



Dignitaries address Doha Bank's interactive virtual client conference held recently

'Qatar economy on road to post-COVID recovery'

Doha Bank's interactive virtual client conference discusses Qatar economic development and opportunities

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FOLLOWING the COVID-19 disruption, Qatar's economy is coming back on the right recovery path, said Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) Authority CEO Yousuf Mohamed Al Jaida, while addressing Doha Bank's interactive virtual client conference held recently.

Jaida attributed the rebound to timely response from the government as well as the private sector institutions in adequately handling the shockwaves of the pandemic.

"The current growth prospects stem from the early stimulus measures that were taken to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on businesses in Qatar, he said.

"The country's economy is set to witness further key developments revolving around important milestones, including the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the awarding of the North Field South (NFS) contracts, the commencement of The North Field Expansion (NFE) LNG export volumes, and further expansion of the Hamad International Airport (HIA) airport, which will serve as important catalysts for long-term stability.

"Qatar's continuous and timely economic reforms, coupled with the opening of more sectors for foreign investors as well as the relaxing of foreign ownership, are some of the key steps that add to the attractiveness of the country's market to businesses and investors from different parts of the world, especially from South Asian and Far East Asian countries, including India, China, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and others."

As these reforms continue, Qatar offers a range of other facilities for foreign businesses wishing to enter the country's market, he said.

"These include, among others, free zones, and other facilitation centres such as the QFC, which offers unmatched benefits for foreign investors. QFC saw a considerable growth

of over 63% in the number of companies registered on its platform in 2020 compared to 2019, which is a testament to the effectiveness of the reforms as well as the incentive programmes on offer."

The conference was also addressed by Qatar Development Bank's Executive Director of Business Finance Khalid Abdulla Al Mana, Qatar Stock Exchange CEO Rashid Ali Al Mansoori and Director of Public Health Sheikh Dr Mohammed bin Hamad bin J Al Thani, besides Doha Bank CEO R Seetharaman.

QDB's Khalid Abdulla Al Mana said, "As a key contributor to the nation's economic diversification, QDB continues to play a critical role in maintaining the strength of SMEs in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts are bolstered to great effect due to the tremendous support of the Government and QDB's flexible and meticulous response strategy, in addition to the rapid digital transformation process we are continuing to undergo.

"These factors were positively reflected in a significant increase witnessed at the level of financing, export and advisory, and educational services, as well as the localization of supply chains and the development of the creative energies of Qatari entrepreneurs. It is this resilience which has truly enabled us to transform the challenges into opportunities and continue supporting the development and prosperity of the Qatari economy."

QSE's Rashid Ali Al Mansoori said the Qatar Stock Exchange was part of the country's delegation to the St. Petersburg International Economic forum, and that it held a number of important meetings and signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation with the Moscow Exchange, as an important step toward strengthening cooperation between the two countries' capital markets and an indication of the dynamism that the Qatar Stock Exchange possesses.

He emphasized that the QSE is working on a variety of fronts to promote its market and elevate it to the ranks of advanced international stock exchanges. He also praised the speakers' keynote speeches, as well as the valuable and important contributions made by many seminar participants, who focused on the Qatar econ-

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QSE CEO Rashid Ali Al Mansoori

omy's resilience, the effectiveness of the government's policy responses and sustainable development initiatives, and the pandemic's ongoing effects on the global economy.

Mansoori confirmed that Qatar Stock Exchange was able to adapt to the pandemic's conditions by holding important awareness seminars similar to those held by Doha Bank, adhering to all precautionary measures recommended by competent health authorities, and allowing its employees to work remotely with great success, which has proven to be effective despite the fact that the pandemic has been around for more than a year.

Mansoori added that despite the pandemic's persistence, the Qatar Stock Exchange continued to implement its ambitious policy of strengthening its infrastructure, providing more services to investors, and launching the Venture Market, in which a family business became the first to be listed and transformed into a public shareholding company whose shares are now traded in the market.

Sharing insight on global economy, Doha Bank's Seetharaman said according to IMF's April 2021 report, the global economy is expected to grow by 6% in 2021.

"The advanced economies are expected to grow by 5.1% in 2021 and emerging markets and developing economies are expected to grow by 6.7% in 2021. According to World Bank's June 2021 report, the global economy expected to grow by 5.6% in 2021.

"The advanced economies are expected to grow by 5.4% in 2021 and Emerging Market and Developing economies are expected to grow by 6% in 2021. In the recent Fed meeting, Chairman, Jerome H. Powell, said that he expects the economy to continue improving this year but plans to keep interest rates near zero

until employment increases. The Global COVID-19 cases are near 174 million."

Giving insights on Qatar's economy, Seetharaman said "According to IMF April 2021, Qatar economy expected to grow by 2.4% in 2021. The banking sector witnessed a lending growth of more than 5% in the first 4 months of this year. Qatar's fiscal 2021 had earmarked QR 194.7bn for spending.

This year Qatar has come out with ambitious expansion plans on the LNG segment. In Dec 2020, Qatar Central Bank launched new currency notes. The easing of the 3.5-year-old regional dispute since Jan 2021 will improve trade, tourism and logistics.

The normalization of relations between Qatar and its neighbours would help Qatar's non-oil economy, with a resumption of travel links eventually lifting tourism inflows and greater interest of regional buyers in Qatar's real estate market.

In April 2021, Qatar Cabinet had announced support to private sector which was closed to COVID-19 precautionary measures. Qatar's trade surplus had tripled YOY in April 2021.

The PPP law and Investment law will provide opportunities. The 2 tier residency program has encouraged participation in Qatar property market. Qatar Free Zone Authority had unveiled \$3bn development and foreign direct investment fund in 2019 for SMEs. A draft law has come into effect in April 2021, allowing 100% foreign ownership in Qatari listed companies and provides opportunity for global investors. Many Qatari Banks had come up with Bond issuances in 2021. Qatar stock exchange has recovered to pre-COVID-19 levels. The Qatar's reforms can enable Post-COVID economic recovery."

Sheikh Dr Mohammed bin Hamad bin J Al Thani said that to minimize the negative impacts of the pandemic, the Ministry of Public Health in Qatar has implemented proactive preventive strategies to mitigate transmission and focused on Emergency preparedness and response governance, timeliness and rigor of measures, in addition to a robust health care sector response to COVID-19 with adequate supply and distribution of vaccines.