

Bahrain Development Bank Launches \$100m Venture Capital Fund of Funds to Support Middle East Startups

Al Waha Fund of Funds will invest in venture capital funds with presence in Bahrain

Manama, [10] May 2018: Following instructions from His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and Chairman of the Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB), the Bahrain Development Bank (BDB) today launched a \$100m Venture Capital Fund of Funds aimed at boosting the start-up ecosystem in Bahrain and the Middle East.

The Al Waha Fund of Funds will invest in venture capital funds that have a presence in Bahrain – providing additional capital to funds supporting startups in Bahrain and across the Middle East

Commenting on the launch of the Fund, Khalid Al Rumaihi, Chairman, BDB said: “This is very exciting news for the startup ecosystem both here in Bahrain and across the Middle East. We know that access to capital is one of the biggest constraints on growth for startups, so this fund will help businesses in Bahrain and across the Middle East to get access to the capital they need to expand.

“Venture capital investment in the MENA region is a fraction of the level in markets like the USA and China – this means there are entrepreneurs with great ideas that are not realising their potential because they cannot access the funding required. We are delighted to be able to utilize the strengths of Bahrain as a regional financial centre and its growing startup ecosystem to support the growth of a new wave of innovative businesses across the region.”

The fund was launched at Gateway Gulf Forum, which is being held under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and Chairman of the Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB), and brings together over five hundred global investors and business leaders to explore ways of unlocking the opportunities being created by the economic transformation in the GCC. The event provides a direct route into accessing the GCC market by showcasing major investment-ready projects worth USD \$18billion, with projects in the planning phase driving up the value of the project pipeline to USD \$26 billion. The event also offers an opportunity to match funding with large-scale infrastructure projects in Bahrain.

As well as providing additional capital to regional startups, the fund is expected to help attract additional venture capital funds to Bahrain, enhancing the local startup ecosystem. Bahrain's ecosystem has benefitted from a number of major economic reforms in recent years, including a reduction in the minimum capital required for starting a business, measures to enable onshore crowdfunding in conventional and shari'a-compliant finance and the introduction of a regulatory sandbox for fintech.

These advances were reflected in the recent Global Startup Ecosystem Report, released by the Global Entrepreneurship Network and Startup Genome, which included Bahrain in global 'ecosystems to watch' in both fintech and gaming. Bahrain was the only Arab country to be included in either list.

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Notes to editor

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About the Bahrain Economic Development Board

The Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB) is an investment promotion agency with overall responsibility for attracting investment into the Kingdom and supporting initiatives that enhance the investment climate.

The EDB works with the government and both current and prospective investors to ensure that Bahrain's investment climate is attractive, to communicate the key strengths, and to identify where opportunities exist for further economic growth through investment.

The EDB focuses on several economic sectors that capitalise on Bahrain's competitive advantages. These sectors include financial services, manufacturing, ICT, tourism, logistics and transport.

For more information on the Bahrain EDB visit www.bahrainedb.com; for information about Bahrain visit www.bahrain.com.

About Gateway Gulf

Gateway Gulf is a major new investment event that will convene global industry leaders in order to unlock the opportunities being created by the economic transformation in the GCC.

The invitation-only event, held under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and Chairman of the Bahrain Economic Development Board, will bring together 500 global investors and CEOs at the Four Seasons hotel, Manama from 8-10 May 2018.

Gateway Gulf will include both high-level plenary sessions and showcase investment-ready projects from across the region in sectors including oil and gas, real estate, tourism, housing, power, water, transport, public works and manufacturing. Additional information can be found at: www.gatewaygulf.com