

BANKING



Ms Sasitorn joins other LH Bank and SET executives to toast the company's trading debut.

Healthy debut for LH Bank

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Land and Houses Retail Bank (LH Bank) expects approval from authorities for an upgrade to commercial bank status by August.

President Sasitorn Phongsathorn said LH Bank submitted its request to the Bank of Thailand on March 31. The process normally takes five months — three months for the central bank to give the green light and another two months for Finance Ministry approval.

That means an answer can be expected by late August.

“Our prospective new status as a commercial bank will present more opportunities to acquire strategic foreign partners to help accelerate business expansion following the success of our holding company in listing on the Stock Exchange of Thailand,” said Ms Sasitorn.

Yesterday was the first day of trading on the SET for the bank's holding com-

pany, LH Financial Group, which trades under the symbol LHBANK.

The shares opened in the morning at 1.84 baht, an increase of 31.4% from the IPO price of 1.40 baht. They closed at 1.79 baht, in heavy trade worth 3.76 billion baht.

Mrs Sasitorn said both LH Bank and LHFG welcomed foreign partners, yet each had individual strategies.

LH Bank wants a banking partnership that supports organic growth, while LHFG prefers non-banking partners to facilitate inorganic growth.

Over the next three years, LH Bank is aiming for asset growth of 20% annually from 62.3 billion baht last year and net profit growth of 10% annually from 412 million. Its loan portfolio stood at 42.5 billion baht as of Dec 31, while its non-performing loans were kept at a low 1.46% of outstanding debt.

Its capital-adequacy ratio is 30%, the highest in the industry.