

EDITOR'S CHOICE



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SANJAY AGARWAL

DIRECTOR & COO, IJM INDIA INFRASTRUCTURE

A VISIONARY MEGA-PROJECTS
EXPERT CONTRIBUTING
SIGNIFICANTLY TO NATION
BUILDING

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A VISIONARY MEGA-PROJECTS EXPERT CONTRIBUTING SIGNIFICANTLY TO NATION BUILDING

It's no secret that the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has picked up an astonishing pace in completing road projects in recent years. During the peak pandemic months (2020-21), the speed of national highway (NH) construction in the country touched a record 37 km per day. Though NHAI hasn't been able to keep up with the same pace since the road traffic is back across the country, it is still doing an excellent job. The credit for this massive achievement can be attributed to the tech-savvy approach of the ministry and, most importantly, hardly a handful of construction companies and visionary leaders who enable such a high-tech approach.

Sanjay Agarwal,
Director & COO,
IJM India Infrastructure

Through an envious professional journey that started in 1986 when he became an Assistant Project Manager in IRCON, a Government of India Undertaking under the Ministry of Railways, Sanjay has built an impeccable reputation inside and outside the subcontinent, being at the forefront of several ground-breaking innovations in the construction industry across public, commercial and residential projects. A few among them are Asia's largest Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala, Dadri Power Plant Rail connectivity, Road cum rail bridges in Tatanagar, and the development of urban elevated roads & Flyovers in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Hobbies: Music, traveling, & observing

Favorite Cuisine: Desi & Chinese

Favorite Book: Anything fiction

Favorite Travel Destination: Goa and Bali

Awards & Recognition:

- Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Philosophy from Università Popolare Degli Studi Di Milano in CONSTRUCTION SCIENCE – 2014
- Best Managed Company CIDC VISHKARMA Award – 2011
- Y&E Emerging Company Award – 2012

COVER
STORY

CEO *Insights* **TOP 20**
PROMINENT BUSINESS
LEADERS IN ASIA **2023**



A few months ago, India's Honorable Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, inaugurated the Solapur-Vijayapura four-lane 110 km road project, which has been in the spotlight for all good reasons. The project even set a record by laying 25.54 kilometers of road in a short span of 17:45 hours on the Solapur-Bijapur section on National Highway 13. In truth, the credit goes to IJM India Infrastructure Limited (IJMII), the Indian subsidiary (operating from Hyderabad since 1998) of a Malaysian multinational corporation. Under the aegis of Sanjay Agarwal (COO & Director), IJMII has grown as one of the most trusted partners of NHAI, thanks to his dynamic, tech-savvy approach and knack for finding India-centric solutions to unique India-centric problems.

Through an enviable professional journey that started in 1986 when he became an Assistant Project Manager in IRCON, a Government of India Undertaking under the Ministry of Railways, Sanjay has built an impeccable reputation inside and outside the subcontinent, being at the forefront of several ground-breaking innovations in the construction industry across public, commercial and residential projects. A few among them are Asia's largest Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala, Dadri Power Plant Rail connectivity, Road cum rail bridges in Tatanagar, and the development of urban elevated roads & Flyovers in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Sanjay joined IJM Corporation in 1996 and subsequently led the Desa Sri Puteri mega building project using Wall & Table Systems forms. He later went on to head IJM India Infrastructure Ltd. Over the years, Sanjay piloted some of the iconic projects in the country, including a township spread over 114 acres in Vijayawada, a 93 KM BOT Highway project under the N-S corridor in Tamil Nadu, the first city project in Nagpur, and the second cable-stay bridge in Kolkata, to name a few.

Another milestone in his incredible journey came when he voluntarily retired from IJMII and established Team universal Infratech Pvt. Ltd (TUIPL) to provide services to the construction industry. TUIPL became an award-winning company, acing several infra Projects PAN India (having a cumulative value of more than Rs.2200 crore). In 2019, IJM Corporation acquired TUIPL, and a part of the deal was Sanjay looking after IJM's Construction Operations in India as COO of IJMII. Within a year, he was appointed as the whole-time director. The recent completion of the Solapur-Vijayapura four-lane 110 km road project ahead of schedule, despite the havoc wreaked by

the pandemic, is another golden feather in his hat. It is the largest Indian project undertaken by IJM in value so far and one of the largest contracts awarded by NHAI on a design, build, finance, operate, and transfer (DBFOT) basis. We recently had an exclusive conversation with Sanjay. Below is an excerpt from the interview.

In conversation with Sanjay Agarwal, Director & COO, IJM India Infrastructure

How would you describe your leadership style, and what has been your success mantra?

Leadership is about collaboration & inspiring others. I collaborate with my team members by delegating tasks, leading by example, and ensuring that they know I care.

I focus on Direction-Vision-Support, which are the main traits of leadership. I truly believe in the adage, 'Failures are stepping stones to success'. It is said that those who never tried anything have never failed; so never be afraid to fail but have the courage to start again. Believing in this process helps make your desire to succeed stronger than before.

Leaders who are lucid about their vision and mission are always confident in working with the team and empowering members to take charge. They use their lucid vision to direct & support the strategy, encouraging the team to use their combined strength & deliver while growing themselves as future leaders.

One shall appreciate and understand the fact that 'Leadership and Management' always have very different objectives and require different skillsets. Leaders provide inspirations whereas Managers provide direction.

As a leader, I want to influence others to achieve their desired goals, I take the risk while facing challenges, and I also understand that as a leader, I must go through obstacles that always pave the path to success. My belief in the leadership mantra is all about the responsibilities that you are willing to 'own'. Leaders don't choose their followers; followers choose leaders whom they trust, respect & feel comfortable with. The leaders should have the ability to persuade others to believe in the company's vision.

Integrity is the bedrock of effective leadership, and self-ship is the enemy of leadership. A true leader always cares about the success of his/her followers.

How would you define IJM India Infrastructure's impact and presence in the construction domain in India?

This year, IJM India is celebrating its 25 years in India, being a wholly owned subsidiary of the main board-listed IJM Corporation Berhad, based out of Malaysia and engaged in the Construction of Mega Buildings – Infrastructure-Ports- Highways – Property Development, Industry production, and others.

In 1997, when India enhanced its focus on developing highways & Power plants, IJM contributed immensely to EPC & BoT development of highways like Mumbai Pune and Tada Nellore. In those early stages, our projects included property development in Hyderabad, Vijaywada, Nagpur, Delhi, and Bangalore. We then built the tallest buildings in those cities of more than 25 million sqft. We were also associated with DMRC to build Airport links & other metro lines.

IJM swiftly became an enviable name in the Indian Infrastructure segment by delivering quality products within stipulated time & budget, thanks to our highly trained workforce. Many companies today have copied our successful implementation strategies. In short, IJM has done more than 5000 lane km of quality highways & bridges in the General Contract/ PPP model and still thrives in a fiercely competitive market.

As the Director & COO, what are the fundamental factors you look into when formulating effective corporate strategies?

Formulating an effective corporate strategy is one of the pillars that contribute to success—planning development & implementation on the ground while boosting credibility.

COOs need to be communicating in clear terms & objectives which are driven by the company's value & mission. Effective strategic leadership calls for loyalty to the organization, judicious use of power entrusted, transparency, problem-solving skills, readiness to delegate, and creating a passion for the job while maintaining empathy towards others. It also takes being self-aware and simultaneously managing critical factors such as values, opportunities & capability which will align with the company vision.

How do you ensure that the company stays afloat among its competitors in the market?

You need to look after your existing customers and improve service levels by being more responsive since competition is fierce, especially in the infrastructure business. High quality & timely delivery within the stipulated cost is the best way to defend the market

position and build on the competitive advantage. In short, it is largely about knowing the competition, comprehending customers' expectations, and providing value propositions. Other aspects that significantly help are keeping abreast of the developments in the sector, constantly investing in new technology, and upgrading human resources.

What are the measures you have implemented toward upholding environmental responsibility?

Every day, we make choices in our lives that affect the environment, the climate, and other species. We believe in sustainability and do a lot to reduce our environmental footprint by exploring & consuming waste such as using fly ash for earth fills, fly ash bricks, and biofuel, and ensuring that when we buy new P&M, they provide environmental benefits in terms of emissions, being water-wise, and so on.



MY BELIEF IN THE LEADERSHIP MANTRA IS ALL ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITIES THAT YOU ARE WILLING TO 'OWN'. LEADERS DON'T CHOOSE THEIR FOLLOWERS; FOLLOWERS CHOOSE LEADERS WHOM THEY TRUST, RESPECT & FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH

Where are you headed in the next five years and what are the impacts you strive to create through your future goals?

Though I will be retiring in three years, in the future thereafter, I want to play the role of a Mentor in the industry wherein I can share & contribute my critical experiences to upcoming leaders. There is a need to propagate 'ethics is the essence of success' to aspiring leaders who shall be able to fill in the leadership gaps, fix big issues, and execute core strategies in concert with senior leadership. It is a proven success mantra for me and I look forward to this objective which is worth working for. 