



CEO Clubs Network®

# CEO Clubs Network

## No.1 Business Network

December 2025  
ISSUE 68

CEO CLUBS HOSTED  
8TH BURJ CEO  
AWARDS 2025 &  
SUMMIT IN DUBAI

CEO CLUBS  
PARTNERS WITH  
INSURANCEMARKET.AE

DELEGATION TO  
CHINA 2026  
SPRING



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD  
**DR. NERMIN MAKUL**  
FOUNDER, MIBIT

8<sup>TH</sup> EDITION  
BURJ CEO  
AWARDEES

# CEO Clubs Network

Connecting Minds,  
Creating Opportunities

## Our Services

- **Community Building**
- **Event Marketing**
- **Communication**
- **Trade & Investment Promotion**
- **Leadership & Excellence Award**
- **Entity Formation**

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**CEO Clubs Network®**

**CEO Clubs Network** is an award-winning, globally recognized organization specializing in community building, event marketing, communications, entity formation, trade and investment promotion. Our purpose is to nurture relationships, share knowledge, and create opportunities for C-level executives across the private and government sectors. With a strong presence in USA, UAE, and China, we distinguish ourselves by providing tailored advice, fostering strategic collaborations, and empowering businesses to thrive within an influential global network.

Our regional headquarter, CEO Clubs Network UAE, has been in the industry for more than 19 years. Showcasing a list of high-profile members plus 3,000 affiliations, our organization is grateful for the patronage of **His Highness Sheikh Juma bin Maktoum Al Maktoum, a member of Dubai royal family**.

We are a proud winner of the **Dubai Quality Appreciation Awards Cycle 2017 and 2022** which were presented by **His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai**.

Among our numerous major international awards, we are elated with EXPO 2020 Dubai Recognition by His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman & Group **CEO of EXPO 2020 Dubai Higher Committee for our invaluable contribution to the success of EXPO 2020 Dubai**.

## MISSION

CEO Clubs Network creates the most effective business platform for CEOs and Seniors Executives to share experiences, explore opportunities and grow business locally and internationally.



@ceoclubsnetwork



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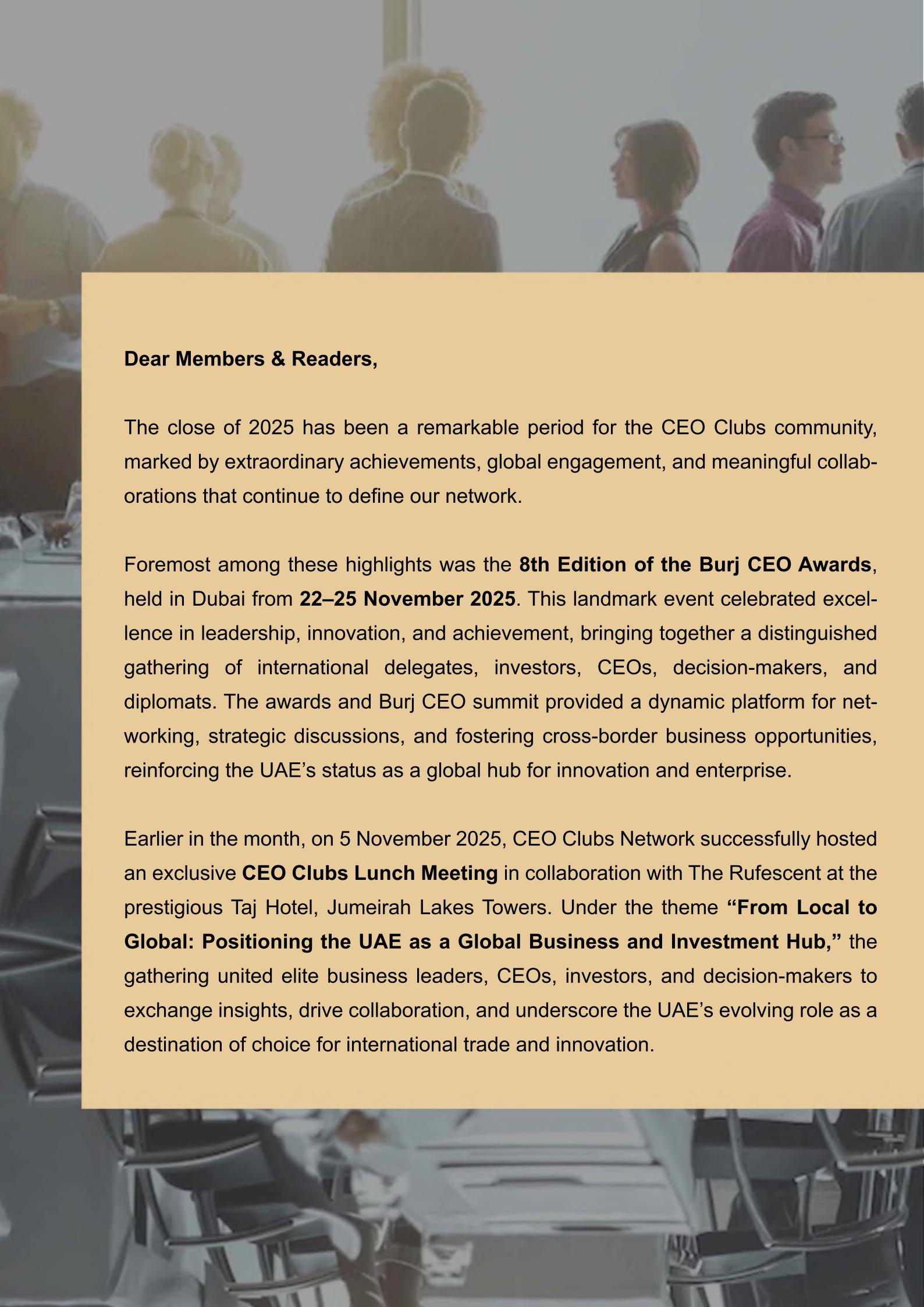
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**Dear Members & Readers,**

The close of 2025 has been a remarkable period for the CEO Clubs community, marked by extraordinary achievements, global engagement, and meaningful collaborations that continue to define our network.

Foremost among these highlights was the **8th Edition of the Burj CEO Awards**, held in Dubai from **22–25 November 2025**. This landmark event celebrated excellence in leadership, innovation, and achievement, bringing together a distinguished gathering of international delegates, investors, CEOs, decision-makers, and diplomats. The awards and Burj CEO summit provided a dynamic platform for networking, strategic discussions, and fostering cross-border business opportunities, reinforcing the UAE's status as a global hub for innovation and enterprise.

Earlier in the month, on 5 November 2025, CEO Clubs Network successfully hosted an exclusive **CEO Clubs Lunch Meeting** in collaboration with The Rufescent at the prestigious Taj Hotel, Jumeirah Lakes Towers. Under the theme "**From Local to Global: Positioning the UAE as a Global Business and Investment Hub**," the gathering united elite business leaders, CEOs, investors, and decision-makers to exchange insights, drive collaboration, and underscore the UAE's evolving role as a destination of choice for international trade and innovation.



A key highlight of the afternoon was the CEO Clubs Category Partnership **MoU Signing Ceremony between CEO Clubs Network and InsuranceMarket.ae**, marking a pivotal step toward enhanced corporate collaboration and shared growth initiatives.

Looking ahead, our global journey continues with the **CEO Clubs Delegation to China 2026**. Scheduled from **21–25 April 2026 in Shanghai and Guangzhou**, this initiative will focus on launching **CEO Clubs China - Shanghai Chapter**, Business Matchmaking & Outsourcing Opportunities, enabling our members to explore new markets, form strategic partnerships, and strengthen international business ties.

As we reflect on the successes of this vibrant season, we are inspired by the energy, vision, and leadership that our community brings to the global stage. Together, we continue to build bridges, unlock opportunities, and shape the future of business worldwide.

Warm regards,  
**Sarah Dong**  
**Editor-in-Chief | CEO Clubs Magazine**



## Burj CEO Awards 2025 Honor Global

**24 November 2025, Dubai, UAE: The 8th Edition of the Burj CEO Awards** returned to Dubai for 2025 to celebrate the global leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs shaping tomorrow's business landscape. Created and organized by CEO Clubs Network, this year's ceremony was staged under the theme '**Leading the Future: Innovation in Action**', spotlighting the vision, creativity, and transformative leadership of the evening's award winners.

The ceremony, hosted by renowned television and radio presenter Tom Urquhart, celebrated winners from an impressive cross-section of industries, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), drone technology, and sustainable development innovation.

Recognized globally as the 'Oscars of the business world, since their inception in Washington, D.C. in 2016, the awards have traveled across the globe, from London in 2017 to Istanbul

# Burj CEO Awards

December 2025 - Dubai, UAE



## Leaders, Innovators and Entrepreneurs

in 2024, celebrating over 400 leaders and organizations to date and serving as an influential platform for connection, partnership, and innovation.

Honoring decades of visionary leadership and influence in advancing next-generation technologies, the prestigious **Lifetime Achievement Award for 2025** was presented to **Dr. Nermin Makul, Founder of MiBit**, a pioneer in tech innovation.



The **Burj CSR Award** was presented to **Fadi Salameh, Managing Director of PFC Group**, a firm delivering cutting-edge construction solutions,

while **Athanasios Polychronopoulos**, Chairman & CEO of circular economy leaders, **POLYGREEN**, was named the Sustainability Champion of the Year.

Innovation was celebrated across several sectors, including the fast growing field of drone technology. **Enrique Plaza, CEO of Microavia**, received the **Global Excellence Award in Drone Technology** for pioneering advancement in the sector. The Best AI Solutions Company of the Year was awarded to **Milad Habibi, Founder & CEO of optifo.ai**, for delivering cutting-edge artificial intelligence innovations. Women leaders took center stage once again with the Woman Leadership of the Year Award, which was presented to **Phakapan Salao, Founder & CEO of Mongkol Muay Thai Corp.**

The future of entrepreneurship was in the spotlight as 22-year-old **Laurens Mannaert, Co-Founder of Boat Trips Club**, was honored as the Youngest Entrepreneur of the Year, celebrating the next generation of business leaders. The event also recognized outstanding contributors with the CEO Clubs Member of the Year Award, presented jointly to **Nadirra Aleem of Naddira Couture and Iqbal Hothur of Hothur Ispat India Private Limited**, while **Professor Selva Pankaj, Chairman & CEO of Regent Global**, was named Forward-Thinking CEO of the Year.

The Start-up Company of the Year was awarded to **Boat Trips Club, and Dr. Sara Khorakiwala, Owner President of Ra by Mastercuts**, was recognized as the Most Influential Woman Leader of the Year. The Global Innovation Excellence Award was presented to **SA Global, and Sia N. Ashok, Managing Partner of Conuity Capital Partners**, was celebrated as Innovation Business Leader. Additionally, **Dr. Kathleen Verleysen, CEO of miDiagnostics**, received the Exemplary Woman of Achievement Award, reflecting the spirit of leadership, innovation, and excellence that defines the Burj CEO Awards.

**Herve Heully, CEO and Founder of NEW3S**, received the Burj Innovation Award, while **Dr. Gennaro Lanza, Founder & CEO of DB Financial**, was named Best Entrepreneur CEO of the Year, and **Rehan Khan, Founder & CEO of Rabb IT Solutions GmbH**, was recognized as European CEO of the Year. **Samer Halteh** was honored with Capital Markets Executive of the Year, while **AIMS International Gulf** received Gulf Best HR Solutions Company 2025 and **optifo.ai** was recognized as Best AI Solutions Company of the Year.

**MUMUSO** received the Fastest Growing Retail Group Award, and **Dr. Tharshiny Pankaj, Group CEO of Regent Global**, was named Outstanding Woman Entrepreneur of the Year.

Other notable honorees included **Vinod Nambiar**, CEO of Vintron Group of Companies, for Visionary Business Excellence; **Captain Pradeep Singh, Founder and Chairman of KARMA Developers**, as Global Business Titan of the Year; **Igor Ilievski**, CEO & Founder of MkMage.com, for Lifetime Achievement Award in Technology; and **Charles Kadri**, Founder & CEO of Abitec Building Contracting LLC, as Best Luxury Villa Builder of the Year.

**Sayed Habib**, Director of Danube Home, received Retail Visionary Leader Award, while **Sayyed Abbas Shah**, CEO of Adam Holdings, was recognized as Middle East CEO of the Year, and **CG Invest** was also honored as Best Fintech Company of the Year.

Additional awards included **Shekhar Natarajan, Founder & CEO of Orchestro.AI**, as AI Visionary of the Year; **Christoph Stock**, Partner at TNG Technology Consulting, for IT Resilience & Recovery Excellence Award; **Ajmal Saifi**, CEO of Prestige One Developments, as Luxury Lifestyle Developer of the Year; and **Ankur S. Arora**, Senior Regional Director at DDN Storage, for Outstanding Contribution to AI Infrastructure in MENA. **ISTO Architecture** was recognized as Architecture Firm of the Year, **United Advocates** as Law Firm of the Year, and Kamran Ghani, Chairman of **Empire Developments**, as Most Trusted Developer of the Year.

Other distinguished recipients included **Sanjay Sundaramoorthy**, CTO & Director of IT Enterprise Architecture at Blue Harvest, as Enterprise AI Transformation Leader; **Shabbir Merchant**, Founder & Chairman of Champion Group, for Legendary Leadership & Enterprise Excellence Award; **Neelivethil Rajeev**, Managing Director of ESPA Spain, for Distinguished Leadership in European-MENA Trade Integration; **Shiju Peetambaran**, CEO of Ascentia UAE, as Emerging CEO of the Year; **Anastasios Spanidis**, President of G.P.A. Ecosystem of Companies, for Excellence in Leadership & Strategic Advisory; **Dr. Pedro Ramos**, CEO of KEEPTALENT Portugal, as People Transformation CEO of the Year; **NGB Construction & Management** for Industrial Real Estate Developer of the Year; **Dr. Uros Nikolaj Pavkovic**, CEO of PDP LOGIS, for Rising Entrepreneur Award; and **Zohran K. Mamdani**, Mayor Elect of New York, as The Most Popular Mayor-Elect, reflecting the global scope of leadership, innovation, and excellence celebrated by the Burj CEO Awards, created by CEO Clubs Network.

Reflecting on this year's event, **Dr. Tariq A. Nizami, Founder & CEO of CEO Clubs Network**, said, "Our mission goes beyond building a trusted community; we are committed to celebrating the success of global leaders. Their exceptional leadership and excellence merit dedicated recognition. Through meaningful gatherings and shared inspiration, we drive positive change and lasting impact together."

## 8<sup>th</sup> Burj CEO Awards 2025





## 8<sup>th</sup> Burj CEO Awards 2025









# 8th Burj CEO Awards 2025

## Leading the Future: Innovation in Action

This year's edition marked yet another milestone as global visionaries, groundbreaking innovators, and powerhouse entrepreneurs came together in Dubai for a spectacular celebration of excellence. From inspiring success stories to dynamic new partnerships, the Awards truly lived up to their title as the "Oscars of the Business World."

Set against Dubai's iconic skyline, the evening showcased trailblazing leadership, world-class achievements, and the unstoppable spirit of innovation that defines today's global business landscape. Thank you to all our distinguished winners, partners, and guests for making this event a resounding success.

Together, we're not just celebrating greatness - we're shaping the future of business.

**45**  
Awardees

**100+**  
International  
Delegates

**6**  
Panel  
Discussions

**300+**  
Business Summit  
Attendees

**300+**  
Awards Gala  
Attendee

## Previous Host Countries



 Dubai  
UAE - 2025



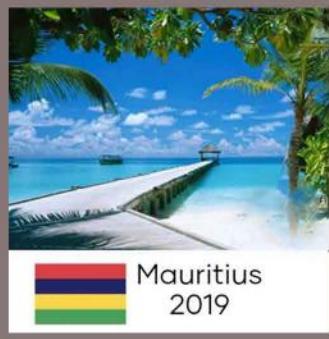
 Istanbul  
Turkiye, 2024



 Mediterranean  
Cruise, 2023



 World EXPO  
UAE - 2022



 Mauritius  
2019



 Shenzhen,  
China - 2018



 London  
UK - 2017



 Washington,  
USA - 2016



## Connecting Minds, Creating Opportunities

### About CEO Clubs Network

CEO Clubs Network is an award-winning, globally recognized organization specializing in **community building, event marketing, communications, global outsourcing, trade and investment promotion**. Our purpose is to nurture relationships, share knowledge, and create opportunities for C-level executives across the private and government sectors. With a strong presence in USA, UAE, and China, we distinguish ourselves by providing tailored advice, fostering strategic collaborations, and empowering businesses to thrive within an influential global network.

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We are a proud winner of the **Dubai Quality Appreciation Awards 2017 and 2022** which were presented by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai. CEO Clubs received a special "**EXPO 2020 Dubai Recognition**" from the Chairman of Expo 2020 Dubai, H.H. Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, for its invaluable contributions to the success of the event

[\*\*CLICK HERE TO JOIN!\*\*](#)



### Panel Discussion 1: The AI-Powered C-Suite: From Hype to Hyper-Growth



#### Moderator:

**Dr. Malik Dzirlo, Chairman, American Keystone Equities & Capital Group**

#### Panelists:

**Mr. Igor Ilievski, CEO & Founder, MkMage.com**

**Mr. Sanjay Sundaramoorthy, CTO & Director of IT Enterprise Architecture;  
Head of GenAI & Agentic AI, Blue Harvest**

**H.E. Maher Al Kaabi, Co-Founder Blink & Chairman BoG, Al Serkal Group.**

**Mr. Farrukh Nizami, IT Expert, CTTC**

**Mr. Shekhar Natarajan, Founder & CEO, Orchestro.AI**

**“The AI-Powered C-Suite: From Hype to Hyper-Growth”** explores how top executives can integrate artificial intelligence into corporate strategy to drive rapid growth. Panelists highlight how AI adoption at the leadership level can transform decision-making, streamline operations, and fuel innovation. They discuss balancing hype with realistic implementation, emphasizing governance, data strategy, and change management.

The panel argues that for AI to succeed, C-suites must commit to a clear vision, invest in talent and infrastructure, and treat AI as a long-term strategic asset rather than a short-term experiment.



# 8th Burj CEO Summit

24 November 2025, Dubai



Smart, Sustainable, and Connected: The Cities of Tomorrow



**Dr. Aftab Hassan**  
Founder & Chairman  
GAIP | Risk Exchange (DIFC)



**Fadi Salameh**  
Managing Director  
PFC Group



**Capt. Pradeep Singh**  
Founder & Chairman  
Karma Developers



**Ellen Mannaert**  
Serial Entrepreneur &  
Impact Leader Driving  
Change in Textiles,  
Fashion, Hospitality and Real Estate



**Waseem Ashqar**  
Managing Director  
Helukabel Middle East DWC



## Panel Discussion 2: Smart, Sustainable, and Connected: The Cities of Tomorrow



**Moderator:**

**Dr. Aftab Hassan, Founder & Chairman - GAIP | Risk Exchange (DIFC) Limited**

**Panelists:**

**Mr. Fadi Salameh, Managing Director, PFC Group**

**Capt. Pradeep Singh, Founder & Chairman, Karma Reality**

**Ellen Mannaert, short: serial entrepreneur, transformation coach, co-author, and international speaker**

**Mr. Waseem Ashqar, Managing Director, Helukabel Middle East DWC LLC**

**“Smart, Sustainable, and Connected: The Cities of Tomorrow”** discusses how urban development is evolving to meet rising demands for sustainability, connectivity, and livability. Speakers highlight integrating smart infrastructure, green design, and digital technologies (like IoT and data-driven planning) to build cities that are efficient, environmentally friendly, and responsive. They emphasize the need for collaboration between governments, private sector, and communities to create inclusive urban spaces. The conversation underlines that future cities should balance technological innovation with human-centered design, resilience to climate change, and sustainable growth.



### Panel Discussion 3: Innovation Frontiers: Harnessing Startup Energy for Next-Level Growth



#### Moderator:

**Ms. Alexandra Timotheadi, Founder & Managing Director, Anthology Honey**

#### Panelists:

**Mr. Herve HEULLY, CEO & Founder, NEW3S**

**Mr. Maurits Mannaert, Founder, Boat Trips Club**

**Dr. Kathleen Verleysen, CEO, miDiagnostics**

**Dr. Tariq Nizami, Founder & CEO, CEO Clubs Network**

**“Innovation Frontiers: Harnessing Startup Energy for Next-Level Growth”** explores how startups can drive innovation and scale rapidly. The speakers discuss building a culture of creativity, leveraging agile teams, and balancing risk with structured strategy. They highlight the importance of mentorship, resilient funding strategies, and embracing failure as part of growth.

The panel underscores how young companies can disrupt traditional industries by staying adaptive, focusing on mission-driven goals, and using innovation to carve out new market spaces.



# 8th Burj CEO Summit

24 November 2025, Dubai



## The New World Order of Capital: Private Markets, Emerging Frontiers and the Hunt for Alpha



**Ramesh Mahalingam**  
Managing Director  
Ideal Capital Management  
Consultants



**Avinash Babur**  
Founder & CEO  
InsuranceMarket.ae



**Dr. Gennaro Lanza**  
Founder & CEO  
DB Financial



**Sajith Kumar P K**  
Group CEO & MD  
IBMC Financial Professionals  
Group



**Dr. Stephen Yue**  
Chairman  
China Cross Border  
Development Group



**Dr. Srinder P Singh**  
Advisory Council of Comptroller,  
State of Maryland



## Panel Discussion 4: The New World Order of Capital: Private Markets, Emerging Frontiers and the Hunt for Alpha



### Moderator:

**Mr. Ramesh Mahalingam, Managing Director, Ideal Capital Management Consultants**

### Panelists:

**Dr. Gennaro Lanza, Founder & CEO, DB Financial**

**Mr. Avinash Babur ACH, CEO, InsuranceMarket.ae™**

**Mr. Sajith Kumar P K, Group CEO & MD., IBMC Financial Professionals Group**

**Dr. Stephen Yue, Chairman , China Cross Border Development Group.**

**Dr. Srinder P Singh, Advisory Council of Comptroller, State of Maryland**

**“The New World Order of Capital: Private Markets, Emerging Frontiers and the Hunt for Alpha”** dives into how global capital flows are shifting toward private markets and frontier economies. Panelists explore strategies for identifying high-yield opportunities outside traditional public equities or developed markets.

They emphasize the growing role of alternative investments in seeking “alpha” (above-market returns), especially in regions or sectors with high growth potential. The conversation also covers the risks involved from political instability to regulatory uncertainty — and argues that careful due diligence and local insight are essential for capitalizing on these frontier opportunities.



### Panel Discussion 5: Inclusive Intelligence, The New DNA of High-Performing Leadership



#### Moderator:

**Ms. Lula Mohanty, Managing Partner - MEA, IBM Consulting**

#### Panelists:

**Mr. Laurens Mannaert, Co-Founder, Boat Trips Club**

**Dr. Tharshiny Pankaj, Group CEO, Regent Global**

**Mr. Anastasios Spanidis, President, G.P.A. Ecosystem of Companies**

**Ms. Reem Mahrat, CEO and Founder, Eaze Bio**

**“Inclusive Intelligence: The New DNA of High-Performing Leadership”** explores how diversity, empathy, and emotional intelligence are reshaping leadership in modern organizations. Panelists argue that beyond traditional metrics like efficiency or profit, inclusive intelligence which involves trust, empathy, collaboration, psychological safety — is becoming essential for high performance.

They discuss how inclusive leaders foster environments where diverse teams feel valued, which drives creativity, resilience and stronger team dynamics. The conversation emphasizes that inclusive intelligence isn't just “nice to have” it's critical for sustainable success and innovation in today's complex, global business landscape.



# 8th Burj CEO Summit

24 November 2025, Dubai



The Boardroom's New Battlefield:

Leadership, Cybersecurity & Digital Resilience as a Competitive Advantage



**Kyriakos Kofinas**  
CEO & Founding Partner  
AIMS International Gulf



**Rehan Khan**  
Founder & CEO  
Rabb IT Solutions



**Theo Kitsos**  
Board Services Consultant  
AIMS International



**Prof. Selva Pankaj**  
Chairman & CEO  
Regent Global



**Dr. Sara Khorakiwala**  
Owner President  
Ra by Mastercuts  
the Unisex Salon



**Sayyed Abbas Shah**  
CEO  
Adam Holdings



**Christoph Stock**  
Partner, Autor  
TNG Technology  
Consulting



## Panel Discussion 6: The Boardroom's New Battlefield: Leadership, Cybersecurity & Digital Resilience as a Competitive Advantage



**Moderator: Mr. Kyriakos Kofinas, CEO & Founding Partner, AIMS International Gulf**

### Panelists:

**Mr. Rehan Khan, Founder & CEO, Rabb IT Solutions**

**Mr. Theo Kitsos, Board Services Consultant, AIMS International**

**Pro. Selva Pankaj, Chariman & CEO, Regent Global**

**Mr. Sayyed Abbas Shah, CEO, Adam Holdings**

**Dr. Sara Khorakiwala, Owner President, Ra by Mastercuts the Unisex Salon**

**Mr. Christoph Stock, Partner & Author, TNG Technology Consulting**

The panel argues that cybersecurity is no longer just an IT concern it must live at the highest levels of corporate leadership. Boards must embed cyber risk and digital resilience into their core strategy, treat breaches and disruptions as inevitable, and invest in detection, recovery, and preparedness not just prevention.

They should demand clear, business-centric reporting on cyber risk, oversee incident response planning, ensure adequate resources, and foster a culture of continuous vigilance. In short: cyber resilience must be a board-level priority, shaping governance, budgets, and enterprise-wide accountability.



## Lifetime Achievement Award

### **Dr. Nermin Makul** **Founder, MiBit**

**Dr. Nermin Makul**, often hailed as the “German Steve Jobs,” is a visionary inventor and scientist with multiple doctoral degrees and over 30 years of groundbreaking achievements. His work spans product development, design, technological innovation, and applied science, consistently pushing the limits of what is possible.

Dr. Makul’s pioneering creations including radiation-free phones, laptops, tablets, payment rings, and a host of life-enhancing technologies reflect his commitment to human safety and environmental sustainability.



Guided by compassion and driven by innovation, he continues to inspire a new era of ethical, human-centered technology that protects people and the planet.

MiBitLabs: Inspired innovation for a life that's safe, secure, and truly yours.





## Best Construction and Engineering Company of the Year

### PFC Group

**PFC Group** provides specialized solutions for construction, concrete repairing, and weatherproofing, delivering dependable services that enhance the strength, safety, and longevity of structures. With technical expertise and a commitment to quality, the company addresses critical industry needs from restoring and reinforcing damaged concrete to protecting buildings against harsh weather conditions. Through these tailored solutions, PFC Group continues to support durable, high-performance construction across a wide range of projects.



In addition to its core services, PFC Group applies a problem-solving approach to every project, delivering customized solutions using advanced materials, modern techniques, and strict quality controls. This ensures long-lasting results that reduce maintenance costs and enhance structural performance.



## Exemplary Woman of Achievement

### Dr. Katleen Verleysen CEO, miDiagnostics

**Dr. Katleen Verleysen** is the CEO of **miDiagnostics**, with a distinguished career spanning life sciences and healthcare. She has held multiple managerial and CEO roles across the United States and Europe and serves on several sector boards. Recognized for her leadership excellence, Katleen was named CEO of Europe in her field for two consecutive years and has received numerous other awards.

# miDiagnostics

She holds a Ph.D. in Analytical Chemistry and completed postdoctoral research at Duke University Medical Centre's Department of Pharmacology and Cancer Biology. Katleen is dedicated to driving innovation and advancing healthcare solutions globally, delivering impact through scientific and strategic leadership.



## Innovation Business Leader

### Sia N Ashok Managing Partner, Conuity Capital Partners

**Sia** is a distinguished professional known for her expertise in design thinking, product optimization, and sustainable growth. As Managing Partner of a Growth Equity Firm, she excels in sourcing and structuring investments while driving value creation through strategic initiatives. With over 15 years of experience in business transformation, she has successfully led ERP/SAP implementations and optimized Finance, Procurement, and HR processes using Lean Six Sigma and Agile methodologies.



Her entrepreneurial mindset and commitment to efficiency deliver tangible results for clients. A thought leader and wellness advocate, Sia fosters a culture of continuous improvement, integrating holistic practices into her leadership and approach to organizational success.



## Forward Thinking CEO of the Year

**Professor Selva Pankaj**  
**Chairman & CEO, Regent Global**

**Professor Selva Pankaj**, Joint CEO of Regent Global, arrived in the UK from Sri Lanka at 19 with just £100, forging a remarkable journey from refugee to global business leader. A qualified Chartered Management Accountant, he held senior roles at Prudential Financial, Schroders, and Fortress Investment Group before co-founding Regent Global in 1999 with his wife, Tharshiny. Under his leadership, the group has expanded into education, real estate, and investment, becoming a multinational enterprise.



An author and philanthropist, Selva champions innovation, unity, and education through initiatives like the Global Unity Forum and the Pankaj Foundation, inspiring others to create meaningful impact.



**Start-up Company of the Year**

**Boat Trips Club**  
**Maurits Mannaert, Founder**

**Maurits Minnaert** is the Founder of **Boat Trips Club**, a global travel brand operating across the Caribbean, Central America, Africa, and the Middle East. He leads the company's international expansion, developing strategic partnerships and B2B collaborations that drive sustained growth across key destinations. With expertise in e-commerce, tourism, and operations, Maurits focuses on creating scalable systems and optimizing performance for long-term success.



Beyond travel, he advises startups on expansion strategy and organizational development, and is actively involved in real estate investment, emphasizing portfolio growth and value creation in emerging markets.



**Herve Heully**  
CEO & Founder  
**NEW3S**

**New3s**

**The Burj CEO Awards**  
8th Edition

**Burj Innovation Award**

**Herve Heully**  
CEO & Founder, NEW3S

**Hervé Heully** is the Founder and CEO of **NEW3S**, a French deep-tech company pioneering secure 3D web technologies. An inventor with multiple patents, including a granted U.S. patent, he created Stealth Data, a breakthrough solution for managing access, masking, and information disclosure in digital twins.

Through 3V.World® (Valued Virtual Visit), Hervé democratizes digital twin creation, transforming environments into immersive, secure experiences.



His work bridges technology, strategy, and trust, empowering industries from real estate to defense with measurable ROI, accelerated deployment, and sustainable digital growth, shaping the future of the metaverse economy.



### Most Influential Woman Leader

**Dr. Sara Taizoon Khorakiwala**

**Owner - President Ra by Mastercuts the Unisex Salon & Wellness Hub**

**Dr. Sara Khorakiwala** is a visionary entrepreneur and wellness economy pioneer, leading SwitzGroup, a global food and bakery enterprise employing over 9,000 across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. A qualified psychiatrist, she co-founded India's Sanjeevani suicide prevention initiative and champions human-centric leadership and cross-cultural fluency.

Her latest venture, Saranoura under Master Cuts, integrates mental health, aesthetics, and lifestyle therapy.



Beyond entrepreneurship, Dr. Sara advises boards, mentors founders, and invests in women-led, impact-driven ventures, building sustainable, generational legacies that prioritize dignity, cohesion, and societal impact across regulated and consumer-focused sectors.

# Sustainability Champion of the Year

**Athanassios Polychronopoulos**  
Chairman & CEO  
Polygreen



## Sustainability Champion of the Year

**Athanassios Polychronopoulos**  
Chairman & CEO, Polygreen

**Mr. Athanassios Polychronopoulos** is the Founder and Executive Chairman of **Polygreen S.A.**, a global leader in circular economy innovation, waste-management solutions, and pollution-response services. With over 20 years of international experience including more than a decade of active presence in the UAE he has led some of the world's most complex environmental projects. He also serves on the Board of SEV's Business Council for Sustainable Development and the UN Global Compact Network Hellas.



In 2021, he launched the Just Go Zero Tilos initiative, making Tilos the world's first island to divert 100% of its waste from landfill. He also founded the Polygreen Culture & Art Initiative, fostering global dialogue between contemporary art and environmental responsibility.



## Best Entrepreneur CEO of the Year

**Gennaro Lanza**  
**Founder & CEO, DB Financial**

**Gennaro Lanza** is the Founder and Group CEO of **DB Financial Ecosystem**, which includes DB Investing, DBI Prime, and DB Pay, operating across trading, payments, and institutional financial services. Based in Dubai, he leads the group's regulated global expansion with licenses from the UAE SCA, Seychelles FSA, and FINTRAC in Canada.



Recognized among the Top 50 Financial Markets CEOs in 2024 and 2025, Gennaro combines fintech innovation with compliance excellence. Originally from Italy, he envisions a unified "super-app" platform that enables clients worldwide to trade, pay, and invest securely and seamlessly.



## Engineering Excellence Award

**Shakeel Imam**  
**Managing Director, EDMAC Engineering Consultant**

**Shakeel Imam**, an IIT Delhi alumnus, founded **EDMAC Engineering Consultant** in the UAE 25 years ago with a vision to provide world-class engineering consultancy. Since then, EDMAC has delivered diverse projects across the Middle East and India, including luxury villas, residential towers, mixed-use developments, hotels, hospitals, medical colleges, infrastructure works, and unique concepts like philosophy houses.



Believing that “engineers are our greatest assets,” Shakeel emphasizes solutions grounded in strong design, safety, and performance. With expertise in planning, execution, and project management, EDMAC integrates architecture and engineering while upholding core values integrity, collaboration, empowerment, responsibility, and result orientation—to create lasting client value.



### Woman Leadership of the Year

**Phakapan Salao**  
**Founder & CEO, Mongkol MuayThai Corp**

**Ms. Phakapan Salao** is the Owner and Founder, CEO of **Mongkol**, the first fight gear brand created by a Thai woman in the USA.

Driven by her passion for Muay Thai and dedication to promoting Thai culture, she has built the brand with ambition and love for the sport. In 2023 and 2024, Mongkol became the first fight gear brand to appear on runways at New York Fashion Week and Milan Fashion Week.



The brand has also opened a retail fight gear store in downtown San Diego, bringing premium Muay Thai equipment directly to enthusiasts.



## Global Excellence Award in Drone Technology

**MICROAVIA**  
**Enrique Plaza, CEO**

**Microavia** is a pioneering aerospace company specializing in advanced drone technologies and autonomous systems. With a strong commitment to innovation and precision engineering, Microavia delivers cutting-edge solutions that redefine efficiency and safety in aerial operations.

Under visionary leadership, Microavia has achieved rapid global expansion through strategic international partnerships, establishing itself as a trusted name in the drone industry.

**MICROAVIA**

Today, Microavia continues to push the boundaries of technology, shaping the future of intelligent flight and next-generation aerospace solutions.



### European CEO of the Year

**Rehan Khan**  
**Founder & CEO, Rabb IT Solutions**

**Rehan Khan** is a former professional athlete, active motorsport driver, and certified IT security expert. As Founder and CEO of **Rabb IT Solutions**, he brings the discipline and precision of competitive sports to the digital world, transforming IT infrastructures for medium-sized businesses.

His team replaces IT chaos with clear structures, reliable standards, and growth-focused strategies, ensuring technology drives productivity.



Through modern Rabb GSZ cloud solutions, measurable response times, and fixed contacts, Rehan enables businesses to build secure, efficient, and future-ready IT systems powered by the same focus and determination that define him on the racetrack.



## Capital Markets Executive of the Year

**Samer Halteh**  
Managing Director, CG Invest

**Samer Halteh** is an accomplished entrepreneur and visionary leader in the financial services and fintech sectors. As the Managing Director of CG Invest, he has driven the company's global transformation, expanding across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia and launching new regulated entities in Dubai and Mauritius. Under his leadership, CG Invest has earned major industry recognition, including the Most Popular Broker Award 2024.

**cginvest**

Samer has championed AI-driven trading education tools, next-generation mobile platforms, and advanced client-management systems, reinforcing CG Invest's reputation for innovation. A 40 Under 40 honoree, he is committed to advancing financial literacy and mentoring the next generation of industry leaders.



## Gulf Best HR Solutions Company 2025

**Kyriakos Kofinas**  
**CEO & Founding Partner, AIMS International Gulf**

**Kyriakos** has over 30 years of executive experience across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, serving as Regional CEO, Business Director, and Board Member in sectors including FMCG, Medical, Retail, Energy, and Luxury.

He has worked with global brands such as P&G, Adidas, Safilo, and PPC, leading large-scale commercial, operational, and strategic initiatives.



As the Founding Partner of AIMS International Gulf (Dubai), he drives executive search, leadership assessment, and organizational transformation across the GCC and Jordan. A certified executive coach and recipient of the 2019 UAE "Most Outstanding CEO Coach" award, Kyriakos blends global insight with deep industry expertise to develop exceptional leaders.



**Best AI Solutions Company**

**Optifo.ai**  
**Milad Habibi, CEO & Founder**

**Optifo.ai** is a professional photo and video editing solution designed specifically for car dealerships. Its automated car editor app enables teams to produce consistent, high-quality images and videos with ease, ensuring every vehicle looks polished and ready for online display.



**OPTIFO.AI**

Optimize your online showroom

Powered by advanced AI technology, Optifo optimizes visuals for major online marketplaces, boosts engagement, and enhances your dealership's digital presence helping you stand out, attract buyers, and accelerate sales.



## Fastest Growing Retail Group Award

**MUMUSO**  
**Paul Wenjun Duan, General Manager**

**Mumuso** is a retail leader in the UAE, transforming lifestyle shopping across the MENA region. Driven by creativity, integrity, and teamwork, Mumuso delivers stylish, high-quality products that enrich everyday living.

The brand sets benchmarks in innovation and excellence, offering curated collections that blend design, affordability, and functionality.

**MUMUSO**

By combining trend-forward aesthetics with a strong commitment to customer experience, Mumuso inspires and connects with shoppers on a regional scale. With a clear purpose and consistent vision, the brand leads the way in lifestyle retail across the Middle East and North Africa.



## Global Innovation Excellence

### Shatlykmyrat Annamyradov CEO, SA Global Trading FZE

**Shatlykmyrat (Murat) Annamyradov**, Founder and CEO of **SA Global Trading**, is a next-generation agribusiness leader shaping the future of global fertilizer trade. Born in Turkmenistan and educated in the United States, he has built a multinational enterprise spanning more than twenty countries, with production and trading hubs in Dubai, Ashgabat, Istanbul, Spain, Buenos Aires, and soon Geneva. His work integrates logistics expertise with advanced digital finance and blockchain-enabled solutions.



Guided by the belief that fertilizer is the foundation of food security, Murat is pioneering the world's first tokenized fertilizer platform, designed to connect producers directly with farmers through a transparent, efficient ecosystem. His leadership blends innovation, sustainability, and ethical growth, positioning SA Global Trading and the Uplus Group at the forefront of agritech transformation and global agricultural resilience.



### Outstanding Woman Entrepreneur

**Dr. Tharshiny Pankaj**  
**Group CEO, Regent Global**

**Dr. Tharshiny Pankaj**, Joint CEO of Regent Global, moved to the UK from Sri Lanka at the age of 13 and later earned a BSc (Hons) in Computer Science from Brunel University. Alongside her husband, Selva, she co-founded Regent Global and has been instrumental in transforming it into a multinational group spanning education, real estate, and investment.



Under her leadership, the organisation expanded into the UAE, Malta, India, and the USA, launching Regent European University and several innovative education ventures. A committed philanthropist, Tharshiny supports global peace and sustainability initiatives through the Pankaj Foundation and has received numerous leadership and diversity awards.



## Visionary Business Excellence

### Vinod Nambiar CEO, Vintron Group of Companies

**Vinod Nambiar** is the Chairman and Managing Director of the Vintron Group of Companies, a leading business conglomerate in the Middle East encompassing six successful entities, including Media Vibes FZC. An alumnus of Victoria College (Chemistry) and the Indian Plastic Institute, Mumbai (Engineering), he is a self-made entrepreneur who has built Vintron into a trusted name across Automotive, Building Materials, and Technical Services.



فنترون للتجارة العامة ش.ذ.د  
**VINTRON**  
GENERAL TRADING L.L.C.

Recognized with the Visionary Leader Award at the Professional Excellence Awards – Middle East and a UAE Golden Visa holder, Mr. Nambiar also serves as President of the Sadudhyama Business Council and Dubai Sapphire Lions Club, demonstrating a strong commitment to social, cultural, and health initiatives.



## Global Business Titan of the Year

### Captain Pradeep Singh Founder and Chairman, Karma Developers

**Captain Pradeep Singh** is a Master Mariner turned global entrepreneur, known for driving success across maritime, technology, and real estate sectors. As Co-Founder of Karma Developers, one of Dubai's fastest-growing sustainable luxury real estate firms, he applies precision, financial acumen, and strategic vision to every project.

Drawing on his seafaring roots, Capt. Singh's leadership emphasizes resilience, discipline, and risk management.

# KARMA

With an MBA, MSc in Finance, LLM, Harvard OPM training, and global certifications including CPA, CMA, and CGMA, he also founded Aethon Group and Spectrum Networks. Under his guidance, Karma Developers delivers projects that combine affordable luxury with sustainability and LEED Platinum standards.



## Youngest Entrepreneur of the Year

**Laurens Mannaert**  
**Co-Founder, Boat Trips Club**

At 22, **Laurens Mannaert** is an emerging leader in global travel and hospitality innovation. As Co-Founder of Boat Trips Club, he drives the company's marketing and brand growth strategy, implementing performance-driven systems that generate thousands of bookings across international markets.

Laurens combines strategic vision with data-led execution to scale operations and enhance brand presence worldwide.



Beyond travel, he manages a portfolio of short-term rental properties and advises startups on growth and brand strategy. His professional focus centres on innovation, operational excellence, and delivering measurable impact in the evolving travel and hospitality industry.



### CEO Clubs Member of the Year

**Iqbal Hothur & Dr. Nadirra Aleem**

**Dr. Nadirra Aleem** is a dynamic leader inspired by a lineage of resilient, visionary women. As Managing Director of Naddira Couture and Director of Hothur Ispat India Private Limited, she bridges luxury fashion and industry, combining creativity with strategic leadership.

Committed to empowering women and creating meaningful impact, Dr. Nadirra has been recognized with an Honorary Doctorate in Social Welfare and as a Paul Harris Fellow by the Rotary Foundation.

**NADIRAA**  
STYLE REDEFINED

**HOTHUR ISPAT**

A producer and active contributor to the fashion community, she organizes and judges charity shows and serves on the Bangalore Fashion Week board, building a global legacy of excellence, innovation, and social contribution.

# Lifetime Achievement Award in Technology



## Lifetime Achievement Award in Technology

**Igor Ilievski**  
CEO & Founder, MkMage.com

**Igor Ilievski** is a visionary entrepreneur and co-founder of Amenex, a global AI-driven eCommerce technology company. Beginning his journey in 2002 from his grandfather's basement in Macedonia, he pioneered online art sales and later founded MkMage, generating over \$500 million in client revenue.

He also launched JMDigital, a fractional CMO agency, before focusing on Amenex, where he leads AI innovation through Amenexia.ai.

**AMENEX**  
ECOMMERCE UNLEASHED

Igor combines deep eCommerce expertise with artificial intelligence to enhance personalization, automation, and profitability for online brands worldwide, emphasizing trust-driven growth, operational efficiency, and scalable digital systems for long-term business success.



## Best Luxury Villa Builder of the Year

**Charles Kadri**  
**Founder & CEO, Abitec Building Contracting**

**Charles K.** is the visionary Founder and CEO of Abitec Contracting, a premier luxury villa, fit-out, and contracting firm in Dubai, bringing the legacy of Canada's renowned Abitec brand to the UAE.

With a passion for craftsmanship and design excellence, he leads a team dedicated to transforming ambitious client ideas into refined, tangible realities.



A seasoned entrepreneur with expertise in architecture, construction, and real estate, Charles drives Abitec's mission, "Quality is the Best Business Plan." Guided by a philosophy of purpose over profit, he fosters a culture focused on exceptional value, service, and long-lasting impact through every project.



## Retail Visionary Leader

### Sayed Habib Director, Danube Home

**Sayed Habib, Director of Danube Home**, is the driving force behind the brand's transformation into a regional retail powerhouse with a presence in over 10 countries.

With 20+ years in retail and consulting, he builds scalable business models, empowers frontline teams, and fosters a culture of freedom with accountability inspired by Netflix's high-performance philosophy.

**DANUBE HOME**

Under his leadership, Danube Home has expanded into markets like Madagascar, Qatar, and Kenya, achieved 50% revenue growth (2022–24), reimagined store operations, and launched Ahlan Loyalty 2.0. By integrating AI-driven CRM, inventory planning, and marketing automation, he has increased customer engagement and optimized operational efficiency.



### Middle East CEO of the Year

**Sayyed Abbas Shah  
CEO, Adam Holdings**

**Sayyed Abbas Shah** is a Canadian CPA and seasoned financial expert with over 24 years of experience across the UAE, UK, and Canada. As Managing Partner and Group CFO at Adam Global, he provides strategic leadership in accounting, audit, taxation, and advisory services, ensuring excellence and innovation across all operations.

A Fellow of ACCA (UK), IFA (UK), and CFC (Canada), Abbas holds a Master's in Financial Management from Middlesex University, London.



He has served clients across diverse sectors, including Big Four (KPMG), NGOs, financial institutions, healthcare, hospitality, logistics, and government entities, consistently delivering strategic financial solutions and value.



## Burj CSR Award

### PFC Group

**PFC Group** stands out as a leader in corporate social responsibility, integrating sustainability and social impact into its core values and operations. The company has made significant contributions to environmental protection through initiatives like large-scale tree plantations, recycling campaigns, and community clean-up drives. These ongoing efforts demonstrate PFC's genuine commitment to combating climate change and promoting environmental stewardship, rather than treating CSR as a mere formality.



Beyond environmental work, PFC Group actively supports humanitarian and community development programs, including disaster relief, food distribution, education support, and employee welfare initiatives. By combining global outreach with internal employee engagement, PFC exemplifies a holistic and impactful approach to CSR.



**Best Fintech Company of the Year**

**CG Invest**

**CG Invest** is a global investment and trading firm offering access to a wide range of financial markets, including forex, stocks, indices, commodities, and metals.

The company provides advanced trading platforms, flexible account types, and professional support, making it suitable for both beginners and experienced traders. With a focus on transparency, efficiency, and client satisfaction, CG Invest combines decades of market experience with modern technology to deliver reliable trading solutions.

**cginvest**

Its licensed operations and commitment to regulatory compliance reflect a dedication to building trust and empowering investors to pursue their financial goals with confidence.



## AI Visionary of the Year

**Shekhar Natarajan**  
Founder & CEO, Orchestro.AI

**Shekhar Natarajan**, born in Hyderabad, overcame significant adversity to emerge as a global leader in AI. As Founder and CEO of Orchestro.ai, he pioneers “Angelic Intelligence,” a human-first approach to technology that values people as the true asset.

With over 207 patents in AI, autonomous systems, and predictive technologies, his innovations have been applied across major corporations including Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Walmart, Disney, and Target.



Known for practical, dignity-centered AI solutions, Shekhar focuses on optimizing resources for impact and efficiency. A Harvard, Georgia Tech, IESE, and MIT alumnus, he has received the Medallion Award and Signature Awards Global Impact recognition for advancing ethical, human-focused innovation.



## IT Resilience & Recovery Excellence Award

**Christoph Stock**  
**Partner & Autor, TNG Technology Consulting**

**Christoph Stock** is an experienced technology executive, management consultant, and author with over 20 years in IT modernization.

As Partner and Chairman of TNG Technology Consulting, he oversees strategic governance for a 900-member firm and advises global enterprises on cloud transformation, AI-driven innovation, and system recovery.

**TNG**  **TECHNOLOGY  
CONSULTING**

He authored the *IT Rescue Guide*, providing practical strategies for managing technical debt and revitalizing failing IT systems. A sought-after speaker at Big Techday, Christoph is widely recognized for his expertise in agile transformation, enterprise architecture, and sustainable software quality, helping organizations achieve resilient, efficient, and future-ready IT landscapes.



## Luxury Lifestyle Developer of the Year

**Prestige One Developments**  
**Ajmal Saifi, CEO**

**Ajmal Saifi** is a Canadian entrepreneur and CEO of **Prestige One Developments**, one of Dubai's fastest-growing real estate firms.

With over 18 years of experience in Dubai and international markets, he is recognized as a visionary leader and billionaire investor, honored by the Dubai Land Department as a top non-institutional investor.

Under his leadership, Prestige One has launched more than 20 projects worth over AED 20 billion across iconic locations such as Palm Jumeirah,



Meydan, Dubai Islands, and Dubai Maritime City. Saifi has also driven branded residences, including the region's first waterfront Hilton residential tower, and expanded the company's global presence through high-profile partnerships like sponsoring the Argentina Football Association.



### Outstanding Contribution to the AI Infrastructure in MENA

**Ankur S. Arora**

**Senior Regional Director - Middle East & Africa, DDN Storage**

**Ankur S. Arora** serves as the Senior Regional Director for the Middle East and Africa at DDN Storage. In this role, he specializes in designing end-to-end AI and HPC clusters and crafting storage solutions that leverage GPU acceleration to enhance performance and operational efficiency.

He also provides advisory services to governments across the region, supporting public-sector programs focused on AI, HPC, and data-infrastructure strategy.



Recognized for his strategic vision and solution-oriented approach, Ankur demonstrates leadership in implementing advanced technological frameworks that meet the evolving needs of high-performance computing environments.

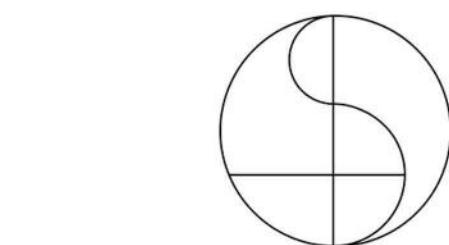


## Architecture Firm of the Year

**ISTO Architecture**  
**Serhii Bykov, Co-Founder**

**ISTO** brings creative energy to every project, reflecting individuality in each design. We reject compromise, crafting unique spaces that clients can confidently call their own, whether embracing balance and harmony or asymmetry and bold rebellion.

As a full-cycle architectural and interior design studio, we pride ourselves on delivering concise, intelligent, and contemporary solutions, treating each project as a distinct craft.



Guided by desire and thoughtful design, we provide tailored solutions from concept to implementation, respecting deadlines and refining every detail until our clients are completely satisfied with the final outcome.



**The Best Law Firm of the Year**  
**United Advocates**

**United Advocates** is a reputable law firm based in Dubai (HQ), that offers comprehensive and innovative legal solutions to meet the diverse needs of our clients. Our experienced and dedicated team of lawyers is highly passionate about delivering exceptional service and results. We pride ourselves on our ability to deeply understand our clients' unique needs and provide tailored services. With a commitment to integrity and professionalism, we uphold the highest standards in all our endeavors.



Whether you require corporate law advice, dispute resolution assistance, or legal guidance for government agencies, we possess the expertise and experience to help you achieve your objectives.

# Most Trusted Developer of the Year

Empire Developments

Kamran Ghani  
Chairman

EMPIRE

DEVELOPMENTS



## Most Trusted Developer of the Year

Empire Developments  
Kamran Ghani, Chairman

Under the visionary leadership of **Mr. Kamran Ghani**, Empire Developments has grown into a diverse group with interests spanning import-export, tourism, hospitality, automobile trading, and real estate. The company excels in client service, organizational efficiency, and financial expertise. A major milestone came in 2016 with the creation of Pazzo Development Real Estate LLC, further strengthening the group's presence in the property sector. Renowned for setting benchmarks in quality, transparency, and customer trust, Empire Developments continues to deliver iconic residential projects with precision and excellence.

EMPIRE  
DEVELOPMENTS

Today, Empire Developments stands as a dynamic conglomerate overseeing investments, subsidiaries, and trading ventures. Guided by a customer-centric vision that drives satisfaction and loyalty, the company leads the UAE real estate market with innovation, reliability, and meaningful impact.



## Enterprise AI Transformation Leader

### Sanjay Sundaramoorthy

**CTO & Director, IT Enterprise Architecture, Head of GenAI & Agentic AI - Blue Harvest**

**Sanjay Sundaramoorthy** is a visionary technology leader with more than 20 years of experience advancing enterprise AI, sovereign cloud, and digital transformation for highly regulated industries.

As CTO and Director of IT Enterprise Architecture, he drives modernization across the DACH region, overseeing multi-cloud platforms built on robust DevSecOps and cybersecurity foundations.

As Head of GenAI & Agentic AI, Sanjay operationalizes autonomous, policy-aware AI systems that align with DORA, GDPR, and NIS2 requirements.

His work ensures secure, compliant, and scalable innovation—turning advanced AI capabilities into measurable enterprise value.



## Legendary Leadership & Enterprise Excellence Award

### Shabbir Merchant Founder & Chairman, Champion Group

**Shabbir Merchant, Founder & Chairman of Champion Group**, is a visionary leader who has shaped Dubai's business landscape for more than four decades.

His stewardship of Champion reflects an unwavering commitment to integrity, innovation, and entrepreneurial excellence, positioning the company as a trusted industry leader and a benchmark for quality and progress.



Widely respected for his transformative vision, Shabbir Merchant has set enduring standards in leadership, business growth, and industry influence. His legacy continues to inspire, defined by impactful decision-making, sustainable enterprise development, and a long-standing dedication to elevating the region's commercial ecosystem.

For Distinguished Leadership in European-MENA Trade Integration

**Neelivethil Rajeev**  
Managing Director (MENA & APAC)  
ESPA Spain



**For Distinguished Leadership in European-MENA Trade Integration**

**Neelivethil Rajeev**  
**Managing Director (MENA & APAC) ESPA Spain**

From the boardrooms of Dubai to the design ateliers of Barcelona, **Dr. Neelivethil Rajeev** is a name that resonates across the UAE and beyond. With more than three decades of transformative leadership, he has redefined what it means to be a business visionary across the MENA and APAC regions. As the driving force behind ESPA's rise in MEP and HVAC excellence, he seamlessly blends engineering precision, marketing expertise, and a globally attuned mindset.



Dr. Rajeev is deeply embedded in elite professional circles from CEO Clubs Network and FSAI to a wide range of international business councils, including the Spanish, Italian, South African, Sri Lankan, Zimbabwean, Australian councils. Whether championing innovation, mentoring emerging talent, or forging cross-border partnerships, he operates with purpose, grace, & a vision that transcends industries.



## Emerging CEO of the Year

**Shiju Peetambaran**  
**CEO & Founder, Ascentia Global Corporate Services**

**Mr. Shiju Peetambaran** is a distinguished finance and business leader with over 22 years of experience in the UAE and India, specializing in audit, corporate structuring, consultancy, and financial advisory. As the Founder and Chairman of Ascentia, he has grown the firm from a solo venture launched in 2019 on Sheikh Zayed Road into a leading consultancy serving more than 4,500 clients across the GCC with services spanning audit, tax, business setup, accounting, corporate tax, ESR, AML, and feasibility studies.



Widely recognized for his visionary leadership, Mr. Peetambaran also serves as the Honorary Trade Commissioner – India Commonwealth Trade Council. His focus on integrating technology and process innovation has strengthened Ascentia's reputation for efficient, reliable, and intelligent service delivery.



### Rising Entrepreneur Award

**Dr. Uros Nikolaj Pavkovic**  
**CEO, PDP LOGIS Logistics Services**

**Dr. Uros Nikolaj Pavkovic** is one of the youngest CEOs in the region, leading PDP LOGIS and transforming it into a fast-rising logistics powerhouse spanning the EU and UAE. In his role as Vice President at BIT FZE Dubai, he drives bold global expansion and oversees high-level strategic operations, demonstrating a unique ability to navigate complex international markets.



A PhD legal expert and theologian, Dr. Pavkovic is known for his sharp intellect and values-driven leadership. He is the driving force behind digital, sustainable, and future-ready logistics innovations across two continents, combining visionary strategy with a commitment to ethical and impactful business practices.

8<sup>th</sup> Edition

## The Burj CEO Awards 2025

Dubai, UAE

### People Transformation CEO

**Pedro Ramos**

CEO

KeepTalent Portugal

 **KeepTalent**

CONECTANDO PESSOAS



### People Transformation CEO

**Pedro Ramos**  
CEO, KeepTalent Portugal

**Pedro Ramos** is the CEO of **KEEPTALENT Portugal**, a Lisbon-based consultancy operating across Portugal and several Portuguese-speaking countries, including Brazil, Cabo Verde, Angola, and Mozambique.

The company specializes in connecting people and strengthening corporate communication content through strategic, human-centered solutions.



Pedro brings strong academic and professional credentials to his leadership role. He holds a PhD in Business Economics, a Master's in Sociology of Employment, and a Bachelor's in Educational Sciences. In addition to his executive work, he is an author and a university professor in HR Management and Leadership.

8<sup>th</sup> Edition

## The Burj CEO Awards 2025

Dubai, UAE

### Industrial Real Estate Developer NGB Construction & Management



**Nicholas N. Bouri**  
Real Estate Developer

### Industrial Real Estate Developer

### NGB Construction & Management Nicholas N. Bouri, Real Estate Developer

For over 30 years, **N.G.B.** has been developing innovative and modern real estate projects across the CEE region. As a family-owned development group, we focus on long-term growth and returns, reinvesting our profits to add value to our assets while upholding the highest standards of business ethics.

Our team of experts combines deep market and industry knowledge with a flexible, client-centric approach, consistently delivering high-quality finished products.



Our developments are strategically located in key areas across several major cities and span industrial, commercial, and residential properties. To date, N.G.B. has maintained a 100% occupancy record in its industrial and commercial properties, partnering with some of the most recognized names in their industries.



**Excellence in Leadership & Strategic Advisory**

**Anastasios Spanidis**  
**President, G.P.A. Ecosystem of Companies**

**Anastasios J. Spanidis** is a global business leader, investor, and founder of Generation Y, which he launched at 18 and developed into Southeastern Europe's leading digital transformation agency. As President of the G.P.A. Investment Group, he oversees a diversified portfolio of over 200 services across digital transformation, real estate, finance, technology, and strategic networking, while holding board roles in 15 countries.

**G. P. A.**  
ecosystem of companies

A distinguished speaker with more than 500 keynotes at major international forums, Anastasios also serves as Vice President of European Business for CEO Coaching International. He is widely recognized for his entrepreneurial vision, strategic leadership, and dedication to fostering innovation and mentorship across industries.

8<sup>th</sup> Edition  
**The Burj CEO Awards 2025**  
Dubai, UAE

**Most Popular Mayor-Elect**

**Zohran K. Mamdani**  
Mayor Elect - New York City



**Most Popular Mayor-Elect**

**Zohran K. Mamdani**  
Mayor Elect - New York City

An Assembly member dedicated to fighting for housing, justice, and dignity for all New Yorkers, [Name] brings a strong commitment to equity and community empowerment.

He made history as the first South Asian man, the first Ugandan, and the third Muslim to serve in the New York State Assembly, representing diverse voices at the highest levels of state government.

A passionate organizer and advocate, he transforms grassroots action into meaningful change for communities.

He champions equitable policies, sustainable neighborhoods, and the amplification of voices that are too often unheard, working tirelessly to create a more just and inclusive New York.





**Dr. Malik Dzirlo**  
**Chairman**  
**American Keystone Equities & Capital Group**



**Mr. Tapan Roy**  
**Vice Chairman**  
**Mother Teresa International Organization**



**Dr. Tahir Akhtar**  
**Founding Chairman**  
**Adam Holdings**



**Dr. Ajay Desai**  
**Chairman & Founder**  
**FTIEA**



**M. Rashid Ashraf**  
Vice Chairman  
Pakistan Educational & Cultural Board



**Syed Zulfiqar Ali**  
Editor in Chief  
RIM



**Dr. Aftab Hasan**  
**Global Association of InsurTech**  
**Professionals (GAIP)**



**Opal Sky Media**  
**Manzoor A Bhatti**  
**CEO**



**H. E. Dr. Mohammed Saeed Al Kindi**  
UAE Former Minister



**Farrukh Nizami**  
IT Expert, CTTC

### BUSINESS EXCELLENCE



# Champions of innovation

The eighth edition of Burj CEO Awards 2025 returns to Dubai to celebrate pioneers in tech, AI, and sustainability

The 8th Edition of the Burj CEO Awards returned to Dubai for 2025 to celebrate global leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs shaping tomorrow's business landscape. Created and organised by the CEO Clubs Network, a globally recognised organisation specialising in community building, marketing, and investment promotion, this year's ceremony was staged under the theme Leading the Future: Innovation in Action.

Spotlighting the vision, creativity, and transformative leadership of the evening's winners, the ceremony was hosted by television and radio presenter Tom Urquhart and celebrated awardees from a cross-section of industries, including Artificial Intelligence, drone technology, and sustainable development.

Recognised as the Oscars of the business world, since their inception in Washington, DC in 2016, the awards have travelled across the globe, from London in 2017 to Istanbul in 2024, celebrating over 400 leaders and organisations and serving as a platform for connection, partnership, and advancement.

Honouring decades of leadership in advancing next-generation technologies, the Lifetime Achievement Award for 2025 was presented to Dr Nermin Makul, Founder of MiBit, a pioneer in tech innovation. The Burj CSR Award was presented to Fadi



Dr Nermin Makul, Founder of MiBit, was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award

Salamch, Managing Director of PFC Group, and Athanasios Polychronopoulos, Chairman & CEO of circular-economy leader Polygreen, was named Sustainability Champion of the Year.

Innovation was celebrated across multiple sectors: Enrique Plaza, CEO of Microavia, received the Global Excellence Award in Drone Technology, and Milad Habibi, Founder & CEO of optifo.ai, was named Best AI Solutions Company of the Year for developing forward-thinking artificial intelligence models.

The Woman Leadership of the Year Award was presented to Phakapan Salao, Founder & CEO of Mongkol Muay Thai Corp. The future of entrepreneurship came into focus as 22-year-old Laurens Mannaert, Co-Founder of Boat Trips Club, was honoured as Youngest Entrepreneur of the Year. The Start-up Company of the Year

title went to Boat Trips Club, and Dr Sara Khorakiwala of Ra by Mastercuts was recognised as the Most Influential Woman Leader of the Year. The Global Innovation Excellence Award went to SA Global, and Sia N. Ashok, Managing Partner of Conify Capital Partners, was celebrated as Innovation Business Leader. Dr Kathleen Verleysen, CEO of miDiagnostics, received the Exemplary Woman of Achievement Award, and Herve Heully, CEO and Founder of NEW3S, received the Burj Innovation Award.

Dr Gennaro Lanza, Founder & CEO of DB Financial, won Best Entrepreneur CEO of the Year, and Rehan Khan, Founder & CEO of Rabb IT Solutions GmbH, received the European CEO of the Year title. MUMUSO was honoured as Fastest Growing Retail Group, and Dr Tharshini Pankaj, Group CEO of Regent Global, was named Outstanding Woman Entrepreneur of the Year.

Reflecting on this year's event, Dr Tariq A. Nizami, Founder & CEO of CEO Clubs Network, said, "Our mission goes beyond building a trusted community; we are committed to celebrating the success of global leaders. Their exceptional leadership and excellence merit recognition."

CEO Clubs Network Managing Partner Sarah Dong concluded, "The true strength of this celebration lies in the meaningful connections it creates." ■

# Global visionaries honoured at 8th Burj CEO Awards in Dubai, spotlighting innovation and leadership



The Burj CEO Awards are recognised globally as the 'Oscars of the business world', since their inception in Washington, DC, in 2016.



**The 8th Edition of the Burj CEO Awards has returned to Dubai for 2025 to celebrate the global leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs shaping tomorrow's business landscape.**

## Global Trend Monitor

DISCOVER THE ART OF PUBLISHING

## Burj CEO Awards 2025 honor global leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs



Thursday, December 11, 2025

## Burj CEO Awards 2025 Honours Global Leaders, Innovators And Entrepreneurs



*8th edition returns to Dubai to celebrate pioneers in tech, AI, and sustainability*

The 8th Edition of the Burj CEO Awards returned to Dubai for 2025 to celebrate the global leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs shaping tomorrow's business landscape. Created and organised by the CEO Clubs



## CEO CLUBS NETWORK HOSTS EXCLUSIVE LUNCH MEETING IN COLLABORATION WITH THE RUFESCENT

**5 November 2025:** CEO Clubs Network successfully hosted an exclusive Lunch Meeting in collaboration with The Rufescent at the prestigious Taj Hotel, Jumeirah Lakes Towers, under the theme "From Local to Global: Positioning the UAE as a Global Business and Investment Hub."

The gathering brought together elite business leaders, CEOs, investors, and decision-makers from across industries to exchange insights, foster collaboration, and highlight the UAE's evolving role as a leading destination for international trade and innovation.

The event commenced with an inspiring welcome address by **Dr. Tariq Ahmed Nizami, Founder & CEO of CEO Clubs Network**, who emphasized the UAE's exceptional progress as a global hub for entrepreneurship, investment, and strategic alliances. He reaffirmed the Network's vision of creating platforms that connect global leaders and empower partnerships that drive sustainable economic growth.

A significant milestone of the afternoon was the CEO Clubs Category Partnership in MoU Signing Ceremony between CEO Clubs Network and InsuranceMarket.ae, marking a key step toward enhanced corporate collaboration and shared growth initiatives.

The highlight of the event was a dynamic panel discussion moderated by Dr. Malik Dzirlo, Chairman of American Keystone Equities & Capital Group. The discussion brought together distinguished industry leaders who shared forward-looking perspectives on “From local to global: Positioning the UAE as a Global Business and Investment Hub.”

The esteemed panel included:

**Mr. Avinash Babur, CEO, InsuranceMarket.ae**

**Ms. Lula Mohanty, Managing Partner – MEA, IBM Consulting**

**Mr. Waseem Ashqar, Managing Director, HeluKabel Middle East DWC LLC**

Together, they explored evolving market dynamics, the power of innovation, and the UAE's strategic advantages in attracting global investors. The session underscored how collaboration, vision, and adaptability continue to drive the nation's global competitiveness and leadership in business innovation.

In her closing remarks, **Ms. Sarah Dong, Managing Partner of CEO Clubs Network**, expressed sincere appreciation to all members, partners, and guests for their active participation and continued support. She highlighted the organization's mission to connect global leaders, foster partnerships, and strengthen the UAE's role as a hub for business excellence.





## CEO CLUBS NETWORK PARTNERS WITH INSURANCEMARKET.AE



In a landmark moment set to redefine corporate collaboration in the region, **CEO Clubs Network** and **InsuranceMarket.ae** officially joined forces through the signing of a prestigious Insurance Category Partnership MoU during the high-profile Lunch Meeting held on 5th November at Taj Jumeirah Lake Towers. The insurance partnership agreement was signed by **Dr. Tariq Ahmed Nizami, Founder and CEO of CEO Clubs Network, and Mr. Avinash Babur, CEO of InsuranceMarket.ae**, marking a significant milestone for both organizations and the wider business community.

The strategic partnership aims to foster innovation, drive growth, and create impactful collaboration within the CEO Club community. By combining their expertise and resources, CEO Clubs Network and InsuranceMarket.ae are set to unlock new opportunities, strengthen industry collaboration, and contribute to the development of a more connected and dynamic business ecosystem.

## EMBASSY OF UKRAINE PARTNERS WITH CEO CLUBS FOR 2026 INITIATIVE



On November 26, **H.E. Dr. Oleksandr Balanutsa, Ambassador of Ukraine to the UAE, held a productive meeting with Dr. Tariq Ahmed Nizami, Founder and CEO of CEO Clubs Network.**

The Ambassador expressed his gratitude for the recent publication highlighting Ukraine's investment potential and emphasized the importance of informed representation of Ukraine within the global business community. A key focus of the discussion was the Embassy's unprecedented initiative **“Ukraine Month in the UAE” scheduled for 15 January – 15 February 2026.** The initiative aims to showcase Ukraine's business opportunities, innovations, cultural heritage, and investment landscape.

Both sides agreed on the active participation of CEO Club Network and Ukraine Business Council Dubai in joint events within the framework of “Ukraine Month in the UAE.”



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Events that unite Ukraine and present it to the World

## **The Month of Ukraine in the UAE**

### **January - February, 2026**

# **CELEBRATING THE UAE'S 54TH NATIONAL DAY AND INTRODUCING THE "MONTH OF UKRAINE IN THE UAE"**

### **A Day of Unity, Pride, and Friendship**

As the United Arab Emirates celebrates its 54th National Day, I am truly pleased to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the leadership and people of this exceptional country.

Eid Al Etihad is more than a date on the calendar – it is a reminder of how unity, vision, and shared purpose can transform a nation in just a few decades. Even for those of us who came from afar, this day carries a special warmth. The spirit of the UAE is one that welcomes, inspires, and brings people together.

Ukraine holds deep respect for the UAE and values the friendship that has grown between our nations.

Today, our partnership is broader, warmer, and more meaningful than ever – rooted in trust, mutual understanding, and a sincere desire to build a better future together.

**Introducing the "Month of Ukraine in the UAE" – 15 January to 15 February 2026**

It is with great joy and personal pride that I announce the launch of a new and heartfelt initiative — the “Month of Ukraine in the UAE,” which will take place from 15 January to 15 February 2026. This initiative will be organized in partnership with the Ukrainian community in the UAE and the Ukrainian Business Council in Dubai, whose active role and dedication make this project especially meaningful for its success.

This is more than a cultural or business program. For us, it is an opportunity to share the story of modern Ukraine with a nation that has become a second home to many Ukrainians.

Throughout this month, we will present the many dimensions of Ukraine — our culture, our art, our innovations, our scientific achievements, our forward-looking businesses, and the energy of our creative industries.

We have prepared a rich and diverse program that includes business forums, presentations, exhibitions, cultural evenings, sports activities, scientific discussions, educational events, and community gatherings.

In addition, the initiative will encompass a wide range of presentation, business, cultural, scientific, and sports events.

Their purpose is clear: to strengthen economic and investment cooperation, to encourage direct dialogue between Ukrainian and Emirati business communities,



**Dr. Oleksandr Balanutsa**

Ambassador of Ukraine  
to the United Arab Emirates

to highlight contemporary Ukrainian culture and the arts, to introduce the Emirati public to Ukraine’s technological and innovation potential, and to expand academic and educational ties between our institutions.

For me personally, this initiative is a chance to speak about Ukraine not only through official channels, but through creativity, sincerity, and human connection.

## An Invitation from the Heart

I warmly invite business leaders, investors, cultural organizations, artists, students, researchers, and all friends of Ukraine to join us throughout the “Month of Ukraine in the UAE,” from 15 January to 15 February 2026.



## **INDIA'S ENDURING STRENGTH: A NATION RISING BEYOND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FAULT LINES**

India's economic journey is unlike that of any other nation. It is a story shaped by centuries of upheavals, external invasions, internal disruptions, colonial exploitation, and countless shocks to its political and economic systems. Yet, despite being looted, divided, and repeatedly pushed to its knees, India never surrendered its spirit.

From the ancient age of global trade flowing through the Silk Route to the modern era of digital transformation, India has always possessed the fundamental ingredients of a great economic power: fertile land, natural wealth, strategic geography, maritime advantage, intellectual prowess, and an unmatched demographic strength.

What has truly sustained the nation, however, is the unbreakable determination of the common Indian — the ability to rebuild, reimagine, and rise stronger after every challenge.

Even today, India stands tall as one of the world's fastest-growing economies not because of any single leadership or ideology, but because of the collective resilience engraved in our national DNA.

**A Nation Blessed With Abundant Resources  
-And Unshakeable Resolve**

India has been blessed with every worldly resource required for building a shining, prosperous economy:

- + Vast agricultural potential
- + Thriving biodiversity
- + A strong artisan and manufacturing heritage
- + The world's most diverse human capital
- + A strategic position connecting East and West
- + A rich history of philosophy, innovation, science, and commerce

Despite experiencing repeated periods of destruction and economic drain, from medieval conquests to colonial exploitation, India continued to regenerate itself. Each time a foreign force attempted to break its backbone, the people of India found the courage to stand up again.

### **This irrepressible resilience is the true engine of India's growth story.**

#### **What Holds India Back: Divisions That Drain National Energy**

India's greatest challenges today are not external; they are internal. Economic progress slows not because of a lack of resources, intelligence, or opportunity but because national energy is wasted in social conflicts, political hostility and divisions rooted in caste, creed, ethnicity, or religion. These divisions benefit no one, except those who thrive on polarisation to retain influence or power.

A nation can withstand external attacks, but even a small crack within an iron rod is enough to break it. The same applies to a society: internal fractures weaken even the strongest nation.

#### **If India truly wishes to emerge as a global economic leader, we must:**

- + Rise above narrow identities
- + Reject hatred in any form
- + Stop demonising each other
- + Recognise and isolate forces that divide society for political gain
- + Reaffirm our timeless values of coexistence, harmony, and mutual respect

#### **Only unity can unlock the full potential of the world's largest democracy.**

#### **The Path Forward: A Wider Canvas, A Higher Purpose**

India's rise will not come from partisan narratives or ideological battles. It will come from:

- + A wider canvas of thinking
- + Policies rooted in fairness and sustainability
- + Governance free from discrimination or bias
- + Equal opportunities for all citizens
- + Investments in education, innovation, and digital empowerment
- + Protection of democratic values
- + A shared belief that India belongs to every Indian equally

When a nation treats every citizen with dignity, irrespective of religion, caste, ethnicity, gender, or background, only then can it invite global admiration, FDI and long-term partnerships.

The world invests in countries where the rule of law, social stability, and economic fairness are assured. India has the potential to be that beacon, and in many ways, it already is.

### **Unity in Diversity: India's Timeless Identity**

India's true strength has always been its ability to hold together a million differences under one flag. From ancient civilisations to modern democracy, our story has been one of coexistence, plurality, and shared destiny.

The common man of India, regardless of background, believes in a harmonious social order.

He believes in peace, progress, and prosperity for all.

He believes that India should remain a nation where every individual has the right to dream and the opportunity to achieve.

**When this spirit thrives, India shines. When division takes over, India loses precious time and potential.**

### **My call to every fellow Indian**

The future of India will not be shaped solely by governments. Indians will shape it; their choices, their values, and their willingness to rise above narrow divisions.

If we wish to see India emerge as a global model of economic strength, sustainable development, good governance, innovation, and social harmony, we must:

Think bigger

Unite deeper

Act responsibly

Prioritise national interest over personal bias

Build bridges, not barriers

**India is not just a country; it is a collective promise; a promise made by 1.4 billion people who believe in democracy, diversity, and dignity.**

**As long as this spirit survives, India will continue to rise; stronger, brighter, and more resilient than ever.**

**“Today, as the world enters a new era of global realignment, India is once again rewriting the narrative; not as a distant emerging market, but as a central pillar of the 21st-century global economy.”**

### A Nation That Surprised the World

Not long ago, I do recall that during the 1990's, global analysts doubted India's pace. Some predicted stagnation. Some dismissed reforms as insufficient. Some believed India's rise would take decades.

But India proved them all wrong. India delivered 8.2% GDP growth, the highest in six quarters.

This was driven by:

Higher consumer spending

Rapid pickup in manufacturing

Rising business confidence

Growth in exports

Acceleration through digital governance and reforms

India didn't just recover.

India transformed.

India is no longer just an emerging market.

It is the world's next major opportunity.

### Youth: India's Most Powerful Economic Engine

With 65% of its population under 35, India holds one of the world's strongest demographic advantages.

This young India is powering:

AI and deep-tech innovation

Fintech and InsurTech leadership



**Dr. AFTAB HASAN**

Chairman of Risk Exchange (DIFC) Ltd. &

CEO of Arya Insurance Brokerage Co

Global IT & digital transformation

Startup culture and unicorn creation

Manufacturing and design capabilities

India Is Rising — And Our Best Chapter Is Yet to Come | India stands at a defining moment.

We have the resources. | We have the youth.

We have the reforms. | We have a global opportunity.

And above all - | We have the strength to rise above every challenge.

**But to reach our full destiny, we must embrace one truth:**

Only a united India can build a truly powerful India.

The world is watching. | The world is partnering.

The world is beginning to believe in India's promise.

"Now it is time for Indians to believe in it even more and believe in each other."



## LOGISTICS AT THE SPEED OF THOUGHT

### The dawn of supply chain agility

Back in the 1960's, MIT's Sloan School introduced a supply chain simulation called The Beer Game. It's based on a scenario in which a beverage retailer, a distributor and a brewery play supply chain tag while a steady, reliable product named Love's Beer experiences a spike in popularity resulting from a surprise appearance in a hit music video.

From beginning to end, the entire simulation spans a period of about six months, which at the time was considered to be a reasonable planning horizon. The object of the game is to maximize sales and profits, regardless of your position

in the supply chain. Although there are a few break-even and winning strategies, most players end up flying their "opportunity" straight into the ground, as frantically-placed order increases cause inventory levels to pile up, just as the fad begins to wane.

As we move into the decade following the dot-com boom, the pace begins to accelerate. In 2003 a real-life scenario similar to the Beer Game was being played out in Europe. In November of that year, Spain's Crown Prince Felipe and a television newscaster named Letizia Ortiz announced their engagement. At the press event, which was televised to the world,

the princess-to-be wore a white pants suit, rather uncharacteristic for old-world royalty. But it generated a wave of excitement among young female viewers.

Seizing the opportunity, the Spanish fashion company Zara quickly designed, manufactured, marketed, distributed and sold hundreds of look-alike outfits. In later years, the princess herself could be seen occasionally sporting Zara apparel and accessories, helping to further boost the company's growing popularity.

The typical fashion industry cycle consists of spring, summer, autumn and winter. Zara helped to disrupt all of that with their product cycles currently lasting as little as one week and operating opportunistically, rather than by a fixed, seasonal calendar. This results in customers visiting their more than 2,200 stores in 96 countries many times more often than the industry average.

### What fish and fashion have in common

In addition to fashion, the Spanish love to eat fish. They are second only to the Japanese in per capita fish consumption. And like the Japanese, frozen fish doesn't cut it. Their fish must be fresh.

The West African coast of Namibia is rich in the favorite and often rare varieties of fish the Spanish crave.

But fishing is more an art than a science, and the catch of the day can vary widely, both in terms of variety and volume. From net to table, the whole process usually takes from 24 to 48 hours.

As soon as the net is raised from the side of the fishing boat, it's emptied into the refrigerated cargo hold below. As the boat heads for port, the skipper is already on a satellite phone, forwarding details of the catch to fish processors and distributors across Spain.

As soon as the boat skipper hangs up, the distributors immediately begin soliciting advance orders from their vast network of food stores and retail outlets.

The Namibian fishing boat arrives in port at Walvis Bay. Since it's nearly 800 miles to the nearest suitable airport, the catch is quickly loaded onto refrigerated trucks with auxiliary fuel tanks needed to cross the scorching Kalahari Desert through Botswana and on to Johannesburg.

At the airport, the fish are loaded into a refrigerated warehouse, awaiting transfer to a Boeing 747 cargo plane. As you might expect, the process isn't always straightforward.

Because the catch of the day varies in weight and volume, two critical variables in the world of freight, there is always an eye open for other companies that might want to hitch a ride on the daily flight.

As luck would have it, Zara often has to quickly ship mohair and wool, both plentiful in South Africa, to respond to the next rapid-turnaround fashion craze.

It's not co-incidental that much of the Africa-Spain connection meets at the 747's final destination: a massive logistics complex in Zaragoza, a city of about 800,000 inhabitants in the somewhat remote region of Aragón, Spain.

### **It's no longer a supply chain**

For today's high-speed, complex, global economy and its myriad connections, the term supply web is more appropriate. With companies looking for ways to increase the speed by which a thought becomes a product working its way through a vast network of transportation, storage, distribution and delivery systems, the race is on.

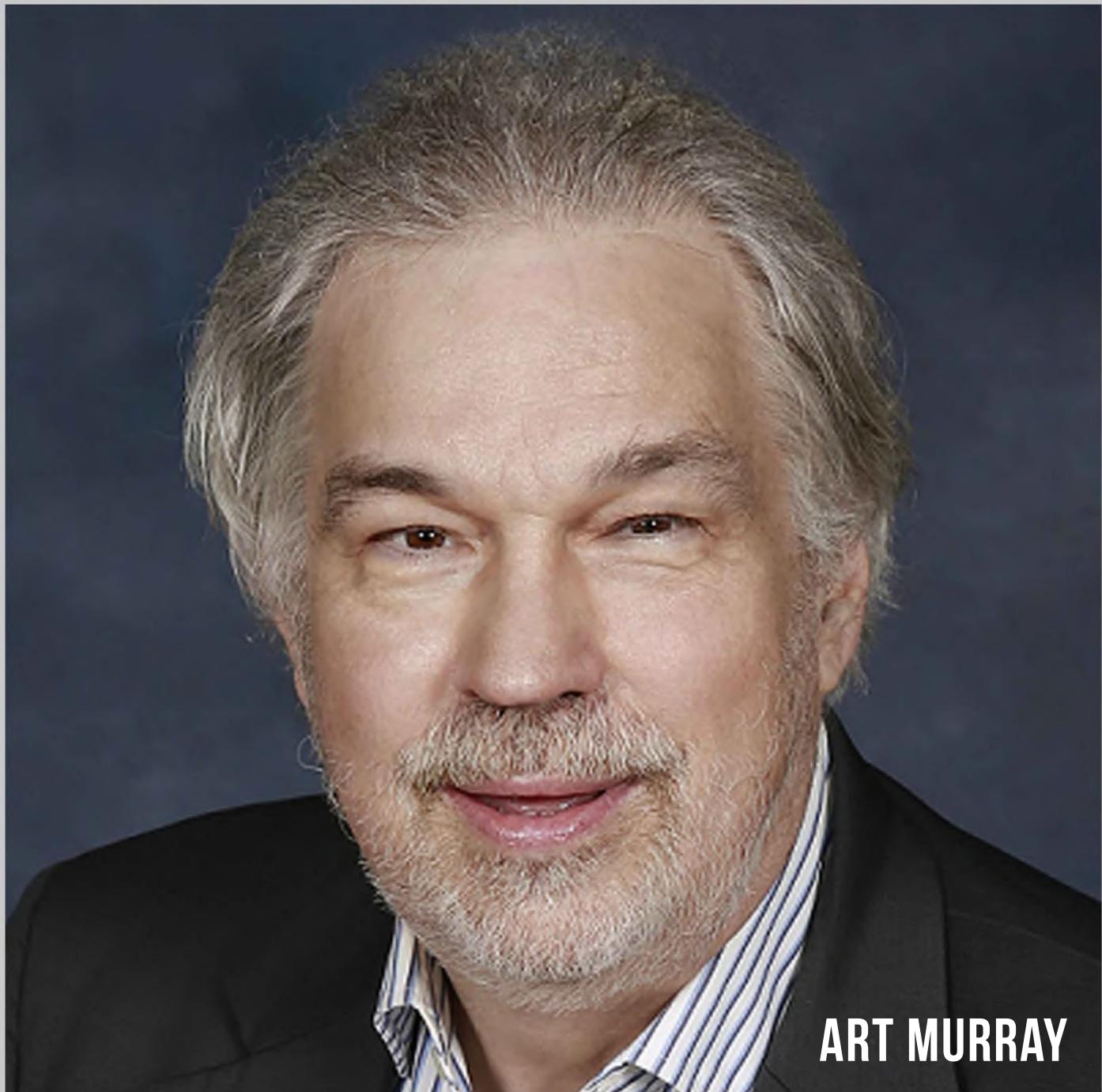
In a world in which manufacturing is outsourced to countries with the cheapest labor, Zara keeps its manufacturing operations local. Supported by AI-enabled robots, conveyors, sorting and packaging machinery, Zara moves over 1 million items of clothing each day, drawing from an inventory of about 34 million.

That's a monthly turnover of slightly less than 90 percent, an extremely enviable metric for that industry.



Zara occupies only a very small percentage of the 140 million square feet of space ultimately planned for the Zaragoza complex. That pales in comparison to the 6 million square feet of warehouse space at Hong Kong's ATL Logistics Centre. Or Dubai Logistics City's 4.3 million square feet devoted to air cargo logistics alone, not including cargo terminals, distribution centers, and other facilities.

These massive logistics hubs provide the obvious benefits of close physical proximity. However, a large, complex digital infrastructure is also needed to provide immediate access to data, information, and knowledge from anywhere in the world. Welcome to 21st-century logistics.



### ART MURRAY

#### Now it's your turn

What's your version of the fish-to-fashion connection? How quickly can you move from an idea to global distribution and sales? Need help in finding new dots and connecting them in new and exciting ways? You really have no other choice. In a world where global logistics occurs literally at the speed of thought, you're going to need AI.

That's what your competition is likely doing. Just be sure to double-check and triple-check everything before diving in. Use every available resource that you can get your hands on, human and machine. You might just end up surprising your competition, rather than the other way around.



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# WE SAY NO TO VIOLENCE

## COFFEE ISLAND EXPANDS ITS SOCIAL IMPACT IN GREECE THROUGH THE “WOMEN SAY NO 2 VIOLENCE” PROGRAMME

Coffee Island is strengthening its commitment to social responsibility in Greece by supporting the **“Women Say NO 2 Violence”** programme, a nationwide initiative designed to provide safety, guidance, and first-response support to women experiencing or fearing gender-based violence.

As part of this effort, selected Coffee Island stores across the country now operate as officially designated Safe Places, offering discreet information, emotional support, and

connection to specialised services within their local communities. These locations feature clear signage, dedicated informational material, and teams trained to respond to sensitive situations with respect, discretion, and humanity.

This partnership with Immortaliting and the Union of Women Associations of Heraklion was launched on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

**No woman is alone. No form of violence is acceptable.**



On 25 and 26 November, volunteers from the partner organisations visited selected Coffee Island stores in Crete to speak with customers, answer questions, and share essential information with both women and men. Similar actions are planned for Athens and Patras, further extending the programme's message of prevention and women's empowerment to local communities across the country.





## BUILDING BUSINESS BEYOND BORDERS: USING INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS TO COMPETE IN DC'S COMMERCIAL MARKET

The Washington, DC commercial real estate market is often associated with its proximity to federal agencies and Fortune 500 headquarters. For The Ellitan Group, however, success comes from building an international network that serves high-net-worth clients with complex, cross-border needs.

**Jesse Elliott, Managing Partner**, has shaped his 25-agent firm around a business-first philosophy that goes beyond traditional brokerage. “I am a businessman and a business person first, and not just a realtor,” Elliott says.

“I am a businessman and a business person first, and not just a realtor,” Elliott says. “The way that we approach business is as business people, and I think that’s a unique and beneficial approach when we discuss assisting clients, especially in the commercial real estate and mergers and acquisition realm.”

### From Entrepreneur to Real Estate Leader

Elliott’s entry into real estate was unconventional. After studying criminology at George Mason University with plans to become an attorney,

he and his partner launched a software company focused on the secondhand market while still in college. They later exited that business, moving into logistics and then custom home building.

"We built a couple of properties, including one in McLean, which is a very affluent area in the suburb of Washington, DC. We built and sold that in-house for two and a half million dollars last year," Elliott recalls.

These early ventures provided essential business connections and development expertise that would later distinguish The Ellitan Group in the crowded DC market. "I've always been somebody who's an opportunist. I look at opportunities," Elliott says. "We saw this as a feasible, growable, scalable opportunity."

### International Networks Drive Local Deals

The Ellitan Group's most distinctive advantage is its international network, anchored by membership in CEO Clubs International—a Dubai and Washington, DC-based organization with thousands of global members. This network has led to significant transactions with overseas clients.

"We worked with clientele in Dubai. We worked with clientele out of London," Elliott explains. "One deal specifically that we just did was a client who is headquartered out of London, with offices in Dubai and in the oil refinery business in Iraq."

That client needed office space near the White House to engage with the Department of Energy. The Ellitan Group secured a penthouse at 800 Connecticut Avenue Northwest, a building that houses Coca Cola, Tesla, and Twitter's main government relations offices. The client took over 10,000 square feet of space with direct views into the Oval Office.

Recently, the firm hosted developers of Trump International Hotel and suites, Lamborghini villas, and Aston Martin residences from Dubai, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia at a Virginia country club. The event attracted about 100 attendees, including the Loudoun County Treasurer and a state delegate, demonstrating how international relationships can open doors for local business.

### Diversified Service Offerings

Unlike many firms that focus on either residential or commercial real estate, The Ellitan Group maintains a roughly 60-40 split between commercial and residential transactions. "High level clients still have nice properties. They live somewhere. Everybody lives somewhere," Elliott says. "We've never wanted to leave that money on the table."

The firm's services extend beyond brokerage to include mergers and acquisitions. Recently, The Ellitan Group completed the acquisition of a 22,000-square-foot hospitality club in Washington for an international hospitality firm with properties from Toronto to Miami.

"We negotiated very hard. It was a long deal, but we ended up getting the asset for less than half the asking price," Elliott notes.

Recognizing a gap in the market, The Ellitan Group is expanding into asset management. "You have people who have made hundreds of millions of dollars in specific industries, and they come to us wanting to buy commercial real estate," Elliott says. "But sometimes you look at the deal and say, 'Well, this is maybe not something that I would buy personally.'"

The firm now advises on investment strategy and manages assets for clients who may lack expertise in real estate.

### **Washington, DC Market Trends**

The DC area's unique conditions support The Ellitan Group's approach. "You have a retail market that's 94% leased," Elliott says, though he notes a slight increase in vacancies, with rates dipping to around 93.5%.

Industrial and flex space is especially sought after, primarily located in Virginia's Chantilly, Lorton Springfield, and Sterling corridors. "There's not a lot of it. It's really centered within specific regions," Elliott explains, highlighting the limited supply and high demand.

### **Why Virginia Leads Regional Growth**

Virginia consistently outperforms Maryland and DC in commercial activity, driven by favorable business policies, robust infrastructure, and landlord-friendly regulations. "Virginia overall is seeing the biggest growth, just in terms of more favorable business policies," Elliott says.

A major driver is the data center expansion along the corridor from Loudoun (County) to Prince William County. "They know that the fiber is here, and you have the talent pool, which is huge as well in our area," Elliott explains. While some residents object to data center development, the facilities bring jobs and increased enterprise activity to the region.

The area's high median household income—about \$200,000 in many neighborhoods—supports a strong consumer base. "Your average consumer can spend money," Elliott says, citing both federal employment and the presence of numerous Fortune 500 headquarters.

### **Strategic Growth and Long-Term Focus**

The Ellitan Group is preparing for further expansion by adding new products and services. "You don't want to be one dimensional. When you're one dimensional, you're limited," Elliott says.



## **JESSE ELLIOTT**

The firm's growth strategy emphasizes building long-term pipelines rather than focusing solely on immediate transactions. "It's 3% of clients who are probably active at any time.

But how do you hit the other 97%? You have to build a pipeline to future clientele," Elliott explains.

Elliott's business philosophy centers on learning quickly from failures to accelerate success.

"You want to get to failure in every possible realm of business as quickly as possible so that you can get to the more successful times," he says.

For The Ellitan Group, succeeding in Washington's competitive real estate market means leveraging international relationships, offering diversified services, and maintaining a business-first mindset that treats real estate as one part of a broader client relationship.

As the firm expands its asset management offerings and deepens its global network, it demonstrates how mid-sized firms can compete with larger players by specializing and using strategic networking to secure a place in the region's evolving commercial landscape.

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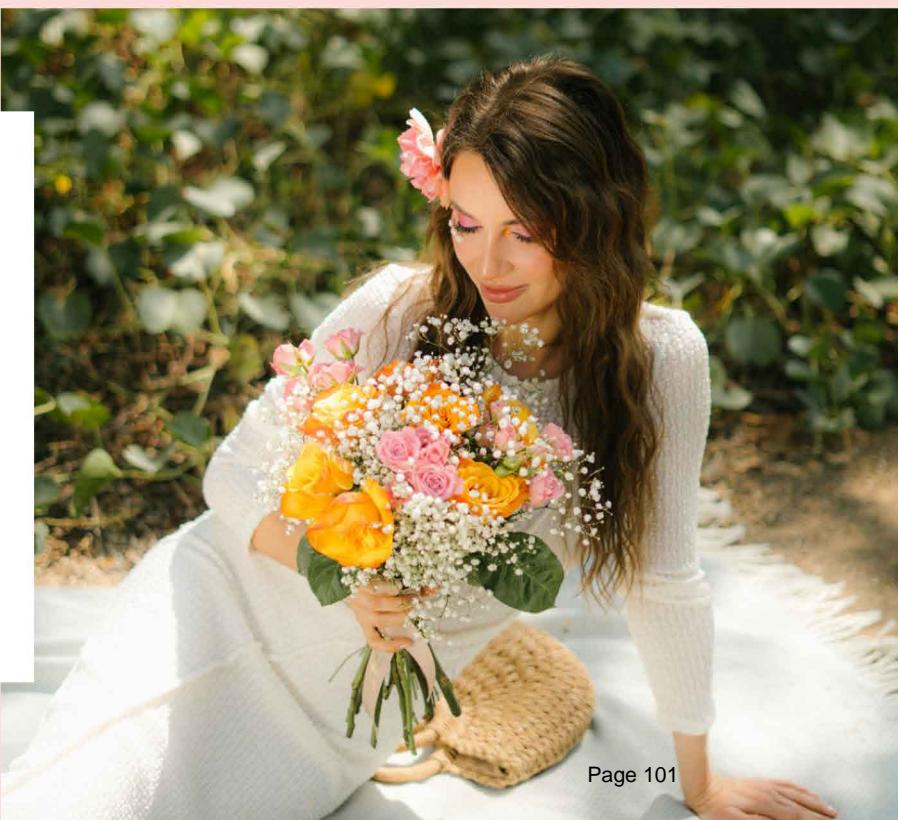


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