Abu Dhabi's Next Generation of Trade

With the launch of Maqta Gateway, Abu Dhabi Ports Company has become the first organisation in the Arab world to establish a ports community system

The last four years have been incredibly busy for Abu Dhabi Ports Company (ADPC). In this period, the government entity launched the multi-billion dollar megaproject duo of Khalifa Port and its neighbouring Khalifa Industrial Zone (Kizad), before commencing a AED 17 million-project to develop the infrastructure of Marfa Port in the Western Region.

Khalifa Port's semi-automated container terminal, the only one in the region, now handles all of the emirate's container traffic and serves the world's largest container ships, while the 420-square-kilometre Kizad has become an industrial powerhouse that houses the world's biggest aluminium smelter.

Busiest year

Activity reached a peak in 2014 when ADPC handled more cargo than ever before. Compared to 2013, the total number of containers that came through Khalifa Port Container Terminal increased 26 percent, and the amount of bulk and general cargo handled grew by 37 percent.
'The volume of general cargo has

more than doubled over the last four years. There are a few, if any ports, recording this pace of year-on-year growth anywhere in the world today," said Capt. Mohamed Juma Al Shamisi, CEO of ADPC.

Martijn Van Del Line, CEO of Abu Dhabi Terminals (ADT), a private joint stock company and ADPC's collaborative partner in operating Khalifa Port's container terminal, affirmed that 2014 was the busiest year yet for ADT, as well as being the fifth straight year that their compound year-on-year growth had risen more than 20 percent.

Overall, ADPC manages nine commercial, logistics, community, and leisure ports in Abu Dhabi. As the master developer, operator, and regulator of all non-oil and gas ports in the emirate, it is also responsible for improving services and building new facilities at its ports.

One of the projects gearing up for completionby the end of 2015, for example, is the new cruise terminal at Zayed Port, Abu Dhabi's oldest commercial port. Covering 8,000 square metres, the terminal will be capable of handling 2,500 passengers and three ships simultaneously.

Cargo unloaded at Khalifa Port
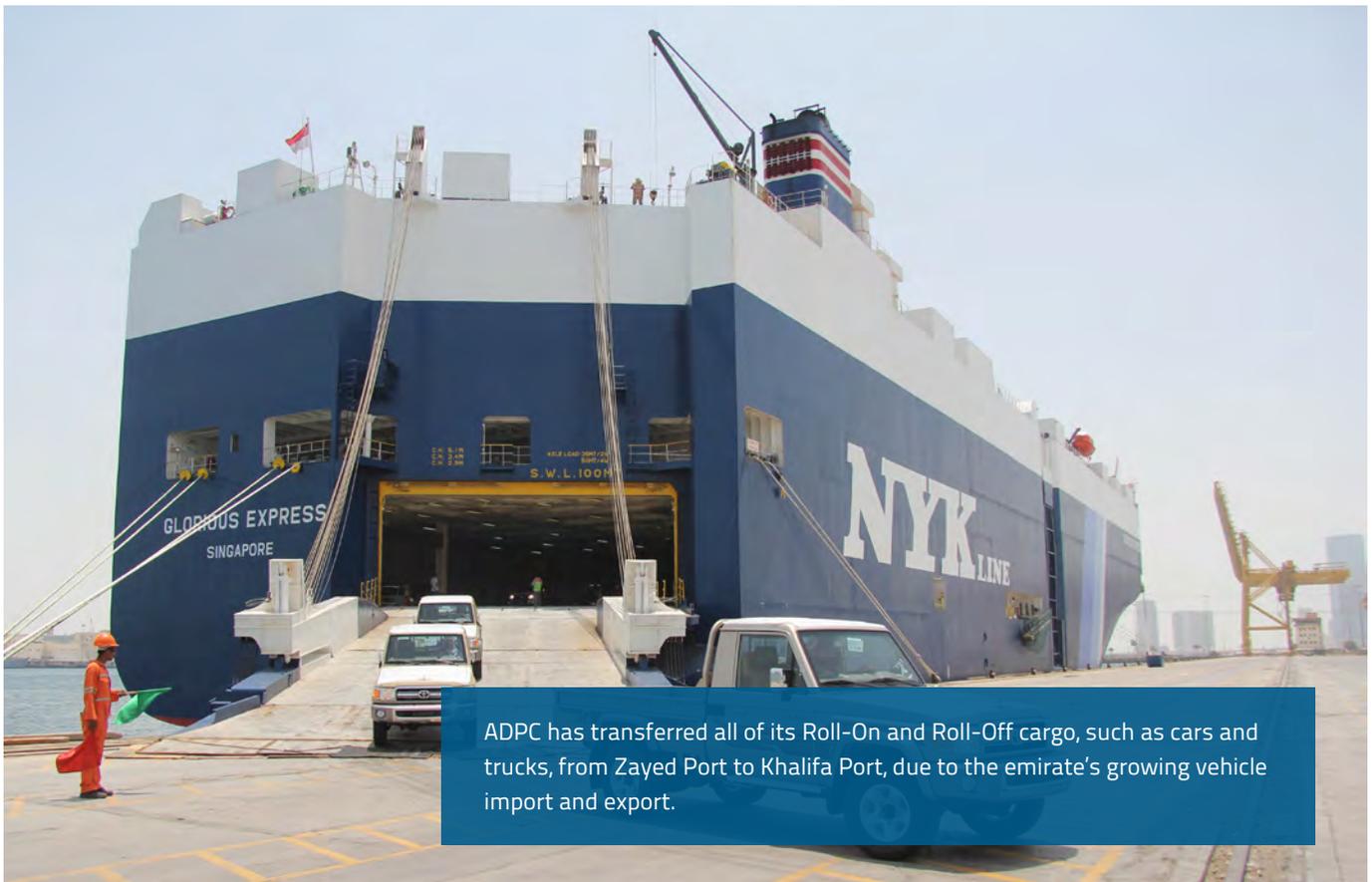
ADPC has transferred all of its Roll-On and Roll-Off cargo, such as cars and trucks, from Zayed Port to Khalifa Port, due to the emirate's growing vehicle import and export.

Single point of contact

Given the remarkable pace of developments across ADPC's operations, it was high time to create a port community system that would optimise and automate smooth port and logistics processes. Indeed, in December 2014, ADPC revealed Maqta Gateway – an electronic window system and a single point of contact and real-time information.

'Maqta will be an online system that can be accessed by stakeholders and port users via any internet connected device, including mobile phones and iPads," says Noura Al Dhaheri, CEO of Maqta Gateway. 'We have completed the first milestone of the system but the deployment and go-live of the first stage will be at the end of 2015.''

In the initial stage, Maqta will offer vessel management, operations and foundation services to shipping agents, terminal operators, and regulatory authorities.

On the long run, however, the objective is to link and provide all of the current and future services that are key not just for the ports involved, but also for cargo moving on Abu Dhabi's roads, airports and in the near future, rail services.

Eventually, the system will feed into the wider global supply-chain communication platforms, covering services such as import, export and e-commerce and enabling users to track and trace all trade related activities from one end to the other.

'Maqta will be a centralized channel bringing together all land, sea and air logistics services. We will start with the port community to improve the level of services and competitive capacity of the ports and then expand to all trade channels," Ms. Al Dhaheri told Insight Magazine.

Once up and running, the system will considerably reduce paperwork and administrative processing time,

thereby boosting productivity at the ports and enabling faster response to requests. Procedures that used to take a few days or weeks will be completed in a few hours.

Additionally, it will enhance transparency and traceability, as users will be able to find out exactly where their transaction is. 'From the point of view of customers, such as shipping agents, they need to have this transparency and know exactly what's happening through a single window. This is how it should be," remarks Ms. Al Dhaheri.

A collaborative effort

Though led by ADPC, Maqta Gateway is not an isolated effort. The project is a collaboration between various stakeholders and partners, and involves three levels of interactions.

Firstly, the port users, such as shipping agents and terminal operators. Secondly, the stakeholders,
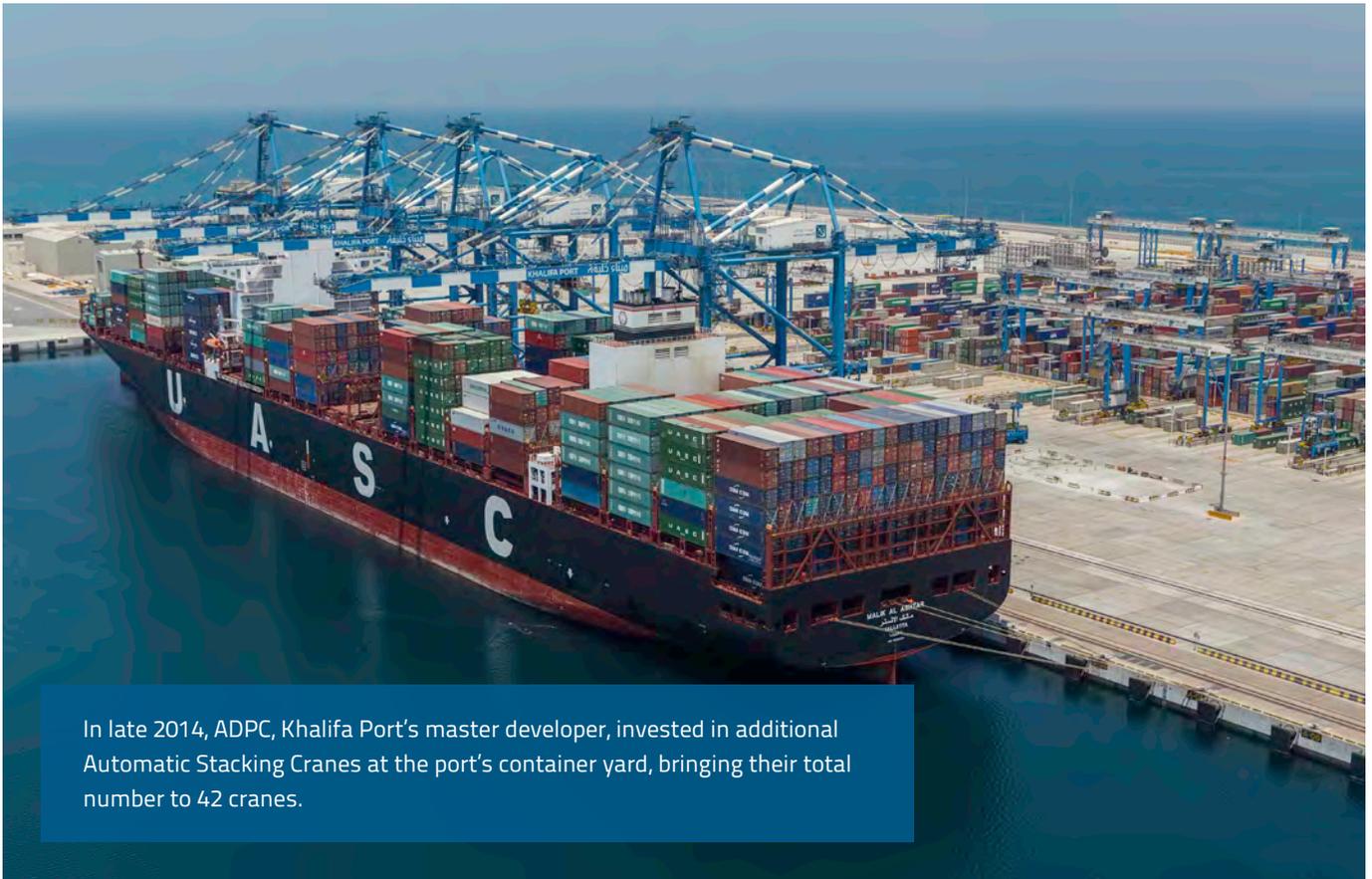
In late 2014, ADPC, Khalifa Port's master developer, invested in additional Automatic Stacking Cranes at the port's container yard, bringing their total number to 42 cranes.

which are government and private entities providing services to those users, most notably Abu Dhabi Customs, the Ministry of Environment and Water, Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority, and Abu Dhabi Police.

And thirdly, port community system operators, who are helping with the development of the system and ensuring the application of international standards.

These business partners include the Centre of Excellence for Applied Research & Training (CERT), which is the commercial, research and training arm of the Higher Colleges of Technology, as well as the Ports Operation Research & Technology Centre (PORTeC), a research group within the Centre for Transport Studies, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the Imperial College London.

'We conducted a very detailed study over two years, of the international

standards, local market needs, stakeholder needs, what to integrate and how to divide the project into stages," says Ms. Al Dhaheri.

Joining IPCSA

As a result of the introduction of Maqta Gateway, ADPC has become the first organisation in the Middle East and North Africa to join the International Port Community Systems Association (IPCSA), a global body which promotes the highest possible standards in international port community system providers.

'We are delighted to welcome ADPC as our 26th member and our first member form the GCC and indeed the whole of the Arab world," said Alan Long, chairman of the IPCSA. 'Port Community Systems play a vital role in the exchange of information and in the simplification of administrative processes, enabling the efficient electronic exchange of millions of messages every week."

'By working closely with international organisations such as the International Maritime Organization, United Nations, and World Customs Organization, we can contribute enormous experience and knowledge in the area of trade facilitation," he added.

Long-time Abu Dhabi residents may already be aware that Maqta Gateway takes its name from the 'Maqta Bridge", the first crossing that connected Abu Dhabi Island with the mainland in the 1970s and was a crucial connection for the emirate's trade and development.

In the same way, Maqta Gateway will act as a crucial bridge for future business opportunities, facilitating the next generation of trade in Abu Dhabi and dramatically transforming the emirate's way of doing business. And by doing so, the project will help realize a central pillar of the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030.

– Heba Hashem