

EMKE Group Plans Dh4.3b Expansion

DUBAI - UAE-based EMKE Group, one of the largest retail chains in the Middle East, plans to invest Dh4.3 billion by the end of next year for its retail stores across the Gulf region and one multi-purpose property in Cochin, India, a top official of the company said.

The group has planned to open 14 new hypermarkets and shopping malls in the Gulf region by the end of 2010, with a total investment of Dh3.2 billion. Abu Dhabi alone will have seven more stores by next year with an investment of Dh1.5 billion.

The company has also planned an investment of Dh1.1 billion for its maiden project in India.

The four-decade old group operates retail chain stores that include Lulu chain of supermarkets, department stores, hypermarkets and now shopping malls.

Headquartered in Abu Dhabi, the group will inaugurate its 75th LuLu Hypermarket in Al Ain on Sunday, the biggest hypermarket in Al Ain. Lulu Hypermarkets is a retail division of EMKE Group, which has 74 stores across the Middle East and the company plans to open its 100th store by the end of 2011.

“Opening of the 75th LuLu Hypermarket in Al Ain will be a turning point for us as we are targeting to reach 100 stores by the end of 2011,” Yusuffali M.A., Managing Director of the group, told Khaleej Times.

Over the years, EMKE Group has ventured into varied businesses operating in the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, China, Kenya, Tanzania and Benin.

Yusuffali said that the group recently opened its 74th store in Doha and intends to open seven more hypermarkets this year in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman.

Despite the global economic downturn and reduction in the UAE population in recent months, the group witnessed significant growth during the first half of 2009.

“The group maintained a 33 per cent growth rate in the region during the first half, compared with same period a year earlier,” Yusuffali said. In the UAE, its market share in the organised grocery sector is over 40 per cent, with turnover topping \$2.1 billion in 2008, he said.

The group has 32 per cent market share in the GCC region’s organised grocery retail sector.

India Project

The mixed-used property, first of its kind in India, covering 2.2 million square feet will include a shopping mall, a five-star hotel managed by Marriot and a commercial tower. The commercial tower is dedicated to travel, tourism and aviation industry.

“The total estimated value of the project is Dh1.1 billion and it is aimed to promote travel and leisure industry in India,” Yusuffali said.

The multi-purpose project will be completed by the end of next year, he said.

Date festival

Last week LuLu launched its first country-wide Date Festival with over 100 varieties of dates to support local farmers.

“The purpose of this festival is to aware customers about the 100 varieties available in all the supermarkets across the UAE,” Yusuffali said adding: “This will also support farmers as we are collecting all these dates directly from farmers.”

Minister of Environment and Water Dr Rashid Bin Fahd inaugurated the festival at the Al Barsha Hypermarket of the Group.

Varieties available at the festival include Sagai, Yabri, Fardh, Maljban, Lulu, Abu Maha, Berhi, Khalas, Sheshi and Maryam from the UAE; Iftar and Sokary from Saudi Arabia and Kimia from Iran.

Ramadan is a prime season and LuLu markets will not increase prices during the holy month, Yusuffali told reporters after the inauguration of the date festival.