

Maker of the Marriotts

HE looks like the sort who can pull a building down. But Rajai Kayal is no comic hero to accomplish such feats. Rather, he has the onerous task of ensuring that buildings come up, brick by brick, to the point of perfection.

It might not be wrong to call him the 'Marriott Man'. Having executed two Marriott projects, he is in the thick of the third one. Somehow he manages to land the job of project manager for the Marriott chain of hotels.

"Due to my background in handling hotel projects, I had an edge over the others," he proclaims with remarkable candour about how he was first hand-picked for the job.

Currently, Kayal has a mammoth task before him and that is to complete the Dubai Marriott's extension (or the second phase, as he calls it) by 1998. The Dhs150 million project has a roof area of 43,000 square metres, a basement, a ground floor, a mezzanine and five floors. "It is one-and-a-half times bigger than the existing Marriott. It is a challenge and I am confident of completing the project on time," he asserts. "On completion it will be among the most impressive hotels in Dubai."

It all began when the Jordanian-born Kayal left for the USA for studies when he was barely in his teens. After graduating from the North Carolina University in Engineering he worked for two years in Washington D.C. with Ralph M. Parson, a construction and consultancy firm and returned to Jordan.

In Jordan, his first project was the Marriott Hotel, which took four years, followed by the Petra Forum Hotel project. After handling two hotel projects successfully, he was hired by an American company to handle a sewage treatment plant in Jordan.

Another challenging project Kayal managed was the central prison in Jordan during 1987-88. "It was a US\$50



Chandra Balan / The Gulf Today

Rajai Kayal: 'Sport helps you in real life and instills self-confidence and a spirit of competitiveness.'

million (Dhs183.50 million) project and was executed in 18 months flat," he says with a hint of pride.

From Jordan he moved to Egypt to carry out a US\$350 million cement factory project.

It was at the start of this decade that he landed the job as project manager to oversee the Dhs350 million Marriott Hotel construction in Dubai. Since he had handled the Marriott in Jordan this project excited him — and was completed on time.

and it will be ready by December 1998," he says optimistically.

Hotel projects seem to bring forth his mettle. "It is sheer pleasure to work on hotel projects because it is interesting to see them coming up. One also meets interesting people while managing hotel projects."

Kayal however goes about executing any job with military precision. "Preparing monthly project reports, follow-ups, verifying daily reports meticulously and

also honoured with an "Outstanding Athlete" award during his days on campus. "Sport helps you in real life and instills self-confidence and a spirit of competitiveness. Sports also teaches one to be the best in everything."

He loves his peripatetic lifestyle and working in different places has given him a rich mosaic of experience.

The hotels in Dubai, he observes, are in a class of their own and among the best in the Middle East. In Dubai construction material is also easily available and fast. "Currently, at least a dozen five-star projects are coming up in Dubai."

Although he personally prefers managing hotel projects, he says that it all depends on what projects the company gets and his job is to translate into reality what is in blueprint.

For the moment, however, he is pulling out all stops to ensure that the new extension of the Marriott is completed on time and becomes yet another splendid structure in Dubai.

Given his formidable facade, it is difficult to believe that Kayal, who has an English wife and daughter, is soft-spoken and very much a gentleman.

PROFILE

STANLEY CARVALHO

Today, it is among the prominent landmarks that dot the Dubaiscape.

This was followed by some smaller projects in Dubai and Abu Dhabi including 220 villas near Abu Dhabi for the army — a Dhs145 million project completed in 15 months.

The Dhs150 million project on hand is like some of the other fast-track projects Kayal has managed. "The Marriott extension project began on 22 December 1996

checking results are all routine jobs that must be undertaken."

Kayal works for Unity Contracting Company (UNCO) Ltd, which is currently handling about eight projects including hotels and shopping malls, valued at Dhs400 million. One which will be completed by next year is the Ajman Marriott Hotel.

The former soccer player who represented the American University was