



Ahmed al-Mazrouy, CEO of Majis, says the company is spending RO30,000 a year on research and development



MAJIS ADOPTS AN AGILE APPROACH TO PUBLIC ASSETS

Partnerships and new technologies are allowing Oman's Sohar Port service provider Majis to take up fresh market opportunities

If there is one sector on the rise in Oman it is logistics, thanks to the government's focus on developing world-class ports and free zones.

Yet the flagship infrastructure projects at Sohar, Duqm and Salalah are just part of the puzzle.

The country's fast-growing list of port clients and free zone tenants also creates demand for power, water and other utilities, and it is here that some of the sultanate's most agile public sector players are at work.

Majis Industrial Services is the water solutions provider for Sohar Port and its associated free zone. It was established in 2006 by the Finance Ministry to provide cooling water for the oil refining and petrochemicals activities of the Oman Refinery Company (Orpic) and Liwa Plastics industrial complex.

"It initially started with providing only one product, cooling water – by getting sea water into a bay, removing the marine life and sending it back to the sea, then filtering the water down to 3 millimetres, adding chlorine to prevent growth and sending it to the client," says Ahmed al-Mazrouy, CEO of Majis.

But the list of customer requirements quickly grew. "Later they wanted demineralised water, which we had to provide through a desalination unit, and then potable water, so we also provided that," notes Al-Mazrouy.

"Today, the processed water is around 10,000 cubic metres a day (cm/d) and potable water is around 11,000 cm/d, while the cooling water is currently 400,000 cubic metres an hour (cm/h)," the latter split across filtered seawater and demineralised cooling water produced using reverse osmosis.

PHOTOGRAPH: MAJIS

In 2012, Majis again expanded its capabilities to handle effluent collection and treatment to prevent the dumping of effluent into the sea or canal around the port. Al-Mazrouy explains that though this waste was already treated, the authorities "wanted to have zero discharge, so now we are treating sewage with industrial effluents with a capacity of up to 20,000 cm/d."

Change in direction

But the past two years has brought the most dramatic change, following the transfer of the ownership of Majis in late 2017 from the Finance Ministry to the Oman Investment Fund. While the company had plans to expand in increments across Oman, the GCC and the wider Middle East and North Africa region, "the new shareholder said: 'No, I want Majis to be global, and I want you to move fast'," states Al-Mazrouy.

Since then, Majis has ambitiously leveraged new international partnerships to bring services in-house and open itself up to new opportunities overseas. The company formed a local joint venture with Spanish water infrastructure operator Aqualia in early 2018 and bought a 32 per cent stake in UAE-based Utico, an engineering, procurement and construction contractor for the power and water sector, in January 2019.

These developments have provided Majis with an operations and maintenance subsidiary that now runs all of its operations at Sohar, as well as a stake in a specialist utility contractor with a foot in another market.

"We are now supporting the expansion of Utico in the UAE through our shareholding," Al-Mazrouy states. "We can approach them or they approach us for partnership for other projects. If they approach us for an independent water project or an independent sewage project, then we look at that. The same applies in Oman: Majis can invite Utico to form partner-

ships on other projects. So it is creating opportunities that both parties can benefit from."

The partnerships bring other benefits, with Al-Mazrouy adding that Aqualia also delivers technical support and knowledge transfer, while Utico represents "a fast-moving private sector company, with a different way of managing the business. They have this potential to expand the business and outreach".

Leveraging technology

As well as capital spending and regional expansion plans, Majis is investing RO30,000 (\$78,023) annually into research and development to reduce operating costs, raise efficiencies and lower its environmental impact.

In September, the company signed an \$8.5m deal with Japan's Toshiba to install gravity filters that will remove the smaller particulates fouling its reverse osmosis membranes. This is expected to reduce maintenance costs as well as lower the energy required to desalinate water by as much as 12.5 per cent.

The company has installed 700kW of rooftop solar, with plans to raise this by a further 600kW. It has also launched a pilot hydropower project with the ambition of generating as much as 2.7MW of energy from the 300,000 cm/h of water that flows back into the sea every hour. Majis is also exploring the possibility of recycling the solid waste from its effluent treatment to create biogas and other useful byproducts.

New technologies are opening up the potential for business opportunities. Majis is in discussions with a client about using its spent reverse osmosis brine to produce bromide.

The company is also in the "advanced stage of discussion" to roll out its services at Duqm port, as well as potential engagements at Salalah, Lusail and Ghala.

What is in no doubt is that today's Majis represents a clear example of agile government. **M**
John Bambridge

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