

## **Emirates Today**

Dubai yesterday passed its long awaited property law, which allows full ownership for expatriates in designated freehold areas.

"Nakheel, Emaar and Dubai Properties are allowed to sell freehold properties to foreigners under the new law," Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, Chairman of Nakheel, told Emirates Today last night. Last month, Emirates Today reported exclusively the details of the law.

Dubai Real Estate Register Law No 7 of 2006 entitles foreigners to own property on a freehold basis in some areas "upon approval of the ruler". Bin Sulayem said this includes the three companies which have been selling properties on the promise of full ownership since 2002.

Lawyers expect His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, to issue a decree shortly defining these areas.

"It is likely that to give further confidence, His Highness will probably in a matter of days, issue a decree outlining the exempted areas," said Essam Al Tamimi, managing partner of the law firm Al Tamimi and Company.

Prior to the law the only guarantee expatriates had of ownership was a contract with the developer. The law dictates that the Dubai Land and Properties Department will set up a real estate registrar to register properties under the names of owners.

"It is a testament to a pioneering emirate and one that keeps its promises to the people," said Emaar Chairman Mohamed Ali Alabbar, who added that the property firm will work with the land department "on documentation and procedures required for registration of ownership for our investors".

Many potential buyers have been wary of buying due to the lack of formal rules. This law will change that, officials said.

"People from outside look for a property law. For buyers from outside of Dubai, whether it is Hong Kong, Singapore, America, Europe, this will open a bigger opportunity. Investors can borrow money and buy a property," bin Sulayem said.

The law gives UAE and GCC nationals the unhindered right to buy property in Dubai. The law also formalises long-term leases of up to 99 years in certain areas, with the ruler's approval.

Any company owned by UAE or GCC nationals may also buy property, as can joint stock companies that include foreign owners.

Observers said the law will add depth to the property market. "This will create opportunities for institutional investors and real estate funds," said Mohammed Ali Al Hashimi, CEO of Amlak Finance.