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## Barwa faces ire over mass dismissals

MD said to order 170 staffers out

**DOHA:** The multi-billion dollar state-backed real estate giant, Barwa Real Estate Company, which has massive projects on-going and huge investments at home and abroad, is in the throes of a major controversy.

In a dramatic move, the company's newly-appointed managing director (MD) on Wednesday gave marching orders reportedly to as many as 170 employees of the company. That, however, could not be independently verified.

But the newly-installed board vetoed the decision of the MD in an apparent bid to avert a major crisis. Appointed on Tuesday after the election to the company's board, the managing director, Dr Mohamed Asad Al Emadi, gave marching orders to 170 employees, some 80 of them fellow citizens, the very next morning, according to some sources.

The sackings were said to be part of Al Emadi's plans to restructure the company, which is listed on the Qatari bourse. But the move came as a shocker for senior members of the company's management as well as the staff. Although his decision has been stayed by the company's board, many senior members of the management are believably still insisting on quitting in protest.

Company employees are in a belligerent mood and are referring to the day of the mass sackings as 'Black Wednesday'. To avert the crisis the board has stayed several other controversial decisions taken by Al Emadi.

According to information available, in less than 24 hours of his appointment to the hot seat, he ordered - aside from sacking 170 staff members - disbanding of the boards of directors of the 27 high-profile subsidiaries of the Group and asked their CEOs to directly report to him instead of the board.

Barwa Bank is one of the key subsidiaries of the group and is considered a major player in the banking sector. It is learnt that the employees concerned refused to accept when the dismissal letters were handed to them. The administration subsequently e-mailed the letters.

Al Emadi was elected member of the board (as executive director) in Tuesday's election but his appointment as MD was to be discussed at a meeting of the board which was slated to be held later. How he became managing director, then, is a mystery which remains unresolved, sources wonder.

They say that the decision of the MD ordering mass sackings indicate there were inherent problems in the company. "He wouldn't have taken such a decision if there were no problems in the company, particularly considering that Barwa is a key listed entity and has hundreds of thousands of shareholders that include foreigners," said a source.

Or else, the new MD has no or little experience of managing large entities and so was exposed the moment he was put in the saddle of a multi-billion dollar Group which has wide business interests and relations not only in Qatar but overseas as well, said another source.

The post of MD at Barwa seems to be jinxed as Al Emadi's predecessor, Yusef Al Khatir, who was Group CEO, couldn't even complete a year, claim observers.

The drama unfolding at the company has left the company's shareholders shocked as many fear the stocks may nosedive.

The news of the sackings has, meanwhile, led to a heated debate on Qatari social networking sites. Some commentators expressed shock and disappointment and said the dismissal of about 12 percent of Barwa employees, majority of them nationals, did not bode well.

According to a commentator, Barwa has in all 600 employees and some 70 of them have been sacked. The company's Qatari staff consists of some highly qualified and experienced professionals, wrote another commentator.

"How did the new MD take such a crucial decision without taking the board in confidence," wondered yet another commentator. The move, he said, clearly reflected a tug of war between the MD and the board. **THE PENINSULA**

Continued on page 4

### World Health Day



Men exercising at the Aspire Park yesterday. Aspire Active, Qatar's leading exercise, fitness and health community programme, celebrated World Health Day by organising exercise activities for men and women. The initiative is part of programme under Aspire Zone Foundation to encourage a healthy lifestyle and is supported by Aspire Logistics. SEE ALSO PAGE 4 (SALIM MATRAMKOT)

## Mobile penetration in Qatar at 182pc, says ICT chief

BY TOFOL JASSIM AL NASR

**NEW YORK:** Mobile penetration in Qatar increased to 182 percent, which stands out as one of the highest in the world, compared to a global average of 76 percent, said Dr. Hessa Al Jaber, Secretary-General of ICT Qatar, during the second round of the Business and Investment in Qatar Forum here.

Addressing a high-level audience on the progress of information communications technology (ICT) sector, Al Jaber said: "This is only the beginning, as we are recently developing Qatar's digital agenda which aims to accelerate progress and further our nation."

One of the innovations ICT Qatar is focusing on developing are Arabic clusters to reflect the Middle East's population, she added. "We are really serious about investing in Arabic digital clusters in Qatar."

Noting that Arabic is the fifth largest spoken language in world, Al Jaber stated that only

1 percent of Internet content is in Arabic. And 90 percent of Internet users prefer browsing in Arabic. However, the Arabic digital content that exists is limited and of low quality. "In Qatar, we have all of the characteristics needed to bargain - the economy, demography, and policies," she said. "We have the fastest growing economy, a young, vibrant population, and mature mobile market ... key attributes for the international market to focus on."

While the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is mainly derived from oil and gas, Al Jaber revealed plans to diversify the economy through the ICT sector:

1. Doubling the ICT sector's contribution to GDP.
2. Doubling the workforce over the next 5 years.
3. Achieving high speed internet access.
4. Creating mass internet and IT adoption, and
5. Achieving more accessibility and effectiveness in key IT services.

Further, she invited US companies to take advantage of Qatar's

vast investment opportunities in ICT. Qatar is currently deploying advance secure infrastructure through a nation-wide broadband network with a total investment of QR2bn. By 2015, Al Jaber said 90 percent of Qatari businesses and homes will access the network. "Qatar will be one of the world most connected societies and will be established as one of the next generation broadband services," Al Jaber said.

She said that \$500m have been invested to establish a submarine cable that will connect Qatar to the world. Adding to Qatar's progress in the ICT field, Al Jaber said Qatar is developing a strategic satellite programme.

"Our plan is to provide coverage all over the world that will give an independence to the broadcast industry." ICT Qatar will be working on continuing development, modernising policies and regulations aimed at protecting consumers, and ensuring responsible use of technology.

**THE PENINSULA**  
See also pages 2 & 3

## Japan disaster zone hit by new powerful quake

**TOKYO:** A powerful 7.1-magnitude earthquake hit the same area of Japan early yesterday that was ravaged by disaster a month ago, seismologists said, prompting a local tsunami alert.

Power was cut to parts of the northeast of the country, much of which is still struggling with the effects of the monster tsunami that roared ashore four weeks ago. The new quake caused a handful of injuries, national broadcaster NHK said, but there were no reported deaths. The tsunami alert was later cancelled after no deadly wave materialised.

The tremor hit at 11:32pm local time (1432 GMT) with an offshore epicentre 66km east of Sendai, a city severely impacted by the March 11 quake and tsunami, according to the US Geological Survey. Japan's Meteorological Agency promptly issued a tsunami alert for the Pacific coast, saying waves of up to six feet could hit the shoreline, but the alert was cancelled 83 minutes after the quake.

Footage from broadcaster NHK showed power was off in parts of Sendai, a regional commercial hub badly shaken last month's double disaster. Witnesses in Kitakami city in Iwate prefecture reported that power had gone off following yesterday's quake. Jiji Press news agency said shortly after midnight that there were five fires and 13 gas leaks in Sendai city.

In Iwate prefecture, local authorities ordered some 500 households to evacuate, NHK said. The quake had a depth of 49km, the USGS said. Although the epicentre was 330km from Tokyo, it shook buildings in the Japanese capital.

A Meteorological Agency official said the tremor was an aftershock of the March 11 tremor, and data on the organisation's website showed that it was one of the most powerful. Around 400 strong aftershocks have rocked Japan since the 9.0 magnitude quake last month and the tsunami it spawned, which killed 12,500 people and left around 15,000 unaccounted for.

**AFP**  
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### Gondolania opens



Artists entertaining people during the grand opening of Gondolania, the largest indoor theme park in the GCC, at the Villaggio yesterday. (ABDUL BASIT)

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## Syria citizenship for Kurds

**DAMASCUS:** Syria yesterday granted citizenship to tens of thousands of Kurds on the same day that a legal committee completed draft legislation to replace nearly five decades of emergency rule.

A Facebook group also called for a "peaceful sit-in until freedom" at the Damascus headquarters of the Baath party to coincide with its 64th anniversary and urged countrywide "resistance today to demonstrate despite our wounds."

President Bashar Al Assad gave citizenship to the country's Kurds, who are a majority in the northeast and who have been denied nationality for nearly half a century, the state news agency SANA reported. "President Assad issued a decree granting Arab Syrian citizenship to people registered as foreigners in (the governorate of Hassake), it said.

The measure, which would benefit some 300,000 Kurds, came a week after Assad

tasked a committee with "resolving the problem of the 1962 census" in Hassake. In 1962, 20 percent of Syria's ethnic Kurdish population were deprived of citizenship after a controversial census, according to human rights groups.

The government at the time argued its decision was based on a 1945 wave of illegal immigration from neighbouring states, including Turkey, to Hassake, where Kurds "fraudulently" registered as Syrian citizens. The issue has long poisoned relations between Damascus and the Kurds, who were banned from public sector jobs because they are not citizens and yet they cannot emigrate as they do not have Syrian passports.

Kurds in the northeast demonstrated last Friday for the first time, calling for the right to citizenship and "freedom as well." Kurdish rights activist Radif Mustafa said

**AFP**



## Business & Investment in Qatar Forum

# Three economic zones to boost growth

**NEW YORK:** The Assistant Secretary for Planning Affairs and Deputy Chairman for Qatar National Master Planning (QNMP) steering committee Abdullah Al Abdulla, said that plans were underway to establish three economic development zones in Qatar to promote growth.

Speaking at the Infrastructure and Real Estate Panel at the Business and Investment in Qatar Forum held in New York, Al Abdulla described the foundation for Qatar's planning.

Under the leadership of the Emir and Heir Apparent, the Qatar recently launched Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030) and National development strategy, which is the blueprint for the future of Qatar. QNV 2030's four pillars are human, social, economic, and environmental development.

"Qatar aims to be an advanced society with sustained development, guaranteeing a high standard of living for all its people," he said adding that the country is striving to improve business investment through 100 percent foreign investment in certain sectors, reducing the tax bracket, and establishing 22 additional trade zones besides Energy City, Qatar Science and Technology Park, amongst others.

Discussing Qatar's urban planning, Al Abdulla explained that the population has more than doubled in the past six years and is expected to grow in the future. He foresees significant demographic changes as the population becomes more diversified.

"There will be more white-collared, knowledge-based workers living in Qatar with their families," he stated, which will present demands on homes, healthcare services, and other facilities.

"This will also bring extra opportunities to Qatar and increase demands and challenges to control growth... traffic, real estate developments, and

delivery expectations." Future business opportunities in Qatar are planning and design consulting services for major engineering projects, planning, procurement of material, innovative building techniques for culture, lifestyle, climate, and those that meet Qatar's commitment to green construction.

"We in Qatar are very optimistic and excited about forthcoming developments taking shape and looking forward to business opportunities and partnerships with US businesses," Al Abdulla stated.

Nasser Al Mawlawi, President of Qatar Public Works Authority (Ashghal), asserted that Qatar will build enough roads that will equal in length from Doha to Rome. He confirmed that \$20bn of estimated spending will take place in the next five years, while schools, healthcare facilities, and ports will require another \$5bn worth of investments.

Commenting on the size of Ashghal's portfolio, Al Mawlawi indicated that the company signed agreements with the American company KBR for programme management for 29 projects worth \$14bn and will be built over the next five years.

"Even though we are very fortunate to win the bid to host the 2022 World Cup, these plans were already there in terms of infrastructure to serve QNV 2030 ambitions," he explained.

Barwa Group Tariq Al-Jaber stated that changes taking place with NDA are organic and necessary.

Mohammed bin Ali Al Hedfa, Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Qatari Diar, the real estate investment arm of Qatar stated that the company is engaged in about 130 projects in 120 countries, with over \$60bn invested so far. Diar's latest project, CityCenterDC, worth \$700m was unveiled in the US capital, Washington, DC, on Monday. "This is only the beginning...

whenever we see an opportunity, we will grab it," he asserted.

Al Hedfa invited American expertise that is much needed in Qatar such as consultancy, designing, architecture, engineering, contracting, and financing.

Speaking about the first phase of developing the Marina, he described the development as "Manhattan-style high rise buildings" to be completed by the end of this year in terms of infrastructure. Seven buildings are already above ground in the development and will open in two months.

Al Hedfa emphasised that this is a golden opportunity for investment as contractors will be able to complete for building and construction in that city. The golf course is currently in phase 2.

Ahead of the World Cup 2022, "Homes and cities have to be built. An extraordinary city, Al Wosail is being built and the first phase is about to be open," said David Foster, Al Jazeera English moderator.

Al Wosail is a new city that is 38 sq km situated north of Doha. It will contain all components required in any city to live, work, and entertain, and built with latest available technology.

The company aims to make Al Wosail a model city for the region as it will be one of the first green cities in the world, reflecting Qatar's commitment to sustainable development.

"I have noticed a big change over past 15 years - Qatar now have big ambitions," Welch stated, adding that having big ambitions is a healthy thing. Qatar would not be the first country with a small population to try to punch above its weight in many respects. National plans are well conceived.

He expressed Bechtel's commitment to delivering the important infrastructure requirements to deliver Qatar's plans and achieve the national goals of stimulating the economy, transferring knowledge, and diversifying the economy. **THE PENINSULA**



The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jasssem bin Jabor Al Thani, the Minister of Energy and Industry H E Dr Mohammed bin Saleh Al Sada and the Chief Executive Officer of ExxonMobil Rex Tillerson with other dignitaries at the Business and Investment in Qatar Forum in New York City.



Members of the Qatari delegation with other dignitaries at the Business and Investment in Qatar Forum in New York City.



## Vodafone proud to invest in Qatar

**NEW YORK:** "Vodafone is a proud investor in Qatar," said Matthew Harrison-Harvey, Director of Regulatory and External Affairs at Vodafone Qatar.

Speaking on a panel discussion at the Business and Investment in Qatar Forum held in New York, Harrison-Harvey said that Vodafone has its presence in 30 countries and was established in Qatar 18 months ago.

"Vodafone is providing competition in the telecommunications sector in Qatar under the new regulatory framework that is consistent with WTO requirements and is closer to those in EU," Harrison-Harvey said.

Lauding Qatar's business-friendly policies, he added, "I can testify to the strength of [the] regulatory framework and ICT Qatar's dedication to try a different model of introducing competition and a level playing field to encourage investment in the country."

With just over 700,000 customers, Vodafone commands 25 percent of customer share in the marketplace and 24 percent revenue share.

"Vodafone is an example that foreign investment can work in Qatar," he said, adding that there is over \$1bn capital expenditure since the company set up in Qatar and plans for more. "Qatar is rolling out a national broadband network, which we at Vodafone very excited about, and will provide 100 MB per second, and access to at least 90 percent of households by 2015."

**THE PENINSULA**

# Education is a priority in Qatar: QU President

**NEW YORK:** Riz Khan, Al Jazeera English presenter, moderating the session on Healthcare and Education at the Business and Investment Forum held in New York asked a question that struck a chord with the panelists: "What about the next generation?"

Dr Sheikhha Abdulla Al Misdad, President of Qatar University, responded that, "Education is one of the first priorities in Qatar. The education sector is one of first sectors to have undergone major

reform plans," she stated. "For the last 15 years, Qatar has invested so much in its education system. Educational reform in Qatar is the most comprehensive and most broad reform in the region," she added.

She explained that K-12 educational reforms are one part of development, while the government has sought to establish higher education institutions by inviting Ivy League universities in Education City.

Further, the country is

developing post-graduate community colleges like North Atlantic.

"All has been done for the purpose of preparing and equipping the future generation of Qataris with the right skills for the global marketplace," she stated.

Reflecting on the vast investments undertaken by the country, it "all means nothing if Qatar can't have its own people who are skilled enough to protect its wealth and develop its future," she said.

In Qatar, major emphasis is placed in science and technology.

A student from Education City commented on Qatarisation, the national labor policy in Qatar, acting as hurdle for non-Qataris in the job market.

Dr Sheikhha responded that the Qatari job market is very wide especially with all of the projects and expansions that have been presented throughout the two-day Forum, which require a large amount of manpower.

"Qatar's population is very small... only 18 percent of the population. So there is a large amount

of non-Qataris in the workforce," she said. "There is an unwritten intention or direction... that yes, Qataris, because they are nationals, will be given priorities in the labor market but the next group who should be given priority are the students who graduated from Qatari universities... Most of all, those who have been born in Qatar and lived there all their lives," she added. **THE PENINSULA**

Stories by Tofol Jassim Al Nasr



## Business & Investment in Qatar Forum

# HMC gearing up for the 2022 challenge

**NEW YORK:** Dr Hanan Al Kuwari, Managing Director of Hamad Medical Corporation, addressed American companies who are potentially interested in investing in Qatar's health sector.

Although Qatar's population

is very small demographically, she described the population as being largely healthy because growth is mainly in the expatriate community.

Qatar's population, while "young and healthy, is burdened by the "double burden" of disease,"

she stated, referring to "communicable diseases from developing countries and modern lifestyle diseases."

The former is derived from expatriate labour from developing countries, while the latter refers to traffic-related traumas, obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

Hamad Medical Corporation is the largest, providing 90 percent of healthcare in Qatar. Described by Dr Al Kuwari as, "a comprehensive government-owned organisation targeting the highest international standards."

One of its biggest initiatives is to achieve an academic healthcare system. She added that equal attention is dedicated to medical care and research - "which will become embedded in the DNA of our system."

There are five existing hospitals in Qatar, with plans for another two. She noted that the unique nature of the healthcare system

is that it houses everything from child immunisation to robotic surgery under one roof. In terms of child immunisation, every child is screened for metabolism issues, hearing and sight impairments. Not only that, but the screenings are free and universal in public and private. "This has saved lives of our children," Dr Al Kuwari said. In fact, Qatar is home to the largest robotic surgeries in the Middle East, and Hamad Medical Corporation is collaborating with Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP) to



Some of the dignitaries at the reception held on the sidelines of the Business and Investment in Qatar Forum in New York City on Wednesday.

## Qatar's football legacy

**NEW YORK:** H E Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, General Secretary of the Qatar Olympic Committee, addressed the Business and Investment in Qatar Forum held in New York about "Culture, Tourism, and Sports."

"Sports in Qatar mean a lot. [They] mean a lot for the government. [They] mean a lot for the people because we feel that through sports, we can reach anywhere in the world. I can say something today that I am proud of. If I asked 10 years ago for anyone not from Qatar to locate Qatar or pronounce its name, there would be difficulty. Now after we won the 2022 [World Cup], everyone recognises Qatar. And that is a legacy."

Sports in Qatar follow the Qatar National Vision 2030. Falling within the national strategy, the country hosts around 30 international events a year in addition to the upcoming 2022 World Cup.

"Qatar has been honoured to be hosting this event. We are hosting major events in the coming years such as the 2015 cup for handball and bidding for international athletic events," he said.

Requirements for infrastructure and other services are necessary to conducting these events, he stressed. He narrowed down two types of investments:

1. Hard Investments, which come in the shape of infrastructure, and is represented in \$4bn earmarked for upgrading and constructing venues. One such investment is in a multipurpose facility to host 20,000 people and an Olympic swimming pool.

2. Soft Investments: such as hotels, airlines, and other aspects of the tourism industry. As mentioned in the World Cup bid, Qatar plans to have 110,000 hotel rooms ready. By the end of 2011 alone, 19,000 rooms will be ready.

"There are a lot of requirements for investment in these sectors," he added, inviting US companies to invest in Qatar. THE PENINSULA

develop a training centre for the region. In 2013, the Medical City will be opened and will double capacity, including a transnational research institute that will be built in the organisation.

Since 2006, Qatar is the only country outside of the US with all public healthcare facilities being accredited, and continues seeking the highest international accreditation.

"What is interesting is that 74 nationalities are under one roof," Dr Al Kuwari described Hamad

Medical Corporation, "we are like a mini-United Nations." The multinational setting, she reflected, presents opportunities because it brings in the best of all countries.

Sidra Medical Center, which will be opened middle of 2012 is the first truly integrated medical educational system in Qatar. It will focus on paediatric care and women's services.

As to worrisome healthcare trends, Qatar is the sixth highest country globally with the diabetes epidemic, and one of the highest

in the Middle East. One way of doing so is through the National Health Strategy, which was launched last week.

Through the programme, a number of prevention techniques have been developed for several epidemics, diabetes is one of them. She emphasised the government's commitment to healthcare, stating that "in order to truly be ready in 2022, to not only host the World Cup, but for us to be a healthy nation."

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