


'HIGHEST' Q1 | Page 8

Lesha Bank's net profit jumps 30% to QR28.8mn

Wednesday, April 24, 2024
Shawwal 15, 1445 AH
GULF TIMES
BUSINESS

LEADING EXPO : Page 2

UDC showcases its premium real estate portfolio at IREX in Mumbai

Commercial Bank posts net profit of QR801.6mn in Q1

Commercial Bank Group posted a first quarter net profit of QR801.6mn, up 6.7% on a reported basis and 38.9% on a restated basis in Q1, 2023.

The group's balance sheet increased by 2% (as at March 31, 2024) with total assets at QR166.2bn compared with QR163bn in March 2023.

Commercial Bank Group's loans and advances to customers decreased 4.7% to QR89.7bn in Q1, 2024 compared to QR94.1bn in March 2023. This is largely due to effects of rising interest rates and at Alternatif Bank level, due to the Turkish lira depreciation.

The group's customer deposits increased by 4.3% to QR79.4bn (as on March 31) compared with QR76.1bn in the same period in 2023. This is largely due to increase in time deposits by customers.

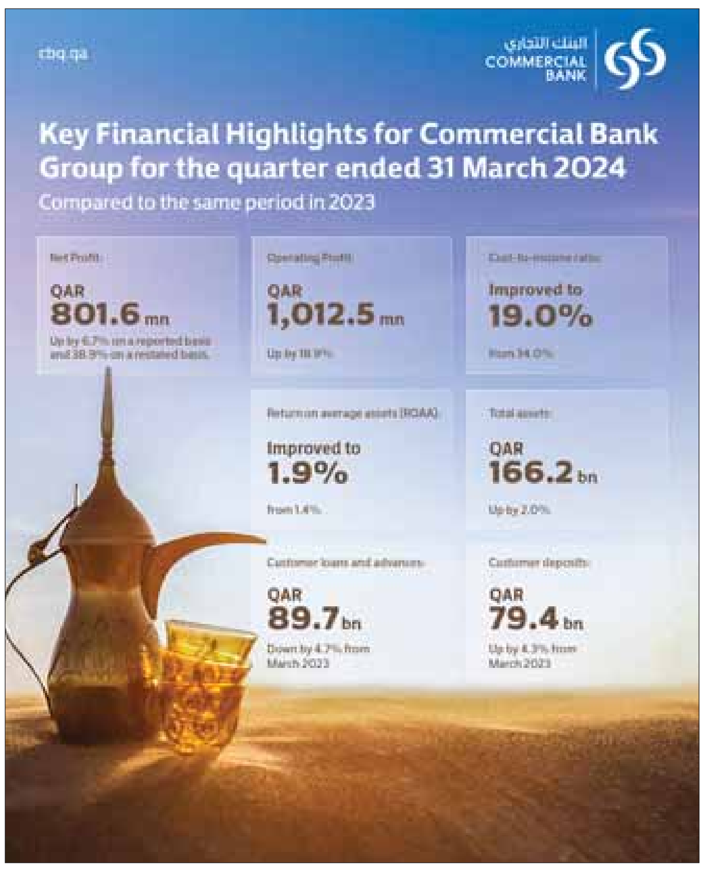
"We have restated the Q1, 2023 numbers due to the restatement of the year-end 2023 financial statements for the underlying derivative on the share option performance scheme. Accordingly, the current Q1, 2024 figures provided are compared with the previous year restated numbers," Commercial Bank said yesterday.

The Group's cost-to-income ratio improved to 19% from 34% during the first quarter of the year.

In the first quarter, the bank recorded strong capital adequacy ratio (at 16.4%), while return on average assets (ROAA) improved to 1.9% from 1.4%.

Commercial Bank Group chairman Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali bin Jabor al-Thani said: "In the first three months of 2024, Commercial Bank maintained consistent progress. The confirmation of our upgrade in Fitch rating from 'A-' to 'A' with a stable outlook, underscores our strong domestic franchise and stable operating environment.

"Building on our 2023 accolades for innovation, Commercial Bank was designated by Edaa as the first bank in Qatar to manage the dividends distribution for listed companies in line with the National Vision of providing services by digital means, and we reaffirm our dedication to bringing technology to contribute to Qatar's digital future."



Commercial Bank vice-chairman Hussain Ibrahim Alfardan said: "We are pleased to report on Commercial Bank's continued positive progress in the first quarter of 2024, reflecting the positive momentum of the Qatari economy and our consistent focus on operational excellence.

"Our financial performance was maintained in a scenario of muted loan growth due to elevated interest rates, demonstrating our ability to adapt to our customers' evolving needs and develop new business streams.

"Commercial Bank has successfully issued a $750mn Regulation S 5-year Bond, which was oversubscribed by 2.4 times. This marks our return to the public international capital markets after a three-year gap. The overwhelming demand for this transaction underscores the strength of our credit and the demand for Qatari institutional paper among international investors.

"Looking ahead, we remain committed to solidifying Commercial Bank's position as a leading banking institution in the region. We look forward to another year filled with significant milestones, all aimed at supporting the growth and prosperity of Qatar's economy."

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In New York, al-Kuwari held a meeting with Paula Narváez, president, ECOSOC. During the meeting, a wide range of topics pertaining to common interests were discussed, with particular attention on the financial and international development work. Page 8

Finance minister addresses UN's ECOSOC forum in New York

HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari has highlighted world's emerging challenges, global dynamics and notable performance divergence of many countries, which hinders sustainable development and dramatically increases borrowing costs.

He was addressing the 4th annual United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Forum on 'Financing for Development' (FfD) in a session titled 'The Road to FfD', which was held at the UN headquarters in New York.

Al-Kuwari expressed the need for new financing ideas to mitigate such obstruction and said: "This divergence, together with the sharp increase in borrowing costs in recent years, underlines the need for new ideas on financing, which I hope this forum and Finance for Development Conference can contribute to."

During the session, numerous topics related to sustainable development were deliberated. The discussions focused on how to implement and establish a framework to ensure its future success. All participating parties shared their opinions and viewpoints, particularly in the areas of economic development, industry, innovation, infrastructure, green energy, reducing inequalities and global development.

The session emphasised the importance of exploring ways for collaboration to achieve and apply sustainability standards and future development.

Governments have established objectives and targets for financing sustainable development, most notably the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Adopted in 2015, the plan establishes a novel worldwide framework for financing developments.

In New York, HE al-Kuwari, also held a meeting with Paula Narváez, president, ECOSOC.

During the meeting, a wide range of topics pertaining to common interests were discussed, with particular attention paid to the financial and international development work.

Both parties were involved in a dialogue concerning possible approaches to enhancing the effectiveness of the joint efforts and promoting mutual benefits.

Vodafone Qatar net profit surges 12.5% to QR150mn in first quarter

Vodafone Qatar has reported a 12.5% year-on-year increase in net profit to QR150mn in the first three months of this year.

Total revenue increased by 3.9% year-on-year to QR806mn on sustained growth across various business segments, including fixed broadband services, managed services, Internet of Things (IoT), handsets and others. Service revenue grew by 2.5% to QR704mn.

Ebitda (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) for the period ended March 31, 2024 increased to QR338mn, reflecting a growth of 5.4% year-on-year, positively impacted by higher service revenue and the continued effectiveness in implementing the company's cost optimisation programme. Consequently, Ebitda margin expanded by 0.6ppts reaching 41.9%.

Vodafone Qatar is now serving 2.1mn mobile customers representing a growth of 1% compared with the previous year period.

The company achieved a notable return on capital employed (ROCE) of 11.5% in the first quarter of 2024 (annualised), reflecting a 0.8ppts increase against the previous year.

"This is the result of successfully allocating capital to existing and new areas to diversify revenue and accelerate profitable growth," it said.

GWC posts QR50.88mn net profit in first quarter

Gulf Warehousing Company posted a net profit of QR50.88mn in the first quarter of the year, the company said yesterday.

The company earned gross revenues of QR375.73mn, earnings per share of QR0.087, and total assets of QR5.07bn during the same period.

GWC chairman Sheikh Mohamed bin Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani said: "The first-quarter results underscore the company's financial position strength, and the business model fostering organisational agility necessary to attract promising investment opportunities.

"GWC is actively implementing a strategic plan to drive growth in line with the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3) 2024-2030, which aims to reinforce Qatar's position as a global logistics hub and position its logistics cluster as a specialised e-commerce distribution hub, focusing on re-exporting high-value items to reach up to QR52bn in re-exports by 2030."

He added: "The launch of Al Wukair Logistics Park's second phase represented a significant milestone in our mission to enable micro, small and medium enterprises in Qatar and the region. This modern facility is not just a logistics hub; it is a catalyst for economic growth, fostering entrepreneurship and facilitating the rapid growth of start-up businesses."

GWC managing director Sheikh Abdullah bin Fahad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani said: "GWC is committed to completing its current and planned projects in order to maximise returns for its shareholders. With a strong focus on improving operational efficiency and pioneering innovative solutions and initiatives, the company remains focused on evaluating emerging investment opportunities." He noted the promising prospects for the Qatari economy, underscoring GWC's dedication to contributing to its rapid development and bolstering various economic sectors.

Sheikh Abdullah added: "GWC has achieved a significant milestone by being the logistics services provider for Expo 2023 Doha, given its strong track record in providing integrated logistics services for major global events, including the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022."



GWC chairman Sheikh Mohamed bin Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani, managing director Sheikh Abdullah bin Fahad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani, and Group CEO Ranjeev Menon.

GWC Group CEO Ranjeev Menon said: "Further expansions include launching GWC's FLAG subsidiary (100% owned company) logistics Hub at Khazaen Economic City in Oman. FLAG is the first company to launch at Khazaen Economic City, which is strategically located to transport links and borders.

"FLAG Oman is set to become a vital hub, connecting powerhouse locations across the region, including Muscat, Doha, Bahrain, Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dubai. It provides a platform, uniting Oman with the GCC, and the GCC with the rest of the world."

BUSINESS

Commercial Bank posts QR801.6mn Q1 profit

From Page 1
Commercial Bank Group chief executive officer Joseph Abraham commented: "During the first three months ended 2024, Commercial Bank continued to demonstrate a stable and sustainable performance while making further progress on our five-year strategic plan, resulting in solid financial results. This success is notably underscored by Fitch's upgrading of our rating to 'A' with a stable outlook.

"The Group's net interest income for Q1, 2024 saw a decrease of 3.0%, to reach QR957.7mn, down from QR987mn in Q1, 2023, due to higher cost of funding in the market. The decrease is attributable to the decrease in asset levels as the loans and advance declined by 4.7%.

"The overall fees and other income decreased by 4.2% to QR291.7mn, compared to QR304.4mn in Q1, 2023. This was mainly driven by reduced FX and trading income.

"The Group's cost-to-income ratio improved to 19% during the period on the account of improved operating expenses, compared to 34% in Q1, 2023. This reduction in expenses was largely attributed to decreased staff related LTIP compensation costs, a consequence of IFRS 2 due to the decline in share price.

"Net provisions were down by 12.1% to QR240.5mn compared to QR273.5mn in Q1, 2023. The gross cost of risk decreased by five basis points (bps) to 89 bps as compared to 94 bps. However, the net cost of risk decreased by 8 basis points to 58 basis points as compared to 66 basis points in 2023, due to strong recoveries and ECL release during the period.

"Investment securities experienced a decrease of 5.7%, reaching QR28.1bn, down from QR29.8bn in Q1, 2023. Customer deposits increased by 4.3% during the period, at QR79.4bn, whilst net loans and advances to customers fell by 4.7%, to QR89.7bn from QR94.1bn as compared to the same period in Q1, 2023. This is largely due to increase in time deposits by customers. In addition, low-cost deposits remained relatively stable at QR29.6bn, compared to QR30.1bn in the previous year.

"The Group remains in adherence to the International Accounting Standards (IAS) 29, which require the application of hyperinflationary accounting for Alternatif Bank. As a result, a non-cash "net monetary loss" of QR40.6mn was recorded in the Group's income statement for the period as compared to QR42.1mn in the corresponding period in 2023."

Forbes has ranked Commercial Bank among the 'Top 30 Most Valuable Banks in the Middle East' for 2024.

During the expo, UDC showcased its flagship projects, including developments at The Pearl Island and Crystal Residence at Gewan Island.

UDC showcases premium real estate portfolio at IREX 2024 in Mumbai

United Development Company (UDC), the master developer of The Pearl Island and Gewan Island, concluded its participation as lead partners at the International Real Estate Expo (IREX) 2024 held recently in Mumbai.

IREX Mumbai stands as India's leading showcase of international real estate and immigration programmes, providing a platform for high-net-worth individuals and investors to explore global investment opportunities.

For the second consecutive year, UDC presented its exciting portfolio of properties at The Pearl Island and Gewan Island during the IREX Mumbai exhibition. This participation marked another significant step in UDC's strategic engagement with the vibrant Indian market and its objective to attract foreign investments into Qatar's thriving real estate sector.

UDC's partnership with Commercial Bank, its financing partner, allows foreign non-resident investors seamless access to real estate investment in Qatar. This collaboration provides attractive financing solutions that complement UDC's premium residential developments, offering high returns and Qatari residency benefits to foreign investors.

During the expo, UDC showcased its flagship projects, including developments at The Pearl Island and Crystal Residence at Gewan Island. These projects represent some of the most sought-after residential destinations in Qatar, highlighting the luxury and quality synonymous with UDC's developments.

IREX Mumbai attracted over 1,000 visitors, providing an ideal platform for UDC to engage with potential investors and showcase Qatar's inviting residency scheme linked with property ownership. UDC's presence at the event emphasised the eligibility criteria for Qatari residency and the associated benefits, further enhancing awareness among Indian investors.

UDC's ongoing strategic engagements in global events, including its recent participation in the International Immigration & Property Expo 2024 in Hong Kong and MIPIM in Cannes, reflect its commitment to attracting foreign investments and delivering premium real estate developments in Qatar.

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF LESHA BANK LLC (PUBLIC) 31 March 2024

بنـك لشـا
LESHA BANK

Below is the extract from interim condensed consolidated financial statements, which are available at www.leshabank.com/investor-relations/financial-statements/

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT ON REVIEW OF INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF LESHA BANK LLC (PUBLIC)

Introduction

We have reviewed the accompanying interim condensed consolidated financial statements of Lesha Bank L.L.C. (Public) ("the Bank") and its subsidiaries (collectively "the Group") as at 31 March 2024, comprising of the interim consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 March 2024 and the interim consolidated statement of income, interim consolidated statement of comprehensive income, interim consolidated statement of income and attribution related to quasi-equity, interim consolidated statement of changes in equity, interim consolidated statement of cash flows, and interim consolidated statement of changes in off-balance sheet assets under management for the three-month period then ended, and the related explanatory notes.

The Board of Directors is responsible for the preparation and presentation of these interim condensed consolidated financial statements in accordance with Financial Accounting Standards ("FAS") issued by the Accounting and Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions ("AAOIFI") as modified by the Qatar Financial Centre Regulatory Authority ("QFCRA"). Our responsibility is to express a conclusion on these interim condensed consolidated financial statements based on our review.

Scope of review

We conducted our review in accordance with International Standards on Review Engagements 2410, "Review of Interim Financial Information Performed by the Independent Auditor of the Entity". A review of interim financial information consists of making inquiries, primarily of persons responsible for financial and accounting matters, and applying analytical and other review procedures. A review is substantially less in scope than an audit conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing and consequently does not enable us to obtain assurance that we would become aware of all significant matters that might be identified in an audit. Accordingly, we do not express an audit opinion.

Conclusion

Based on our review, nothing has come to our attention that causes us to believe that the accompanying interim condensed consolidated financial statements are not prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with FAS issued by the AAOIFI as modified by QFCRA.

Ahmed Sayed
of Ernst & Young
Auditor's Registration No. 326

Doha, State of Qatar
23 April 2024

LESHA BANK LLC (PUBLIC)
INTERIM CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

As at 31 March 2024 (expressed in QAR'000)

	31 March 2024 (Reviewed)	31 December 2023 (Audited)
ASSETS		
Cash and bank balances	**3,911,083**	2,962,937
Financing assets	**66,621**	88,387
Investments securities	**2,651,639**	2,440,385
Investments in real estate	**160,090**	264,262
Fixed assets	**16,121**	17,396
Intangible assets	**2,320**	2,554
Assets held-for-sale	**598,038**	387,303
Other assets	**153,887**	144,849
TOTAL ASSETS	**7,559,799**	6,308,073
LIABILITIES, QUASI-EQUITY AND EQUITY		
Liabilities		
Financing liabilities	**2,309,832**	1,862,616
Customers' balances	**682,944**	129,904
Liabilities held-for-sale	**180,326**	112,220
Other liabilities	**137,560**	149,229
Total Liabilities	**3,310,662**	2,253,969
QUASI-EQUITY		
Participatory investment accounts	**2,934,536**	2,827,095
Equity		
Share capital	**1,120,000**	1,120,000
Share premium	**80,003**	80,003
Legal reserve	**9,439**	9,439
Investments fair value reserve	**(19,610)**	(3,237)
Retained earnings	**58,976**	30,206
Total Equity Attributable to Shareholders of the Bank	**1,248,808**	1,236,411
Non-controlling interest	**65,793**	(9,402)
Total Equity	**1,314,601**	1,227,009
TOTAL LIABILITIES, QUASI-EQIUTY AND EQUITY	**7,559,799**	6,308,073
Off-balance sheet assets under management	**6,382,974**	6,188,915
Contingent liabilities and commitments	**1,832**	1

These interim condensed consolidated financial statements were authorised for issuance by the Board of Directors on 23rd April 2024 and signed on its behalf by:

Mohamed Yousef Al Mana
Vice Chairman

Mohammed Ismail Al Emadi
Chief Executive Officer

LESHA BANK LLC (PUBLIC)
INTERIM CONSOLIDATED INCOME STATEMENT

For the three-month period ended 31 March 2024 (expressed in QAR'000)

	For the three-month period ended	
	31 March 2024 (Reviewed)	31 March 2023 (Reviewed)
CONTINUING OPERATIONS INCOME		
Income from financing assets	**1,619**	4,645
Income from placements with financial institutions	**44,816**	24,430
Profit on the financing liabilities	**(27,988)**	(5,832)
Net income from financing assets	**18,447**	23,243
Fee income	**14,926**	20,399
Dividend income	**4,963**	3,193
Profit on Sukuk investments	**25,582**	13,834
(Loss) / gain on re-measurement of investments at fair value through income statement	**(4,203)**	3,081
Gain on disposal of Sukuk investments	**139**	-
Gain on disposal of equity investments	**8,782**	-
Gain on disposal of real estate Investments	**13,933**	-
Net foreign exchange gain	**855**	3,540
Other income, net	**4,332**	4,386
TOTAL INCOME	**87,756**	71,676
EXPENSES		
Staff costs	**(18,762)**	(18,560)
Depreciation and amortisation	**(1,606)**	(1,641)
Other operating expenses	**(9,887)**	(4,528)
TOTAL EXPENSES	**(30,255)**	(24,729)
Provision for impairment on financing assets, net of recoveries	**-**	(2,929)
Provision for impairment on other financial assets	**(29)**	(848)
PROFIT BEFORE TAX AND ATTRIBUTION TO QUASI-EQUITY	**57,472**	43,170
Less: Net profit attributable to quasi-equity	**(26,505)**	(21,292)
PROFIT BEFORE INCOME TAX	**30,967**	21,878
Income tax expense	**-**	-
NET PROFIT FROM CONTINUING OPERATIONS	**30,967**	21,878
DISCONTINUED OPERATIONS		
(Loss) / profit from discontinued operations, net of tax	**(356)**	757
NET PROFIT FOR THE PERIOD	**30,611**	22,635
Attributable to:		
Equity holders of the Bank	**28,770**	22,118
Non-controlling interest	**1,841**	517
	30,611	22,635
Basic/diluted profit per share from continuing operations - QAR	**0.026**	0.020
Basic/diluted loss per share from discontinued operations - QAR	**-**	-
Basic/diluted profit per share - QAR	**0.026**	0.020

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Lesha Bank LLC (Public) is authorized by QFCRA under license No. 00091 and listed on the Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE:QFBQ)

QSE edges up on buying interests in consumer goods, banking and transport

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

The Gulf institutions were seen net buyers as the 20-stock Qatar Index rose 0.48% to 9,711.02 points, having hit an intraday high of 9,720 points

The Qatar Stock Exchange yesterday gained more than 46 points, lifted by buying interests, especially at the consumer goods, banking and transport counters.

The Gulf institutions were seen net buyers as the 20-stock Qatar Index rose 0.48% to 9,711.02 points, having hit an intraday high of 9,720 points.

The domestic funds' substantially weakened net selling pressure had its influence on the main market, whose year-to-date losses truncated to 10.34%.

As much as 49% of the traded constituents extended gains to investors in the main bourse, whose capitalisation added QR2.7bn or 0.48% to QR564.4bn on account of midcap segments.

The local retail investors continued to be net buyers but with lesser vigour in the main market, which saw as many as 189 exchange traded funds (sponsored by Masraf Al Rayan) valued at QR431 trade across one deal.

The foreign institutions were seen increasingly into net selling in the main bourse, which saw no trading of sovereign bonds.

The Arab retail investors were net profit takers in the main market, which saw no trading of treasury bills.

The Islamic index was seen gaining slower than the other indices in the main bourse, whose trade turnover and volumes were on the decline.

The Total Return Index gained 0.48%, the All Share Index by 0.5% and the All Islamic Index by 0.19% in the main market.

The consumer goods and services sector index rose 0.83%, banks and financial services (0.79%), transport (0.66%), telecom (0.2%) and industrials (0.16%); while real estate declined 1.28% and insurance 0.04%.

Major gainers in the main market included Dlala, Gulf International Services, Zad Holding, Milaha, QIIB, QNB and Woqod.

Nevertheless, United Development Company, Meeza Holding, Qamco, Barwa and Widam Food were among the shakers in the main bourse.

In the venture market, Al Mahhar Holding saw its shares depreciate in value.

The Gulf institutions turned net buyers to the tune of QR6.75mn compared with net sellers of QR1.78mn on April 22.

The domestic institutions' net profit booking decreased substantially to QR15.06mn against QR60.17mn the previous day.

However, the foreign institutions' net selling strengthened markedly to QR29.66mn compared to QR20.68mn on Monday.

The Arab individuals were net profit takers to the extent of QR5.28mn against net buyers of QR7.39mn on April 22.

The Qatari individual investors' net buying declined drastically to QR39.58mn compared to QR67.08mn the previous day.

The foreign individual investors' net buying weakened noticeably to QR3.26mn against QR5.93mn on Monday. The Gulf retail investors' net buying eased perceptibly to QR0.39mn compared to QR1.74mn on April 22.

The Arab institutions had no major net exposure against net buyers to the tune of QR0.51mn the previous day.

Trade volumes in the main market fell 9% to 126.66mn shares and value by 11% to QR425.44mn, whereas deals were up about 1% to 15,674.

The venture market's trade volumes more than doOubled to 0.1mn equities and value almost tripled to QR0.16mn on more than doubled transactions to 16.

QEWC revenues rise 4% year-on-year to QR687mn in January-March

Qatar Electricity and Water Company (QEWC) has reported net profit of QR318mn on revenues of QR687mn in the first three months of this year.

While net earnings declined 21% year-on-year, the company's revenues showed a 4% jump on annualised basis in the review period.

The earnings-per-share (EPS) amounted to QR0.29 for the quarter-ended March 31, 2024 against QR0.36 the previous year period.

Total assets were valued at QR22.65bn in January-March 2024 compared to QR23.29bn in the comparable period of 2023.

QFC-based Allarch Healthcare and US-based HIMSS in strategic partnership

The Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) based Allarch Healthcare Techanalytics, a healthcare transformation consulting firm, and the US-based The Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) have forged a strategic partnership.

This collaboration aims to leverage Allarch's expertise in digital healthcare transformation and alignment with Qatar's healthcare strategy, enhancing patient outcomes and operational efficiency in an ever-evolving healthcare ecosystem.

With more than 25 years of technology enabled healthcare delivery, Allarch Healthcare brings strategic insights to make significant and measurable improvements in healthcare outcomes, said Dharmendra Sushilkumar Ghai, founder, Allarch Healthcare.

Allarch Healthcare's recognition as digital healthcare transformation partner reflects its expertise in innovation and healthcare informatics, according to him.

"This designation is reserved for organisations that have been professionally equipped with HIMSS maturity models and can guide you on your path to digital health transformation," said Ronan O'Connor, HIMSS vice-president and managing director, EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa).

This collaboration aims to leverage Allarch's expertise in digital healthcare transformation and alignment with Qatar's healthcare strategy, enhancing patient outcomes and operational efficiency in an ever-evolving healthcare ecosystem

He said its digital health technology partners can help clients progress through the maturity models and their stages with a variety of consultancy and onsite assessment and advisory services.

HIMSS has served the global health community for more than 60 years, with focused operations across North America, Europe, the UK, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific.

The Commercial Bank (P.S.Q.C.)
Interim Condensed Consolidated Financial Statements
31 March 2024

البنك التجاري
COMMERCIAL
BANK

Interim Consolidated Statement of Financial Position
As at 31 March 2024 — QAR (000's)

	31 March 2024 Reviewed	31 March 2023 Reviewed/ (Restated)	31 December 2023 Audited	1 January 2023 Audited (Restated)
ASSETS				
Cash and balances with central banks	7,795,662	10,203,711	8,631,193	8,030,334
Due from banks	27,374,670	16,343,600	20,525,334	20,843,798
Loans and advances to customers	89,676,655	94,093,364	91,490,410	97,669,951
Investment securities	28,124,539	29,816,355	30,762,358	29,835,260
Investment in associates and a joint arrangement	3,457,979	3,160,913	3,373,307	3,101,753
Property and equipment	3,119,597	3,126,415	3,062,799	3,050,360
Intangible assets	56,573	62,387	62,410	66,040
Other assets	6,634,149	6,183,761	6,468,460	6,307,013
TOTAL ASSETS	**166,239,824**	162,990,506	164,376,271	168,904,509
LIABILITIES				
Due to banks	17,406,407	26,332,807	18,805,257	24,054,014
Customer deposits	79,364,188	76,062,938	76,541,228	83,167,492
Debt securities	9,837,547	11,642,757	7,899,400	10,714,316
Other borrowings	23,192,021	17,298,053	26,266,888	17,071,747
Other liabilities	11,146,865	9,274,772	10,457,673	11,044,004
TOTAL LIABILITIES	**140,947,028**	140,611,327	139,970,446	146,051,573
EQUITY				
Share capital	4,047,254	4,047,254	4,047,254	4,047,254
Legal reserve	10,223,581	9,882,644	10,024,432	9,877,879
General reserve	26,500	26,500	26,500	26,500
Risk reserve	2,274,574	2,274,574	2,274,574	2,274,574
Fair value reserve	(514,353)	(448,346)	(390,373)	(255,047)
Cash flow hedge reserve	(58,086)	(97,042)	(163,970)	(111,988)
Foreign currency translation reserve	(2,632,377)	(2,628,713)	(2,718,529)	(2,690,920)
Other reserves	1,216,673	954,537	1,137,954	884,977
Revaluation reserve	1,198,403	1,115,904	1,140,161	1,082,336
Employee incentive phantom scheme shares	(1,139,524)	(1,114,872)	(1,139,524)	(1,114,872)
Retained earnings	4,830,148	2,546,735	4,347,343	3,012,240
Instruments eligible for Additional Tier 1 Capital	5,820,000	5,820,000	5,820,000	5,820,000
TOTAL EQUITY ATTRIBUTABLE TO EQUITY HOLDERS OF THE BANK	**25,292,793**	22,379,175	24,405,822	22,852,933
Non-controlling interests	3	4	3	3
TOTAL EQUITY	**25,292,796**	22,379,179	24,405,825	22,852,936
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	**166,239,824**	162,990,506	164,376,271	168,904,509

The interim condensed consolidated financial statements were approved by the Board of Directors on 23 April 2024 and were signed on its behalf by:

Sheikh Abdulla Bin Ali Bin Jabor Al Thani
Chairman

Mr. Hussain Ibrahim Alfardan
Vice Chairman

Mr. Joseph Abraham
Group Chief Executive Officer

Interim Consolidated Statement of Income
For the three months ended 31 March 2024 — QAR (000's)

	Three months ended 31 March 2024 Reviewed	31 March 2023 Reviewed/ (Restated)
Interest income	2,431,481	2,186,350
Interest expense	(1,473,787)	(1,199,323)
Net interest income	**957,694**	987,027
Fee and commission income	371,111	338,900
Fee and commission expense	(168,884)	(213,934)
Net fee and commission income	**202,227**	124,966
Net foreign exchange (loss) / gain	(16,803)	120,130
Net income / (losses) from investment securities	77,196	(7,110)
Other operating income	29,036	66,375
Net operating income	**1,249,350**	1,291,388
Staff costs	(84,128)	(276,051)
Depreciation	(53,759)	(65,031)
Amortization of intangible assets	(16,752)	(18,207)
Other expenses	(82,191)	(80,345)
Operating expenses	**(236,830)**	(439,634)
Operating profit	**1,012,520**	851,754
Net impairment reversals / (losses) on investment securities	59	(177)
Net impairment losses on loans and advances to customers	(130,369)	(159,961)
Net impairment losses on other financial assets	(14,017)	(108,040)
Other provision	(96,148)	(5,296)
	772,045	578,280
Net monetary losses due to hyperinflation	(40,574)	(42,069)
Profit before share of results of associates and a joint arrangement	**731,471**	536,211
Share of results of associates and a joint arrangement	78,718	69,560
Profit before tax	**810,189**	605,771
Income tax expense	(8,566)	(28,518)
Profit for the period	**801,623**	577,253
Attributable to:		
Equity Holders of the bank	801,623	577,253
Non-controlling interests	-	-
Profit for the period	**801,623**	577,253
Basic/diluted earnings per share (QAR)	**0.20**	0.14

Interim Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income
For the three months ended 31 March 2024 — QAR (000's)

	Three months ended 31 March 2024 Reviewed	31 March 2023 Reviewed/ (Restated)
Profit for the period	**801,623**	577,253
Other comprehensive income/(loss) for the period:		
Items that are, or may be subsequently reclassified to profit or loss:		
Foreign currency translation differences from foreign operation	(575,364)	(648,570)
Hyperinflation impact	661,516	710,777
Share of other comprehensive income/(loss) of investment in associates and a joint arrangement	7,353	(13,067)
Net movement in cash flow hedge reserve:		
Net movement in cash flow hedges-effective portion of changes in fair value	105,884	14,946
Net amount transferred to consolidated statement of income	-	-
Net change in fair value of investments in debt securities at FVOCI :		
Net change in fair value	(80,234)	30,654
Net amount transferred to interim consolidated statement of income	(56)	(145)
Items that may not be subsequently reclassified to profit or loss:		
Net change in fair value of equity investments at FVOCI	(49,644)	(179,565)
Share of other comprehensive income of investment in associates and a joint arrangement	(1,399)	2,666
Revaluation on land and buildings	58,242	33,568
Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period	**126,298**	(48,736)
Total comprehensive income for the period	**927,921**	528,517
Attributable to:		
Equity Holders of the bank	927,921	528,517
Non-controlling interests	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	**927,921**	528,517

Independent Auditors' Report on Review of Interim Condensed Consolidated Financial Statements to the Board of Directors of The Commercial Bank (P.S.Q.C.)

Introduction

We have reviewed the accompanying 31 March 2024 interim condensed consolidated financial statements of The Commercial Bank (P.S.Q.C.) (the "Bank") and its subsidiaries (together the "Group"), which comprise:

- the interim consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 March 2024;
- the interim consolidated statement of income for the three-month period ended 31 March 2024;
- the interim consolidated statement of comprehensive income for the three-month period ended 31 March 2024;
- the interim consolidated statement of changes in equity for the three-month period ended 31 March 2024;
- the interim consolidated statement of cash flows for the three-month period ended 31 March 2024; and
- notes to the interim condensed consolidated financial statements.

The Board of Directors of the Bank is responsible for the preparation and presentation of these interim condensed consolidated financial statements in accordance with IAS 34, 'Interim Financial Reporting'. Our responsibility is to express a conclusion on these interim condensed consolidated financial statements based on our review.

Scope of Review

We conducted our review in accordance with the International Standard on Review Engagements 2410, "Review of Interim Financial Information Performed by the Independent Auditor of the Entity". A review of interim financial statements consists of making inquiries, primarily of persons responsible for financial and accounting matters, and applying analytical and other review procedures. A review is substantially less in scope than an audit conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing and consequently does not enable us to obtain assurance that we would become aware of all significant matters that might be identified in an audit. Accordingly, we do not express an audit opinion.

Conclusion

Based on our review, nothing has come to our attention that causes us to believe that the accompanying 31 March 2024 interim condensed consolidated financial statements are not prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with IAS 34, 'Interim Financial Reporting'.

Emphasis of Matter - comparative information

We draw attention to note 22 to the interim condensed consolidated financial statements which indicates that the comparative information presented as at and for the three-month period ended 31 March 2023 has been restated. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

23 April 2024
Doha
State of Qatar

Gopal Balasubramaniam
KPMG
Qatar Auditor's Registry Number 251
Licensed by QFMA: External Auditor's License No. 120153

BUSINESS

Egypt commits to 'ending direct central bank lending' under IMF programme

Reuters
Cairo

Egyptian authorities have committed to stop sidestepping the finance ministry to borrow billions of dollars directly from the central bank, the International Monetary Fund said in a staff report prepared for a board meeting last month.

Such borrowing risks undermining the economy by expanding the money supply, fuelling inflation and causing the exchange rate to weaken against foreign currencies, economists say.

Egypt's central bank as of February 2023 had lent as much as 765bn Egyptian pounds ($15.9bn) to state agencies other than the finance ministry, an apparent breach of a 2020 central bank law, said the IMF report, excerpts of which were seen by Reuters. It did not say when the lending started.

Egypt's central bank, the finance ministry and the IMF did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The IMF board meeting on March 29 approved an expansion of Egypt's current loan programme to $8bn, citing damage to the economy from the crisis in Gaza. The approval came weeks after Egypt struck a record $35bn investment deal with the United Arab Emirates that eased a foreign currency shortage.

The IMF report said the central bank had yet to specify which agencies had done the borrowing. About 104bn pounds had been repaid, and the agencies were paying interest on outstanding loans at the regular rate, it added.

The IMF board meeting on March 29 approved an expansion of Egypt's current loan programme to $8bn, citing damage to the economy from the crisis in Gaza. The approval came weeks after Egypt struck a record $35bn investment deal with the United Arab Emirates that eased a foreign currency shortage

"The authorities are committed to prohibiting new development lending to public agencies excluding the ministry of finance," it said.

In order to control on- and off-budget public sector spending, Egypt would require public entities to report investment spending to a cabinet-level committee, the report said.

These include companies controlled by the military's engineering authority and the company overseeing construction of Egypt's new capital, which is being built in the desert east of Cairo at a cost that was estimated in 2019 at $58bn.

Total public investment spending, including that in the main budget, would be limited at 350bn pounds in the first half of 2024 and 1tn pounds in 2024/25, a substantial real decline over previous years. Inflation averaged more than 30% last year.

The government in the near term has postponed any new budget sector projects, the report said.

Other elements of the IMF programme include "greater transparency and control over off-budget activities, a reformed and expanded divestment programme and accelerated measures to improve the business environment and reduce the state's economic footprint", according to the report.

It said the sale of state assets had slowed since the beginning of the 2023-24 financial year, but should pick up with a weaker currency and advice from the International Finance Corp.

The government plans eventually to pursue a sector-by-sector approach focused on large transactions that appeal to foreign investors, but would meanwhile push through advanced sales such as windfarms, a power plant and desalination plants, the report said.

The government in February issued regulations eliminating preferential tax treatment and exemptions for state companies, including ones owned by the military.

QSE MARKET WATCH

COMPANY NAME	Lt Price	% Chg	Volume
ZAD HOLDING CO	13.85	2.29	43,427
WIDAM FOOD CO	2.11	-0.85	478,103
VODAFONE QATAR	1.69	-0.41	6,018,918
UNITED DEVELOPMENT CO	1.14	-2.57	11,327,096
SALAM INTERNATIONAL INVESTME	0.63	-0.47	1,193,160
QATAR & OMAN INVESTMENT CO	0.89	-0.78	753,738
QATAR NAVIGATION	10.78	1.60	81,169
QATAR NATIONAL CEMENT CO	3.60	0.06	326,780
QATAR NATIONAL BANK	13.90	1.24	7,154,608
QLM LIFE & MEDICAL INSURANCE	2.10	0.48	83,247
QATAR ISLAMIC INSURANCE GROU	7.98	0.73	26,226
QATAR INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTUR	2.69	-0.55	311,605
QATAR INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC	10.20	1.29	1,751,471
QATARI INVESTORS GROUP	1.56	-0.06	175,581
QATAR ISLAMIC BANK	17.80	0.68	1,428,141
QATAR GAS TRANSPORT(NAKILAT)	3.92	0.00	4,004,552
QATAR GENERAL INSURANCE & RE	1.11	0.00	1,300
QATAR GERMAN CO FOR MEDICAL	1.37	0.00	3,609,354
QATAR FUEL QSC	14.68	1.24	349,458
LESHA BANK LLC	1.27	-0.08	440,222
QATAR ELECTRICITY & WATER CO	16.19	0.25	170,723
QATAR EXCHANGE INDEX ETF	9.73	0.00	-
QATAR CINEMA & FILM DISTRIB	2.91	0.00	-
AL RAYAN QATAR ETF	2.31	0.00	189
QATAR INSURANCE CO	2.20	-0.32	356,739
QATAR ALUMINUM MANUFACTURING	1.43	-1.17	9,605,657
OOREDOO QPSC	10.18	0.39	1,060,640
ALIJARAH HOLDING COMPANY QPS	0.69	0.00	1,351,772
MAZAYA REAL ESTATE DEVELOPME	0.65	0.62	6,017,816
MESAIEED PETROCHEMICAL HOLDI	1.89	0.27	5,200,386
MEKDAM HOLDING GROUP	3.90	-0.46	24,464
AL MEERA CONSUMER GOODS CO	13.91	-0.57	111,443
MEDICARE GROUP	4.07	-0.49	840,612
MANNAI CORPORATION QPSC	3.91	0.13	158,790
MASRAF AL RAYAN	2.50	0.60	7,086,570
INDUSTRIES QATAR	12.00	0.00	2,084,017
INMA HOLDING COMPANY	3.84	0.26	289,465
ESTITHMAR HOLDING QPSC	1.96	0.98	1,778,244
GULF WAREHOUSING COMPANY	3.35	0.00	457,403
GULF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES	2.77	2.55	4,306,341
AL FALEH EDUCATION HOLDING	0.74	0.00	-
EZDAN HOLDING GROUP	0.81	0.62	10,502,375
DOHA INSURANCE CO	2.28	0.31	236,476
DOHA BANK QPSC	1.50	0.74	1,653,492
DLALA HOLDING	1.32	4.02	3,354,547
COMMERCIAL BANK PSQC	4.21	-0.66	1,625,586
BARWA REAL ESTATE CO	2.87	-0.97	1,103,501
BALADNA	1.30	0.46	5,333,900
DAMAAN ISLAMIC INSURANCE CO	3.75	0.00	-
AL KHALEEJ TAKAFUL GROUP	2.57	0.67	-
AAMAL CO	0.78	-0.39	956,299
AL AHLI BANK	3.70	-0.08	49,706

CORPORATE RESULTS

General Motors lifts 2024 profit forecast after strong Q1

General Motors reported higher profits on Tuesday thanks to continued strength in North America that offset a loss in its China business, enabling the carmaker to lift its forecast.

GM, which has benefited from consistently strong demand from US consumers for pickup trucks and other larger vehicles, increased its range for 2024 net income by $300mn to between $10.1bn and $11.5bn.

"The team is executing well and making progress across the board," GM Chief Executive Mary Barra said in a letter to shareholders.

Net profits in the first quarter rose 24% to $3.0bn on a 7.6% rise in revenues.

US auto deliveries were down slightly in terms of volume, but North American earnings climbed on "consistent" pricing and lower costs, the company said in a presentation.

"Our consumer has been remarkably resilient in this period of higher interest rates," Chief Financial Officer Paul Jacobson said in a conference call with reporters.

Jacobson said pricing was "essentially flat" compared with the prior quarter. The company still expects pricing power to erode slightly in 2024, although it has yet to see a decline surface in the market.

Vehicle inventories at GM dealers in the US have risen to 534,000, well above the level seen in 2023. Inventories have been lower than industry targets in recent years due to Covid-19 outages and supply chain issues.

The current inventory translates into about 63 days of supply, which GM considers "pretty good" given that spring is a seasonally strong period for car sales, Jacobson said.

GM executives confirmed plans to build between 200,000 and 300,000 electric vehicles in 2024, which will include the launch of the Chevrolet Equinox at a lower price point than other EVs.

Barra said GM was well positioned to meet consumer demand in both EVs and conventional vehicles.

"We are very focused on making sure that we don't overbuild and that we're able to maintain our prices, our margins," Barra said on a conference call with analysts.

GM's strength in its home market helped offset an operating loss of about $100mn in GM's China operation.

Barra acknowledged that the competitive landscape had changed in China with the rise of more Chinese car producers.

"Over the long-term, we're committed to China," said Barra, who pointed to the "luxury premium" segment as an area of strength for GM in the market.

Shares of GM jumped 4.7% in morning trading.

Kering

French luxury group Kering expects a 40% to 45% plunge in first-half operating profit, it said on Tuesday, after first-quarter sales declined as wealthy shoppers curbed spending on products from its star label Gucci.

Sales for the three months ending in March stood at €4.5bn ($4.82bn), down 10% on a comparable basis.

Kering had warned on March 19 that sales over the period were likely to drop by around 10%, dashing hopes it had stemmed sales declines at Gucci, the century-old Italian fashion house which accounts for half of group sales and two-thirds of profit.

The warning prompted concern in the luxury sector about prospects for China's rebound — traditionally Gucci's most coveted market — which has been clouded by a property crisis and high youth unemployment.

Sales at Gucci in the first quarter were down 18%, significantly worse than the 4% decline in the prior quarter, the company reported.

"The Chinese market right now is fairly polarised between appetite from clients for the very high end or more affordable products, and Gucci, more positioned in the middle, is therefore not benefiting from this polarisation," Chief Financial Officer Armelle Poulou told journalists.

She added though that the situation could change quickly.

The label was also suffering as Chinese shoppers wait for its new collection to arrive in stores, said Poulou.

The first designs from new creative director Sabato de Sarno began trickling into stores in mid-February.

Kering has been pushing the brand upmarket, with a focus on classic leather goods, and says that early products from the new Ancora collection, which include glossy Jackie bags and chunky, platform loafers, have been well received.

Kering shares have dropped 18% since March 19, while rivals LVMH and Hermes are down 7.5% and 2.8%, respectively.

Spotify

Shares in music and podcast streaming giant Spotify soared after it reported on Tuesday an increase in the number of paying subscribers and a rare but lower-than-expected operating profit for the first quarter.

The company posted a "new quarterly high" operating profit of €168mn ($179mn) — a turnaround from a loss of €156mn over the same period last year.

While the figure was lower than its guidance of €180mn, investors were encouraged and shares in Spotify — which is listed on the New York stock exchange — rose over 13% in the early hours of trading.

Spotify said the operating profit had been impacted by higher-than-expected payroll taxes which are tied to share-based compensations.

The audio group also said it had 615mn active users at the end of the quarter, just short of its guidance of 618mn.

Some 239mn were paying subscribers, just in line with its projections.

Spotify said the business had "performed well" in the quarter, "led by healthy subscriber gains, improved monetisation and record strength in profitability."

"Overall, we are encouraged by the strong start to the year," the company said in its earnings report.

Revenue grew 20% year-on-year to €3.6bn, but was down 1% compared to the preceding quarter.

Spotify has invested heavily since its launch to fuel growth with expansions into new markets and, in later years, exclusive content such as podcasts.

Despite its success in the online music market, the company has never posted a full-year net profit and only occasionally quarterly profits.

On Tuesday, it said it expected an operating profit of €250mn in the second quarter of the year.

In December, Spotify announced it would reduce its staff by around 17% in a bid to reduce costs, which followed earlier cuts announced in January and June of 2023.

In July 2023, the Swedish company announced it was raising its prices for premium subscribers "across a number of markets around the world," following in the footsteps of similar moves by competing music services from Apple and Amazon.

Oman LNG

Oman LNG's net income fell by 21% last year to $1.5bn even though its output was robust at 11.5mn metric tonnes for a second consecutive year, it said on Tuesday.

The liquefied natural gas output was slightly above its enhanced nameplate production capacity of 11.4mn tonnes per annum (mtpa), Oman LNG said in its 2023 annual report.

Revenues last year were $4.9bn, down from $5.8bn in 2022. The report did not give a reason for the fall but gas prices globally retreated last year after disruption caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered record prices in 2022.

Qalhat LNG, which merged with Oman LNG in 2013, had revenues of $2.4bn last year, Oman LNG said. It did not disclose Qalhat's profit.

Oman LNG delivered 173 LNG cargoes last year, from 176 in 2022, and 31 natural gas liquids cargoes. Its sales comprised 94% via contracts and 6% spot sales.

"Oman LNG remained active in the spot market and contracts optimisation leveraging increased agility and deals that yielded over US$1bn in upside," Oman LNG Chief Executive Hamed al-Naamany said in the report.

Oman LNG on Monday signed a deal to supply TotalEnergies, one of its shareholders, with 800,000 mtpa of LNG for 10 years from 2025, finalising an announcement in October that Oman LNG had agreed to extend supplies to shareholders for up to 10 years beyond 2024.

Founded in 1994 after the discovery of significant gas reserves, Oman LNG is 51% owned by the Omani government, 30% by Shell, 5.54% by TotalEnergies, 5% by Korea LNG, 2.77% each by Japan's Mitsubishi Corp and Mitsui & Co, 2% by Thailand's PTTEP and 0.92% by Itochu Corp.

The company also signed 10-year supply deals with Shell and Japan's largest power company JERA earlier this month, as well as deals with Germany's state-owned Secure Energy for Europe (SEFE) and Turkiye's state gas grid operator Botas.

Renault

French automaker Renault reported on Tuesday a slight increase in revenue in the first quarter as a strong performance in its financing arm made up for a drop in car sales.

Renault Group posted global revenue of €11.7bn ($12.5bn) in the first three months of the year, up 1.8% from the same period in 2023.

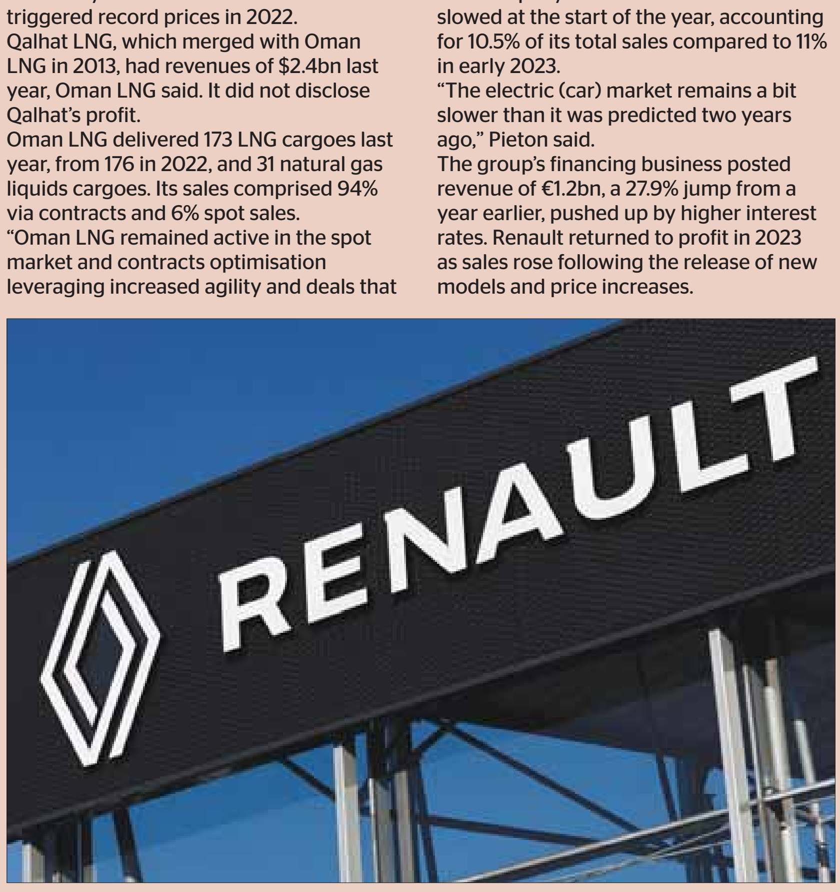
"It's the strongest quarter since 2019 in absolute terms," Renault's chief financial officer, Thierry Pieton, said in a conference call. Its automotive revenue fell 0.7%, mainly due to the devaluation of the Argentinian peso and the Turkish lira, the company said in a statement.

At constant exchange rates, Renault's auto sales were up 3.6% in the first quarter.

The company's electric car business also slowed at the start of the year, accounting for 10.5% of its total sales compared to 11% in early 2023.

"The electric (car) market remains a bit slower than it was predicted two years ago," Pieton said.

The group's financing business posted revenue of €1.2bn, a 27.9% jump from a year earlier, pushed up by higher interest rates. Renault returned to profit in 2023 as sales rose following the release of new models and price increases.



Luca de Meo during a visit to the Renault Sandouville plant in Le Havre.

Air France-KLM CEO Ben Smith.

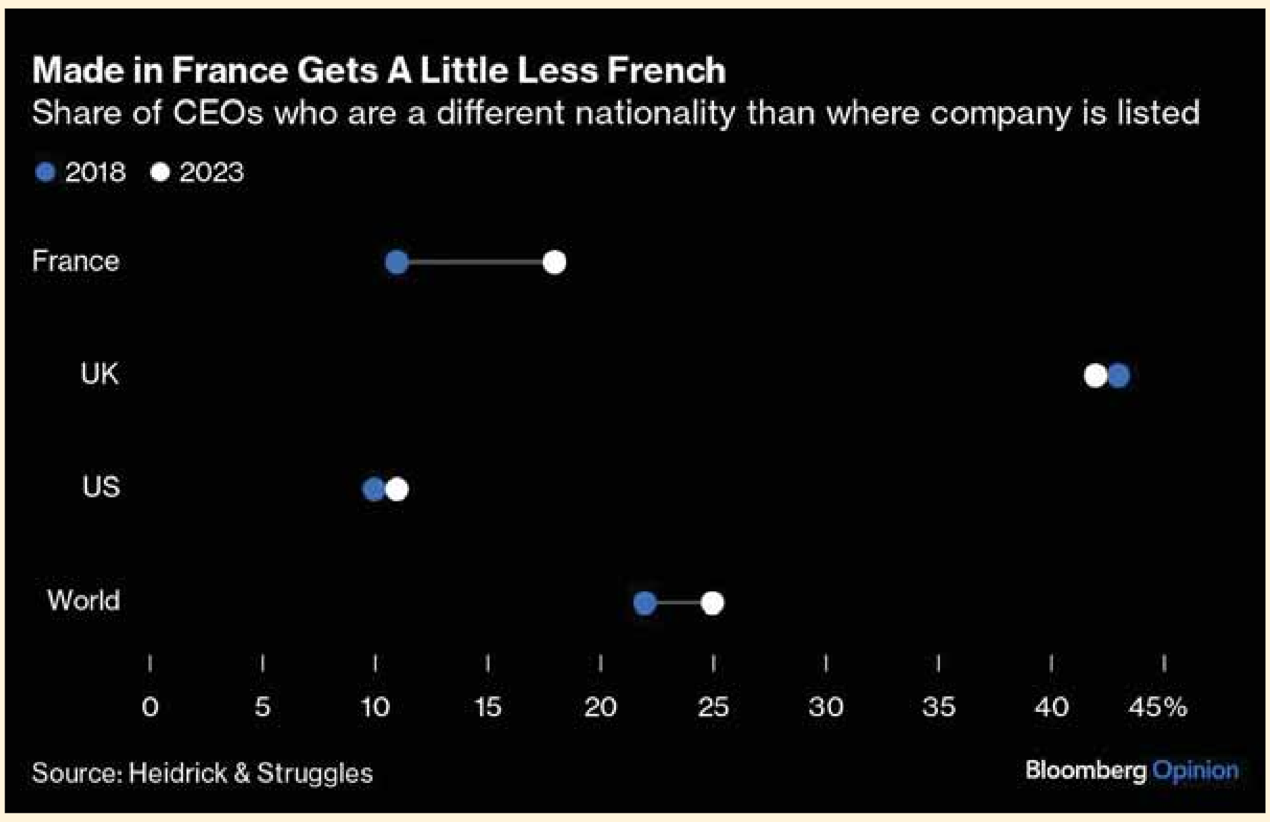
Foreign CEOs are changing the corporate landscape of France Inc

Bloomberg
Paris

For a little while now, a quiet revolution has been under way in France Inc: Foreign-born CEOs are running some of the country's most-strategic companies, something that would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago. With some of them succeeding in the briefs they've been given, the trend may be here to stay.

The flag bearer Air France-KLM, the symbol of the country's manufacturing industry Renault SA, the nation's biggest pharmaceuticals company Sanofi and its troubled tech champion Atos SE that serves the critical nuclear and defence industries are all being helmed by executives who are not French. Although not unusual in the UK or the US, the phenomenon marks a sea change in the corporate landscape in France, where jobs at key companies used to go not just to French executives, but those that had attended certain elite schools — like the École Nationale d'Administration or Polytechique.

"The world has become a lot more flexible and very global, and CEO hires reflect this," says Philippe Waechter, chief economist at Ostrum Asset Management. "The older generation didn't have such an open culture."



The hirings have also coincided with the increasing internationalization of France's largest companies, with many getting more than 70% of their revenue outside France. Foreign CEOs still make up only 18% of top French firms — below the global average of 25%, according to data from executive recruiter Heidrick & Struggles, but it shows how executive experience is increasingly trumping a historic tendency toward elitism. The moves have also come on the watch of President Emmanuel Macron, himself a former investment banker who was first elected in 2017 and whose pro-business stance helped him win white-collar votes. Macron has pushed to re-industrialize France, seeking to attract more tech companies to rival the hubs of London, Frankfurt and Berlin, and also to woo diverse international talent.

One of the pioneers of the trend is the Canadian-born Ben Smith, 52, who was brought in to head Air France-KLM at a critical juncture for the carrier at the end of 2018. The French part of the Franco-Dutch airline was being torn apart by labour troubles and paralysed by strikes — made famous by a photograph in 2015 of company executives fleeing over a fence with their shirts ripped off by protesters. Using a non-confrontational demeanour and focusing on the airline's French heritage, Smith has been able to successfully transform the former problem-child, Air France, with the group reporting a record profit last year.

Still, his nationality was an issue when he was being considered, Air France-KLM Chairwoman Anne-Marie Couderc said in an interview.

"It was one of the questions the government had, the fact that he wasn't French," she said. "But after meeting him, after analysing his profile, after listening to him, the government and all our shareholders backed our choice. It's true that it was important for him to improve his French as soon as he arrived."

Smith relied on a close working relationship with Couderc, a former minister, to help him navigate the intricacies of the French government, which owns a 28% stake. For labour relations, he leaned on Air France CEO Anne Rigail, who's French and says she spends "between 30% and 50%" of her time talking with labour unions and other employees — often alongside Smith — to make sure the strategy is understood.

The result: during weeks of national strikes in 2023 to protest the government's pension reforms, Air France had none.

A similar transformation is under way at Renault, which is 15%-owned by the government. The carmaker, headed by 56-year-old Italian born CEO Luca de Meo since July 2020, is hiring in France again and betting it can profitably build at least some affordable electric vehicles at home.

De Meo took the reins at Renault when it was losing millions of euros a day; it's now back in the black, is paying a dividend and has a market value surpassing that of partner Nissan Motor Co for the first time in years.

The executive, who has more than 30 years of experience in the automotive sector and was crucial in the successful revamp of the Fiat 500, is now investing heavily to promote his made-in-France push — with the new Renault 5 even featuring French flags on its front lights with glass supplied by another French powerhouse, Cie. de Saint Gobain.

He renamed Renault's Formula 1 team Alpine to revive the group's sports-car brand, and picked two French F1 drivers for it. Renault just inaugurated a new concept store dubbed 'rnlt' on the central Boulevard Haussmann, a stone's throw away from the French capital's busy tourist area around the Opera Garnier. At the same time, De Meo also is refurbishing a Renault store on the Champs-Elysees as other brands pull out from the renowned Paris avenue.

"You can't get much more French than this," De Meo said during an interview last year.

Helping De Meo — who had never run a listed company before taking the top job at Renault — is Chairman Jean-Dominique Senard, a mentor and ally in the difficult task of turning around a loss-making company that was traumatized by the drama surrounding the surprise imprisonment in Japan of former CEO Carlos Ghosn. When Ghosn had taken over the helm at Renault in 2005, his not being French had been seen as a handicap for the Lebanese-Brazilian executive.

"When I wanted Ghosn to succeed me, I advised him to get French citizenship," says former Renault Chairman and CEO Louis Schweitzer. "Renault is a very symbolic company for France; I thought it would make him a stronger CEO." But now, not being French may have helped both Smith at Air France-KLM and De Meo at Renault. Both CEOs found fraught relations with their respective company's foreign partners upon arrival, and being non-French and neutral may have made talks easier. De Meo has managed to disentangle complex relations with Japan's Nissan, while Smith helped appease staff at Dutch carrier KLM, which is part of the French-Dutch group, in which both governments own a stake.

"Ben is sensitive to different cultures," said Couderc. "He has respect not only for people but also for the group's different brands and for the group's cultures."

De Meo was awarded France's highest decoration, the Legion d'Honneur, last year; Smith is slated to get his on April 23.

Foreign CEOs — or CEOs with duel citizenships — are at the helm of several other notable French corporates: the 57-year-old German national Peter Herweck runs industrial giant Schneider Electric SE and Paul Hudson, 56, is the CEO of French drugmaker Sanofi. In the strategic banking industry, French-Polish executive Slawomir Krupa beat out a French rival for the top job of Societe Generale SA in 2022. Stellantis NV's Peugeot brand is run by a British executive, Linda Jackson.

Meanwhile, the embattled French IT company Atos, which this month got interim funding from the French government to stay afloat as it struggles with almost €5bn of debt, is now headed by US citizen Paul Saleh. The firm supplies IT services to the nuclear and defence sectors, and handles Olympics cybersecurity.

To be sure, there are very significant, highly global sectors in France where French executives still have a stranglehold on the top jobs — especially when they are family controlled — like the luxury industry. The sector powers the country's benchmark CAC 40 Index with some of the world's biggest companies by market value, and their CEOs remain resolutely French: the billionaire Bernard Arnault is the chairman and CEO of Louis Vuitton owner LVMH Moet Hennessy Louis Vuitton, Europe's biggest company by market value.

The bosses of Gucci owner Kering SA and Hermes International also are French.

But increasingly, as French companies seek a bigger piece of the global markets in which they operate, old nationalist taboos are melting away, said Air France-KLM's Couderc.

"Many companies can be French, and based in France, but with global businesses," she said. "Many companies want to develop outside their borders, which means that being French isn't a must."

China is front and centre of record-breaking rally of gold

Bloomberg
Hong Kong

Gold's rise to all-time highs above $2,400 an ounce this year has captivated global markets. China, the world's biggest producer and consumer of the precious metal, is front and centre of the extraordinary ascent.

Worsening geopolitical tensions, including war in the Middle East and Ukraine, and the prospect of lower US interest rates all burnish gold's billing as an investment. But juicing the rally is unrelenting Chinese demand, as retail shoppers, fund investors, futures traders and even the central bank look to bullion as a store of value in uncertain times.

China and India have typically vied over the title of world's biggest buyer. But that shifted last year as Chinese consumption of jewellery, bars and coins swelled to record levels. China's gold jewellery demand rose 10% while India's fell 6%. Chinese bar and coin investments, meanwhile, surged 28%.

And there's still room for demand to grow, said Philip Klapwijk, managing director of Hong Kong-based consultant Precious Metals Insights Ltd. Amid limited investment options in China, the protracted crisis in its property sector, volatile stock markets and a weakening yuan are all driving money to assets that are perceived to be safer.

"The weight of money available under these circumstances for an asset like gold — and actually for new buyers to come in — is pretty considerable," he said. "There isn't much alternative in China. With exchange controls and capital controls, you can't just look at other markets to put your money into."

Although China mines more gold than any other country, it still needs to import a lot and the quantities are getting larger. In the last two years, overseas purchases totalled over 2,800 tonnes — more than all of the metal that backs exchange-traded funds around the world, or about a third of the stockpiles held by the US Federal Reserve.

Even so, the pace of shipments has accelerated lately. Imports surged in the run-up to China's Lunar New Year, a peak season for gifts, and over the first three months of the year are 34% higher than they were in 2023.

The People's Bank of China has been on a buying spree for 17 straight months, its longest-ever run of purchases, as it looks to diversify its reserves away from the dollar and hedge against currency depreciation.

It's the keenest buyer among a number central banks that are favouring gold. The official sector snapped up near-record levels of the precious metal last year and is expected to keep purchases elevated in 2024.

It's indicative of gold's allure that Chinese demand remains so buoyant, despite record prices and a weaker yuan that robs buyers of purchasing power.

As a major importer, gold buyers in China often have to pay a premium over international prices. That jumped to $89 an ounce at the start of the month. The average over the past year is $35 versus a historical average of just $7. For sure, sky-high prices are likely to temper some enthusiasm for bullion, but the market's proving to be unusually resilient. Chinese consumers have typically snapped up gold when prices drop, which has helped establish a floor for the market during times of weakness. Not so this time, as China's appetite is helping to prop up prices at much higher levels.

That suggests the rally is sustainable and gold buyers everywhere should be comforted by China's booming demand, said Nikos Kavalis, managing director at consultancy Metals Focus Ltd.

China's state media have warned investors to be cautious in chasing the rally, while both the Shanghai Gold Exchange and Shanghai Futures Exchange have raised margin requirements on some contracts to snuff out excessive risk-taking.

A less frenetic way to invest in gold is via exchange-traded funds. Money has flowed into gold ETFs in mainland China during almost every month since June, according to Bloomberg Intelligence. That compares with chunky outflows in gold funds in the rest of the world.

The influx of money has totalled $1.3bn so far this year, compared with $4bn in outflows from funds overseas. Restrictions on investing in China are again a factor here, given the fewer options for Chinese beyond domestic property and stocks.

Chinese demand could continue to rise as investors look to diversify their holdings with commodities, BI analyst Rebecca Sin said in a note.

Amir's visit paves way for comprehensive economic partnership, says Bangladesh minister

QNA
Dhaka

Minister of State for Commerce of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ahasanul Islam Titu, has underscored that the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to Bangladesh represents a transformative opportunity to elevate the bilateral relations to the level of comprehensive economic partnership.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Titu said: "The visit could potentially constitute a significant boost to bilateral relations between the two countries, particularly in terms of trade, commerce and investment. Such high-level visits often serve as platforms for leaders to discuss and solidify agreements, partnerships, and initiatives that can enhance economic co-operation.

"The visit may lead to discussions on projects or sectors where both countries can collaborate. This could include infrastructure development, energy projects, technology transfer, and capacity-building initiatives, among others. Promoting trade and investment opportunities in both countries can involve highlighting the investment-friendly policies, incentives, and market potential to attract businesses and investors."

Titu pointed out that the trade relations between Qatar and Bangladesh are gradually growing, and both countries have shown interest in enhancing their economic relations, especially in sectors such as energy, construction, labour, and promoting trade exchanges.

BIDA chairman welcomes Qatari investments with over $100bn promising opportunities

QNA
Dhaka

Executive Chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) Lokman Hossain Miah welcomed the Qatari investments in his country, calling on the Qatari businessmen and investors to capitalise on the promising investment opportunities worth over $100bn in a variety of sectors.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency, Miah said the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to Dhaka will lend impetus to the bilateral relations between the two countries and promote them in multiple fields, in addition to highlighting the emerging and more dynamic economy in Bangladesh.

Miah added that there is excitement about the visit of His Highness the Amir, affirming that it reflects the strength of Bangladesh's economy.

He added that Bangladesh has showcased stunning growth not only in economy, but also in all the socio-economic perspectives, including food production, 100% electricity generation, 100% mobile penetration, 90% access to mobile financial framework etc. He noted that the visit will be very helpful in rebranding Bangladesh to not only Qatar, but also many investors in the Middle East region. He also said that the visit of His Highness the Amir will open the door for more visits and exploration of economic opportunities by the investors from Qatar, stressing that BIDA will be ready to serve the delegations with all the necessary support they might need.

Miah said that Qatar and Bangladesh are making progress in strengthening economic, commercial and technical co-operation between them, including seeking to sign a memorandum of understanding, in addition to a framework agreement, and he expects the establishment of a platform to explore new trade and investment opportunities in the two countries. He expressed Bangladesh's readiness to use those platforms to initiate more promotional activities towards rebranding Bangladesh as the new potential hub for investment in the region.

He pointed out that while the size of trade and investment between the two countries are still not within a substantive level despite the existing opportunities and cultural ties, talks between officials in both countries are focused on establishing a permanent platform for economic co-operation and introducing more dynamism into the trade and investment sectors.

He discussed the Bangladesh Investment Summit that took place in Doha in May 2023 during the visit of the Bangladesh Premier in Qatar, adding that the event was jointly organised by BIDA and Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC), which generated a huge response from traders and investors from the Qatar community with an attendance of more than 300 investors. He emphasised that BIDA is following up on the summit to generate more investment from Qatar.

Miah revealed that Bangladesh now boasts a huge $100bn investment opportunities across a number of sectors. Currently 85% of export earnings come from the RMG sector and the government is focusing on various sectors to diversify its export basket. He added that the key investment sectors include agro-food processing and machinery, readymade garments, manufacturing of high-end apparel items, man-made fibres, clothing accessories, fabrics/yarns, and natural and synthetic fibres, software and IT-enabled services, healthcare and medical equipment/devices, automobile and accessories, shipbuilding, leather and leather products, as well as tourism.

Doha Bank looking to expand further in Asian countries: CEO

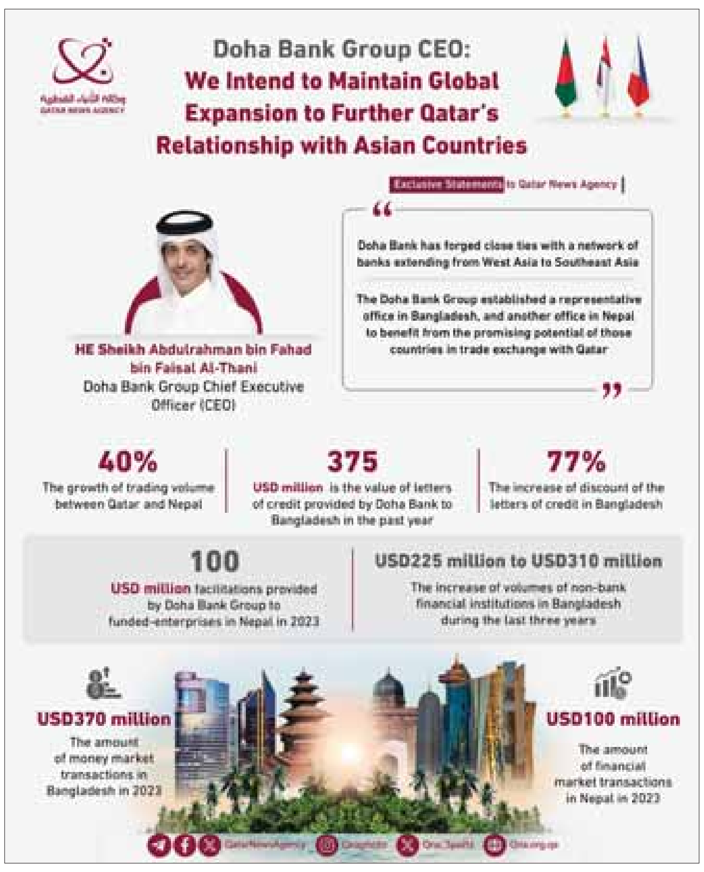
QNA
Doha

Doha Bank Group Chief Executive Officer Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Fahad bin Faisal al-Thani has asserted that the bank looks forward to continuing its strategy to expand globally in pursuit of capitalising on trade and investment opportunities and build on the growing advancement of Qatar's relationships with countries, especially in Asia.

On the occasion of the tour of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to the Philippines, Bangladesh and Nepal, Sheikh Abdulrahman highlighted to Qatar News Agency that the bank's expansion plans are consistent with its vision to be a reliable partner in achieving growth and prosperity, lend impetus to economic development and strengthen bilateral relations between Qatar and these countries.

The bank has an extensive presence in Asia through operating two subsidiaries that offer integrated services in India, along with the representative offices in Singapore, Japan, and China, alongside two offices in Nepal and Bangladesh, Sheikh Abdulrahman added, pointing out that the bank has forged close ties with a network of banks extending from West Asia to Southeast Asia.

He affirmed that these offices play a crucial role in enhancing trade and investment cooperation between the State of Qatar, Nepal, and Bangladesh, emphasizing that the Doha Bank Group established a representative office in Bangladesh in May 2016, followed by another office in Nepal in 2018 to benefit from the promising potential of those countries in trade exchange with the State of Qatar.



He pointed out that the two offices undertake a critical role in pushing trade and investment ties between the three countries forward, particularly with Nepal's transition to a middle-income country, generating massive opportunities for the two sides to advance trade and investment exchange in vital economic sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and banking.

To substantiate its role in this area, Doha Bank Group provided facilitations to enterprises in Nepal in 2023 worth $100mn, Sheikh Abdulrahman asserted, stating that the growth of trading volume between the two sides, which rose to 40%, is a testament to the major role played by Doha Bank Group in boosting cooperation between Nepali and Qatari enterprises.

He emphasised that the same thing applies to the bank's role in Bangladesh where it provided letters of credit worth $375mn in the past year, highlighting that Bangladesh's dependence on Qatar to obtain urea fertilisers represents an opportunity for Doha Bank Group to provide further funding service and upgrade trade ties with Qatar.

Sheikh Abdulrahman pointed out that the office of Doha Bank Group has significantly contributed to fostering financial and banking systems in Nepal and Bangladesh via a remittance platform established based on state-of-the-art technologies in collaboration with four banks in Nepal and Bangladesh to meet the needs of the 350,000-member communities residing in Qatar. He stated that the majority of remittance outflows from Qatar to Nepal and Bangladesh is processed through Doha Bank Group, something that supports financial inclusiveness.

Doha Bank Group in Qatar is key to help the local enterprises in Nepal and Bangladesh access international banking services and expertise since the bank invariably expedites financed and non-financed transactions, as well as financial market transactions of multiple banks in Nepal and Bangladesh, culminating in bolstering the financial and banking system in those countries.

After more than five years since its inauguration, the offices of Doha Bank Group in Nepal and Bangladesh have made major gains, in terms of facilitating financial flows and trade exchanges, in addition to enhancing investment opportunities, Sheikh Abdulrahman said.

Bangladesh eyes greater co-operation with Qatar in the field of energy

QNA
Dhakka

State Minister of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Nasrul Hamid Bipu has affirmed that his country looks forward to greater and broader co-operation with the State of Qatar in the field of energy.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Bipu said: "We need more energy from Qatar and need investment in energy-related projects. Recently, Qatar has expressed a keen interest in establishing liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure within Bangladesh, encompassing a land-based LNG terminal, LNG supply, and a pipeline network." "Qatar is our brotherly and friendly country. we find unwavering support from Qatar. We have a memorandum of understanding in cooperation in the energy sector with Qatar. On top of that, we established a long-term LNG Sale and Purchase Agreement (SPA) with Qatargas in September 2017 and ensured a steady supply of up to 2.5mn tonnes per annum of LNG for 15 years," he added.

Bipu also pointed to the LNG SPA signed with QatarEnergy in June 2023 to purchase up to 1.8mn tonnes per annum of LNG for 15 years.

Bangladesh has emerged as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, he said pointing to the rapid increase in energy demand with the growth of the per capita income. "We have done another LNG Sale and Purchase Agreement with QatarEnergy to ensure energy security and promote development," he said.

Praising Qatar's role in securing energy supply for his country and the world, the minister said: "As one of the world's largest LNG producers, Qatar plays a significant role in the energy sector, and has been a reliable and uninterrupted source of LNG"

He went on saying: "We have a gap between national demand and supply. To meet the current energy gap, we are importing LNG. Parallelly, we are focusing on our offshore to extract more gas and oil. Our government works to ensure energy security and sustainable energy in Bangladesh."

Praising Qatar's role in securing energy supply for his country and the world, the minister said: "As one of the world's largest LNG producers, Qatar plays a significant role in the energy sector, and has been a reliable and uninterrupted source of LNG."

He also voiced the belief that Qatar can mitigate the energy crisis in light of its efforts to develop the gas industry and raise production capacity to 142mn tonnes annually of liquefied natural gas during the next few years. Bipu affirmed that the Qatar-Bangladesh relationship will grow in different spheres saying: "It is through collaboration, open communication, and mutual trust that we can ensure our energy security and collectively contribute to building a Smart Bangladesh."

Al-Kuwari meets CEOs of Morgan Stanley, JPMorgan Chase and Global Infrastructure Partners



HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari held a bilateral meeting with Morgan Stanley's chief executive officer and co-president, James P Gorman and Daniel Simkowitz in New York recently. In New York, al-Kuwari, also held a bilateral meeting with Jamie Dimon, chief executive officer of JPMorgan Chase & Co. Al-Kuwari also met in New York Adebayo Ogunlesi, chairman and CEO of Global Infrastructure Partners. During the meetings, a wide range of topics pertaining to common interests were discussed, with particular focus on issues relating to finance and economy.


Lesha Bank chairman Sheikh Faisal bin Thani al-Thani, and CEO Mohamed Ismail al-Emadi

Lesha Bank Q1 net profit jumps 30% to QR28.8mn

■ First-quarter 2024 results mark 'highest' Q1 profit ever recorded by the bank

Lesha Bank has posted a first-quarter net profit of QR28.8mn, up 30.1% on Q1, 2023.

This marks the highest first-quarter profit ever recorded by the bank.

Lesha Bank's total assets under management (AUM) increased to QR6.4bn, reflecting a growth of 11% year-on-year.

Concurrently, the total investment witnessed an increase of 27%, reaching QR2.8bn compared to the corresponding period in the previous year.

Total assets (as of March 31, 2024) stood at QR7.6bn, registering a year-on-year growth of 52%. The bank's total customer deposits grew by 23% to QR3.6bn in the same period of the previous year.

The continuous profitability contributed to the total equity climbing to QR1.2bn, marking an increase of 8% compared to the corresponding period last year.

The book value reached QR1.12, while the earnings per share reached QR0.026, indicating improved performance in both indicators.

In the reported period, Lesha Bank completed the acquisition of Alta Federal Hill, a multifamily residential building located in Maryland, US.

Additionally, the bank recently participated in a transaction known as 'Project Algebra', securing a stake in a portfolio comprising some 36 premium private schools primarily located in the UK and Western Europe.

Lesha Bank chairman Sheikh Faisal bin Thani al-Thani commented, "After concluding 2023 on a positive note, we are pleased to announce that we have commenced 2024 with a profitable momentum. Over the past few years, our goal has been to fortify our business with strong fundamentals, a forward-looking approach, strategically diversifying our investment portfolio, and delivering value to our shareholders and clients.

"We hope the measures, actions, and key decisions we have taken are aiding the Bank in sustaining profitability, enhancing our liquidity position, and maintaining a robust balance sheet."

Lesha Bank CEO Mohamed Ismail al-Emadi added, "Our key business lines are consistently working towards contributing to the growth of the bank. Throughout the first quarter, we successfully closed several investment deals, while collaborating closely with our business partners and leveraging our extensive global network to target potential growth opportunities within the global investment landscape.

"By harnessing our capabilities, we are strategically investing in key markets and sectors to potentially enhance our growth further, through a prudent approach targeting minimised risk and maximised return."

GCC inches towards unified e-commerce legislative framework; unified law for commercial franchise

The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries are inching towards establishing a unified mandatory legislative framework for e-commerce among the countries, and preparing a unified law for commercial franchise.

These, amongst other key topics, were discussed at the 58th preparatory meeting of the Undersecretaries of Commerce Committee, and the GCC's 44th meeting of the Undersecretaries of Industry, chaired by Mohamed bin Hassan al-Malki, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI).

At the 65th Trade Co-operation Committee meeting in 2023, the GCC ministers had mulled the formulation of a unified legislative framework governing e-commerce across the Gulf region, based on flexible principles.

The officials discussed several topics in the preparatory meeting of commercial co-operation committee, including the construction of a committee specialised in investment.

They also discussed commercial laws updates such as the consumer protection law and the competitiveness law.

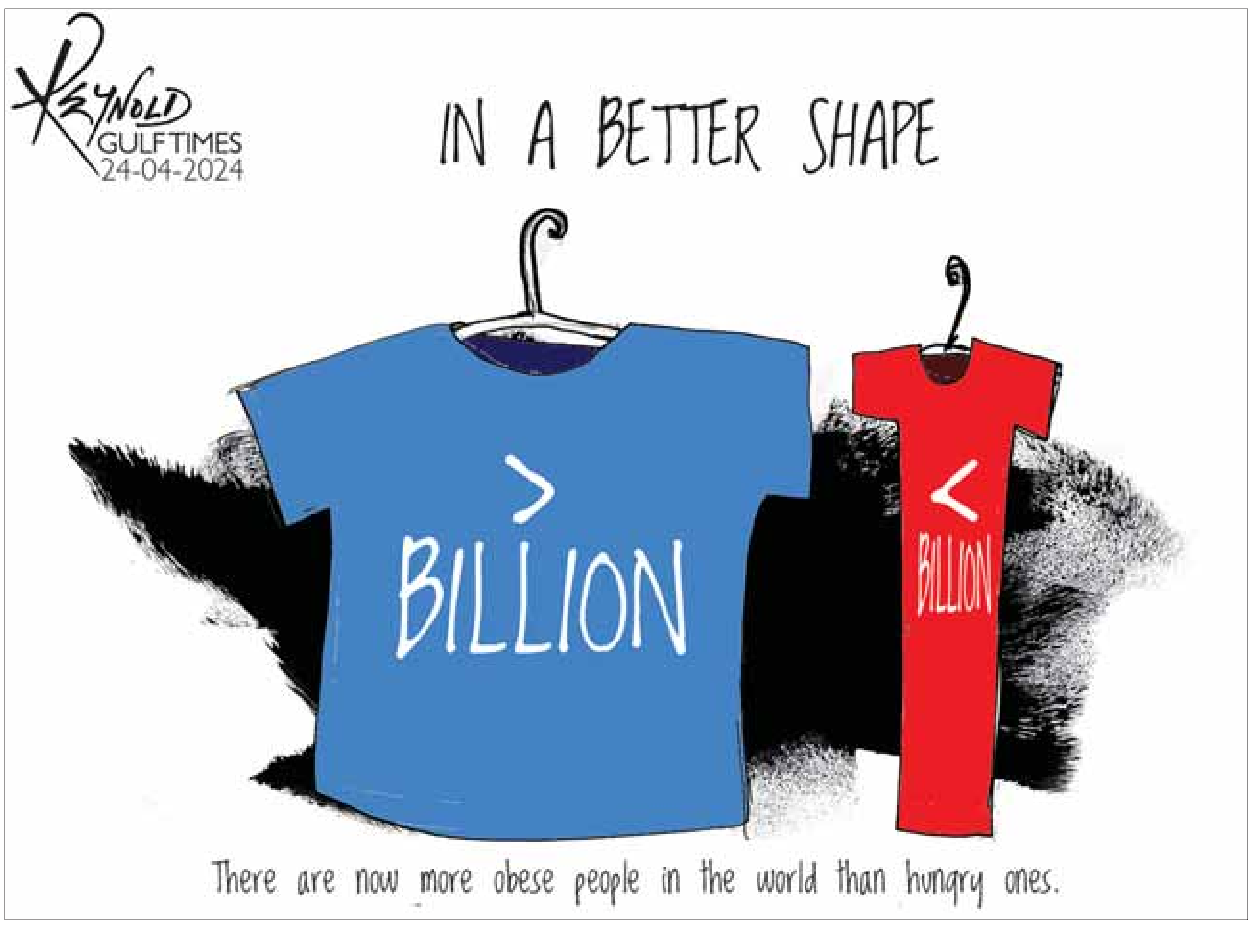
The meeting also discussed the work of the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship committee, the internal trade committee, and the external trade committee; reviewed the updates of the negotiations of free trade with countries and international blocs, and other topics of common interest to the GCC countries.

The officials reviewed the proposal of establishing an electronic platform for Gulf industrial projects and joint projects to act as a database that helps investors to access information of the industrial sector, as well as to review member countries experiences in the field of future factories, combating harmful practices, and protecting Gulf industries from unfair competition.

"These meetings are part of the ongoing efforts to reinforce joint action and achieve joint goals and aspirations of the GCC countries, aimed at developing various sectors especially commerce and industry in a way they will contribute to driving economic development in member countries," said al-Malki in the presence of Khalid bin Ali al-Sunaidi, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Development Affairs at the General Secretariat of the GCC.

Saleh bin Majid al-Khulaifi, Assistant Undersecretary for Industrial Affairs and Business Development, and Ayedh al-Qahtani, acting Assistant Undersecretary for Commerce Affairs at MoCI, were present at the meeting.

The Undersecretaries of the Ministries of Commerce and Industry in the GCC have chalked out broad contours to reinforce joint action and achieve joint goals and aspirations, aimed at developing various sectors, especially commerce and industry.



Tesla is targeting about 400 voluntary job cuts in Germany

Reuters
Frankfurt

Tesla is targeting around 400 job cuts at its German gigafactory near Berlin, or about 3% of the plant's total workforce, it said on Tuesday, adding it was hoping to achieve this without forced layoffs.

That is less severe than group-wide efforts to slash over 10% of Tesla's more than 140,000 global employees, a response to an intensifying price war for electric vehicles that is pressuring automakers to reduce costs.

"The currently weakening sales market for electric cars is also presenting Tesla with challenges," the company said in a statement, adding talks were being held with the plant's works council.

The company said it was hoping the cuts at Tesla's Gruenheide site, its only gigafactory in Europe, could be achieved through a voluntary programme.

"I regret the announced job cuts at Tesla in Gruenheide very much. However, I am pleased that this will be implemented with a sense of proportion," said Joerg Steinbach, economy minister of the German state of Brandenburg, where the factory is based.

He said the cuts were "comparatively moderate". Tesla's Gruenheide site employs more than 12,000 staff and the carmaker last week said it would shed around 300 temporary workers as its global job reduction programme unfolds.

"It is always in our interest to operate our production as efficient as possible," Tesla said.

The news about job cuts in Germany came ahead of first-quarter results expected later on Tuesday, with investors bracing for the group's lowest gross profit margin in more than six years as global demand for electric vehicles ebbs.

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