

## **Abdulelah A Aldeheem: Keynote speech - Money20/20 Middle East**

Keynote speech by His Excellency Mr Abdulelah A Aldeheem, Assistant Governor for Executive Affairs of the Saudi Central Bank, at the Money20/20 Middle East, Riyadh, 16 September 2025.

\* \* \*

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

I would like to begin by extending my thanks to the organizers, partners and attendees of Money20/20 for convening in this flagship global event held in the Middle East for the first time.

We at SAMA, and in Saudi Arabia are honoured to host all of you here, and for those whose visiting from overseas, we extend a warm welcome.

I hope you can all see from the scale of this event and the range of speakers and exhibitors that are taking part over these three days, this is an exciting time to be talking about the development of the Saudi and regional payment and fintech sector.

I will commence my remarks by outlining SAMA's strategic goals, and how they have informed the transformation journey that we have embarked on, particularly in how they relate to our stewardship of the payments industry.

SAMA has recently completed a strategy review and refresh of our operating model. This has the objective of better equipping us to continue to deliver our mandate in a dynamically changing environment.

Through this process, we have identified strategic priorities across four pillars that drive our efforts – Resilience, Excellence, Influence, and Development.

In the areas of Currency and Payments, the focus is on delivering strategic initiatives related to development of our national payments infrastructure, whether that is physical or digital.

In the digital payments domain, SAMA has been a recognized leader, and has helped shape the international regulatory agenda. We championed global payment reform during Saudi Arabia's presidency of the G20 in 2020, working with our peer central banks and multilateral entities such as the FSB and BIS on creation of the Roadmap for Enhancing Cross-border Payments. This roadmap was endorsed by G20 leaders at the Riyadh Summit, it sets specific targets for making payments faster, cheaper and more accessible, as a necessary step to closing the digital divide. We continue to actively engage in G20 and BIS working groups, enabling collaboration with peers around the world on implementing this roadmap.

Within the Kingdom, we have commenced an extensive programme of initiatives to continue advancing infrastructure reliability, accessibility, and functionality; through

RTGS modernization, expansion of international acceptance in the Kingdom, and enhancing national payment systems to cater for more innovative use cases, while maintaining robust cybersecurity, enhanced data infrastructure, and adopting AI.

The resulting evolution of the payments landscape has been readily observable.

For those of you who live here in Saudi Arabia, or have been frequent visitors over the past few years, you will have seen the growth and innovation across digital payments over the past decade, alongside the wholesale transformation of the economy, made possible by Saudi Vision 2030.

This evolution of payments was largely made possible through the historical and landmark initiatives undertaken by SAMA, including the launch of SPAN and the development of the RTGS back in 90's which positioned the Kingdom among the first countries to adopt such technologies; and the launch of SADAD in the early 2000's, which was applauded as a revolution in the payments field.

These steps were leveraged and became the building blocks for what came next. Retail E-Payments rose dramatically from 18% in 2015, to 79% as of last year. Alongside, acceptance of international payment networks has also grown significantly from around 120 million transactions processed through the national payment system in 2019 to more than 800 million in 2024.

National payments systems operated by SAMA- such as mada, sarie (IPS), and SADAD have scaled dramatically, with processed payments reaching around 12.8 bn transactions during 2024.

And, Mobile and tokenized wallets, of which some were announced yesterday, have thrived, supported through the national scheme (mada) maintained by SAMA's standards.

In addition, several other initiatives, including SAMA's opening of the ecosystem to nonbank players, the expanding our national Instant Payment System, to include a greater range of payments; have widened the scope of digital solutions and delivered significant benefits for users and the wider economy.

Let me now turn to the key drivers of this transformation, which I would describe as being a result of a resolute focus on three core areas:

- Firstly, developing the underlying payment infrastructure – RTGS, sarie (IPS), mada and SADAD.
- Second, implementing regulatory reform – this has included the launch of the Regulatory Sandbox and the facilitation of a regulatory regime that encourages the entrance of new providers.
- And finally, fostering a culture of innovation – and a key step forward in this was the development of the national Fintech Strategy in 2022, which aims to deliver a diversified digital economy.

A key development within payments globally has been the rise of instant, real-time transactions.

Instant payments are a necessity for the future of the digital economy.

We have placed instant payments at the heart of our strategy to continue modernizing the Kingdom's financial ecosystem, and we also recognise they will directly support the delivery of Saudi Vision 2030 by driving financial inclusion, widening payment options, and fostering innovation across the sector.

We continue investing to maintain and develop the rails while enabling market participants to innovate and explore use cases.

In 2021, we launched the sarie instant payment system to provide 24/7 real-time fund transfers for individuals and businesses.

Through sarie, individuals can make seamless peer-to-peer payments using simple identifiers like a mobile number or email, while corporates benefit from immediate liquidity and better cash flow management.

The resulting increase in velocity of cash circulation, will naturally have a positive impact on economic growth.

Support for innovation must, of course, be carefully balanced with the need to ensure stability, and a number of challenges must be addressed in achieving such a balance.

SAMA aims to serve as a prudent yet enabling regulator – one of our mandates is to support financial stability, we deliver this by maintaining a resilient financial system while also providing a framework to promotes innovation.

We follow a principles-based regulatory approach, which combined with detailed technical, operational, and security standards gives clear pathways for banks and nonbanks to innovate safely.

We have also opened market access to non-banks, which include e-money issuers, acquirers, by developing robust and progressive licensing, certification, and onboarding frameworks.

Fintechs are able to work in partnership with existing providers, and licensed nonbanks fintech are able to integrate directly with national rails (mada, SADAD, sarie).

This means that Fintechs are able to combine services to deliver integrated propositions to their stakeholders and will be complementing traditional financial institutions to drive innovation, inclusion, and customer choice as they expand across the value chain.

We also want to make sure that new payments service providers meet the high standards of anti-fraud and cybersecurity controls currently deployed in the traditional banking sector.

It is important to further maintain the strength of rail resilience; including enhancing uptime and real-time risk controls.

This has allowed us to support the important role that fintechs and other new entrants are playing in shaping Saudi Arabia's payments industry, while preserving stability within the financial system.

Looking ahead, several avenues for further innovation are already underway.

These are being built around Saudi-first use cases (for example: Pay by Account, transit & toll, and interoperable QR) and expanded service features.

We also aim to institutionalize collaboration via partnerships with banks, PSPs, international schemes and fintechs.

And, finally, we are seeking to drive inclusion with low-cost acceptance as well as continue the exploration of potential use cases for technologies such as tokenization, AI and enhanced data analytics.

I would conclude with the following highlights:

- SAMA has a long tradition of innovating in payments stretching over more than three decades, which has created a strong infrastructure foundation.
- The pace of innovation has accelerated in recent years with rapid digitalization of the economy made possible by Saudi Vision 2030.
- In this environment, the Saudi Central Bank remains focussed on being a prudent, yet enabling regulator.