “they aren't”.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo noted that even without Yongbyon, the North would still possess missiles, warheads and other elements of a nuclear programme that were unacceptable to the US.

He said the two sides would go back to working-level discussions but did not say when these might begin.

While both sides have made positive noises about continuing the process, there is likely to be a period of disengagement, said Prof Li, as the two sides test each other's resolve and patience.

“The Americans understand that the sanctions are

Feb 27

- The two leaders sit down for dinner together, which lasts for more than two hours.
- Mr Trump expresses hopes for a “very successful” summit.
- Mr Kim, in return, praises Mr Trump’s “courageous decision” to initiate the second summit, and says he will do his best to produce a “great outcome”.

March 1

- North Korean Foreign Minister Ri says Pyongyang made realistic proposals at the summit, and was seeking partial sanctions relief, not a complete lifting of sanctions.
- Mr Moon says South Korea will cooperate with the US and North Korea to help their talks reach a complete settlement.

Feb 28

- Mr Trump and Mr Kim begin their day with a one-on-one chat and a stroll, with Mr Kim reiterating his willingness to abandon nuclear weapons.
- Things take a turn when a scheduled working lunch and joint agreement signing ceremony are abruptly cancelled and the summit is cut short.
- Mr Trump later says no agreement was reached because North Korea wanted sanctions “lifted in entirety”.
- China says it hopes both sides can maintain a dialogue.

Mr Trump

“Sometimes you have to walk and this was just one of those times. I’d much rather do it right than do it fast.”

“There’s a warmth that we have and I hope that stays; I think it will.”

Mr Kim

“If I’m not willing to do that (denuclearisation), I won’t be here right now.”

ILLUSTRATION: CHNG CHOON HIONG ADAPTED FROM MIEL SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

working and hurting North Korea quite significantly, so they want to maintain the sanctions and let them take effect for some time, until the North Koreans feel further pain and (come to a) compromise,” he added.

That both sides want to keep the process going is evident.

Asked about the possibility of a third summit at the press conference, Mr Trump left the door open, saying “we continue to work, and we’ll see.”

Mr Kim, through North Korea’s news agency KCNA, pledged to meet Mr Trump again, after his Deputy Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui told a press conference the night before that the North Korean leader “may have lost the will” to negotiate with the US President.

For the North Koreans, this process with the US is “a rare opportunity” that would not come again any time soon, noted RSIS associate research fellow Shawn Ho.

“They feel that Trump is a president that they can strike a deal with because Trump is willing to talk to North Korea and has a good relationship with Kim,” he said.

In addition, there is a leader in South Korea, President Moon Jae-in, who is on the same page of wanting to do more with North Korea – he has worked hard to help get the denuclearisation process off the ground – and President Xi Jinping of China, Pyongyang’s close ally, who also wants North Korea to denuclearise, he added.

Challenges remain, however, not least of which are seemingly irreconcilable differences.

While the North Koreans’ primary objective of the talks is to get the sanctions lifted, the Americans want to see a clear, serious and genuine intent to denuclearise fully in a verifiable manner.

And while the Americans are coming round to accepting the idea of a step-by-step approach towards denuclearisation, Pyongyang’s preferred way, there is still a huge gap here, noted Prof Li. The North Koreans prefer small, piecemeal steps while the Americans want each step to be major and concrete rather than symbolic.

While the North wants to see simultaneous steps made, the US wants to see results from action by Pyongyang first before it will reciprocate.

Some optimists believe that a third summit before Mr Trump’s current term of office ends in January 2021 is possible.

”

Missiles at a military parade at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang. If the international community helps North Korea reform economically and transform into a normal country, it would then be less dependent on nuclear weapons.

PHOTO: REUTERS



The North Koreans basically want sanctions to be lifted and they don't want to pay the price of really moving towards denuclearisation to get it. That's the gap that's pretty much unbridgeable.



– DANIEL SNEIDER,
Stanford University
lecturer in
international policy

Ideally, both sides will have some flexibility and adjust their positions, said Mr Ho, who thought that a third summit before Mr Trump's term of office ends is possible.

He added that the South Koreans will likely try to bring the two parties back to the negotiating table.

For there to be substantive progress at the lower level of discussion in the coming months or year, said Prof Li, there is a need for Pyongyang to change some of its positions, expect less on the lifting of sanctions and be more serious about denuclearisation.

"Otherwise, there will be a stalemate for quite some time," he added.

He warned that if there is no progress in the next half-year to a year and no policy change on the part of Pyongyang, then the hawks in Washington will say "we've given diplomacy a chance, it's time to put on the pressure again." This would include military deployment, resumption of the US-South Korea military exercises that North Korea routinely denounces as preparations for an invasion, and the rhetoric of coercion that was seen in 2017.

Among those who do not expect the two sides to bridge their differences is Mr Sneider.

"The North Koreans basically want sanctions to be

lifted and they don't want to pay the price of really moving towards denuclearisation to get it. That's the gap that's pretty much unbridgeable," he said.

"As a result I don't see any prospect for these negotiations even if they resume to yield any outcome than we have already seen," he added.

What will happen then is that the two sides will settle back into the status quo that they are already in with a great degree of uncertainty.

North Korea would continue to develop its nuclear weapons and nuclear capability while trying to relieve the economic pressure on it by going to China and South Korea for help.

"I feel it's likely that Beijing is going to help them and it is possible that the Moon government will as well," Mr Sneider said, adding that the South Koreans wanted to do this so that they can move ahead with their own North-South economic engagement.

Dr Zhao Tong of the Carnegie-Tsinghua Centre for Global Policy in Beijing agreed that North Korea would continue working on perfecting some of the nuclear and missile technology that it has.

But it is likely to show self-restraint and not make any major military provocation even if talks with the US were to break down, he said.

This is because its priority now is to focus on domestic economic development.

Instead, it will project the image of a country that wants to open up to and embrace the international community, he added.

He said that in the long run, there is a case to be made for the international community to help North Korea reform economically and transform into a normal country, as it would then be less dependent on nuclear weapons. [ST](#)

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THE STRAITS TIMES

Asian Insider

MONDAY, JAN 17 2019



1 | Crunch time for Jokowi



By all accounts, Indonesian President Joko Widodo should win the upcoming presidential elections: He [holds a big lead in the polls](#) in his rematch with challenger Prabowo Subianto and enjoys the built-in advantages of incumbency.

2 | Trade woes



There was a bloodbath in December 2018. This week, as economies around the region total up the numbers for last month, many are finding export figures well below expectations.

3 | The wait goes on for Thai polls



Thinking Aloud

Looking back to chart the way forward

Instead of angst over the bicentennial, draw lessons from the past

WARREN FERNANDEZ
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THE FARTHER BACK YOU CAN LOOK, THE FARTHER forward you are likely to see.

So the late British prime minister and famed orator, Winston Churchill, is once supposed to have said.

This year, many will be doing so, with major milestones and anniversaries being marked around the world – 150 years since the birth of India's Mahatma Gandhi; 50 years after American astronaut Neil Armstrong's great lunar "leap for mankind"; 100 years since the May Fourth Movement in China; and 30 years after the Tiananmen Square student protests in 1989.

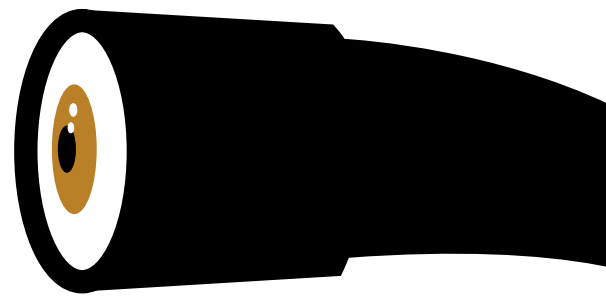
Singapore, too, looks likely to spend quite a bit of time casting an eye backwards, with the commemoration of the bicentennial of the landing of Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles kicking off in January with an official launch by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Furthermore, the organisers behind the year-long string of events – "it's not a celebration", they insist – have also sought to put Singapore's colonial past in a wider context, tracing its history all the way back to the legend of Sang Nila Utama, the Hindu prince of the Srivijayan Empire, who is said to have landed on this island of Temasek in 1299.

Other prominent pioneers such as business leader and philanthropist Tan Tock Seng, Raffles' secretary and interpreter Munshi Abdullah, the chief clerk at the Treasury and Indian community leader Naraina Pillai, have also been literally put on a pedestal, with statues of them being set up by the Singapore River, to highlight their contributions, alongside that of Raffles and his British peers.

This has sparked a spirited debate about the purpose and intent behind the bicentennial events, with some commentators leery of what they see as official efforts to uphold Singapore's colonial past, a period when the local people were exploited and subjugated. The criticism seems to have led to some officials tip-toeing nervously around the subject.

That, in turn, has led to a push-back. As a Straits Times reader, Mr Toh Cheng Seong, noted in a recent



ST ILLUSTRATION: MANNY FRANCISCO

letter to the newspaper's Forum page: "It is very odd to call the office in charge of the celebrations of Singapore's 720-year history the Bicentennial Office. Wouldn't 'septcentennial' be a better approximation of the period under coverage for the festivities?"

"Or was this extended historical framing a mere reaction to criticism that the office was glorifying colonial imperialism, and that we should instead look further back at the time when local affairs were managed by the locals, never mind the fact that most of them were similarly oppressed subjects of absolute rule?"

"This begs the question: Was Sang Nila Utama any more local than Sir Stamford Raffles? After all, the Srivijayan prince was born and bred in Palembang, Sumatra, and not on the island which he founded as the kingdom of Singapura."

Similarly puzzled, another writer, Mr Loke Hoe Kit, turned to the country's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew for some guidance, noting how he had once said that "if Raffles had not come here in 1819 to establish a trading post, my great-grandfather would not have migrated to Singapore."

Mr Loke added: "Mr Lee wisely avoided the virulent brand of anti-colonialism espoused by other former colonies that ultimately sent international investors packing. His government recognised history for what it was, and had no desire to rewrite the past by renaming streets or removing monuments."

"Hence, it is odd that Singapore should now be so reticent about celebrating its bicentennial."

A POST-COLONIAL FUNK?

I agree. It does strike me as strange indeed that more than 50 years after Independence, some Singaporeans might now find themselves in a belated post-colonial funk.

One would have thought that the Republic's success over the past five decades – with even today's British leaders extolling its economic transformation as a model for their country, post-Brexit – would have imbued Singaporeans, especially younger ones, with a greater sense of their promise and potential, rendering any lingering colonial hang-ups as pointless as it is *passee*.

To those who still harbour doubts, I would offer the wise words of Eleanor Roosevelt, the former American first lady who once said, eloquently: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

So, to my mind, Singaporeans need not be angst-ridden about marking the bicentennial, as if doing so implies revelling in the past subjugation of their forebears. Rather than hailing its colonial masters, the whole point of the exercise, it seems to me, is for people to draw the right lessons from the past 200 years, to help set them up for the future.

To do so requires an appreciation of what

transpired in 1819 and the years thereafter. A gripping account of this is found in the book *Singapore 1819: A Living Legacy*, by sociologist Kennie Ting, who is the director of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

"Singapore's success lay in the very beginning in Raffles' shrewd strategy to declare it a free port," he notes.

The approach at the time, taken by the Dutch and others, was to restrict trade strictly to vessels from their country, or to slap punitive tariffs on others for the privilege of selling their goods in local markets (sound familiar?).

Singapore under Raffles went the other way, he adds, noting: "Raffles waived customs and other duties for any trading vessels wishing to trade in Singapore."

"The principle was freedom to trade: any vessel from anywhere in the world, should have equal opportunity to trade their wares within the confines of this particular harbour, as long as there was a market for their goods. This *laissez faire* approach gave Singapore a huge competitive edge almost immediately, as it became the cheapest port to dock at overnight."

Singaporeans need not be angst-ridden about marking the bicentennial, as if doing so implies revelling in the past subjugation of their forebears... the whole point of the exercise... is for people to draw the right lessons from the past 200 years, to help set them up for the future.



"Word spread and within three years, Singapore had begun to corner the market, with all manner of trading vessels – European ships, Chinese junks and Malay boats – particularly from Malacca – eager to dock and trade their wares in its port..."

Mr Ting continues: "On 12th January 1823, just before he left Singapore for the last time, Raffles wrote: 'The progress of my new settlement is in every way most satisfactory... Every day brings us new settlers, and Singapore has already become a great emporium. Houses and warehouses are springing up in every direction, and the inland forests are fast giving way before the industrious cultivator. I am now engaged in marking out the towns and roads, and in establishing laws and regulations for the protection of person and property. We have no less than nine mercantile houses (European) and there is abundant employment for capital as fast as it accumulates'"

Barely five years after 1819, Singapore had become home to 10,683 residents: 4,580 Malays, 3,317 Chinese, 1,925 Bugis, 756 from India, 74 Europeans, 16 Armenians and 15 Arabs. By the turn of the century, the population would swell further

Journeying back 700 years

Here's a look at how Singapore is marking the island's rich 700-year-old history.



Working storyboards of what the projection might look like at Nagore Dargah in Telok Ayer Street.



A working sketch of how the roadshows will look.



The book will feature illustrations, videos and articles.

An immersive and cinematic experience through five galleries, showcasing iconic moments in Singapore's 700-year history.

PHOTOS: SINGAPORE
BICENTENNIAL OFFICE
AND PARTNERS

MARCH 15 TO APRIL 7

Projecting little-known stories of Singapore

A series of projected installations will be launched around the city centre every Friday, Saturday and Sunday during this period. These are the working storyboards of what the projection might look like at Nagore Dargah in Telok Ayer Street. The street was the site of many arrivals in the 1800s.

APRIL TO AUGUST

Heartland roadshows

Roadshows showcasing 700 years of history will be rolled out in the heartland as well.

MAY TO AUGUST

Bicentennial Interactive Book

The book will tell the story of 700 years of Singapore's history through the experiences of 25 historical characters such as Palembang Prince Sang Nila Utama. It will feature illustrations, videos and articles. Chapters will be rolled out progressively each month.

JUNE TO SEPTEMBER

From Singapore to Singaporean: The Bicentennial Experience @ Fort Canning

An immersive and cinematic experience through five galleries, showcasing iconic moments in Singapore's 700-year history. There will also be installations at the Fort Gate area for visitors to explore.



As I see it, no Singaporean today needs or wants to glorify the country's colonial past. But nor do we need a puerile pretence of rejecting what we inherited, if only to prove our commitment to this fledgling Republic we call our own.

”

to about 300,000, as more immigrants made their way here, seeking a better future for themselves and their families.

Personally, I can't help but be grateful it all happened this way, for otherwise, my father's Indian ancestors would probably not have ventured to this island, nor my mother's from the Netherlands, and their offspring born here would never have had the chance to meet and bear "uniquely Singaporean" children, including me. This is very much a part of the Singapore story for many Singaporeans today.

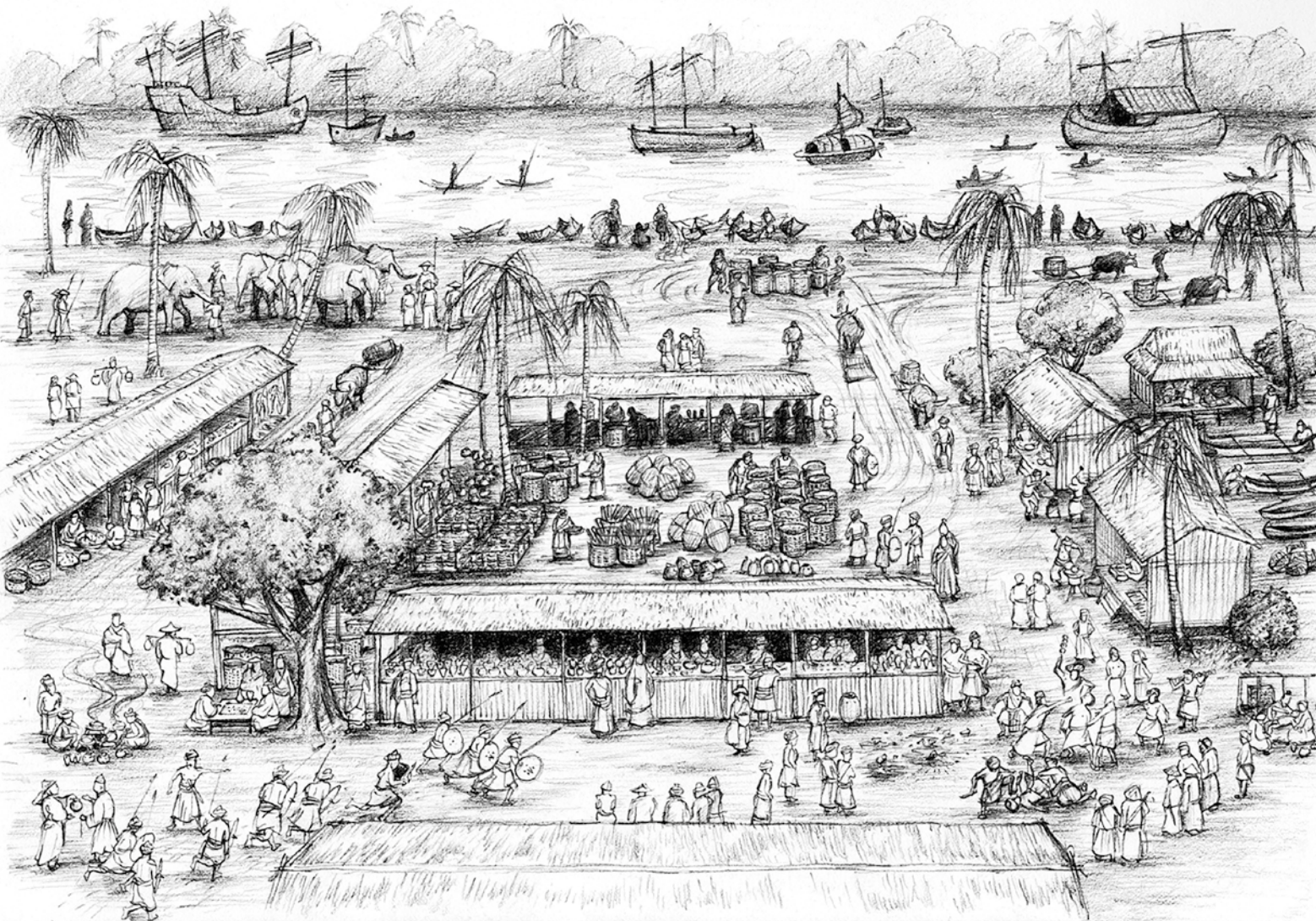
So, for me, the lessons to be drawn from the bicentennial events seem to be these. First and foremost, they remind us all how Singapore's fortunes have ebbed and flowed through the ages, with prosperity and success neither preordained nor naturally enduring.

Second, the critical importance of Singapore being connected with, and staying open to, the world, trading freely in goods, capital, people and ideas. Our commitment to welcoming people and talent from everywhere, affording them opportunities to seek their fortunes here, helped set the stage for the multi-racial and meritocratic society that Mr Lee and the pioneer generation of leaders, together with their supporters, helped forge over the years.

Thirdly, whether intended or otherwise, the British left Singapore a few precious gifts – the rule of law, sound systems of civil administrations and governance and, most importantly, the English language, which has served as a glue to bind the disparate peoples who came here into one united people – more so and more quickly than anyone imagined possible – while also enabling us to plug and play in today's modern world.

Thankfully, our founding fathers had the good sense to make use of these assets, rather than spurn them in a fit of post-colonial petulance and pique; we, the beneficiaries, should strive to be no less wise.

As I see it, no Singaporean today needs or wants to glorify the country's colonial past. But nor do we need a puerile pretence of rejecting what we inherited, if only to prove our commitment to this fledgling Republic we call our own. Far better for us to look back with equanimity, and draw the right lessons from the past, so that we are better able to chart our way forward. [ST](#)



Insight

Unearthing pieces of Singapore history

The arrival of the British in 1819 set in motion Singapore's development into a trading port and modern metropolis. Here's why the bicentennial matters to Singapore.

TO SOME SINGAPOREANS, THE BICENTENNIAL – which marks the 200th anniversary of the British arrival – does not make much sense.

Coming just four years after Singapore celebrated SG50 – marking 50 years of independence after leaving the Federation of Malaysia and, before that, the British empire – it is understandable that Singaporeans might be confused about the latest bout of flag-waving, the bicentennial.

For it was on Feb 6, 1819, that Sir Stamford Raffles signed a treaty allowing him to set up a trading

post on the strategically located island known as Singapura at the end of the Malay peninsula, on behalf of the British East India Company, a company set up to exploit trade with East and South-east Asia and India.

And now, a specially set-up Singapore Bicentennial Office has, together with community groups, arranged a year of activities to commemorate what is regarded as the founding of modern Singapore.

Organisers emphasise that it is not a celebration.

An artist's impression of the Victoria Concert Hall site in the 14th century depicting a busy marketplace, a small cottage industry for copper or metal work and residences.

PHOTO: LIM CHEN SIAN, AARON KAO

MELODY ZACCHEUS

Heritage and Community Correspondent



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Right: Before the pubs and restaurants moved in, coolies along the banks of the Singapore River in 1960 looked to storytellers for entertainment.
PHOTO: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE

The office says it wants to be “responsible to history” and address elements that may not be always positive.

Still, hot on the heels of the SG50 golden jubilee marking the founding of Singapore – the independent one – there is the bicentennial for the founding of another Singapore – the British mercantile one.

Some millennials, whose school syllabus mostly focuses on two dates – 1819 and 1965 – might wonder: What relevance does marking 200 years since the British arrived have today for Singaporeans?

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in his speech announcing the bicentennial activities, said 1819 marked a turning point: “Because of Raffles, Singapore became a British colony, a free port and a modern city.” But he also called on Singaporeans to “understand truly how far back our history reaches, and how complex it is.”

The *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) documents that Palembang prince Sang Nila Utama landed here in 1299.

HOW SINGAPORE CAME UNDER BRITISH CONTROL

Raffles was not the only one with the foresight and vision to set up a British post at the end of the strait, as the engraving on the plinth of his statue by the Singapore River so proudly proclaims.

Major William Farquhar had earlier urged his employers, the British East India Company, to establish one, and it was a confluence of circumstances that led Raffles – who was racing against the Dutch to stake a claim in the area – to Singapore in 1819.

A fleet of eight ships with Raffles and Farquhar on board first landed at the nearby Karimun islands, which proved too rocky and inhospitable. Captain Daniel Ross, who had previously seen Singapore in passing, suggested heading there.

Already living there were about 1,000 people, including local chieftain Temenggong Abdul Rahman of Johor and his entourage. Most of the population were indigenous people, with about 20 to 30 Chinese.

Raffles was relieved that the Dutch, who had a stranglehold on the region’s key ports and spice trade sea lanes, were not present.

He worked with the Temenggong and Sultan Hussein Shah of Johor. A treaty was signed on Feb 6, 1819, which split control over Singapore among the three parties.

This 1819 treaty did not give Raffles the outcome



he wanted, as it amounted to little more than permission to erect a storehouse where the British could keep goods and undertake trade.

In the end, the Dutch agreed not to launch a claim on Singapore. Subsequently, the Sultan and the Temenggong agreed to sell Singapore to the British East India Company. In 1824, a new Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between the two Malay leaders and the British replaced the 1819 treaty. The Sultan and Temenggong received a lump sum as part of the deal.

This resulted in Singapore and its surrounding islands being ceded to the East India Company. In 1826, Singapore became part of the Straits Settlements, which included Penang and Malacca.

Raffles made only three visits to Singapore before he died in 1826 and historians in more recent times credit a broader cast of characters for the development of early Singapore. Texts such as *Singapore, A 700-year History: From Early Emporium To World City* attribute Sultan Hussein’s role as essential in forming the basis for the treaty to start a settlement.

They also recognise Farquhar, who was installed as First British Resident and Commandant of Singapore, as the one who got the settlement up and running. His successor, John Crawfurd, introduced a legal system and secured investments by traders and immigrants.

WHY IT MATTERS

People should care about this chapter of the past to recognise 1819 as relevant today for triggering the coming together of Singaporeans’ forebears as an internationally connected colonial port city, say

Scenes from The Bicentennial Experience at Fort Canning Centre will include a depiction of Raffles and his crew (below) approaching Singapore in 1819; and Singapore as a trading port in the early 1900s (far right).
PHOTOS: SINGAPORE BICENTENNIAL OFFICE AND PARTNERS



those in the heritage community.

Five years after that 1819 date, Singapore had become home to 10,683 residents: 4,580 Malays, 3,317 Chinese, 1,925 Bugis, 756 from India, 74 Europeans, 16 Armenians and 15 Arabs.

It was becoming a port city, plugged into an international maritime trading system, helped by the fact that the British navy secured the waters beyond its shores.

By the late 1800s, Singapore was a kaleidoscope of peoples who had brought with them their own worldviews, skills, practices and religions. The port city was also a centre for pilgrimage, culture and politics, note historians Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng and Tan Tai Yong, and a local experience began to emerge from these wide-ranging influences.

The bicentennial is an opportunity for public reflection and discussion on the portrayal of those involved in making a success of the colonial endeavour, says archaeologist John Miksic. These include Farquhar, local rulers, Chinese merchants, Arab and Bugis traders, community pioneers as well as other contributors.

By the 1910s, the population had grown to more than 300,000. In all, the island before World War II had more or less thrived for about 120 years.

Surely, such a significant episode in the country's past is worth re-examining, especially in the context of Singapore's existing relationship with remnants from colonial times, declares the heritage community.

The island has also inherited the British's trading port legacy, as well as legal and political frameworks. How aware are Singaporeans of this colonial-era heritage that is part of everyday life? What is rejected, kept or built upon further?

For instance, should Singapore continue to rely on Cambridge Assessment to mark its students' examination scripts, when graders in Britain occasionally lose the scripts?

The colonialists' legacy must be weighed against the negatives, including divisive racial policies, the subjugation and humiliation of communities and their cultures, suspension of civil rights, the erasure and even destruction of histories (blasting the Singapore Stone), and their failure to defend the island against the Japanese in the 1940s.

QUESTIONING THE NARRATIVE

Fresh historical research of Asian texts and European archives, as well as archaeological digs since 1984, show that Singapore was, in fact, long acknowledged as a strategic location by mariners and others.



The finds debunk agenda-driven myths and allow Singaporeans to travel beyond the British colonial narrative and the 1965 nation-building account.

For instance, a 15th century Ming Dynasty text described Singapore as a great international centre where passengers from Indonesia could transfer to a ship going east or west.

Other sources corroborate that the island was recognised as an important point of transition between two maritime zones. Historian Dr Borschberg has seen about 1,000 mostly maritime references to it, written in languages like Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch.

The writings of Flemish gem trader Jacques de Coutre, who passed by Singapore on several occasions around 1600, reveal a detailed plan to build fortresses on and around Singapore. This took place two centuries before Raffles' arrival, and "calls into question the long-held view that he was a specially gifted person with a unique vision for Singapore Island", argues Dr Borschberg.

Ancient Singapore may have had an established government with a head ruler or chieftain in the late 14th century who had ties with overseas heads.

In 2011, archaeologist Lim Chen Sian and his team found the teeth of inhabitants from the 1300s to 1600s on the grounds of Victoria Concert Hall. Human civilisation can even be traced back to thousands of years ago, following the discovery of neolithic stone tools on Pulau Ubin and in Tuas.

People across sectors in Singapore are relooking, documenting and presenting their stories and lesser-known histories this year as part of a packed bicentennial calendar. Collectively, these efforts will add much needed threads of historic detail, perspectives and missing links to Singapore's longer past. [S1](#)

A view of the city skyline with the ArtScience Museum awash in light. Across Singapore, people are relooking, documenting and presenting stories and lesser-known histories this year as part of a packed bicentennial calendar.

ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE





Spotlight

The Straits Times newsroom's central hub, where the key editors of all the sections are stationed. Screens all around the newsroom display charts with real-time information on what stories are trending or gaining traction with the audience.

ST PHOTOS: LIM YAOHUI

The Straits Times gets a revamped newsroom with multimedia focus

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Correspondent



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New set-up designed to foster collaboration and meet readers' needs

THE STRAITS TIMES HAS RETURNED HOME TO ITS revamped newsroom, which has been transformed to enable its journalists to meet readers' changing needs.

The new set-up will allow journalists and editors from different desks to collaborate and work more seamlessly across platforms, producing content for its digital, mobile, video, radio and print products.

There is also a greater emphasis on using data to track readers' interests, with screens all around the newsroom displaying charts with real-time information on what stories are trending or gaining traction with its audience.

The Straits Times moved into its current News Centre premises in Toa Payoh North in February 2002, after 43 years at Times House in Kim Seng

Road. The ST newsroom occupies the second floor of the main building, and this is its first complete renovation since it moved in.

Drawing inspiration from some of the top newsrooms in the world, the refurbished space features a central hub where the key editors of all the sections are stationed.

This facilitates cross-desk and multi-platform collaboration, said Warren Fernandez, editor-in-chief of The Straits Times and Singapore Press Holdings' English/Malay/ Tamil Media (EMTM) Group.

This is critical, he said, as The Straits Times is "no longer just a newspaper but a wholly multimedia operation", and the revamped newsroom reflects these changes.

"We thought it was time to revamp the newsroom, not just to change its look and feel, but also to reflect the changes in the way we need to operate," said Mr Fernandez. "We started from scratch and redesigned the newsroom as if we were starting to build the newsroom today."



The conference room, where editors have their daily meetings



ST's revamped newsroom will allow staff from different desks to collaborate and work more seamlessly across platforms, with numerous discussion corners and nine "phone booths" (below), where staff can make calls or work on stories together. ST PHOTOS: LIM YAOHUI, ARIFFIN JAMAR

ST executive editor Sumiko Tan said that underpinning the newsroom's transformation is a focus on data analytics. This helps journalists and editors to understand better what readers are interested in.

Journalists now receive a daily report on how their top stories performed digitally. There are also screens located all around the newsroom showing the day's most well-read stories.

Ms Tan said that before the age of data, stories were played up on the newspaper and website based mostly on editors' gut feel on what matters to readers. "Now, the data proves us right," she said.

She added that one of the goals of the revamp was to create a conducive and comfortable working space. There are numerous discussion corners, nine "phone booths" where staff can make calls or



collaborate on stories, as well as brighter lighting and ergonomically designed chairs.

"We want a liveable space where people are happy to come to work and are proud to be part of the newsroom," she said.

Teams that can benefit from greater collaboration are now seated in close proximity – for instance, reporters on the education beat and those in the Schools team, which produces student publications.

EMTM deputy managing editor S. Murali, who oversaw the year-long renovation project, said that the final product was the result of a "real team effort."

For example, sub-committees were formed to look into what staff wanted for the recreation areas, pantries and also heritage corners. The Straits Times has a long history, with its first issue published on July 15, 1845.

"It is still a work in progress, but we are getting a lot of positive vibes about the new place, which is nice," he said of the new space.

Mr Peter Williams, head of EMTM Visual and ST art editor, said the design was guided by how journalists work in a changed media environment.

"We work faster than before, and getting a story out on our various platforms means having to work closer together," said Mr Williams, who oversaw the design aspects of the renovation.

"To be able to put out stories that matter – and across our platforms – means having to break down silos between departments, and to find ways to integrate print and digital in ways that surprise our readers."

The second stage of the newsroom revamp is slated for completion next month. It will feature a state-of-the-art video production and editing lab to take video production to the next level.

This includes more live, personality-based programmes on social media platforms as well as roundtable discussions with ST journalists and opinion leaders.

Mr Fernandez said: "Over the next few months, readers and viewers will see the benefits of these new facilities as we ramp up our production of content across all our products and platforms to suit their changing information needs." ST



MULTIMEDIA OPERATION

The Straits Times today is no longer just a newspaper but a wholly multimedia operation... We thought it was time to revamp the newsroom, not just to change its look and feel, but also to reflect the changes in the way we need to operate.

”

– Warren Fernandez, editor-in-chief, The Straits Times and Singapore Press Holdings' English/Malay/Tamil Media Group.



On the fast train from

China's high-speed train, Fuxing (Rejuvenation), completes the journey from Hong Kong to Beijing in just under nine hours, travelling at an average speed of 300kmh. Our correspondent reports on 8 stops.

CHONG KOH PING
China Correspondent



✉ kohping@sph.com.sg

NOTE: The time the train leaves each station.

STARTING STOP: HONG KONG

One country, two systems

The opening of a mega sea bridge and a high-speed rail link this year has made Hong Kong more accessible to mainlanders and it is now a lot easier for people in Hong Kong to visit major Chinese cities, especially those further inland.

But greater integration with the mainland could mean a faster erosion of the "one country, two systems" arrangement that allows Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy in its legal and political systems.

The new Hong Kong West Kowloon Station for the high-speed rail houses both the Hong Kong and Chinese immigration checkpoints – this means that the Chinese authorities can apply mainland laws there, including the power to arrest people inside the station. To many Hong Kongers, this threatens their autonomy, rights and freedom, and the special administrative region is in danger of becoming just another city in southern Guangdong province.



Forty minutes from Shenzhen North Station is this enclave, where you can buy a Van Gogh replica or get a self-portrait done. ST PHOTO: CHONG KOH PING

SHENZHEN

High-speed rail spurs development

A new business district for boom town Shenzhen is shaping up around the Shenzhen North Station, the new hub of South China's high-speed rail (HSR) and passenger train network.

Slated for completion in 2022, the 6.1 sq km area is around the same size as the current Central Business District in Futian.

The area, which has drawn a total investment of more than 200 billion yuan (\$40 billion), will be home to more than 60 new skyscrapers. It is projected to provide as many as 250,000 high-end white-collar jobs and house 110,000 people.

In a common pattern across China, the HSR has spurred real-estate investments in the areas along train lines, where better connectivity means people can live further away from core cities.

And, in this case, a second city centre is being built around the HSR station in a very large city.

8.05AM

8.27AM

Hong Kong to Beijing



In Shamian, Guangzhou, European-style buildings dot the area. Many have since been converted to restaurants and shops. ST PHOTO: CHONG KOH PING

GUANGZHOU

Great buzz in Greater Bay Area

Home to Shenzhen and its tech innovators, as well as Hong Kong and its banking and legal system.

Deeper synergies between the two dynamos are on the cards with the development of the Greater Bay Area made up of Hong Kong, Macau, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and seven Chinese cities in Guangdong province around the Pearl River estuary.

China plans to turn the area into an economic powerhouse centred on innovation and technology to rival bay areas in San Francisco, Tokyo and New York.

Thrice as big as the San Francisco Bay Area at 56,000 sq km, the Greater Bay Area is home to nearly 70 million people and accounted for about 12 per cent of China's gross domestic product last year.

HSBC estimates that the Greater Bay Area's economic output will equal that of the New York Metropolitan Area by 2025.



Mao Zedong sculpture in Hunan, home province of the late Chairman Mao. Visitors also head for the trend-setting Hunan TV station. PHOTO: XINHUA

CHANGSHA

China's soft power

Hunan, the home province of late Chairman Mao Zedong, draws not just Maoist devotees but also "pilgrims" of a different stripe.

Some visit Hunan TV station to see how the trend-setting station cooks up hit variety shows such as Happy Camp, Day Day Up or Singer. It is China's second most watched channel after the state-owned CCTV-1.

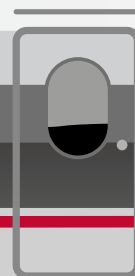
A visit to Hunan is seen as a necessary rite of passage by some foreign artists hoping to burnish their name in China, including Singapore singer Kit Chan and British pop star Jessie J, who took part in music talent show Singer, formerly called I'm A Singer.

Hunan TV is part of a larger boom in China's entertainment industry, which has given the world dramas and variety shows as well as Internet video-streaming platforms such as iQiyi and Tencent.

复兴号

9AM

11.20AM





The double-deck road and rail bridge, Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge, is often referred to as the "First Bridge of the Yangtze". PHOTO: HUBEI.GOV.CN

WUHAN

Ancient city has stood test of time and water

Wuhan, the capital of central Hubei province, is known for its long history and large number of ponds and lakes - 166 currently.

The city, which sits at the confluence of the Yangtze and Han rivers, is prone to massive floods.

City planners hope to change this through a pilot programme that aims to remake Wuhan into a "sponge city" which can soak up 70 per cent of rainwater.

Come war, revolution or massive floods, Wuhan has remained standing, for some 3,500 years.

It was formed by combining three cities - Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang, which was already a busy port during the Han dynasty more than 2,000 years ago.

In 1927, Wuhan was China's capital under the Kuomintang left wing, and the country's wartime capital for 10 months in 1937. Today, it is the most populous city in central China.



Students at one of the many private schools teaching the so-called "Shaolin way of life" in Zhengzhou, capital of Henan province. ST PHOTO: LIM YAN LIANG

ZHENGZHOU

City has sweet spot in New Silk Road to Europe

Zhengzhou, the provincial capital of central Henan province, is in a sweet spot in the middle of major trade routes.

People and goods always seem to be on the go in Zhengzhou, which is set to get even busier as China develops its rail freight services to Europe.

The routes, collectively known as the China-Europe Railway (CR) Express, connects 59 Chinese cities to 49 other cities in 15 countries, according to figures for last year.

They are part of a bigger plan by China to build a new Silk Road to Europe under its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to boost trade between the country and other regions of the world.

12.41PM

2.28PM

3.54PM



The glass bridge in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, spans two buildings, and is said to be China's first urban glass bridge. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SHIJIAZHUANG

Smog capital of China

The capital of northern Hebei province was China's smoggiest city in 2017, in a ranking by the country's environment ministry.

Shijiazhuang is in a steel-producing region known for bad air.

In recent years, China has vowed to bring back blue skies amid rising public anger.

"Clear waters and green mountains are as good as mountains of gold and silver," Chinese President Xi Jinping has said repeatedly, indicating a move away from the previous "growth at all cost" economic model.

The central government has listed fighting pollution alongside curbing financial risks and stamping out extreme poverty as its top three economic priorities.



LAST STOP: BEIJING

High-speed rail diplomacy

The destination stop of West Beijing on the West Kowloon-Beijing West HSR route is one of three HSR stops in the Chinese capital. From Beijing, you can transfer to a train that takes you to Moscow on the Trans-Siberian railway 8,961km away.

In 10 years, China went from having one HSR line – linking Beijing to Tianjin in 2008 – to having the world's longest HSR network with 29,000km of tracks criss-crossing the country.

Since the early 2010s, China has doubled down on efforts to export its high-speed rail technologies. But its HSR diplomacy has not been all smooth-sailing. Projects in some countries have been cancelled while others have been delayed.

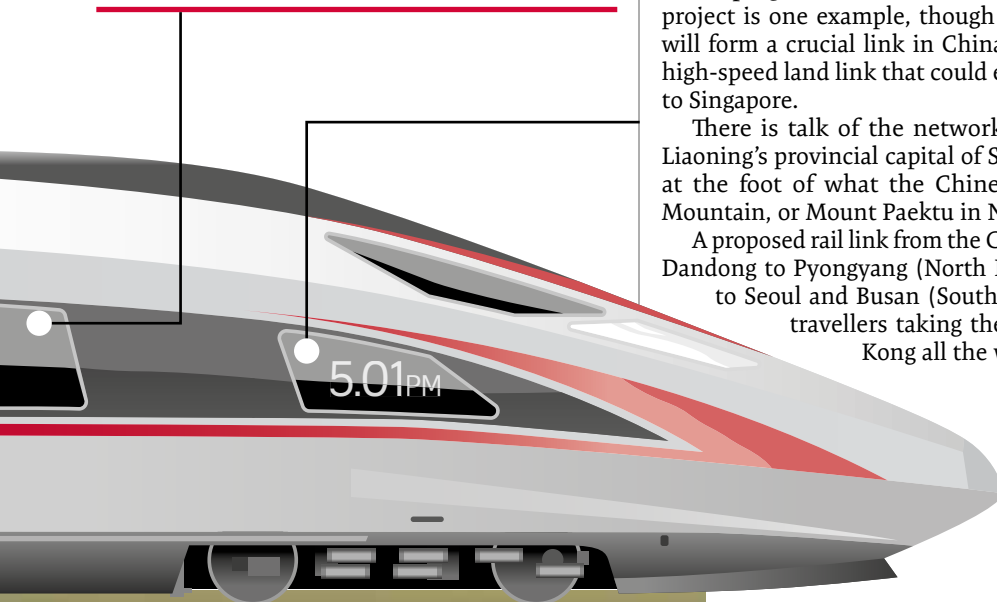
There are concerns that the HSR investments could be financially unviable for the mostly developing countries. The Vientiane-Kunming project is one example, though supporters say it will form a crucial link in China's plan to build a high-speed land link that could extend all the way to Singapore.

There is talk of the network extending from Liaoning's provincial capital of Shenyang to Baihe at the foot of what the Chinese call Changbai Mountain, or Mount Paektu in North Korea.

A proposed rail link from the Chinese border city Dandong to Pyongyang (North Korean) and then to Seoul and Busan (South Korea) could see travellers taking the HSR from Hong Kong all the way to Busan. [ST](#)

Head to the quieter Mutianyu section of the Great Wall if you do not like the crowded Badaling stretch. Or you can camp overnight at some of the "wild" sections of the Great Wall not usually visited by tourists.

ST PHOTO: CHONG KOH PING



China charts timeline for Greater Bay Area integration plan

CLAIRE HUANG

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Beijing aims to boost collaboration among 11 cities, including HK and Macau, by 2022

HONG KONG - THE CHINESE AUTHORITIES HAVE unveiled a timeline to further integrate Hong Kong and Macau into the mainland under the ambitious Greater Bay Area plan to create a cluster of world-class cities in southern China.

An 11-chapter document released on Feb 18 by the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party states that the 11 cities in the plan would boost collaboration by 2022 in areas including the central pillar that is science and technology, intellectual property rights and even ecological conservation.

By 2035, the region would have developed an

economic system largely driven by innovation.

The plan involves linking 11 cities in the Pearl River Delta area within a two-hour radius of Hong Kong. It comprises Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Dongguan, Huizhou, Zhongshan, Foshan, Zhaoqing and Jiangmen.

Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Macau were identified by Beijing as core engines for driving growth in nearby regions.

Under the road map, Hong Kong would build on its status as an international financial, transportation and trade hub. The city would focus on offshore yuan, international asset management and risk management, as well as developing innovation and technology industries.

Beijing also outlined its support for Hong Kong becoming the hub for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam has welcomed the blueprint, and thanked the central government "for placing importance on the views



STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



of the Hong Kong government.” The government issued a statement saying: “The development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area is not only a new attempt to break new ground in the country’s pursuit of opening up on all fronts in a new era, but also a further step in taking forward the implementation of ‘one country, two systems.’”

Guangzhou would strengthen its function as an international commerce and industry hub, while Shenzhen would bank on its strength as home to China’s innovation and technology giants and be turned into a special economic zone.

Macau would focus on being the “world centre for tourism and leisure” and act as a bridge to Portuguese-speaking countries.

Ms Ayesha Lau, the Hong Kong managing partner at KPMG China, noted that Beijing has a lot riding on the Bay Area plan, given that the trade war with the United States “really highlights the risk of China being isolated in the world.”

“China needs more engines for economic growth.

It can no longer rely on exports. It must generate more internal demand,” she said, adding that the Bay Area is “an ideal place” for China to try out new initiatives aligned with the country’s opening up policy before rolling them out at a national level.

Still, significant doubts remain as to how the scheme could work, given all the different legal and tax systems in the area.

Professor Chen Guanghan of Sun Yat-sen University, who is also vice-dean of the Research Institute of the Development of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, said the plan “would face many problems in trying to integrate these different systems.”

“In this case, the central government should allow the local authorities to have space to explore what can be done,” he added.

The Bay Area plan reflects China’s innovation and technology ambitions and is aligned with its Made in China 2025 masterplan: a 10-year road map for the future of the manufacturing sector. [ST](#)

The Zhuhai Grand Theatre, a new landmark in Zhuhai, one of the 11 cities of the Pearl River Delta that will be part of the Greater Bay Area. Under the plan, Hong Kong would build on its status as an international financial, transportation and trade hub. PHOTO: WWW.BAYAREA.GOV.HK

Truce extension offers hope for US-China deal

Agreement could mean better prospects for world trade.

CHONG KOH PING
China Correspondent

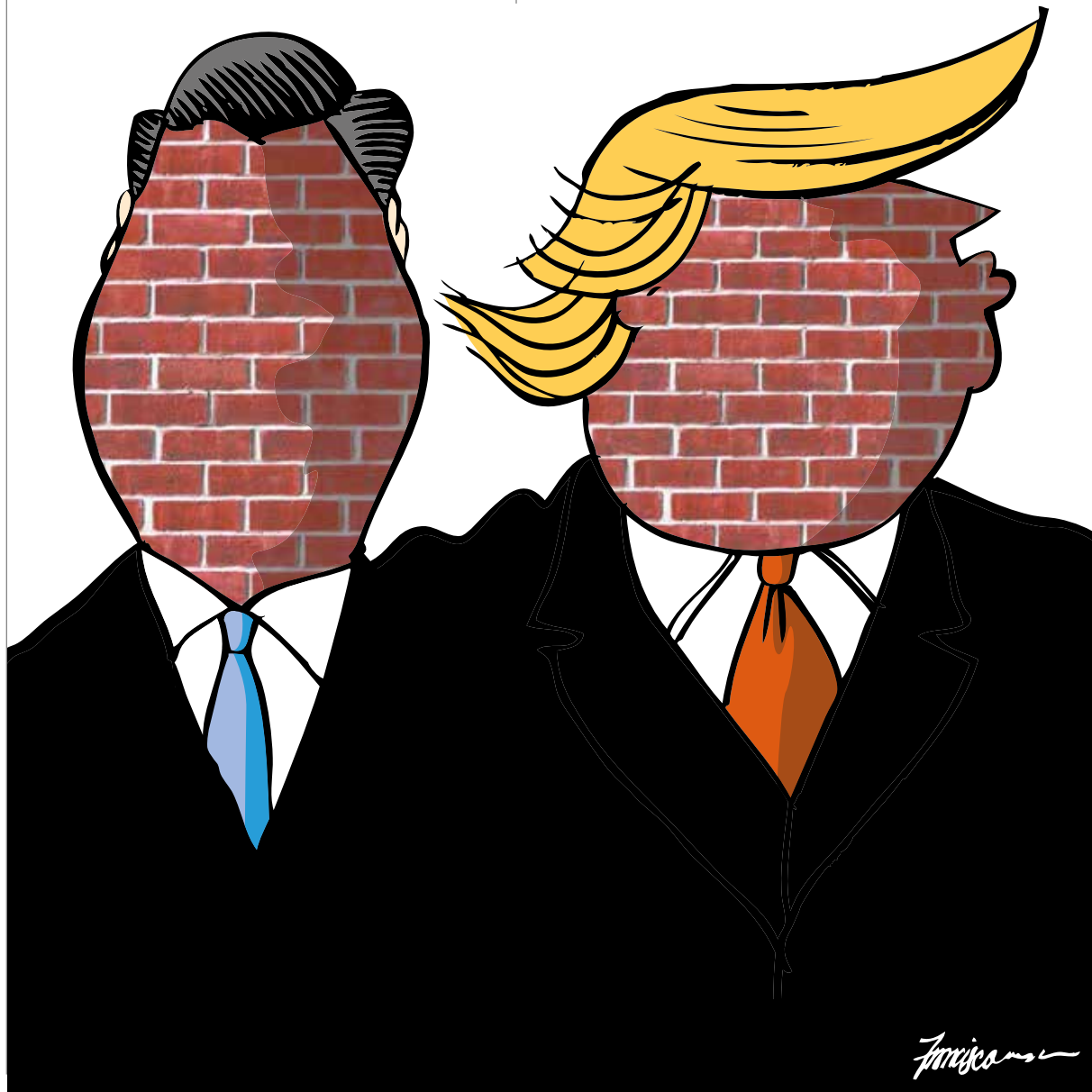


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THE EXTENSION OF THE US-CHINA TRADE WAR truce beyond March 1 points to a higher chance of a deal between the world's two largest economies, which is good news for China as well as the global economy.

Most observers have expected this outcome as it is in the interest of both countries to strike a deal to avert any further escalation in tensions.

China is likely to have made the biggest possible concessions for negotiations to come to this point.



ST ILLUSTRATION:
MANNY FRANCISCO



US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer (left) listens as Chinese Vice Premier Liu He talks while they line up for a group photo at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on Feb 15, 2019. PHOTO: REUTERS

"The tariff hike from 10 per cent to 25 per cent will hit the Chinese economy severely," said Dr Shen Janguang, chief economist at JD Digits, a Chinese fintech group.

"Already the goods affected by the first round of tariffs have seen export growth plummeting from 50 per cent to zero recently."

China is willing to pay a high price in exchange for stability in trade ties, he added.

Mr Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics at Oxford Economics, a Hong Kong-based consulting firm, said this latest development "should be a positive for international trade and business in both countries, as well as the global economy more generally.

"It reduces some of the uncertainty that has been hanging over international trade and investment and seems to further confirm that, in the end, in such international conflicts the Trump administration seems to strive for deals rather than escalation."

That said, uncertainties still remain as there are no details emerging from this seventh round of trade talks.

According to media reports citing unnamed sources, China has pledged to buy up to US\$1.2 trillion (\$1.63 trillion) worth of American goods, including corn and an additional 10 million tonnes of soya beans.

China will also keep the value of the yuan stable so that Beijing cannot resort to devaluing its currency to improve the competitiveness of its exports to counter the US tariffs.

Dr Shen observed that these issues are low-lying fruits that China can easily concede.

But he added that there is very likely to be a compromise between the two countries on structural issues like the removal of unfair subsidies for state-owned enterprises.

Agreeing, Professor Shi Yinhong of Renmin University in Beijing said China's strategy is to concede as much as possible on areas like increasing imports and markets opening so as to lift pressures off other demands such as intellectual property

THE STRAITS TIMES SAYS

A Sino-US deal to foster better ties?

The decision by United States President Donald Trump to delay the increase in tariffs on US\$200 billion (\$270 billion) worth of Chinese goods in anticipation of a trade deal is a positive development and brought relief to jittery markets. But the scope and durability of any agreement between the US and China are open to question. The tariff increase, from 10 per cent to 25 per cent, was supposed to take effect from March 1. But Mr Trump postponed the hike to an as-yet-unspecified date, indicating that meanwhile, there is a "good chance" of a trade deal which he hopes to formally sign with China's President Xi Jinping by the end of March. The easing of China-US trade tensions has been welcomed by US business groups and has propelled Chinese stocks higher. But from what is known at this stage, the deal is limited.

One of its highlights is a pledge by Beijing not to artificially weaken the value of the yuan as well as to step up Chinese purchases of US agricultural and energy products – both of which will help reduce China's bilateral trade deficit with the US, which crossed US\$380 billion last year. China has also drafted a new foreign investment law that bans foreign technology transfers – which US and other foreign companies operating in China have long complained about. However, several key issues that have been at the core of US objections to China's trade policies remain unaddressed, including subsidies to China's state-owned enterprises, policies that grant more favourable market access to local companies and issues relating to cyber security and the alleged cybertheft of industrial secrets by Chinese entities.

Mechanisms to enforce the provisions of the agreement are also not yet in place. Thus, the evidence suggests that the trade deal that is reportedly to be signed next month is more likely to resemble a memorandum of understanding – whether Mr Trump likes the description or not – on selected issues than a substantive agreement.

Securing the political buy-in needed to make the deal credible and durable will also be a problem for Mr Trump. Many Democrats, who control the US House of Representatives and who are just as hawkish on China's trade practices as the Trump administration, would not support a trade agreement which is perceived to let China get off lightly. They may also suspect that Mr Trump is eager to get a trade deal done to burnish his credentials as a dealmaker in the run-up to the US election season, which is getting under way. Related to this are concerns that Mr Trump is playing a tactical game, trying to obtain Chinese support for his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Many Republicans, including Mr Trump's own trade advisers, have indicated that they want to see a comprehensive trade deal. Thus, while a deal may well be on the cards, it will likely be partial and patchy, leaving many issues outstanding. [ST](#)

rights protection and state subsidies, as well as the "verification and enforcement" mechanisms required by the US.

OCBC economist Tommy Xie noted that the increased chance of a trade deal eases a key external risk for China.

It bodes well for market sentiments in the near term. However medium term prospects still remain murky due to disagreement between both countries on structural reforms and how the deal could be enforced.

He noted that it has been reported that the US has demanded that the Chinese notify the US when and why they are intervening with the Chinese yuan.

The latest round of US-Chinese trade talks was originally scheduled to wrap up within a day, but went so well that the Chinese negotiators extended their stay and will continue meeting their US counterparts through the weekend.

While such a currency pact supports the yuan in the near term, it evokes the memory of the Plaza Accord, he said.

In 1985, the Japanese yen was made to appreciate significantly against the US dollar to help make American exports cheaper, but in the end it created a decades-long recession in Japan.

"Hopefully the yuan does not appreciate for the wrong reasons," Mr Xie added.

To some analysts, the real good news in both countries reaching a trade deal is the impetus for China to deepen its market reforms.

This will go a longer way to help lift the Chinese economy than the short-term euphoria of a trade truce.

With wider markets opening and stronger protection of intellectual property rights, China could attract more foreign investments, said Dr Shen.

Addressing the issue of subsidies for state-owned enterprises will also benefit the private firms in China.

"Overall, it will be a plus for the Chinese economy if it adopts more market-based, law-based and internationalised practices," he added. **ST**

Trade Briefs

Indonesia and Australia reach agreement

Indonesia and Australia have signed a long-awaited trade deal after months of diplomatic tension over Canberra's contentious plan to move its Israeli embassy to Jerusalem.

Indonesian Trade Minister Enggartiasto Lukita and his Australian counterpart Simon Birmingham wrapped up the multi-billion-dollar agreement in Jakarta, some nine years after negotiations first started.

The pact will include improved access for Australian cattle and sheep farmers to Indonesia's 260 million people, while Australian universities, health providers and miners will benefit from easier entry to South-east Asia's biggest economy.

Greater access to the Australian market is expected to spur Indonesia's automotive and textile industries, and boost its exports of timber, electronics and medicinal goods.

— Agence France-Presse



People posing for photos outside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, with the National People's Congress taking place inside. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

China opens up to foreign-owned firms

China's state planner has said more opening measures will be introduced in the agriculture, mining, manufacturing and service industries, letting wholly foreign-owned firms operate in more sectors.

The "negative list" of industries that are off-limits to foreign investors will be further shortened, Mr Ning Jizhe, vice-chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission said on the sidelines of the annual parliamentary meeting.

He stressed that foreign firms will be treated as equals with Chinese companies before and after they enter China.

Mr Ning noted that this year's annual meeting of lawmakers will review a draft foreign investment law, which clearly stipulates intellectual property rights protection for foreign investors and firms, and bans forced technology transfers through administrative means.

— The Straits Times

Asean ministers and partners resolve to settle RCEP this year

Commerce ministers of Asean and its key partners have agreed on a series of monthly targets to ensure that talks on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) cross the finish line this year.

Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing outlined the developments when he updated the House in Singapore, in March, about progress on the mega trade pact.

This follows his visit to Cambodia where he and other ministers from Asean's 10 member states and six key partners – Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand – held talks on the deal.

The RCEP covers issues such as trade in goods and services, investment as well as intellectual property, among others.

— The Straits Times



Asean in Focus

Ethnic Chinese votes a political dilemma for Indonesian election candidates

IT WAS A SCENE STRAIGHT OUT OF CHINESE mythology, complete with hundreds of performers in elaborate costumes re-enacting Taoist folklore freely on the streets of Padang, West Sumatra.

Elsewhere, from Jakarta to Singkawang in West Kalimantan on Borneo island, devotees openly took part in rituals and festivities at Chinese temples in late February, to mark Chap Goh Meh, the 15th and last day of Chinese New Year.

This was not always the case for the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

Before the fall of President Suharto in 1998, the Chinese in the Muslim-majority country were banned from celebrating such festivals, while speaking Chinese dialects in public was also prohibited.

More than 20 years after the strongman's New Order regime ended, Imlek – or what Chinese New Year is known as here – is now gazetted as a national holiday.

However, prejudice against Chinese Indonesians continues today amid rising intolerance in the

Indonesia will hold its presidential and legislative elections on April 17. With more than 192 million people eligible to vote, it will be the largest polls since direct elections were first held 15 years ago. Here's a look at some issues that will matter.

country, which was manifested in the ugliest of ways less than two years ago, just before former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, an ethnic Chinese who is also Christian, was jailed for blasphemy against Islam.

A performer dressed as the Chinese God of Fortune at a Chap Goh Meh carnival in Jakarta on Tuesday. Many such celebrations were held across Indonesia to mark the 15th and last day of Chinese New Year. Before President Suharto's fall in 1998, the Chinese in the Muslim-majority country were banned from celebrating such festivals. PHOTO: ANTARA FOTO

FRANCIS CHAN

Indonesia Bureau Chief



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President Joko Widodo (left) and rival candidate Prabowo Subianto engaging in an escalating war of words during the February debate.
PHOTOS: EPA-EFE, REUTERS

Such is the state of Indonesian elections today, where race, religion and identity politics have become the focal points of a candidate's strategy to win.

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Such is the state of Indonesian elections today, where race, religion and identity politics have become the focal points of a candidate's strategy to win.

At the time, Muslim conservatives rallied against the double-minority politician with a series of street protests that threatened to destabilise the capital during a highly divisive gubernatorial race, which Mr Basuki eventually lost in early 2017.

While racial and religious conflicts have not taken hold in the current election campaigns for the presidency and legislature as they did during the Jakarta gubernatorial polls, an awkward tension remains in the lead-up to the April 17 elections.

Many believe that Mr Basuki, best known as Ahok, had slipped away quietly after his high-profile release from prison last month, to avoid jeopardising the re-election of his close ally, President Joko Widodo.

While Mr Basuki remains popular among the moderates and other minorities, he is still regarded by certain parties as politically toxic, in part due to his race and faith.

It is no secret that minority Chinese politicians in Indonesia tend to be big targets for their detractors.

Earlier this year, a politician of Chinese descent filed a police report against an Indonesian Ulama Council official for labelling the Chinese characters in his campaign posters as hate speech.

“The Chinese characters form my Chinese name. I don't know why that's such a problem,” said Mr Heriandi Lim, who is from the National Awakening Party, an Islam-based political party, no less.

According to Mr Lim, who is running to be a Member of Parliament in Jakarta, three other legislative candidates were similarly attacked by the same official on social media.

The participation of ethnic Chinese Indonesians in domestic politics is not a new phenomenon, but it remains coloured by fears of the communist agenda from the old Suharto era.

Aside from deep-seated suspicion, there is also a strong feeling of resentment towards Chinese Indonesians in some quarters, particularly over their perceived wealth at the expense of the Muslim working class in the country.

Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy, said

in a report last year that it is this growing belief that Muslims are “victims of economic and political injustice” that has empowered Islamists of late. According to the report, domestic groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front, which was behind the anti-Ahok protests, want to roll back protections for minorities in the country.

The influence such groups wield has already made an impact on political decisions at the highest levels, with many observers seeing Mr Joko's decision to pick senior Muslim cleric Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate as a move to neutralise any potential threats to his own Islamic credentials.

So do the votes of Chinese Indonesians, or any other minority, even matter in these elections?

Despite Chinese Indonesians making up less than 2 per cent of the more than 192 million eligible voters at the April elections, their support will be crucial in a tight race, said Professor Leo Suryadinata, a visiting senior fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

“Their economic power is much stronger than the numbers indicate (and) wealthy Chinese Indonesians are often given much attention by presidential candidates as they are able to provide financial support to them,” he added.

Indeed, both the President, who goes by his popular moniker Jokowi, and his election rival, former army general Prabowo Subianto, have recently been seen courting Chinese voters actively.

Some observers have said that it may not be entirely accurate to presume that a reform-minded president like Mr Joko, who has had to fight accusations that he is half-Chinese and pro-China, would naturally attract the lion's share of Chinese support.


“Others who have been unable to enjoy benefits under the Jokowi administration are also hoping that a different government could make life easier for them,” said Prof Leo, who added that Mr Prabowo knows this, and hence has been working hard to shake off his perceived anti-Chinese image.

Still, all election candidates will need to be mindful of how their efforts to garner the support of Chinese Indonesians will play out in the minds of conservative voters, as they grapple with this political dilemma.

Such is the state of Indonesian elections today, where race, religion and identity politics have become the focal points of a candidate's strategy to win.

Referring to them as a disease, constitutional law expert Mahfud M.D., who was once poised to contest for the vice-presidency with Mr Joko, has called for efforts to ease tensions instead of playing up hostilities.

“These elections have led to quarrels between supporters, between followers of this religion and that religion, members of this tribe and that tribe, and members of this race and that race,” the former chief justice said at a public dialogue on nationalism.

“We need to calm down before it infects the nation.” 

Voter turnout a worry at Indonesia polls



Electoral commission workers preparing ballot papers for Indonesia's April 17 general elections. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

INDONESIA HAS OFTEN CAST ITSELF AS THE third largest democracy in the world, particularly after it started holding direct elections in 2004, six years after Reformasi.

With a population of 260 million, three-quarters of whom are eligible to vote this year, Indonesia is behind only the United States and India in the size of its national electorate. But with the April 17 presidential and legislative polls fast approaching, the country is again forced to confront a rising trend of voter abstentions and its impact on the elections.

The Jakarta-based research firm Lingkaran Survei Indonesia said at the release of its latest survey recently that around 30 per cent of respondents are planning to abstain come polling day. If true, this will mean the 2019 presidential and legislative polls – held on the same day for the first time in Indonesia – could see the highest proportion of no-shows at an election since its first experiment with democracy after the fall of former president Suharto in 1998.

Paramadina University political expert Ahmad Khoirul Umam pointed out that voting is not compulsory in Indonesia, hence the declining voter turnout over the years. But he noted that voter participation is still higher in Indonesia than in the US, where about 40 per cent of voters abstain.

Deliberate abstention is a big bugbear for election candidates, especially those in straight fights, such as the presidential contest between the incumbent Joko Widodo and his challenger Prabowo Subianto. President Joko is once again facing the former army general whom he defeated in the 2014 election with a tight margin of 6.3 percentage points, or about 8.4 million out of more than 133 million votes cast.

That was on a turnout of just under 71 per cent. In 2009, it was almost 72 per cent and, in the first direct election held in 2004 for the presidency, closer to 80 per cent of voters cast their ballots. The steady decline in voter turnout will affect the

final results of the upcoming elections, especially the presidential polls, with experts like Dr Wawan Mas'udi from Gadjah Mada University saying the President has more to lose.

“Why? Because many of those behind the golput campaign are social activists who used to support the incumbent,” he added. Golput is short for golongan putih, or white group in Bahasa Indonesia, but it is also slang for abstention.

The guerilla movement, which started as a protest against rigged elections during Suharto's New Order regime, urged citizens then to invalidate their votes by marking on the white space on their ballot cards instead of checking the box of a candidate or party.

Many groups advocating golput today are made up of former supporters of President Joko, who goes by his popular moniker Jokowi. These voters had backed Mr Joko five years ago because he was seen as a reformer with no ties to the political blue bloods and military elite that once ruled Indonesia.

“But just one year into his presidency, activists began criticising Jokowi for his failure to meet campaign commitments to human rights, religious freedom, corruption eradication and law enforcement,” wrote Melbourne University academics Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir and Rafiq Qurrata A'yun in a recent assessment.

They said that disappointment with President Joko peaked when he showed that he was not above playing identity politics by appointing conservative Islamic cleric Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate.

However, Dr Ma'ruf has not won over younger Indonesians and those who hold moderate views on Islam, including those who still blame him for testifying against former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama in his 2017 blasphemy trial.

“Dissatisfaction with Jokowi's performance led many of his former supporters, who voted against Mr Prabowo in the last election, to declare that they would rather golput than vote for either of the candidate pairs,” wrote Mr Abdil and Ms Rafiq.

Many in the Muslim-majority nation also abstain from voting for ideological reasons.

Election fatigue is also to blame, especially with the presidential and legislative polls coming just months after a major round of regional elections in June last year. That voters can only choose between the same two presidential candidates from the previous election is also a factor, said Dr Wawan.

With several weeks to go before the elections, observers warned that the focus on drawing votes from the undecided voters may obscure the real threat of golput voters.

Dr Wawan, however, believes there is still time for the candidates to convince these voters to exercise their democratic right. “But this requires hard work,” he said. **ST**

– Francis Chan

MAKING THEIR MARK

Dissatisfaction with Jokowi's performance led many of his former supporters, who voted against Mr Prabowo in the last election, to declare that they would rather golput than vote for either of the candidate pairs.



– Melbourne University Academics **Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir** and **Rafiq Qurrata A'yun**

READ MORE ONLINE:

Follow our coverage on the upcoming Indonesian elections here <http://str.sg/indonesiavotes2019>



Asean in Focus

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (centre) launching the National Community Policy in February. He already ruffled feathers when he announced last Friday that his Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia would stretch its wings into Sabah – reneging on a deal with Pakatan Harapan partners already established in the eastern state.

PHOTO: BERNAMA

Mahathir upsets allies by forging new ties

Premier warns coalition partners against betrayal as he continues to welcome opposition members

SHANNON TEOH

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TENSIONS ARE RISING IN MALAYSIA'S RULING Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition as Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad continues to welcome opposition members to his camp while saying that he will not hesitate to abandon his current partners if "they are not loyal to the country".

Tun Dr Mahathir had already ruffled feathers when he announced that his Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) would stretch its wings into Sabah – reneging on a deal with PH partners already established in the eastern state – ostensibly to allow former Umno members to join the coalition. Among them are five MPs and eight assemblymen who have refused to take up residence in existing Sabah parties. Then, it was revealed that the Premier had brokered a deal to obtain the backing of Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) to fend off any possible internal coup against him.

"If DAP, Keadilan, Amanah betray and are no longer loyal to the country, I will switch to other parties. We are mobile, we are not fixed," Dr Mahathir said when welcoming seven former Umno MPs – who quit the scandal-hit party after it lost power in last May's general election – into PPBM.

The reference to PH allies, the Democratic Action Party, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and Parti Amanah Negara, at first appeared to be hypothetical, to justify taking in leaders of the previous long-ruling Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

But now it seems to be akin to a warning shot across the bow, after PAS officials began referring publicly to rumours of a vote of no-confidence in Dr Mahathir's leadership. The Islamist party has become a fierce rival to erstwhile allies, DAP as well as PKR president Anwar Ibrahim, who is waiting to become premier, according to PH's transition plan,

albeit one without an official firm timeline.

PAS secretary-general Takiyuddin Hassan said a “sample” letter of support given to Dr Mahathir – which the PM affirmed – during a recent meeting with the Islamist party’s president, Mr Abdul Hadi Awang, was to indicate “backing” only in the event of “a vote of no confidence.”

“We know Parliament will resume in March, and this began with Dr Mahathir’s statement. Tun mentioned it (betrayal) and politicians understand,” the PAS secretary-general said.

Datuk Seri Anwar, for his part, has denied the existence of any plan for a coup, dismissing the allegation as “a PAS attempt to deflect the focus on the money taken from 1MDB.” The PKR leader, who has said he expected to be prime minister in two years, was referring to a probe into allegations that PAS leaders received RM90 million (S\$30 million) from Umno prior to last year’s general election.

Two PKR vice-presidents and several DAP leaders have publicly rebuked PPBM for the “betrayal” in accepting former Umno “rubbish.”

Other PH members in Sabah, who have backed the chief minister and president of the Warisan party, Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, have expressed shock at the PPBM move, with Luyang assemblyman Phoong Jin Zhe denouncing it as “a stab in the back.”

But, in a short statement, Mr Shafie chose not to rebuke PPBM although he pointed out that Sabahans gave his “Parti Warisan Sabah the mandate

to govern... they were fed up with the Umno-BN government and wanted a change for the better.”

Dr Mahathir, 93, returned to power after PH’s shock win in the polls last May 9, but his party made up only 13 of the 122 MPs in PH and Parti Warisan Sabah. PPBM’s strength, however, has now grown to 22 MPs, with at least five more set to join in Sabah. At this juncture, the majority of the MPs from Dr Mahathir’s party would have won their seats as Umno members.

Singapore Institute of International Affairs senior fellow Oh Ei Sun told The Straits Times that Dr Mahathir “is not happy that he is constrained by DAP and PKR”, which collectively have 92 MPs.

“So he is broadening PH. This does not mean he wants to stay on forever, but that his legacy must stay forever. Of course, this also checkmates Anwar, so he is killing two birds with one stone,” Mr Oh said.

Not all of Dr Mahathir’s PH partners are upset at an expanding PPBM. PKR deputy president Azmin Ali, who leads a rival faction to Mr Anwar in the party, said the defecting Umno leaders “can go to the ground and meet Umno members to explain the need to leave their rotten party.”

Mr Eekmal Ahmad, special officer to PKR’s Selangor chief minister, also said those criticising Dr Mahathir’s “consolidation of power... do not understand political dynamics” of the crucial Malay majority. “PKR or Bersatu are all in Harapan. A strong Bersatu means a strong PKR,” he added. **S**

WARNING SHOT

If DAP, Keadilan, Amanah betray and are no longer loyal to the country, I will switch to other parties. We are mobile, we are not fixed.



– Malaysia Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, when welcoming seven former Umno MPs into PPBM.

Who will blink first – Anwar or Mahathir?

WHEN DATUK SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM ARRIVED at Universiti Selangor (Unisel) to give a talk in February, he was introduced as the “eighth prime minister of Malaysia.”

There was deafening applause from the floor. The man making the introduction was Unisel vice-chancellor Mohammad Redzuan Othman, who has been devoted to Mr Anwar since their undergraduate years in Universiti Malaya.

Mr Anwar basked in the adulation. But it was a different story a day later when he was informed of several banners that had appeared overnight in the city, lauding him as the eighth prime minister while asking Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to step down. He immediately asked his party officials to remove the banners.

Just as Dr Mahathir is finding it tough to be prime minister the second time around, Mr Anwar is finding it to be a case of “so close yet so far away.” He is surely aware of the joke that he might be “PM-in-waiting forever.”

Moreover, all eyes tend to turn on him each time there are allegations of a plot against Dr Mahathir.

That was what happened when news of a potential vote of no confidence in Parliament started making the rounds.

Around the same time, a list of MPs said to have pledged their allegiance to Mr Anwar went viral. There were 101 names on the list, which suggests that he is only 12 names short of a simple majority in Parliament.

However, it was hard to take the list seriously because it included some Umno MPs who had jumped to Bersatu, Dr Mahathir’s party.

SUCCESSION AGREEMENT

“There are people coming to see Anwar, to pledge allegiance, to ask him to do something. But he is not entertaining what they say. My boss will wait. He intends to hold on to his end of the (succession) agreement, and he believes that Dr Mahathir will keep his word,” said Mr Farhash Wafa Salvador, Perak’s Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) chief and a close aide of Mr Anwar.

As Mr Farhash pointed out, it was not a personal agreement but one made between Dr Mahathir and Pakatan Harapan.

Of course, Mr Anwar gets wind of what the Bersatu leaders think of him and is also aware of attempts to block his ascent. But he now seems more mellowed, patient and rather sanguine about life and politics.

JOCELINE TAN

BIDING HIS TIME

There are people coming to see Anwar, to pledge allegiance, to ask him to do something. But he is not entertaining what they say. My boss will wait. He intends to hold on to his end of the (succession) agreement, and he believes that Dr Mahathir will keep his word.



— **Mr Farhash Wafa Salvador**, Perak's PKR chief and a close aide of Mr Anwar.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at the launch of the National Anti-Corruption Plan 2019-2023 in Putrajaya on Jan 29. Mr Anwar is to take over from Dr Mahathir in about two years, according to a deal struck within the Pakatan Harapan alliance.

PHOTO: BERNAMA

“He does not want to get distracted by the political noise that goes on between him and Dr Mahathir,” said Mr Farhash.

Visitors to Mr Anwar's Jalan Gasing office say he is relaxed and wants to go with the flow.

He is very active on Twitter, especially on national policies, although it must be quite a struggle to ignore the provocative tweets of his estranged deputy president, Datuk Seri Azmin Ali.

Relations between him and Mr Azmin have broken down irrevocably although both of them held hands and smiled for the camera when Mr Anwar visited Mr Azmin after the latter's surgery. Some have described the occasion as an Oscar-worthy moment.

THE LONG GAME

There were calls at the Bersatu annual general meeting for Dr Mahathir to serve a full term, which Mr Anwar chose to ignore.

Mr Anwar is playing the long game. He can afford to wait or, to put it delicately, he is 71 and Dr Mahathir is 93.

Most of all, Mr Anwar understands all too well the Prime Minister's powers of incumbency. He tasted the full blast of it in 1998 and has no wish to experience it again.

To be fair to Mr Anwar, talk of a potential vote of no confidence actually started after Dr Mahathir began recruiting former Umno MPs. Speculation reached a crescendo after he struck an understanding of support with Parti Islam SeMalaysia leaders.

It is understood that Dr Mahathir has also been meeting individual MPs to sniff out where they stand, and at least two Amanah leaders are believed to support him.

When the Prime Minister made an official visit to the Defence Ministry in Feb, the perception was that Defence Minister Mohamad Sabu was one of them.

As everyone knows, all prime ministers want a strong hold on the Defence and Home ministries.

Despite denials of a showdown in Parliament, the session in March will be closely watched.

Any attempt to move a vote of no confidence has

to be done with all the numbers in hand. Otherwise, it will be an instantaneous death by numbers for the person behind it.

CABINET RESHUFFLE

If the session passes without drama, the next potential flashpoint is the Cabinet reshuffle that is expected to take place some time in May.

A reshuffle after only one year is actually too soon for any government. But it has become a necessity for Dr Mahathir, given the host of complaints about some of his ministers and deputy ministers.

The complaints range from sheer incompetence to their inability to speak decent Bahasa Malaysia.

Even Tun Daim Zainuddin, the man widely perceived as the power behind the scenes, said in an interview with Sin Chew Daily that some of the ministers are “L licence drivers” whereas Dr Mahathir is used to the F1 circuit.

Dr Mahathir's recruitment of former Umno MPs is not only about the numbers game, but also to give him more choice in the event of a Cabinet reshuffle. He needs experienced hands, like Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, to connect with the Malay base and deal with the civil service.

It is no secret that some Pakatan government figures have encountered problems with the civil service. There is still some distrust and these leaders are paying the price for bad-mouthing everything to do with the government during their years in the opposition.

THE MAN TO WATCH

The impending reshuffle will happen at the midpoint of Dr Mahathir's two-year tenure.

There is therefore an expectation that the reshuffle will pave the way for a succession Cabinet.

But strangely enough, no one is expecting Mr Anwar to replace Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail as the No. 2.

Instead, the gossip is that Dr Mahathir is eyeing Mr Azmin for the No. 2 job or even as the second deputy prime minister. That would be controversial and could spark a showdown.

“Why should Mahathir rock the boat with something like that? He is the captain, he wants the ship to sail on. Rock the boat and the captain may sink with the boat,” said Mr Minaq Jinggo, a photojournalist and long-time admirer of Dr Mahathir.

By the time Dr Mahathir is ready to reshuffle his Cabinet, his party should have at least 27 MPs, thanks to the crossovers. It will strengthen his hand to do what is needed.

But the man to watch in the coming months is Mr Azmin. If Dr Mahathir is Mr Anwar's biggest threat, then Mr Azmin is his second-biggest one. The Economic Affairs Minister is poised for bigger things on account of his experience, age and personality.

The three of them will be the key players in the coming months. **ST**

— The Star / Asia News Network





Lunch With Sumiko

Creative Technology's Sim Wong Hoo is back, with Super X-Fi getting rave reviews

Creative's Super X-Fi audio technology allows headphone users to experience sound in expansive, three-dimensional detail

AT 63, SIM WONG HOO IS LOOKING BETTER THAN ever before.

He's slimmer and fitter than when he was in his 40s and the poster boy of Singapore's tech scene. He still has a full head of hair with just a few streaks of grey, and his stride is purposeful.

How have you been able to keep looking young, I ask the founder, chairman and CEO of Creative Technology.

He laughs and says: "You want to know the secret?"

I nod. What's the secret?

"You want to know the secret?" he teases again.

Yes, what's the secret, I say.

"Don't get married."

He chortles and is clearly delighted he has shocked me with his answer.

I laugh and take it as a cue to probe further into the private life of Singapore's most famous bachelor businessman.

For years, there had been rumours he had dated

a certain Chinese-language TV newscaster. I ask if there's any truth to that story.

"Goodness," he says. Are people still saying that, he asks.

I tell him it's an unsolved mystery.

"Even now?"

Well, her face and name pop up when your name is googled.

"Google - will be there forever lah," he says. "The whole world knows who Sim Wong Hoo's girlfriend is except me."

So you've had girlfriends then?

He says he wants to "protect the innocent" but "of course I've had girlfriends." The newscaster wasn't one of them though.

He shares how, at the peak of the gossip, even his siblings quizzed him about it. They surrounded him at a weekend gathering and told him: "We want a confession."

He protested he had never heard of the newscaster, much less met her. "Still never met

In 2007, Creative Technology's Mr Sim Wong Hoo decided to run a marathon on a whim. He has since run more than 50 marathons including a dozen ultramarathons. Running, he says, clears his mind and gives him breakthrough ideas. His latest Super X-Fi technology has won rave reviews for allowing headphones to produce sounds in all their 3D wonder.

ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

SUMIKO TAN

Executive Editor



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her,” he adds. “I don’t know how the thing started.”

Truth is, he is still happily single and lives alone.

But he has two big loves in his life right now, which are probably what is keeping him youthful.

One is running. He discovered it in 2007 and has since done more than 50 marathons, including a dozen ultramarathons.

Our lunch in December takes place soon after the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon (his 11th) which he completed in just under seven hours – “it was very hot and I was not trained”

He regards the StanChart race as training for the Hong Kong 100, a 103km run that kicked off in January and which racers must complete in 30 hours. That, in turn, will be his training for the 100km TransLantau in March, which is “more teruk”

He’s in fact wearing a TransLantau 2017 finisher jersey at our lunch, paired with running pants and Altra sneakers.

Running has trimmed his weight from 84kg to 77kg. He loves it for the challenge and how it clears the mind. “A lot of times, it’s when I’m running that I have breakthrough ideas.”

One such idea is Super X-Fi, his other great passion right now.

This is a revolutionary audio technology that Creative has spent the last 20 years developing – to the tune of US\$100 million (\$\$135 million), he says – and which is finally bearing fruit.



Creative Technology's SXFI AIR Bluetooth headphones

NO ENDORSEMENT NEEDED

Nothing. I don't require people to endorse me. I think I've done my job. We created Sound Blaster. It's a big thing already. Normally you've got one shot in your life.

”

– MR SIM WONG HOO, on what he wants to be remembered for.

Super X-Fi allows headphone users to experience sound in expansive, three-dimensional detail, like in real life.

The headphone audio industry has been trying to achieve this “holy grail” for a long time, he says.

Right now, no matter how good a pair of headphones is, the sound is forced and “claustrophobic”, as Mr Sim puts it.

There have been attempts at creating 3D audio on headsets but all have been “crap”.

His Super X-Fi technology involves an artificial intelligence engine that customises the user's audio experience based on how he perceives sound in the real world.

Creative showed a prototype of it at the prestigious Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in January 2018. It won rave reviews with audio sites using words like “glorious” and “magical” to describe it. It also got a Best of CES award.

In September last year, it created a Super X-Fi enabled dongle called the SXFI Amp that connects to headphones, and has since added more products.

At this year's CES in January, Super X-Fi bagged 13 Best of CES awards. Creative is now looking to allow audio firms to use it in their headphones.

His technology is akin to black and white TV switching to colour TV, he says. He adds: “With Creative or no Creative, that will happen. I think Creative is ahead right now.”

Super X-Fi has breathed new life into the company he started as a computer shop in Chinatown in 1981.

Its Sound Blaster sound card, launched in 1989, was a game changer in allowing PCs to generate quality sound. It has sold 400 million units.

But with competition and industry changes, Creative's fortunes took a dive in recent times and his name also dropped off the headlines.

With Super X-Fi, market interest and confidence have rebounded.

Following its CES showing last year, its share price hit highs of \$9.77 after years of languishing under \$2.

Lunch is at Creative's headquarters, which is housed over five floors in the International Business Park complex in Jurong.

The main lobby area is well lit but doesn't have the design-conscious vibe you now expect of tech companies. It feels more like a homely, if high-end, SME.

It is our first meeting and Mr Sim turns out to



PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

be likeable. He is down to earth and personable, and has an easy laugh and manner.

He's waiting at the reception and leads me to a sound room. Like journalists who have visited Creative over the past year, I'm given a briefing and demonstration of Super X-Fi by him and his team.

My face and ears are first mapped by an app, then some audio thing is rather alarmingly zinged through my ears via headphones, to test how I perceive sound.

It's all bewildering to me and I'm no audiophile, but the reviewers are right – the sound you get is impressive.

After 70 minutes, we head to the boardroom for lunch. A spread of dishes from Taiwanese restaurant chain Din Tai Fung – fried rice, xiao long bao, pork cutlet – awaits.

It's more for me than him because it emerges he has little interest in food. He picks restaurants based on how easy it is to park his car and prefers eateries that are empty.

He says cheerfully that he's an "outlier" and a "contrarian."

"Everything people do, I don't do. They like good food, I don't like good food."

This doesn't sound right, so he clarifies: "Not that I don't like good food, but to me eating is just a chore. If only there's a pill I can swallow and, you know, solve my hunger."

He revels in being unorthodox and shares other examples of his maverick ways.

In 1999, he was cracking his head for a crazy idea to usher in the new millennium.

"You can go to a tall building, throw one million dollars and let people go crazy, but that will cause accidents, so no good. Or you can do charity, which I did already..."

"I wanted to do something people cannot do."

With the clock ticking away, he decided to write a book and get it delivered to bookshops by Dec 31. Problem was, he had six weeks before that deadline.

He did it, penning a 270-page tome called *Chaotic Thoughts From The Old Millennium* which he dedicated to "the younger generation, the hope of the new millennium"

He passes me a copy.

Design-wise, it looks like a textbook and so is not very appealing. But when I went back and read it, the content is well written, engaging and inspiring.

The book comprises short chapters on random topics.

There are bits on his widowed mother and their farm in Bukit Panjang, his student days at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Creative's early years and assorted brain-teasers, magic tricks and a parable or two.

His craze for running also came about in an unusual way, he lets on.

Back in 2007, he was out with his former classmates one Friday when a friend – Ng Kai Wa, who was Creative's co-founder and now a board member – mentioned he was doing a marathon the following Sunday.

"I was very envious. Aiyah, wish I could be like him," Mr Sim recalls thinking. "I was not into athletics... I was not fit. Plump."

On a whim, he decided he would run the marathon too. His secretary managed to register him and the following week, he trained by walking to and from his Bukit Timah house to Creative in Jurong.

That Sunday, he completed the race in a credible six hours 40 minutes, walking half the way.

The following week, he called Mr Ng and said they should try an 84.4km ultramarathon next.

"He said, 'You're crazy. That's in March.' I said, 'Why not? Let's go and try.' He said, 'You go, I go.' I said, 'OK, let's go.' So my second marathon was an ultramarathon."

After his first marathon, he had another crazy idea: He would do an "age-km" run every birthday.

He had not been one to celebrate birthdays. "It's a random date, there's no meaning. And I hate birthday cakes. For goodness' sake, don't do birthday cakes. It's unhealthy, it's a waste of money."

Instead, he resolved to do something healthy and more fun.

"I started from my 53rd birthday, so that's 53km. And then 54, I ran 54km." Last year, he ran 63km, which took him 10 hours.

He's a non-conformist in other ways. While talking about Apple – Creative famously got a US\$100 million payout from it for a patent breach

In September last year, it created a Super X-Fi enabled dongle called the SXFI Amp that connects to headphones, and has since added more products. At this year's CES in January, Super X-Fi bagged 13 Best of CES awards. Creative is now looking to allow audio firms to use it in their headphones.

”



Creative Technology's SXFI mobile application is used during a demonstration of the head mapping process in Singapore, in December last year.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

- I ask if he uses an Apple iPhone.

He fishes out a phone from his pocket and I gasp. It's an old Nokia Asha.

There's a slip of white paper pasted on the back of the phone with rows of printed numbers like C1 10km 5K5 1h50 1150. It's his ultramarathon plan. "C" stands for checkpoint and the rest are timings he must keep to stay in the race.

If he had his way, the Nokia would be the only phone he has. But with Super X-Fi, he needs a smartphone for music and so has a Google Pixel which he keeps on silent mode.

He's not on any social media platforms either. "If you see anything, it's fake, it's not me."

While Creative seems to be regaining its mojo, I wonder how he coped when things were down.

He meets the question head-on but does become a little pensive.

He has kept a low profile in recent years because "there's nothing to say except bad news, right? Company is not performing. So whatever I say, people will not believe until they see the result."

That result is Super X-Fi, which he "just dumped money into" over the years because he kept a long-term view of the company, and believed it could be done.

When it was time to launch it, he hesitated about fronting it, wanting to leave it to Creative's new generation.

"But the team said I should go out and help them do this."

He says he's introverted by nature but had to force himself to put on a different face during Creative's heyday.

When the accolades dried up, it was easy to revert to his true self.

"During those kind of bad years, I'm OK, I'm myself."

In fact, tough times invigorate him more. When Creative was listed on Nasdaq in 1992 - it delisted there in 2007 - and feted, he felt empty.

"I felt hollow. Nothing much to congratulate. So what? It's just a number, a point in life."

The tough years that followed have been energising.

I ask what in his life has given him the most happiness.

"I'm at peace" is his response.

He doesn't believe in wild swings of emotions. "To have happiness, you must have sorrow. When you want to keep at peace, then you don't have a lot of happiness, you also don't have a lot of sorrow."

It puzzles him why some people rave over things like, say, food.

"I've kind of transcended above all these earthly things."

While he was born a Christian, his religion now is "my own."

He doesn't get a salary at Creative but owns 33 per cent of the company. "I did not sell shares. I bought back a lot of shares at high prices, and I'm proud of it."

Money, he maintains, is not important.

It's because you have it, I say.

"No," he replies. "It's not important."

I ask if he has a Crazy Rich Asian lifestyle. Ferrari? He practically snorts. "I think it's a sin to drive something like that."

He drives himself, in a Toyota Camry. The fanciest car he had was a Lexus. He lives in a semi-detached house in Bukit Timah, does not mix around "big shots" and counts running in Gunung Tahan in Malaysia as an exotic holiday.

When I ask what he wants to be remembered for, he shoots back: "Nothing."

"I don't require people to endorse me. I think I've done my job. We created Sound Blaster. It's a big thing already. Normally you've got one shot in your life."

But he has another shot actually - Super X-Fi.

There are challenges. For one thing, it is difficult to market audio. There is also an educational process in getting people to understand how to use it, which is a hurdle. And now that the product is out, others are ready to pounce on it.

"I tell my teams, 'The cat is out of the bag. The whole world has seen it, they are coming after us, so we have to run like hell.'"

But he is confident because Creative has had a long head start.

We've come to the end of a lengthy and, for me, fascinating lunch. I've done most of the eating and there's a bit of food left.

I ask him for photos of him running in case I need them for this story.

He sends me a WhatsApp of the pictures later and adds: "btw, just had dinner from the lunch leftovers. Still tasty. Sinful to throw them away. So thanks for the dinner and the lunch too." [ST](#)



ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Spoilt for choice

With the road tax on battery-powered cars being reviewed and a seductive line-up of electric vehicles due to be launched, those looking to plug into an electric drive are in for an exciting ride.

ELON MUSK CAN WHINE ALL HE WANTS, BUT 2019 will be the year car buyers in Singapore will be able to plug into a wide array of electric rides.

No fewer than 10 new electrified cars – either fully battery-powered or innovative hybrid models – are slated to be launched over the next 12 months here – a market the Tesla chief labelled in a yet another Tweet as “unwelcome” for e-vehicles.

The slew of e-rides will be supported by an expanding network of charging points, not least the 1,000 which SP Group will have up by 2020.

The following is a rundown of the new electrified models

AUDI E-TRON

This electric five-seater sport utility vehicle (SUV, above), like the Jaguar I-Pace, is driven by two electric motors powered by a 95kWh battery. It has 356hp and up to 664Nm of torque at its disposal, allowing it to accomplish the century sprint in 5.7 seconds. It has a stated range of 400km and is due in the third quarter of the year. Expect to pay close to \$400,000 for the first of many electric Audis. PHOTO: AUDI

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BMW i3S 120AH

The carbon-fibre tall hatch from Bavaria gets a bigger battery and nearly twice the range of the original i3. It is due in the second quarter of the year and estimated to cost \$162,000 before a certificate of entitlement.

PHOTO: BMW



SUBARU FORESTER E-BOXER

The hybrid concept, pioneered by Toyota, is more than 20 years old. But what will it feel like in a car famed for its horizontally opposed "boxer" engines and symmetrical all-wheel-drive chassis? The answer is probably within the Forester e-Boxer, which will be unveiled very soon. It pairs a 12hp electric motor with a 2-litre engine to produce more boost and more efficiency.

HYUNDAI KONA ELECTRIC

Following the Ioniq Electric sedan, Hyundai introduced a battery-powered variant of its Kona compact crossover (below) in January. There are two versions – a 39kWh one with a range of more than 300km, and a 64kWh one which can cover 480km between plug-ins. Prices range from \$137,999 to \$168,999. PHOTO: **HYUNDAI MOTOR**



JAGUAR I-PACE

This luxury electric SUV (above) from Jaguar boasts two motors powered by a 90kWh battery. It has 400hp and 696Nm of torque on tap, allowing it to zip to 100kmh in 4.8 seconds. The car, priced between \$346,999 and \$369,999, was unveiled in January. PHOTO: **REUTERS**

NISSAN LEAF

The second generation of Nissan's electric Leaf – a best-selling zero-emission car in many markets – was unveiled in January. It has a real-world driving range of 250km, allowing you to drive comfortably to Malacca at one go. It is chock-full with features and expected to go for under \$160,000.

Will electric cars be more affordable?

ELECTRIC CARS MAY SOON RECEIVE A JOLT which will make them more viable against less expensive combustion-engined models.

Up till now, electric cars make up less than 0.2 per cent of the total car population.

But that is expected to change soon. There is talk in the motor industry that road tax levied on battery-powered car will be reviewed.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) noted that encouraging "the adoption of greener vehicles" is part of its strategy to address emissions from the land transport sector.

It added that road tax for electric cars includes "an element of progressivity" based on maximum motor power.

Motor industry players, however, said the sums do not work out well for electric vehicles (EVs).

For instance, the road tax on a Tesla Model S (P85) is \$6,202, almost equivalent to what a 6-litre petrol car attracts.

The power the Model S produces is about what

a Porsche 911 Carrera S makes. Yet its road tax is nearly treble that of the Porsche's.

Mr Vincent Ng, sales manager of Hyundai agent Komoco, which has two electric models in its line-up, said: "With all the news of an expanding infrastructure, we hope there will be more incentives to make electric vehicles more affordable to consumers."

He pointed out that the compact Hyundai Kona Electric with a 150kW motor has an annual road tax of \$2,246 – almost equivalent to that of a 3-litre petrol car.

But Wearnes Automotive, which has Renault and Jaguar electric models in its line-up, said high road tax is not the main hurdle for consumers who are considering an electric car.

Wearnes pointed out that its subcompact electric Zoe will still save an owner more than \$2,200 a year, with lower running cost offsetting the higher road tax. The Zoe, however, costs at least \$40,000 more than a slightly bigger hatchback like the 1-litre Suzuki Swift.

PORSCHE TAYCAN

This sizzling electric cruiser from Stuttgart could arrive by year-end. Promising Tesla-rivalling performance, the Taycan (right, pronounced ty-cahn) is said to pack more than 600bhp and a century sprint time of under 3.5 seconds. With a high-powered motor at each axle, the electrified Porsche will also offer the roadholding of an all-wheel-drive. PHOTO: AUDI



KIA NIRO EV

The Niro Hybrid (above) is quite peachy, so its full-electric twin should be something worth waiting for. And the wait will not be too long, as the car is slated to arrive by next month. It is expected to cost about \$160,000.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NISSAN SERENA E-POWER

This multi-purpose vehicle drives like an electric car, but is actually a hybrid. But unlike most hybrids, the Nissan's e-Power system consists of a small petrol engine, which acts as a generator to keep its battery constantly charged. The battery then drives the motor to drive the car. The innovative Serena will be launched in the second half of this year, with a price tag of around \$136,000, going by current certificate of entitlement premiums.

VOLVO S60 T8

This plug-in petrol-electric hybrid from Volvo is tuned by Polestar (Volvo's sports department) and may arrive by year-end. It has 400hp from a twin-charged four-cylinder driving the front wheels as well as an electric motor driving the rear axle.

Electric vehicle advocates said tax policies for battery-powered cars should consider the health benefits they bring.

Mr Goh Chee Kiong, head of strategic development at SP Group, said: "Electric vehicles help reduce tailpipe emissions and noise. The cost to manufacture, operate and maintain EVs is considerably lower than conventional vehicles."

But Singapore University of Social Sciences transport economist Walter Theseira said: "Singapore has no need to be ahead of the curve when it comes to private EV adoption. This is because of the significant cost of building a charging infrastructure and the real risk that the infrastructure would become obsolete."

"However, when it comes to public-use vehicles, I think there is a case to be made for adoption because the infrastructure can be utilised more efficiently."

On this front, Ms Corinne Chua of Wearnes said: "Currently, there are no rebates for purchasing greener electric commercial vehicles." **ST**

— Christopher Tan



The Hyundai Ioniq Electric is one of the electric cars available in Singapore. PHOTO: ST FILE



Travel

Slow journeys to savour for busy folks

Kumano Kodo Torii Gate
on the left of Daimon
Gate on Mount Koya.
ST PHOTO: MAVIS TEO

Travellers seek out journeys
that have them moving at a
different pace

MAVIS TEO

For The Straits Times

THE CONCEPT OF “SLOW TRAVEL” IS IN DEMAND. It is a movement that answers the modern malaise of having to be efficient, to rush and to hurry.

Slow travel has its roots in the same philosophies as the slow food trend.

Mr Carlo Petrini, Italian activist and founder of the Slow Food Movement, said in 2008 that “we have lost our sense of time.”

His observation: “We have an idea that life is short – and we must go faster to fit everything in. But life is long. The problem is we don’t know how to spend our time wisely.”

The slow traveller enjoys the experience of the journey unfurling, rather than the actual destination.

He may travel by foot, train or boat. He is not out to “maximise” leave and pack tonnes into one itinerary. The idea is to breathe, relax and take it all in.

Many “slow travel” trips require one to unplug completely. There is no or extremely limited access to Wi-Fi and phone calls.

One might choose to sail along the Mekong Delta or hike through the wilderness.

Stone Horse Expeditions and Travel (www.stonehorsemongolia.com) offers horse-riding expeditions into national parks and tours in the Gobi Desert, providing stays with nomadic families.

The company's set departure expeditions are between eight and 14 days, with travel by horseback. This means that participants might see just part of a national park, but the fact that they are travelling mostly at a trot means they get to truly experience their surroundings – and their steeds.

Dr Sabine Schmidt, co-owner of the Mongolian company, says interest in its trips has risen 20 per cent year on year since it started in 2010. Bookings from Singaporeans tripled last year compared with 2012.

Many clients are professionals in demanding jobs, she says. What they want is not the “highlights” of Mongolia. Instead, they seek out journeys that deliberately have them moving at a different pace.

This, says Mr Joni Herison, marketing director of Druk Asia (www.drukasia.com), a Bhutan travel specialist, helps those in demanding jobs reconnect with themselves.

Druk Asia has seen a sharp increase in bookings in its treks, which last between three and six nights, from 2017 to last year. Of such bookings, 30 per cent came from Singaporeans. Two-thirds of the participants were high-flying career women in their 30s to 40s.

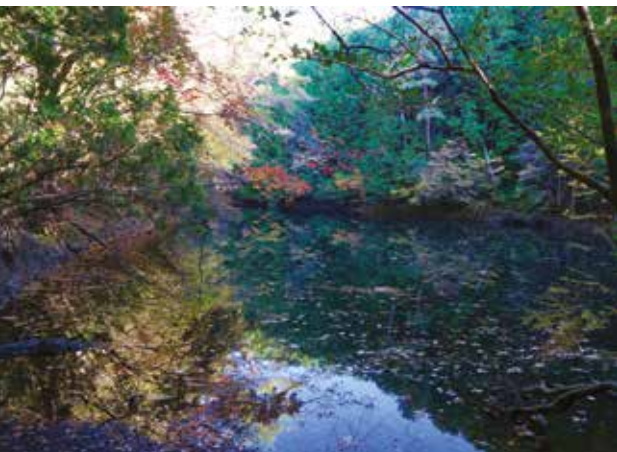
“Most of the time, they tell me they return to Singapore with a fresher mind,” says Mr Herison. “They say they feel more in the present.”

Ms Wu Ye-Her, executive director at an institute of higher learning, has been making a yearly slow travel trip to hike or dive since 2012. One of her most recent sojourns saw her spending a week discovering the coffee plantations in Medellin in Colombia on foot.

The focus on her trips is to relax and to get deeper into herself.

The result: She returns home calm and with a fresh perspective on work and life. “I would find a breakthrough in a problem that has been plaguing me for a few months or even the year,” says Ms Wu, 42.

Ready to jump on the slow travel trend? Here are two ways to do so.



The view on the way to Chikatsuyu. ST PHOTO: MAVIS TEO



Japanese cypress trees.
ST PHOTO: MAVIS TEO

KUMANO KODO

Ancient Japanese retreat from urban life

The 900-year-old Kumano Kodo refers to a pilgrimage that stretches through the mountainous Kii Peninsula on Honshu island. In 2004, it was listed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation World Heritage site.

You can choose to do just a day walk or one that spans over 11 days.

I asked travel company Oku Japan (okujapan.com) to customise a seven-day solo itinerary that would include part of the touristy and better marked Nakahechi route as well as the more remote and challenging Kohechi trail.

I would start my trip in Osaka, passing through Wakayama and Nara prefectures, and end in the legendary Mount Koya where I would check into a shukubo, a Buddhist temple with accommodation for tourists and pilgrims.

Kumano Kodo, especially the Kohechi, is not a walk in the park. Although some parts had me passing through sleepy towns, a large part of my trip involved trekking across forested mountain ranges thick with cedar, cypress and bamboo trees.

I climbed – sometimes vertically – for hours a day, scrambling over thick, knotty tree roots and steep boulders. I trudged along narrow paths where a misstep could mean falling 10 floors down into a ravine.



A suspension bridge at the end of the day is always a welcome sight as it means I am getting close to a town and the ryokan where I will retire for the night.

ST PHOTO: MAVIS TEO

When it rained, I had to go slow, but had to make it out of the woods before sunset at around 4pm. Then, the sky would grow dark in minutes and the homestay that was expecting me would worry and call Oku Japan if I did not show up by a certain time. If that were to happen, a staff member, the police or park rangers would be deployed to look for me.

Despite these challenges, or because of them, the journey was a life-changing experience that echoes other pilgrimage walks.

I had chosen to do the Kumano Kodo in late November – the peak of autumn colours.

The mountains were a colourful canvas of pumpkin, rust, cinnamon and cinnabar.

Very often, the obstacles that wound through heavily forested areas would suddenly lead to a clearing, like the secret entrance to an enchanted oasis.

I would sometimes find myself among ruins of old teahouses – formerly pit stops for pilgrims hundreds of years ago. A lichen-covered Jizo (a bodhisattva) or Kannon (Goddess of Mercy) would be standing by, to lift the spirits of the weary and the faithful.

The surrounding silence was so crystal-clear that I would take a moment to listen to the symphony of insects in the undergrowth, birdsong in the distance and soft swoosh of leaves rustling and falling in the crisp autumn air. More than once, I would put a hand on the trunk of a tree. I swear I could sometimes feel a pulse resonating with something deeper within myself.

The view from the top deck of Arenui at sunset.

PHOTO: THE ARENUI

ALOR

Communing with the ocean in Indonesia

For another form of slow travel, consider exploring the Indonesian archipelago of Alor on a boat trip.

Unlike the more famous Komodo and Raja Ampat, Alor is not a well-known travel destination.

It is located 200km east of Flores, within the Lesser Sunda Islands in the eastern half of Indonesia.

Instead, it is better known among divers for the diversity it offers – from muck to wall, and even drift, diving.

Even if you are not a scuba diver, there are other sights. There are villages to visit. There is also the Kelimutu, a live volcano that erupts every 30 minutes, with a spectacular three-crater lake.

The best way to see the most of the far-flung islands is to do it on a liveaboard, which means a boat designed for living on, full-time, for the entire journey.

If you are a diver, all the equipment is set up for you, though you would still need to do the mandatory safety checks before every dive.

I chose The Arenui (thearenui.com), a 10-year-old boat fashioned in the style of a traditional Indonesian phinisi. My 10-day trip started in Maumere, to the north of east Flores. Currents range from gentle to fierce.

When we dove in the Pantar Strait, walls of hard and soft coral in Technicolor and fish galore were the views.

We experienced drift diving, where one surrenders entirely to the currents (the inexperienced diver may find it hard to stay calm) and enjoys the ride.

Diving makes you focus on your breathing as your breath controls your buoyancy and thus affects your safety and enjoyment. It also stills your mind and you hear your thoughts quieten as you give in to the sound of your breathing.

And then, you look around.

In Kalahi Bay, you will see the kaleidoscopic mandarin fish finning against the volcanic black sandy seabed.





You catch the flashing colours of flamboyant cuttlefish as they dart around. You feel a thrill when you spot a lacy scorpion fish staring sullenly into space.

It is not all diving on these trips.

Itineraries can be customised for charters. We made visits to some villages, many of whose inhabitants still retain animist cultures.

On the island of Bena, the megalithic tombs still exist in front of houses to ensure that ancestors “live on” among the villagers.

In some places, the villagers are eager to say hello.

Children from a village on Pura Island paddled out to us in dug-out boats. They showed off their diving skills, plunging into the water with their gear, with goggles handmade from wood and glass bottles.

A few evenings earlier, we found our phinisi surrounded by around 20 wooden boats. Children boldly clambered aboard.

Fortunately, they were no pirates – they were after the sweets and stationery the crew had brought for them. The adults stayed in their boats, but showed us their handmade ikat weavings.

Out in the vast open seas, the backdrop is often beautiful and captivating. This is especially so at sunrise and sunset.

For the most part, you are alone and your fellow travellers often meet you on deck, but you each drift

off to different parts to admire the light changing in the skies.

The vessel you are on glides through the waters. And you breathe in the ocean air, grateful, happy and alive. **ST**

A former journalist, the writer is the owner of a media outreach and content strategy consultancy and a freelance travel writer.

It is an underwater world of Technicolor in the Pantar Strait, with walls of hard and soft coral and fish galore. PHOTOS: MAVIS TEO, THE ARENUI

A village on the remote islands in the eastern Indonesian archipelago. ST PHOTO: MAVIS TEO





PHOTO: AFP

Big Picture

Indian rail project on track

IT WAS A BREAKTHROUGH MOMENT FOR THE construction of the Ahmedabad Metro mass transit rail system in February, when two tunnel boring machines ended their journey in a record breaking time of 11 months.

Here, a worker gets to work after one of the machines broke through the east-bound tunnel.

Phase 1 of the Ahmedabad Metro Rail Project covers a distance of about 40km, out of which approximately 6.5km is underground. The project will connect four

corners of Ahmedabad city with two corridors – North-South and East-West – and 32 stations.

The tunnel has been constructed under the densely populated area of old Ahmedabad.

Construction began with a ground-breaking ceremony in March 2015, and is expected to be completed by next year.

The project aims to meet the transport needs of the city's growing population, which is expected to reach 8.64 million next year. [ST](#)



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