

## Al Adil readying 20 supermarkets across the Gulf in the next 2 years

From running a kirana store to establishing a chain of supermarkets, it has been quite a journey for Dhananjay Datar, Dubai based Maharashtra entrepreneur and Managing Director of Al Adil Group. With a dirham 450 million empire spread across the Gulf, he is now better known as the 'Masala King'. His flagship food brand Peacock already sells spices, staples, jams, canned foods, to Indian palates in Gulf countries as he seriously weighs foraying into the ready to eat and instant food segment. The products are mainly being sourced from his Mumbai based company, Masala King Exports. Datar who was in Navi Mumbai to open a swanky new office and a large warehouse, spoke to DNA Money about how he managed to do it all from scratch and what drives the growth momentum.

From running a kirana store to establishing a chain of supermarkets, it has been quite a journey for **Dhananjay Datar**, Dubai-based Maharashtra entrepreneur and managing director of Al Adil Group. With a dirham 450 million empire spread across the Gulf, he is now better known as the 'masala king'. His flagship food brand Peacock already sells spices, staples, jams, canned foods to Indian palates in Gulf countries as he seriously weighs foraying into the ready-to-eat and instant food segment. The products are mainly being sourced from his Mumbai-based company, Masala King Exports. Datar, who was in Navi Mumbai to open a swanky new office and a large warehouse, spoke to DNA Money about how he managed to do it all from scratch and what drives the growth momentum. Edited excerpts:

—Ravi Jadhav

## Al Adil readying 20 supermarkets across the Gulf in the next 2 years

**How did you establish your business in a foreign land, and how did you expand over the years?**

At 20, I went to Dubai and joined my father, who had just set up a grocery store there. He had realised the potential for an Indian spices and food specialty store that would cater to different Indian communities there. After five years, I took over from him. Over time, we started supplying our products to restaurants and five-star hotels. We set up a larger factory and also opened newer stores in Sharjah and Abu Dhabi. Today, we run 19 supermarkets across the UAE and have two flour mills and two factories while four new supermarkets are in

the pipeline in Sharjah and Dubai. Peacock, our own brand under which we sell flour, pulses, spices and dry fruits, has already taken the numero uno position in Dubai.

**How do you plan to expand over the next few years?**

We now are in the process of expanding our supermarkets to areas like Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. There is no other player in the Gulf that competes with us on Indian products, but there are many Indians there... We have just set up a huge warehouse in Navi Mumbai to meet the rising demand of exports. We will now be exporting 300 tonnes of Indian products per day to Gulf countries under the Peacock brand. Three years ago, it was only 50 tonnes. From India, we also export several brands across ready-to-eat snacks, jams, pickles, thereby helping hundreds of regional vendors. Today, Al Adil is selling more than 5,000 food items and other products in the Gulf through the supermarkets, most of which are sourced from India.

**Would you ever expand your business to India?**

I feel the opportunity in the Gulf itself is very good. We have been in this business for

28 years now and have found the laws very friendly to expand the business. In India, there are many restrictions, and the laws are not very easy. With a turnover of dirham 450 million, our expansion is in top gear. Our plan is to open 20 new supermarkets across Gulf countries over the next two years.

**Tell us about your supermarkets, what all do they sell?**

Our supermarkets known as Al Adil supermarkets are across sizes of 4,000 sq ft, 5,000 sq ft, 8,000 sq ft, and 10,000 sq ft. They are entirely different from others as we sell only Indian products — be it food, personal care, beverages, household care, appliances, or utensils. In products, we want to expand our range to 2,000 products within the next 6 months. We have already entered categories like canned foods, pickles, jams, and now we want to enter ready to eat, instant food space and expand categories like canned foods.

**If ever a larger company offers to acquire you, will you sell?**

I have been asked this question for the first time. This is very overwhelming. The company has given us everything — respect, money, identity. I can never even think of a sale.

### Q&A

Dhananjay Datar

Edited Experts:

**Q. How did you establish your business in a foreign land, and how did you expand over the year?**

A. At 20, I went to Dubai and joined my father, who had just setup a grocery store there. He had realized the potential for an Indian spices and food specialty store that cater to different Indian communities there. After five years I took over from him. Over time, we started supplying our products to restaurant and five star hotels. We set up a larger factory and also opened newer stores in Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. Today, we run 19 supermarkets across the UAE and two factories while four new supermarkets are in the pipeline in Sharjah and Dubai. Peacock, our own brand under which we sell flour, pulses, spices and dry fruits, has already taken the numero uno position in Dubai.

**Q. How do you plan to expand over the next few years?**

A. We are now in the process of expanding our supermarkets to areas like Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. There is no other player in the Gulf that competes with us on Indian products, but there are many Indians there. We have just set up a huge warehouse in Navi Mumbai to meet the rising demand of exports. We will now be exporting 300 tonnes of Indian products per day to Gulf countries under the Peacock brand. Three years ago, it was only 50 tonnes. From India, we also export several brands across ready to eat snacks, jams, pickles, thereby helping hundreds of regional vendors. Today, Al Adil is selling more than 5000 food items and other products in the Gulf through the supermarkets, most of which are sourced from India.

**Q. Would you ever expand your business to India?**

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**Q. Tell us about your supermarkets, what all do they sell?**

A. Our supermarkets known as Al Adil Supermarkets are across sizes of 4000 sq. ft., 5000 sq. ft., 8000 sq. ft. and 10,000 sq. ft. They are entirely different from others as we sell only Indian products - be it food, personal care, beverages, household care, appliances, or utensils. In products, we want to expand our range to 2000 products within the next 6 months. We have already entered categories like canned foods, pickles, jams, instant food space and expand categories like canned foods.

**Q. If ever a larger company offers to acquire you, will you sell?**

A. I have asked this question for the first time. This is very overwhelming. The company has given us everything - respect, money, identity. I can never ever think of a sale.