

Venturing into modern retail

After making history by being the first group of companies headed by a Sri Lankan and the first Sri Lankan owned company in Dubai to offer Sri Lankans a way of buying their own homes in Dubai, AMG International is making history once again.

The diverse group of companies based in Dubai started in 2004 by entrepreneur Anthony Malik Gunasekera is expanding its business operations into "Modern Retail" supermarkets with a series of Sri Lankan supermarkets soon to be opened across the Middle East.

AMG International is allegedly the only group of companies to be owned by a Sri Lankan in Dubai and also operates in the real estate, hospitality, trade and foliage industries.

Speaking to The Sunday Leader, AMG International CEO/ Managing Director Anthony Malik Gunasekera said that even in the face of economic downturn, Dubai, a hub of business and trade activity in the Middle East (ME), is faring comparatively well.

"Even though the real estate market is not doing too great (and no one expected this recession), the Middle East has always been a stable and secure place for businesses and the companies that are focused and work intelligently-the entrepreneurs-will continue to do well."

Gunasekera believes that Dubai, as with the rest of the world will bounce back from the recession. He also believes now is the time for businessmen and entrepreneurs to rise above the challenges they face. He said, "In the face of this recession, we too have changed and adapted the ways we do business. But thankfully since our projects and investments are with the Dubai government they are safe and secure."

Together with a team of professionals that include AMG Director General Manager Viraj Ekanayake and Group Marketing Manager Jerome Jayasinghe, the idea of a Sri Lankan supermarket was born. Gunasekera explained, "Everywhere you go there are shops and restaurants and services in general that cater to people of all nationalities except Sri Lankans. No real Sri Lankan restaurants or stores, if you ask me I'd say that Sri Lankan consumers are seriously neglected."

But all this is about to change as Gunasekera hopes to unveil the first Sri Lankan supermarket chain in the world (outside Sri Lanka) to cater solely to the needs of Sri Lankans living abroad.

This first ever Sri Lankan supermarket is scheduled to open on June 15 in Sharjah and will offer over a 1,000 Sri Lankan brands, from "frozen foods like meats to fresh vegetables," spices and even cosmetic products and newspapers, books and music, the supermarket will have it all.

With a large amount of Sri Lankan expatriates who miss home this venture is expected to be a lucrative and popular one.

He said, "This project will also take Sri Lankan brands to the international market, help keep Sri Lankans living abroad closer to home and we'll have only the best Sri Lankan brands available. I want people to step into this supermarket and feel like they've been transported back home." Jayasinghe added, "From our research we know that Sri Lankans in the ME miss their home brands, so we hope to provide them the total range in all 'SKUs' they'd have back home, be it beverages, baked goods, chilled foodstuff, frozen meats, fresh vegetables, sauces and chutneys, spices and even cosmetics, 'homeware,' books, music and right down to the local newspapers. "

Even the supermarket staff will be Sri Lankan to give it added authenticity. Jayasinghe said that to maintain standards the company has decided to approach Sri Lankan companies behind these brands directly. A central purchasing unit is located in Negombo where all products will be received before being sent to Dubai.

With success in its core business sectors that include Real Estate and Investments, Foliage and Hospitality and Specialty Services, the success of AMG International according to Gunasekera lies in the high level of professionalism displayed by the AMG team of experts who are sensitive to customer needs in all spheres of activity.

Gunasekera says he couldn't have picked a better team to work with and is thankful for the talent and dedication his staff brings to the business.