

2024

ABA NEWSLETTER

February Issue



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ABA Announcements

40th ABA General Meeting and Conference to be held on November 18-19 in Taipei



The Asian Bankers Association (ABA) is pleased to inform members that the **40th ABA General Meeting and Conference** is scheduled to take place on **November 18-19, 2024** in Taipei, Taiwan, with the CTBC Bank Co. Ltd. as co-organizer.

As in previous years, the two-day event is designed to once again provide another valuable platform for ABA members to meet and network with each other, as well as to exchange views with invited experts on:

- a. Current trends and developments in the regional and global markets that are expected to have a significant impact on the banking and financial

sector of the region

- b. How industry players can address the challenges - and take full advantage of the opportunities - presented by these developments.

We are, therefore, counting on members' valuable participation for the successful outcome of our annual gathering this year.

In the meantime, in preparation for the 2024 Conference, the **ABA Planning Committee** is scheduled to meet virtually on **March 13, 2024, at 2:00 pm, Taipei time**. The main agenda is to discuss and finalize the Conference theme and topics, Conference format and program, possible line-up of speakers, and other related matters.

Should members have questions or are interested to attend the virtual meeting, please do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat at aba@aba.org.tw or teresaliu@aba.org.tw.

ABA Secretariat Executives Call on Officers of MUFG Bank and Mizuho Bank in Tokyo



Mr. Yoshi Katsuda, Managing Director and Head of Global Corporate Banking Office of MUFG Bank Ltd. (center, left photo) and Mr. Dai Sato, General Manager, International Financial Institutions Banking Dept at Mizuho Bank Ltd. (2nd from right, right photo) and his colleagues Mr. Tomoyuki Ozawa (rightmost) and Ms. Minami Kagawa (leftmost) - received ABA Secretary-Treasurer Mr. David Hsu and Deputy Secretary Amador Honrado at the

headquarter of their respective banks during the February 22 Tokyo visit of the ABA Secretariat executives. During the meetings Mr. Hsu and Mr. Honrado invited both banks to : (a) attend the 40th ABA General Meeting and Conference to be held on November 11-12, 2024 in Taipei; (b) participate in the virtual Planning Committee Meeting on March 13 to discuss preparations for the 40th ABA General Meeting and Conference; (c) to participate in the webinar series

this year on “Connecting and Exploring Opportunities with ABA” and make a presentation on the current trends and latest developments in the Japanese economy and financial sector; and (d) to co-host an annual ABA General Meeting and Conference in Japan in the near future, perhaps jointly with our other Japanese member banks and the Japanese Bankers Association.

Training Programs

Wealth Management Summit Asia



The Asian Bankers Association (ABA) is a supporting partner of FT's live Wealth Management Summit Asia. The summit will be held in a hybrid format on March 14 at The Westin Singapore.

Asia has been more resilient to inflation, yet US-China polarisation, constraints on offshore investments, and limited private market exit options are posing structural hurdles for capital deployment. Wealth managers are turning to thematic investing to boost long-term returns, and Asia's commitment to

decarbonisation is creating sustainable investment opportunities across the region. While Japan is welcoming a return of consumer confidence, all eyes are on India as portfolio managers are pivoting from their long-favoured overweight position on China.

On the business side, trust and stability are imperative to future growth. Demands for hyper-personalised services are calling for a fresh approach to talent recruitment and the smart exploitation of machine learning tools. As younger, tech-savvy clients emerge in contrast to Asia's ageing population, how are traditional players strategising to boost client retention and capitalise on opportunities down the wealth continuum?

Now in its second year, Wealth Management Summit Asia is FT Live and PWM's gathering of market-leading private banks, family offices and wealth managers, discussing how best to bolster business against risks and chase organic growth in the region. From interactive panel discussions to exclusive roundtables and market briefings, this year's conference will uncover outperforming business models and how investors can angle for higher returns in the face of US-China tensions and shifting supply chains.

For more details and register at a discounted rate for ABA members, please visit [Wealth Management Asia website](#).

ABA and Fintelekt to organize "Certified AML/CFT Professional Training Programme"

Fintelekt



The Asian Bankers Association (ABA) and Fintelekt Advisory Services, an official ABA Knowledge

Partner, wish to invite fellow bank members and friends to join the "Fintelekt Certified AML/CFT Professional Training Programme" on March 20-21, 2024 to be held in the Hotel Aloft Bangkok Sukhumvit 11 in Bangkok, Thailand.

This is a two-day intensive training programme for AML compliance professionals as well as others within the bank/financial institution seeking advanced knowledge on AML/CFT.

The programme is relevant for bank staff from the AML Compliance, Regulatory Compliance, Financial Crime, Trade Finance, Remittances, Payment Systems, Retail Banking, Wholesale Banking, Digital Banking, Technology, Cyber Security, Audit, Legal, Strategy and Corporate Governance departments.

Participants who attend all sessions and pass the assessments are entitled to receive the Fintelekt Certified AML/CFT Professional (FCAP) certificate. FCAP members earn the right to use "FCAP" as a designation against their name, signifying specialist knowledge, industry leadership and

commitment to AML/CFT compliance.

This will be a non-residential training programme (i.e., accommodation costs will have to be borne by the participant.) However, Fintelekt worked out a special rate with the venue hotel which participants can avail of. Further details will be made available upon registration.

Regular price: US\$675 per participant

ABA members' special price: US\$550 (18% discount)

Registration Deadline is March 1, 2024. Seating capacity is limited. Please send your nominations at the earliest. Registrations will be on a first come, first served basis.

For more information and registration contact oliver@fintelekt.com.

What is FCAP?

Fintelekt Certified AML/CFT Professional (FCAP) is designed as a comprehensive and practical master class for aspiring and practicing AML/CFT professionals to learn and stay updated with latest tools, techniques and developments in anti-money laundering and combating terrorist financing.

Hong Kong finance firm VSFG targets to apply for spot Ethereum ETF in Q2

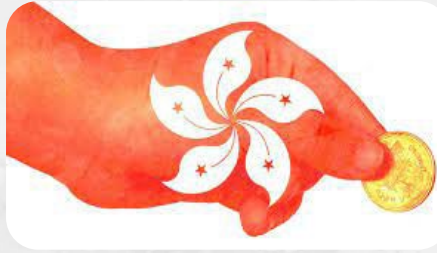
Venture Smart Financial Holdings Ltd. (VSFG), a Hong Kong-based financial services firm, is preparing to apply for a spot Ethereum exchange-traded fund (ETF) in anticipation of potentially launching its spot bitcoin ETF in the first quarter.

In a Friday February 2 interview with The Block, VSFG Chairman Lawrence Chu said that the firm is in the final phase of officially submitting its application for a spot bitcoin ETF to the Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission.

In Hong Kong, extensive regulatory discussions typically precede the submission of an application, according to Chu. "Submission for application is almost like when you're 95% there," he added.

Chu noted that the company is targeting a second-quarter submission for a spot Ethereum ETF, provided its spot bitcoin ETF is approved and listed in the first quarter. "But that really depends on the conversation we have with the regulator," he said. "We will be ready."

In January 2024, Livio Weng, chief operating officer of



Hong Kong crypto exchange HashKey, said that around 10 fund companies have started looking into launching potential spot crypto ETFs in the city.

With several fund companies in Hong Kong preparing to apply for spot bitcoin ETFs, there could be a race to lower fees among asset managers, similar to what has been observed in the U.S.

"There will be a few ETFs that come out," Chu said. "Our role is slightly nuanced because I think we're also trying to help ETF issuers get into the game."

Chu pointed out that U.S. ETF issuers tend to have their own digital asset teams. "In Hong Kong, there's a bit of a licensing requirement but also a knowledge gap. Most ETF issuers don't have a digital asset team."

"It becomes less of a competition for us, but rather it's competition between ETF issuers on their marketing side," Chu continued. "From that point of view, you can think of us as more of a service provider to all ETF issuers."

The Block

BSN Releases myBSN, its First Mobile App for Retail Customers



After years of a web-only myBSN online banking portal, Bank Simpanan Nasional (BSN) has finally released the myBSN mobile app for personal banking BSN account holders.

The new app is not too be confused with BSN's BSNeBiz Mobile app, which is specifically targeted at corporate and SME clientele only. myBSN is intended to fill the mobile banking gap, as prior to this BSN was one of the few local banks without a smartphone app for personal banking customers.

The myBSN mobile app can now be obtained for Apple and Android devices, and is intended to simplify access and enable seamless consumer banking services including savings and credit card account enquiries such as account balance and transaction histories.

In a departure from the features available on the myBSN

internet banking portal, the mobile application also introduces the capability for QR payments, allowing customers to scan and make payments directly from their mobile devices. Additionally, the app supports fund transfers and credit card payments through DuitNow, facilitating instant transactions.

To prioritise security, myBSN leverages biometric identification with fingerprint and facial recognition to verify identity on the mobile device. myBSN also can secure funds and prevent unauthorised transactions with the BSN Safe Switch, a self-service security feature that other banks are introducing too, allowing the user to block access to their account in real-time, if the account is suspected to be compromised.

Bank Simpanan Nasional (BSN) was initially established in 1974, with the primary mission to enhance the public's access to financial services in Malaysia. The foundation of BSN was part of a broader government initiative aimed at boosting savings and investments among Malaysians, particularly within low and middle-income groups.

Broadening its financial inclusion focus even further, BSN CEO Jay Khairil sat down with Fintech News Malaysia's Vincent Fong to explain the bank's journey in catalysing microfinancing for small businesses in Malaysia next.

Fintech News Malaysia

India to cut financial aid to Maldives by 22%; Bhutan, Nepal to receive majority share

In the recent budget document released by the government on February 1, India has proposed a 22% reduction in aid to the Maldives for the 2024-25 financial year. The Maldives now is slated to receive INR 600 crore for developmental assistance, ranking it as the third-highest recipient of aid from the government for foreign countries.

It was also outlined that Bhutan and Nepal are slated to be the top two recipients of government grants. Bhutan is allocated INR 2068.56 crore for developmental assistance, while Nepal is earmarked INR 700 crore.

Several other countries are also witnessing decreases in their allocations for the 2024-25 fiscal, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the Latin American nations. But surprisingly, budget allocations for Sri Lanka, African countries, Mauritius, and the Seychelles have seen increases.

Coming back to the Maldives, in the previous fiscal year (2023-24), the Maldives was granted INR 770.90 crore in aid, marking an increase of more than 300% from the INR 183.16 crore allocated in 2022-23. Notably, the initial allocation for the Maldives in the 2023 Budget was INR 400 crore, but it was later revised to INR 770.90 crore.

India has consistently been a key aid and assistance partner to the Maldives, contributing to sectors such as defence, education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Government data indicates that in 2018, the Maldives received 2.1% of the total



foreign aid allocation, a figure that rose to 6.8% in 2019 and reached 6.84% in the fiscal year 2023-24.

The reduction in aid is not exclusive to the Maldives, as the government plans an overall 10% cut in aid to foreign countries for the upcoming fiscal year. India has earmarked INR 4883.56 crore for foreign aid in 2024-25, a decrease from the INR 5426.78 crore allocated in the 2023-24 budget.

India and the Maldives have found themselves entangled in a diplomatic dispute triggered by disparaging remarks made by certain Maldivian ministers directed at the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Things went a little sour when PM Modi visited Lakshadweep and shared pretty images of the place. In the Maldives, this was interpreted as an attempt to promote Lakshadweep as an alternative tourist destination, posing a potential threat to the island nation's heavily tourism-dependent economy.

This dispute resulted in a wave of cancellations for myriad hotel bookings and flight tickets bound for the Maldives.

For information, the government grants to foreign nations serve various purposes, including aid for cultural and heritage projects, as well as assistance for disaster relief.

Times of India

BOI and UOB Sign MOU to Support New Investments into Thailand and Across the Region



The Thailand Board of Investment (BOI) and UOB Thailand have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), solidifying their commitment to promote business cooperation and facilitate new investment opportunities into Thailand across UOB's key markets.

The Thailand Board of Investment (BOI) and UOB Thailand have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to promote new investment opportunities in Thailand and across UOB's key markets. The partnership aims to facilitate foreign direct investment into Thailand and support Thai companies in expanding overseas.

The MOU between BOI and UOB Thailand aims to promote new investment opportunities in Thailand and across UOB key markets, fostering greater economy and industrial linkage.

UOB's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Advisory unit has supported over 4,200 foreign companies with cross-border expansion and enabled more than US\$1.6 billion of projected foreign direct investments into Thailand since 2019.

Thailand remains an appealing destination for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) due to its developed industrial infrastructures, supply chains, and long-term growth potential, with Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia being top destinations for Thai companies' expansion.

The collaboration will leverage UOB's financial solutions and regional networks to connect businesses with government agencies and professional

service providers across Asia. Thailand remains an attractive destination for foreign direct investment, and the collaboration between BOI and UOB is expected to accelerate the country's transition to the "New Economy" and facilitate rapid growth in FDIs across the region.

UOB's Foreign Direct Investment Advisory unit has played a significant role in supporting cross-border expansion, helping foreign companies and Thai companies to venture abroad. The MOU also highlights the intention to establish new overseas offices in Singapore and Saudi Arabia to increase outreach capabilities.

Thailand Business News

VIB implements Temenos core banking solution on cloud



Vietnam International Bank (VIB) will team up with Amazon Web Services (AWS) and ITSS, a technology solutions and IT services company from Switzerland, to implement Temenos core banking solution on cloud.

This follows a cooperation agreement inked between these companies in HCM City on February 22.

Under the agreement, VIB will implement the latest core banking version R23 from Temenos on the AWS cloud and VIB's private cloud platforms, marking it as the first bank to deploy the Temenos core banking system on a cloud computing platform in Việt Nam.

Trần Nhật Minh, Deputy CEO cum CIO of VIB, said: "With the strategic positioning to become a leading retail bank in Việt Nam, VIB is always at the forefront of investing in technology initiatives, digitalisation, and building an advanced and robust technology platform.

"The banking industry in Việt Nam is undergoing significant transformation, driven by increase in customer demand for digital experiences and the constant advancement of technology. Particularly, the migration of core banking systems to the cloud has emerged as a game-changing factor, promising flexibility, innovation and enhanced customer experiences."

"This core banking modernisation project on the cloud reaffirms VIB's commitment to continuously improve services quality and operational efficiency, while creating a strong

foundation to serve customers in a prominent digital era," he said.

For his part, Eric Yeo, Vietnam Country Manager, AWS, said the cloud revolution provides capabilities to optimise operation, improve security, reduce operation cost for technology infrastructure and minimise downtime during peak traffic. This technology platform will help VIB meet and exceed the rapid business growth in future.

In its strategic transformation phase (2017-26), VIB is witnessing impressive growth, positioning it as one of the leading retail banks in Việt Nam.

To date, VIB is among the most retail oriented banks in the country with retail loan proportion of over 85 per cent loan portfolio. Over the past seven years, the bank achieved compounded growth in credit portfolio at 32 per cent due to strategic business changes and successful penetration and expansion in the individual customer segment.

With the aim of becoming the most innovative bank in Việt Nam, VIB has been implementing long-term digital strategies, with digital banking witnessing significant growth alongside high penetration and digital conversion rates.

From 2017 to 2023, the compound annual growth rate of digital transactions was 100 per cent, with over 94 per cent of retail transactions conducted through digital channels, serving millions of active customers every month.

Vietnam News

ADB to Help Empower Philippine Rural Banks through Digital Transformation



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will provide grants totaling \$655,000 to nine rural banks and a bank consortium in the Philippines to implement digital transformation solutions aimed at catalyzing financial inclusion, especially in underserved sectors in the country.

The grants are part of ADB's Fintech for Inclusion Transformation (FIT) program funded by the High-Level Technology Fund and the Republic of Korea e-Asia and Knowledge Partnership Fund. The grant awardees were chosen from among rural banks nationwide serving women, farmers, fisherfolk, and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, which submitted their digital transformation project proposals following the program's launch in June 2023. The Rural Bankers Association of the Philippines (RBAP) and the Bangko Sentral

News Updates

ng Pilipinas are supporting the grant program.

“The FIT program builds on ADB’s efforts to utilize technology to increase the efficiency, sustainability, and resilience of the finance sector, especially those which service underserved sectors in the country,” said ADB Director for the Finance Sector Group Emma Xiaoqin Fan.

The grant awardees are aiming to achieve more efficiency in their operations, reduce operational expenses and friction costs, expand their reach, improve customer service, and build more resilient financial institutions overall. Some of the digital transformation proposals involve putting up cloud-based core banking systems, loan origination systems, and credit scoring systems.

ADB hosted a series of workshops and consultations with industry experts to assist the applicants in creating viable digital transformation solutions. ADB engaged a consulting firm to evaluate proposals and conduct due diligence, interviews, and assessment of the impact and institutional health of qualified applicants.

The grant awardees come from across the Philippines, with six banks from Luzon, one from the Visayas, and two from Mindanao. The awardees are Banco San Vicente, Camalig Bank, MVSM Bank, Rural Bank of Guinobatan, Rural Bank of Medina, Rural Bank of Montalban, Rural Bank of Porac, Rural Bank of Silay, and Rural Bank of Tandag. The Good Bank Consortium is composed of three rural banks.

The FIT program is part of the ADB-financed Inclusive Finance Development Program, which supported government reforms to expand Filipinos’ access to financial services, especially the unbanked segment of the population. The reforms are linked to the government’s National Strategy for Financial Inclusion. For more details on the FIT program and the awardees, please visit www.fit-program.com.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

ADB

Special Features

Sustainable Finance Climbs Asia’s Treasury Agenda

Asian firms have become increasingly focussed on the adoption of green financing in recent years, not least because of the environmental risks faced by many countries in the region, as well as the transition risk and opportunity associated with global efforts to move away from fossil fuels.

As Prakash Arikrishnan, Director, Risk Advisory, Global Treasury Advisory at Deloitte points out, interest in green finance “is especially pronounced in regions that are either heavily impacted by environmental issues, or where there is a strong regulatory push towards sustainability.”

In addition to helping treasurers fulfill regulatory requirements and mitigate environmental risks, he added, the attractions of green financing also include “the financial incentives that often accompany sustainable investments.”

Sunil Veetil, Head of Commercial Banking Sustainability, Asia-Pacific, at HSBC, observed that the topic of sustainable finance is now raised in nearly every meeting with corporate treasurers. “Whereas in the past they would ask ‘why?’, nowadays they ask ‘how?’,” he added.

And governments are taking it seriously, for example on January 24, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) welcomed the new creation of the Singapore Sustainable Finance Association.

Addressing the Environmental Impact

Some sectors are embracing sustainable finance more rapidly than others. Alongside renewable energy, other notable



adopters of green finance include manufacturing firms, as well as the automotive sector and property sectors.

Jason Teo, Head of Treasury, SEA at LOGOS Property, explained that the Apac logistics specialist continually strives “to address material, environmental, social and governance (ESG) impacts from our operations and provide ethical leadership for organizational growth and success.”

In 2020, LOGOS secured its maiden green development load with IFC (a member of World Bank Group) for two logistic assets in Indonesia.

But while certain sectors are more active in the sustainable finance space, Veetil noted that “there is a dawning realization among all businesses that decarbonization is a strategic pivot they must make and there are long-term advantages to reducing their direct and indirect emissions.”

Benefits Stack Up

There are numerous reasons for exploring green financing, from accessing additional investors to improving the company’s reputation. Cost savings are also a consideration: as Veetil observes, “Any good treasurer would want to shave basis points, and sustainability-linked facilities can offer better pricing when KPIs are met.”

That said, he added it has been encouraging to see that a growing number of companies “are proactively exploring green finances because of genuine business reasons.”

Compliance is another driver for adoption.

“Globally, governments and regulatory agencies

Special Features

are increasingly enforcing policies that promote eco-friendly practices,” said Arikrishnan. “This encompasses incentives like tax benefits and subsidies, as well as penalties for non-compliance, rendering green financing a viable option for adhering to these policies while benefiting from these incentives.”

Other factors include pressures from investors and stakeholders, as well as the opportunity to tap into novel markets and opportunities.

“Sustainability is about creative value for our stakeholders and customers while supporting the communities in which we work,” commented Teo. With an increasing emphasis on procedures, standards and regulatory compliance, he said the alignment with international frameworks “will enhance investors’ confidence”, increasing access to factorable financing through green loans and bonds.

Terms and Conditions

When exploring green and sustainable finance, treasurers need to pay close attention to the types of terms and conditions that come with the territory.

Veetil explained that there are two main types of sustainable finance instruments, namely the use of proceeds and sustainability-linked instruments.

“In the former, the use of proceeds of the loan either reduces the borrower’s environmental footprint (green loans) or supports improved socio-economic conditions for a target population (social loans),” said Veetil. “This use is stipulated in the terms and conditions, and the client needs to prove that the funding is only being used for this green or social project.”

While sustainability-linked loans can be used for general corporate purposes, he notes that these transactions have KPIs that, if met, can cause margin to be lowered.

“In some cases, if the KPI is not met, the margin increases,” he added, noting that the incentive-penalty mechanism must be clearly set out for sustainability-linked instruments, “and must comply with the LMA’s Sustainability Linked Loan principles.”

In addition, Arikrishnan observes that green loans usually require borrowers to provide regular reports on the use of funds and the environmental impact of projects being funded, with some loans requiring third-party certification or verification. Green loans may also include specific covenants or

conditions that borrowers must adhere to, “such as maintaining certain environmental performance standards or complying with specific sustainability policies.”

As such, treasurers should be aware of the compliance requirements and increased reporting burden that comes with green finance, while also remaining alert to the risk of green washing, and the greater level of scrutiny over this topic.

Regulations Ramp Up

Looking ahead, Veetil predicts that increasing numbers of treasurers will be asking how - rather than if - sustainability is relevant to their businesses, and what actions they should be taking and prioritizing to meet their ESG goals, “especially on the back of disclosure updates in jurisdictions such as China and India.”

Likewise, treasurers will need to be aware of newly announced or adopted regulations, such as the [EU Deforestation Law](#), [Corporate Sustainable Due Diligence Directive](#) and the [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism](#) (CBAM).

“The two themes of disclosure requirements and supply chain traceability will cause companies to take more actions to meet ESG targets, which in turn will lead to continued growth in sustainable finance in Asia in 2024,” Veetil noted. “Our sustainable finance business experienced double-digit percentage growth in 2023 and we expect further growth in 2024.”

Delete’s Arikrishnan agreed that 2024 will see wider adoption and mainstreaming of the sector. At the same time, he expects the integration of digital and financial innovations like blockchain and AI “will enhance transparency, efficiency, and the ability to monitor environmental impacts.”

The scope of green projects will diversify beyond the current focus on renewable energy and energy efficiency with sectors such as sustainable agriculture, water management, and circular economy initiatives playing a more prominent role, Arikrishnan said.

He added that investor scrutiny on the actual environmental impact of green finance is also likely to heighten in the coming year, “paralleled by a growing interest in sustainable investments fuelled by ethical considerations and the acknowledgment of the long-term value of sustainability.”

Corporate Treasurer

On gaining financial freedom in 2024, RCBC provides helpful tips

These days, financial freedom is not just a goal; it’s a survival skill. Life can be quite unpredictable, and nothing can help you overcome its hurdles more than being financially prepared.

And Chinese New Year is the best time to start your journey towards financial health and improve your financial game. Based on the Chinese Zodiac, 2024 is the Year of the Dragon—a year that astrologers describe to be interesting and unpredictable, with never a dull moment. Of course, you can

choose to believe if what the Chinese Zodiac says is true. Yet even on a practical level, the Chinese New Year—which falls on February 10 this year—can serve as an auspicious period for new beginnings and positive life changes!

Here are some Chinese New Year-inspired pieces of financial wisdom and insights that can help attain financial freedom this 2024, curated by Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC):

1. Pay debt or save emergency

unds? With the Year of the Dragon said to be a year of moment and unpredictability, it’s wise to put some stability into your finances at the start of 2024! And the best way to do that is to sort out your debts and build an emergency fund.

Financial wisdom may dictate that it is important to invest to increase sources of income. The idea here is to live a life where you don’t depend on just your day job. But it also isn’t wise to invest without considering your personal financial status. Before

Special Features



investing, make sure you pay off your debts first. Pay more than the minimum and, if possible, pay more than once a month. Pay off your most expensive loan first, as it is likely to be the one with the highest interest rate. Once you have paid off your outstanding loans, save up a decent amount for your emergency fund. Conventional wisdom says you should have an emergency fund that could cover at least three month's worth of your expenses. But it depends on your financial capacity and personal circumstances.

Should you pay off your debt first before building an emergency fund? Ideally, it's best to be debt-free first; the longer it takes you to pay off your loans, the higher the interest rate and other related fees could be. Yet, practically speaking, it's ideal—perhaps even wise—to save a bit of your monthly income for emergencies even as you pay off your debt. Having funds ready for those unforeseen events and tight spots can help get more loans.

2. Diversify income. A financial advice that never goes out of style is the advice to create more income sources for yourself. Many think this means investing in property, bonds, and stocks, among other financial products. And while this can be a good way to diversify income, investing isn't the only way—especially when your financial circumstances won't allow you to go big on investments just yet. Expanding income sources can also mean taking on a side hustle to supplement your regular income. It means monetizing that hobby you've been working on for years. The main point here is to make sure you are not vulnerable to economic fluctuations or major financial hurdles (like a huge hospital bill or a sudden loss of a job) that you may unexpectedly encounter.

3. Automate savings using your banking app's features. Have trouble building that emergency fund? If you believe in the Chinese Zodiac, this will be common in 2024 due to the Year of the Dragon's restless energy. You can, however, offset this restless energy by building a practice of stability and constancy.

Create or open a separate savings account just for this purpose so you wouldn't be tempted to dip into your "savings" when you get that sudden urge to go on a shopping spree or out-of-budget night out. Take advantage of your banking app's fund transfer feature; make sure a specific but reasonable amount from your monthly salary or income goes straight to your savings account, so you can resist the temptation to spend it.

RCBC digital app, now known as RCBC Pulz, is one of the most comprehensive banking apps in the country equipped with features that empower its clients to manage their funds anytime, anywhere. You can open a savings account using the app to get your started.

4. Prepare for the future. Financial freedom is not just about the now; it's also about the future and securing a stable and comfortable life for yourself several years from now. This means securing investments, life insurance plans and private health insurance (for when you are already retired and can no longer depend on insurance provided by your employment). This also means making sure you have a pension and retirement fund source. This means having a passive income stream.

RCBC Trust can help you manage your investments, with a team of portfolio managers dedicated to providing you with expert financial advice to help you realize your funds' potential through a variety of investment products and services such as Unit Investment Trust Funds, Investment Management Accounts (IMAs), and Personal Management Trusts, among others.

Wouldn't it be great to start working on these steps this year? RCBC can help you reach your financial dreams through its rich and diverse list of products—from savings accounts, personal loans, and a personal business relationship manager who can help assist you on your specific financial goals.

Visit [RCBC](#) to check out the services.

Business Mirror

Wee Cho Yaw, former UOB chairman and one of Singapore's richest men, dies aged 95



Mr Wee Cho Yaw, the former chairman and CEO of Singapore bank UOB, has died at the age of 95.

Mr Wee is one of Southeast Asia's most successful businessmen, having helmed UOB Group for more than 60 years before he retired from the board in 2018.

He was also chairman of real estate developer UOL Group.

UOB announced his passing on Feb 3, describing Mr Wee as a "visionary banker, celebrated businessman and community pillar" who was "pivotal to UOB's development as a leading bank in Asia".

UOB is Singapore's third-largest bank by market cap. Mr Wee had stayed on as its Chairman Emeritus and Honorary Adviser after retiring from the board.

Special Features

Born in Kinmen in 1929, Mr Wee moved to Singapore as a child amid the Sino-Japanese war.

At the age of 28, he became the youngest director on the board of United Chinese Bank which his father Wee Kheng Chiang co-founded in 1935. It was later renamed United Overseas Bank (UOB).

Under Mr Wee's leadership, the bank grew from one branch to a regional bank in 19 countries and territories, UOB noted.

One of Singapore's wealthiest men, the banking veteran consistently appeared on Forbes' rich list.

In 2023, he was eighth on the Forbes list of Singapore's 50th richest people, with a net worth of US\$7.1 billion. He was Singapore's richest man in 2011, with a fortune of US\$4.2 billion.

In a tribute posted on Facebook, Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam described Mr Wee as "simply unique".

Mr Tharman, a former Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) chairman, remembered Mr Wee as a man with "an insatiable appetite for work and a shrewd eye for opportunities - unmatched in local banking".

"I enjoyed my meetings with Cho Yaw during my many years at the MAS," wrote Mr Tharman. "He had insights that I always found useful. And a tenacious, but very warm personality."

Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, the current MAS chairman, praised the late banker for his "transformative leadership" and how it made UOB a regional banking powerhouse.

"His vision and ethical standards set a lasting industry benchmark, and his contributions to our financial centre and much more, will be remembered," wrote Mr Wong.

Wee Cho Yaw's Legacy

Mr Wee has five children. His eldest son, Wee Ee Cheong, is the current deputy chairman and CEO of UOB.

"My father has left an indelible mark in Singapore and the region," said Mr Wee Ee Cheong.

"He has been a source of inspiration for me in all aspects of my life. Much will be said about his business acumen and dealmaking but it will be the values of honour, enterprise, unity and commitment that will be the legacy he leaves us at UOB.

"Whether it is thorough thinking for the long-term, the

importance of deep relationships, doing the right thing or giving a helping hand to those in need, the influence of my father and his values will endure at UOB."

UOB chairman Wong Kan Seng also paid tribute to the late banking tycoon, saying he is "without doubt" one of Singapore's most successful entrepreneurs.

"His towering presence can be seen across Singapore through the many industries, businesses, individuals and communities that UOB has supported over the years," Mr Wong said.

"He has also made many important contributions to the development of Singapore as a global financial centre."

Beyond business, the late Mr Wee was passionate about education and giving back to the community.

He headed the Hokkien Huay Kuan - one of Singapore's largest clan associations - from 1972 to 2010. He was also the founding president of the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA) from 1985 to 2010, the umbrella group for local Chinese clan associations.

As then-president of the SFCCA, he was instrumental in the formation of the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), which was founded in 1992 to help less fortunate Chinese families and academically weaker students.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in his speech to mark the CDAC's 20th anniversary, described Mr Wee as a "prime mover" behind the non-profit self-help group.

"He led the Fund Raising Committee and donated generously to the Endowment Fund, helping to raise more than S\$10 million. He helped introduce many CDAC programmes, like the CDAC-SFCCA Hardship Assistance Fund, the Bursary Schemes and many others," Mr Lee said in 2012.

After Nanyang University was merged with the University of Singapore in 1980, Mr Wee was invited to become a council member of the newly formed National University of Singapore (NUS).

He later became pro-chancellor of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in 2004.


Both universities had conferred an honorary doctor of letters on Mr Wee for his contributions.

In 2015, UOB also set up the S\$50 million Wee Cho Yaw Future Leaders Award scholarship programme to help provide financial assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Channel News Asia

Among Member Banks

BEA Launches BEA Mobile

The Bank of East Asia,  **BEA 東亞銀行** Limited ("BEA" or "the Bank") announces the launch of BEA Mobile, its new mobile banking application. Redesigned from the ground up with a focus on customers' daily needs, the app takes care of their financial requirements at any moment. With its brand-new interface and personalised functions, BEA Mobile delivers a superior digital experience.

BEA Mobile provides a comprehensive suite of wealth management services which add flexibility to the creation of a portfolio, thanks to up to 14 investment functions, including trading stocks, unit trusts, linked deposits, and foreign currencies. The "Fund Portfolio Builder" intelligently shortlists funds that are suitable for the customer to build a personalised fund portfolio. The all-new "Wealth Portfolio" gives customers

a holistic overview of their assets at a glance.

For daily banking needs, customers not only can personalise the user interface of BEA Mobile by creating shortcuts for frequently performed tasks such as transfers and remittances, they can also re-arrange the sequence of their accounts, so that balances and summaries of specific accounts are easier to see. In addition, they can instantly buy travel protection insurance, exchange foreign currencies 24/7 and open all-in-one accounts directly through BEA Mobile.

BEA Mobile marks an important milestone in the digitalisation of retail banking at the Bank. BEA is committed to driving digital development and providing customers with innovative, convenient digital financial services and an optimised customer experience.

Bank of East Asia

State Bank of India (SBI) & Flywire team to digitize education payments

Flywire Corporation (Flywire), a global payments software company, has announced that it has partnered with the State Bank of India to enable Indian payers to pay international education-related fees seamlessly and digitally in Indian rupees to higher education institutions globally.

The integration provides students and families with a streamlined and completely digital experience when making high-value education payments and helps them comply with the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS), which is a set of guidelines to help streamline overseas transactions and investments for residents of India.

Flywire integrates directly into SBI's banking platform, providing Indian students with a fully digital checkout experience for their transactions, ranging from application fees to tuition payments. The solution is available only to local currency account holders of SBI in India. Students can make the payment in three simple steps from within their SBI net banking platform, all in Indian rupees, and can track the payment through



to when the funds are delivered to their university.

The partnership between Flywire and SBI provides a novel approach to education payments and offers many benefits to students and institutions alike. First, the integration creates a seamless and digital payment experience for the more than 480 million Indian residents who are customers of SBI, transforming what was formerly a lengthy and complex process into one that is completely online. SBI customers can complete payments from local currency accounts to the thousands of Flywire education clients in a simple, three-step process.

"We are thrilled to partner with SBI to combine their comprehensive banking network and Flywire's payment technology with the goal of transforming how international payments are made," said Mohit Kansal, SVP of Global Payments at Flywire.

A spokesperson at SBI shared, "We are pleased to partner with Flywire and offer this unique offering to Indian students and customers of SBI. By partnering with Flywire, we're expanding the footprint of our payment solutions to benefit the next generation of students."

IBS Intelligence

MUFG Bank (China) Receives Lead Underwriting License for Corporate Panda Bonds in Chinese Interbank Bond Market



MUFG Bank January 22 announced that its wholly owned subsidiary MUFG Bank (China), Ltd. (MUFG China) has received a lead underwriting license for corporate panda bonds[1] in the Chinese Interbank Bond Market. The license is issued by NAFMII, a self-regulatory body governed by the People's Bank of China.

The Chinese bond market, covering bond trading and issuance markets in the country, has been growing rapidly and is now the second largest in the world after the U.S. With this license, MUFG China can leverage its global network and local expertise to participate in bond issuances by offshore companies, thereby better supporting the direct financing needs of corporate clients in China and the diversification of investor portfolios.

MUFG China was the first foreign bank to issue renminbi (RMB)-denominated bonds in the Chinese onshore market in May 2010. In May 2014, it became the first foreign bank to issue RMB-denominated bonds (dim sum bonds) in Hong Kong. MUFG Bank was also the first to issue onshore RMB-denominated bonds (fujiyama bonds) in Japan in June 2015, and in January 2018, the first Japanese company to issue panda bonds in the Chinese interbank bond market. In 2019, MUFG China was awarded a qualified syndicated members' license for corporate bonds, further underscoring its significant contributions to the RMB-denominated bond market.

MUFG Bank and MUFG China will fully utilize this underwriting license to provide holistic financial services to clients wishing to capture business and investment opportunities in China while contributing to the ongoing development of the Chinese bond market.

MUFG

Among Member Banks

Renewal of business cooperation agreement between Mizuho Bank and Bank of the Philippine Islands



Mizuho Bank, Ltd. has signed a business cooperation agreement with the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI).

A renewal of the existing business cooperation agreement that Mizuho Bank signed with BPI in 2012, this new agreement expands and strengthens the scope of business cooperation between the two banks.

In 2012, Mizuho Bank and BPI signed a business cooperation agreement with the aim of providing Japanese companies considering entering the Philippines with local banking information and enhancing their support systems after entering the Philippines. The two banks have been cooperating mainly in the areas of local currency services, introduction of local partners and sales partners, mutual cooperation in developing local credit markets, and information exchange in relation to local financial markets and regulations.

The new agreement aims to further expand the areas

of cooperation described above. Specifically, it adds timely and relevant themes such as mergers and acquisitions (M&A), asset management, human resources, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) to the scope of cooperation. This will equip the banks to respond to the needs of their customers that are becoming more complex and diverse.

BPI is part of the Ayala Group, the oldest Philippine conglomerate, and it is the second-largest financial institution in the Philippines in terms of asset size. It has a large network of more than 1,200 branches and provides a wide range of financial services together with its subsidiaries.

The Philippines is expected to enjoy stable economic development as the country continues its upward trajectory from pandemic recovery, and it is one of the most promising markets for Japanese companies. With the renewal of the agreement, Mizuho can continue providing support for the diverse needs of its customers that are seeking investment or partnerships in the Philippines.

Mizuho

SMBC Aviation Capital and CDPQ established an aircraft financing platform



Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, Inc., Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation and Sumitomo Mitsui Finance and Leasing Company, Limited hereby announce that SMBC Aviation Capital Limited, a subsidiary of SMFL, and CDPQ, a global investment group, have established a new global aircraft financing and leasing platform.

SMBC Aviation Capital and CDPQ have established Maple Aircraft Company Holdings Limited, a platform focused on opportunities in new technology aircraft. The investment is targeted at US\$500 million per year, over 3 years, for a total of US\$1.5 billion. SMBC Aviation Capital will conduct aircraft

procurement and asset management.

Through the above initiatives by SMBC Aviation Capital, the world's second largest aircraft leasing company by the number of aircraft, SMBC Group will continue to provide financing solutions to benefit airline customers worldwide primarily by Sale and Lease Back of aircraft. In addition, SMBC Group intends to contribute to the diversification of our customers' investment portfolio through the Group's alternative assets.

SMBC Group will continue to strengthen its investment policies in alternative assets, including aircraft, and provide Japanese investors with attractive investment opportunities by leveraging its experience overseas.

SMBC

Maybank champions financial inclusion and independence among PwDs in ASEAN



Since its inception in 1960, Maybank is committed to be a force of good - serving its diverse stakeholders across ASEAN. This is showcased through its unwavering efforts to ensure financial services can be accessed equally by all while ensuring a sustainable progress. Anchored by its mission of Humanising Financial Services and M25+ strategy, Maybank is committed to uplift the underserved and unserved communities, especially Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), via awareness campaigns, career development opportunities and social impact programmes.

As part of its ongoing efforts to accelerate financial inclusion in Southeast Asia, Maybank introduced the Maybank Work Placement Programme for PwDs as part of its strategy in

building a more inclusive workforce for the PwDs to gain career experience while addressing key challenges on securing a job or training.

In line with the Bank's disability inclusion strategy, PwDs trainees will be provided with hands-on life skills, working exposure and training designed to enhance their skills, confidence, and employability for a period of eight months, to ensure that they are well-equipped to excel in their respective fields.

To date, Maybank has close to 100 PwD trainees on boarded and will continue to reach out to more talents in efforts to support its commitment to drive financial inclusion among them. This year, Maybank targets to scale up its Work Placement Programme regionally in Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, and the Philippines.

Visit [Maybank Work Placement Programme](#) for more information.

Maybank

Among Member Banks

Bank of Maldives Reduces Student Loan and Financing Rate to 2.5%



BANK OF MALDIVES

Bank of Maldives has announced a further reduction of its student Kiyavaa Loan and Education Financing rate to 2.5%, as agreed by the Board of Directors during their meeting on 24th January 2024. The new rate will be effective from 1st February 2024 and will be applicable for both new and existing facilities.

Further, the BML Kiyavaa Loan and Education Financing will now be available to cover up to 90% of the cost of education including tuition fees and other living costs. With the new lower interest and financing rate, the repayment period for existing customers will be automatically reduced.

BML's CEO and Managing Director, Karl Stumke

commented, "We are delighted to announce a further reduction in our student financing rates to 2.5%. Our rate reduction last year was a positive change that allowed students easier access to funding for further education anywhere in the world. With today's announcement, we look forward to providing this chance to an even bigger cohort of students."

Further details, as well as the option to pay a lower monthly installment, will be communicated to all existing Kiyavaa Loan and Education Financing customers.

The BML Kiyavaa Loan and Education Financing, with a repayment period of 10 years, is available for students to cover the cost of further education anywhere in the world.

Bank of Maldives

Maldives Islamic Bank Introducing Business Banking at Male' Branch



Maldives Islamic Bank

Maldives Islamic Bank announces an exciting programme to upgrade its flagship branch, Male' Branch to enhance Business Banking Services, to expand on the services provided to individuals and to streamline and improve on the over-the-counter cash services.

Among some of the notable changes are

1. Business Banking Hours are extended till 4.00pm
2. Establishing Self Service Lobby to the ground

floor of the branch which will be accessible 24-7

3. One stop Business Banking Desk on the 1st floor to cater to all non-cash requests.
4. More banking days for Business Banking customers by opening during the entire month of Ramadan and the more frequently during long holidays.

To learn more visit www.mib.com.mv/business-banking.

Maldives Islamic Bank

PNB earnings surge by 55% to P18B in 2023



PNB

LUCIO Tan-led Philippine National Bank (PNB) saw its consolidated net income rise 55 percent to P18 billion in 2023, from 2022's P11.6 billion, following robust net interest income and lower credit provisions.

Excluding gains on a property sale, net core banking income ballooned to 156 percent year on year. This translated to a return on equity of 10 percent, improving from 7.0 percent in 2023.

"Our performance for 2023 is a testament to the bank's efforts in upholding our vision of being among the top banks in terms of customer growth and satisfaction as well as return on equity," PNB President Florido Casuela said in a statement.

He also affirmed the bank's commitment to promoting financial prosperity for Filipinos and their businesses as well as empowering them by "helping build a competitive, inclusive, and sustainable economy."

Lower provisions on distressed loans and other credit assets bolstered last year's "healthier performance," the bank said, as markets rebounded from the pandemic and other adverse

conditions.

Net interest margin was said to have expanded to 4.2 percent from 3.6 percent, driven by PNB's continued focus on the "efficient deployment of funds."

Gross loans grew 5.0 percent year on year to P642 billion following increased lending to the commercial sector and small- and medium-sized enterprises.

The bank said that current account and savings account (CASA) deposits, which climbed 4.0 percent year on year, accounted for 83 percent of its total deposits in 2023.

Trading and foreign exchange gains, meanwhile, rose by more than fourfold to P1.8 billion as a result of efforts to capitalize on growth opportunities amid "limited market liquidity and a rising interest rate environment."

The prudent cost management scheme led to flat operating expenses of P28.4 billion, PNB said, recording a cost efficiency ratio of 50 percent, better than a year ago's 54 percent.

Total assets as of end-2023 reached P1.2 trillion, up 6.0 percent year on year on the back of higher loans and investment portfolios.

Manila Times

Among Member Banks

RCBC posts 48% growth in credit card receivables

Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC) saw a 48 percent surge in credit card receivables to P74.7 billion last month compared to the same period in 2022.

In a statement to the media, RCBC said this reflected a 45 percent growth in credit card spending among clients, which reached P139.4 billion in December 2023.

“While we experienced aggressive growth in 2023, we remain prudent in credit standards and ensure that we provide tools to help our cardholders better manage their finances,” RCBC Credit Cards president Arniel Vincent B. Ong commented.

RCBC said it had distributed 1 million credit cards



due to the bank's range of privileges, promos to clients, and increased partnerships with merchants.

With these, the bank said it shows its commitment to clients to enable them to “live life unlimited.”

“Notable highlights include the Travel Fairs, access to airport lounges, the seasonal launch of the Lowest Foreign Currency Conversion Fee and Japan Rebate Promotions, and numerous Dining, Shopping, and Wellness Offers at over a hundred in-store and online merchants,” RCBC said.

RCBC said it continues to enhance its digital processes to ensure credit cardholders maximize the benefits of using the cards while avoiding any penalty.

Daily Tribune

Doha Bank Proudly Sponsors HH the Amir Sword International Festival

Doha Bank, a leading commercial bank in Qatar, is pleased to announce its sponsorship of the prestigious HH the Amir Sword International Festival, scheduled to take place from February 15th to 17th.

Sheikh Mohammad Bin Fahad Bin Jabor Al Thani, representing Doha Bank, expressed enthusiasm about the partnership, stating, “We are honoured to be named an official sponsor of HH the Amir Sword International Festival. This collaboration emphasises our commitment to fostering the growth of talented Qatari riders, amidst both local and international participation. As part of our corporate social responsibility



strategy, this partnership exemplifies Doha Bank's dedication to supporting diverse events, particularly equestrian sports, integral to Qatar's rich cultural heritage. We eagerly anticipate future collaborations with the Qatar Equestrian Federation in organising and hosting tournaments, advancing the development of this sport together.”

Concluding his remarks at the press conference, Sheikh Mohammad Bin Fahad extended gratitude to the festival organisers, conveying best wishes for their continued success. He highlighted Doha Bank's pride in Qatar's global recognition as a sporting capital and premier host of major international tournaments.

Doha Bank

ACRA affirms IBEC credit ratings

Analytical Credit Rating Agency (ACRA) affirms 'BBB+' to International Bank for Economic Co-operation, Outlook Stable, under the international scale, 'AAA(RU)', Outlook Stable, under the national scale for the Russian Federation and 'AAA(RU)' to IBEC bond issue 001R-02 (RU000A101RJ7).

In the official press release, ACRA emphasizes that the amount of the Bank's assets and contingent liabilities increased in 2023, and the financial result returned to positive values. Thus, we can already say that the significant loss recorded at the end of 2022 was of a one-off nature and will not impact the Bank's ability to deliver positive financial results in the future.

The Bank's assets grew mainly due to interbank trade finance loans and investments in debt securities. At the same time, the quality of assets remains quite high, and the share of debt overdue for more than 90 days remains at a low level. The



Agency also notes still high capital adequacy, amounting to 53% as of the end of 2023, which allows the Bank to withstand potential risks of significant deterioration of asset quality.

The overall diversification of liabilities remains moderate, and funds raised from other banks amounted to less than 20% of all liabilities at the end of 2023. The amount of highly liquid assets noticeably exceeds the amount of short-term liabilities, which indicates the preservation of strong liquidity indicators.

In the current circumstances, IBEC maintains the focus on promoting the development of economies and foreign trade relations of the member countries and pays special attention to geographical diversification of its activities by entering new markets. The new strategy currently being developed will allow the Bank to define strategic priorities and specify its business model in the medium term.

IBEC

Among Member Banks

DBS Bank India achieves sustainable financing milestone



In line with its commitment to responsible banking, DBS Bank India has successfully supported Louis Dreyfus Company India Pvt Ltd (LDC) in securing sustainable financing for the procurement of palm oil certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). The transaction was facilitated through DBS Bank Limited; Singapore and this milestone was achieved through the implementation of the bank's innovative Supplier Payment Services (SPS) solution.

By providing early payment options and improving financial stability for suppliers, DBS Bank's SPS solution reduces the risk of disruptions, resulting in a more stable and resilient supply chain for clients. Furthermore, it promotes supplier inclusion, empowering the bank's clients to expand their supply chains and diversify their sourcing options. The SPS solution enables the bank to make early payments on behalf of clients to their suppliers, allowing them to preserve liquidity and

while reducing cash flow pressures on the suppliers. The solution is entirely digital and tailored to meet the client's specific needs.

The RSPO plays a crucial role in promoting sustainability within the palm oil industry and its supply chain by enforcing globally recognised standards. Certified producers undergo regular audits to ensure adherence to these standards, demonstrating their dedication to responsible practices. This initiative aligns with the bank's broader efforts to enhance sustainable financing and offer solutions that empower its clients to further their sustainability goals.

DBS Bank is renowned for its expertise in supply chain financing and goes beyond traditional banking to enable responsible solutions for large enterprises, their supplier networks as well as small and medium businesses, empowering them to streamline operations for enhanced efficiency. The bank's extensive Asian network and deep expertise in customising sustainable solutions enable businesses to mitigate risks and seize growth opportunities.

DBS

More than S\$2.2 million raised for charity at UOB's annual Lunar New Year celebrations



UOB and its Commercial Banking clients raised more than S\$2.2 million for charity, as part of the Bank's annual Lunar New Year festive celebrations.

The funds raised through a series of art workshops and fundraising gala, will be used to support art, children and education causes. These include The Business Times Budding Artists Fund, The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund, FaithActs, and Central Singapore CDC (UOB My Digital Bootcamp), North West CDC and South East CDC.

Mr Frederick Chin, Head of Group Wholesale Banking and Markets, UOB, said, "Our tradition of combining art, philanthropy and celebrations gives us the opportunity to spread festive joy to the broader community through annual fundraising activities. We are grateful to our clients for their generosity every year, where the business community come together to support children and artists in a meaningful way. Through our combined efforts, we continue to do good together."

As part of the fundraising efforts, about 40 clients took part in an art workshop on 30 January 2024. During the workshop, Mr Wee Ee Cheong, Deputy Chairman and CEO, UOB, applied finishing touches to the art pieces.

These art pieces were auctioned off to Mr Neo Kah Kiat, Founder, Chairman and CEO of Neo Group Limited and Mr Karsono Kwee, Executive Chairman of Eurokars Group, for a bid amount of S\$188,000 and S\$128,000 respectively at the fundraising gala on 13 February 2024 with clients.

The first art piece, titled, "Soaring Dragon", depicts a legendary dragon on jade, signifying an abundance of gold and jade, and exuding a noble atmosphere. The dragon soars above a

solid foundation of a jade seal, flying amid the auspicious clouds, conveying the joy of a flourishing future. The artwork reflects honour, success and good fortune, demonstrating the Eastern traditional beliefs, wisdom and optimism. "Soaring Dragon" is a commissioned artwork by Leo Liu, Platinum Award winner of the 2012 UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore) art competition.

Titled "Flourishing Vitality", the second piece is a commissioned artwork by artist Phuai Li Ying. It features a majestic dragon soaring across the mountains amid a flock of golden cranes. The golden cranes, which symbolises UOB's key markets in the region, were personally folded and stitched by Mr Wee and his wife.

The dragon, depicted through the curation of mixed mediums such as watercolour and silk embroidery, represents UOB and how we connect our clients to growth opportunities across Southeast Asia.

Mr Neo Kah Kiat, Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Neo Group Limited, said, "Every year, we look forward to UOB's fundraising activity during the festive season as it gives businesses the opportunity to come together to do good and support those who are in need. We are glad to be part of this meaningful initiative to give back to the community and we look forward to participating in future events."

Mr Karsono Kwee, Executive Chairman of Eurokars Group, said, "We always look forward to this chance to come together as a business community over the Lunar New Year as we collectively spread cheer through this good cause. This annual activity also gives us the opportunity to give back to the causes close to our hearts, and we are glad to be part of UOB's commitment in giving back."

UOB

Among Member Banks

Hatton National Bank, Sri Lanka's Best Corporate Citizen continues to records sustainable performance

Hatton National Bank PLC (HNB) showcased strong and sustainable performance in 2023, in all aspects namely liquidity, asset quality, capital, efficiency and profitability amidst global and local economic uncertainties.

Commenting on the performance, Mr Nihal Jayawardene, Chairman of Hatton National Bank PLC, stated that "we commenced the year with optimism, hoping that the worst of the financial crisis was behind us. However, we remained cautious about the uncertainties that prevailed. The Board continued to maintain focus on key risk areas and the opportunities, to navigate through the uncertainty in the operating environment. This enabled us to record robust performance overall"

He added that "The Board joins me in commending the CEO/Managing Director Jonathan Alles for the leadership provided to steer ahead during the most difficult times in the history. I express my sincere gratitude to the HATNA team for their commitment and our customers who have been HNB's strongest champions".

The Bank's interest income experienced a YoY growth of 37.2%, reaching Rs 284.1 Bn despite the decline in AWPLR by approx. eight percentage points during the last two quarters of the year, in line with Central Bank's expansionary monetary policy. Although deposits rates also declined in line, the 12.2% growth in deposits and the term deposits mobilized at higher interests resulted in Interest expense increasing by 72.6% to Rs 179.8 Bn. The resultant net interest income expanded by 1.4% YoY to Rs 104.3 Bn.

The Bank's net fee and commission income saw a YoY increase of 4.4%, rising from Rs 15.2 Bn to Rs 15.8 Bn, primarily fueled by higher volumes in credit cards, improved remittances and an increased adoption of our digital banking services. Increased SWAP volumes and the revaluation of on-balance sheet assets with the appreciation of Sri Lankan Rupee during the year as opposed to the significant depreciation experienced in the previous year, resulted in the Bank recording a net exchange loss for the period.

The Bank's total effective tax rate increased to 52.5%, reflecting the full year's impact of the increase in corporate tax rate from 24% to 30% and the introduction of the social security contribution levy of 2.5%, which took effect from October 2022.



The Bank recorded a profit after tax of Rs 20.35 Bn compared to Rs 14.0 Bn recorded in 2022 while the Group recorded a PAT of Rs 23.6 Bn compared to Rs 15.7 Bn in the previous year. The Board of Directors has proposed a final dividend of Rs 8.00 per share, which consist of a cash dividend of Rs 4.00 per share and a scrip dividend of Rs 4.00 per share, for both voting and non-voting shares.

Commenting on the performance, Jonathan Alles, Managing Director / Chief Executive Officer of HNB PLC, stated that "During these most challenging and uncertain times the Bank has focused on sustainable growth ensuring the safety of depositors, facilitating access to finance and business revival for customers, providing fair rewards and recognition for employees, and offering investors a reasonable return for the assumed risk."

He added that "Inspiring our customers to move forward with optimism is key to growth and we set out to understand and address customer pain points. We also supported our customers through the pandemic, the financial crisis and its aftermath, keeping businesses afloat by restructuring loans, offering moratoria and even grants for micro entrepreneurs. HNB has established a robust support system for our clients, catering to their financial services requirements across their entire value chain through the Bank and other Group companies."

"HNB has always aligned its strategy to the country's needs and is committed to charting a course that delivers shared prosperity to Sri Lankans and supporting the Country's transition to a low carbon economy. Areas identified for growth include tourism, exports, renewable energy, healthcare, education, information technology, local manufacture and agriculture. We are excited about inspiring farming communities to adopt green agricultural practices to strengthen the country's food security. We also want to groom the next generation of entrepreneurs through dedicated programmes and working with educational institutions at different levels. Simultaneously we will work to attract greatly needed foreign direct investments to optimise the infrastructure in place."

He further stated that, "growth must be resilient, built on solid foundations of disciplined financial management and sound corporate governance. It is the need of the hour at individual, entity and government levels as we stand up not just for our rights but to honour our obligations as well."

Hatton National Bank

Bank of Taiwan to open office in Fukuoka, Japan

Bank of Taiwan, the largest lender in Taiwan, is scheduled to open a representative office in Fukuoka, Japan, on March 22. At the same time when the Taiwanese semiconductor industry is extending its reach into the Japanese market, led by contract chipmaker Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC).

Speaking with reporters, Bank of Taiwan chairman Lyu Jye-cherng said the bank has been a major supporter of the local semiconductor industry and is determined to follow the industry's move by making its presence felt in the Japanese



market by providing one-stop shopping services to Taiwanese IC suppliers.

Bank of Taiwan would be able to integrate its strength in domestic business units (DBUs) and offshore business units (OBUs) along with its branches internationally to provide the best possible services to Taiwan's high-tech sector in foreign markets, Lyu said.

To develop a better understanding of Japan's economic and industrial development, the bank decided to open a representative office in Fukuoka with an application approved by the Financial Supervisory Commission (FSC) in early December.

Among Member Banks

Bank of Taiwan has forged close business ties with major Japanese banks, such as Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp, Mizuho Bank and Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc, so the Taiwanese bank would be able to provide better services through such cooperation in Japan, Lyu added.

Bank of Taiwan already has a branch in Tokyo and operates branches in 10 other cities internationally: New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Singapore, London, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Sydney and Johannesburg.

In addition, Bank of Taiwan has representative offices in 10 cities including Mumbai, Yangon, Ho Chi Minh City, Bangkok and Phoenix, Arizona, where TSMC is building two advanced wafer fabs.

In Japan, the first TSMC wafer fab in Kumamoto is scheduled to begin operations on Sunday next week.

On Tuesday February 6, TSMC, the world's largest contract chipmaker, announced it would build a second wafer fab

in Kumamoto — Japan Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing (JASM) — through a joint venture with its Japanese partners.

The second fab is expected to break ground at the end of this year, with operations slated to begin at the end of 2027.

Together with JASM's first fab, the overall investment of JASM would exceed US\$20 billion, TSMC has said.

Led by TSMC, its suppliers are investing in Japan, which has prompted more Taiwanese banks to set their sights on the Japanese market, the FSC said.

On Feb. 6, the FSC approved an application from Bank of Taiwan to set up a branch in Tokyo.

The FSC said that in addition to Bank of Taiwan, First Commercial Bank, Chang Hwa Commercial Bank, Mega International Commercial Bank, Taiwan Business Bank, E.Sun Commercial Bank, Taishin International Bank and CTBC Bank also operate branches in Japan.

Taipei Times

Cathay United Bank Singapore branch signs first green trade loan with Apeiron to boost low carbon transport

Cathay United Bank (CUB) Singapore Branch saw its long-term commitment to green finance bear fruit in the final quarter last year after it closed a green trade loan deal with Apeiron Bioenergy (Apeiron), a leading player in Singapore's sustainable energy sector. The entire loan proceeds will support Apeiron's procurement of used cooking oil (UCO) for the production of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), thereby demonstrating CUB's resolve to advance net zero sustainability.

As the transport hub of Southeast Asia and one of Asia's major financial centers, Singapore has spared no effort in promoting the Singapore Sustainable Air Hub Blueprint as well as clean energy for the aviation industry. In comparison to traditional aviation fuel, SAF has the potential to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the air transport industry by up to 80%, thus making energy management all the more efficient. As the first bank in Taiwan to sign the Equator Principles, CUB is deeply committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and has assisted its customers in their low carbon transition through diverse financial services. As of the end of 2023, the balance of CUB's sustainable loans to customers at home and abroad reached an astounding USD 1.99 billion.

Apeiron is actively developing various biofuel solutions. Headquartered in Singapore, Apeiron's operations



span across 10 countries, featuring a comprehensive value chain that includes storage, processing facilities, and biofuel refineries. Since 2017, Apeiron has supplied over 600 million litres of UCO for the production of biodiesel and renewable diesel, including SAFs, which has contributed to an estimated savings of 1.8 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, Apeiron places a strong emphasis on traceability and adheres to stringent ecological and social criteria, thus ensuring traceability within the bioenergy sector. Apeiron's commitment to excellence is reflected in its green trade loan with CUB: the green trade loan was structured according to the Green Loan Principles published by the Asia Pacific Loan Market Association, Loan Market Association, and Loan Syndications and Trading Association; and the company's Green Financing Framework endorsed by Morningstar Sustainalytics, thereby ensuring proper management of the loan proceeds.

CUB is dedicated to creating a low-carbon economy, partnering with external institutions and actively engaging in carbon reduction initiatives. Maximizing the full extent of its core financial capabilities and influence, CUB has developed comprehensive climate finance solutions that offer customers green sustainable loans and support in building sustainable supply chains. Together, these efforts lower the threshold for customers seeking to reduce carbon emissions and assists them in developing net-zero businesses.

Taipei Times

CTBC Holding Achieves Milestones in Sustainability

CTBC Holding has been selected for the Dow Jones World Index for the 5th Sustainability Index (DJSI) time and 4th consecutive year, and the DJSI Emerging Markets Index for the 8th year. As the results of the 2023 Standard & Poor's (S&P) Global Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA) were revealed, CTBC Holding outperformed 98% of its peers in the industry. The DJSI World Index represents the top 10% of the 2,500 largest companies in the S&P Global Broad Market Index, while the Emerging Markets Index



comprises the top 10% of 800 companies across 20 emerging markets. A key factor in CTBC Holding's industry-leading scores is our commitment to sustainable finance and decarbonization strategies. Those includes phasing out investments and loans in thermal coal mining, loans in coal power generation, and unconventional oil and gas by 2035. CTBC Group is also actively investing in renewable energy, such as wind farms and solar energy. For instance, CTBC Bank played a major role in wind farm project finance syndication deals totaling over NT\$300 billion, and Taiwan Life committed to NT\$55.8 billion in sustainable finance by the end of 2022.

Among Member Banks

In addition to our environmental efforts, CTBC Holding is dedicated to financial inclusion, providing services to those with limited access to financial services. Our Poverty Alleviation Program, for example, has helped launch 96 businesses in 2022 alone and cumulatively lifted nearly 40% of its 657 recipients out of poverty. Taiwan Life also underwrote 17,999 inclusive product policies, including microinsurance, and policies for people with pre-existing conditions. This achievement is not just a testament to our commitment to sustainability, but also a

reflection of the dedication and innovation of CTBC Group. To better serve our clients and other stakeholders, we shall continue to innovate and lead the way in sustainable finance. Together we can make a significant impact for a brighter and more sustainable tomorrow toward net zero emission by 2050.

“CTBC Holding's industry-leading scores were attributed to our commitment to Sustainable finance & Decarbonization strategies”

CTBC

Land Bank's Exemplary Performance in Fair Customer Treatment Recognized by FSC for the Fifth Time



On December 22nd, the Financial Supervisory Commission (FSC) hosted the "Domestic Bank Presidents' Business Liaison Meeting" and commendation ceremony, recognizing banks that ranked in the top 25% for their standout performance in adhering to the principle of fair customer treatment in the financial services industry for 2023. The Land Bank of Taiwan (Land Bank) has been recognized for five consecutive years, showcasing its consistent exemplary performance.

Under the joint supervision of the Board of Directors and the senior management team, the Land Bank upholds the core value of "prioritizing customer rights," promoting the concept of fair customer treatment. In 2019, the Land Bank established its "Customer Care Committee", and the senior management team subsequently convened cross-departmental meetings to thoroughly review the causes of customer complaints, formulate improvement measures, and contemplate enhancements to fair customer treatment. Routine updates on the impact of these initiatives are presented to the Board of Directors, fulfilling their supervisory role by offering guidance and directives. This motivates various departments to actively strive for improvements, particularly in the scope of "friendly service" and "business integrity," as emphasized in the customer rights evaluation for 2023.

To enhance the accessibility of financial products and services, Land Bank has invested in both services and hardware infrastructure while refining educational training programs. Recognizing the diverse needs of its clientele, the bank is dedicated to creating a customer-friendly financial environment. Through the implementation of various platforms and communication channels, barriers are overcome to achieve customer equality.

To bridge the gap in financial knowledge and prevent financial exploitation and fraud, the Land Bank's business development team goes above and beyond conventional banking boundaries, conducting outreach activities in schools and rural areas to raise awareness of financial exploitation and fraud. Moreover, a few of the Land Bank's 150 service points are situated in rural regions and offshore islands, where we offer accessible and friendly financial services. Recently, the Land Bank collaborated with the Ministry of Finance's Universal Shared Cash for All policy, assisting in the distribution of cash in rural areas. This underscores our broader commitment to implementing fair customer treatment initiatives.

In the future, the Land Bank will continue to uphold the rights of customers from diverse backgrounds, enhance financial inclusivity, and cultivate a corporate culture grounded in integrity. The Land Bank is dedicated to earning customer trust, pursuing sustainable development, and striving towards becoming a high-quality and customer-friendly financial institution.

Land Bank of Taiwan

Mega International Commercial Bank ends currency exchange services plans



State-run Mega

International Commercial Bank on February 21 ended its currency exchange settlements services for online credit cards after peers and regulators raised issues regarding legal compliance.

The termination came one day after the lender announced it would lower fees to NT\$10 per currency exchange settlement valued at less than NT\$500,000.

Peers and regulators voiced concern that the offer was tantamount to marketing a cash advance, in contravention of constraints on lenders.

Underregulated promotion of cash advances were an issue linked to a credit card debt problem in Taiwan in 2005 and 2006.

Mega Bank said it might have misunderstandings about an exclusive regulatory permit for online credit card operations involving foreign exchange settlements and would halt the disputed service.

Demand for currency exchange settlements is escalating as overseas travel has expanded multifold after countries around the world ditched border restrictions amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phil Tong, deputy director of the Financial Supervisory Commission's Banking Bureau, said that lenders should diligently review legal compliance issues and refrain from questionable practices regardless of whether they are explicitly banned.

The market has undergone drastic changes in the 20 years since Mega Bank was granted a regulatory permit, Tong said, adding that the commission would frown on similar business propositions by other banks.

Among Member Banks

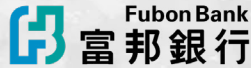
Credit cards should be used as a payment tool and should provide cash advances only in emergency cases, he said.

The central bank said that in 2005 it approved online currency exchange settlements to facilitate easy transactions, but never agreed to marketing of cash advances.

Mega Bank's offer of currency exchange settlements to online credit card operations drew protests from peers partly because the local banking market is excessively competitive, rendering exclusive practices controversial.

Taipei Times

Taipei Fubon Bank plans branch in Mumbai



Taipei Fubon Bank has received the approval of the Financial Supervisory Commission (FSC) to open a branch in the Indian city of Mumbai, reports said Feb. 21.

If the plan receives the go-ahead from the Indian authorities, the privately owned lender will become Taiwan's fourth bank with offices in the South Asian country, per CNA. CTBC Bank already manages two branches, while the Bank of Taiwan and Mega International Commercial Bank have two representative offices each.

Taipei Fubon was reportedly attracted to India by its record of sustained economic growth and the transfer of international supply chains to include the country. Major Taiwanese corporations, including iPhone maker Foxconn Technology, have launched manufacturing projects in India.

Taipei Fubon Bank operates branches in Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam's Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and the North Korean capital Pyongyang. The company also runs representative offices in Jakarta and Sydney and a subsidiary in China.

Taiwan News

Bangkok Bank extends the success of its "Young Director Award Season 2" project

Bangkok Bank extends the success of its "Young Director Award Season 2" project to promote tourism in eight secondary provinces, announcing the winners of the Golden Bualuang award who won prizes totaling 800,000 baht. The Bank will present the winning submissions on the Bank's online channels to help stimulate the economy and distribute income to local areas. At the same time, the project will give Thai students who are interested in making films a stage to showcase their skills and directly learn from eight famous directors as they embark on their careers as film directors.



Bangkok Bank President Mr. Chartsiri Sophonpanich said the Bank has supported the Young Director Award project for two consecutive years to help stimulate the economy by promoting the unique charm of Thailand's secondary provinces as new destinations for tourists from around the world. At the same time, the project will showcase the creativity and storytelling skills of young generations who are interested in making films. The event was well received with more than 230 participating teams. Eight finalists had a chance to join a masterclass session in creating short films with eight famous directors who acted as their mentors to help promote tourism in eight secondary provinces.

"The Bank would like to thank those who participated

in the Young Director Award Season 2 project. The event was well received with more than 230 participating teams. We would like to congratulate all winners who created outstanding works that won the judges' hearts. We believe that all of them gained useful knowledge and experience from this project which will help them in their future careers in the Thai film industry, which plays a key role in stimulating the Thai economy with creative thinking. As a leading regional bank, we are delighted to support activities that stimulate the economy and distribute income to local communities. We are ready to be a trusted partner for all people, businesses and industries to help drive the Thai economy toward sustainable growth," said Mr. Chartsiri.

Bangkok Bank Director and Senior Executive Vice President, Corporate Secretary and Project Founder Kobsak Pootrakool highlighted the success of the Young Director Award Season 1, which was produced under the theme of "Favorite Dish, Secret Episode". "The first round of the Young Director Award promoted restaurants with a "Favorite Restaurant, Secret Episode" badge certified by Bangkok Bank. This year the second season of the project invited new generations to promote local community tourism and products to strengthen local economies, particularly across the eight secondary cities. Short films from eight finalists represent the potential of the young generation who are ready to become professionals in the film industry."

Bangkok Bank

Among Member Banks

Vietcombank continues to achieve record profits

State-owned lender **Vietcombank** reported record pre-tax profits of VND41.2 trillion (US\$1.68 billion) for 2023.

Its previous highest was VND37.4 trillion a year earlier.

It made the bank the most profitable in the industry by a margin of tens of trillions of dong.

But its net interest income barely grew and non-interest income such as from services and foreign exchange transactions



Vietcombank

also underperformed.

Profits before credit risk provisioning were worth VND45.8 trillion, a 2.2% decline.

But halving the provisioning to VND4.5 trillion meant the lender maintained profit growth.

Vietcombank's bad debts ratio (groups three to five) increased from 0.68% at the beginning of the year to 1% by the end, while loans that require attention (group two debts) surged by 40% to over VND5.55 trillion.

VnExpress International

VietinBank reduces price of \$2.1M Hanoi penthouse in debt recovery effort

VietinBank is set to auction a penthouse in Hanoi for VND53.5 billion (US\$2.1 million), marking a nearly VND6 billion decrease from its price a year ago, after failing to sell the property in four previous attempts.

Located in the Vinhomes Metropolis building in Ba Dinh District, the luxurious five-bedroom penthouse spans the 44th and 45th floors and features 456 square meters of living space, including a private pool and a view of West Lake.

The property, serving as collateral from a private enterprise, showcases a neoclassical interior design with wooden



VietinBank

Nâng giá trị cuộc sống

staircases and gold-plated railings.

Initially offered in February 2023 for over VND59 billion, the penthouse's price cut comes as part of a broader trend where banks are struggling to liquidate high-value real estate collateral amidst a sluggish property market.

Current secondary market prices for apartments in prime Hanoi locations like Vinhomes Metropolis range from VND100-120 million per square meter.

This situation echoes difficulties faced by other banks, including a Ho Chi Minh City-based institution that unsuccessfully attempted to sell over 20 apartments, including 10 penthouses, even after price reductions.

VnExpress International

Agribank spends VND 15,000 billion to fund investment projects in 6 key industries and the green sector

Agribank spends VND 15,000 billion to finance investment projects in 6 key industries and green sector with preferential interest rates for medium and long-term loans, applicable to disbursements from February 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 (or until sufficient funds have been disbursed).

For customers who are borrowing capital from Agribank or other credit institutions to implement projects, buy back projects, offset project investment costs or projects that have been completed and put into operation. Feasible and effective projects in the following industries: (1) Processing and manufacturing; (2) gas-fired power production and distribution



AGRIBANK

(power projects); (3) transportation and warehousing; (4) Investment projects on construction and business of industrial park/industrial cluster infrastructure, Construction of factories for rent; (5) Loans to invest in rental farms; (6) Health, education; projects in green sector.

To participate in the preferential credit program, customers financing investment projects in 6 key industries and green sector must have good credit ratings and financial reports. Under the program, customers are also advised on financial solutions suitable to their needs and actual implementation of investment projects such as account services, payment and cash flow management (salary payment services, bill payment, automatic investment, etc.), electronic banking, card services, trade finance and foreign currency trading.

Agribank

Hong Kong

Hong Kong Sells \$750 Million of Digital Green Bonds

The government of Hong Kong sold \$750 million of digital green bonds across four currencies as the city works to boost its role as a digital-asset hub.

Hong Kong issued the two-year tokenized notes in the offshore Chinese yuan, Hong Kong dollar, US dollar and euro. Coupons ranged from 2.9% to 4.625%.

The issuance will use HSBC Holdings Plc's tokenization platform, HSBC Orion, according to people familiar with the matter who requested anonymity discussing private matters. Using blockchain-powered platforms, digital bonds can potentially offer quicker

settlement as they bypass clearing systems. Coupon payments can also be made faster.

Hong Kong late 2023 was considering offering more digital green bonds, Bloomberg News reported at the time. The city last February sold HK\$800 million (\$102 million) of them in the government's first-such deal, part of a green bond program which helps finance projects with environmental benefits.

Bloomberg

India

RBI allows Indian bank branches in GIFT-IFSC to trade on international bullion exchange

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a circular on February 9 allowing

Indian bank branches in GIFT-IFSC to act as Trading Members or Trading and Clearing Members of the International Bullion Exchange IFSC Ltd (IIBX).

Zee Business

Japan

Japan's finance minister: Watching currency moves carefully

The Bank of Japan said January 23 that prospects of the world's third-largest economy sustaining the 2% inflation target were "gradually heightening," after the central bank expectedly retained its ultra-loose monetary policy at its first meeting this year.

The BOJ decided unanimously to keep interest rates at -0.1%, and stuck to its yield curve control policy

that keeps the upper limit for 10-year Japanese government bond yield at 1% as a reference, according to a policy statement released January 23 after a two-day meeting. This was in line with the expectations of economists polled by Reuters.

"We were able to confirm that the economy is moving in line with our projections on inflation," Governor Kazuo Ueda said in a press conference in Tokyo, according to a Reuters translation.

"Our core-core inflation forecast is at 1.9%, very close to our 2% target. This was the case in October but it happened again this time, after close scrutiny."

Japan's central bank defines

"core-core inflation" as inflation that excludes growth in food and energy prices, while core inflation is inflation that excludes only food prices.

"This is the biggest factor that made us more convinced than before that the likelihood (of sustainably achieving our price target) is gradually heightening," Ueda added. "But it's hard to quantify how close we've come."

The yen strengthened 0.7% to 147.4 yen against the dollar and the Nikkei 225 equity benchmark closed 0.1% lower after briefly nearing a fresh three-decade high. Yields on the 10- and 30-year JGBs inched higher, while those on shorter-term bonds crept lower.

CNBC

Malaysia

Malaysia Banking stocks make roaring entry into Dragon Year with fresh record highs

Banking and financial services stocks were among the top gainers on

February 13, with several climbing to new record highs, marking a bullish start for the sector in the year of the Dragon under the Chinese lunar calendar.

Prior to the Chinese New Year celebrations, the banking stocks were dominating the gainers list due to the favourable forecast for the 2024 banking sector and recent decisions of Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) and the US

Federal Reserve (Fed) to maintain their key rates.

The Bursa Malaysia Financial Services Index was up 267.29 points or 1.58%, reaching its nearly five-year high of 17,148.26 points. The last time it breached the 17,000 mark was in March 2019.

At market close, Hong Leong Bank Bhd (HLBB) was the biggest gainer

on the local stock exchange, rising 2.11% or 40 sen to settle at its one-month high of RM19.36, giving the bank a market capitalisation of RM41.97 billion.

Financial Group Bhd, which holds a 64.2% stake in HLBB, rose 1.23% or 20 sen to RM16.48, making it one of the top gainers in Bursa.

Malayan Banking Bhd (Maybank) was also among the top 20 gainers, rising 1.94% or 18 sen to its all-time high of RM9.44. At the current price, Maybank's market capitalisation stood at RM113.85 billion.

CIMB Group Holdings Bhd also hit a new record high at RM6.34 after climbing 2.42% or 15 sen, giving the bank a market capitalisation of RM67.62 billion.

RHB Bank Bhd closed at RM5.63 after a more modest five sen or 0.9% gain, valuing the bank at a market capitalisation of RM24.13 billion.

Also pushing up the Financial Services Index was insurance provider Allianz Malaysia Bhd, which was the sixth biggest gainer of the day, rising 1.34% or 26 sen to close at RM19.66,

valuing the group at RM3.50 billion.

Other gainers were reinsurance group MNRB Holdings Bhd and takaful provider Syarikat Takaful Malaysia Keluarga Bhd.

MNRB, which posted a 47% jump in its net profit for the third quarter ended Dec 31, 2023 (3QFY2024) last week, rose 5.49% or nine sen to its five-year high of RM1.73 for a market capitalisation of RM1.33 billion. Syarikat Takaful climbed 2.11% or eight sen to close at RM3.87, valuing it at RM3.24 billion.

The Edge Malaysia

Maldives

World Bank VP Offers Maldives Urgent Fiscal Reform Support

World Bank Vice President for South Asia, Martin Raiser, on February 6 concluded his four-day visit to the Maldives. During this visit, he reaffirmed the World Bank's support for the country's development agenda that builds on more than four decades of strong partnership. He also highlighted the urgent need for fiscal reforms in the face of significant risks stemming from rising spending, limited foreign exchange reserves, high debt, and elevated global interest rates.

In Male', Raiser met with his Excellency President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, Honorable Minister of Finance Dr. Mohamed Shafeeq, Honorable Minister of Climate Change, Environment and Energy Mr. Thoriq Ibrahim, and Honorable Minister of Economic Development and Trade Mr. Mohamed Saeed, other cabinet ministers and development partners.

"Maldives has achieved

impressive development results, including in improving access to health, education, housing and other public services," Raiser said. "However, large fiscal and external deficits put these gains at risk and require urgent measures to contain untargeted spending, raise more revenues and manage debt more prudently. This is essential to create the space for sustained investments in people, nature and infrastructure that the Maldives needs to grow and thrive."

The first-ever Human Capital Review for the Maldives, launched by the government and the World Bank on February 6, indicates that while the country's human capital is higher than its regional, small-island nation and income comparators, regional and gender inequities persist. Given the need to control public expenses, such inequities can no longer be addressed simply by spending more overall. Instead, greater prioritization of spending, targeting of subsidies according to need, and efforts to improve the quality of services particularly in the less advanced islands, will be required to ensure further progress. Raiser offered the Bank's technical and financial support for such efforts.

Raiser's visit also focused on

addressing climate impacts that present an existential threat to the country's nature and infrastructure. He stressed the intertwined nature of the economic and climate crises and the importance of working together with the government, development partners and the private sector to identify opportunities for investments that generate triple dividends in economic, social and environmental terms.

The World Bank and Maldives share a strong partnership of over 45 years. The current World Bank program in Maldives includes 10 projects financed by the International Development Association (IDA), one regional project and one IDA guarantee operation for a total net commitment of \$217 million. The projects are focused on renewable energy, competitiveness and growth, youth resilience and employability, digital development, urban development, solid waste management, COVID-19 response, fisheries, labor, health, education, and social protection. The World Bank also provides analytical support in macrofiscal monitoring, policies and analysis, financial sector, social protection, and poverty.

Mirage News

Nepal

Nepal's 10 largest banks to be audited by external experts later in 2024

The International Monetary Fund says Nepal is expected to launch a review of the loan portfolios of the 10 largest banks in the country later in 2024 as preparatory works are underway.

In-depth on-site inspections of 10 such banks, assisted by a third-party international audit firm, to review their loan portfolios in line with the new regulatory framework with special attention to loan and collateral valuation, evergreening, group borrowing and concentration risks is one of the key IMF conditions that Nepal agreed in order to get funding under its Extended Credit Facility (ECF).

The IMF has promised to provide credit amounting to \$395.9 million under the ECF facility.

"Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) has prepared the terms of reference for the loan portfolio review," Tidiane Kinda, Deputy Division Chief, IMF's Asia and Pacific Department, told journalists on February 12.

He led a staff visit to the IMF to discuss recent macroeconomic developments and the implementation of the Fund-supported programme.

He said that the IMF was providing its inputs on the ToR that the central bank was supposed to finalise in December 2023.

"As the ToR is being finalized, the loan portfolio review is likely to be delayed by two to two-and-a-half months," said Dev Kumar Dhakal, Chief, Banking Supervision, NRB.

There was a plan to start in-depth on-site inspections assisted by independent international third-party auditors by the end of April 2024.

"Once the ToR is finalised, there is a plan to hire an international consultant through a bidding process," said Dhakal. "Once the consultant is hired, it is expected to start an off-site review of the loan portfolio by June or July."

According to him, the 10 banks will be chosen based on their size of their loans. Even though there was a plan to conclude loan portfolio review by December 2024, Dhakal expects the review process to take a few months after December.

Kinda said that the loan portfolio review of the largest banks was important to uncover the full extent of

non-performing loans (NPL) in the major banks.

NPL is a sum of borrowed money whose scheduled payments have not been made by the debtor.

According to the central bank, average NPL in Nepal's banking system is 4.29 percent as of mid-January. But, the IMF is doubtful whether the banks and financial institutions reported the true picture of the NPL.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, NPL of the banks and financial institutions has been on the rise.

Post pandemic, loans grew exponentially as a result of credit made available cheaply to help economic recovery, said Prakash Kumar Shrestha, Chief, Economic Research Division, NRB. "But the economy didn't recover as expected, which led to defaults on loans."

The IMF has earlier warned that the bank asset quality in Nepal has deteriorated, reflecting a decline in the repayment capacity of borrows.

"Increased vigilance on banks' asset quality and stepped-up supervisory efforts are important to preserve financial stability in view of growing non-performing loans," Kinda said in a statement on February 12.

The Kathmandu Post

Philippines

Philippine Finance chief not expecting further rate hike

Finance Secretary Ralph Recto said he does not expect interest rates to further increase as inflation is already easing.

"I don't expect a future rate hike because inflation is going down and it seems that it's going down globally also," Finance Secretary Ralph Recto said on the sidelines of the Bureau of Internal Revenue's National Tax Campaign kick-off on February 8.

Recto is the government

representative to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' Monetary Board (MB).

Headline inflation settled at 2.8 percent in January, the lowest recorded since October 2020.

The BSP's MB has so far kept policy rates unchanged for two consecutive meetings. It is scheduled to hold its rate-setting meeting on Feb. 15.

"I think our policy rates today are high enough," Recto said.

The BSP has so far hiked policy rates by a total of 450 basis points since May 2022 to tame the elevated inflation. This brought the benchmark policy rate to 6.5 percent.

"Inflation is on its way down. Assuming it continues to go down and within the range, then realistically, what

follows is the lowering of the interest rates," he said.

Recto noted, however, that in terms of policy easing, the BSP may take its cue from the United States Federal Reserve.

"There's a possibility it would go down. It all depends on what the US Fed does, as well. And then we look at our own data too," he said.

"But I think the key is what happens with the Fed – are they (going to) start reducing rates? If they do, then possibly we can start reducing rates. I think the Fed needs to cut first then we take a look at our own data. We live in a global world, we're affected with what the Fed does, as well," Recto added.

Philippine News Agency

Qatar

Switzerland and Qatar Continue Collaboration Discussion About Digital and Sustainable Finance

The second session of the Joint Economic and Financial Committee between the Ministry of Finance of the State of Qatar and the Swiss Federal Finance Department was held recently in Doha.

HE Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari chaired the Qatari side while the Swiss side was chaired by HE Federal Councilor and Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER) of Switzerland Guy Parmelin. A lineup of senior officials from government

and private agencies in both countries attended the meeting.

The committee discussed a set of proposals and visions to enhance economic and investment cooperation between the two countries, where digital financing, sustainable financing, and ways of cooperation in the infrastructure sector were discussed, in addition to cooperation in the field of strategic projects related to food security and bilateral cooperation in development projects.

In the closing speech of the session HE Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari stressed the importance of the partnership between the two countries, stressing that the meeting is part of the State of Qatar's commitment to constantly improve the business environment, and to enhance and strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries in the financial and economic fields of mutual benefit.

For his part, HE Guy Parmelin underscored the goals of promoting common interests, adding that the committee contributes to formulating proposals regarding strengthening and promoting financial and economic relations between the two countries.

The convening of the Qatari-Swiss committee comes after the State of Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Finance, and the Swiss Federal Council, represented by the Federal Finance Department, signed in March 2022 a memorandum of understanding on joint cooperation to establish the joint committee concerned with the financial and economic fields with the aim of developing and enhancing relations between the two countries. Joint meetings are held alternately in the two countries.

Fintech News

Russia

Confiscating Russia's Assets Would Send Negative Signal, Says Central Bank

The potential confiscation of Russian assets by Western governments would send a strongly negative signal to other central banks and would gradually undermine international finance, Russia's Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina said.

The European Union on

February 12 adopted a law to set aside windfall profits made on frozen Russian central bank assets, in a first concrete step towards the bloc's aim of using the money to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine following the war.

Russia's foreign ministry warned the West that it would take a very tough response, describing the plan as "theft" and "appropriation". Nabiullina, in a more measured response on Friday, said the central bank would take steps to protect its legitimate interests.

Nabiullina was speaking after the Bank of Russia held its key interest rate at 16%, opting to leave borrowing

costs unchanged after five successive rate hikes since last summer, due to stubborn inflation pressures.

"Essentially, confiscation is a breach of the basic principles of central bank reserve protection," Nabiullina said. "In international law, this is one of the key, basic principles of immunity of central bank assets from coercive measures of seizure.

"In our view, deviation from this principle, will lead to the, albeit gradual, undermining of the system of international finance and the position of reserve currencies in the world."

Reuters

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka inflation to reach 5% during Q3-Q4: Central Bank official

Sri Lanka's inflation is expected to return to the government's 5% target starting from the last two quarters of

the year, a Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) official said on February 21 as the economy stabilises from a crippling financial crisis.

Zee Business

Thailand

Thai PM to keep pressing for rate cut, seeks central bank chief meeting

Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin on February 22 said he would continue pushing the central bank to cut interest rates and would meet its governor again to discuss the issue at an appropriate time.

Srettha said there was space for easing and the current rate of 2.50%, a

10-year-high, was hurting the public and could exacerbate Thailand's stubbornly high household debt levels.

"With 2.5%, there is still plenty of room if there is any crisis," he told reporters.

He said a cut of 25 basis points should not be a problem for the central bank in driving its policies.

Srettha also asked the central bank to cut rates before its next scheduled meeting on April 10, saying the economy was at a "critical" stage.

Srettha, who is also finance minister, has been at loggerheads with

the central bank over the direction of monetary policy, repeatedly saying rate cuts will help an economy he describes as being in crisis, as it confronts high household debt and China's slowdown.

Thailand's household debt ratio has been hovering at about 90% of gross domestic product.

The central bank chief has openly disagreed with Srettha and said Thailand's issues were structural and cutting rates or pumping stimulus into the economy, as the government is proposing, would not address weaknesses.

The Star

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's banking sector records 28% increase in cash receipts

In 2023, the banking sector of Uzbekistan experienced a substantial increase in cash receipts, totaling UZS 669 trillion (approximately \$53.6 bn), marking a 28% surge compared to the previous year. This data, derived from the review conducted by the Central Bank of Uzbekistan, sheds light on the evolving financial landscape within the country.

The review indicates that cash receipts to banks escalated by 20% over the course of the year, amounting to UZS 414 trillion (approximately \$33.2 bn). Despite this notable uptick, the proportion of cash in the total cash receipts fell from 66% to 62%, as compared to 2021 when it stood at 69%. Conversely, receipts through terminals witnessed a significant surge of 44%, reaching UZS 255 trillion (approximately \$20.4 bn). This surge contributed to an increase in their share from 34% to 38%, with the figure for

2021 recorded at 31%.

Furthermore, bank card transactions saw a considerable surge, with a total of UZS 789 trillion (approximately \$63.2 bn) credited to bank cards in 2023, marking a 1.4-fold increase from the previous year. Interestingly, there has been a trend of funds received on cards increasingly being withdrawn in the form of cash. The data reveals a steady decline in cash withdrawals from bank cards over the past years: 31.9% in 2019, 34.4% in 2020, 31.7% in 2021, 26.9% in 2022, and 24% in 2023.

Moreover, the share of cash in the total money supply (M2) as of January 1 of the current year decreased to 21.5%, representing a 0.8% decrease compared to the previous year. This reduction follows a growth trend observed in 2022. For context, the share of cash in circulation reached 27% in 2019, 23% in 2020, 19.7% in 2021, and 22.3% in 2022.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized the detrimental impact of the shadow economy, estimating damage to the state budget at UZS 30 trillion (approximately \$2.4 bn) and to GDP at UZS 135 trillion (approximately \$10.8 bn). Mirziyoyev underscored the

impediment posed by the shadow economy to legitimate business operations.

In a bid to formalize employment within the construction sector, Deputy Prime Minister Jamshid Kuchkarov announced plans to introduce a standard for the number of workers required for construction projects, slated to come into effect from April 1, 2024. This initiative is expected to initially impact state-funded construction projects.

Furthermore, authorities are exploring strategies to reduce cash circulation and promote electronic payments. Plans include incentivizing entrepreneurs with high sustainability ratings by offering tax exemptions, expedited VAT refunds, and streamlined tax overpayment reimbursements.

The launch of an entrepreneurial sustainability rating on February 1 aims to bolster the formalization of businesses and combat the shadow economy. Entrepreneurs with high ratings stand to benefit from favorable tax treatment and expedited administrative processes, further incentivizing compliance with regulatory frameworks and fostering economic transparency and stability.

Daryo.uz

Vietnam

Vietnam's Future of digital banking hinges on data security: Experts

Data security and privacy play a pivotal role in the digital transformation of the finance and banking sector, according to experts.

As the Government advances the national digital transformation agenda, the banking industry as a whole and individual lenders are speeding up the transformation of all their operations, they said.

Nguyễn Việt Hòa, head of

community information, Vietnam Blockchain Union (part of the Vietnam Digital Communications Association), said the finance and banking industry has always been associated with the construction, management and operation of data systems – going from basic means such as physical books and records to core banking systems storing billions of digital records every day.

“Throughout that evolution, data security has played a key role in protecting the entire system so that it can operate safely, transparently and effectively. Organisations inside and outside the finance-banking sector have been developing a plethora of solutions to minimise vulnerabilities and the risks of

attacks that result in data breaches.”

He said data security solutions deployed by banks in Việt Nam could be divided into five common categories: fraud prevention, data risk control, network infrastructure security, phishing attack prevention, and preventing loss and unlawful interference of data.

There are international standards that Vietnamese banks could adopt to improve risk control and information security, he said.

“Nevertheless, more inputs from real-life situations are always needed to ensure that actual practices are updated and effective as technology advances and transforms all the time.”

Vietnam News

Publications

Developments In Maritime Finance & Maritime Financial Centres



Z/Yen and Busan Finance Center have collaborated on new research on developments in Maritime Finance & Maritime Financial Centres.

The maritime sector is a critical part of the global economy which facilitates up to 90% of global trade. Maritime financial centres – the clusters of interlinked businesses, organisations, and agencies that support maritime activity - are vital for national and regional economies, and drive growth and employment throughout the supply chain.

This report, “Developments In Maritime Finance &

Maritime Financial Centres”, looks at the scale and scope of the international maritime sector and examines how, in this era of rapid transformation, digitalization and the net-zero transition, new challenges and opportunities will affect maritime centres around the world.

The report finds that three key challenges will determine the success of maritime financial centres over the next couple of decades:

- **Embracing the challenge of financing the maritime industry** – ship owners are facing an increasingly tight fiscal environment, as banks and equity funds redirect capital to lower risk sectors.
- **Embracing the challenge of net zero** – Achieving International Maritime Organisation (IMO) net zero targets will have a seismic impact on the commercial shipping fleet over the next twenty years. This will send waves throughout the industry, affecting shipbuilding, technological development, insurance, the freight futures market, and finance.
- **Embracing technology advancements** – Maritime financial centres have been slow to adopt developments in fintech. Many processes are still paper based and require the involvement of intermediaries for processing, adding to costs for both ship owners and clients. Digitisation holds significant promise to streamline processes and reduce costs, and new developments in blockchain technology hold promise for both ship financing and freight handling.

Publication: [Long Finance](#)

Publications

Asia Clean Energy Forum 2023 — Navigating Toward a Carbon-Neutral Future through Clean Energy Solutions: Event Highlights

Providing a rundown of the Asia Clean Energy Forum 2023, this report shows why the Asia and Pacific region should harness technology, work with the private sector, and prioritize gender to speed up its shift towards a sustainable energy future.

It explains why countries should collaborate closely and share knowledge to spur the clean energy transition which has the potential to create jobs and drive economic development. It highlights financing challenges, assesses the role artificial intelligence can play, and underscores why closing the energy sector gender gap can help the region decarbonize and meet its ambitious climate goals.

Publication: [Asian Development Bank](#)



Sustainable Signals - Understanding Individual Investors' Interests and Priorities

This is the fifth edition of the Morgan Stanley Sustainable Signals: Individual Investor survey. This report is led by the Morgan Stanley Institute for Sustainable Investing in partnership with Morgan Stanley Wealth Management. It presents results from an online survey of individual investors conducted by Dynata LLC on behalf of the Institute for Sustainable Investing in October 2023.

This survey was conducted in the U.S., Europe (the U.K., Germany, France, Switzerland) and Japan. For the U.S., the sample includes 1,002 individual investors, with gender identity, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, age and geography matching 2020 U.S. Census records. For Europe, the sample includes 1,025 individual investors (289 from the U.K., 273 from France, 285 from Germany and 178 from Switzerland), with gender identity, age and geography matched to each country's most recent census. For Japan, the sample includes 793 individual investors. It was not possible to match the sample to the census; therefore, responses from Japan may not be directly comparable to those from the other two regions. For all geographies, respondents were required to be self-identified 'active' or 'somewhat active' investors between 18-80 years old with over \$100,000 in investable assets, excluding personal retirement accounts, employer-sponsored retirement accounts and personal real estate. Having a nonretirement taxable investing account was a prerequisite to be included in the sample, except for those between 18-26 years old (Gen Z), where those planning to open an account were included.

Prior surveys were conducted in the field by different



providers and were not census-matched, so they may not be directly comparable. In all our surveys, we use the same definitions of 'ESG' and 'sustainable investing,' which are provided below.

The source for all charts is the survey unless otherwise indicated. For more information on respondent demographics and additional definitions used throughout the report, please see the Appendix.

Publication: [Morgan Stanley](#)

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