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Oil prices seen to drift higher despite India demand hiccup

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BUSINESS

MAINTAINING LEAD : Page 8

QIB named Qatar's 'Digital Bank of the Year' at Digital Awards 2021

Qatar seen 'growing market' for Turkish contractors

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

On the back of developing political and economic relations between Qatar and Turkey, the LNG-rich Gulf state has been a growing market for Turkish contractors since 2014, an official of a Turkish consultancy firm has said.

Citing data by Engineering News Record, Cigdem Ulug Kutlu, partner Shedu Consulting & International Trade, said Turkey has 46 contracting companies among the top 250 international contractors, and holds the second place after China for the number of contracting companies building the largest volume of projects across the world.

In Qatar, Kutlu said, the Doha Metro was completed by a major Turkish contractor. There are several other major infrastructure and "superstructure projects" undertaken by Turkish contractors in Qatar, Kutlu noted.

"It would be safe to claim that the contracting business is the pioneer service industry for Turkish companies doing business in Qatar," Kutlu told *Gulf Times*.

She said, "Turkish contractors also create considerable demand for Turkish products in Qatari market. Once a project is undertaken by a Turkish contractor, it may create demand for some of the major export products of Turkey like building materials (steel, building chemicals, isolation material, natural stones), HVAC equipment, and contract furniture, among others."

"Not surprisingly, these are also the industries that Turkey increased for its exports to Qatar within the last decade," she also said.

Describing Turkey and Qatar as "complementary economies," Kutlu said Turkey's exports to Qatar include finished goods, such as building materials, machinery, furniture, and food and beverage (F&B) products.

Shedu Consulting & International Trade partner Cigdem Ulug Kutlu.

Qatar's major exports to Turkey, on the other hand, include raw materials, such as raw aluminium and mineral fuels like liquefied natural gas (LNG).

"So, Qatar is not only a major export destination but it is also a dependable source of energy and raw materials for Turkey. This is another major reason for the deepening bilateral trade and economic relations between the two countries," Kutlu said.

Asked what makes Qatar an attractive market for Turkish export companies, Kutlu noted that the Gulf state "has been one of the fastest-growing export markets for Turkey in the last decade."

She said several reasons include "good political relations," Qatar's increased demand for goods and services due to the preparations to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022, and increased awareness among the Turkish business community about Qatar.

Kutlu pointed out that the 2017 economic blockade against Qatar, "was a breakthrough in bilateral trade relations between Turkey and Qatar," adding that "2017 was the year when Turkey's exports to Qatar increased the most."

Asked what sectors in the Qatari market are attractive to Turkish companies, Kutlu said: "Qatar is the wealthiest nation in the world with a GDP per capita of nearly $133,000 and offers many opportunities for its trade partners in different industries.

"Turkey exports thousands of different products to Qatar but the top five export items are F&B products, chemicals, furniture, electronics, and readymade clothes. These industries are among those that Turkey is most competitive."

Mannai Corporation's Q1 net profit jumps 260% to QR33mn

Mannai Corporation has posted a first-quarter net profit of QR33mn, an improvement of QR54mn and an increase of 260% compared to the first quarter of 2020.

The first quarter of 2020 was impacted by the Covid-19-related closures, which restricted trading during the year. Mannai reported a growth in first quarter revenues to QR3.6bn, a growth of 35% compared to the first quarter of 2020.

EBITDA for the quarter grew to QR270mn, an increase of 44% compared to the first quarter of 2020. Earnings before interest and tax increased by 63% to QR150mn, Mannai said yesterday. Keith Higley, Mannai Corporation director, said, "We are pleased to report a solid bottom line of QR33mn, with all our major business lines showing a rebound following the challenging year of 2020."

Qatar banks see growth in asset base; costs remain region's lowest: KPMG

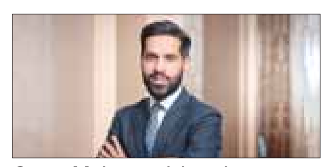
By Pratap John
Business Editor

Banks in Qatar have seen a growth in their asset base, driven by the need to continue to support the country's future ambitions, KPMG said in its latest report on 'GCC listed banks results 2020'.

Qatar banks' costs continue to remain the lowest in the region, which reflects the relentless focus on efficiencies to help counter the impact of increased provisioning, it said. Despite the financial uncertainty arising from Covid-19, Qatar's listed banks recorded the lowest profit decline amongst its regional peers, KPMG said.

"Increased loan provisioning as a result of liquidity and credit challenges being faced by borrowers reflected the more cautious approach taken by banks. This impact was partially offset by higher interest spreads and lower costs," KPMG said.

Omar Mahmood, head, Financial Services for KPMG in the Middle East and South Asia, and partner at KPMG in Qatar said, "Qatar National Bank continues to maintain the top spot for the largest bank in the GCC in terms of assets and profits; banks in Qatar had the highest sector average for return on equity (13%); and banks in Qatar were the clear leaders amongst their regional peers in terms of their cost-to-income ratios (24%) demonstrating the tight cost control measures across the sector."



Omar Mahmood, head, Financial Services for KPMG in the Middle East and South Asia, and partner at KPMG in Qatar

Overall, Mahmood noted how banks in the GCC are cautiously optimistic about the future. "Banks have come through the past year as being more resilient, backed by strong government support, which positions them well for future growth, while also being very aware of the challenges that the current global economic conditions continue to pose for the regional banking sector".

He said, "2020 was a pivotal year for banks in the GCC, as their digital transformation plans were accelerated, hybrid working was introduced and customer centricity remained at the forefront".

Mahmood also commented on the numbers explaining how "the region posted a drop in profitability (31%) for the first time in a number of years and this was primarily as a result of a 59% increase in credit provisions. Market sentiment also followed the fundamentals with a 10% drop in listed bank share prices too".

Looking forward, Mahmood noted see six key themes for the banking sector in the region.

"First we expect the challenging credit environment to remain with rising NPLs and loan impairment as a result of the impact of Covid-19 across all sectors of the economy; second, we see banking sector consolidation continuing with further M&A activity expected thus creating larger, healthier and stronger financial institutions; third, we see digital as being here to stay with the emergence of new digital-only players and traditional banks making further digital investments; fourth, we predict agile and flexible working with a blended work from home and office approach becoming the norm; fifth, we see ESG taking centre stage and moving from the periphery to the core of Board agendas; and finally we see regulators embracing tech through a focus on digital currencies, open banking, and licensing new fintech entrants to the market."

Burj Alfardan wins 'Best International Commercial High-Rise Development' award

Burj Alfardan, located in Lusail smart city's most coveted Marina District, has been awarded the title 'Best International Commercial High-Rise Development' at the 2020 International Property Awards for its outstanding architectural design, development, and sustainability aspects.

The building's state-of-the-art design is credited to Qatari architectural pioneering company, Arab Engineering Bureau (AEB), which has received several international awards for their remarkable designs.

The International Property Awards celebrate the highest levels of achievement by companies operating in all sectors of the property and real estate industry. They are open to residential and commercial properties and professionals from around the globe.

The title gives recognition to Burj Alfardan's visionary design, which features a cantilevered podium intended as a luxury showroom, which transitions into a symmetrical, sharp-edged, 32-storey high-rise building wrapped in a glazed facade.

The judges were also impressed with Burj Alfardan's effective energy performance, water consumption, cutting edge technology, and high standards of safety and security that have been incorporated in the building.

Omar Hussain Alfardan, president and CEO of Alfardan Properties, stated: "We are proud of the global recognition that has been given to Burj Alfardan through this award. As a brand that is constantly evolving with changing market needs, Alfardan Properties is always looking to bring quality and innovation to its developments.

"Burj Alfardan has been inspired heavily by the pillars of sustainable development, which reaffirms our commitment to bringing the best and future-proof building practices to the country in line with Qatar National Vision 2030."

The building's designer, Ibrahim M Jaidah, CEO and chief architect of AEB, added: "I am delighted that Burj Alfardan won this prestigious honour. This is just a step further in showcasing innovative design which stems from Qatar to an international audience."

Burj Alfardan brings forth acute architectural design, which merges modernity with Qatar's cultural heritage and delivers on sustainability. The building's environmentally-friendly practices from urban connectivity to operations and materials have previously earned it the prestigious 'Green Commercial Building 2020 Award' by the Qatar Green Building Council (QGBC).

A striking feature of the Lusail skyline, Burj Alfardan serves as a visionary address for high-profile business endeavours, situated aptly in the country's emerging central commercial district.

The tower features advanced offices and is equipped with state-of-the-art amenities, home to the biggest Jaguar Land Rover showroom worldwide and home to Alfardan Medical with Northwestern Medicine (AMNM), a patient-centric ambulatory care centre that offers world-class healthcare and advanced medical services in its outpatient and day surgery facility.

More information is available on *www.alfardanproperties.com*, *leasing@alfardan.com.qa*, and +974 4440 8308.

Alfardan Properties, a subsidiary of Alfardan Group, is a leading luxury real estate developer in Qatar, holding a diverse portfolio of visionary, mixed-use, commercial, and residential developments with flagship projects across Qatar, Oman, and Turkey.

Since its foundation in 1993, Alfardan Properties has provided an enriched lifestyle with a variety of services to its commercial and residential tenants, offering modern residences, executive offices, state-of-the-art facilities, recreational activities, and unique privileges.

Today, Alfardan Properties has established itself as a market leader and a pioneer in contemporary real estate development, pursuing a strategic and ambitious expansion drive.

The company's numerous high-end ventures further Alfardan Group's legacy, enriching various sectors in the country from hospitality and real estate to infrastructure development and contributing significantly to the economy under the Qatar National Vision 2030.

The award gives recognition to Burj Alfardan's visionary design, which features a cantilevered podium intended as a luxury showroom, which transitions into a symmetrical, sharp-edged, 32-storey high-rise building wrapped in a glazed facade

Oil prices seen to drift up despite India concerns

Oil demand in India drops as brutal virus wave convulses nation

Bloomberg
Mumbai

India's Covid-19 crisis has pummelled demand for transport fuels to the lowest in several months, highlighting the risks for energy consumption amid an uneven global recovery from the pandemic.

April sales of gasoline – used in cars and motorcycles – fell to 2.14mn tonnes to the lowest since August, according to preliminary data from officials with direct knowledge of the matter. Sales of diesel, a bellwether for economic activity, was a tad higher than February, which had two fewer days. If that's factored in, then monthly sales of the country's most-used fuel last month would have been the lowest since October.

Leading oil producers, including members of the Opec+ alliance, as well as traders have been tracking the devastation across the country, which has been assailed by a record wave of coronavirus infections. Lockdowns and curfews in states and cities such as New Delhi and Mumbai have curbed mobility and stoked speculation that the nation's refiners will cut back on crude purchases.

Despite India's predicament, Brent gained in April as investors bet recoveries elsewhere, principally the US, China and Europe, would lift overall demand. Against that backdrop, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies agreed to relax supply curbs from this month, while warning the virus wave in India and other nations may derail the recovery.

Fuels sales in India could have been worse in April but for the elections in some states that helped spur demand as thousands of people attended rallies and staff of political parties used vehicles for campaigning. But with those elections over and the virus still spreading, there could be a deeper impact in May.

Reuters
Bengaluru, India

Oil prices will inch higher this year as vaccines revive demand and Opec+ keeps a leash on supply, but the worsening Covid crisis in India and elsewhere poses a roadblock, a Reuters poll showed on Friday.

The survey of 49 participants forecast that Brent would average $64.17 in 2021, up from last month's consensus of $63.12 per barrel and the $62.3 average for the benchmark so far this year.

This is also the fifth straight upward revision in the 2021 consensus, and also the highest outlook for the period since January last year.

"With vaccine rollouts gaining pace this year, we anticipate people will likely go out again and businesses will fully reopen over the coming quarters – indeed, this is already happening in the US and the UK," supporting demand and pushing Brent to about $75 in the second half, UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo said.

Oil demand was seen growing by 5.5mn-6.5mn barrels per day (bpd) this year.

This was in line with a cautiously optimistic picture drawn by the International Energy Agency earlier this month that producers may then need to pump 2 mn bpd more to meet the expected demand.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries has also raised its forecast, although three sources from the Opec+ joint technical committee (JTC) flagged surging Civid-19 cases in India and elsewhere as a concern.

"The recent rise in Covid-19 cases in Europe, India, and Brazil, along with the risks associated with fast-spreading variants, could blunt the world oil demand recovery," said Marshall Steeves, energy markets analyst at IEG Vantage.

India, the world's third-biggest oil consumer, is being hit hardest by the pandemic, with large parts of the country now under lockdown.

But some analysts say the impact may be limited.

"India oil demand growth will be affected for a couple of months at least, but may not make a major enough dent to global oil demand recovery," said Suvro Sarkar, an analyst at DBS Bank.

A flame torch at the French oil giant Total's refinery in Donges, western France (file). The survey of 49 participants forecast that Brent would average $64.17 in 2021, up from last month's consensus of $63.12 per barrel and the $62.3 average for the benchmark so far this year.

Xi vows to focus on emission cuts, end energy-inefficient plans

Bloomberg

China will make cutting emissions a focus of its ecological strategy in the next five years, President Xi Jinping said, vowing to call off projects which consume a lot of energy and can't meet environmental standards.

"The carbon neutral and emission-peaking goals are solemn promises China has made to the world," Xi said at a study session of the Communist Party's Politburo on Friday. "They will bring about broad and profound economic and social reforms and they will not be achieved easily," according to a statement carried by the official Xinhua news agency, which cited him.

Local governments at all levels must set out clear timetables, road maps and work plans for the efficient use of resources and development in a low-carbon way, he said. High energy-consuming and high-emission projects that fail to meet environmental standards must be stopped, he added.

At a climate summit convened by US President Joe Biden last week, Xi reiterated the nation's goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2060. While China will increase coal consumption between now and 2025, it plans to reduce it in the following five-year plan from 2026.

China will improve its management of binding targets for environment protection, energy saving and emission reduction, and build a stable fiscal spending mechanism, the Chinese leader said at the Politburo event.

The country will provide funds and technology support for developing nations to improve their environment management capabilities, Xi said.

China will stick to "the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities" to "firmly protect our development interests," he added.

Philippines studies $499mn wage subsidy plan for firms

The Philippines is considering a 24bn-peso ($499mn) wage subsidy plan that could help pandemic-hit companies retain as many as one million workers, reports Bloomberg. Small businesses that have reduced work hours or temporarily closed will be prioritised, Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez said in a virtual employment summit yesterday. The plan, which is under review by economic managers, will provide a monthly subsidy of 8,000 pesos for each worker for three months.

"The proposed wage subsidy program is a safety net program which aims to save jobs, promote employee retention, and augment income loss of affected workers," Lopez said.

The Philippines is struggling with widespread unemployment and income losses. Tighter movement curbs in the capital region and surrounding provinces – the country's economic backbone – in late March to April are expected to fan the jobless rate, which rose to 8.8% in February. More recent jobs data is scheduled for release Thursday.

The Philippines' recovery will lag that of regional peers, according to the Asian Development Bank. It's also expected to chart Asia's highest jobless rate this year, according to a Bloomberg survey.

BUSINESS

The Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE) index gained 66.48 points, or 0.61%, during the week, to close at 10,911.40. Market capitalisation increased by 0.5% to QR630.88bn compared to QR627.32bn at the end of the previous week. Of the 48 listed companies, 20 companies ended the week higher, while 27 fell and one remained unchanged. Qatar Cinema (QCFS) was the best performing stock for the week, with a gain of 13.9%. On the other hand, Widam Food Co (WDAM) was the worst performing stock with a decline of 14.7%.

Industries Qatar (IQCD), Mesaieed Petrochemical Holding (MPHC) and Qatar Aluminium Manufacturing Co. (QAMC) were the primary contributors to the weekly index gain. IQCD was the biggest contributor to the index's weekly increase, adding 66.6 points to the index. MPHC contributed 12.7 points to the index. Further, QAMC tacked on another 9.8 points.

Trading value during the week decreased by 13.6% to reach QR2,690.4mn versus QR3,112.2mn in the prior trading week. QAMC was the top value traded stock during the week with total traded value of QR462.0mn.

Trading volume declined by 20.9% to 1,278.1mn shares versus 1,616.4mn shares in the prior trading week. The number of transactions decreased by 18.1% to reach 49,216 transactions versus 60,067 transactions in the prior week. QAMC was also the top volume traded stock during the week with total traded volume of 300.8mn shares.

Foreign institutions ended the week with net buying of QR168mn versus net buying of QR338mn in the prior week. Qatari institutions remained negative with net selling of QR168mn versus net selling of QR441mn in the week before. Foreign retail investors ended the week with net buying of QR13mn versus net buying of QR51mn in the prior week. Qatari retail investors turned bearish with net selling of QR13mn versus net buying of QR52mn the week before.

So far YTD (as of Wednesday closing), foreigners were net buyers of $556.7mn.

QNB FINANCIAL SERVICES

Weekly Market Report

Market Indicators	Week ended Apr 29, 2021	Week ended Apr 22, 2021	Chg. %
Value Traded (QR mn)	2,690.4	3,112.2	(13.6)
Exch. Market Cap. (QR mn)	630,878.2	627,315.9	0.6
Volume (mn)	1,278.1	1,616.4	(20.9)
Number of Transactions	49,216	60,067	(18.1)
Companies Traded	48	48	0.0
Market Breadth	20:27	26:20	–

Source: Qatar Exchange (QE)

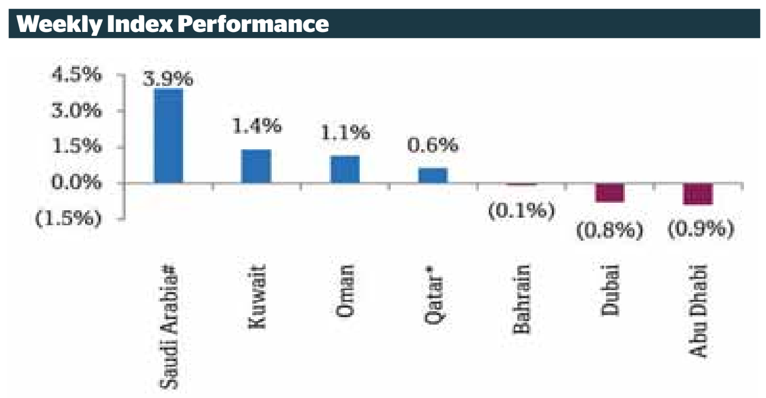
Market Indices	Close	WTD%	MTD%	YTD%
Total Return	21,599.78	0.6	4.9	7.7
ALL Share Index	3,449.18	0.6	4.1	7.8
Banks and Financial Services	4,505.28	0.2	3.3	6.1
Industrials	3,647.94	3.1	9.8	17.8
Transportation	3,478.04	(0.6)	(0.8)	5.5
Real Estate	1,903.68	(1.5)	0.7	(1.3)
Insurance	2,651.30	1.4	1.3	10.7
Telecoms	1,088.04	(0.1)	2.8	7.7
Consumer Goods & Services	8,332.65	(1.1)	3.2	2.3
Al Rayan Islamic Index	4,658.62	0.3	6.1	9.1

Source: Qatar Exchange (QE)

QSE Index and Volume

Source: Qatar Exchange (QE)

Weekly Index Performance



Source: Bloomberg

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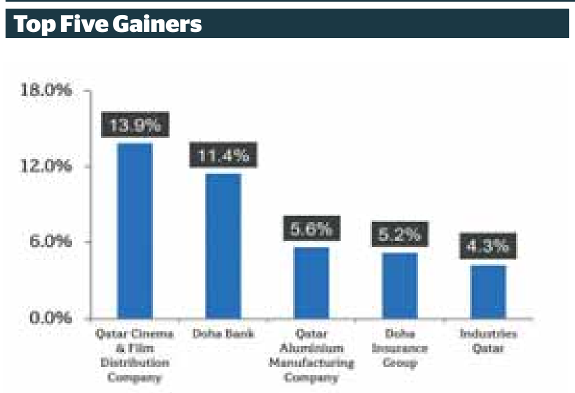
Regional Indices	Close	WTD%	MTD%	YTD%	Weekly Exchange Traded Value ($ mn)	Exchange Mkt. Cap. ($ mn)	TTM P/E**	P/B**	Dividend Yield
Qatar*	10,911.40	0.6	4.9	4.6	729.16	172,355.9	18.6	1.6	2.7
Dubai	2,605.38	(0.8)	2.2	4.6	183.38	99,191.4	20.3	0.9	3.2
Abu Dhabi	6,046.81	(0.9)	2.3	19.8	1,542.75	241,477.9	22.9	1.7	4.3
Saudi Arabia#	10,531.22	3.9	6.3	21.2	12,237.24	2,605,599.8	33.8	2.4	2.3
Kuwait	6,113.60	1.4	5.8	10.2	1,122.83	116,330.1	51.0	1.5	2.3
Oman	3,761.00	1.1	1.4	2.8	135.73	17,034.0	11.3	0.7	4.8
Bahrain	1,484.85	(0.1)	1.8	(0.3)	12.55	22,802.7	40.9	1.0	2.4

Source: Bloomberg, country exchanges and Zawya (** Trailing Twelve Months; * Value traded ($ mn) do not include special trades, if any; #Data as of April 28, 2021)

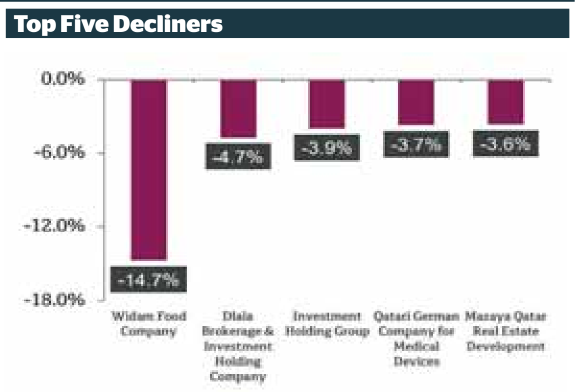
Qatar Stock Exchange

Top Five Gainers



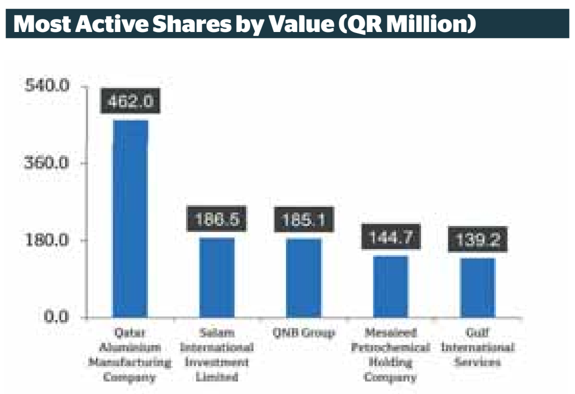
Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Top Five Decliners



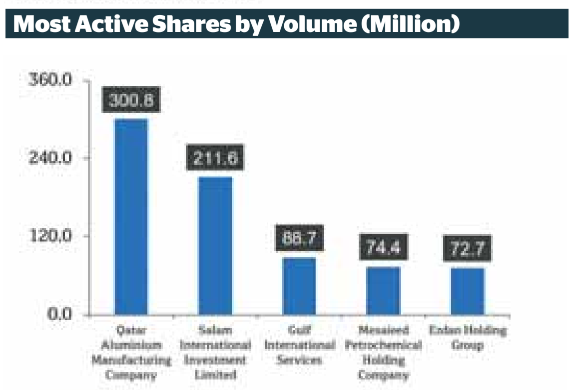
Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Most Active Shares by Value (QR Million)



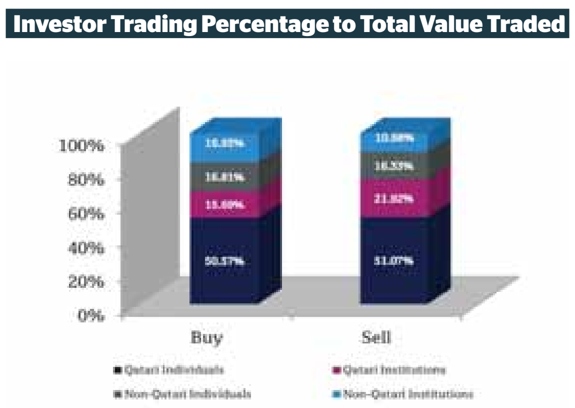
Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Most Active Shares by Volume (Million)



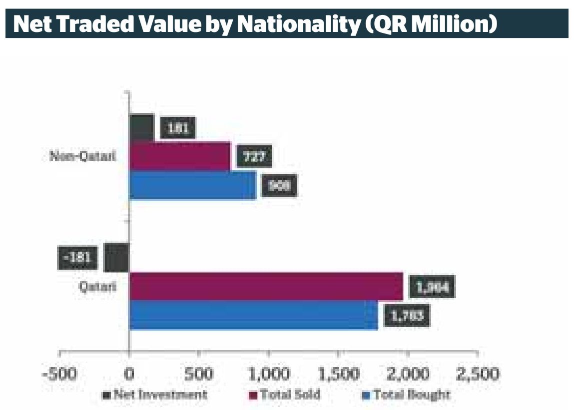
Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Investor Trading Percentage to Total Value Traded



Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Net Traded Value by Nationality (QR Million)



Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Company Name	Price April 29	% Change WTD	% Change YTD	Market Cap. QR Million	TTM P/E	P/B	Div. Yield
Qatar National Bank	17.90	(0.28)	0.39	165,332	15.4	2.3	2.5
Qatar Islamic Bank	17.40	(0.29)	1.69	41,115	14.1	2.3	2.3
Commercial Bank of Qatar	5.40	0.97	22.73	21,855	16.8	1.2	1.9
Doha Bank	2.63	11.44	11.11	8,154	14.2	0.8	2.9
Al Ahli Bank	3.70	(2.12)	7.34	8,990	13.1	1.4	4.1
Qatar International Islamic Bank	9.25	(1.39)	2.19	14,002	16.5	2.2	3.5
Masraf Al Rayan	4.47	(0.04)	(1.37)	33,510	15.2	2.5	3.8
Al Khalij Bank	2.17	0.00	18.06	7,812	12.5	1.2	2.6
Qatar First Bank	1.92	(0.36)	11.50	1,343	43.7	2.7	N/A
National Leasing	1.21	(2.82)	(3.06)	596	13.0	0.9	2.1
Dlala Holding	1.70	(4.71)	(5.29)	483	57.2	2.3	N/A
Qatar & Oman Investment	0.91	(1.72)	3.04	288	42.5	0.9	N/A
Islamic Holding Group	5.15	(3.29)	0.63	292	41.6	2.0	1.0
Banking and Financial Services				**303,772**			
Zad Holding	15.60	2.30	15.09	4,067	20.2	2.6	4.1
Qatar German Co. for Medical Devices	2.89	(3.67)	29.19	334	397.6	10.6	N/A
Salam International Investment	0.87	1.28	33.33	992	N/A	0.7	N/A
Baladna	1.63	(0.37)	(8.94)	3,099	N/A	1.4	4.5
Medicare Group	9.51	0.63	7.58	2,677	30.9	2.6	18.9
Qatar Cinema & Film Distribution	4.20	13.85	5.18	264	57.9	1.9	2.4
Qatar Fuel	18.20	(1.62)	(2.57)	18,095	23.8	2.1	2.5
Qatar Meat and Livestock	4.78	(14.66)	(24.41)	860	33.8	2.3	2.1
Mannai Corp.	3.96	0.30	32.00	1,807	26.4	0.8	0.3
Al Meera Consumer Goods	19.25	(0.72)	(7.05)	3,850	20.1	2.5	4.7
Consumer Goods and Services				**36,044**			
Qatar Industrial Manufacturing	2.96	0.27	(7.82)	1,406	15.8	0.9	3.4
Qatar National Cement	5.10	2.00	22.89	3,333	20.1	1.1	3.9
Industries Qatar	13.48	4.25	24.01	81,554	25.3	2.5	2.4
Qatari Investors Group	2.07	(3.36)	14.30	2,574	27.1	0.9	2.9
Qatar Electricity and Water	17.20	1.24	(3.64)	18,920	15.6	1.9	3.7
Aamal	0.95	(2.58)	10.53	5,954	54.1	0.8	4.2
Gulf International Services	1.57	1.49	(8.45)	2,918	N/A	0.9	N/A
Mesaieed Petrochemical Holding	1.93	3.76	(5.72)	24,247	28.5	1.6	2.1
Invesment Holding Group	1.12	(3.93)	87.65	933	42.4	1.1	N/A
Qatar Aluminum Manufacturing	1.56	5.61	61.53	8,716	91.6	1.5	2.2
Industrials				**150,553**			
Qatar Insurance	2.52	1.12	6.60	8,224	35.5	1.0	N/A
QLM Life & Medical Insurance	5.08	(2.12)	N/A	1,778	N/A	N/A	N/A
Doha Insurance	1.98	5.16	42.03	989	14.1	0.9	5.1
Qatar General Insurance & Reinsurance	2.35	0.09	(11.84)	2,052	15.3	0.4	N/A
Al Khaleej Takaful Insurance	3.84	3.95	102.53	981	28.8	1.8	1.3
Qatar Islamic Insurance	7.90	0.64	14.49	1,185	15.9	3.0	4.1
Insurance				**15,209**			
United Development	1.59	(2.63)	(3.99)	5,626	25.2	0.5	3.1
Barwa Real Estate	3.24	(0.37)	(4.82)	12,596	10.4	0.6	3.9
Ezdan Real Estate	1.75	(1.30)	(1.63)	46,339	119.1	1.4	N/A
Mazaya Qatar Real Estate Development	1.17	(3.62)	(7.36)	1,354	43.5	1.1	2.6
Real Estate				**65,916**			
Ooredoo	7.11	0.85	(5.45)	22,775	25.1	1.1	3.5
Vodafone Qatar	1.78	(2.15)	32.58	7,503	38.6	1.7	2.8
Telecoms				**30,278**			
Qatar Navigation (Milaha)	7.50	(1.21)	5.78	8,593	119.5	0.6	4.0
Gulf Warehousing	5.13	(0.27)	0.63	301	12.8	1.6	1.9
Qatar Gas Transport (Nakilat)	3.16	(0.16)	(0.63)	17,507	15.1	2.5	3.5
Transportation				**26,401**			
Qatar Exchange				**630,878**			

Source: Bloomberg

Technical analysis of the QSE index

The QSE index gained only 0.61% from last week and closed at 10,911.4 in the last session last week. The index managed to continue with its bounce as we expected in the past reports. We remain positive in the short term on the general direction of the index. Our projected resistance level remains at the 11,000 points and the support level at the 10,000 points.

Definitions of key terms used in technical analysis

RSI (Relative Strength Index) indicator – RSI is a momentum oscillator that measures the speed and change of price movements. The RSI oscillates between 0 to 100. The index is deemed to be overbought once the RSI approaches the 70 level, indicating that a correction is likely. On the other hand, if the RSI approaches 30, it is an indication that the index may be getting oversold and therefore likely to bounce back.

MACD (Moving Average Convergence Divergence) indicator – The indicator consists of the MACD line and a signal line. The divergence or the convergence of the MACD line with the signal line indicates the strength in the momentum during the uptrend or downtrend, as the case may be. When the MACD crosses the signal line from below and trades above it, it gives a positive indication. The reverse is the situation for a bearish trend.

Candlestick chart – A candlestick chart is a price chart that displays the high, low, open, and close for a security. The 'body' of the chart is portion between the open and close price, while the high and low intraday movements form the 'shadow'. The candlestick may represent any time frame. We use a one-day candlestick chart (every candlestick represents one trading day) in our analysis.

Doji candlestick pattern – A Doji candlestick is formed when a security's open and close are practically equal. The pattern indicates indecisiveness, and based on preceding price actions and future confirmation, may indicate a bullish or bearish trend reversal.

Tech titans poised to reap long-term benefits of pandemic shifts

Bloomberg
New York

Scads of Internet companies saw a boost in user attention – and the revenue that comes with it – during pandemic lockdowns that kept people at home and glued to their devices. But only the biggest ones are poised to reap the long-term benefit of changing consumer habits.

In earnings reports this week, Amazon.com Inc, Facebook Inc and Google detailed the ways people have become more dependent on their offerings since shutdowns and quarantines changed how people shop, work, learn and interact – saying these trends could drive growth long-term.

Meanwhile, smaller social networks Twitter Inc and Pinterest Inc disappointed investors, with the former forecasting revenue that missed estimates and the latter warning that user growth is waning in the US. EBay Inc said sales gains during the outbreak would fade as consumers get vaccinated and stimulus checks run out. The contrast underscored how the already-dominant players are leveraging their strength and size to further entrench their ubiquity.

Amazon added customers for grocery delivery, sold more Alexa speakers, and signed on more businesses to its cloud computing service – a trend it expects "to continue as we move into the post-pandemic recovery," chief financial officer Brian Olsavsky said on an investor call. Google pressed its case that Chromebooks are the best tools for virtual school and that YouTube can rival television as personal entertainment – making it more worthy of advertiser investment.

Both Google and Facebook spoke about how the pandemic has accelerated small businesses' shifts to the web, using their platforms for e-commerce advertising and sales. Such businesses are "asking us what we can do to help them not just now, but over the long run," Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg said.

Even before the Covid-19 outbreak gave the Internet giants new ways to cement their places in consumers' everyday life, the companies were under scrutiny for potentially anti-competitive behaviour. All three have faced Congressional antitrust probes amid concerns they have built empires at the expense of healthy competition and consumer choice. Their results during the pandemic may open up new questions about their potential monopolies – with in-person retail and entertainment options shuttered, consumers who had fewer choices for spending time and money turned their attention to the convenient, omnipresent tech behemoths.

Where consumers went, product marketers followed. The pandemic's effects have been most dramatic in digital advertising, particularly campaigns for e-commerce. Sandberg said Facebook's ad results in the first quarter were buoyed by consumers purchasing more goods online. The social-media company's average price per ad jumped a whopping 30%, indicating that healthy demand allowed it to charge more for each spot.

Amazon's "other" revenue, which includes advertising, surged 77% to $6.9bn, "another indication that the boost to Amazon's business last year shows no sign of ebbing," according to Nicole Perrin of researcher EMarketer.

Google spent the past quarter serving up more ads from retail and travel companies eager to reach consumers who are starting to spend again. Ruth Porat, chief financial officer of Google parent Alphabet Inc, said the durability of that trend will depend on the pace of the global coronavirus recovery, but some analysts are more bullish on the internet giant's prospects to take advantage of a great reopening in subsequent quarters.

Philipp Schindler, Google's chief business officer, said the company's "sweet spot" is a blend of online and offline purchases facilitated by products like Search, Maps and YouTube. Google has helped big retailers such as Dick's Sporting Goods Inc and arts-and-crafts chain Michaels Cos. fulfil orders with customers looking for curbside pickup options or trying to locate products available near them. "Trends are likely to continue as the broader economic recovery takes hold throughout 2021 and the ramp in digital adoption trends becomes more permanent," JMP Securities analyst Ron Josey wrote in a recent note. "We were most impressed with core search advertising results as Google highlighted strength across most advertising categories, with a core focus on retail and that travel is seeing renewed interest among users."

The internet giants' advertising and e-commerce revenue streams were immune to some of the problems facing other tech leaders during the pandemic. Apple Inc, also named in the Congressional antitrust investigation, makes most of its money from hardware, meaning it's more vulnerable to supply chain risks. Company executives this week said it will see a negative $3bn to $4bn impact in the June quarter from chip shortages hitting iPads and Macs, two product lines that gained popularity during the pandemic.

Apple has in turn been focusing more on non-hardware revenue, including from the App Store, Apple Music, gaming, cloud storage, technical support, advertising and video. That Services division now brings in more than $50bn a year in sales.

At a fraction of the size of Facebook, rival social network Twitter has missed out on fully capitalising on the ad spending bonanza in part because the company sells more promotions meant to help companies improve their brand recognition, as opposed to ads that lead people to directly buy products.

With consumers at home on their phones, online shopping became a pastime, as spending shifted from travel and events to groceries, home improvement and more comfortable wardrobes.

Meanwhile, Pinterest and EBay both saw an increase in activity during lockdowns, but cautioned that those gains probably won't last. "Starting in mid-March, the easing of pandemic restrictions slowed US. MAU growth and lowered engagement year over year as people spent less time online," Pinterest said in a statement.

Blow-out first-quarter earnings suggest US market has room to run

Reuters
New York

US companies are leaping above expectations on first-quarter earnings, giving investors stronger confirmation that profit growth will be able to support the market this year.

A big piece of that growth is coming once again from technology and growth companies, which suggests greater durability in companies that underperformed more economically focused value names for months.

Earnings are rebounding from last year's pandemic-fuelled lows.

With results in from more than half of the S&P 500 companies, earnings are now expected to have risen 46% in the first quarter from the previous year, compared with forecasts of 24% growth at the start of the month, according to IBES data from Refinitiv.

About 87% of reports have come in ahead of analysts' estimates for earnings per share, putting the quarter on track to have the highest beat rate on record going back to 1994, when Refinitiv began tracking the data.

Some strategists say the stronger-than-expected earnings could drive a richly valued market higher still.

The benchmark S&P 500 is trading at about 23 times forward earnings, above the long-average of about 15, based on Refinitiv's data. "The earnings results are really not being fully priced in yet, and that's because you're seeing estimates for the back half of the year start to pick up now in response to this better-than expected environment.

That says to us there's still more room," said Eric Freedman, chief investment officer at US Bank Wealth Management.

The high percentage of beats also follows many quarters where companies were holding off on giving guidance on the future, making it harder for analysts to estimate results for this year.

Citing stronger earnings, Jonathan Golub, chief US equity strategist and head of quantitative research at Credit Suisse Securities, on Friday raised his 2021 S&P 500 price target to 4,600 from 4,300.

The S&P 500 index was last at about 4,180. Stocks have had little reaction to results overall so far. The S&P 500 is up more than 11% since December 31.

The index is up less than 2% since mid-April when the earnings period kicked in to high gear, but remains near record highs. Earnings also are raising some fresh questions in the debate over growth versus value. After a decade of steadily underperforming the overall market, value has been a favourite among some investors as a bet on the reopening of the economy.

However, "tech is showing an ability... to still create as good, if not superior, sales growth to cyclicals. That's what I find amazing," said David Bianco, Americas chief investment officer for DWS.

"Tech is as much as of a reopening play as everybody else," he said. Investors will be watching reports in the weeks ahead to see if the trend continues.

Results are expected next week from a wide range of companies including Activision Blizzard, Cummins Inc, ConocoPhillips and Pfizer Inc. The first-quarter results come after a months-long rally in value stocks as investors bet on the reopening of businesses as Covid-19 vaccines became more available.

Value has outperformed growth names that include heavily weighted technology stocks, and for the year so far, the Russell 1000 value index remains up about 15%, while the Russell 1000 growth index is up about 8% in that time.

Technology-related companies as well as banks – value trade favourites – have had the largest percentage point contribution to estimated first-quarter S&P 500 earnings, with JPMorgan Chase & Co and Apple Inc at the top of the list, based on Refinitiv's data.

Tech is also among the strongest sectors for year-over-year sales growth for the quarter, Bianco noted. While the risks of higher inflation and possibly higher taxes have given some investors reason to become more cautious on growth shares, earnings may make them think twice about avoiding the group.

"It pays for a lot of investors to be balanced between value and growth," said Sameer Samana, senior global market strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute in St Louis. "We're actually carving out a third group...defensives," he said, adding that those are the areas for investors to avoid for now.

People are seen on Wall Street outside the New York Stock Exchange. US companies are leaping above expectations on first-quarter earnings, giving investors stronger confirmation that profit growth will be able to support the market this year.

Wall St hiring spree puts junior bankers in driving seat

Bloomberg
Washington

HSBC Holdings Plc this week became the latest global investment bank pledging to hire a flock of junior bankers to help analysts and associates avoid burnout amid an avalanche of deals. JPMorgan Chase & Co said last week it plans to add almost 200 staff, joining Goldman Sachs Group Inc and Jefferies Financial Group Inc in bolstering their ranks.

Dealmakers have tried handing out raises, paying for vacations and enforcing curfews to try to prevent defections or even revolts as active markets and the work-from-home grind weighed on the bottom of their corporate pyramids. Now, many firms are coming to the conclusion that, with no let-up on deals, the best fix is more bodies.

"We have not seen this level of demand for investment bankers since pre-2008," Anthony Keizner, a managing partner at the recruiting firm Odyssey Search Partners, said in an interview. "People are being brought in because pitch books need to be produced, deals need to be worked on and there just isn't the staffing at the banks that are able to do that."

Along with an increased focus on hiring, banks are desperate to hold on to the workers they already have. HSBC is speeding up some promotions and boosting fixed pay for young dealmakers. Others, including Credit Suisse Group AG and Wells Fargo & Co, are giving some of their junior employees one-time $20,000 bonuses. Houlihan Lokey Inc offered some workers an all-expenses paid vacation.

"This reminds me of the dot-com days," said Joseph Leung, founder and managing partner of London-based banking-recruitment firm Aubreck Leung. Back then, Leung said, potential new recruits were being lured away to tech startups by Ping-Pong tables, Aeron chairs, free lunches, and business-casual Fridays and summers. "Fast-forward 20 years and now banks need to take it up a notch or two."

Raymond James Financial Inc. told bankers this week it would pay them $20,000 bonuses now and an additional $10,000 bonus in December as a retention offer, according to a spokesman. The firm's also debuting an initiative to come up with long-term plan to change the investment banking work environment.

Concerns that young bankers are being overworked aren't new. Many firms have enacted policies or strengthened existing ones over the past decade to try to ensure employees get a break. In some of the most extreme cases, worker suicides have spurred the companies to act.

But pandemic lockdowns have brought a new set of challenges as the work-from-home experience failed to measure up to the expectations of post-college life on Wall Street.

Workers stuck at home over the past year have spent endless hours in front of computers handling requests from higher-ups to fine-tune Excel models or slide presentations as deal volume soared. Meanwhile, the things that make the early years of the job worth it – face time with executives, camaraderie with fellow junior workers staying at the office into the wee hours, the bustle of city life – are virtually nonexistent.

There are 1,342 openings for investment-banking analysts in New York and an additional 639 slots for associates, according to job listings compiled by LinkedIn. In London, such openings total 1,214 and Hong Kong has 588, the data show.

"There's no question that hiring at the junior level is way up. It ebbs and flows from year to year – either it's a candidate-rich market or there's more jobs," Russ Rybinski, chief executive officer of the recruiting firm Rybinski Capital Partners, said in an interview.

Exxon, Chevron preach prudence even as cash waterfall returns

Bloomberg
New York

Exxon Mobil Corp and Chevron Corp added momentum to a nascent recovery in the US oil industry as they reported bumper cash flow, a dramatic improvement after a torrid 2020.

The energy giants generated enough cash to cover dividends, debt payments and project spending in the first quarter, the first time they've managed to do that in more than a year.

The results are especially significant for Exxon because they signal a turnaround from its most difficult period in at least four decades. The gains provides breathing room for chief executive Darren Woods as he seeks to persuade sceptical shareholders that his fossil fuel-based strategy can profitably navigate the energy transition.

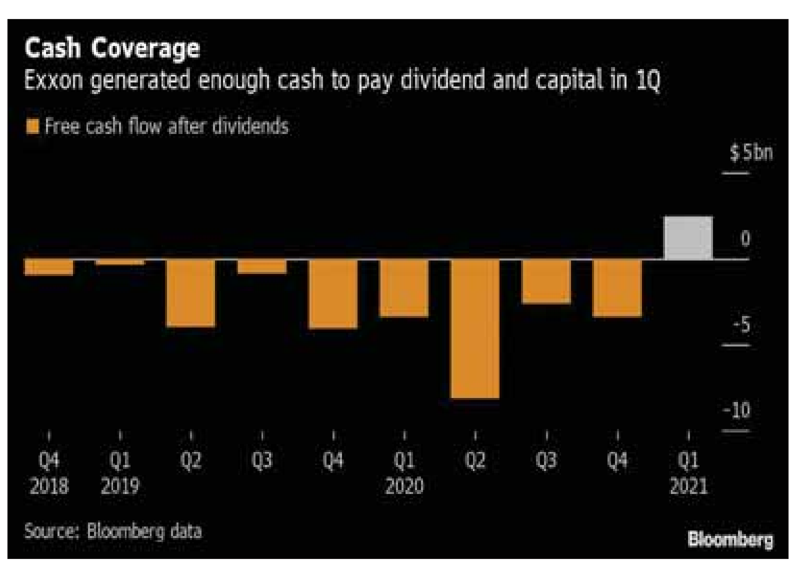
Chevron foreshadowed strong cash flow earlier in the week when it raised dividends above pre-pandemic levels, beating all its rivals. But investors signalled on Friday that they won't be satisfied until the explorer also restores share buybacks, something chief financial officer Pierre Breber was loathe to predict.

Noteworthy was the absence of a perennial feature of oil-price rallies: Plans to ramp up crude output. Instead, the biggest US drillers held firm to austerity measures adopted during the darkest days of last year's market crisis, easing concerns that gushing cash flow would spark another cycle of disastrous production growth.

"It's really is a 180-degree turnaround from a year ago," said Neal Dingmann, an analyst at Truist Securities. "What still resonates from both of these companies is the capital discipline."

Exxon's free cash flow, a key metric watched by Big Oil analysts, reached the highest since 2018, allowing the Texas oil titan not only to fund the S&P 500's third-largest dividend but also invest in key projects in Guyana and the Permian Basin.

The explorer also reduced debt by 6% in just three months. It was a stark contrast to the prior two years during which Exxon's cash generation fell short of payouts and expenditures, forcing it to borrow heavily. All the supermajors are making money again after crude's 30% year-to-date rally to more than $65 a barrel, buoyed by rising energy demand as economies emerge from the pandemic and Opec holds the line on big supply increases.



The difference this time is that they've all drastically cut costs: Exxon's capital spending was down 56% from a year earlier while Chevron's was 43% lower.

But shareholders shouldn't expect to be showered with cash just yet. Exxon CEO Darren Woods stressed that any windfall will go toward paying down debt, which ballooned 44% last year.

"If margins and prices stay higher than planned, we'll deleverage faster, rebuilding the balance sheet," he said during a conference call with analysts.

Chevron's Breber was pressed repeatedly by analysts on when the California-based company would begin share buybacks. He declined to give a timeframe.

"Folks want a formula or a trigger and some of our competitors have those numbers," he said. "We're going to use judgment and we're going to consider what we see in front of us."

Expectations were high after BP Plc, Royal Dutch Shell Plc and Total SE all preceded their US peers with bigger-than-expected profits.

"Chevron continues to make progress in restoring its balance sheet and may be in a position to restart share buybacks by 2H, if oil prices remain near current levels", says Fernando Valle, BI analyst.

Exxon's reversal of last year's fiasco couldn't be more timely. CEO Woods goes into a potentially awkward annual meeting within weeks where shareholders will consider activist shareholder Engine No 1's proposed boardroom shake-up.

Woods said the first-quarter results were a manifestation of ambitious and oft-criticised spending decisions he made during the past few years.

"We've never lost sight of the long term fundamentals of our business," Woods said. "We knew economies would recover, populations and living standards would continue to grow, ultimately driving demand for our products and an industry recovery."

Exxon earned 64 cents a share in the first quarter, beating the 61-cent average estimate from analysts in a Bloomberg survey.

The oil giant's production division drove most of the gains but it also received a substantial tailwind from higher demand for plastics and consumer packaging should remain strong for the rest of this year as the economic recovery continues, particularly in the US, Woods said.

Chevron's earnings matched the average of analysts' forecasts but refining suffered a 99% drop in profits due to lower-than-normal fuel demand.

WEEKLY ENERGY MARKET REVIEW

Oil falls on India demand fears and weak Japan imports

www.abhafoundation.org

Oil

Oil prices fell from six-week highs on Friday as investors unloaded positions after weak Japanese crude import data and worries about fuel demand in India, where Covid-19 infections have soared.

On the last day of trading for the front-month June contract, Brent crude settled at $67.25 a barrel, a fall of 1.9%, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) settled at $63.58 a barrel, down 2.2%. For last week, both benchmark crudes – Brent and WTI, gained 1.7% and 2.3% respectively.

India, the world's third-largest oil consumer, is in deep crisis, with hospitals and morgues overwhelmed, as the number of Covid-19 cases topped 18mn on Thursday. Japan, another major crude oil importer, recorded a fall in imports of 25% in March to 2.34mn barrels per day, compared to the same period last year. However, the country's factory activity expanded at the fastest pace since early 2018.

A Reuters survey forecast that Brent would average $64.17 in 2021, up from last month's consensus of $63.12 per barrel and the $62.3 average for the benchmark so far this year.

Opec oil output has risen in April as higher supply from Iran countered involuntary cuts and agreed reductions by other members under a pact with allies, adding to signs of a 2021 recovery in Tehran's exports.

Oil rigs rose for the eighth straight month, to their highest since April 2020.

However, US oil rigs fell by one to 342 last week, according Baker Hughes Company.

Gas

Asian spot prices for LNG jumped last week on the back of strong demand to restock gas inventories in Europe and Asia, industry sources said. The average LNG price for June delivery into Northeast Asia was estimated at about $8.85 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), up $0.20 from the previous week. According to Diaz, the spread between Asian prices and the TTF reference index in Europe, which closed at $7.99 per mmBtu last week, narrowed to less than $1 – the level of difference that usually starts to make the longer trip from the Atlantic basin to Asia attractive.

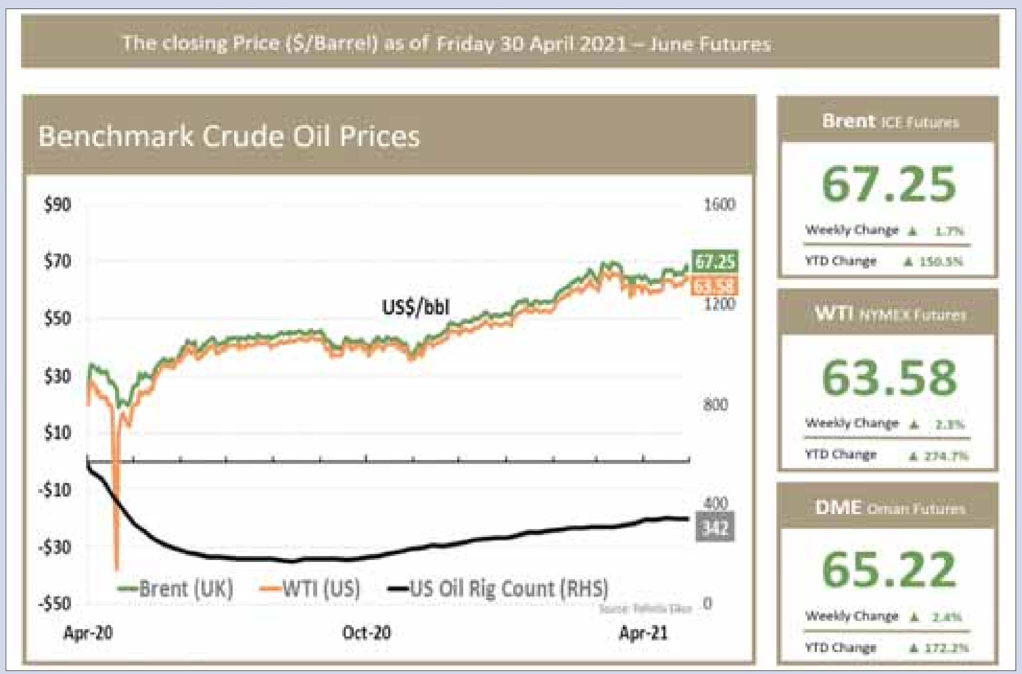
Demand from China and Japan has remained strong as both countries re-stock in early preparation for winter, according to research firm Rystad Energy.

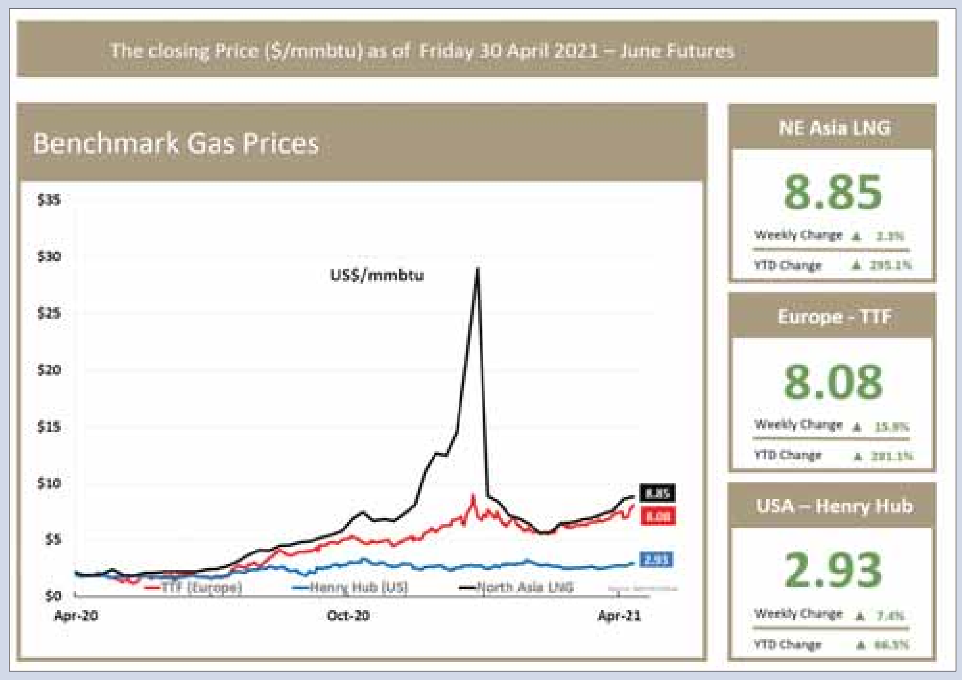
In the Atlantic Basin, LNG demand was also solid as European buyers replenished stock depleted when prices reached near record levels during winter. Unipec Singapore sold a cargo for June 3-7 delivery to BP at $8.90 per mmBtu on Thursday.

The daily charter rate for shipping LNG on a vessel able to carry around 175,000 to 180,000 cubic metres has risen to as much as $70,000 to $80,000 from around $50,000 to $65,000 last week, two shipping sources said.

In the US, natural gas futures climbed to a nine-week high on Friday on record exports, slight decline in output, forecasts for cooler weather, and higher heating demand over the next two weeks than previously expected. Front-month gas futures rose 2.0 cents, or 0.7%, to settle at $2.931 per million British thermal units, their highest close since February 22. For last week, the contract was about 7% higher, putting it up for a third week in a row for the first time since February. As for the month, the contract was up about 13% after falling around 6% last month. Buyers around the world continue to purchase record amounts of US gas because prices in Europe and Asia remain high enough to cover the cost of buying and transporting the US fuel across the ocean. Traders, however, said that US LNG exports cannot rise much more until new units enter service in 2022, since the United States only has the capacity to export about 10.5 bcfd of gas as LNG.

■ *This article was supplied by the Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Attiyah International Foundation for Energy and Sustainable Development.*





Dukhan Bank wins two awards from *World Economic* Magazine

Dukhan Bank has been recognised by the *World Economic* Magazine under two categories: 'Best Corporate Digital Services in Qatar 2021' and 'Best New Contactless Payment Platform for (D-Pay)'. The *World Economic* Magazine aims to acknowledge the spirit of industry disruptors across the global financial marketplace by recognising businesses and thought leaders in today's 'innovation economy'. The awards highlight the digital forward banking services that have been spearheaded by Dukhan Bank over the last year.

A robust digital transformation remains underway with plans to advance its technological infrastructure, portfolio of services, and innovative banking products.

The awarded contactless D-Pay platform, launched earlier this year, meets customers' increasing demand for digital banking products and services.

The platform enables its individual and corporate customers to conduct all their transactions online easily and securely by integrating its payment services with branded wearable devices as well as facilitating payments through Fitbit and Garmin Pay and other services.

The accolades are the latest in a slew of awards accrued by the bank last year by numerous international entities in five separate categories, namely the annual International Business Magazine Awards, the annual Global Business Outlook (GBO) Awards, and the International Finance Awards 2020.

In 2020, Dukhan Bank received numerous accolades. The bank's Shariah-compliant savings account service, Thara'a, was named the 'Most Innovative Banking Product' at the annual GBO awards 2020.

Dukhan Bank's Mobile Application was awarded 'Most-User Friendly Banking Application', while also given recognition for its overall services as 'The Best Retail Bank' and 'The Most Innovative Bank' in Qatar by the *International Business Magazine* Awards 2020.

Dukhan Bank CEO Khalid al-Subeai has also previously been awarded as 'Banking CEO of the Year Qatar 2020', as well as 'Most Progressive Bank Award', The New Age Banking Summit.

Commenting on the two awards, Dukhan Bank stated: "We are pleased of the recognition given to Dukhan Bank for its robust digital transformation on the recently launched (D-Pay) platform and other digital capabilities. "This comes as a reaffirmation of Dukhan Bank's unhinged commitment to a tech-forward future.

We are constantly striving to enhance our portfolio that offers the most-diversified banking services to our customers making Dukhan Bank Qatar's bank of choice."

Dukhan Bank's wide-ranging banking solutions to satisfy clients in Qatar are built on forward-thinking strategies, positioning it as one of the leaders in the banking industry.

The bank has reputed itself as the country's most progressive Shariah-compliant service provider, offering a diverse spectrum of award-winning banking products and services on all levels: local, regional, and global. The recent titles rank hand-in-hand awards and recognitions garnered by Dukhan Bank over the years for its groundbreaking services in Shariah banking.

Dukhan Bank holds over a decade worth of excellence in service awards, recognised in the industry as a leader in multiple areas, as it paves the way towards being one of the world's leading Islamic financial services group based out of Qatar.

QIB named Qatar's 'Digital Bank of the Year'; awarded 'Best Retail Mobile Banking Experience'

Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB) was recognised as 'Digital Bank of the Year' and 'Best Retail Mobile Banking Experience' in Qatar at *The Asset Triple A* Magazine's Digital Awards 2021.

The recognition reflects QIB's success in maintaining its leadership in digital banking in Qatar, allowing its customers to fulfil their banking needs remotely via the bank's innovative digital channels and services.

The award recognition took place via a virtual ceremony on April 28, where QIB was represented by D Anand, QIB general manager – Personal Banking Group, and Dinos Constantinides, QIB's Chief Strategy & Digital officer.

Constantinides said, "QIB continues to revolutionise the digital banking scene in Qatar with the introduction of innovative digital products and services related to everyday banking needs, from opening an account to instant fulfilment of personal financing and credit cards.

"Last year, we launched a new banking channel, QIB's Corporate Mobile App, while we are constantly upgrading our Retail Mobile App, as well as the Internet banking portals for both retail and corporate customers.

As a result, and in light of the pandemic, we have experienced the highest ever customer engagement on the QIB digital banking channels, allowing all our individual and corporate customers to fulfil their banking needs remotely."

The Asset Triple A **Magazine's recognition reflects QIB's success in maintaining its leadership in digital banking in Qatar, allowing its customers to fulfil their banking needs remotely via the bank's innovative digital channels and services**

Anand said, "Thanks to our relentless investment in upgrading our mobile banking services, the QIB Mobile App has become the preferred channel of all our retail customers, and the one-stop-shop that offers them the fastest and most secure banking experience in Qatar.

"With over 100 feature and services, the mobile App now allows our customers to fulfil most of their banking needs in a few minutes, from sending money locally and internationally to having full control on their accounts and cards 24/7 and from anywhere in the world."

QIB's recognition as 'Digital Bank of the Year' follows the bank's outstanding success in launching a series of new digital banking solutions in a short period of time to support customers in fulfilling all their banking needs remotely, and in light of Covid-19, where QIB has seen an acceleration of the introduction of innovative digital products and services.

The bank has also succeeded in significantly increasing customers' trust and usage of digital channels to fulfil most of their banking needs in only a few minutes, including local and international transfers and payments, requesting, and managing cards and financings, opening, and managing new or additional accounts, and much more.

QIB was awarded the 'Best Retail Mobile Banking Experience' accolade for offering its retail customers the best, safest, and most secure banking experiences via the QIB mobile App, and its success in introducing innovative services and updates to the App over the past year.

With more than 100 features, the QIB mobile App has become customers' preferred banking channel and a digital one-stop-shop in answering all their banking needs from any location across the globe, and at any time with 24/7 accessibility.

The Asset Triple A Magazine's Digital Awards is amongst the most prestigious banking awards in Asia.

The awards recognise financial institutions and technology firms that have excelled in innovating and developing a unique digital experience for customers across the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions.

The Asset adopts a rigorous approach in selecting the best institutions in various countries and its awards are built upon stringent methodology. The awards are adjudicated by *The Asset*'s board of editors who collectively have several decades' worth of experience evaluating industry awards in the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

For more information, visit www.qib.com.qa.

IMF upgrades outlook for global economy again amid challenges: QNB

Despite short-term challenges associated with new waves of Covid-19 and a softer recovery in Europe, the IMF has again upgraded its outlook for the global economy, QNB said in an economic commentary.

"Nonetheless, the future presents daunting challenges," QNB noted. The pandemic is yet to be defeated as virus cases are accelerating in some countries. Recoveries are also diverging across regions where economies with slower vaccine rollout and more limited policy support perform less well, it said.

One year since the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the global economy remains under pressure as the human toll rises and millions remain unemployed.

However, the way out of this crisis is increasingly visible, despite considerable uncertainty about the future path of the pandemic. Hundreds of millions of people are being vaccinated at an unprecedented pace and are adapting to ways of working with reduced mobility, QNB said.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently published the April update of its World Economic Outlook (WEO), entitled "Managing divergent recoveries".

Four points summarise the updated IMF take on the global economy. Stronger estimates for growth in 2020 and higher growth expectations for 2021, despite divergence across countries and persistently elevated uncertainty.

First, the IMF has continued to revise up its estimates of global economic output in 2020. While the IMF in October 2020 forecast a global GDP contraction of 4.4% for 2020, it now estimates a smaller contraction of 3.3%.

The higher estimates for 2020 are mainly thanks to the swift policy action that was taken worldwide, including $16tn dollars of fiscal support, which have prevented a far worse outcome. Indeed, IMF estimates suggest that last year's collapse could have been three times worse without such support.

Second, the upgrade to global growth for 2021 is mainly due to a substantial upgrade for the United States (US), which is now expected to grow at 6.4% this year. Indeed, US stimulus is so strong that it is expected to surpass the level of GDP it was forecast to have in 2022 before Covid-19 caused a global pandemic.

In addition, the continued effective rollout of vaccines is expected to lead to a strengthening of activity later in the year, despite the drag on near-term impact due to rising Covid-19 infections.

Third, the recovery is diverging across countries and regions. The strength of the outlook varies depending on two main factors, the severity of the pandemic in each country, and the effectiveness of policy stimulus.

Not only has the US outperformed in terms of policy stimulus, it has already administered over 50 doses of vaccines per hundred people, which is already slowing the spread of Covid-19.

China also provided powerful policy stimulus, but has relied on effective testing, contact tracing and targeted localised lockdowns to avoid another surge in Covid-19 cases, despite a slower pace of vaccination.

In contrast, the Euro area has struggled to deliver either effective policy stimulus or a rapid vaccine rollout and is still suffering from a surge in Covid-19 cases. Indeed, European Union (EU) bureaucracy, supply constraints, and vaccine hesitancy mean that the EU has administered around 20 doses of vaccines per hundred people.

This is only around 40% of what the US is able to deliver, weakening and delaying the recovery until later in the year.

Fourth, a high degree of uncertainty still surrounds the global outlook. The two main risks are around the future path of the pandemic and US interest rates. Faster progress with vaccinations could drive further upgrades to the forecast. The emergence of new virus variants, that reduce the efficacy of vaccines and require regular boosters, could cause a sharp downgrade.

"Divergent recoveries could pose financial risks if the strong growth in the US drives up interest rates in unexpected ways.

This could cause inflated asset valuations to unwind in a disorderly manner, financial conditions to tighten sharply and recovery prospects to deteriorate," QNB said.