



## Expanding into a new horizon

Paramount Group, a cluster of companies with focus in the international peacekeeping, defence and internal security industry sector, hopes to retain its prominent presence in the UAE market through partnership with a UAE-based group. The makers of Africa's first aircraft created from scratch, aim to market and distribute their vehicles in the country as a sign of commitment.

*Khaleej Times* spoke to **Ivor Ichikowitz**, Executive Chairman of Paramount Group, to get an insight into the group's operations and goals. The interview excerpts:



**Ivor Ichikowitz**

### Give us a little history and background about the Paramount Group.

Paramount Group started in 1994 and is Africa's largest privately owned defence and aerospace business. We are known for innovation and groundbreaking technologies in land systems and aerospace. We launched Africa's first designed and built aircraft, AHRLAC, this year. Our investment in next-generation technology and innovation is paying off and we are becoming a major player in the global defence market.

### Being part of the global defence community, what is the reach of Paramount's products and solutions around the world in general, and the Middle East and the UAE in particular?

We work with government clients across the world. Africa is very important, we manufacture in Central Asia, have agreements in place for the Middle East, Asia and South America. These regions — and the Middle East in particular — are developing fast.

**“ All our vehicles (Mbombe, Marauder, Matador and Maverick) are suitable for security forces in the Middle East**

### Has Paramount Group worked in the region in the past? How important are the Middle East markets to you?

We've operated in the Middle East for a number of years and have expanded over the past 18 months. The main reason is a new partnership with UAE-based International Golden Group for our Mbombe, a high mobility six-wheeled infantry fighting vehicle.

This will see us market and distribute Paramount's vehicles in the region and signals

our commitment to the United Arab Emirates as a market. We have ambitious plans here.

**Do you provide customised defence solutions to suit region-specific needs?**

It is all about understanding our customers. We provide 'turn-key solutions' to deliver a bespoke solution for clients. It is our ability to meet exact needs that sets us apart.

**What is AHRLAC? Tell us a little bit about its unique features and its uses.**

AHRLAC is the first aircraft designed and developed from scratch in Africa. It is a flexible, multi-role light aerial platform for border patrol, internal security, defence, disaster management and environmental protection to name a few uses.

It seats two and performs many of the functions of a helicopter for a fraction of the cost. It is ideal for some of the long-term security issues in places like the Emirates, including border surveillance and monitoring strategic installations, like oil pipelines. It is a testament to our innovative drive to find solutions to some of the world's biggest challenges.

**What sets AHRLAC apart from other reconnaissance aircraft?**

Nothing like AHRLAC exists — it merges the capabilities of an unmanned aerial vehicle or drone, an attack helicopter and surveillance aircraft into one and it is far more affordable. It requires very little logistical support, can be deployed from unprepared airstrips, stay in the air for 11 hours, at high altitudes and cruise speeds. It really is unique — and there's huge demand for such a flexible and cost-effective aircraft.

**Tell us about other equipment and/or machinery that you can provide to governments? Are governments your only buyers?**

We have created some of the world's most advanced armoured vehicles, designed for current and future threats on



the battlefield, urban warfare, counter-insurgency, public order and peacekeeping. All our vehicles (Mbombe, Marauder, Matador and Maverick) are suitable for security forces in the Middle East.

Our aerospace capabilities include AHRLAC and we are partners with South Africa's largest aeronautical engineering company that manufactures high-tech components for Boeing and Airbus.

We also provide correctional services solutions, maritime maintenance and support, full camp systems for peacekeeping missions, and mission critical communications

equipment.

Governments are our only customers, we only supply to sovereign states approved by the UN, AU and the South African government.

**Which of your products are best-suited for the Middle East region?**

All of our products are suitable for use in the Middle East. Mbombe is a groundbreaking infantry fighting vehicle; Marauder and Matador are both highly advanced mine-resistant armoured vehicles and Maverick is an internal security/police vehicle designed for urban opera-



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tions. All four provide exceptional levels of protection and mobility. AHRLAC's flexibility is perfect for tackling traditional as well as non-traditional security threats. All have capabilities that aren't matched by our rivals — so there's a lot of interest in them.

**What kind of after-sales support do you provide to clients?**

This is a solutions-based business, which means developing close relationships with clients, from designing a system that meets their particular needs to full support through their product's life; including maintenance and upgrades to final disposal.

**What has been the biggest win for Paramount Group in the last few years?**

We have had some big wins and are on the verge of our biggest order to date. Our biggest achievement is that we continue to grow at such a rate — around 20-30 per cent growth over five years. With clients in South America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Caucasus, we continue to expand and develop new technologies every day.