



▲ Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish leads the organisation's diverse operations in Oman and overseas

# INVESTED IN THE FUTURE

**Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish** discusses the MHD legacy, Oman 2040, the parent vs manager balancing act and the pandemic's upside **BY RIAZ NAQVI**

**In 1974, Mohsin Haider Darwish established a company under his own name in Oman. Today, under the guidance of his daughter, Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish, chairperson of the automotive, construction equipment and renewable energy (ACERE) cluster of MHD LLC, the company has grown into one of the country's most renowned business houses, with substantial interests spanning a number of sectors, including automotive, construction equipment and renewable energy.**

Twenty-seven years after she joined the family business, Areej reflects on how MHD LLC aims to help Oman achieve the objectives of Vision 2040, her late father's legacy, balancing roles as a parent and mentor to her son, and the challenges of the pandemic.

## Legacy means progress

For Areej, MHD LLC's legacy is its family business and core values – something she hopes to see continuing to benefit Oman.

"We are proud of it, and our key objective is to continue the family legacy by making a noteworthy contribution to the country.

"Oman's economy is geared up for accelerated growth as it is building a productive and diversified economy with innovation, infrastructure, education, development of workforce, sustaining national resources and modern legislative framework as its key drivers."

One of the country's advantages is its strategically located ports, she says, something Oman's government is trying to leverage through Duqm airport, through

which it aims to place a special economic zone on the world map. It was the project's revitalisation of the logistics sector that attracted MHD to enter Duqm.

Sustainability is an important aspect of Vision 2040 that MHD is invested in by introducing electric charging stations around the country, while the company is also building solar panels for different projects.

"Green investments are the future of tomorrow and conservation of energy is a national priority."

## Training for the future

Another aspect of Vision 2040 is the development of youth and creation of a dynamic labour market that attracts



▲ Mohsin Al Bahrani is the CEO, Automotive, Construction Equipment & Renewable Energy at Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC

the best talent. "We recognise that the youth are a key partner in development of our country as they have immense potential," says Areej. With the MHD Training Institute, she adds, the group aims to inspire the country's youth and provide them with the training and skills they need to be competitive within Oman and internationally.

Under her leadership, MHD has prioritised Omanisation, focusing on providing employment opportunities to the country's fresh graduates.

"We provide them on the job training to equip them with the required skills to handle multiple tasks, take on additional responsibilities and become productive resources.

"Our strategy is to help our people to develop their talents and enhance their leadership skills.

"Our training institute works in close conjunction with the ministry to offer the best training programs to the Omani youth in sales and marketing, leadership and management, administration, finance, accounting, budgeting, human resources, health and safety training in Oman."

## Balancing act

Describing her own management style as "co-operative and participative rather than authoritative or delegative", Areej believes it's important to keep the business and personal clearly distinct. This serves her well during the day-to-day running of the business, as her son, Mohsin, is CEO of MHD ACERE.

"When we are at work, we are a team working towards shared business goals. We

**"Green investments are the future of tomorrow and conservation of energy is a national priority"**

**1994**

The year in which Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish began her career with MHD LLC

work collectively, devising strategies and future plans through collaborative discussions and meetings. Business tasks and decision-making happen at the business. The lines of authority and communication are clear."

Areej appreciates the mix of experience and youth each of them brings to the ACERE business. "My son has different thoughts and ideas on how to expand our presence and I have the experience of foresight."

She adds that Mohsin's grandfather, who would take him to business meetings from a young age, passed on to him values such as foresight, perseverance, focus, discipline and hard work.

As a parent, Areej strives to encourage, guide and motivate Mohsin to work hard and try to achieve the best.

"Balancing between the two roles can get tricky and it's not very easy to separate the two as sometimes unintentionally, we tend to talk business during family time, and vice versa. However, it's my endeavour to keep them independent of each other and avoid discussing business issues when I am at home or with family as we need to have a cut-off point."

## Pandemic: the mother of innovation

While Areej admits the company did see a dip in revenue during the coronavirus pandemic, the unprecedented nature of the event encouraged MHD to focus on building up its resilience and rethink established practices. "The group has also sought to take advantage of the current challenges to deploy several innovative ideas through which we overcame challenges, reached a wider customer base and maintained a continuous relationship with our current customers and partners.

"The pandemic gave us an opportunity to examine current practices in order to pivot to new opportunities. The lessons learnt were leveraged as it guided us to our future actions and helped us prepare a roadmap for 2021."

Today, Areej sees 2021 as a year the group looks forward to, with newer opportunities, enhanced performance and newfound efficiencies coming to the business. "The current crisis has opened the door for us to implement changes and transformational strategies."

As an organisation, she adds, MHD has emerged sturdier and better equipped for the future.