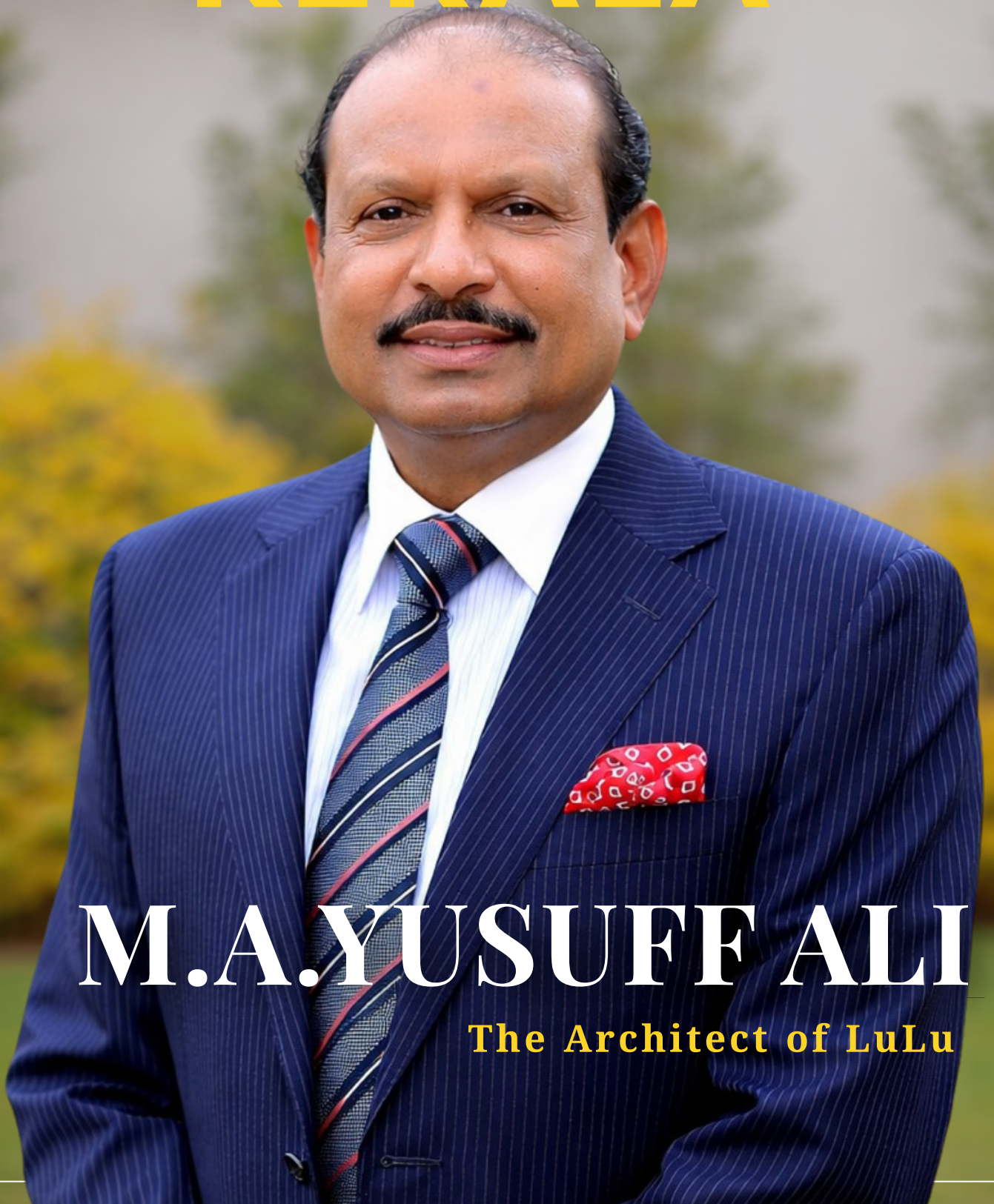


KERALA'S LEADING BUSINESS LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

Outstanding KERALA

JANUARY 2026

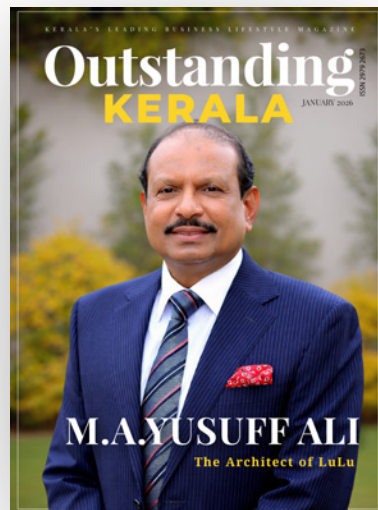
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M.A. YUSUFF ALI

The Architect of LuLu

CREATIVE TEAM



JANUARY 2026 Edition

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M.A. YUSUFF ALI

Who Made Every Malayali Think, “Why Not Me?”

Before the cities of the Gulf fully awaken, the doors of vast warehouses slide open. The air is thick with the scent of spices. Stacks of rice sacks stand in neat rows. Frozen fish, electronics, perfumes, trucks arriving in rhythm. Beneath that orchestrated chaos lies the quiet force of a single man’s vision, a journey that began in a small coastal village in Kerala and stretched across continents.

Inside every Lulu store today, behind thousands of products and hundreds of workers, lives the story of a young man who once crossed the sea simply to learn trade.



The Architect of Lulu

In the early 1970s, just as the United Arab Emirates was coming into existence, an 18-year-old from Nattika, Thrissur, stepped onto the docks of Dubai's Port Rashid. M. A. Yusuff Ali arrived not as a visionary tycoon, but as an assistant to his uncle, M. K. Abdullah, a businessman based in Abu Dhabi.

No one, not even him, could have predicted that this arrival would mark the beginning of a global business empire.

Quick to absorb the fundamentals of trade, Yusuff Ali began carving his own path. What started as learning the ropes soon turned into building something entirely new.

The Hypermarket Experiment

With his uncle's guidance, he identified a crucial opportunity, importing food and essential goods into the Gulf. From there came a bold idea, the hypermarket.

At a time when the concept was unfamiliar in the region, Yusuff Ali introduced large retail spaces where everything, groceries, electronics, clothing, household items, existed under one roof. It was simple, efficient, and revolutionary. The model clicked instantly.

Lulu became a space where middle-class families and migrant workers could shop with equal ease. That early experiment laid the foundation for what would become LuLu Group International.

From a single store, the business expanded into a global retail network spanning Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the hypermarket model had firmly taken root, transforming Lulu into one of



the most recognizable retail brands in the region.

As of 2025, Yusuff Ali's net worth stands at around \$7.3 billion, placing him among India's wealthiest individuals.

An Ambassador of Kerala

One of his landmark achievements was acquiring ownership of the historic East India Company in the UK. A building once associated with Scotland Yard now forms part of his hospitality ventures.

He also made history by becoming the first expatriate, and the only non-Arab, to serve on the board of the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In 2021, he was appointed its Vice Chairman.

In India, he is often present alongside visiting Gulf leaders as a bridge between nations. During times of crisis, whether floods or the pandemic, Kerala has repeatedly turned to him, and he has consistently responded with swift, large-scale support.

The Return Home

Today, Lulu operates across 42 countries, including Malaysia, the UK, Egypt, Kenya, and Indonesia.

Its entry into India began in 2006 with a convention centre in Thrissur. Since then, the expansion has been aggressive and strategic, from Kochi to Lucknow, Bengaluru to Kashmir.

Yusuff Ali's investments extend beyond retail. He holds significant stakes in major banks such as Federal Bank, South Indian Bank, and Dhanlaxmi Bank. He is also a director at Cochin International Airport (CIAL) and Kannur International Airport (KIAL).

Meanwhile, Lulu continues to diversify across logistics, hospitality, IT, shipping, and tourism.





A Guardian to Many

Beyond business, Yusuff Ali has built a reputation that transcends wealth. With over 65,000 employees from 43 countries, he is not just an employer but a provider for thousands of families. His philanthropic reach extends from struggling migrant workers in the Gulf to remote villages in Kerala.

For many Malayalis, he is more than a businessman. He is a figure of reassurance, often referred to simply as “Yusuff Bhai.”

Fifty Years of a Relentless Journey

Yusuff Ali's story is not just about wealth. It is about migration, risk, and belief.

He often says, business is not merely about money, products, or services. It is about people.

That philosophy runs through everything he has built.

From a young man who left Nattika in search of opportunity to the head of a global retail empire, his journey continues to echo through the aisles of every Lulu store, a reminder that ambition, when grounded in people, can travel farther than borders.

Key Positions

- Member, Prime Minister's International Advisory Council
- Patron, Indian Development Committee
- Board Member, Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Director, Cochin International Airport (CIAL)
- Board Member, NORKA Roots
- Independent Director, Air India

Awards

- Padma Shri, 2008
- Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, 2005

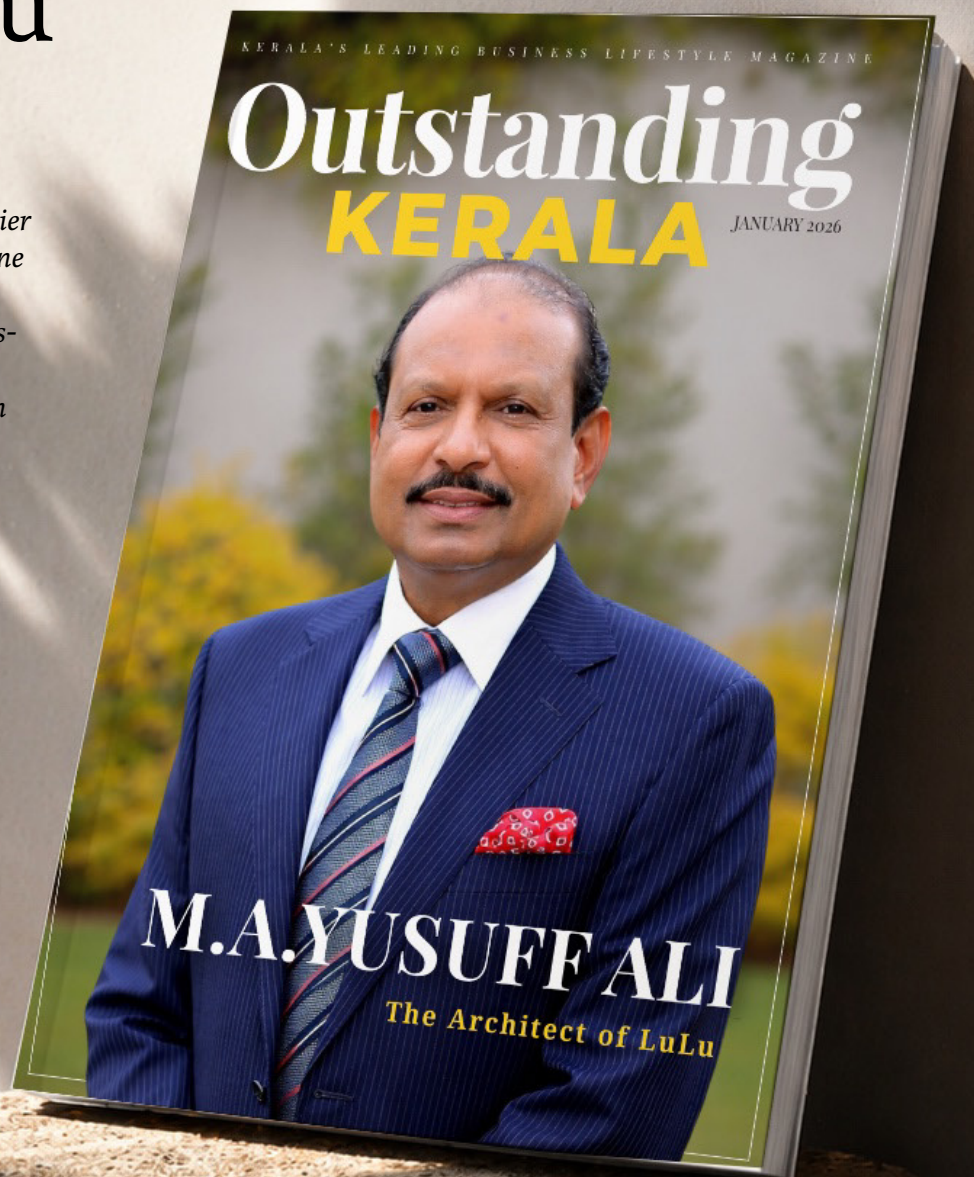


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Stories that Stay With You

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