

# Business

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## Boursa Kuwait reflects on its response to COVID during 'Investing in Kuwait' forum

### Company continues to go from strength-to-strength with record-setting revenues

**KUWAIT:** Boursa Kuwait participated in the 'Investing in Kuwait' virtual forum, the third in a series of digital briefing events held from London Silicon Valley, and online. Jointly presented by Financial Times Live, fDi Intelligence and the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), the forum provided an outstanding platform for the discussion of investment opportunities in the country's post-COVID-19 business environment.

Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Sector, Noura Al-Abdulkareem, took part in a lively and informative panel discussion titled 'Kuwait's Capital Markets and Economic Development', which also featured fellow industry experts and business leaders.

During the discussion, Al-Abdulkareem shed light on the impact of COVID-19 on the Kuwaiti capital market. She emphasized that Boursa Kuwait had succeeded in remaining operational with minimal impact on trades and transactions, thanks to the swift adoption of effective health and safety protocols that adhered strictly to government guid-

ance. "Throughout the pandemic, Boursa Kuwait and the capital market apparatus have been taking every step necessary to allow our operations to continue normally with no interruption, working closely with our partners across the international investment community to ensure that the key projects we had in the pipeline were completed," Al-Abdulkareem stated.

She added: "During 2020, we oversaw the self-listing of Boursa Kuwait on the exchange and successfully managed the inclusion of seven listed companies into the MSCI Emerging Markets Index." The inclusion of Kuwait in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index generated unprecedented inflows, with the successful inclusion of seven listed companies resulting in more than 961.6m Kuwaiti dinars traded during a single day. The company has also successfully introduced its first offering of real estate investment trusts (REITs).

Boursa Kuwait's position as a regional leader among stock exchanges also continued to be reinforced with the listing of the bourse on the local

stock exchange, continuing a series of firsts for the company. It is the first stock exchange to be at least 90 percent owned by the private sector in the Middle East and the first government entity in Kuwait to successfully undergo privatization.

Al-Abdulkareem commented: "The listing represented a major milestone in our journey that will elevate the country's stature regionally, making it undoubtedly one of the biggest success stories of the last five years for the Kuwaiti financial scene. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we are attracting more investments and have achieved record-setting revenues and profits. We aim to continue to roll out new products and services to further develop the capital market and attract investors and issuers from all classes."

Boursa Kuwait's participation in the 'Investing in Kuwait' virtual forum comes as part of its ongoing efforts to engage virtually, with key partners across the investment community. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the company has successfully organized a series of virtual roadshows



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BOURSA KUWAIT

and corporate days, as well as conducting its Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary General Meetings online.

## EU flexes muscle against big tech 'gatekeepers'

**BRUSSELS:** US tech giants such as Facebook and Google face unprecedented regulation in Europe, as the EU prepares to unveil landmark proposals that could change the face of life online. The EU wants the Digital Services Act and its accompanying Digital Markets Act to set strict conditions for internet giants to do business in the bloc's 27 countries. The biggest tech firms will be designated internet "gatekeepers", subject to specific regulation, in a proposal that will be unveiled by EU vice president Margrethe Vestager and commissioner Thierry Breton on Tuesday.

Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon and maybe a few others will almost certainly be slapped with the designation, which could be compared to big banks that are deemed "too big to fail" and subject to special oversight. "We've come to a point where the power of digital businesses—especially the biggest gatekeepers—threaten our freedoms, our opportunities, even our democracy," said Vestager.

"So for the world's biggest gatekeepers, things are going to have to change. They are going to have to take more responsibility." The proposals will go through a long and complex ratification process, with the EU's 27 member states, the European



Parliament, and a lobbying frenzy of companies and trade associations, influencing the final law. France and the Netherlands have already come out in favor of Europe having all the tools it needs to rein in the gatekeepers, including the power to break them up.

### 'Blunt and rigid'

Big Tech, unsurprisingly, is asking for moderation and wants companies to be judged not simply by their size. "What we could end up having would be blunt and rigid rules targeting size instead of problematic conduct," said Kayvan Hazemi-Jebelli, an expert at the Computer and Communications Industry Association, a big tech lobby group. For the past decade the EU has taken the lead worldwide in trying to grapple with the insurmountable power of big tech, slapping billions in antitrust fines against Google, but critics believe the method has done little to change its behavior.

The EU has also ordered Apple to pay billions of euros in back taxes to Ireland,

but that decision was quashed by the EU's highest court. In the meantime, US authorities have taken up the call and are themselves reassessing the role of big tech, with several major antitrust cases putting Google under the gun in addition to a legal bid to strip Facebook of its Instagram and Whatsapp products.

The details of the proposal have been carefully guarded by the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, even though a few details have leaked. What is certain is that gatekeepers will face built-for-purpose dos and don'ts that may include a ban on companies prioritizing their own services on their platforms or chasing away rivals by exploiting data inaccessible to others.

### Control their power

The Digital Services Act is expected to give the commission sharper teeth in pursuing social media platforms when they allow illegal content online, with the power to inflict fines, possibly through a newly created EU authority, instead of the voluntary system that exists now. Tech giants will be especially vigilant to maintain their exemption from liability when it comes to illegal content on their platforms, a status they say preserves free speech since it prevents over-enforcement and creates fertile ground for the innovation that triggered the internet revolution.

The proposal may not go as far as reversing that exemption, but it will clearly increase the platform's responsibility by setting out clear rules and incentives for ad transparency and online information. —AFP



Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

## Shinzo Abe gets Turkmen medal for investments

**ASHGABAT:** Turkmenistan's autocratic leader has awarded Japanese ex-premier Shinzo Abe with a state medal, state media reported yesterday, after Tokyo invested heavily in the gas-rich country to counter China's clout. Abe, who resigned his post earlier this year owing to poor health, was among the more than 20 foreign dignitaries to receive medals from Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov as Turkmenistan celebrated a quarter-century of neutrality.

Other recipients included UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, his predecessor Ban Ki-moon and the Russian ambassador to Turkmenistan Alexander Blokhin. There were no Chinese nationals on the medal list. Under Abe, Japanese banks and firms began pouring money into

Turkmenistan, mostly in industrial projects that tapped the desert nation's vast gas reserves.

Experts saw the trend as part of Tokyo's bid to balance China in ex-Soviet Central Asia, which has fallen firmly under Beijing's economic sway during the last decade.

China imports more than 30 billion cubic meters (1.1 trillion cubic feet) of Turkmen natural gas annually via the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline that was completed in 2009 and saw Beijing displace Moscow as the region's top gas purchaser. Turkmenistan's reserves are the fourth largest in the world but the republic of six million people has struggled to diversify export routes and remains heavily reliant on sales to Beijing. Abe became the first Japanese leader to visit the isolated country in 2015, signing deals with Berdimuhamedov worth more than \$18 billion.

Notable projects completed with finance from Japanese banks since then include a \$1.7 billion gas-to-liquids plant and a \$3.4 billion petrochemical plant. —AFP

## UK puts navy on standby to protect fishing if talks fail

**LONDON:** Britain yesterday readied armed Royal Navy ships to patrol its fishing waters if tempers flare after a "no-deal" Brexit as a make-or-break deadline approached for talks with the European Union. Four 80-metre (260-foot) vessels have been placed on standby to guard British waters from EU trawlers in case the two sides decide to abandon efforts to secure a free-trade agreement today.

The development is part of increased contingency planning on both sides of the Channel, and evokes memories of the "Cod Wars" with Iceland over fishing rights in the North Atlantic in the 1960s and 70s. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said it is "very, very likely" the talks will fail, and Britain will revert to World Trade Organization (WTO) terms with its largest single trading partner. European leaders have also been told the chances of a deal are slim with both sides at loggerheads over rules to govern fair competition and fishing rights in British territorial waters.

Deal or no deal, Britain will leave the EU single market and customs union on the evening of December 31, more than four years after a landmark referendum on membership of the bloc. Meanwhile, British and EU negotiators began what may prove to be their final hours of trade talks yesterday with



In this file photo, freight lorries leave the port of Dover, Kent on the south coast of England. —AFP

a decision imminent on whether a post-Brexit deal is possible. Both sides have promised a decision today as to whether there is still time to close the gap in expectations before Britain leaves the EU single market at the end of the year.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Brexit frontman David Frost and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen's chief negotiator Michel Barnier met in a Brussels conference center from early afternoon. Britain left the European Union on January 31 and the two sides have been wrangling over a trade agreement as the days count down to the end of a post-Brexit transition.

Without a deal, Britain leaves the EU single market and customs union on December 31 and tariffs will be imposed on cross-

Channel trade after a half-century of integration. Johnson flew to Brussels this week for a working supper with von der Leyen but there was no breakthrough, with both sides promising that today would be decision day.

Hardline Brexit-supporting Conservative MPs have sought assurances from Johnson that the navy should be deployed to protect British waters. Lawmaker Daniel Kawczynski said it would help "prevent illegal French fishing" when EU access ends. Former Tory party chairman Chris Patten voiced concerns about a "runaway train of English exceptionalism" after headlines backing the military threat in the Daily Mail—"We'll send in gunboats"—and Daily Express—"Gunships to guard our fish". —AFP

## Oracle leaving Silicon Valley for Texas

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Business computing giant Oracle on Friday said it is leaving Silicon Valley for Texas as it embraces a remote work model made common by the pandemic. "We believe these moves best position Oracle for growth and provide our personnel with more flexibility about where and how they work," Oracle said in response to an AFP inquiry. "Depending on their role, this means that many of our employees can choose their office location as well as continue to work from home part time or all the time."

Oracle is moving its headquarters from Redwood Shores in Northern California to Austin, which has long been attracting tech firms and is home to the South by Southwest Festival which has an "interactive" portion devoted to internet innovations. "Another day, another global giant moving to Texas," the state governor, Greg Abbott, said in a tweet.

"Welcome to the Lone Star State, @OracleHQ!" Oracle has offices in an array of US cities, including Austin. Word of Oracle's move comes as internet firms that have been letting workers do their jobs remotely due to the pandemic embrace the practice, which frees them to hire people who live far from offices and leaves companies less tethered to Silicon Valley campuses.

Colorful entrepreneur Elon Musk this week confirmed his move to Texas. Tesla co-founder and chief executive Musk said left California after a heated squabble earlier this year with local authorities, who ordered one of his auto factories closed to stop the spread of COVID-19. Texas also offers a lower cost of living and no state income tax, both of which may appeal Oracle as well as South Africa-born Musk, 49, who overtook Bill Gates to become the world's second-wealthiest person last month as Tesla stock reached ever-greater heights.

Musk justified the move by saying he needed to be closer to two of his biggest projects: the development of rockets by his company SpaceX in the southern part of the state, and construction of a Tesla automobile plant near state capital Austin. —AFP