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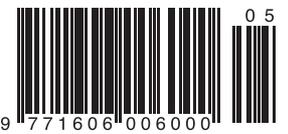
BBK Discloses its Financial Results for Q1 2021

# BUSINESS LIFE

May 2021

## From Beirut Street Child to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Sir Vartan Melkonian: We can emerge from this crisis to a better world, if we act quickly and jointly



Lebanon.....LBP5,000  
Saudi Arabia.....SR12  
Kuwait.....KD1

U.A.E.....Drhm12  
Bahrain.....BD1  
Qatar.....QR12

Jordan.....JD2  
Oman.....OR1  
Cyprus.....CE1

Egypt.....EP5  
Europe.....Euro4  
U.S. & Canada.....\$4

Algeria.....DZD200  
Libya.....L,D4  
Morocco.....MAD33

Tunisia.....TND4  
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**COVER INTERVIEW**

**11** | From Beirut Street Child to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

**MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE**

**18** | Nobody Knows What Lebanon's Currency Is Worth Anymore

**20** | IsDB, ICD and the Government of Burkina Faso Join Hands to Support the BRAVE Women Project in Burkina Faso

**22** | New IRTI Report Highlights Progress of IsDB Member Countries Towards SDGs

**24** | Saudi National Bank Launched in Region's Largest Merger in 2021

**26** | Doha Bank Q.P.S.C. Achieves a Profit Growth of 17.3% for the First Quarter of 2021

**28** | Doha Bank Won "Best Digital Wallet App Qatar 2021 Award" & Doha Bank CEO Honoured as "Banking CEO of the Year Qatar 2021 Award"

**30** | BBK Discloses its Financial Results for the First Quarter Ended 31st March 2021

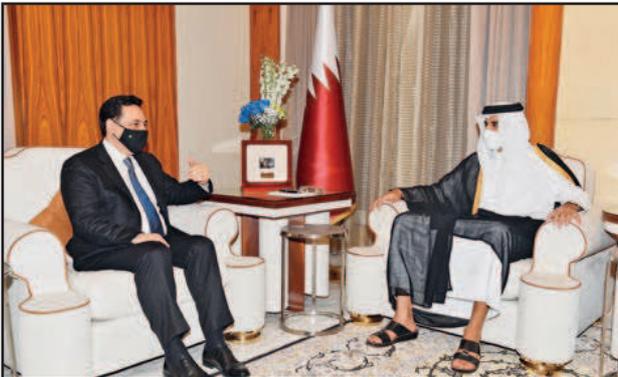
**QUICK NEWS**

**8** | Middle East Scan

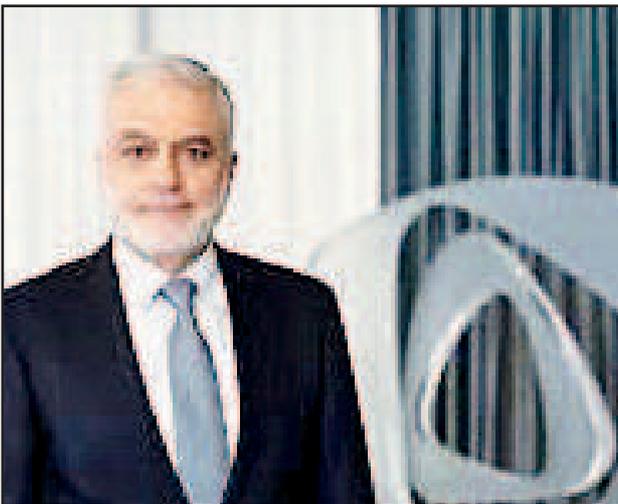
**28** | Market Brief



**Interview:** *Sir Vartan Melkonian – Renowned Conductor and Composer - The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the founder of Seva Coin*



**Seeking unified Arab effort:** *Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab meets Qatar's ruler Emir Sheikh Tamim Hamad Al-Thani*



**ADNIC's Credit Rating Upgraded to 'A' With Stable Outlook By S&P:** *Ahmad Idris, Chief Executive Officer*

**ENERGY**

**36** | World Adds Record New Renewable Energy Capacity

**38** | Accumulated Cost of the Pandemic Estimated to Top \$227 Billion by End of 2021

**INSURANCE**

**40** | GlobeMed Group Conducts its First 2021 Virtual Executives Seminar

**42** | ADNIC's Credit Rating Upgraded to 'A' With Stable Outlook By S&P

**44** | Saudi Re's 2020 Net Profit Up 2% to SAR 60.7 Mln

**46** | Emmanuel Clarke, Senior Reinsurance Industry Figure, Joins Tremor Board as Growth Accelerates

**48** | AM Best Maintains Negative Outlook on U.K. Life Insurance Market

**MAIN STORY**

**50** | COVID-19 Amplifies Integrity Challenges For Businesses in Emerging Markets

**INFORMATION INDUSTRY**

**58** Ransomware attacks in Life Sciences

**30** | News From Around The World

**54** | Middle East Markets

**56** | First Look on Lebanon

**60** | Middle East Event Calendar

**62** | What's New?

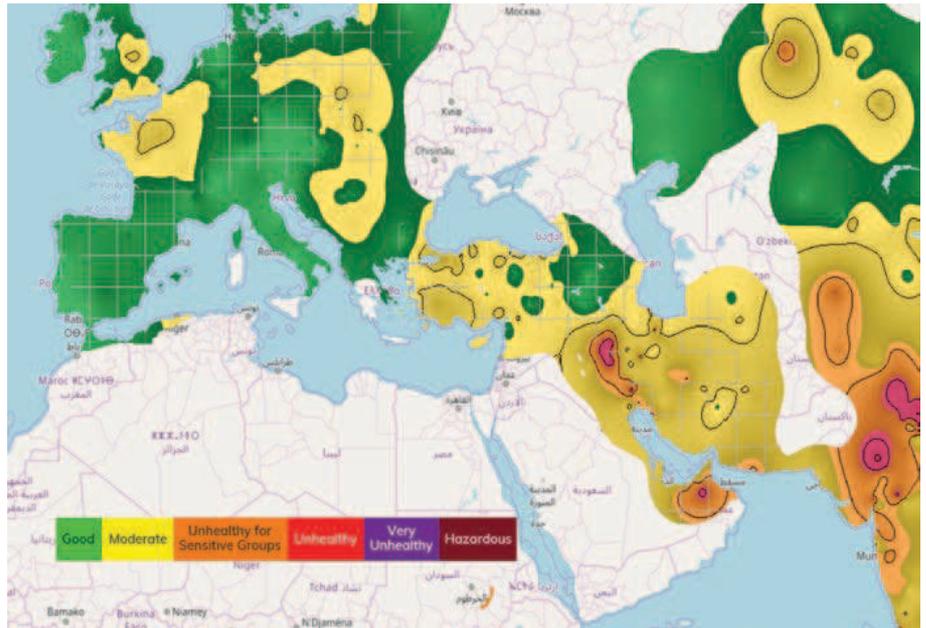
# DRIVING EXCELLENCE THROUGH AGILITY

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### Pollution Shocks Lebanon

Lebanon is now facing a shocking reality facing as fish turn up dead on lake Qaraoun



**A cause for concern:** Air pollution in the Middle East (Image source: Berkeley Earth, [www.berkeleyearth.org](http://www.berkeleyearth.org))

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**A**ir pollution has long plagued the Middle East, with Iran and countries lining the Arabian/Persian Gulf being especially affected. This is a serious matter as lead, cadmium, nickel and radioactive particles which can increase one's risk of getting cancer have been detected in the air. Such substances will increase the prevalence of non-smoker lung cancer. Air pollution is not often in the news nor is it given the attention that it deserves. It can be considered a silent killer since it is invisible and its effects are often only seen on the long-term.

Many countries, especially in the oil-rich GCC have taken measures to improve air quality and this has focused on the adoption of alternative sources of energy such as solar electricity. Moreover, the electrification of transport is ongoing though far slower than in regions such as Europe. Clearly, the price of petrol is much more prohibitive in Europe which stimulates buyers to more readily opt for electric vehicles. Nonetheless, Dubai Taxi Corporation has invested heavily in electric and hybrid vehicles and the emirate has been among the regional leaders in the electrification

of transport.

Now to Lebanon where the government has been involved in a World Bank funded project started in 2016, estimated US\$ 60 million, named "Lake Qaraoun Pollution Prevention Project". The project was deemed as "moderately satisfactory" and the project will conclude in 2023. "Moderately satisfactory" now seems to be a little out of touch with reality as tonnes of dead fish have just washed up on the shores of the lake. The government has been busy cleaning up the stinky mess and ensure that the polluted fish do not end up on the market. In fact, fishing has been forbidden in the lake since 2018. The lake is plagued with toxic industrial and agricultural waste. The result of this man-made catastrophe is increasingly evident and literally deadly.

Afaf Issa (Malak Issa)  
Editor in Chief,



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**Last issue's main story:**  
**Oil Giant Saudi Aramco Sees 2020 Profits Drop to \$49 Billion**

Here in Saudi Arabia, we celebrate this week the five-year anniversary of Prince Mohammed bin Salman's launch of Vision 2030. Here, we launched "NEOM," "Amala," "Red Sea," and "Qiddiya", and initiated plans for sustainability. Here, we strive to rationalize consumption to save 200 dollars over the

next ten years to finance our development plans.

We already said "goodbye" to 90 percent of income from oil, and generated a record non-oil revenue of more than 46.5 percent last year in total revenue.

Here, we set our goals to develop human capital, and lower the unemployment rate to 12.6 percent by the end of 2020. We welcome cultural and social reforms and encourage the new generation to become more advanced in science and technology.

Here we activate the privatization programs to include many new sectors. This is our opportunity to transfer our huge new projects from the colorful drawing boards to facts on the ground.

Abdulla Alami  
 Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

It is encouraging how Egypt will make all possible efforts' to help resolve crisis in Lebanon. Cairo continues to make every effort to communicate with all sides involved in the political arena and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said the Egypt will spare no effort to help Lebanon at this delicate stage.

Yusra Husni  
 Cairo, Egypt

Towards a decent economy, the Lebanese are trying hard to regain Europe's confidence. How Europe Can Help Lebanon Overcome Its Economic Implosion ... of its economic tailspin, Lebanon badly needs a functional cabinet able to make reforms.

Lebanon cannot pull itself out of its economic crisis without a new government to transform the country and launch long-stalled reforms, a senior official at the International Monetary Fund said.

Lebanon defaulted on its debt last year, sending its currency crashing. Its economy shrank by 25% in 2020, the IMF said lately.

Joseph Askar  
 Dubai, UAE

**LETTERS**

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*Pope Francis meets with Lebanese Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri*





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## Algeria

The Mediterranean is a pollution hotspot when it concerns marine litter, in particular plastics and single-use plastics. Through the Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean which was adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, Algeria is also addressing this growing problem. Under this plan, countries in the Mediterranean are asked to include measures to address marine litter in their National Action Plans. In this framework, Algeria already implemented several pilot actions and activities in ports and pilot zones. The EU funded Water and Environment Support project (WES) started its latest activity in Algeria which will focus on monitoring actions and on measures to address the problem. Through comprehensive monitoring Algeria will be able to take informed decisions and identify priority measures to address the problem of marine litter.



## Bahrain

Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, has extended sincere congratulations to workers in Bahrain marking the International Workers' Day 2021, lauding their dedication in strengthening the pillars of the comprehensive development march the kingdom is witnessing at various work and production sites.

The minister valued highly the unwavering support the oil sector enjoys from His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, which, he said, has contributed to attaining more national gains through optimal investment in oil projects to develop the national economy.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Khalifa commended the efforts being exerted by the oil sector workers to achieve the aspirations of the kingdom for developing the oil and gas sector and increasing its role in supporting the national economy, hailing the policies and budgets adopted by the National Oil and Gas Authority.

## Egypt

Egypt is aiming for tourism revenues of

€6 billion-€7 billion in 2021, the deputy tourism minister told Reuters. The country expects to attract more than 1 million Russian tourists during the rest of 2021 as direct flights between both countries are set to resume, Ghada Shalaby added.

## Iran

Iran said it will start enriching uranium to 60% purity, a move bringing the fissile material closer to levels suitable for a bomb, after accusing Israel of sabotaging a key nuclear installation.

The disclosure came soon before the resumption of talks in Vienna aimed at reviving Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with major powers, an accord Israel fiercely opposed, after former U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned it three years ago. A fissile purity of 90% is suitable for a nuclear bomb.

Announcing 60% enrichment, chief nuclear negotiator Abbas Araqchi also said Iran would activate 1,000 advanced centrifuge machines at Natanz, a nuclear plant hit by an explosion that Tehran called an act of sabotage by its arch-foe Israel.

## Iraq

At least 82 people were killed in the fire Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi decided to suspend the work of the Minister of Health and the Governor of Baghdad and refer them to investigation, after the fire that broke out in Ibn Al-Khatib Hospital lately, killing at least 82 people and wounding 110 others, according to AFP.

## Jordan

Jordan's King Abdullah II and former Crown Prince Hamzah bin Al-Hussein appeared today together in celebrations of the centenary of Jordan's founding, in their first public appearance since the last crisis, according to scenes broadcasted on state television, as reported by France Press.

The Royal Court published via "Twitter" a photo of the Jordanian Monarch and his Crown Prince Hussein, as well as Prince Hamzah bin Al-Hussein and a number of princes visiting the royal shrines on the occasion of the country's centenary.

## Kuwait

Reuters reported, quoting the General Administration of Civil Aviation in Kuwait, that it had "suspended all direct



Aristotelia Pelsoni told reporters.

## Morocco

The Moroccan Royal Court announced in a statement that King Mohammed VI made a phone call to his brother, King Abdullah II of the brotherly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan this morning, where talks centered on the prevailing conditions in Jordan. According to the royal statement, “His Majesty King Mohammed VI, on this occasion, renewed his full and natural solidarity with brotherly Jordan, and His Majesty’s full support for all decisions taken by His Majesty King Abdullah II to establish security and stability.”

## Oman

Dr. Mohammed Javad Zarif, Iranian Foreign Minister and his accompanying delegation left here today after a two-day visit to the Sultanate. During the visit, he met with senior officials in the Sultanate. He also led the Iranian side in political talks between the two friendly countries.

The guest and his accompanying delegation were seen off by Sayyid Badr Hamad al-Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Ali Najafi, Iranian Ambassador to Oman and Dr. Khalid Said al-Jaradi, Head of Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry.

## Qatar

Qatari authorities plan to update entry requirements into the country from April 25. All travelers coming into Qatar will have to obtain a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of arrival.

Currently, only nationals, permanent residents, and those with pre-approved entry permits can enter Qatar. Individuals arriving from “high-risk” countries must quarantine at hotels, whereas individuals from “low-risk” countries can quarantine at home. The measures do not apply to those who use shared quarantine facilities; they must continue to quarantine for two weeks. Additionally, following the discovery of new strains of COVID-19, individuals arriving from Denmark, the Netherlands, South Africa, and the UK must enter a seven-night quarantine at a government-designated hotel. Individuals are required to provide proof of hotel reservation before boarding their flights to Qatar.

Individuals who have received the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine are exempt from quarantine requirements when returning to Qatar. The measure only applies to individuals who received their vaccinations in Qatar; they must allow at least 14 days to pass following their second dose and test negative upon arrival. The quarantine exemption will

be valid for three months, starting after 14 days from the second dose.

Residents who are currently in Qatar and wish to travel will automatically receive an exceptional entry permit upon departure, which will allow them to return to the country. However, residents who are currently outside Qatar have to obtain an exceptional return permit via the “Qatar Portal” website if they wish to return.

## Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia executed three soldiers who were sentenced for “high treason” and “cooperating with the enemy”, a statement from the kingdom’s defence ministry said.

It said that the three had been sentenced to death by a specialist court after a fair trial. The ministry did not name the alleged “enemy” but the executions were carried out in the southern province bordering Yemen where Saudi Arabia has been at war for more than six years against the Iran-aligned Houthi movement.

Saudi Arabia has come under increasing global scrutiny over its human rights record since the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year at the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate and the detention of women’s rights activists.--- Reuters

## Tunis

Tunisian authorities said a female suicide bomber killed herself and her baby during security operations in an interior mountainous province. Two other fighters were killed in the operations, according to an Interior Ministry statement lately.

## United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates’ first nuclear power plant started commercial operations, the Gulf Arab state’s leaders announced on Twitter.

The Barakah nuclear power plant in the Abu Dhabi emirate is the first nuclear power station in the Arab world and part of the oil producing state’s efforts to diversify its energy mix. “The first megawatt from the first Arab nuclear plant has entered the national power grid,” Vice President Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum said on Twitter.

## Yemen

The US-Saudi aggression coalition fighter jets waged recently 20 raids on Marib province.

A security official said the aggression fighters hit Serwah district with 18 raids and Madghal district with 2 raids. The raids caused serious damage to civilians’ property.

commercial flights coming from India until further notice.”

It indicated that Kuwaiti citizens, their first-degree relatives, and domestic workers will be granted entry permission, adding that the ban does not include cargo flights. The move came according to the instructions of the health authorities in the country, after assessing the global situation of the Corona pandemic.

## Lebanon

France has started to put in place measures limiting access to French territory for people blocking the political process in Lebanon, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said. Le Drian also said in a statement that France is taking similar measures for people involved in corruption in Lebanon. ---Reuters

## Libya

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held a landmark visit to Libya and reopen the country’s embassy after over six years, Athens said. Mitsotakis travelled to Tripoli “to normalise and restore relations”, Greek government spokeswoman



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# From Beirut Street Child to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Sir Vartan Melkonian: We can emerge from this crisis to a better world, if we act quickly and jointly

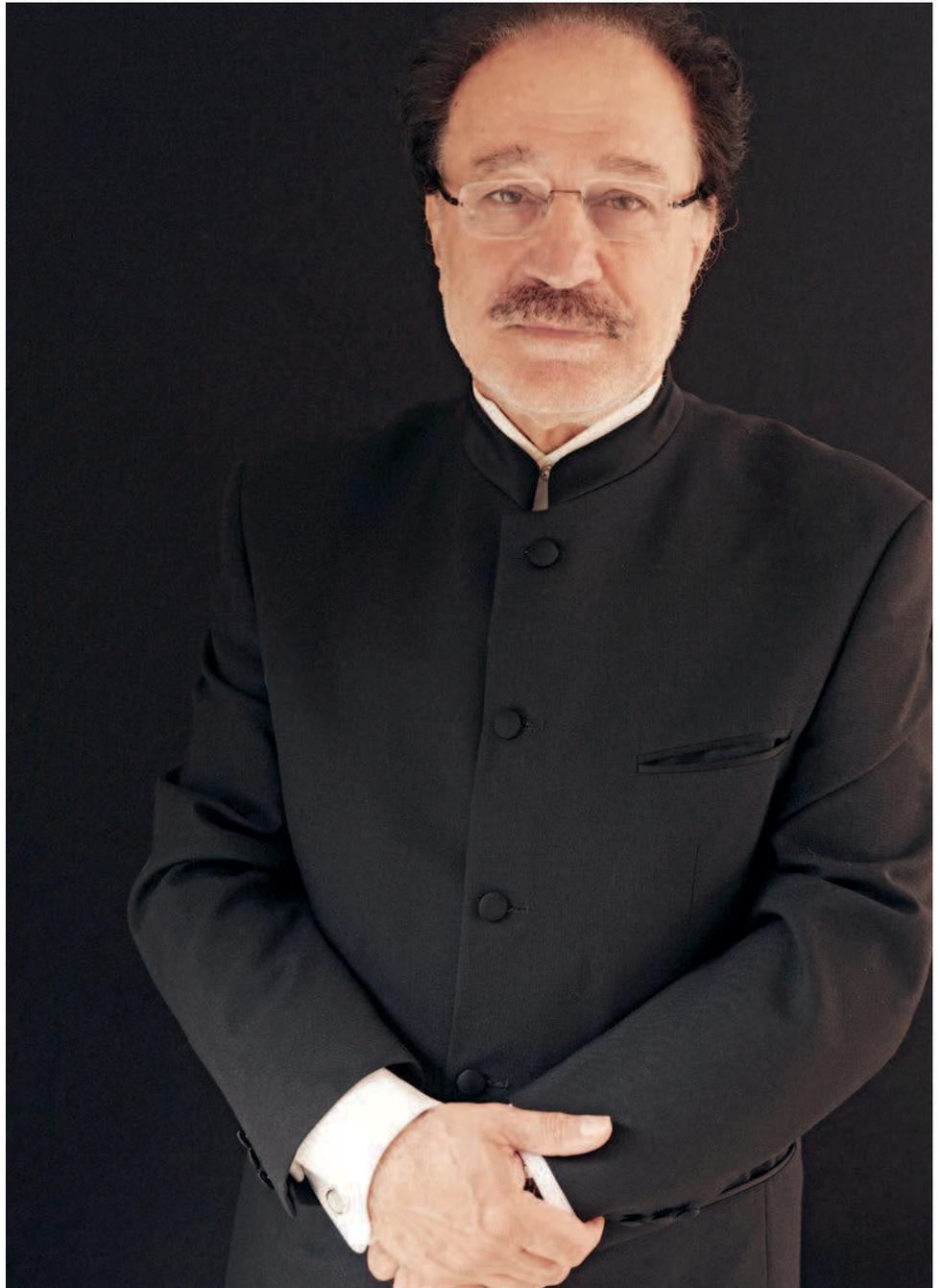
**M**usic plays an important role in our daily lives and is woven into the fabric of society. We listen to music while alone or in company, in a dance club or at home, through simple headphones or via high-end speakers, as background or as foreground, after we get up or before we go to bed. Music accompanies us when we are traveling, doing sports, shopping, working or relaxing. This omnipresence of music raises several questions: What is the relation between the society we live in and the role, function, and position.

Music can raise someone's mood, get them excited, or make them calm and relaxed. Music also - and this is important - allows us to feel nearly or possibly all emotions that we experience in our lives. The possibilities are endless. ... It is an important part of their lives and fills a need or an urge to create music.

Reading the above, it is time to know more about the world's famous music conductor Vartan Melkonian who began his life as an Armenian refugee in Lebanon, spending his early years in an orphanage outside Beirut, followed by living rough on the streets for many years. How did Vartan overcome such adversity, and what do his experiences tell about a post-Covid world?

Sir Vartan Melkonian was brought up in the early '50s as an orphan in the Birds' Nest orphanage in Lebanon until the age of eight. He then lived rough in the slums of Beirut, scouring the streets of the city with thousands of street orphans like him.

Remarkably, this 'street-slug' - as he used to be called in the gutters - with a severe speech impediment, would grow up to become a conductor of classical music in London's most famous halls conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra and others, as Melkonian



**Interview:** *Sir Vartan Melkonian – Renowned Conductor and Composer - The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the founder of Seva Coin*



**Supporting the power of music to change lives:** *Sir Vartan Melkonian giving HRH Prince William a trophy at a polo match*

did since 1985.

Arriving in the UK in 1972, fleeing the civil war in Lebanon, Melkonian worked as a singer on the 'Northern-Clubs' and was soon discovered by a local agent. His singing voice soon won him a place on TV's *New Faces*.

By the mid-'70s Melkonian had become a leading singer and producer in a number of famous West End night spots: *The Celebrity Club* in New Bond Street, *the Talk of the Town* in Leicester Square and other notable venues. He also directed TV video clips, *No Easy Walk to Freedom* for Nelson Mandela's release... but it was his interest in classical

music that led him to a new field.

Vartan has composed a 55 minute long symphony: *Impressions of Oman*, which was recorded at Abbey Road Studios in 1995 by the London Symphony Orchestra, with Melkonian himself as the conductor. In the same year he made a number of recordings with the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in Budapest.

As part of his work to inspire underprivileged children with hope, he has expressed his gratitude to the orphanage where he was looked after as a child by setting up a children's charitable trust.

Vartan's novel, *The Young Nomad and the City*, follows Dikran Pakradouni's life in the city of Beirut from his birth until his sixteenth birthday.

In May 1999 Melkonian produced the *Children of Kosovo* concert at the Royal Albert Hall in support of Save the Children's ongoing work in the Balkans. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Choral Society, Amanda Roccoft, Sally Burgess, Willard White, Stephen Kovacevich and many more leading artists gave their services free for his charity's aims. The concert was supported by the Princess Royal and



**A renowned musician, conductor and composer:** *Sir Vartan Melkonian with HRH Prince Charles*

the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and was transmitted in its entirety on Classic FM.

In April 2003, Melkonian conducted the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall: celebrating Favourite Classics in an Easter concert in aid of the Birds' Nest Orphanage.

Melkonian believes that we can all contribute to society provided that a chance and the right opportunities are given and consequently everyone will contribute something towards society.

"I see a great many people still look at refugees, people like me, with disdain perhaps, but I hope that I will be a demonstration that people like me and many others can indeed contribute wonderful things to the society in which we live," he told BBC Hardtalk.

Recently and with the UN's encouragement, Vartan launched his long awaited Seva Coin which is not a traditional cryptocurrency. Seva Coin is a transparent digital wealth platform. When people buy Seva Coin, both the people and their community will benefit at the same time. The more people buy Seva Coin, the more valuable it will become.

Just after two days into the launch of Seva Coin, there has been an overwhelming positive response. A new idea will be launched

at some point in the coming winter.

This month, BUSINESS LIFE magazine had the opportunity for an exclusive interview with the world's famous music conductor Sir Vartan Melkonian. He is a Fulbright Scholar, Philanthropist and Adventurer. Sir Vartan needs no further introduction. Music leaders have a special beauty, that they bring to light.

**BL: How can you contribute and cooperate with society and especially with the refugees and the less fortunate people?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** I believe we all have a certain gift unique to us which helps us improve our lives and in particular, the lives of others. I believe we all have a duty of care to ourselves and to those less fortunate than ourselves. We should all endeavour to demonstrate that the less fortunate people do have just as much potential as anybody else to contribute good things to society given the opportunity, given the spirit of care and consideration towards others. I have a vision, like many do, that one day the whole world becomes one nation with multitude of cultures, variety of folklore, different colours, various kinds of music... yet, we all live in one country, in one nation – a global nation.

**BL: What is your role in society?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** I think of society as I think of my home. I think of how can I improve my home, my society? How can I make my home be more hospitable and more welcoming when neighbours come in for a visit? I consider my role as the society's caretaker, as we should all be, the custodian of our homes, be proud of our homes, embracing our society as we embrace our families, our relatives, and our dear friends, be together as a well organised community with a common goal for the betterment of human life.

**BL: How did you evolve throughout the years?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** I look at my work as my leisure as well, throughout the year. I strive to find joy in my work however tedious it may seem. Every year is like a road you travel along which is lined with streetlights, and wonderful opportunities, if you miss one, there will always be another. Just remember, traveling is going towards new opportunities with every mile, and be ready to make use of these opportunities for yourself, for your family and for your community.

**BL: What is the importance of music on your life?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** Music has been my



**The Philharmonia & Melkonian at the Royal Festival Hall:** *Sir Vartan Melkonian Vartan Conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra*

passport to go around the world many times. I've found deep solace in music since my early days living on the streets of Beirut scouring the slums, doing any kind of work, searching the pavements for scraps of leftover food. Music for me is nothing less than the life-giving air I breathe. Music and life for me is one and the same thing; they have always been inseparable phenomena; one doesn't exist without the other.

**BL: What about your experience and your past and present status in UK and abroad?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** My experience, living in the Birds Nest Orphanage at an early age and then living on the streets of Beirut, is the solid and indestructible foundation on which I have built my present status here in UK and abroad. On the streets, I had to make decisions crucial to my own existence, so one can only imagine how quickly I learnt to walk the dark alleyways of the city at a young age without fear. But for that solitary upbringing, I don't think I could have ever built my life the way it is today. I don't think I could have ever walked through palaces of different kingdoms... I am forever thankful for that start in life.

**BL: What are the most important roles of music in**

**society?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** Music is as important to society as the sound of your heartbeat is to you, as critical as the oxygen you inhale. Without that life-giving beat, without that life-giving oxygen, society wouldn't even be alive. Have you ever been in a place where there is no sound, no sound of the wind in the trees, no sound of the waves in the sea? Even clouds have sound of their own if you just listen. Well, there is no place on earth where there is no sound, and sound is music. Therefore, music and sound together are a part of reality, part of the universe since creation.

**BL: Why is music important to culture?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** Music is the identity of a culture, the manifestation of culture, the making of a culture. Think of samba music, for example, and you cannot help but to think of Latin America. Think of flamenco music, and you cannot help but to think of Spain. Wadie Al Safi, for example, sung the songs of Lebanon, Elvis Presley, the songs of America, Edith Piaf, of France... Each culture is decorated by its own colour characteristic to its own folkloric music, distinctive to its own tradition and culture.

**BL: What are the benefits of music?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** Music benefits us in a way more profound than any other kind of inspirations, and more intimately. It lifts our spirits when we are down, it calms us down when we're in upheaval – it does all sorts of things to our emotions. We each are moved by the sound of music unique to us as individual. It moves each of us in a different way. One kind of music may evoke sadness in someone and yet to someone else it may arouse happiness. You can sing along with it, dance to its beat, or remember someone, or different places, by its melodies. That's the mystery of music.

**BL: Why music is beneficial to society speech?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** When we speak, we deliver our utterance with various kinds of mini melodies. The words, 'how are you?', for example, has a melody of its own, but each one of us say them in different melodies, in separate variations. Like the old saying, music is an international language. Music has no geographical or artistic boundaries; it mostly occupies the domains of the feeling. It belongs to no nation, yet it affects everyone young and old, and understood by all societies, modern or primitive. And one of the things that unites us all is communications, talking

with music.

**BL: The Covid-19 crisis was a huge shock for the market, companies and states, how far did it impact your career?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** My professional life in music and TV were affected in a most profound way because of covid-19. My work has always evolved traveling to different parts of the world, having to stop over in different cities and give concerts and TV appearances. But all that came to a sudden halt, with a devastating effect on the whole art industry. One minute you have packed your luggage ready to travel, next minute you are locked down, imprisoned in your own home, with nothing much to do, with a bleak foresight to the future.

**BL: What are your suggestions to correct the current mishaps in the current Lebanese politics?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** My life revolves around the Art. I compose music, conduct music, direct TV programs for the Arts, therefore, I wouldn't be able to give any significant comments about the current political system in Lebanon, or about any country for that matter. I just hope that a new government will be established in Lebanon and the economic situation will be improved, soon.

**BL: Recently you have launched Seva Coin online, would you elaborate on Seva Coin?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** People are often tired of being asked to give donations, again and again. You can give as much as you can, once, twice, three times... but at the end you cannot sustain this giving for ever. You have your own financial responsibilities. You need to look after your children's education, pay for your personal outgoing... So, we all have our financial burdens. Seva Coin will hopefully change all that, which means you invest in Seva Coin and your investment will grow for you and for the community, the more people invest, the higher the investment will grow over time.

**BL: How can people buy Seva Coin to benefit themselves and the wider community?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** In October 2019 we were having a private discussion about the digital money market at the UN, and what impact the digital currency is making on our lives which most of us in the community are totally unaware. The idea of the Seva Coin began back in October 2019, and it has taken more than a year to develop because of its highly advanced digital technology.

**BL: What are the principles of Seva Coin?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** Seva coin is in a



**The power of music and art:** *George Clooney and Sir Vartan Melkonian in New York launching the Aurora prize*



**Sir Vartan Melkonian began his life as an Armenian refugee in Lebanon:** *Sir Vartan Melkonian (centre) at the Birds' Nest Orphanage - late 1950s*



**The best composers usually can handle many different musical tasks:** *Sir Vartan Melkonian Vartan Conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra*



**Music, power, and politics:** Sir Vartan Melkonian Vartan with Kafi Amman at the Prince of Wales Trust



**From Beirut street child to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra:** Sir Vartan Melkonian Vartan during Hardtalk interview

limited supply. It has been minted on the Ethereum Blockchain, therefore we cannot possibly mint any more than the amount we have already minted, that's the nature of the Ethereum Blockchain technology. Unlike other digital wealth, 30% of the total supply of Seva Coin is reserved for the community. There will be grants to be given to good causes, like hospitals, schools, places of worship, sports facilities, and other worthy projects. To get an idea, you should visit the Grant page on [www.seva.coin.com](http://www.seva.coin.com). Seva Coin is predicted to rise in value quite rapidly, and therefore, help and benefit the buyer and the community all at the same time.

**BL: What is the difference between Seva Coin and Bitcoin?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** Bitcoin started about nine years ago, also on the Blockchain technology, and the price of one coin was less than \$1 each. Ordinary people took no notice of it, but the financial world looked at it with a magnifying glass. Now, in 2021, the price of Bitcoin is more than \$50,000 each coin. Like Seva Coin, Bitcoin is also in limited supply, that is why the more people buy it the higher the price will rise. But unlike Seva Coin, Bitcoin is decentralised, which means Seva Coin is operating with the UK Company House rules and regulation. All its income is accounted for and tax paid – un-

like Bitcoin. But Seva Coin's profit-line is along the line of Bitcoin – sky is the limit...

**BL: What are some long-range objectives?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** In these pandemic times, long-term objectives mean nothing more than hope for the future. No one really can confidently say when the pandemic will be over, even at World Health Organization. Yes, vaccine seem to have some positive affect, but that's only in a few countries, but what about the developing countries, like India, for example, with a population of over one billion people, when will they all be vaccinated? So, the future can only be seen as hope for now.

**BL: What are your current challenges?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** We, in the world of art, in public concerts in particular, are hit the hardest. There no concerts taking place. There are no theatres to attend, no cinemas to go to. This unbelievable situation has been like this for over a year now. Even the UK government is unable to say when crowd of people will be able to sit together in a concert hall, or in a theatre, or in a restaurant, without being subjected to the rules of social distancing. However optimistic you are, you cannot bypass the natural law of keeping safe for your sake and for the sake of others. There are many major challenges for us all – the whole world is just one big hospital, and there is not enough medicine to go round.

**BL: What are your major achievements till date?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** I consider my major achievement is being able to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Through my profession I am able to have a platform where I can play elegant music and at the same time remind people that there are children – yes, children – out there on the streets without education and through no fault of theirs. What would the future generation say about us if we live the current situation as they are now? That is what the UN is striving for, to make the world a better place now for the future.

**BL: What are your expectations and plans for the 2021? Do you feel optimistic about 2021 and 2022?**

**SIR VARTAN MELKONIAN:** I am optimistic, even in the face of the current gloom. I must be. That is all we have, be optimistic. There are talks about this particular aspect at local and international level. Perhaps we would be able to start putting on major public concerts again at the tail-end of 2022. So, that is a long way away yet. But just keep hold on tight to the ropes of hope, optimism and confident spirit and we will all get there – I promise!

# Nobody Knows What Lebanon's Currency Is Worth Anymore

Lebanon cannot pull itself out of its economic crisis without a new government to transform the country and launch long-stalled reforms

**L**ebanon is enduring a severe and prolonged economic depression in part due to inadequate policy responses to an assailment of compounded crises — the country's largest peace-time financial crisis, COVID-19 and the Port of Beirut explosion. Real GDP growth contracted by 20.3% in 2020. Inflation reached triple digit while the exchange rate keeps losing value; poverty is rising sharply. Lebanon lacks a fully functioning executive authority as it attempts to form its third Government in a little over a year.

Lebanon's crisis started before the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated after a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate, stored unsafely for years, exploded in the capital's port in August last year, killing 200 people.

International support through grants was needed, Azour said.

"Lebanon needs some large financing in order to jumpstart the economy again in order also to allow Lebanon to be on a recovery path that will take time but is highly needed."

Lebanon needed to rebuild confidence among citizens, investors and the international community," he added.

"This reform package is the starting point. And for that you need to have a new government who will lead the implementation of this reform program."

## Key Conditions and Challenges

Monetary and financial turmoil continue to drive crisis conditions, with interactions between the exchange rate, narrow money and inflation a key dynamic. The banking sector, which informally adopted severe capital controls, has ceased lending and does not attract deposits. The burden of the ongoing adjustment/deleveraging is highly regressive concentrated on the smaller depositors and SMEs. Inflationary effects are highly regressive factors, disproportionately affecting the poor and middle class. The social impact, which is already dire, could become catastrophic.

## Recent Developments

Real GDP is estimated to have declined by 20.3% in 2020. High frequency indicators support a substantial contraction in economic activity. The sudden stop in capital inflows, coupled with a continued large current account deficit, has implied a steady depletion in foreign exchange reserves at BdL. Partial-year fiscal data confirm severe fiscal stress.

## Outlook

Subject to unusually high uncertainty, we project real GDP to contract by a further 9.5% in 2021. Our projection assumes that COVID-19 effects carry through 2021, while macro policy responses remain inadequate. We also assume a minimum level of stability on the political and security scenes (i.e. formation of Government), and refrain from assuming runaway inflation-depreciation, which is a realistic scenario.

Lebanon's recession is likely to be arduous and prolonged given the lack of policy-making leadership and reforms. Macroeconomic stabilization is a key prior action for Lebanon's recovery process. A contraction of real GDP per capita and high inflation in 2020 will undoubtedly result in substantial increase in poverty rates affecting all groups of the population in Lebanon through different channels.

Money works as a medium of exchange, in part because its value is mutually agreed on in transactions. Lebanon is now reckoning with the economic consequences of when that is no longer true. It has been a long time since Lebanese knew the actual value of their money. There are, at the moment, at least four vastly different exchange rates at which the Lebanese pound (LBP) is exchanged into U.S. dollars (USD). The result is a daily struggle with misery and absurdity.

In 1997, the pound was pegged to the dollar at the rate of 1,500 to 1, and the two were used interchangeably on that basis until October 2019. But after the country



Seeking unified Arab effort to save Lebanon and

slid into an economic crisis a year and a half ago, the currency lost its value steeply on the open market, losing 80 to 90 percent of its worth, even as the official rate stayed stuck at its 1997 peg.

To avoid a run on the banks, Lebanese were then barred from withdrawing dollars deposited before the economic crisis. They can withdraw in Lebanese pounds but at a loss compared to the market rate. The central bank allowed withdrawals at a rate arbitrarily set at 3,900 pounds to the dollar, even as the market rate soared beyond that, reaching 15,000 pounds to the dollar at one stage last month. It has now plateaued between 11,000 to 11,500 pounds to the dollar as of last week. Meanwhile, a fourth exchange rate of 6,240 pounds to the dollar emerged when the central bank proposed issuing money at that rate to 800,000 recipients of a World Bank emergency aid loan of \$246 million.

In short, everyday Lebanese with now humble earnings are navigating a mind-boggling maze of multiple exchange rates and are paying for a crisis caused by the incompetence—or corruption—of the financial and political elite.

Many money-changers, economists, and



**the Lebanese:** Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab meets Qatar's ruler Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani

bankers said Lebanese people's savings were effectively being arbitrated away on a mass scale to reduce bank losses while preserving the elite's privileged access to its cash. The richest have been bailed out, thanks to political connections or "wasta," which allegedly allowed many to rescue their savings from a collapsing system.

The peg to the U.S. dollar was always fragile so long as Lebanon remained a country that exported little and imported most of its needs. To keep the peg going, Lebanon's central bank offered ever higher interest rates to private banks, which passed some of those interest rates on to customers to lure depositors. But eventually, something had to give. As both the government and central bank's debt mounted in 2019, depositors began to lose confidence, the diaspora whose remittances were the main source of foreign earnings began to withhold deposits, and the system started to unwind as Lebanese took to the streets to protest the country's impending economic collapse. A government default on a euro-denominated bond in March 2020 triggered an accelerating downwards spiral.

A disproportionate cost of the crisis was imposed on the country's small to medium

depositors. None of the country's banks declared bankruptcy, and an earlier suggestion that a haircut is imposed only on large depositors or shareholders was brushed aside. Moreover, the absence of capital controls law that legally forbids capital flight was allegedly exploited by the rich to transfer their money to banks in Switzerland or France. Although the exact number is disputed, reports say as much as \$6 billion could have been smuggled out of the country. Meanwhile, small to medium Lebanese depositors, including the protesters who warned of the collapse in 2019, had to deal with informal capital controls freezing their accounts or withdraw at a hefty loss.

A senior banker who spoke to Foreign Policy on the condition of anonymity admitted the wealthy used their political connections to transfer their money overseas. "Banks have imposed tight capital controls with the objective of halting the financial collapse," the banker said. "However, the political and wealthy elite put more pressure on the banks to transfer money overseas. In the absence of a capital control law, such transfers are not illegal yet, in many ways, are immoral and wrong. Such incidents have occurred in most banks and usually with

intense pressure on bank management."

Mohammed is one of the many money-changers in Lebanon's capital, Beirut. He chose to be identified just by his first name and shared how the mercurial exchange rates were working to the detriment of average consumers and were being arbitrated in a way that amounted to indirect theft. Mohammed receives Lebanese pounds from a supermarket that withdraws them from its local bank at 3,900 pounds to the dollar. But since the supermarket needs dollars to import the goods it sells—and banks are not giving it any—it needs to procure the dollars from the black market. Mohammed tracks hundreds of others like him on WhatsApp groups where, he said, the free market rate is decided. "If more dollars are in demand, then the rate plummets, which is now always the case," he said. Then he sends texts replete with cheerful emojis to those who have dollars stashed under their mattresses. "Good morning everyone [sunshine emoji]. The rate is exceptionally high today, at 11,800 LBP for the dollar," read one of Mohammed's texts. "Call me." With wads of Lebanese pounds in his bag, Mohammed zips through the streets of Beirut on his motorbike and provides at-home cash delivery.

# IsDB, ICD and the Government of Burkina Faso Join Hands to Support the BRAVE Women Project in Burkina Faso



**Commitment to supporting strategies that promote women's economic empowerment:** H.E. Dr. Bandar Hajjar, President of IsDB



**Supporting the private sector:** Ayman Amin Sejny, Chief Executive Officer of ICD

**T**he Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group and its private sector development arm, the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD), have joined hands with the government of Burkina Faso through “Maison de l’Entreprise du Burkina Faso (MEBF)”, to implement the “Business Resilience Assistance for Value-adding Enterprises” (BRAVE Women) Project in the country.

Implemented by the IsDB/ICD, the “BRAVE Programme was initially launched in Yemen in 2016 with the aim of combining capacity building and a grant-matching scheme concept for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in addition to Value Chain support, all within an integrated framework that responds to the in-conflict challenges of the private sector. The MENA Transition Fund (Deauville Partnership) provided the sponsorship of this project which was successfully completed in 2020.

The IsDB’s President, Dr. Bandar Hajjar, has expressed his commitment to supporting strategies that promote women’s economic empowerment which is considered critical to building a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable world.

This BRAVE Women Burkina Faso

project falls under the sponsorship of the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi), a collaborative partnership among fourteen donor governments (including Saudi Arabia), eight multilateral development banks (including the IsDB), and other public and private stakeholders, which seeks to address the financial and non-financial barriers faced by women entrepreneurs while attempting to create a better ecosystem for them. This new project is expected to not only enhance the resilience of SMEs owned/managed by women but to also support the National Economic and Social Development Plan (PNDES) of Burkina Faso.

According to ICD CEO, Ayman Amin Sejny, the roll out of BRAVE Programme in Burkina Faso follows successful implementations of the similar ongoing projects in Yemen and Nigeria where it has managed to support 916 Women owned/led SMEs to date with business resilience trainings and disbursed \$6.4 million of financial support out of which \$3.2 million of funds were provided in the form of matching grants.

“ICD is pleased to play a significant role in the collective efforts aimed at overcoming the challenges faced by women

entrepreneurs in fragile environments. We aim to enhance the private sector, as the engine of sustainable growth in fragile settings. This cooperation seeks to enhance the resilience of Women owned SMEs that have struggled during the current crisis. And we pray to Almighty Allah for the success of the Burkina Faso project, as well,” he has stated.

The Maison de l’Entreprise du Burkina Faso “MEBF” (or Burkina Faso Business Association) is an organization which support the private sector in Burkina Faso (recognized as Association of Public utility since 2010) established with the help of the World Bank in 2002 in order to support and develop the Private Sector actors in the country mainly through an integrated platform of value-added services for the benefit of private companies and professional associations. The institution is attached to the Ministry in charge of trade which falls under the Government authority.

The Islamic Development Bank is a multilateral development bank (MDB), working to improve people’s lives by promoting social and economic development in Member countries and Muslim communities worldwide, delivering impact at scale.

Through collaborative partnerships between communities among our 57 member countries (MCs), we seek to equip people and communities to drive their own economic and social progress at scale, putting the infrastructure in place to enable them to fulfil their potential.

The Bank’s New Business Model of “Making Markets Work for Development” contributes to strengthening the competitiveness of our MCs in strategic industries for better participation and upgrading within the Global Value Chains. These are the food and agribusiness industry, the textiles, clothing, leather, and footwear industry, the petrochemicals and petroleum industry, the construction industry, and Islamic finance. We also foster innovative and sustainable solutions to the world’s greatest development challenges, leveraging the potential of Science, technology and innovation as strategic drivers of economic growth, as we work towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

# The Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector and the Arab Tourism Organization sign a Memorandum of Understanding



**MOU Ceremony:** Ayman Amin Sejiny, CEO of the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector, member of the Islamic Development Bank Group (IDBG) & H.E. Khaled Murad Reda

**U**nder the patronage of His Excellency Dr. Bandar bin Fahd Al Fahid, President of the Arab Tourism Organization (ATO) - Ayman Amin Sejiny, CEO of the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD), member of the Islamic Development Bank Group (IDBG), and His Excellency Khaled Murad Reda - Assistant Secretary General of the ATO, signed a memorandum of understanding and joint cooperation to establish a general framework for the development of the tourism sector through financing tourism projects in the Arab region, with special emphasis on least developed Arab countries.

On this occasion, Ayman Sejiny declared that this memorandum fulfils the objectives of the ICD, aiming at enhancing

and improving the structures and mechanisms of cooperation among the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (including the Arab countries), as well as responding to their needs by extending financing for development projects and carrying out supporting activities that foster human development and institutional efficiency. The memorandum also tends to implement ICD strategy, which aims to finance investment projects with developmental impacts and to promote activities related to capacity-building, especially for the organizations in charge of promoting investment and trade in IDB member countries. Besides, the Memorandum seeks to build a strategic cooperation relationship between ICD and the ATO especially in the current

circumstances, where the tourism sector has been severely affected by the repercussions of the spread of the Corona epidemic.

On his part, H.E. Al Fahid expressed his pleasure to sign this memorandum through which many programs and consultations will be presented that serve and support the tourism industry in the Arab world, with emphasis on less developed countries in terms of their public and private sectors and SMEs, as well as the investors in the tourism sector, who have been affected by the Corona pandemic. He also noted that the Memorandum includes an implementation plan for several activities and projects that will be designed in the near future, comprising issuing sukuk, financing SME projects, financing tourism projects of the ATO's partners in Arab countries through financial and legal support, and benefiting from its strategic partners in the field of preparing advisory studies for financing projects. Moreover, the plan includes participating in investments in local and social funds directly or through countries and banks within a network of banks in Africa and the Arab World in order to develop local communities and create sustainable tourism.

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The Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) is a multilateral development financial institution and is member of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group. ICD was established in November 1999 to support the economic development of its member countries through the provision of finance for private sector projects, promoting competition and entrepreneurship, providing advisory services to the governments and private companies, and encouraging cross border investments.

## New IRTI Report Highlights Progress of IsDB Member Countries Towards SDGs

The Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group has published a report highlighting the progress of the 57 IsDB Member Countries (MCs) in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report, entitled 'Reaching the SDGs: Progress of IsDB Member Countries', finds that while progress has been made towards achieving the SDGs, the IsDB MCs have a long way to go if they are to reach the targets by 2030. The overall SDG Index score of IsDB MCs stands at 61.0, suggesting that IsDB, as a group, is just over 60 per cent of the way to achieving the 17 SDGs.

Major challenges also remain, with disparities evident in the level of progress across the goals. Despite high achievement on some goals, such as Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), progress is low on others, particularly Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

There is also a wide variation among IsDB Member Countries in terms of achieving the SDG targets. In addition, SDG priorities differ from country to country. These reflect the need for the IsDB to adopt

a more country-focused approach when assisting MCs with their initiatives towards attaining the SDG goals and to increase its cooperation with MCs in identifying and tackling SDGs of concern within each MC.

In his comments on the release of the report, Dr. Sami Al-Suwailem, IRTI Acting Director-General and IsDB Group Chief Economist, said, "This report contributes to IsDB's efforts by providing data-driven evidence to guide the Bank's interventions in MCs through a comprehensive presentation of countries progress towards the SDGs. It shows that MCs continue to face varied and unique challenges in achieving the SDGs, with some MCs falling behind others. Progress across different targets and dimension also varies as MCs struggle with competing development priorities."

The report identifies that the most challenging SDG dimension for IsDB MCs is the Prosperity dimension, particularly Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). Indeed, the sectors that constitute Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) are the core and essential sectors for the development of each MC. Therefore, the report recommends that IsDB Group may direct its limited resources to improving these relevant sectors. Existing interlinkages

among the SDGs imply that contributing to the achievement of Goal 9 can also help towards the enhancement of other Goals which MCs are still struggling to address.

The report is structured in three parts. Part A gives an introduction and presents the main findings. It discusses IsDB MCs' achievements on the SDGs as a group, covering issues on where IsDB MCs stand with respect to the SDG targets and achievement. Part A also presents the performance of countries aggregated to the level of IsDB Regional Hubs and gives a summary of the main findings of the report. In Part B, the results by regional hubs and MCs are shown graphically. Lastly, Part C provides details on the methodology.

About the Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI)

The Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) is a Member of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group responsible for knowledge creation and dissemination in Islamic Economics and Finance and fostering the use of Islamic Finance to contribute to the sustainable development of IsDB Member Countries. Within the framework of the IsDB Group's 10-Year Strategy and the President's Five-Year Program, IRTI works as a catalyst for knowledge-based sustainable development.

## The Republic of Maldives Successfully Prices Its Debut Sovereign US\$200 Million 5-Year Sukuk Issuance

The Ministry of Finance, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Maldives, successfully priced a US\$200 million debut sovereign Sukuk on 29 March 2021. The country's first Sukuk issue will have a 5-year maturity and pays a 9.875% semi-annual coupon. The proceeds of the issuance will be used to settle tender offers for the Government's 2022 bonds.

The Senior Unsecured 144A/ Reg S Sukuk will be issued from the recently established Maldives Sukuk Issuance

Limited's US\$1.0 billion Trust Certificate Issuance Programme. The issue, rated B3 by Moody's, will settle on 8 April 2021 and will be listed on the Euronext Dublin and Nasdaq Dubai.

The Sukuk follows an Ijara structure with a Murabaha component and will be supported by rental income from assets which are owned by the Government of the Republic of Maldives.

The Joint Lead Managers and Joint Bookrunners for the issuance were The Islamic Corporation for the Develop-

ment of the Private Sector (ICD), Credit Suisse, Emirates NBD Capital and HSBC.

Commenting on the inaugural Sukuk issuance, Ibrahim Ameer, Finance Minister of Maldives, said "This debut issuance marks the beginning of Maldives in the International Islamic Finance markets and reaffirms our support to develop and to remain as an active player through the diversification of our existing debt portfolio. The programme paves way for the continuous engagement with the sukuk centric investors."

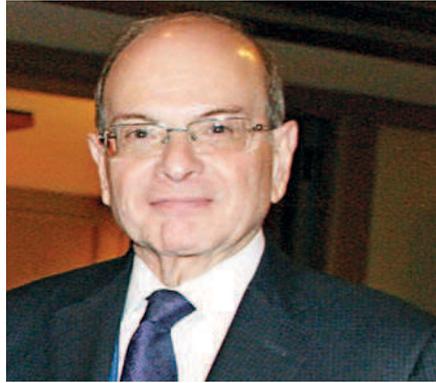
# اجتماع الهيئة العامة للبنك العربي بواسطة وسيلة الاتصال المرئي والالكتروني

من الآثار الاقتصادية والمالية على العملاء سواء في قطاع الشركات أو الأفراد من خلال توفير الحلول التمويلية المختلفة بما فيها إعادة الهيكلة أو الجدولة أو تأجيل الاقساط أو التخفيض من أعباء خدمة الدين من خلال تخفيض الفوائد والمشاركة في برامج التمويل التي استهدفت القطاعات الأكثر تأثراً وخاصة الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة. كما وقامت مجموعة البنك العربي بالتبرع بمبلغ ٢٥ مليون دولار أمريكي لدعم الجهود والمبادرات الوطنية الرامية إلى محاربة هذا الوباء والحد من آثاره وتداعياته الصحية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية في الاردن وعدد من البلدان التي يعمل فيها البنك. وتوجه المصري بالشكر الجزيل إلى البنك المركزي الأردني والجهات الرسمية على كافة الجهود التي يبذلونها من أجل تجاوز هذه الظروف الإستثنائية غير المسبوقة والحد من تداعياتها.

من جانبه استعرض نعمة صباغ - المدير العام التنفيذي للبنك العربي النتائج المالية للبنك مشيراً إلى أن صافي أرباح مجموعة البنك العربي بلغ بعد الضرائب والمخصصات 195.3 مليون دولار أمريكي في نهاية العام 2020 مقارنة مع 846.5 مليون دولار أمريكي في نهاية العام 2019 وبتراجع نسبته 77% مبيناً أنه وعلى الرغم من الظروف الاستثنائية غير المسبوقة المرافقة لجائحة كورونا العالمية إلا أن البنك تمكن من المحافظة على قاعدة رأسمالية متينة حيث بلغ إجمالي حقوق الملكية 9.4 مليار دولار أمريكي مقارنة بـ 9.1 مليار دولار أمريكي كما في 31 كانون الأول من عام 2019.

وأشار الصباغ إلى أنه نظراً للظروف الاقتصادية العالمية، واصل البنك خلال العام 2020 اتباع سياسته المتحفظة برصد مخصصات اضافية تحوطاً لمواجهة التحديات الاقتصادية التي تعصف بالمنطقة والعالم. وبين الصباغ أن صافي الأرباح التشغيلية للبنك بلغ 1.01 مليار دولار أمريكي وبتراجع 25% عن العام السابق، بسبب انخفاض صافي الفوائد وكذلك انخفاض صافي العمولات، بالإضافة إلى انخفاض أرباح الشركات الحليفة للبنك، في حين نمت ودائع العملاء بنسبة 7% لتصل إلى 38.7 مليار دولار أمريكي مقارنة بـ 36.2 مليار دولار أمريكي كما في 31 كانون الأول من عام 2019، وبلغت التسهيلات الائتمانية 26.5 مليار دولار أمريكي في نهاية العام 2020 مقارنة بـ 26.1 مليار دولار أمريكي كما في 31 كانون الأول من عام 2019 وبنسبة نمو بلغت 1%. وبلغت نسبة كفاية رأس المال 16.8% كما في 31 كانون الأول من عام 2020، بالإضافة إلى احتفاظ البنك بنسب سيولة مريحة حيث بلغت نسبة القروض إلى الودائع 68.4%، بينما فاقت نسبة تغطية القروض غير العاملة 100%.

وأكد الصباغ أن مجموعة البنك العربي تمكنت من التعامل مع جائحة كورونا من خلال اتخاذ عدد من التدابير التي من شأنها الحفاظ على جودة محفظة التسهيلات الائتمانية وتوفير نسب سيولة مريحة.



نعمة صباغ- المدير العام التنفيذي للبنك العربي



صبيح المصري رئيس مجلس الإدارة للبنك العربي

القطاعات الأكثر تضرراً ولو بدرجات متفاوتة. كما بادرت البنوك المركزية العالمية والعربية بإجراءات قوية وسريعة شملت تخفيض أسعار الفائدة والتوسع النقدي وضخ السيولة مما أوقف تحول الأزمة الصحية والاقتصادية إلى أزمة نقدية ومالية، الأمر الذي ساهم في تخفيف آثار الأزمة على العديد من القطاعات. وأشار المصري إلى أن الإنكماش الاقتصادي العالمي شمل المنطقة العربية، خاصة مع تأثر الدول المصدرة للنفط بتراجع الطلب العالمي على النفط والانخفاض الحاد في سعره خلال النصف الأول من العام 2020. كما كان للتراجع الكبير في السياحة وتحويلات العاملين والصادرات أثراً سلبياً على العديد من اقتصادات المنطقة، وخاصة غير النفطية، والمعتمدة على هذه المصادر للدخل.

وبين المصري أن القطاع المصرفي العربي تأثر خلال العام 2020 بهذه الظروف الاستثنائية العالمية والعربية. حيث أدت الأزمة إلى تراجع كبير في أرباح القطاع المصرفي العربي، كما العالمي، لهذا العام بفعل انخفاض صافي إيرادات الفوائد ورسوم العمولات مصحوباً بارتفاع حجم المخصصات لمواجهة الزيادة المتوقعة في الديون غير العاملة إلى جانب ضعف فرص الاقراض الجديدة وتراجع جودة المحافظ وارتفاع كلفة المخاطر.

وأكد المصري أنه وعلى الرغم من الظروف غير المسبوقة والتحديات الاستثنائية التي فرضتها جائحة كورونا العالمية، إلا أن مجموعة البنك العربي تمكنت من المحافظة على مركز مالي قوي وتحقيق نتائج إيجابية، حيث تجاوز صافي الأرباح التشغيلية للبنك المليار دولار مع المحافظة على نسب سيولة مرتفعة وملاءة مالية قوية، مما يعكس قدرة البنك على التعامل بكفاءة مع هذه المعطيات ويؤكد نجاح استراتيجيته وسلامة نهجه المؤسسي وسياساته الحصيفة.

وذكر المصري أنه واستجابة للتحديات والصعوبات التي واكبت جائحة كورونا وانسجاماً مع التوجهات والمبادرات الصادرة عن الجهات الرقابية والبنوك المركزية، فقد قام البنك العربي باتخاذ العديد من الإجراءات والخطوات التي كان من شأنها التخفيف

عقدت الهيئة العامة العادية لمساهمي البنك العربي اجتماعها بتاريخ 2021/3/25، بواسطة وسيلة الاتصال المرئي والالكتروني، وذلك عملاً بأحكام قانون الدفاع رقم (13) لسنة 1992 وأمر الدفاع رقم (5) لسنة 2020 المنشور في الجريدة الرسمية بتاريخ 2020/3/31 والإجراءات الصادرة عن معالي وزير الصناعة والتجارة والتموين بتاريخ 2020/4/9 بموجب أمر الدفاع أعلاه. وعقد الاجتماع برئاسة صبيح المصري رئيس مجلس الإدارة وبحضور أعضاء مجلس الإدارة والمدير العام التنفيذي ومساهمين يحملون أسهما «أصالة وإنباء ووكالة» يشكلون حوالي 79.27% من رأس المال، كما وحضر الاجتماع مراقب عام الشركات عطوفة الدكتور وائل العرموطي. وتم خلال الاجتماع اقرار البنود المدرجة على جدول أعمال الهيئة العامة العادية. وبهذه المناسبة أشار السيد صبيح المصري - رئيس مجلس إدارة البنك العربي إلى أن العالم أجمع يواصل التعامل مع التحديات الكبيرة وغير المسبوقة الناتجة عن جائحة فيروس كورونا العالمية حيث شهد الاقتصاد العالمي خلال العام 2020 انكماشاً غير مسبوق بحدته وشموليته منذ تسعة عقود. إذ أدت جائحة «كورونا» إلى تعطيل العملية الانتاجية لفترات طويلة وإلى فرض الإغلاقات واتباع التباعد الاجتماعي مما أدى إلى تراجع كبير في الإنفاق الاستهلاكي والاستثماري الخاص والطلب على قطاعات الخدمات المباشرة بما فيها السفر والسياحة وكذلك إلى تراجع ملحوظ في التجارة الخارجية. وكان الأثر الاقتصادي الأسوأ للجائحة خلال النصف الأول من العام المنصرم، إذ تدرجت أغلب الاقتصادات الرئيسية في التكيف مع الجائحة والتأقلم في تنظيم العملية الانتاجية والاستهلاكية لتقليل الخسائر البشرية مع تقوية مناعة الاقتصاد ومحاولة الحد من تبعات هذه الجائحة الصحية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية.

وبين المصري أن الحكومات وفي إطار تعاملها مع هذه الأزمة قامت بزيادة الإنفاق الحكومي على الخدمات الصحية والإعانات الاجتماعية ومساعدة

# Saudi National Bank Launched in Region's Largest Merger in 2021



- Saudi National Bank created from the merger of NCB and Samba, as planned, on 1st April, 2021
- Saudi National Bank is the largest bank in Saudi Arabia, with over SAR 896 billion (\$239 billion) in total assets
- Customers should expect a gradual transition of accounts and services over the next 9 months while integration of back office functions progresses
- Saudi National Bank will be headquartered in Riyadh

**N**ational Commercial Bank (NCB) and Samba Financial Group (Samba) announced today the formal completion of their historic merger to create a new Saudi banking champion and a regional powerhouse. Operations under the new combined entity name, Saudi National Bank (SNB) (ISIN: SA13L050IE10) (SYMBOL: 1180), are effective as of 1st April 2021.

While this completes the legal combination of NCB and Samba, the two banks will continue to service customers as normal while progressing the full integration of products and services. Customers should continue to bank as normal with their respective banks and will not experience any difference to their banking services. In case of any updates to products, services, or if any action is required from a customer, the bank will communicate in advance to advise of any changes.

With over SAR 896 billion (\$239 billion) in total assets, SAR 127 billion (\$34 billion) in shareholders' equity, and a combined net profit of SAR 15.6 billion (\$4.2 billion), Saudi National Bank is the largest bank in Saudi Arabia with ~30% market share across all metrics. As a strong bank with a robust capital position and strong liquidity, the bank is optimally positioned to finance economic development and enable the delivery of Vision

2030 by leveraging its increased scale, enhanced capabilities, and unparalleled employee talent.

Ammar Alkhudairy, Chairman of Saudi National Bank, commented: "This is truly a historic moment that we can all be proud of. The formation of Saudi National Bank signals a new era of banking for the Kingdom, and I want to thank our shareholders, customers, and employees for their unwavering support. Now with the legal completion of the merger, Saudi National Bank is in prime position to compete regionally and locally, ultimately creating a positive impact for all of our stakeholders while accelerating the Kingdom's journey towards Vision 2030."

Saeed Al-Ghamdi, Managing Director and Group CEO of Saudi National Bank, said: "Today marks the beginning of our journey as Saudi National Bank. The legacy banks NCB and Samba served the Kingdom over the last 68 years and now, we combine their respective strengths to lead the future of banking that is committed to creating value for the nation and its people. Our customers remain our priority, and we look forward to ensuring a smooth transition as enter into the integration process."

Following earlier approval from the CMA for NCB to increase its capital from SAR 30 billion to 44.78 billion, Samba shareholders will receive 0.739 ordinary shares in Saudi National Bank as consideration for every ordinary Samba Financial Group share held.

The new bank began trading as a single listed entity on the Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul) on April 1st, 2021. Equally, Samba shares had been de-listed from the Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul), and all its assets, liabilities and operations transferred into the Saudi National Bank, which will continue to honour Samba's



Head quarters: Al Ahli Saudi Tower- Riyadh

obligations going forward.

## Merger History

NCB and Samba initially entered into a Framework Agreement to conduct due diligence and negotiate definitive and binding terms of a potential merger on 25th June, 2020. Following the successful completion of the due diligence phase NCB and Samba signed a binding agreement to merge on 11th October 2020, subject to shareholder and regulatory approvals.

During two extraordinary general assembly (EGA) meetings on March 1st 2021, NCB and Samba shareholders respectively voted overwhelmingly in favor of the merger. The merger also received the relevant regulatory approvals from the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA), General Authority for Competition (GAC), Capital Markets Authority (CMA), and Tadawul. NCB changed its name to Saudi National Bank and accordingly, Samba merged into Saudi National Bank on 1st April 2021.

## Integration Timeline

Saudi National Bank's new board and leadership structure is in effect and overseeing the integration process, which is expected to be complete within the next 18 months. Clients, counterparts, and stakeholders will be advised on how the merger may affect them in a phased manner over the coming months.



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# Doha Bank Q.P.S.C. Achieves a Profit Growth of 17.3% for the First Quarter of 2021

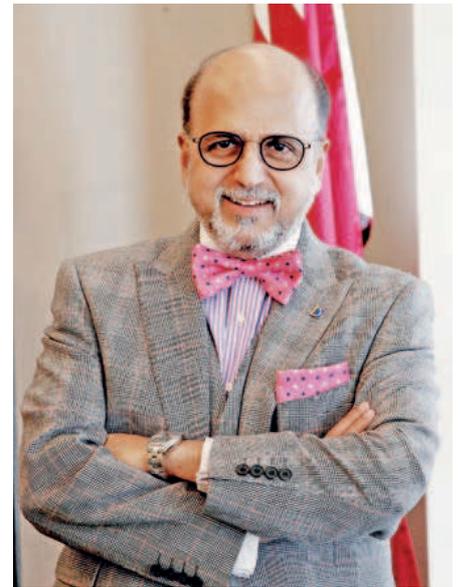
Doha Bank achieves a Profit Growth of 17.3% for the first quarter of 2021



**Net profit QAR 380 million as compared to QAR 324 million for the same period in 2020:** Sheikh Fahad Bin Mohammad Bin Jabor Al-Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Doha Bank



**The total shareholder's equity by end of quarter reached to QAR 14 billion showing an increase of 15%:** Sh. Abdul Rahman Bin Mohd Bin Jabor Al Thani, M.D of Doha Bank



**Doha Bank's financial results for the first quarter of 2021:** Dr. R. Seetharaman, Group Chief Executive Officer of Doha Bank

**H**is Excellency Sheikh Fahad Bin Mohammad Bin Jabor Al-Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Doha Bank, announced Doha Bank's financial results for the first quarter of 2021. Net profit recorded QAR 380 million as compared to QAR 324 million for the same period in 2020 showing an increase of 17.3%.

H.E. Sh. Fahad said that total assets increased by QAR 5.7 billion, a growth of 5.4%, to QAR 112.1 billion as at 31 March 2021. Net loans and advances increased to QAR 70.5 billion or by 8% as at 31 March 2021. Customer deposits showed increase of 16.2% from QAR 54.8 billion to QAR 63.7 billion as at 31 March 2021. The bank's cost to income ratio has come down to 26.5% in the first quarter as compared

to 30.8% for the same period last year.

H.E. Sheikh Abdul Rehman Bin Mohammad Bin Jabor Al-Thani, Managing Director of Doha Bank said, "The total shareholder's equity by end of quarter reached to QAR 14 billion showing an increase of 15%. The bank continued to strengthen its key capitalisation ratios, where the total capital adequacy ratio of the bank increased to 19.7% in March 2021 from 16.2% as compared to the same period last year."

H.E. Sheikh Fahad bin Muhammad bin Jabor Al Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors stated that, despite the circumstances the world is currently witnessing, it is that, under the wise leadership pursued by H.H. Sheikh/ Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, and

his directives to provide support to all sectors and banks in Qatar in the face of the Covid-19 crisis, and based on the instructions issued by Qatar Central Bank in this regard, Doha Bank will make all efforts to be a main pillar in supporting companies and individuals in benefiting from all possible facilities, and will work in line with the plan pursued by the State of Qatar to address the obstacles faced by its customers during this period to overcome this crisis.

Doha Bank is one of the largest commercial banks in the State of Qatar and has been consistently registering a strong growth during the last decade with participative leadership philosophy. Inaugurated in 1979, Doha Bank provides domestic and international banking services.

# Doha Bank Hosted an Online Event for their High Net worth Clients

**D**oha Bank hosted an online client event on 31st March 2021 on the topic of “Investment Outlook”. The event was sponsored by the Private Banking division solely for their high net worth clients in Qatar.

The event was kicked off by Slim Bouker, Head of Private Banking who briefly spoke about the partnership with Bank of Singapore, Asia’s Global Private Bank. The guest speaker Karim Aita, Director / Investment Counselor at Bank of Singapore provided a client investment outlook update and covered the following topic:

The effects of easy monetary policy and unprecedented fiscal stimulus on economic growth and risk assets.

The tipping point in treasury yields.

Rotation into Cyclical and Value stocks from Growth and Momentum stocks.

Chinese Equity turbulence, structural bull market still intact.

How to hedge against inflation?

Underweight Investment Grade Fixed Income.

Cryptocurrency Vs Gold.

FX and commodity overview.

Karim said: “We remain positive on risk assets and we recommend to stay invested during near term volatility. This is echoed through our overweight positions in equity and Emerging Markets High Yield. The long-term outlook remains positive given the vaccine driven economic recovery.

The rise in yields is reflecting improving economic growth prospects and higher inflation expectations. The tipping point where higher yields threaten to end the post-pandemic rally in risk assets still has some distance to go. Our medium-term USD forecast remains in favour of a weaker dollar although near term consolidation is likely.”

At the closing of the event Slim emphasized on the fact that Doha Bank supports the views of “Capital preservation and growth, our customers are conservative, so we encourage them to diversify their investments to better manage their risk and hedge against volatility. At the same time, it is important to stay invested in the market and invest smart for the long term.”

Doha Bank has established overseas branches in Kuwait, Dubai (UAE), Abu



**Online Event for their High Net worth Clients:** Webinar-Speakers-Doha Bank High Net Worth Clients

Dhabi (UAE), Mumbai, Chennai and Kochi (India) as well as representative offices in Japan, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Africa, South Korea, Australia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Doha Bank has received numerous awards in recognition of its achievements. Doha Bank was adjudged as the ‘Best Regional Commercial Bank’ – The Banker Middle East for the 4th straight year. Doha Bank was recently awarded as ‘Bank of the Year – Qatar Domestic Trade

Finance’ by Asian Banking & Finance. Additionally, Doha Bank has in the past claimed various other awards such as, ‘Bank of the Year’ – The Banker, ‘Best Commercial Bank in the Middle East’ – Global Banking & Finance, ‘Bank of the Year’ – ITP Group, ‘Best Bank in Qatar’ – IAIR Award and ‘Best Bank in Qatar’ – EMEA Finance.

Doha Bank is rated A by Fitch and A3 by Moody’s for its Issuer Default Rating and long-term Counter Party Risk Assessment respectively.

# Doha Bank Won “Best Digital Wallet App Qatar 2021 Award” & Doha Bank CEO Honoured as “Banking CEO of the Year Qatar 2021 Award”



**The “BANKING CEO OF THE YEAR QATAR 2021 AWARD”:** Doha Bank CEO Dr. Raghavan Seetharaman

**D**oha Bank won the “BEST DIGITAL WALLET APP QATAR 2021 AWARD”. The award was given to Doha Bank for its commitment to provide clients with latest advancements through their wallet app offering. The mobile app brings new dimension to the payment to the customers’ wallet, giving them the freedom to make safe & secure purchases, instant P2P transfers, control their cards spending. Doha Bank customers can enjoy these quick, safe, and seamless payments features simply by downloading the application from

the App Stores (Apple, Google Play) and enrolling their Doha Bank Credit or Debit Cards to the wallet. Recently Doha Bank had introduced Doha Pay Wallet.

Doha Bank CEO Dr. Raghavan Seetharaman was honoured with the “BANKING CEO OF THE YEAR QATAR 2021 AWARD” from the International Business Magazine. The award was given to him for bringing transformational leadership in Doha Bank with focus on technology and sustainable development.

Best Digital Wallet App  
CEO of the Year PR200421

On receiving the award, Dr. R. Seetharaman highlighted on technology developments “Doha Bank has been at the forefront of developing leading banking solutions for valued customers locally and internationally. The bank has pioneered in Internet Banking, SMS Banking, IT Security, Borderless banking and web based architecture. Doha Bank has taken the responsibility of constantly evolving with changing technologies and introducing state of the art products and services. The adoption of Emerging Technologies and implementing IT transformation initiatives has also provided Doha Bank a platform in building Digital Eco Systems. Doha Bank has built a reputation as an innovative bank in Qatar and has leveraged on technology to provide better solutions to its customers. Doha Bank also hosted knowledge sharing sessions virtually in 2020 during the COVID-19 times covering bilateral relationships with Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, India, Singapore, Turkey, UK, Germany, Srilanka and Bangladesh.”

Dr. R. Seetharaman gave insights on the initiatives of Doha Bank on sustainable development. He said “Doha Bank advocates and practices Green Banking, which is one of the core business philosophies that would support the sustainability into the future. Doha Bank has worked on “ECO-Schools Programme” which works with educational institutions to build awareness of key environmental issues. It had launched Green Credit Card. Green Accounts are Doha Bank’s answer to a proactive approach on eco-friendly banking towards its drive for a cleaner and greener environment by promoting the concept of “Paperless Banking “. Internet Banking, SMS Banking, Phone Banking, E-Remittances and Bills Payments through online also encourage eco-friendly banking. Doha Bank also conducted Green Quiz and seminars on Global warming and climatic changes to spread environmental awareness in various countries. Doha Bank has hosted Green fun run and support tree planting activity to generate awareness of environmental preservation and protecting the natural environment. Doha Bank has also provided funding for district cooling facilities.”

# Doha Bank Becomes the First Bank in Qatar to Launch a Full Suite of Visa Corporate Card Solutions



**Visa Corporate Card solutions catering for SMEs and Corporate Clients in Qatar:** Doha Bank CEO Dr. Raghavan Seetharaman Braik Al Marri – Chief Retail Banking Officer

**D**oha Bank has collaborated with Visa to launch Visa Corporate Card solutions to cater for SME & corporate clients in Qatar.

Doha Bank has collaborated with Visa, the world's leader in digital payments, to become the first bank in Qatar to launch a full suite of Visa Corporate Card solutions catering for SMEs and Corporate Clients in Qatar.

The launch revealed Doha Bank's new Visa Corporate Card solutions, whereby businesses and corporates are able to manage and have greater control over their employee expenses, travel & entertainment expenses and general business expenses in a simple and easy manner.

Businesses and corporates are now able to simply go online and access a self-service tool – Visa Payment Controls, where they are able to effectively manage their Visa Corporate Card program by establishing limits for each card, establishing account alerts and avoid improper business spend by placing robust controls around time, location, category and spending limits. Doha Bank's key focus is to address "Payments to Suppliers" for which

the Visa Corporate Card can function as a payment tool for Qatar's key corporates and the SME sector – allowing for cash flow extension and stronger working capital management especially during the pandemic period where cash flow has been a key issue across the market.

Simplifying payments allows businesses to not only streamline their accounts payable function and pay their suppliers in a digital fashion with ease, but it gives back time to allow businesses to focus on their core objectives such as running a business and increasing revenue and profitability. Doha Bank is also currently working with Visa to issue Virtual Corporate Cards in the near future – a technology that allows instant issuance of a one-time use virtual cards to suppliers in the "buyer and supplier" supply chain. In addition, this will also benefit travel use cases when a one-time card is sent to the mobile phone of individuals/employees when they receive their hotel's final checkout bill to settle.

On this occasion Braik Al Marri – Chief Retail Banking Officer said, "Doha Bank is proud and excited to add yet an-

other product to its vast array of services. With the bank's focus to be a driving force in the local Qatari economy, the Doha Bank Visa Corporate Card will not only help us build our clientele but will also help corporates adopt smarter and robust technologies. Doha Bank and Visa share a strong relationship and have partnered on various "first-in-the-market products" in the recent past. The launch of the Doha Bank Visa Corporate Card reinforces our commitment to our long-standing partnership with Visa and to the growing payment needs in the local economy."

Dr. Sudheer Nair, Visa's Country Manager for Qatar, said, "We are delighted to see Doha Bank become the first bank in Qatar to launch our full suite of Visa Corporate card solutions for the local businesses. After a difficult year for many businesses, particularly SMBs, our Visa Corporate Card solution is an attractive proposition for businesses looking to reduce cost and streamline expense reporting both easily and securely. We continue to work with our partners like Doha Bank in supporting local businesses in their recovery and the country's economic growth."

# BBK Discloses its Financial Results for the First Quarter Ended 31st March 2021



**Well positioning BBK for further future success.:** Chairman of the Board of Directors of BBK Murad Ali Murad



**Adopting various measures to enhance resilience and efficiency:** Dr. AbdulRahman Saif, BBK's Group CE

**B**BK (trading code BBKB.BH) announces its financial results for the quarter ended 31st March 2021. The bank achieved a net profit attributable to the owners of the bank of BD 14.3 million, compared to BD 17.1 million for the same period in the previous year, representing a decrease of 16.4%. The basic and diluted earnings per share were 10 fils compared to 12 fils during the corresponding period last year.

Total comprehensive income attributable to owners of the Bank for the three months ended 31st March 2021 amounted to BD 18.5 million compared to total comprehensive loss of BD 140.8 million during the corresponding period last year. The significant increase in total comprehensive income is attributable to the increase in valuation of investment securities as financial markets continued to recover from the sharp drop experienced during the first quarter of year 2020.

The drop in net profit is mainly related to decrease in net fees and commission income by 42.9% from BD 6.3 million reported during the first quarter of 2020 to BD 3.6 million achieved during the first quarter of the current year, mainly due to the impact of new regulatory caps on fees and charges that came into effect

around mid-2020 on retail and credit card business.

In addition, the Bank's share of profit from associated companies and joint ventures declined from a profit of BD 0.8 million during the first quarter of 2020 to a loss of BD 1.4 million during the first quarter of 2021, largely due to the adverse impact of the pandemic on the financial performance of the Bank's associates and joint ventures.

On the other hand, Investment and other income registered a robust increase by 31.8% from BD 4.4 million to BD 5.8 million during the current reporting period due to the strong rebound in financial markets. Net interest income was only marginally lower at BD 20.9 million (BD 21.0 million same period of last year) despite the frequent and substantial interest rate drops during year 2020, demonstrating the resilience and flexibility of the Bank's business model and its exceptional ability to adapt and digest unpredicted operating environment changes. In addition, the Bank continued to take vigorous measures to optimize operating costs, which in turn helped to effectively decrease operating costs by 10.9% to BD 14.7 million (BD 16.5 million same period last year) despite continued investment in digitalization

and other strategic initiatives.

The total shareholders' equity attributable to the owners of the Bank as of end March 2021 stood marginally lower than the end of the financial year at BD 501.1 million (BD 511.8 million as of end of December 2020), mainly due to the cash dividend declaration to shareholders during the first quarter of 2021.

The total assets by the end of March 2021 reached BD 3,741.8 million compared to BD 3,760.4 million as of the 2020 financial year-end, registering a marginal decrease of 0.5%. Treasury bills registered a decrease of 29.1% to reach BD 345.8 million compared to BD 487.8 million as of end of December 2020. Investments in associated companies and joint ventures stood at BD 63.0 million as of end of March 2021 (31st December 2020: BD 65.5 million). On the other hand, cash and balances with central banks increased by 38.5% to stand at BD 355.2 million compared to BD 256.5 million as of end of December 2020, reflecting robust liquidity position of the bank during unstable business environments. In addition, the Investment portfolio increased by 1.2% to stand at BD 969.2 million compared to BD 957.3 million as of end of December 2020, also net loans and advances registered a slight increase of 0.6% to reach BD 1,565.2 million compared to BD 1,555.8 million as of end of December 2020. The total customer deposits increased by 1.1% to stand at BD 2,192.1 million (31st December 2020: BD 2,167.4 million), while the loans to customer deposits ratio remained at a good level of 71.4% (31st December 2020: 71.8%).

The board of directors has praised the bank's financial results and mentioned, "BBK continues to put in place measures to optimize its operations and improve its financial resilience in response to the current global pandemic and the unprecedented economic environment, and this has been reflected in the bank's financial results for this quarter. Despite all the challenges and the drop in profitability across the banking sector, we are delighted to continue to provide attractive returns to our shareholders. Also, we are very proud of the role we continue to play since the very beginning of the pandemic in supporting our customers and the communi-

ties in which we operate. In BBK we look forward to the future with optimism and we are confident that with the Bank's solid fundamentals, together with the support of our shareholders, loyalty of our customers, and the dedication of the management team and employees we will emerge from this crisis stronger."

Also commenting on the results, Dr. AbdulRahman Saif, BBK's Group CE said,

"The challenges posed by the pandemic continued to adversely impact various economic sectors, including the banking sector. In BBK, we vigorously adopted various measures to enhance our resilience and efficiency, to adapt the new challenges, focusing on the long-term sustainability of our group, while at the same time supporting our employees, customers and the communities in which we

operate, to alleviate the negative impact of the pandemic. Such measures, coupled with solid cost and risk discipline and exceptional client relationship management enabled us to continue to generate attractive returns to our shareholders, and preserve a robust capital and liquidity position that enable us to continue supporting our customers, and well positioning BBK for further future success."

## Doha Bank Hosted a Meeting for Srilankan Delegation

**D**oha Bank had a meeting with the Srilankan delegation headed by Hon. Ajith Nivard Cabraal, Member of Parliament of Sri Lanka, State Minister of Money & Capital Market and State Enterprise Reforms and N W G R D Nanayakkara, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka on 10th April 2021. The other dignitaries include H.E M Mafaz Mohideen, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Qatar, Dr. Mohamed Z. M. Aazim, Superintendent of Public Debt Department, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Dr. Chandranath Amarasekara Director of Economic Research, Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

Dr. R. Seetharaman, CEO of Doha Bank highlighted on key developments in Qatar which includes its recent LNG expansion plans. Qatar Petroleum (QP)'s North Field East Project (NFE) is expected to start production in the fourth quarter of 2025. The NFE project represents the first phase of LNG expansion in the State of Qatar, while the second phase, referred to as the North Field South Project (NFS). With an expected production start date in 2027, the NFS project involves the construction of two additional mega LNG trains and associated offshore and onshore facilities. According to IMF April 2021, Qatar economy expected to grow by 2.4% in 2021.

Dr. R. Seetharaman gave insights on Srilankan economy. According to IMF April 2021, Srilankan economy expected to grow by 4% in 2021. Srilanka's recent monetary policy has maintained low interest rates and policy rate at which money is injected overnight at 5.5 percent and the rate at which excess money is deposited at 4.5 percent. Srilankan fiscal policy for 2021 has a deficit of 8.9% of GDP. Srilanka Vision 2025 has given thrust on FDI and exports and to improve per-capita income.

Dr. R. Seetharaman highlighted on bilateral relationships between Srilanka and Qatar. He said "Sri Lanka has enjoyed



**Srilankan event- Doha Bank:** Sri Lanka's State Minister of Money, Capital Market, and State Enterprise Reforms H E Ajith Nivard Cabraal (second left), Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka N W G R D Nanayakkara (first right), Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Qatar H E Mohamed Mafaz Mohideen (second right), and Doha Bank CEO Dr. R Seetharaman during the Doha Bank-hosted meeting in Doha recently

close ties with Qatar, with over 120,000 Sri Lankans. There are more than 200 Srilankan companies established in partnership with Qatari side. Doha Bank entered into agreements with the four biggest Srilankan banks to facilitate the remittances from Qatar to Sri Lanka. Doha Bank also playing an important role to facilitate trade finance opportunities between Qatar and Srilanka and has seen a substantial growth in the past few months. Qatari businessmen should explore the huge investment opportunities in Sri Lanka and establish business partnerships and alliances with their Sri Lankan counterparts. Many Sri Lankan companies are looking to take part in Qatari projects and establish joint ventures in all sectors.

Qatar Airways and SriLankan Airlines Announce Significant Codeshare Expansion in Dec 2019."

Hon. State Minister Cabraal gave insight on investment opportunities in Srilanka. He said "Construction of new terminals, supporting logistic establishments, Ship building and repairing industries, Developing minor ports & connectivity, Expanding related leisure activities and Marine support industries are some of the areas which offers potential."

N W G R D Nanayakkara, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka stated it was a fruitful tour with Qatar that has opened several avenues for Sri Lanka. Meetings with Dr. R. Seetharaman was very useful.

## Tunisia: World Bank Funds US\$300 million to Consolidate Social Safety Nets for Children and Poor Households

The World Bank Group's Board of Executive Directors today approved US\$ 300 million in financing for the COVID-19 Social Protection Emergency Response Project. The new project will provide cash transfers for approximately 1 million vulnerable Tunisian households to help them deal with the economic impact of the COVID crisis, while also supporting the roll out of a comprehensive national social safety net system. The latter will assist the country in building its ability to better respond to future economic shocks.

The project will also help protect more than 100,000 vulnerable children under five years old by covering their health and educational needs through a new child allowance program.

"Tunisia needs a sound social safety net to help protect the poor against the worst effects of health and economic crises such as the ones we are experiencing today," said Tony Verheijen, World Bank Tunisia Country Manager. "This new project will help the Government of Tunisia accelerate the implementation of its safety net program, protect the health and education of the most vulnerable children, and ultimately improve the lives of millions of Tunisians in the years ahead."

The project has three main pillars. Through the first pillar (US\$ 245 million), the project will fund emergency cash transfers to poor and vulnerable households, including those that have become poor due to the COVID crisis, and it will support the permanent Amen social safety net.

The second pillar (US\$ 32 million), will help protect human capital of youth from the country's most vulnerable families. The project will increase allowances for vulnerable families with children under 5 years old to provide better access to health services and education – the building blocks of human capital.

And through the third pillar (US\$ 22 million), the project will strengthen the social protection system to deliver efficient and inclusive programs capable of protecting Tunisians through any crisis in the years and decades to come.

## Zarif's leaked recording aimed to create 'discord' during Iran nuclear talks: Rouhani

Iran's president said the leak of an audio recording of his top diplomat was aimed at creating "discord" in the Islamic republic during talks aimed at reviving a nuclear deal.

"It was published right when the Vienna (talks) were at the height of their success, so that it creates discord inside" Iran, Hassan Rouhani told a meeting of his cabinet in televised remarks.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he favored a "smart adjustment" between the military and diplomatic spheres, in his first public reaction after the controversial leaked audiotape.

The top diplomat wrote on Instagram that the "main point" of his remarks in the audio – in which he says the military has too much influence on diplomacy – is emphasizing "the need for a smart adjustment of the relationship between these two wings" of Iran's power. —AFP

## Syria's Assad submits candidacy for May vote

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has been in power for 21 years, has submitted his candidacy for next month's presidential election, state media said.

"Parliament was informed by the high constitutional court that Bashar Hafez al-Assad has filed a request" to run in the upcoming poll, the official SANA news agency said.

Five other candidates have so far filed applications with the high constitutional court, it said.

The little-known contenders include a former lawmaker and several businessmen.

Presidential hopefuls have until April 28 to put forth their candidacy for the second such vote to be held since the start of the country's civil war a decade ago.

They will have to garner support from at least 35 members of the 250-seat parliament, which is dominated by Assad's Baath party.

They must have lived continuously in Syria for at least 10 years, meaning that opposition figures in exile are barred. —AFP

## Egypt Says Killed Three Suspects in Jihadist Murder of Copt

Egypt's interior ministry said it killed three "terrorist elements" in the Sinai Peninsula suspected of involvement in the execution of a Coptic Christian claimed by an Islamic State-affiliated group.

"National security received intelligence about a group of terrorist elements involved in the killing of Nabil Habashi... in North Sinai... with the aim of carrying out hostile operations targeting the homes and houses of worship of Coptic citizens," the ministry said in a statement.

Three suspected militants were killed in an "intense firefight" with security forces, the ministry added.

The ministry said its troops found one suicide belt and a hand grenade in the militants' possession. It said a manhunt was continuing for other suspected members of the cell.

In a 13-minute video released by IS affiliate Sinai Province, the 62-year-old Copt from Bir al-Abd in North Sinai is shot dead at point blank range by a militant flanked by two others carrying rifles.

"As for you Christians of Egypt, this is the price you are paying for supporting the Egyptian army," the militant who executes the man says in the video shared widely on messaging app Telegram.

The Coptic Orthodox Church, which is followed by most members of Egypt's Christian minority, who make up between 10 and 15 percent of its 100-million population, paid tribute to Habashi.

"He kept the faith till the moment he was killed... The church affirms its steadfast support of the Egyptian state's efforts in quelling hateful terror acts," the church's spokesperson said.

Two young Sinai tribesmen were also seen being executed in the video, with the militants accusing them of fighting alongside the Egyptian military.

The long-running, jihadist insurgency in North Sinai escalated in 2013 when the army overthrew Egypt's elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.

Most attacks have been carried out in the Sinai Peninsula but they have also used the territory as a launchpad to strike elsewhere in Egypt, such as the bombing of a chapel next to the Coptic cathedral in Cairo in 2016.

In February 2018, the government launched a nationwide operation against militants focused on North Sinai.

The army says some 975 suspected militants have been killed in the ongoing campaign.

But the region has remained largely cut off to journalists, making the compilation of independent casualty figures almost impossible. —AFP

## Saudi and Iranian officials held talks to patch up relations FT

Senior Saudi and Iranian officials have been holding direct talks in a bid to repair relations between the two regional rivals, four years after they cut off diplomatic ties, the Financial Times reported, citing officials briefed on the discussions.

The first round of Saudi-Iranian talks took place in Baghdad on April 9 and included discussions about the Houthi attacks and were positive, FT report added, citing one of the officials. — Reuters

## Militants attack north Iraq oil wells, production unaffected ministry

At least 32 people were killed and 84 injured recently when militants using explosives attacked two oil wells northwest of Kirkuk in northern Iraq but no significant damage resulted and production was not affected, the Iraqi oil ministry said.

The attack at the Bay Hassan oilfield “did not cause a fire or damage, affect production or stop oil pumping from the well,” the ministry said in a statement. — Reuters

## Saudi Arabia’s city of roses blooms in Ramadan

Every spring, roses bloom in the western Saudi city of Taif, turning pockets of the kingdom’s vast desert landscape a vivid and fragrant pink.

In April, they are harvested for the essential oil used to cleanse the outer walls of the sacred Kaaba, the cubic structure in the holy city of Mecca towards which Muslims around the world pray.

This year, the harvest falls during the holy fasting month of Ramadan, which observant Muslims devote to prayer and reflection.

Workers at the Bin Salman farm tend rose bushes and pick tens of thousands of flowers each day to produce rose water and oil, also prized components in the cosmetic and culinary industries.

The perfumed oil has become popular among the millions of Muslims who visit the kingdom every year for pilgrimages.

Patterns of plants and flowers have long been part of Islamic art.

Known as the city of roses, with approximately 300 million blooms every year, Taif has more than 800 flower farms, many of which have opened their doors to visitors.

While workers pick flowers in the fields, others labor in sheds, filling and weighing baskets by hand. The flowers are then boiled and distilled.

“We start boiling the roses on high heat until they are almost evaporated, and this takes around 30 to 35 minutes,” Khalaf al-Tuweiri, who owns the Bin Salman farm, told AFP.

“After that we lower the heat for around 15 to 30 minutes until the distilling process starts, which lasts for eight hours.”

Once the oil floats to the top of the glass jars, the extraction process begins. The oil is then extracted with a large syringe to fill different-sized vials, the smallest going for 400 Saudi riyals (\$106).—AFP

## Turkish delegation to visit Egypt in May for ‘normalisation’ talks: Foreign Minister

A Turkish delegation will visit Egypt next month as part of Ankara’s efforts to mend ties, the foreign minister said.

“Egypt invited a delegation from Turkey. The delegation will go in early May,” Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told the private NTV broadcaster. “We will discuss openly how to normalise relations.”

Turkey and Egypt froze ties after the 2013 overthrow of ex-Islamist president Mohamed Morsi, who forged close ties with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

That year, both countries expelled each others’ ambassadors and Cairo had then declared the Turkish envoy “persona non grata.”

But Turkish officials last month said Ankara had established the first diplomatic contacts with Cairo since 2013 as part of wider efforts to repair relations with other Middle Eastern rivals.

Cavusoglu said the first delegation talks would be at the level of deputy foreign ministers, ahead of a contact between the ministers. “I hope we will all together further improve relations,” he said.—AFP

## IOM launches its Five-Year strategy for the MENA region to effectively address growing challenges facing migrants

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Office launched today its 2020-2024 Regional Strategy, with an online event including panelists from governments, the League of Arab States, UN agencies, regional institutions, academics and other stakeholders in the region.

Guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and Agenda 2063 of the African Union Commission (AUC), this strategy aims to prioritize three key pillars - resilience, mobility and governance - for 2020 to 2024, in line with the implementation of IOM’s 2019-2023 Strategic Vision.

The 2020-2024 Regional MENA Strategy reflects how the organization will navigate years to effectively address the growing complex challenges and uncertainties in the fields of migration, mobility and humanitarian aid and to seize the opportunities that migration can offer to both migrants and society.

“The strategic pillars reflect the reality that it is no longer possible to work through strictly defined programmatic areas, but rather through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to manage migration in a way that recognizes its transnational, transboundary and multi-dimensional nature,” said IOM Director General, Antonio Vitorino, in his opening remarks.

“This strategy is based on IOM’s institutional approach to Migration and Sustainable Development which comprehensively integrate migration and development into policymaking and programming within IOM,” said IOM MENA Regional Director Carmela Godeau. “IOM MENA strategy seeks to bring greater coherence and development impact to IOM’s activities.”

The strategy was formulated in accordance with regional priorities and Member States’ efforts to enhance migration governance and always protect vulnerable populations. IOM aspires to further support governments in national priorities and regional and international commitments to allow migrants, displaced populations, and host communities to exercise their rights.

The first GCM Regional Review in the Arab Region, held in February 2021, shed light on the cruciality of managing migration through a 360-degree approach to “Build back better” together. Many stakeholders and actors across the region are now showing a growing enthusiasm to integrate this holistic approach into the ways in which they plan, deliver and operate.

While IOM remains committed to ensuring that migration is safe, orderly and regular, this regional strategy will be reviewed periodically to ensure that the ongoing and emerging impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and other significant regional and global developments are being addressed effectively.—UNIC

## 20 killed, 3 injured when bus, truck crash in southern Egypt

Abus overturned while trying to pass a truck on a highway in southern Egypt, causing a collision that killed at least 20 people and injured three others, authorities said.

The bus was travelling from Cairo when it turned over and was hit by the truck on a road in the southern province of Assiut, 320 kilometers (199 miles) south of Cairo, Assiut Gov. Essam Saad said in a statement. Both vehicles caught fire, it added.

Photos released by the governor’s office showed a burned out bus, with rescue teams looking for survivors. The victims were taken to nearby hospitals, the statement said.

Traffic accidents kill thousands every year in Egypt, which has a poor transportation safety record. Crashes are mostly caused by speeding, bad roads or poor enforcement of traffic laws.

The country’s official statistics agency says around 10,000 road accidents took place in 2019, the most recent year for which statistics are available, leaving over 3,480 dead. In 2018, there were 8,480 car accidents, causing over 3,080 deaths. —AFP

## DFS Aviation Services welcomes new second managing director

As of the second quarter of this year, Pierre Hermann, together with managing director Andreas Pötzsch, continues to manage the international business of DFS Aviation Services (DFS).

Pierre Hermann previously held various executive positions in parent company DFS Deutsche Flugsicherung (DFS), including head of Aeronautical Information Management (AIM). The graduate industrial engineer began his career at DFS back in 1999 with responsibility for marketing the Academy of German Air Traffic Control.

At DFS Aviation Services, Pierre Hermann will be responsible in particular for Finance, Air Traffic System Development and Maintenance, Project Management and Business Development & Marketing/PR. He states: "I'm very much looking forward to joining the commercial business of the DFS group, and would like to drive the successful development of DFS Aviation Services. The DFS group offers an innovative, future-focused portfolio of products and services for both the national and international aviation sector. With a strong team of expert colleagues, and building on our extensive customer base and network of investments and partners, I would like to actively develop the positive business performance of DFS Aviation Services."

Andreas Pötzsch, DAS managing director, says: "Pierre Hermann knows the ins and outs of the ATM sector and has been instrumental in his previous roles at DFS in creating lean, reliable processes. He also has valuable contacts from his international work which we can make good use of for the further growth of our company. We really appreciate having someone as experienced and knowledgeable as Pierre on board at DAS."

## Erdogan says Biden's Armenian genocide recognition 'destructive'

Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently denounced US President Joe Biden's recognition of the Armenian genocide as "groundless" and harmful to bilateral ties.

Erdogan had issued a carefully-worded statement moments before Biden made his landmark announcement at a ceremony commemorating the tragic 1915-17 events.

But the Turkish president did not hold back his anger in a televised address that he also used to point out the US history of slavery and persecution of Native Americans.

"The US president has made comments that are groundless and unfair," Erdogan said.

"We believe that these comments were included in the declaration following pressure from radical Armenian groups and anti-Turkish circles. But this situation does not reduce the destructive impact of these comments."

The Armenians — supported by historians and scholars — say 1.5 million of their people died in a genocide committed under the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

Ankara accepts that both Armenians and Turks died in huge numbers as Ottoman forces fought tsarist Russia.

But Turkey vehemently denies a deliberate policy of genocide and notes that the term had not been legally defined at the time.

Biden tried to temper the inevitable Turkish anger by calling Erdogan for the first time since taking office in January.

The two leaders agreed in a phone call to meet on the sidelines of a NATO summit in June.

But Erdogan said on that Biden needed "to look in the mirror" when calling the century-old events a genocide.

"We can also talk about what happened to Native Americans, Blacks and in Vietnam," Erdogan said.

Turkey summoned the US ambassador to complain that

Biden's decision had opened "a wound in relations that is difficult to repair."

Washington had been bracing for a furious Turkish response.

The United States closed its Ankara embassy and the consulate in Istanbul and two other cities for citizen and visa services as a precaution for Monday and Tuesday.

The embassy also issued an advisory to US citizens in Turkey "to avoid the areas around US government buildings, and exercise heightened caution in locations where Americans or foreigners may gather."

Dozens of angry Turks shouted slogans and held up banners at a rally lately outside the US consulate in Istanbul.

"Turkish people, stand up against American lies," said one banner. Another called on Turkey to shut down an air base US forces have been using since the Cold War.—AFP

## Armenian PM triggers early election a day after Biden's genocide announcement

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who was swept to power in pro-democracy protests in 2018, triggered an early election to try overcome criticism over his handling of last year's conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

His resignation, which was expected, came a day after U.S. President Joe Biden said that massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 constituted genocide, a move welcomed by Armenians worldwide and condemned by Turkey.

Pashinyan told Biden the symbolic decision was a matter of security to Armenia after the six week conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, in which Turkey backed Armenia's neighbour Azerbaijan, where the ethnic Armenian-populated enclave is located.

Pashinyan had been under pressure to resign since he agreed to a ceasefire after ethnic Armenians lost territory in the fighting with Azeri forces in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

He had already named a June 20 date for an early election.

Announcing his resignation, he said on his Facebook page that he was returning power received from citizens to them so they could decide the future of the government through free and fair elections. He said he had been compelled to agree to the peace deal, which was brokered by Russia, to prevent greater human and territorial losses. The Armenian army called for his resignation and he then tried to sack the chief of staff, a decision blocked by the former Soviet republic's president.

Pashinyan updated Russian President Vladimir Putin about the elections and the situation over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, where around 2,000 Russian peacekeepers have been deployed, in a phone call, the Kremlin said.

The Armenian Prime Minister has complained before that some issues over the region, including the return of prisoners of war, have not been resolved yet.

According to the Sputnik media outlet, Pashinyan's My Step ruling alliance led an opinion poll conducted by Gallup International Association at the end of last month.

Its main rival is likely to be a grouping led by Robert Kocharyan, Armenia's president from 1998-2008. — Reuters

## Turkey to issue warrant for missing crypto founder: Reports

Turkish authorities recently started procedures to issue an international warrant to arrest and extradite the missing founder of a cryptocurrency exchange, state media reported. Thodex founder Faruk Fatih Ozer fled, officials said, to the Albanian capital of Tirana with a reported \$2 billion in investors' assets.—AFP

## India's PM addresses Leaders' Summit on Climate,

## pushes for concrete action to combat climate change

India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has said that for humanity to combat Climate Change, concrete action is needed at a high speed, on a large scale, and with a global scope.

"We in India, are doing our part; despite the development challenges, India has taken many bold steps on clean energy, energy efficiency, afforestation and bio-diversity," Modi said as addressing the Leaders' Summit on Climate Change through video conferencing.

"India's ambitious renewable energy target of 450 Gigawatts by 2030 shows our commitment. Our per capita carbon footprint is 60 per cent lower than the global average and it is because our lifestyle is still rooted in sustainable traditional practices," the Prime Minister added. He went on to say that India, a climate-responsible developing country, welcomed partners to create templates of sustainable development in India. "These can also help other developing countries, who need affordable access to green finance and clean technologies," he explained.

Modi announced launching, along with US President Joe Biden, the India-US climate and clean energy Agenda 2030 partnership. "Together, India and the US will help mobilise investments, demonstrate clean technologies, and enable green collaborations."

He then emphasised the importance of lifestyle change in climate action. "Sustainable lifestyles and a guiding philosophy of Back to Basics must be an important pillar of our economic strategy for the post-COVID era. Climate Change is a lived reality for millions around the world and their lives and livelihoods are already facing its adverse consequences," maintained Modi.

The Prime Minister then highlighted the fact that humanity was battling a global pandemic and that this event was a timely reminder that the grave threat posed by Climate Change had not disappeared. Recalling the words of Swami Vivekananda Arise, awake and stop not until the goal is reached, Modi called upon everyone to make it a "Decade of Action" against climate change.

## China launches core module for its first permanent space station

China launched the core module for its first permanent space station that will host astronauts long-term.

The Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony," module blasted into space atop a Long March 5B rocket from the Wenchang Launch Center on the southern island province of Hainan, marking another major advance for the country's space exploration program that has chalked up a series of accomplishments in recent months. The launch begins the first of 11 missions necessary to construct and provision the station and send up a three-person crew by the end of next year. The astronauts will live on the station for six months at a time.

China's space programme has also recently brought back the first new lunar samples in more than 40 years and expects to land a probe and rover on the surface of Mars later next month.—AFP

## UK PM denies wrongdoing in Downing Street flat makeover

Prime Minister Boris Johnson lately denied breaking the rules over the refurbishment of his Downing Street flat, as Britain's Electoral Commission watchdog launched a formal probe.

"I've conformed in full with the code of conduct and ministerial code," Johnson told parliament, as he came under sustained pressure to state who paid for the lavish revamp, and wider accusations of cronyism and favoured access.—AFP

## Quake of magnitude 6 strikes India's Assam, dam-

## ages some buildings

An earthquake of magnitude 6 struck India's rugged northeastern state of Assam recently, causing cracks in the walls and floors of some structures, but no immediate casualties were reported.

The quake hit at a depth of 34 km (21 miles) near the town of Dhekiajuli, 140 km (86 miles) north of the main city of Guwahati, the United States Geological Survey said.

"This earthquake was the biggest I can remember, there was first a big jolt and then a smaller one," said a police official in the town. "We did not receive any distress calls, but people did run out of their homes."

People streamed into the streets for fear of fresh tremors, with some saying the quake left cracks in their homes.

"Our entire multi-storied apartment has witnessed massive damage with roofs and walls caving in," said Subham Hazarika, a businessman living in an upmarket apartment in Guwahati. "Luckily no one got injured."

Strong tremors repeatedly struck other northeastern areas and the neighbouring mountainous region of Bhutan.

"We don't have reports of any casualties but we are seeing images and visuals of extensive damage," Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told Reuters.

Earlier, the European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) had put the quake's magnitude at 6.2. India's disaster management officials were assessing reports of destruction and casualties, said one of the officials, who sought anonymity.

"I pray for the well-being of all and urge everyone to stay alert," Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal told Reuters television partner ANI. —Reuters

## France detains ex-members of Red Brigades sought by Italy: presidency

France detained seven former members of left-wing terror group the Red Brigades at the request of Italy, and is seeking three more, the French presidency said. It said the decision to move against the 10, among 200 people that Italy has been seeking from France for years, was taken by President Emmanuel Macron. —AFP

## Kanye West sneakers fetch record \$1.8M at private sale

A pair of prototype Nikes worn by Kanye West during his performances of "Hey Mama" and "Stronger" at the Grammy Awards in 2008 has shattered the record for a pair of sneakers ever sold.

Sotheby's announced that West's so-called "Grammy Worn" Nike Air Yeezy 1 fetched \$1.8 in a private sale. It was acquired by RARES, a sneaker investment marketplace.

The sale marks the highest publicly recorded price for a sneaker sale and the first pair of sneakers to top \$1 million. Sotheby's brokered the private sale.

The size 12 shoes designed by West and Mark Smith are made of soft black leather with perforated detailing throughout the upper, and the heel overlay is branded with a tonal swoosh. The design features the iconic Yeezy forefoot strap and signature 'Y' medallion lacelocks in bright pink.

The price is nearly triple the auction record for a sneaker set in 2020 at Christie's for \$615,000. That was a pair of '85 Jordan 1s that the basketball superstar wore when he famously shattered the backboard during a pre-season game in Italy.

"We are thrilled with the result, which has nearly tripled the highest price on record," Brahm Wachter, Sotheby's head of streetwear and modern collectables, said in a statement. "The sale speaks volumes of Kanye's legacy as one of the most influential clothing and sneaker designers of our time, and of the Yeezy franchise he has built which has become an industry titan."—AP

# World Adds Record New Renewable Energy Capacity

Despite COVID-19 pandemic, more than 260GW of renewable energy capacity added globally in 2020, beating previous record by almost 50%

**G**lobal renewable energy capacity additions in 2020 beat earlier estimates and all previous records despite the economic slowdown that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to data released by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) the world added more than 260 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy capacity last year, exceeding expansion in 2019 by close to 50 per cent.

IRENA's annual Renewable Capacity Statistics 2021 shows that renewable energy's share of all new generating capacity rose considerably for the second year in a row. More than 80 per cent of all new electricity capacity added last year was renewable, with solar and wind accounting for 91 per cent of new renewables.

Renewables' rising share of the total is partly attributable to net decommissioning of fossil fuel power generation in Europe, North America and for the first time across Eurasia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russian Federation and Turkey). Total fossil fuel additions fell to 60 GW in 2020 from 64 GW the previous year highlighting a continued downward trend of fossil fuel expansion.

"These numbers tell a remarkable story of resilience and hope. Despite the challenges and the uncertainty of 2020, renewable energy emerged as a source of undeniable optimism for a better, more equitable, resilient, clean and just future," said IRENA Director-General Francesco La Camera. "The great reset offered a moment of reflection and chance to align our trajectory with the path to inclusive prosperity, and there are signs we are grasping it."

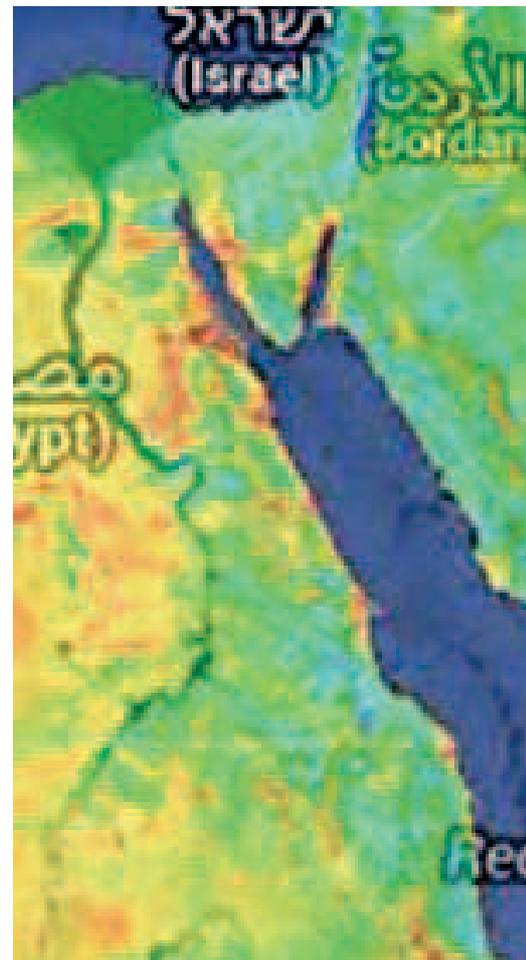
"Despite the difficult period, as we predicted, 2020 marks the start of the decade of renewables," continued La Camera. "Costs

are falling, clean tech markets are growing and never before have the benefits of the energy transition been so clear. This trend is unstoppable, but as the review of our World Energy Transitions Outlook highlights, there is a huge amount to be done. Our 1.5 degree outlook shows significant planned energy investments must be redirected to support the transition if we are to achieve 2050 goals. In this critical decade of action, the international community must look to this trend as a source of inspiration to go further," he concluded.

The 10.3 per cent rise in installed capacity represents expansion that beats long-term trends of more modest growth year on year. At the end of 2020, global renewable generation capacity amounted to 2 799 GW with hydropower still accounting for the largest share (1 211 GW) although solar and wind are catching up fast. The two variable sources of renewables dominated capacity expansion in 2020 with 127 GW and 111 GW of new installations for solar and wind respectively.

China and the United States of America were the two outstanding growth markets from 2020. China, already the world's largest market for renewables added 136 GW last year with the bulk coming from 72 GW of wind and 49 GW of solar. The United States of America installed 29 GW of renewables last year, nearly 80 per cent more than in 2019, including 15 GW of solar and around 14 GW of wind. Africa continued to expand steadily with an increase of 2.6 GW, slightly more than in 2019, while Oceania remained the fastest growing region (+18.4%), although its share of global capacity is small and almost all expansion occurred in Australia.

Highlights by technology:



Work at the Middle East's largest wind farm in Saudi Arabia

**Hydropower:** Growth in hydro recovered in 2020, with the commissioning of several large projects delayed in 2019. China added 12 GW of capacity, followed by Turkey with 2.5 GW.

**Wind energy:** Wind expansion almost doubled in 2020 compared to 2019 (111 GW compared to 58 GW last year). China added 72 GW of new capacity, followed by the United States of America (14 GW). Ten other countries increased wind capacity by more than 1 GW in 2020. Offshore wind increased to reach around 5% of total wind capacity in 2020.

**Solar energy:** Total solar capacity has now reached about the same level as wind capacity thanks largely to expansion in Asia (78 GW) in 2020. Major capacity increases in China (49 GW) and Viet Nam (11 GW). Japan also added over 5 GW and India and Republic of Korea both expanded solar capacity by more than 4 GW. The United States of America added 15 GW.

**Bioenergy:** Net capacity expansion fell by half in 2020 (2.5 GW compared to 6.4 GW in 2019). Bioenergy capacity in China expanded by over 2 GW. Europe the only other region with significant expansion in



**Saudi Arabia reaches 50% completion:** *The Middle East's largest wind farm in Saudi Arabia*

2020, adding 1.2 GW of bioenergy capacity, a similar to 2019.

**Geothermal energy:** Very little capacity added in 2020. Turkey increased capacity by 99 MW and small expansions occurred in New Zealand, the United States of America and Italy.

**Off-grid electricity:** Off-grid capacity grew by 365 MW in 2020 (2%) to reach 10.6 GW. Solar expanded by 250 MW to reach 4.3 GW and hydro remained almost unchanged at about 1.8 GW.

The economic fallout from the pandemic is far-reaching, with an adverse impact on many sectors including renewables. For many reasons, however, the impact may be different than in other economic sectors. Governments can turn to a renewables-based energy transition to bring a range of solutions at this difficult moment. Many renewable technologies can be ramped up relatively quickly, helping to revive industries and create new jobs.

Decentralised technologies also allow for greater involvement by citizens and communities in energy decisions, with transformative social implications.

Importantly, they offer a proven approach for remote health care in energy-poor communities and add a key element to the crisis response toolkit.

In the creation of future infrastructure, energy solutions aimed at scaling up renewables provide a safe and visionary strategic investment choice. Recovery measures could help to install flexible power grids, efficiency solutions, electric vehicle (EV) charging systems, energy storage, interconnected hydropower, green hydrogen and multiple other clean energy technologies. With the need for energy decarbonisation unchanged, such investments safeguard against short-sighted decisions and increased accumulation of stranded assets.

The latest oil price developments and the heightened unpredictability of returns on hydrocarbon investments make the business case for renewables even stronger. Current market dynamics could further weaken the viability of unconventional oil and gas resources and long-term contracts. The moment has come to reduce or redirect fossil-fuel subsidies towards clean energy without added social disruption.

While the current crisis has undoubtedly underlined global interconnections and strengthened the vision of a more resilient society at national and regional levels, it has also highlighted the vast differences in countries' circumstances and capacities. International co-operation is needed to tackle deeply embedded shortfalls and vulnerabilities, and crisis responses must reflect global co-dependency. Investments must be directed everywhere they are needed, including to the most vulnerable countries and communities.

This year was meant to be a turning point for climate and sustainable development, with 2020 marking the start of the decade of action. The unexpected pandemic, with its devastating consequences for communities and economies is upending plans, interrupting trends and testing assumptions. The mounting loss of life is devastating, and the strain on communities and economies will require thoughtful and far-reaching strategies. A wider perspective is needed, viewing energy, society, economy and the environment as parts of a unique, holistic system.

# Accumulated Cost of the Pandemic Estimated to Top \$227 Billion by End of 2021

To protect businesses from pandemic risk, governments need to be ‘insurers of last resort’

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated long-standing development challenges in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, contributing to a rise in poverty, a deterioration of public finances, an increase in debt vulnerabilities, and a further erosion of trust in government.

The substantial borrowing that MENA governments incurred to finance health and social protection measures increased government debt. Countries must continue spending on health and income transfers, which will add to already high debt burdens and lead to complicated policy decisions after the pandemic recedes.

The World Bank’s latest regional economic update report, entitled *Living with Debt: How Institutions Can Chart a Path to Recovery in the Middle East and North Africa*, details the economic devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic to date, the long-term ramifications of the resulting explosion in public debt, and the difficult choices governments will face, even as the public health crisis abates.

As an example, the report shows that the region’s economies are estimated to have contracted by 3.8% in 2020, which is 1.3 percentage points above the World Bank forecasts in October 2020; however, the regional growth estimate is 6.4 percentage points lower than the pre-pandemic growth forecast published in October 2019. The estimated accumulated cost of the pandemic, in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) losses by the end of 2021, will amount to \$227 billion. The region is expected to recover only partially in 2021, but that recovery is, in part, dependent on an equitable rollout of vaccines.

“When MENA governments increased borrowing to address COVID-19, they saved lives and livelihoods, all investments in human capital,” said Ferid Belhaj, World

Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa. “We can see hopeful signs of light through the tunnel, especially with the deployment of vaccines, but the region remains in crisis. Strong institutions are crucial to absorbing this crisis, re-launching economies, and building them back stronger and more resilient in the years ahead.”

According to the report, the substantial borrowing that MENA governments had to incur to finance essential health and social protection measures increased government debt dramatically: the average public debt in MENA countries is expected to rise 8 percentage points, from about 46% of GDP in 2019 to 54% in 2021. Notably, debt among MENA oil importers is expected to average about 93% of GDP in 2021.

The need to keep spending — and keep borrowing — will remain strong for the immediate future. MENA countries will have no choice but to continue spending on healthcare and social protection as long as the pandemic continues. Consequently, in a post-pandemic world, most MENA countries may find themselves stuck with debt service bills requiring resources that otherwise could be used for economic development.

Addressing what MENA countries can do to resolve the tensions between short-term objectives and the long-term risks of rising public debt, the report discusses policy options during three distinct phases of economic recovery:

- Expenditure priorities during the pandemic;
- Fiscal stimulus as the pandemic subsides;
- Mitigating the potential costs of debt overhang in the medium term.

Governance and transparency issues emerge as central protagonists across all three phases.

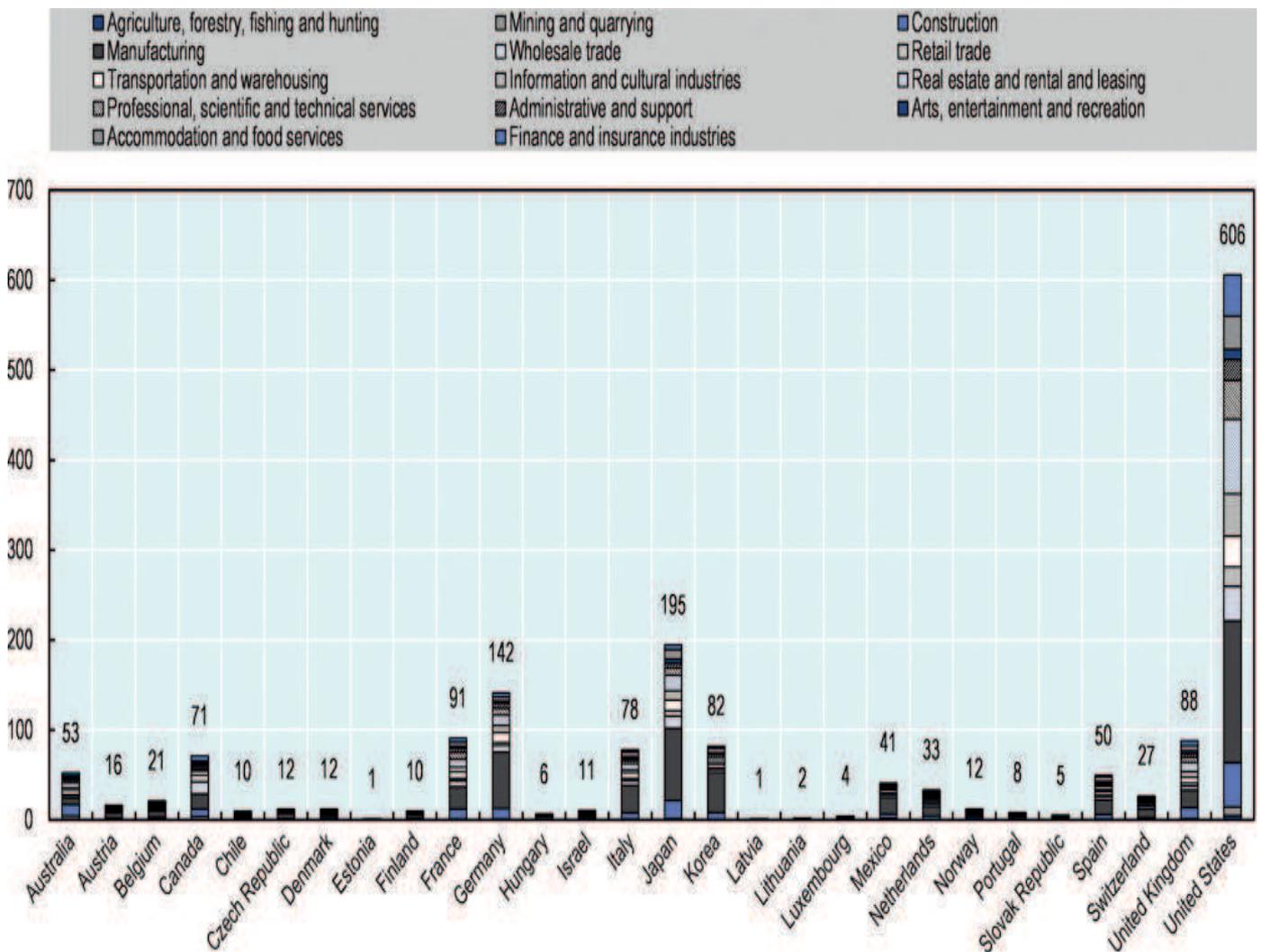
“Transparency will play an important

role in helping MENA countries address the tradeoffs between short-term needs and the long-term risks of public debt,” said Roberta Gatti, World Bank Chief Economist for the Middle East and North Africa Region. “Transparency in the use of public information on the spread of Covid-19 and vaccination programs can help accelerate the recovery. In turn, reforms that improve debt transparency and the quality of public investment can be implemented immediately, reducing borrowing costs and raising long-term growth. Simply put, transparency can help chart a path to lasting recovery for the MENA region.”

#### COVID-19 Response

The World Bank Group, one of the largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries, is taking broad, fast action to help developing countries strengthen their pandemic response. It is supporting public health interventions, working to ensure the flow of critical supplies and equipment, and helping the private sector continue to operate and sustain jobs. The WBG is making available up to \$160 billion over a 15-month period ending June 2021 to help more than 100 countries protect the poor and vulnerable, support businesses, and bolster economic recovery. This includes \$50 billion of new IDA resources through grants and highly concessional loans and \$12 billion for developing countries to finance the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Saying the above, it is important to know that ent lockdown measures, making it impossible for insurers to model and price such a risk. Furthermore, it is systemic in nature, inducing widespread and simultaneous financial losses. Coverage for pandemic business continuity risks with meaningful limits will therefore remain unavailable from the private insurance market due to prohibitively high capital requirements.



**Responding to the COVID-19 and pandemic protection gap in insurance:** Source: Data on output by business sector is taken from (OECD, 2020. The latest available data for many countries was 2017 and so the figures were adjusted upwards to account for GDP growth in 2018 (from OECD, 2020 and inflated to 2019 USD)

Government involvement is essential to enhancing preparedness for and resilience to future pandemic shocks.

In this context The Geneva Association has just released Public-Private Solutions to Pandemic Risk, expounding four exemplary pandemic risk funding schemes where governments can play a leading role:

- Direct insurance: the public sector provides voluntary or mandatory insurance to businesses exposed to pandemic risk
- Reinsurance: governments provide reinsurance coverage to insurers that kicks in above a certain threshold and up to a certain limit
- Social insurance: modest public-sector coverage with mandatory participation through pre-event payments (e.g. tax or levy)
- Post-event protection: an ad hoc safety net offered by governments to those affected

Recognising there is no one-size-fits-all solution, the report assesses the benefits of

each scheme against seven public policy goals: 1) maximum coverage, 2) limited public exposure, 3) matching of funds with needs,

4) risk mitigation incentives, 5) cost-efficiency of risk transfer, 6) operational efficiency, and 7) macroeconomic benefits.

Jad Ariss, The Geneva Association's Managing Director, said: "It is a tragedy that businesses, particularly SMEs, have suffered so much financial loss during the pandemic as a result of the lockdowns, which were beyond their control. The public sector had to step in with multi-trillion dollar emergency relief measures. Governments and insurers must work together on how to close the massive protection gap exposed by COVID-19, with governments as the leading players."

Kai-Uwe Schanz, The Geneva Association's Head of Research & Foresight and the leading author of the report, said: "We want to emphasise that of the four pandemic risk

insurance schemes outlined, distributing cash postevent – as many governments did for COVID-19 – is likely least effective. For the other schemes, deciding whether participation is mandatory or voluntary, as well as the role of insurers in pricing and offering coverage, are critical considerations. We hope this report effectively guides governments and insurers in finalising their partnership terms."

Analysts at Fitch have reported that the world's largest life and health reinsurers remained profitable in 2020, as heightened mortality losses from the coronavirus pandemic have only moderately impacted the segment so far.

Fitch expects mortality claims related to the pandemic to decline in 2021 for Hannover Rueck SE, Munich Reinsurance Company, Reinsurance Group of America Inc., SCOR SE and Swiss Reinsurance Company Ltd due to the global rollout of vaccinations.

# GlobeMed Group Conducts its First 2021 Virtual Executives Seminar

Mounir Kharma emphasizes the importance of several strategic development projects such as entering new markets, launching the Telehealth service



**Focusing on the importance of embracing change during the corona pandemic:** *Group's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Mounir Kharma*

**G**lobeMed Group, the leading Healthcare Benefits Management Group in the MENA region, held its first Executives Seminar for the year 2021 virtually over three days during March, 2021. The virtual seminar saw executive attendance from GlobeMed's 12 operations headed by the Group's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Mounir Kharma and board members H.E. Michel Pharaon, Roger Nasnas, Pierre Pharaon, and Elie Nasnas, and the executive team members from across the region.

Mounir Kharma focused on the importance of embracing change particularly during these highly testing times with the corona pandemic. He emphasized the importance of several strategic development projects such as entering new markets, launching the Telehealth services, as well as other initiatives and the heroic efforts of GlobeMed team members which empowered the organization to progress and lead despite all challenges.

GlobeMed executives demonstrated

the main accomplishments achieved by different operations in various markets. Empowered with high digital capabilities, GlobeMed operations were able to apply remote working measures smoothly ensuring business continuity to serve clients and their insured members without disruption despite mobility restrictions as a result of the COVID19.

The seminar introduced several planned digital developments incorporating artificial intelligence applications to ensure further integration with clients and healthcare providers. Disaster recovery plans under cloud technologies, have taken the center stage during the 2nd and 3rd days of the seminar. New customer experience strategy was introduced with focus on putting the insured members first and managing their journeys to meet their needs.

In conclusion, the seminar identified major strategies and perspectives among attendees to respond to disruptive forces and challenges in the health insurance

market.

GlobeMed combines technical expertise and information technology with more than 29 years of experience in providing well-tested solutions in the management of healthcare benefits.

GlobeMed is the largest healthcare benefits management company in the Middle East. Over the last 29 years, GlobeMed has redefined the standards of managing healthcare insurance benefits in the region, expanding its operations to 12 countries in the Middle East and Africa to serve over 220 insurance companies, self-funded and social health insurance schemes.

GlobeMed is serving clients in other countries under licensing agreement. We are connected to over 20,250 providers directly contracted with GlobeMed, and over 120,000 providers worldwide.

Being one of the first organizations to introduce the Third Party Administrator (TPA) model in the region, GlobeMed combines technical expertise and information technology to deliver superior services and state-of-the-art solutions. GlobeMed has extended its offering and emerged as system vendor providing unbundled, flexible, and scalable solutions for all stakeholders in both the public and private sectors.

In addition to healthcare benefits management, GlobeMed provides pharmacy benefits management, ambulatory benefits management (ABM), actuarial support services, international health services, revenue cycle management and other services and solutions.

Our partners enjoy access to a centralized and updated database through over 100 specialized online portals dedicated to every stakeholder involved in the management of healthcare benefits. Over 45,000 users access these portals, which are supported by advanced, highly secure and reliable disaster recovery plans.

GlobeMed's expertise and network are constantly growing to reflect the limitless service possibilities ahead.

# GlobeMed Publishes a White Paper about the Importance of Prevention and Care Management Programs in Driving Better Health

**G**lobeMed, the leading healthcare benefits management group in the Middle East, published a white paper titled “Improving Care while Battling Costs” about the importance of adopting prevention and care management programs to drive better health outcomes and curb the rising healthcare costs.

The paper sheds light on the significant increase in the number of individuals suffering from chronic conditions, such as diabetes, chronic kidney disease, cardiovascular diseases, etc., particularly in the MENA region. For instance according to the International Diabetic Federation, over 39 million adults aged between 20 and 79 suffered from diabetes in the MENA region in 2019 and this number is expected to increase to 108 million in 2045.

The paper demonstrates GlobeMed’s experience in prevention and care management programs. GlobeMed has carefully designed a comprehensive, patient-centered care management program for risk carriers and their insured members with chronic conditions. The program aims to help patients control the diseases and avoid the associated complications. Since its launch in 2018 in Lebanon, the program targeting diabetic patients has achieved many successful stories for insured members and risk carriers including:

- 75% of enrolled individuals suffering from type 2 diabetes showed significant improvement in their HbA1c test results.
- Around 50% in cost savings has been achieved per individual at the level of inpatient and outpatient claims from 2018 till 2020.

GlobeMed’s care management program employs certified care managers including a team of compassionate nurses and medical doctors who proactively engage insured members and their family members in a personalized care program to improve their health through:

- \* Risk evaluation and assignment of personalized care plan
- \* Setting interventions, follow-up care and reminders of upcoming medical



tests, vaccines, etc.

- \* Patient education program
- \* Reviews of test results and drug utilization
- \* Improved access to healthcare services including admissions support
- \* Coaching and support to achieve health goals per 24/7 support line.
- \* Digital tools such as GlobeMed Fit app, SMS reminders, etc.

In conclusion, the white paper encourages healthcare systems and risk carriers to adopt care management programs or practices to curb the rising healthcare costs, empower patients and encourage self-management, particularly through facilitating the use of technology, design a variety of educational programs targeting individuals or groups.

# ADNIC's Credit Rating Upgraded to 'A' With Stable Outlook By S&P

S&P raised its long-term issuer credit and insurer financial strength ratings based on ADNIC's strong financial performance indicators

**A**bu Dhabi National Insurance Company (ADNIC), one of the leading regional multi-line insurance providers for corporates and individuals, announced today that its credit rating has been upgraded from 'A-' to 'A' with a stable outlook by ratings agency Standard & Poor's (S&P).

ADNIC's credit rating upgraded to 'A' with stable outlook by S&P

S&P raised its long-term issuer credit and insurer financial strength ratings based on ADNIC's strong financial performance indicators. S&P noted ADNIC's leading insurer position in the UAE among more than 30 listed insurers, in term of gross written premiums (GWP). ADNIC has built a strong track record of positive underwriting performance while maintaining its market share over the past five years. According to S&P, the company's capital adequacy will remain at the 'AAA' benchmark in its model, supported by profitable earnings from both its underwriting and investment activities over the next two years.

Ahmad Idris, Chief Executive Officer of Abu Dhabi National Insurance Company (ADNIC), said: "ADNIC has been the UAE's reliable insurer for nearly half a century, with our size, strength and competitive advantage. Our strong financial position and market share is maintained through a clear strategy, underwriting discipline, operational excellence and a diversified investment portfolio. We are pleased S&P has upgraded our rating to 'A' stable, which recognizes our track record over many years."

Abu Dhabi National Insurance Company (ADNIC) PJSC is a composite insurance partner with long standing expertise in providing insurance products to individuals and corporates across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Founded in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1972, ADNIC has a wide network of branches as well as sales and service centres across the country. ADNIC also has a representative office in London, under the name ADNIC International Ltd. ADNIC is a publicly listed company on Abu Dhabi Securities



**A clear strategy:** Ahmad Idris, Chief Executive Officer of Abu Dhabi National Insurance Company (ADNIC)

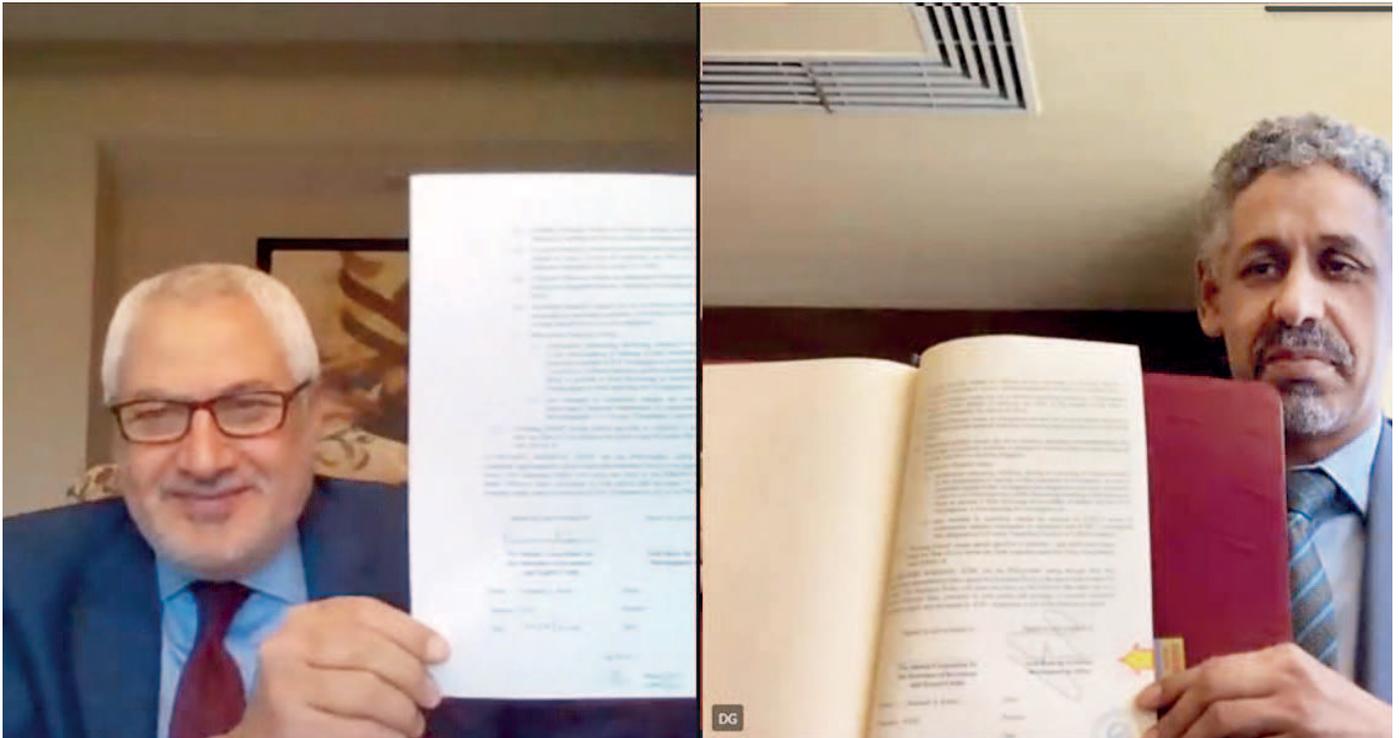
Exchange (ADX).

Abu Dhabi National Insurance Company (ADNIC) PJSC was established in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1972, ADNIC is a leading multi-line regional insurance provider with long-standing expertise in providing insurance and reinsurance services to individuals and corporates across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. ADNIC is licensed by the Insurance Authority under No. (1) and listed on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX).

Headquartered in Abu Dhabi, ADNIC has a wide network of branches, as well as sales and customer service centres, across the country.

ADNIC offers both commercial and consumers insurance products that are customisable and scalable. This flexibility enables the company to meet the unique and evolving needs of individuals, as well as small, mid-sized and large companies in the UAE and wider MENA region.

# ICIEC Insurance Coverage Supports BADEA's Participation in Financing Syndication for EBID



Providing USD 50 million in insurance coverage to the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA): Oussama Kaissi, ICIEC CEO

**T**he Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit (ICIEC) has provided USD 50 million in insurance coverage to the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA).

The Bank Master Policy (BMP) provided by ICIEC assists BADEA's participation in syndication with the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) and BMCE Bank of Africa. The intended syndication is to provide financing to the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID). The financing will facilitate the import of strategic goods from Arab countries to ECOWAS member states, strengthening the strategic south-south cooperation between Arab and African countries.

This transaction marks the first Islamic BMP signed between ICIEC and a Multilateral Development Bank (MDB).

"ICIEC is delighted to be signing our first BMP transaction for this seminal collaboration," claims ICIEC CEO, Oussama

KAISSI. "The catalytic impact of the larger syndication is one of the main driving factors behind ICIEC's participation. ICIEC and BADEA's involvement has increased the availability of financing to EBID to not only facilitate the importation of strategic goods to ECOWAS countries but also support the business and growth of Arab exporters and enhancing strategic trade relations within the OIC – a foremost priority for ICIEC in light of the trade shocks presented by the pandemic."

About ICIEC

The Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit (ICIEC) is a member of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group. ICIEC was established in 1994 as a multilateral institution to strengthen the economic relations between member countries of the OIC. ICIEC's vision is to be recognized as the preferred enabler of trade and investment for sustainable economic development in Member Countries. Its mission is to facilitate trade and investment between

member countries and the world by providing Shariah-compliant risk mitigation tools and financial solutions.

About BADEA

The Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa- BADEA- is a multilateral development bank owned by eighteen (18) Arab countries, members of the League of Arab States (LAS). The Bank has been operational for the last 45 years, with footprints in about 44 countries. BADEA aims to promote economic development in Africa and foster cooperation between the beneficiary countries and the Arab World through investment and trade. To this end, BADEA's operations revolve around four strategic pillars:

- i) Infrastructure investment in energy.
- ii) Private sector and trade financing.
- iii) Agriculture value-chains.
- iv) Entrepreneurship and SMEs. In addition, capacity development weighs in as a cross-cutting pillar.

## Saudi Re's 2020 Net Profit Up 2% to SAR 60.7 Mln

Saudi Re for Cooperative Reinsurance Co. reported a net profit before Zakat of SAR 60.7 million for 2020, up 2%, compared to SAR 59.3 million a year earlier

**S**audi Cooperative Reinsurance Company (Saudi Re) has recorded a turnover of 935.114 million SAR (249.022 million USD) compared to 792.847 million SAR (211.145 million USD) in 2019, that is an increase of 17.9%.

The insurer attributed the increase to a 6% decrease in net incurred claims, which positively impacted underwriting results.

The company reported Q4 2020 net profit before Zakat of SAR 25.6 million, compared to SAR 3.2 million in the year-earlier period.

The net profit before zakat (tax) showed a slight increase of 2.3% in 2020, set at 60.691 million SAR (16.162 million USD) in comparison with 59.317 million SAR (15.796 million USD) in 2019. Such performance is mainly due to the 6% decrease in the net incurred losses. The latter decreased from 417.069 million SAR (111.071 million USD) as of 31 December 2019 to 391.979 million SAR (104.384 million USD) by late 2020.

During the year under review, the net investment income reached 37.439 million SAR (9.97 million USD) against 45.479 mil-



**Focusing on the importance of embracing change during the corona pandemic:** *Fahad Al-Hesni\_MD-CEO\_Saudi Re*

lion SAR (12.111 million USD) in 2019, thus decreasing by 17.6%.

## The Insurance Federation of Egypt Held a Virtual Webinar

**A**s part of its strategy to cope with any updates in the global economic outlook that have an impact on the insurance industry, the Insurance Federation of Egypt held a virtual webinar on Wednesday 28th of April under the title:

DEFENSELESS MOMENTS -LEADERSHIP WEBINAR

The webinar addresses the following aspects:

- Incident causation and the three main sources of unexpected events
- Critical errors and the human factors that cause or contribute to them.
- The state-to-error risk pattern and the Critical Error Reduction Techniques
- The neuroscience behind the Critical Error Reduction Techniques
- Requirements for implementing phase 1 and average expectations based on.

It is worth to mention that the speaker in this webinar is Larry Wilson, who is a behavior-based safety consultant. He has authored numerous articles as well as authoring the book: Defenseless Moments...A different perspective on serious injuries. In addition to this, Larry has over than 25 years of speaking experience at health and safety conferences, international events in three continents.

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## Emmanuel Clarke, Senior Reinsurance Industry Figure, Joins Tremor Board as Growth Accelerates

Emmanuel has had a long and successful career in the reinsurance industry, spending more than 25 years at PartnerRe, most recently leading the firm as President and CEO

**T**remor Technologies, the leading online reinsurance marketplace, is pleased to announce that reinsurance executive Emmanuel Clarke has joined its Board of Directors. Emmanuel has had a long and successful career in the reinsurance industry, spending more than 25 years at PartnerRe, most recently leading the firm as President and CEO.

The vast majority of reinsurance capital has signed up to the Tremor marketplace from all major reinsurance markets of the world including the U.S., Continental Europe, the London Market including Lloyd's, Bermuda along with leading companies from the Asia-Pacific region. The company has completed 15 placements to date and has priced more than \$2B of reinsurance limit for a number of cedents.

The company recently launched Tremor Panorama, its next generation marketplace that is seeing rapid adoption with the company doubling its client base in the first quarter. Tremor Panorama delivers tools for buyers that allows them to see the entire market of competitive quotations before they bind capacity at their chosen price while allowing reinsurers to quote with specific preferences.

Along with providing strategic counsel to the firm, Emmanuel will help Tremor accelerate its growth with ceding companies, further its work with reinsurance brokers and bring on more reinsurance capital over the coming years.

"I have always been impressed by Tremor and its products and today I am very excited to join Tremor's board and contribute to its growth acceleration. I am convinced Tremor represents the future evolution of reinsurance purchasing, where buyers make most informed decisions based on transparent, comprehensive information. Tremor's platform brings value to the whole reinsurance placement process - including buyers, brokers and reinsurers, by generating best outcomes through data and expertise, optimized execution and greater efficiency," said Emmanuel Clarke.



**New appointment:** *Emmanuel Clarke, Senior Reinsurance I*

"This is an exciting moment with the recent roll-out of Panorama, an enhancement that enables our customers to make best placement decisions based on comprehensive market data and feedback, with the growth in new clients combined with repeat customers, and now with Emmanuel joining our Board. It will be a great privilege to work side by side with such a senior figure from the reinsurance industry as we work to accelerate Tremor's adoption in the marketplace over the coming years", said Sean

Bourgeois, Founder and CEO of Tremor.

Tremor is a venture-backed insurance technology firm where world class computer scientists, economists, market designers and industry practitioners are working together to build a modern risk transfer marketplace. Tremor's "smart market" platform incorporates intelligent market design, state-of-the-art auction technology and sophisticated optimization techniques to vastly improve how risk is transferred around the world.



**Find your inner peace. Insure.**

Take a load off and free your mind. We at AL MASHREK insurance & reinsurance SAL are always committed to provide our valued customers the most affordable insurance options with outstanding support, service and respect they deserve to free their minds from unexpected risks and to enjoy life.

Since its founding in 1962, AL MASHREK insurance & reinsurance SAL has been engaged in the writing and sales of diverse insurance and reinsurance policies, covering all classes of insurance to protect our customers' financial status, assets, health (medical, life), and legal liability.

For more information regarding "finding your inner peace", please don't hesitate to visit us at [www.almashrek.com.lb](http://www.almashrek.com.lb), scan the QR code above, or e-mail us your questions at [info@almashrek.com.lb](mailto:info@almashrek.com.lb)

[www.almashrek.com.lb](http://www.almashrek.com.lb)



# AM Best Maintains Negative Outlook on U.K. Life Insurance Market

**A**M Best is maintaining a negative outlook on the United Kingdom life insurance segment.

The negative outlook considers the economic uncertainty associated with the consequences of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, which through increased financial market volatility or reduced demand

for life insurance could weigh on insurers' financial positions and earnings. Other challenges for the segment include careful management of growing exposures to illiquid assets, and having to contend with low interest rates for longer than previously anticipated.

However, a new Best's Market Segment Report, "Market Segment Outlook: U.K.

Life Insurance," notes there are a number of factors that offset these negative trends, including a strong business pipeline for pension-related products, the expectation of further longevity releases and the acceleration of the digital transformation of insurers, which should support cost reduction and improve underwriting practices.

## Saudi Insurers Mergers

**A**ccording to the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA), recent mergers between insurance companies have witnessed great success.

SAMA still supports local insurers to accelerate M&A transactions to align the market with the "KSA Vision 2030" development strategy.

Through this initiative, the regulator aims to strengthen the competitive capabilities of the sector and encourage the creation of new insurance products and services.

In 2020, the Saudi insurance market has seen several mergers of companies including: Aljazira Takaful Taawuni and Solidarity

Saudi Takaful

Saudi Enaya Cooperative Insurance and Amana Cooperative Insurance

Walaa Cooperative Insurance and MetLife AIG ANB Cooperative Insurance

Further to the announcement made by Amana Cooperative Insurance Co ("Amana") on 01/04/1442H (corresponding to 16 November 2020G) in respect of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Amana and Saudi Enaya Cooperative Insurance Co. (Enaya) concerning the potential merger between the two companies.

AMANA would like to announce sign-

ing of a binding merger agreement on 17/09/1442H (corresponding to 29 April 2021G) (the "Merger Agreement") pursuant to which Amana and Enaya have agreed to take the necessary steps to implement a merger between the two Companies in accordance with the Companies Law issued by Ministry of Commerce, the Merger and Acquisition Regulations and the Rules on the Offer of Securities and Continuing Obligations issued by the Capital Market Authority, The Listing Rules issued by Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul) and the implementing regulations issued by Saudi Central Bank (SAMA).

## Alkhaleej Takaful Insurance: Net Profit Increase in Q1 2021

**A**lkhaleej Takaful Insurance has recorded a net profit growth of 3.48% in the first quarter of 2021 which went from 16.19 million QAR (4.44 million USD) as at 31 March 2020 to 21.83 million QAR during the same period of 2021. Al Khaleej Takaful Insurance Company QPSC, formerly Al Khaleej Takaful Group QPSC, is an Qatar-based company, which is engaged in the insurance and reinsurance

business. The Company reports six segments: Motor insurance includes protection against physical damage, theft and bodily injury for vehicles; Marine and Aviation insurance includes insurance for sea freight, air freight, air parcel post and land conveyance; Fire segment offers solutions, such as Fire and Special Perils Insurance, General Accident Insurance, Liability Insurance and Engineering Insurance to businesses

exposed to risks; Health insurance offers medical, dental, maternity, travel and personal accident insurances; Energy insurance is serving both the onshore and the offshore oil and gas industries, and Travel insurance segment offers medical assurance cover in order to obtain a visit visa and travel policy, which is included medical, emergency, hospital, legal and catastrophe assistance abroad, among others.

# Moody's Affirms SCOR's Aa3 IFS Rating, Outlook Changed to Stable From Negative

**M**oody's Investors Service ("Moody's") has today affirmed SCOR SE's (SCOR) Aa3 insurance financial strength (IFS) rating as well as its debt ratings and the ratings of its subsidiaries. The outlook has been changed to stable from negative.

## RATINGS RATIONALE

### OUTLOOK – CHANGE TO STABLE REFLECTS MANAGEABLE RESIDUAL COVID LOSSES FOR THE REST OF 2021

The change in outlook to stable from negative reflects our expectation that (1) residual Covid-19 related underwriting claims will not meaningfully hamper SCOR's credit profile during the remainder of 2021 and beyond, (2) SCOR's capitalization, which has proven to be resilient during the pandemic, will remain close to the current very strong levels, and (3) SCOR's underlying business will continue to perform in line with the group's revised strategic plan.

In 2020, SCOR reported Covid-19 related claims of Euro 598 million, approximately equally split between Life and Property and Casualty (P&C) reinsurance. The group's resilient underlying performance helped to absorb these losses, resulting in an overall net profit of Euro 234 million (down from Euro 422 million in 2019). The expected ultimate losses are in line with Moody's base case scenario but far less significant than what Moody's had envisaged in an extreme pandemic event. In fact, for the Life business, the negative impact of the pandemic was moderated by (1) the significant difference in mortality rates between SCOR's insured population and the general population, (2) the good protection via retrocession to other reinsurers, and (3) the good performance in non-mortality Life reinsurance business. As a result, SCOR reported only a small decline in life technical margin to 5.8% in 2020 from 7.5% in 2019. In P&C, SCOR reported a combined ratio of 100.2% in 2020, better than many peers, as SCOR benefited from being only moderately exposed to event cancellation and business interruption, when compared to peers.

Moody's believes the residual risk of mortality claims to be manageable for SCOR and that the number of claims will abate significantly over the second and third quarter of 2021 as the roll-out of vaccines, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, continues. For the first quarter, SCOR

reported additional mortality claims of Euro 162 million, reflecting mainly the surge in mortality in the United States, which is in line with its earlier forecast for the quarter.

In P&C, there remains some uncertainty around SCOR's ultimate loss burden, as the bulk of reserves continues to be reserves for 'incurred but not reported' ("IBNR") claims, but we expect this to be manageable. For the first quarter of 2021, SCOR reported no additional P&C claims related to Covid-19 and – on a headline basis – no increase in claims reserves set aside in 2020.

SCOR's capital adequacy has held up well throughout the Covid-19 crisis so far, also compared to peers, reflecting strong operating capital generation, low sensitivities to adverse market movements and benefitting from the cancellation of the 2019 dividend. For the first quarter 2021, SCOR reported a very strong Solvency II ratio of 232% (220% at year-end 2020), the increase mainly driven by the rise in interest rates, particularly in the United States. While clearly above the target range of 185-220%, we expect SCOR to maintain its Solvency II ratio close to the upper end of this range going forward.

Looking ahead into the remainder of 2021 and into 2022, we expect overall profitability to improve. After muted topline growth in 2020, SCOR has reported strong rate momentum and volume growth (in constant Foreign Exchange Rates) in the January and April 2021 renewals, while maintaining its approach to selective underwriting. We expect that the positive pricing momentum will continue in the upcoming renewals and that SCOR's normalized combined ratio will confirm the positive development seen in the first quarter of 2021. This should also translate into reported combined ratios improving from the levels experienced in 2017-2020, even though SCOR reported significant natural catastrophe claims in the first quarter of 2021. Similarly, we expect that Life technical margins will revert towards the levels outlined in SCOR revised strategic plan and that the combined improvements in P&C and Life underwriting performance should help to offset the negative effect of continuously low yields on SCOR's investment results.

## AFFIRMATION OF THE RATINGS

The affirmation of SCOR's ratings reflects its very good franchise and market

position across Life and P&C reinsurance, its well diversified business profile and moderate risk appetite in terms of both underwriting and investment risks, which results in lower earnings volatility and more stable capitalisation than for many of its peers. Still Moody's considers SCOR to be positioned at the lower end within its rating category, compared to larger Aa3 rated peers, given its smaller size and its reliance on the retrocession market, albeit that its performance over the past year has been ahead of some of these peers. In addition, SCOR could be exposed to some risks associated with the transition to a new CEO in 2022, particularly given the instrumental role that its current CEO has played in shaping SCOR's strategic direction and culture for almost two decades.

## FACTORS THAT COULD LEAD TO AN UPGRADE OR DOWNGRADE OF THE RATINGS

Upward pressure on the ratings in the short term is unlikely given the positioning of SCOR's ratings within their category. In the long term, upward pressure on the ratings could result from (1) an improvement in capitalization, as evidenced by a Solvency II ratio consistently above 250%, and (2) sustained improvements in profitability, reflected in a return on capital (Moody's definition) of 10% over the underwriting cycle, and (3) financial leverage consistently lower than 20% together with earnings coverage over 10x through the cycle.

Conversely, negative rating pressure could arise from (1) return on capital of below 5% over the underwriting cycle, or a sharp increase in volatility of the returns, and/or (2) Solvency II ratio consistently below 200%, and/or (3) financial leverage consistently above 25% and earnings coverage consistently below 6x, and/or (4) material deterioration in the group's risk profile, for example following rapid growth in volatile or risky business, and/or (5) meaningful and sustained adverse reserve development.

For ratings issued on a program, series, category/class of debt or security this announcement provides certain regulatory disclosures in relation to each rating of a subsequently issued bond or note of the same series, category/class of debt, security or pursuant to a program for which the ratings are derived exclusively from existing ratings in accordance with Moody's rating practices.

# Deloitte Review

Issue 27 | July 2020

Future of work  
Health care transformed  
Connectivity and its potential  
Responsible business  
Strength in diversity



## The essence of resilient leadership

Business recovery from COVID-19

# COVID-19 Amplifies Integrity Challenges For Businesses in Emerging Markets

63% of global respondents in emerging markets say it is difficult for organizations to maintain standards of integrity during difficult market conditions- 30% of UAE respondents, and 32% in the KSA believe that bribery and corrupt practices present the greatest risk to the long-term success of businesses

**A**s organizations transition from managing the COVID-19 crisis towards building economic resilience, the EY Global Integrity Report 2020 reveals some diversity regarding the impact on company ethics. The findings are part of a survey highlighting the views of 2,948 board members, managers, and employees from emerging markets around the globe. In the Middle East, the survey covers interviews with 175 respondents in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The report reveals that 63% of global respondents believe that businesses operating in emerging markets are likely to be impacted adversely by the current disruption.

The survey also highlights that regulatory scrutiny and remote working aggravate these issues. A total of 32% of global respondents in emerging markets said they believe that bribery and corrupt practices present the greatest risk to the long-term success of their businesses, roughly on a par with 30% of respondents in the UAE and 31% in KSA.

Globally, 30% of respondents believe that a cyber and ransomware attacks are a significant risk to the long-term success of organizations. This is lower than in KSA, where 32% believe it is a threat, but is significantly higher than in the UAE, where only 15% expressed concerns.

Regulatory scrutiny and remote working as a result of the pandemic are aggravating these issues. 32% of respondents in emerging markets believe that bribery and corrupt practices present the greatest risk to the long-term success of their

businesses, compared with 25% in India. 30% of respondents believe that the risk of a cyber and ransomware attack is a significant threat, compared to 41% in India.

Arpinder Singh, Partner and Head – India and Emerging Markets, Forensic & Integrity Services, EY said, “As organizations navigate the crisis and prepare for a ‘Great Reset’, corporate revival and recovery efforts should not get derailed by fraud, bribery corruption risks. Business leaders should go beyond today’s travails to review their integrity agenda and determine the next steps to bolster their risk and compliance programs. Leadership commitment to foster a culture of integrity and trust amongst stakeholders will be pivotal to derive long term value and preserve an ethical future.”

Mohammad Malkawi, KSA Forensic & Integrity Services Leader at EY, said:

“The disruption caused by COVID-19 poses a risk to ethical business conduct, making it imperative for corporations and firms of all sizes to continue being vigilant on compliance related issues. This holds true for organizations around the globe, as well as in the UAE, KSA and elsewhere around the region. Business leaders must make a firm commitment to encourage a culture of integrity and trust among all stakeholders. Particular attention must be placed towards risks of fraud, bribery and corruption, the threat of cyber attacks, and a constantly evolving regulatory environment. Ultimately, this will be the key towards creating long-term value and ensuring stability.”

The report highlights four key areas that organizations should consider to manage the risk of corporate misconduct

more effectively:

Corporate integrity should be a top priority in management’s playbook

Business leaders are in a key position when it comes to taking difficult decisions. The report highlighted that 55% of global respondents in emerging markets say that their management communicates frequently with them on the importance of operating with integrity.

Voicing misconduct through whistle-blowing channels

Globally, 37% of respondents in emerging markets say that they not reported concerns about integrity due to apprehensions about their career progression.

In the UAE, 29% reported keeping concerns to themselves because they were concerned about their future career. A slightly larger figure - 31% - said they felt like their concerns would not be acted upon. In KSA, 27% said they stayed quiet as a result of career concerns, compared to 39% who felt their concerns would not be acted upon.

In a post-pandemic environment, businesses must take steps to ensure that employees feel comfortable reporting instances of misconduct and protect would-be whistle-blowers from retaliation of any kind. Training and awareness programs should become institutional pillars in the corporate governance framework of organizations.

Embracing disruptive technologies while protecting data

Around the world, emerging markets are embracing new and disruptive technologies and adapting towards a general shift towards the digital realm. This shift, however, brings with it a host of potential

security problems and amplifies risk exposure for organizations. Notably, the report showed that in emerging markets, 55% offered training to employees on prevention of data security breaches, compared to 45% in developed markets, leading the way to mitigate risks. Emerging markets also performed well with regards to organizational preparedness, with 42% of global respondents having an incident response plan in place.

#### Tackling third party integrity risks

The need to establish remote working protocols in many locations as a result of the pandemic has also made it riskier to manage third-party relationships – and conducting adequate due diligence before onboarding a third-party vendor is critical to mitigate long-term risks. According to the survey results, 35% of businesses in emerging markets are confident that their third-party partners operate with integrity. This was even higher in KSA - with 43% of respondents comfortable with the integrity of their third-party partners, but markedly lower in the UAE, where only 20% of businesses reported confidence.

Charles de Chermont, UAE Forensic & Integrity Services Leader at EY, added:

“The results show that many businesses around the world have faced challenges when it comes to maintaining integrity as they build a pathway towards economic recovery. However, there are reasons to be optimistic. Around the world – and in the UAE and KSA in particular – companies are recognizing the need to take steps to address these issues. With proper management, organizations can manage the risk of corporate misconduct effectively, and assure all stakeholders that they are committed to doing the right thing at all times.”

Business leaders are always in a crucial position when it comes to taking difficult decisions. The report highlights that 55% of respondents in emerging markets say their management frequently communicates the importance of operating with integrity, compared with only 39% in developed markets. This proportion varies significantly by country from just 25% in UAE, rising to 53% in Malaysia and 66% in India.

· Voicing misconduct through whistleblowing channels 37% of respondents in emerging markets say they haven't reported concerns about integrity due to apprehensions about their career progression. Worryingly, nearly 3 in 10 kept their concerns private out of fear for their own personal safety. In India, 49% of respondents were uneasy to report such concerns. In a post COVID-19 world,

businesses must make employees feel that they can safely report misconduct, provide protection to whistle-blowers to minimize any possible retaliation. Training and awareness programs should become the cornerstone in the corporate governance framework of organizations.

· Embracing disruptive technologies while protecting data

Emerging markets are embracing disruptive technologies and adapting to a digital life. While there has been an overwhelming shift to using new technologies and increased use of internet with work from home, the risk exposure for organizations has amplified. The report highlights that emerging markets are leading the way in mitigating growing risks, with 55% offering training to employees on how they can prevent data security breaches, compared with 45% in developed markets. Organizational preparedness is also robust in emerging markets with 42% of respondents having an incident response plan in the event of a data security breach – regions such as South Africa were at 56% while India at 32%.

· Tackling third party integrity risks

Remote working, restricted operations and limited mobility in many locations has also made it riskier to manage third-party relationships. Only 35% of businesses in emerging markets are very confident that their third-party partners operate with integrity, compared with 56% of respondents from India. Conducting adequate due diligence before onboarding a third-party vendor is critical to mitigate long-term risks and comply with enforcement standards. Technology solutions such as automated dashboards and data analytics can be enablers to bring efficiency into the third-party due diligence process.

In no lockdown scenario, most of the population is fully exposed to the outbreak. Nevertheless, the working population is under higher risk compared to the non-working population. In partial lockdown scenario, teleworkable occupations start working from home and hence the basal infection rate declines for this group. It is important to note that the individuals in the highest risk group, ages 65 and above, as well as the younger people are assumed to have lower infection rates either because they do not work or because they switch to distanced learning. This is consistent with the optimal setting identified by Acemoglu et al. (2020). The infection rate is still high for the on-site workers. In full lockdown, we assume that only the essential sectors require their non-teleworkable employees on-site.

The infection rate declines substantially for the remainder of the population that stays home.

Several recent closed economy papers employing epidemiological models similar to us, including Acemoglu et al. (2020), Alvarez et al. (2020), Farboodi et al. (2020), and Eichenbaum et al. (2020) reach similar conclusions where imposing full lockdowns or stricter measures at the early stages of the pandemic lower economic costs. Although none of these papers include sectoral demand shocks within a SIR framework, the aggregate demand operates in a similar way. We argue that, for an open economy, sectoral demand is indispensable. The decline in external demand amplifies the domestic demand shock via sectoral I-O linkages. We show that once the number of infections reach a certain threshold, demand stalls and remains rather sluggish so long as the infection numbers do not exhibit a substantial decline. In fact, even if the domestic infection numbers are reduced, economic recovery will not be complete until the pandemic is contained abroad and foreign demand improves consequently. Thus, the course of the pandemic abroad affects domestic sectors differentially via international I-O linkages. In this framework, even if the supply channels remains unrestricted, demand drags the equilibrium output down and elevates the size of economic costs. There is a rapidly growing literature that aims to capture the economic impact of COVID-19 crisis.

Many papers utilize SIR models or its extensions to incorporate the infection dynamics into their analysis. Papers such as Stock (2020) and Alvarez et al. (2020) consider a standard SIR model and focus on the trade off between unemployment that arises from lockdowns versus the number of deaths due to the pandemic. They reach the conclusion that the optimal policy is a full lockdown that covers the majority of the population where the restrictions are removed gradually afterwards.

There are still substantial uncertainties ahead regarding the course of the pandemic.<sup>67</sup> In the absence of global coordination, countries that successfully contain the virus struggle about how to enable international trade and travel with the fear of a second wave. In this paper, we highlight that the role of global coordination is essential for open economies with international I-O linkages.

If the lockdown could be implemented with global synchronization, demand would return to pre-pandemic levels faster and the economic costs of the pandemic could be kept at a minimum level.

مخاوفك نحن نهتم بها  
Leave your worries to us.

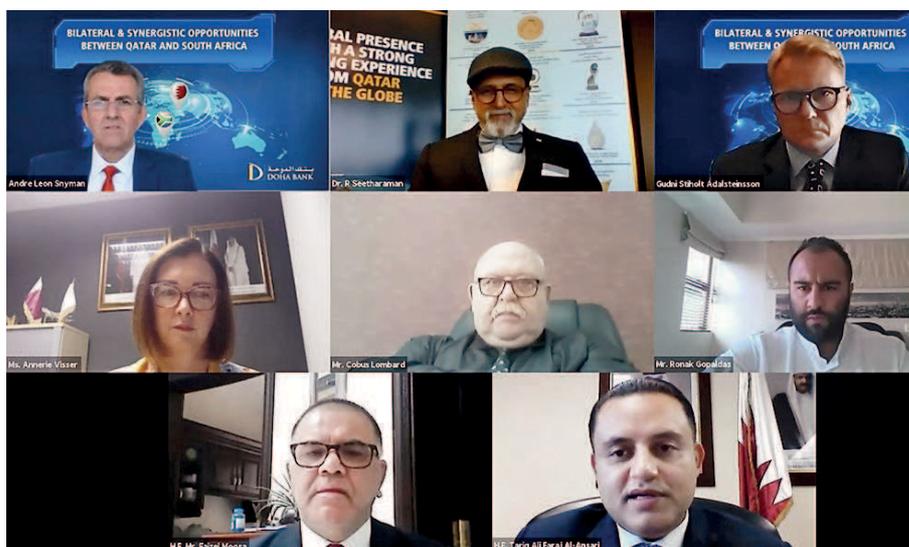
## Unleashing the Bilateral Opportunities – South Africa and Qatar

Doha Bank hosted a virtual client interaction session in collaboration with the South African Embassy and Qatari Embassy on the topic “Bilateral and Synergistic Opportunities between Qatar and South Africa” on 21 April 2021. The Speakers at the event included H.E. Tariq Ali Faraj Al- Ansari, Ambassador of the State of Qatar in the Republic of South Africa, H.E Faisal Moosa, Head of Mission, South African Embassy in Doha, Cobus Lombard, Chief Operating Officer, Souq Ukaz and Ronak Gopaldas, Director, Signal Risk. Dr. R. Seetharaman, CEO of Doha Bank was the moderator of the event.

The Welcome and Introductory Note was given by André Snyman, Acting Chief International Banking Officer, Doha Bank. He gave insight on macro- economic fundamentals of Qatar and South Africa.

H.E. Tariq Ali Faraj Al- Ansari, Ambassador of the State of Qatar in the Republic of South Africa spoke on Qatar – South Africa bilateral relations. Qatar and South Africa should focus on trade, economy and banking co-operations. Qatar has a national vision and sectoral strategies for diversification of sources of natural income and to reduce the dependence on fossil and fuel. South Africa has excellent relationship with Qatar in the last two decades. The air-service agreements support business, tourism and enhance ties between Qatar and South Africa. Qatar Airways have 31 flights a week from Doha to Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, plus 15 cargo flights. The trade in the last 5 years is approx. \$2bn. Agreements have been signed on Double Taxation and Protection of Investment and Promotion of Technical Co-operation between both the countries. QCB is an active regulator and is able to handle the emerging challenges of 21st Century. Doha Bank Representative Office in South Africa has helped South African companies in financing. We expect bigger role from Doha Bank in providing services to individuals and embassies and also relationships with other banks. The banks in Qatar should work with BRICS Bank in South Africa. We are looking forward to enhancing relationships between Business chambers of both countries. The embassies in both countries are enhancing initiatives on tourism. The embassy of the State of Qatar stands ready to provide all support to Qatar banks and companies.

H.E Faisal Moosa, Head of Mission, South African Embassy in Doha gave insight on the South Africa’s natural resources, infrastructure development,



**Unleashing the Bilateral Opportunities – South Africa and Qatar: Qatar-South-Africa-Webinar**

technology developments and power generation programs in South Africa. The African Continental Free Trade Area framework will provide great opportunity to provide trade relationships between Qatar and various countries on the African continent. The single African market is worth \$1.3tn. Many opportunities prevail for SMEs in agriculture. A Qatar South Africa Business Council needs to be established to facilitate interaction between Qatar and South African Businessmen. South Africa is a stable investment location.

Cobus Lombard, Chief Operating Officer, Souq Ukaz spoke on the role of retail in the Qatari market. Souq Ukaz is an online platform. The grocery industry was positively influenced by Covid-19, as online shopping volumes have increased across the globe. The entire retail landscape changed during Qatar Blockade as Qatar was successful in finding alternate suppliers. There are great opportunities for high quality South African products in the Qatar retail segment, particularly in the grocery segment. Qatar has a very mature retail market. The retail hospitality market is also a major consumer of imported items. Lombard ended off by re-iterating that Qatar is open for business.

Ronak Gopaldas, Director, Signal Risk. He addressed the outlook for Africa in 2021 – specifically looking at how the continent handled COVID-19, its prospects for recovery and the governance implications of vaccine diplomacy and geopolitics. In relation to Africa and the Covid-19 Pandemic, the outlook is mixed, with varied responses across the continent. Overall, however the continent experienced a much lower mortality and morbidity rate than other regions of the world, which surprised on the upside.

Despite this initial success, policymakers cannot afford to become complacent given more virulent strains, lockdown fatigue, limited financial resources and slow vaccine procurement. Economically, Africa experienced its first recession in 25 years due to the combination of commodity price declines, Covid-19 and rising costs of funding. Many countries are highly indebted and navigating this debt dilemma will be the key priority for governments, bilateral and private sector creditors to navigate this year. Rising commodity prices, improving risk sentiment and supportive financial conditions should also support the recovery. Vaccine inequality remains an ongoing problem, with Africa lagging behind the rest of the world. Global superpowers will compete for reach and relevance across the continent via vaccine diplomacy.

Dr. R. Seetharaman, CEO of Doha Bank, gave insight into the global scenario and developments in Qatar. The global economy is witnessing multiple Covid-19 virus mutants. Global trade was impacted by Covid-19. According to IMF April 2021, Global economy is expected to grow by 6% in 2021. Dr Seetharaman also gave insight on the latest Fed policy and President Biden’s infra plan. He highlighted initiatives of QCB and Qatar Government during Covid-19 and recent Qatar LNG expansion plans. He stated that a draft law has come into effect in April 2021 which allows 100% foreign ownership in Qatari listed companies and provides opportunity for global investors.

The Vote of Thanks was given by Annerie Visser, Chief Representative, Doha Bank South Africa Representative Office.

**Oil, Vaccination and Constructive**

## **Geopolitics Bodes Well for Qatar's Economic Growth**

Doha Bank hosted a virtual client conference on the "Impact of oil prices and changing regional dynamics" on 7th April 2021 with distinguished speakers such as Dr. Yarkin Cebeci, Economist, Turkey & Middle East Region – JP Morgan and Anita Yadav, CEO, Global Credit Advisory and Dr. R. Seetharman, CEO of Doha Bank as the moderator for the event. The virtual event was attended by a large number of Doha Bank's corporate customers.

Dr. R. Seetharman, CEO of Doha Bank spoke about the global economy, the ever-changing world and how COVID-19 has provided great lessons for humanity. According to IMF April 2021, the global economy is projected to grow at 6 percent in 2021, moderating to 4.4 percent in 2022. Advanced economies expected to grow by 5.1 percent in 2021 and 3.6 percent in 2022 respectively. The emerging and developing economies expected to grow by 6.7 percent in 2021 and 5 percent in 2022 respectively. He spoke about the good progress Qatar is making with its vaccine drive amidst the surge in Covid-19 and remains cautiously optimistic about the outlook for the global economy.

Dr. Yarkin Cebeci, Economist, Turkey & Middle East Region – JP Morgan spoke about the impact of Covid 19 on the economy and the severity of the recession it has caused, making it the third most severe recession in a century. He expects a sharp economy recovery and a global rebound, one not seen perhaps in the last 50 years, with a lot of global growth recovery coming from emerging economies, especially China. "The emerging economies are solving current account issues and their fiscal performance is getting better" he said. He does not expect US Federal Reserve to hike interest rates before end of 2022, with US treasury yields expected to reach 1.8% to 1.9% by end of this year. On oil prices, Dr. Yarkin Cebeci said their house view was that oil between \$60 to \$70/ Barrel in the coming year.

Anita Yadav the CEO of Global Credit Advisory, a leading capital advisory firm, spoke on a wide range of topics ranging from the US economy, oil prices, US bond yields, reforms in the region, influence of OPEC and the importance of Qatar in the region. She believes that US focus would be on their economy, COVID-19, the infrastructure bill and corporate taxes. She expects oil to be range between \$55-\$65 a barrel with production cuts by OPEC at one end and potential increase in supply at the other keeping prices range bound.

Anita Yadav is bullish on GCC as a

whole and Qatar in particular. Qatar is well positioned globally with Google, Microsoft and Oracle having presence in Qatar and Qatar marketing its fintech capabilities. She believes that the GCC is a great investment destination with tax free zones, trade promotion agencies, favorable corporate taxes and continuous improvement in ease of doing business rankings.

Gudni Stiholt the Chief Treasury and Investments Officer for Doha Bank thanked the speakers who had joined in from different parts of the world and shared their views and ideas to make the event a success.

## **CIBAFI Submitted Comments to the Accounting & Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions**

Aligned with its role as an advocate of the Islamic Financial Services Industry (IFSI), the General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI), the global umbrella of Islamic financial institutions, announced that it has submitted its comments on 21st April 2021 to the Accounting & Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) on the Revised Financial Accounting Standard (FAS) 1: "General Presentation and Disclosures in the Financial Statements of Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions".

The Exposure Draft (ED) has been issued on 5th January 2021 and is open for public consultation until 30th April 2021.

In its comments, CIBAFI thanked the AAOIFI for giving the opportunity to the Islamic Financial Services Industry to comment on the ED and provided collective feedback of its member institutions from over 34 jurisdictions, comprising the following key points.

First, the ED, to a greater extent than its predecessor, assumes that there may be cases where its requirements conflict with national laws or regulations. CIBAFI members believe that this is unusual because reporting standards are normally adopted on a national basis and are mandatory for those institutions covered by them. The implication is, therefore, that some institutions may be attempting to report both under AAOIFI standards and under those mandated in their jurisdiction.

Second, the ED changes some of the definitions from those in the earlier version of FAS 1. For example, the definition of quasi-equity is introduced as a concept that will include "unrestricted investment accounts" but will also be somewhat broader. CIBAFI members believe that this may have major implications for Islamic financial institutions, particularly in countries where AAOIFI's FASs are enforced.

Third, CIBAFI members have some concerns about the change in the language used in relation to Murabaha, Musharaka and Wakala. The terms normally used in Islamic banking for transactions using these forms is "financing", and they are different in character from those transactions normally described as "investment". For example, trade in equities or Sukuk, or capital participation in other institutions. It would be recommended to ensure consistent use of terminologies to avoid potential confusions.

## **Lebanon's central bank chief says French properties bought prior to becoming governor**

Lebanon's central bank chief said his properties in France were all acquired prior to him being appointed governor.

Riad Salameh made his comments to Reuters in response to news that a non-profit organisation Sherpa and a group of lawyers had filed a legal complaint to France's financial prosecutor against him over alleged corruption and money laundering.

Salameh said he had declared his source of wealth and shown documents "on many occasions" before that prove he was worth €23 million in 1993, prior to his appointment. -- Reuters

## **Mortada contacts Kuwaiti Trade Minister, sends two letters to General Food Authority in Kuwait & Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to follow up on export issue**

Caretaker Minister of Agriculture, Abbas Mortada, addressed a correspondence letter to the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in which he followed-up on the issue of exporting Lebanese products to the Arab Gulf states, explaining "the need to communicate with the Kuwaiti brethren and inform them of the correspondence addressed within the official diplomatic protocol."

Mortada's move came after receiving a report from the Lebanese Commercial Attaché at the Lebanese Embassy in the State of Kuwait on the invitation of the General Authority for Food and Nutrition in Kuwait to a meeting aimed at examining the status and eligibility of Lebanese food and agricultural exports to Kuwait.

In the same context, Mortada sent a letter to the General Authority for Food and Nutrition in Kuwait, in which he affirmed Lebanon's commitment to international food standards, especially those issued by the Codex Alimentarius, emphasizing that Lebanon has been a member of the Commission since its establishment.



**Tackling pharmaceutical delegation efforts to manufacture vaccine:** Caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab meets Mini

## Diab tackles with Hoballah, pharmaceutical delegation efforts to manufacture vaccine

Caretaker Prime Minister, Hassan Diab, received at the Grand Serail, Minister Imad Hoballah, the President of Arwan Pharmaceutical Industries, Eng. Abdul Razzak Youssef and vice-president, Dr. Roueida Daham. The meeting pursued talks on the company's attempts to manufacture the Russian vaccine, Sputnik V, in Lebanon. – Press Office

## French Ambassador inspects health center in Douris, confirms France's support to Lebanese people amid plight

French Ambassador to Lebanon, Anne Grillo, visited the International Amel Foundation and the Mother and Child Health Center in Douris, where she was briefed on the activities of the center, which has been serving the people of the region and its neighborhood since 2020, in partnership with Mérieux Foundation and the support of the Principality of Monaco.

"France stands by the Lebanese side-by-side amid their ordeal and continues to support humanitarian programs to serve all people," stressed Grillo, praising "the model presented by Amel Foundation based on promoting the

values of citizenship and solidarity towards building a better Lebanon."

## Hariri meets Russian, Egyptian ambassadors over general situation

PM-designate Saad Hariri, received at the "Center House" Russian Ambassador to Lebanon, Alexandre Rodakov, in the presence of Hariri's Special Envoy to Russia, George Shaaban, and Advisor Bassem el-Shab.

PM-designate Hariri thanked the Russian leadership for the welcome he received during his recent visit to Moscow, and Russia's understanding towards his stances regarding the political and economic crises afflicting Lebanon.

Hariri also valued Russia's support for forming a government of specialists as soon as possible, in line with the French initiative.

On the other hand, Hariri met with Egyptian Ambassador to Lebanon, Dr. Yasser Alawi, with whom he discussed the general political situation in the country and Cairo's efforts to help Lebanon overcome its current crises.

## Aoun meets committee for establishing and equipping Deir El Qamar Hospital, East Christian Relief Organization delegation

President of the Republic, General Michel Aoun, asserted his keenness on the unity of Jabal region, and its people, considering that this unity constitutes the backbone of Lebanese unity, and that with our national unity we can overcome all challenges which face us.

The President also said that his main concern, when he moved to the summer Presidential residence in Beiteddine Palace was to preserve, fortify and push forward for this unity. "Our concern was also to achieve development projects in Shouf region, most prominent of which was the completion of Deir El Qamar Governmental Hospital" President Aoun indicated.

Stances of the President came while receiving, MP Farid Boustany, who was accompanied by a delegation from the committee for equipping the Deir El Qamar Governmental Hospital.

The delegation included: President, Professor Antoine Loutfallah Al-Boustany, head of Our Lady of the Hill, Father Joseph Abi Aoun Al-Mariami, members: Engineer Karim Moussa Dr. Danny Youssef, Mary Rose Layan Arab, Nicolas Aftimus, Michel Khattar, Lilian Naasi, Abdo Akl, Wassim Al-Boustany, and Antoine Reno.

MP Boustany firstly conveyed the greetings of the people of Deir El Qamar and Shouf saying: "Our visit today is a



Minister Imad Heballah

thank-you, especially since you were among the first to sponsor the Deir Al-Qamar Governmental Hospital project, so you had the white hands in allocating the necessary support by the concerned ministries to complete this medical facility in the town of Deir Al-Qamar, Shouf”.

“With your support, we have overcome all difficulties. We are here today in the process of finishing the first section of the hospital which will be soon opened under your auspices. The delegation accompanying me today includes the committee appointed by the Health Ministry, headed by Professor Antoine Loutfallah Boustany, and the Hospital’s support committee” MP Boustany added.

“Despite the crisis which Lebanon is passing through, we came to assure your Excellency of our determination and will to implement this hospital. This wouldn’t have been possible without the land granted by the Maronite Order. Here, the truth must be said, many good hands were behind the establishment of this hospital” MP Boustany concluded.

Then, Father Abi Aoun thanked President Aoun for receiving the delegation and for his efforts in tireless follow up on the completion of the hospital project “In accordance with the directives of your Excellency in order to

establish the principle of balanced development in various Lebanese regions”.

“As monasticism, we are an essential part of our people in Deir al-Qamar, and from this point of view we have provided the land on which the hospital will be established, to serve the people of Deir al-Qamar and the Shouf region. We are in safe hands, President, as long as you are leading the ship of the homeland” Father Abi Aoun concluded.

Head of the committee, Professor Antoine Boustany, said: “The project to build Deir Al-Qamar Governmental Hospital dates back to more than 15 years, and after a stop due to various reasons we prefer not to mention, and for the good fortune of the Shouf region and its residents, MP Boustany came with honest words, working with commitment and care. Deir Al-Qamar Hospital is the only governmental hospital in the Upper, Middle and Coastal Shouf region, which receives the attention of the Ministry of Health”.

“The hospital will combine high professional specialties and modern medical equipment, and we will create an atmosphere of professional cooperation with all the Shouf hospitals and their doctors. Finally, this project will have a very important impact on rooting the population and decent living, and how much we need this national mission” Professor Boustany concluded.

For his part, the President responded welcoming the delegation and stressed that “Deir El Qamar enjoys great history and was distinguished by its men. It is not permissible for this town to remain without this hospital and everyone should cooperate to complete this achievement. This hospital is an important matter and we will cooperate with you to support its completion, especially in equipment and construction”.

President Aoun also hoped that this project would be completed soon “So that it would be in the service of Deir El Qamar people, and all the people of Jabal region”.

President Aoun met the Director General of SOS CHRETIENS D’ORIENT, Benjamin Blanchard, the head of the mission in Lebanon Artur Lanternier, and the director of the Lebanon Mission, Mrs. Karen Ashkouti.

The delegation briefed the President on the relief work which the Association carries out, especially works which were done after the August 14 Beirut Port explosion, which focused in particular on caring for those affected and providing means of support for them and for damaged hospital health centers.

For his side, the President thanked

the delegation for their accomplishments, especially after the Beirut Port explosion, and referred to the difficulties which Lebanon faces, due to the repercussions of the Syrian displacement on various sectors of the country.

President Aoun also asserted the need to work for the return of displaced Syrians to safe areas in their country, while providing them with assistance, stressing the importance of international support for this return.-- Presidency Press Office

### **Presidency of Council of Ministers: Information circulated by certain newspaper on Diab’s Qatar visit too lame to deserve a reply**

The Press Office of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers issued the following statement: “One of the newspapers has dealt lightly with the visit of Prime Minister, Hassan Diab, to the sisterly State of Qatar, in an attempt to offend the content and results of the discussions that took place with Qatari officials, especially His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, with regards to helping Lebanon in these difficult circumstances.

PCM Press Office is keen on confirming that the information circulated by the newspaper is too lame to deserve a reply.” -- Press Office

### **Strong Lebanon calls on countries, especially EU, to support disclosure of money transfers abroad**

The Strong Lebanon parliamentary bloc announced in a statement after its periodic meeting, headed by MP Gebran Bassil, that the bloc was still awaiting the PM-designate’s integrated government formula, affirming its “constant readiness to provide any assistance necessary to speed up the formation of the government.”

The bloc demanded that “the judiciary proceed to the end with the open investigation into the dossier of money smuggled abroad,” considering that “this matter coincides with the necessity to approve the law of recovering money transferred abroad; a law proposed by the bloc,” calling on “countries of the world, specifically the European Union, to support Lebanon in revealing the details of these transfers, by taking measures against persons or entities in Lebanon that misused public money and led the country to bankruptcy and collapse.”

“This is the fastest way to help Lebanon carry out reforms, by punishing those impeding the reform process and penalizing the perpetrators of corruption,” the bloc said.

## Ransomware attacks in Life Sciences

Cyber criminals look to extort cash from critical health sector



STOPPING CYBERCRIMINALS PROFITING FROM ENDPOINT VULNERABILITIES IN HEALTHCARE SECTOR

**T**he prevalence — and cost — of increasingly sophisticated ransomware attacks continue to grow unabated. The threat of ransomware is nothing new, but the nightmare scenarios targeting businesses in every sector are becoming more targeted and crippling by

the day.

Attackers using ‘big game hunting’ tactics, for example, are setting their sights on specific larger organizations where they anticipate that they can extract the largest financial pay-out. Unlike auto-spreading ransomware such as WannaCry and Not-

Petya, many new strains open the door for criminals to steal data and manipulate systems, as attackers exhibit deeper knowledge and understanding of their target’s environment.

Amid the disruptive impact of the global pandemic over the last year, cyber

criminals are turning their attention to the life sciences industry. The industry's crucial role in launching COVID-19 vaccination programs — combined with the sector's massive revenues and endless volumes of sensitive data — makes it an ideal target for organized crime groups wielding today's destructive ransomware tactics.

Notable ransomware attacks on the industry to date include Ryuk, Conti and Sodinokibi — and cyber criminals are expected to keep healthcare and pharmaceutical businesses firmly in their sights in 2021 and beyond. The US-based Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) reinforced this message with its October 2020 advisory warning of the 'increased and imminent threat' of ransomware in the healthcare and public-health sector.<sup>1</sup>

The evolving threats of ransomware

Today's ransomware attacks are transitioning away from traditional 'smash-and-grab' tactics, as more-sophisticated and intrusive techniques increase the impact and profitability of attacks. This often involves attackers spending weeks performing significant reconnaissance of targets to gain a deep understanding of their systems and data, and how best to leverage a ransomware attack for the largest financial pay-out.

So how is ransomware changing?

Double extortion: As they move away from 'smash-and-grab' tactics, crafty cyber criminals are applying double extortion to their attacks — combining hefty ransom demands with the threat of making sensitive data publicly available. By spending time hiding in a target's network, attackers can identify where best to encrypt systems during their attack — as well as identifying the most-sensitive data and assets to use as leverage for future ransom payments. If a ransom isn't paid, data may be leaked. In an age where trust is integral to any organization's reputation and success, such techniques are increasingly effective in extorting large payments from unsuspecting victims.

Sodinokibi, Conti and Egregor are examples of ransomware groups cashing in on these potentially paralyzing techniques. The large volumes of sensitive and confidential information held by today's pharmaceuticals, including valuable intellectual property related to the COVID-19 vaccine, makes them particularly vulnerable to such attacks. Exposing such data could undermine vaccination programs and health safety worldwide and threaten organization's reputation and entire business value.

What can pharmaceuticals do in response? Having an effective incident-

response capability that that can provide a rapid response is critical. It is also essential to prioritize the detection of lateral movement across the network, by leveraging effective log management and closely monitoring network traffic. Having strong containment and isolation procedures to minimize the impact of ransomware events is also crucial.

Online backups: Like double-extortion tactics, this new wave of ransomware also has attackers performing reconnaissance, in this case to understand and disable their target's backup landscape. Data backups are encrypted or deleted to give criminals additional leverage over their target — the Sodinokibi ransomware is an example of this devastating tactic on Windows shadow copies.

Attackers can be particularly cunning by embedding Sodinokibi ransomware into backup schedules — when victims attempt to restore systems with backed-up data, the ransomware is detonated once again. Victims soon discover that their backups are not recoverable, rendering data recovery not possible at all in many circumstances. Such attacks on pharmaceutical companies have the potential to inflict massive disruption on vaccination programs, ultimately forcing organizations into paying a ransom in order to avoid catastrophic results.

What can pharmaceuticals do in response? Maintain strong offline, encrypted backups of data at all times to foil attackers. Also, segregate backups from the rest of the network and regularly stress test these to ensure their integrity. Implementing privileged access-management controls is also a crucial defense tactic.

Should you pay the ransom?

Pharmaceutical regulators, including the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and the UK's Medicines & Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA), have yet to detail their stance on paying ransoms. However, many countries and industries are becoming less tolerant about paying attackers and in some cases, it is now illegal to meet their ransom demands.

For example, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has issued an advisory to highlight the possible sanction risks associated with paying ransom demands. This is on the premise that paying attackers encourages future attacks and demands, does not always lead to recovery of encrypted files, and may violate OFAC regulations.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, in jurisdictions where it is still legal, paying a ransom is a business decision which should be made at the Board level with legal advice. The pros and

cons of capitulating to attacks should be weighed up very carefully and decision making should include independent, non-executive Board members. Prior to these emergency situations, organizations should have exercised how they deal with a major ransomware incident and have debated and agreed their stance on ransom payments, so they can quickly make decisions in a fast moving and stressful situation.

In the life sciences industry in particular, meeting ransom demands may seem like the right choice, particularly when the sector is playing a fundamental role both in saving lives during the global pandemic and leading the way in enabling a worldwide economic recovery. The pandemic has proven that health and economic prosperity go hand in hand, meaning that organizations experiencing ransomware attacks may feel the pressure from multiple angles and stakeholders to ensure that production is not disrupted.

The sector, perhaps more than others, is therefore presented with an ethical dilemma: protecting health and economic prosperity versus paying a ransom that could arguably encourage costly future attacks.

Security leaders need to adapt to bold new threats

Strong, practical guidance on how to prepare for and respond to ransomware attacks has already been published by the likes of the UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC)<sup>3</sup>, the US's CISA<sup>4</sup>, and other security organizations around the world. Security leaders in the life sciences industry should familiarize themselves with this guidance and embed new controls into their plans where they have gaps.

It's also critical for security leaders to focus on the entirety of the defense and response lifecycle of a ransomware attack, from strategy and planning, monitoring and incident tracking through to disaster recovery and remediation.

A deeper understanding of how ransomware attacks are evolving is critical too. Cyber criminals are incredibly resourceful and entrepreneurial and will continue to look for new methods that increase their prospects for success and profitability.

The life sciences industry is critical to the recovery from COVID-19 and we can expect cyber criminals to continue their efforts to exploit today's unprecedented global environment. There is no time to waste in developing comprehensive new approaches to combat the risk of costly attacks and safeguard the integrity and sustainability of health services.

<b>Exhibition</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Organizer</b>	<b>Contact</b>
<b>Iraq Oil and Gas Show</b>	2-3 March 2020	Babylon Hotel, Baghdad	Ministry of Oil Announces	events@frontier-exchange.com
<b>STEP 2020</b>	11 – 12, February 2020	Dubai, UAE	Step Group	media@stepgroup.co
<b>The 4th annual Dubai World Insurance Congress (DWIC)</b>	26 – 27, February 2020	Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai	lobal Reinsurance, in partnership with Dubai Int'l Financial Center	adam.jordan@nqsm.com
<b>Iraq Oil and Gas Show</b>	2-3 March 2020	Babylon Hotel, Baghdad	Ministry of Oil Announces	events@frontier-exchange.com
<b>Middle East Healthcare Financing Summit</b>	9-10 March, 2020	Rosewood Hotel, Abu Dhabi	Maarefah	info@mehcfs.com
<b>9th Middle East Business &amp; IT Resilience Summit</b>	12th March 2020	Dubai, UAE	N/A	summit@bcm-me.ae
<b>Rendez-vous des Carthage</b>	22-24 March, 2020	Laico Tunis Hotel	Tunis Re & FTUSA	<a href="https://www.rdv-carthage.com/">https://www.rdv-carthage.com/</a>
<b>Rendez-vous de Casablanca de l'Assurance</b>	01-02 April, 2020	Hayatt Regency Hotel	Federation Marocaine Des Societes D'Assurances et Reassurance	info@mehcfs.com information@rdvdelassurance.ma
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<b>The 4th annual Dubai World Insurance Congress (DWIC)</b>	26 – 27, February 2020	Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai	Global Reinsurance, in partnership with Dubai Int'l Financial Center	adam.jordan@nqsm.com
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Audi presents fully electric luxury-class Sportback concept car

## AUDI A6 E-TRON CONCEPT-THE NEXT E-EVOLUTION

AUDI IS RESOLUTELY PUSHING AHEAD with its “e-evolution” towards electric mobility and will be unveiling the forerunner of an innovative family of fully electric, production cars – the four-door Audi A6 e-tron concept – at the Auto Shanghai 2021 show. A completely new technology architecture, the “Premium Platform Electric,” or PPE for short, will serve as the technology platform for these vehicles in the future. Expected to begin in late 2022, the first production cars in the C- and later also B-segment will be relaunched with PPE technology, including – a first in the market for electric vehicles – both SUVs with a high ground clearance and dynamically styled models with a lower ride height,

such as the upcoming Audi A6 e-tron.

Sporting the Audi A6 emblem, the concept car underscores its place in the brand’s luxury-class model series. This model has represented the brand in one of the world’s highest-volume segments since 1968 – initially, and until 1994, as the Audi 100. First the Sedan, Avant, and allroad, then later the Sportback – which was introduced as the A7 – rounded out the model family. An electrified drive system already has a long tradition in the Audi A6 – after a full hybrid version that was released back in 2011, the current Audi A6 TFSI e made its debut in 2019 with a plug-in hybrid drive and an electric range of up to 91 kilometers (WLTP).

Unlike the latter, however, the Audi A6 e-tron concept being exhibited at the Auto Shanghai 2021 show relies exclusively on electric power, based on the future PPE platform developed under Audi’s leadership. At the same time, it also represents an entirely new design concept – the only thing it has in

common with the current A6 are its dimensions. The 4.96-meter-long, 1.96-meter-wide, and 1.44-meter-high body is designed as a Sportback, and its lines are an obvious reflection of the systematic advancement of Audi’s current design language.

The Audi A6 e-tron concept exterior model making its debut in Shanghai is far more than just a simple design exercise – its body is a foretaste of Audi’s future production models and provides clear indications of just how dynamic and elegant the electric-powered luxury class from the brand with the four rings will look.

For its part, the PPE technology will ensure that what the car’s lines imply is actually translated into dynamic driving performance and everyday suitability befitting use as a primary vehicle. Specifically, this means that depending on the selected drive system and model version, an Audi A6 e-tron is expected to boast a range of more than 700 kilometers (based on the WLTP standard) in



the future – and the most powerful member of the family are anticipated to sprint from 0 to 100 km/h in less than four seconds.

E for e-tron, E for elegant – the Audi A6 e-tron concept's design

Based on its dimensions, the Audi A6 e-tron concept is clearly a representative of the luxury class – 4.96 meters in length, 1.96 meters in width, and 1.44 meters in height, the same as the current members of the Audi A6/A7 series. With its dynamic proportions and elegant lines, including the fastback design typical of the brand, it's obvious at first glance that this vehicle was conceived in a wind tunnel.

Aerodynamics has always played a key role in Audi's long history of success in the luxury class. The Cd value of the Audi 100/C3 remains legendary – at the time it was the aerodynamics world champion across all classes, and with its Cd value of 0.30, Audi was already far outperforming its competitors as early as 1982, and continued to do so

for many years to come. With its flowing lines, the third generation of the Audi 100 also revolutionized and profoundly transformed automotive design in the luxury class, which until then had been highly conservative.

Now the Audi A6 e-tron concept is writing a new chapter in this success story, proving once again that the brand always combines form and function in a perfect symbiosis. A Cd value of just 0.22 is unprecedented in the electrified C-segment. In layman's terms, this means the car exhibits minimal aerodynamic drag – which initially translates into lower energy consumption and therefore extended range. At the same time, the fine-tuning in the wind tunnel has once again resulted in an organic design with exceptional elegance and harmony down to the last detail.

Large 22-inch wheels and short overhangs, the flat cabin, and the wide coupe roof arch give the vehicle proportions distinctly reminiscent of a sports car. The absence of hard edges results in smooth transitions between convex and concave surfaces throughout the body, as well as in soft shadows. The Audi A6 e-tron concept appears monolithic, as if from a single mold – particularly when viewed from the side.

The slope of the rear side window is a typical feature of Audi Sportback window design; as a result, the D-pillar rises up from the stable base of the vehicle's rear end in an especially streamlined manner. The eye-catching quattro wheel arches effectively accentuate the width of the body and are simultaneously integrated organically into the side surfaces.

The wheel arches are connected by the specially sculpted battery area above the rocker panel, which is highlighted with a black inlay – a design element that is now a hallmark of the Audi brand's fleet of electric vehicles. Also typical of Audi e-tron models are the sleek, camera-based virtual exterior mirrors at the base of the A-pillar.

Looking at the front, it is immediately apparent that the Audi A6 e-tron concept is an electric-powered representative of the brand with the four rings. A characteristic feature is the large enclosed Singleframe grille, which is bordered at the bottom by deep air intakes for cooling the drivetrain, battery, and brakes. The flat headlight bezels extend far into the sides of the laterally sweeping front end, underscoring the horizontally aligned architecture of the vehicle body.

The influence of the wind tunnel on the rear end is unmistakable. The upper rear end is shaped to create an aerodynamically functional breakaway edge. And in the lower section, the rear diffuser's generously sized air outlet is integrated into the spoiler

area. This element channels the air that flows under the vehicle in a manner that reduces turbulence – a perfect combination of reduced aerodynamic drag (i.e. the Cd value) and minimized lift.

"Heliosilver" is the name of the tech-noid-looking color of the paint, which in turn adds aesthetic presence and functionality to the appearance of the Audi A6 e-tron concept. The paint accentuates the shapes of the body with a three-dimensional depth effect, which is particularly visible in the area around the quattro wheel arches. In the front end, the Singleframe grille, also in Heliosilver, forms a striking contrast to the deep matte black color of the frame. This stark contrast also accentuates the horizontally oriented proportions in the rocker panel sections on the sides of the vehicle.

In addition to its breathtaking appearance, the paint also offers tangible technical benefits that can help reduce energy consumption. This is because it can reflect a significant percentage of the thermal radiation in sunlight, thus reducing the amount of energy that enters the car's body and, above all, its interior. The result is that in many situations, the occupants may not need to use the air conditioning to maintain a constant level of comfort – which is one of the main factors that has an impact on energy consumption in addition to the drive system. This could benefit the vehicle's range – over every mile and even when stopped at traffic lights.

See and be seen – the Audi A6 e-tron concept's lighting technology

The flat headlights and taillights are slim and flush with the overall composition of the lines. Digital Matrix LED and digital OLED technology makes it possible to achieve maximum brightness and a wide range of features even with a minimal surface area, while at the same time offering customizable light signatures. The team of Audi lighting designers and developers has once again done an amazing job – this concept car packs a host of new features and personalization options into its lighting units.

Three small, high-resolution LED projectors are built in into each side of the body, transforming the ground beneath them into a stage when the doors are opened – small extended dynamic lighting effects greet the occupants with messages in their own language. At the premiere in Shanghai, this means in Chinese characters, of course.

The combination of safety features and aesthetic design has always been of particular importance to Audi. That's why the small, high-resolution projectors also display warning symbols on the ground – to warn a bike rider that the car door is about to open, for example.

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