

BUSINESS

Asian gold-backed ETFs grow by nearly 10 pct in Feb

Asian gold-backed exchange-traded funds (ETFs) added more tonnes in February than North America and Europe, reversing its 2017 trend of having more flows out, the World Gold Council said on Tuesday.

Asian-listed gold ETFs added 7.9 tonnes worth \$318.1 million. This was an 8.3 increase from January.

"We've seen overall investment demand pick up in Asia,

particularly in ETFs. This highlights the robust gold demand from emerging markets, as well as the increased accessibility to, and interest in, ETFs in these regions," said Adam Perlakly, who works in investment research for the World Gold Council.

North American gold-backed ETFs lost 5.1 tonnes worth \$196.2 million, following the price of gold, Perlakly said. This

was a 0.37 percent loss of its total assets under management.

"The recent volatility in the market and in gold prices is likely leading to outflows in the US in the past two months," he added.

Gold prices dropped 2 percent in February, as the US dollar strengthened and the new US Federal Reserve chairman fueled views that the US central bank would raise rates four times this year rather than three. (RTRS)

Sibur says targets rubber venture with Aramco

Russian petrochemical giant Sibur is in talks with Saudi Aramco to set up a venture to produce synthetic rubber, its chief said in a move highlighting growing cooperation between OPEC leader Saudi Arabia and Russia, the biggest non-OPEC oil exporter.

Former arch-rivals Russia and Saudi Arabia have forged closer ties in the past two years as they sought to prop up oil prices by

curbing output.

The deal between OPEC and Russia also opened the door to political dialogue even though the two nations are still effectively fighting a proxy war in Syria. It has also encouraged discussions of broader bilateral investment in the energy sector.

"The Saudi-Russian dialogue has probably accelerated the project, even though we started discussion some four years ago,"

Sibur Chief Executive Dmitry Konov told reporters.

The two companies signed a cooperation memorandum last year when Saudi King Salman visited Russia but so far have not disclosed project details.

Konov said Sibur possessed synthetic rubber technology it was looking to export amid low feedstock availability in Russia and low demand growth at home. (RTRS)

NBK-Bahrain posts KD 74.9mn net profit for 2017

Solid performance affirms success of strategy: Al-Sager

MANAMA, March 6: National Bank of Kuwait-Bahrain (NBK Bahrain), the branch of NBK Group in Bahrain, reported net profits of BHD 93.5 million (KD 74.9 million) for the year 2017 compared with BHD 73.4 million (KD 58.9 million) in 2016, a growth of 27% year-on-year.

As of end of 2017, NBK-Bahrain's total assets increased by 13% y-o-y to BHD 5.8 billion (KD 4.6 billion), compared with BHD 5.1 billion (KD 4.1 billion) in 2016. While total shareholders' equity increased by 19.8% y-o-y to BHD 599.6 million (KD 480.7 million). Customer deposits reached BHD 3 billion (KD 2.4 billion), up by 10.4% y-o-y.

Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group Chief Executive Officer said "NBK-Bahrain continues its solid performance despite the challenging operating environment. The Bank's strong results affirm the success of NBK Group's regional expansion strategy that is built on a culture of prudence and strict risk management practices."

"We are successfully proceeding in strengthening our position as a leading regional bank," Al-Sager added. "NBK's subsidiaries continue to deliver strong results contributing positively to the Group's profitability and adding val-



Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group CEO

ue to the growth in our business."

Ali Fardan, NBK-Bahrain General Manager, said "This strong performance reflects our conservative management as we have consistently focused on our core business and ways to diversify sources of income. We continue to grow our operations locally by developing new products to serve our customers benefiting from the support of NBK Group."

NBK has been present in Bahrain since 1977 and enjoys strong and historical relationships with the major Bahraini and international companies. Al Fardan added.

NBK continues to enjoy collectively one of the highest ratings among all banks in the Middle East from the three international rating agencies Moody's,



Ali Fardan, NBK-Bahrain GM

Fitch Ratings and Standard and Poor's. The Bank's ratings are supported by its high capitalization, prudent lending policies, and its disciplined approach to risk management, in addition to its highly recognized and very stable management team. NBK was also named among Global Finance's list of the 50 safest banks in the world for the twelve consecutive times and was awarded as the Best Bank in Kuwait in 2017 by the Banker, Euromoney and Global Finance.

NBK enjoys the widest banking presence with a local and international network reaching 4 continents. NBK's international presence spans many of the world's leading financial centers including New York, Europe, GCC, Middle East, Singapore as well as China (Shanghai).

Revenue increases 3.2% and operating profit rises by 43.5%

Al-Tijaria reports stable performance for 2017

KUWAIT CITY, March 6: The Commercial Real Estate Company (referred to "ALTIJARIA" in Boursa), one of the leading real estate developers and management companies in Kuwait and the GCC region, today announced its financial results for the full year ended Dec 31, 2017.

Commenting on the results and outlook, Abdulfatah M. R. H. Marafeh, Chairman of Al-Tijaria said:

"I am pleased to announce yet another remarkable year with stable financial performance despite geopolitical challenges across many of our regional markets. Our revenue growth during the year was driven by a strong real estate segment performance, supported by a combination of both higher rental yields and an improvement in occupancy levels. We continue to focus on achieving operational excellence and have made significant efforts in implementing cost saving initiatives in general across all our business units. These efforts have resulted in higher operating margins during the year. Our associate companies also started to contribute towards anticipated growth."

Al-Tijaria is currently developing a luxury housing project in kingdom of Bahrain, Al Tijaria Tower in Hooraa on an area of 3,856 sqm and over 46 floors. The unique architecture positions the tower as a landmark in contemporary living and luxury. Construction has progressed and is now around 15 percent



Abdulfatah Marafeh, Al-Tijaria Chairman

complete, which is in line with management's expectation at the outset of the project. We will be launching the sales and marketing plan across the region soon which will lead to further value addition and growth for Al-Tijaria.

The company has developed several iconic properties and our diversified presence has helped us mitigate the impact of business cycles. Our strong fundamentals have ensured that we always stay relevant to customers by fulfilling their expectations. The inherent strength of our asset portfolio to generate stable annuity income will drive long term sus-

tainable growth and create value for all Al-Tijaria's stakeholders.

2017 Financial Performance

The company has continuously improved its performance over the years and diversified its portfolio of income generating properties, which has further supported the steady performance during the year. Total revenue for the full year 2017 increased by 3.2 percent to KD 39.8 million from KD 38.6 million in 2016. Operating profit increased by 43.5 percent to KD 20.3 million from KD 14.1 million in 2016. However, net income declined by (0.4) percent from KD 15.3 million in 2016 to KD 15.2 million in 2017 due to increased financing costs. Rental revenue increased by 27.2 percent to KD 24.5 million or 61 percent of the total revenue in 2017 as compared to KD 19.3 million or 50 percent in 2016. Earnings per share attributable to shareholders were 8.63 fils as compared to 8.67 fils in 2016.

The company's assets at year end 2017 amounted to KD 519.4 million, an increase of 0.9 percent compared to KD 514.7 million for 2016. The total liabilities at year end 2017 were KD 204.0 million, a decrease of 1.6 percent compared to KD 207.3 million for 2016. The shareholders' equity at yearend 2017 amounted to KD 291.2 million, an increase of 2.3 percent compared to KD 284.7 million for 2016.

Contract for South Abdullah Al-Mubarak housing project

Limak signs infrastructure deal with PAHW

KUWAIT CITY, March 6: Limak Holding, one of the world's leading conglomerates constructing landmark projects worldwide including the new terminal at Kuwait International Airport, has signed an infrastructure contract with the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) for the construction, completion and maintenance of 3,260 plots of land for the South Abdullah Al-Mubarak Housing project during a signing ceremony held on March 5.

The contract was signed by Limak Holding Tendering and Cost Control Director Ms Melek Güvener and Kuwait Minister of State for Housing and Minister of State for Services, Ms Jenan Bushehri. In attendance at the signing ceremony were PAHW Director General Engineer Bader Al-Wuqayyan, Chairman of the Housing Committee MP Faisal Al-Kandari, and Limak İnşaat Kuwait SPC General Manager Kayihan Bağdatli, in addition to VIPs from the government

and business sector in Kuwait and the company's senior management. Under the agreement Limak will construct 3,260 plots of land in 730 days, which will include road networks, parking lots, sewage systems, rainwater drainages, a telephone network, power stations, road lighting, a 250-gallon irrigation tank, and placement of power cables.

Ms Melek Güvener, Limak Holding Tendering and Cost Control Director said: "We are honored to have been selected by the Public Authority for Housing Welfare to implement the South Abdullah Al-Mubarak housing project, and are proud to continue to play a prominent role as a trusted contractor in the community, and have a role in the growth and advancement of Kuwait through various development megaprojects."

Kayihan Bağdatli, Limak İnşaat Kuwait SPC General Manager said: "Utilizing our extensive experience in construction, renewable energy, and management, we are proud to have a role in Kuwait's development plan and help the country achieve its Vision 2035 goals. Representing our continued interest towards the community we established a local presence under the Foreign Direct Investment Law, Limak İnşaat Kuwait, and recently increased our capital to 10 million, and will continue to seek ways to contribute and invest in Kuwait for decades to come."

Limaks began contributing to Kuwait's development projects in 2009 with the company's first project, the Infectious Diseases Hospital, followed by the West Abdullah Al-Mubarak Housing project, and then most notably the New Terminal Project at Kuwait International Airport (Terminal 2).

Working previously with the PAHW, in September 2017 Limak İnşaat successfully completed and delivered the first phase of the West Abdullah Al-Mubarak infrastructure project two months ahead of schedule. The KD 45.9 million project is one of the largest residential areas in Kuwait with 5,201 units, and the first phase alone includes 2,346 units.



Zain's Bader Al Kharafi and Huawei's Guo Ping sign MoU flanked by Zain and Huawei executives.

Group vows to focus on digital transformation, talent development

Zain signs MoU with Huawei Technologies

BARCELONA, March 6: Zain, a leading telecommunications provider in the Middle East and Africa, vowed to further expand focus on digital transformation and talent development, through signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Huawei Technologies. The signing took place during MWC 2018 in Barcelona in the presence of Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi and Guo Ping, rotating CEO of Huawei.

Under the terms of the agreement, Huawei and Zain will establish a Joint Innovation Team to explore collaboration opportunities in digital transformation. Both companies are committed to combine their expertise to advance in the field of testing and deploying 5G technologies. In addition, Zain will work closely with Huawei to rollout exciting and compelling innovative solutions to enrich the enterprise market, e.g. Smart Cities and digital services. Also, the cooperation will

see both entities focus on exploiting the vast opportunities in cloud services and gaming, both key growth areas for Zain.

The MoU also has an element of corporate social responsibility; Zain and Huawei will collaborate to achieve a plan for the development of youth talented workforce, a key focus area as new technologies continue to develop across the Middle East.

Bader Al Kharafi commented, "Our goal at Zain Group is to ensure that our clients enjoy a world-class user experience and benefit from the most cutting-edge products and solutions. We believe that our strategic partnership with Huawei will help us continue to deliver outstanding services to our customers and further bolster our transformation to be a leading digital lifestyle operator."

Guo Ping added, "Once again, we are proud of our strategic partnership with Zain Group. It is vi-

tal for people and organization to have access to intelligent and agile telecommunication infrastructure in order to stay competitive in an increasingly digital world. By partnering with Zain, we hope to deliver the most technologically innovative infrastructure to the Middle East as well as develop the digital skillsets of the region's future leaders."

This is not the first instance of collaboration between Huawei and Zain. Throughout the Middle East, Huawei and Zain have been strengthening their strategic partnership across various technology initiatives. In 2016, the two companies signed a strategic agreement to enhance the efficiency of the telco networks through NFV/SDN solutions by the year 2020. In May 2017, Zain and Huawei held the fourth annual Zain-Huawei MBB Summit under the theme of "4G Evolution Towards 5G". The summit resulted in another strategic MoU between Zain and Huawei promising further collaboration in the field of 5G.

Co presented with an award to commemorate achievement

Future chosen as top partner by Alcatel Lucent

KUWAIT CITY, March 6: Future Communications Company was announced as a top partner by Alcatel Lucent and presented with an award to commemorate the achievement at a ceremony held in Kuwait recently. The award was presented to Future for the excellent work put in by the group's Enterprise Networking & Security Services division in winning new business within the first year of its partnership with the renowned French company.

This award signifies Future's commitment to growing the business in Kuwait and further solidifies

its reputation as a leading technology services provider in the region. Apart from successful implementations, the award is also based on quality of service experienced by customers.

"As a forward-thinking company with a rich history, we take great pride in our relationships and put all our energy into building mutually beneficial partnerships" quoted Future Chief Executive Officer, Salah Al Awadhi at the event.

Future has announced its vision of becoming a leading technology services company in the region and has recently began working on cre-

ating a larger and more diversified portfolio of services that revolve around information communication technology services.

"As business around the world has evolved, we are focusing on providing our customers with world class technology services that they can leverage to optimize performance and ultimately grow their bottom line and partnering with the right global brands is an extremely crucial step in our plan to achieve this goal" concluded Mr. Sundar Krishnamoorthy, Chief Operating Officer, Future ICT at the event.



Photo from the event