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LEADERSHIP

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CEO - Retail &
Commercial,
Mantri Developers*

Sanjay Agarwal

COO & Director, IJMII

**A LEGENDARY MEGA-PROJECTS
EXPERT IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE ARENA**

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COO & Director, IJMII

A LEGENDARY MEGA-PROJECTS
EXPERT IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE ARENA

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COO & Director, IJMII

A LEGENDARY MEGA-PROJECTS EXPERT IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE ARENA

Over the last few years, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has been on a roll, completing several groundbreaking projects in record time. A few months ago, NHAI hit the spotlight yet again by setting 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. Lend your ears to NHAI's Project Director Sanjay Kadam who poured praises on the project partner: "This critical activity has not been attempted in such a short span of time by any construction company in India. It is a proud moment for us and I am extremely delighted to be a part of this initiative". We are talking about IJM (India) Infrastructure (IJMII), the Indian subsidiary (operating from Hyderabad since 1998) of a Malaysian multinational corporation. Sanjay Agarwal (COO & Director, IJMII), an Infrastructure industry veteran and an expert in mega projects, has been at the forefront of many such 'firsts' in the country across public, commercial and residential projects.

Having kick-started his career in 1986 as an Assistant Project Manager in IRCON, a Government of India Undertaking under the Ministry of Railways, Sanjay has imprinted his signature on the Infrastructure Development industry inside and outside the subcontinent, accomplishing several prestigious infrastructure projects of diversified nature. This includes Asia's largest Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala, Dadri Power Plant Rail connectivity, Road cum rail bridges in Tatanagar, and development of urban elevated roads & Flyovers in Jakarta, Indonesia. In 1996, he moved to IJM Corporation and executed the 'Desa Sri Puteri' mega building project using Wall & Table Systems forms. After three years, he relocated to IJM India Infrastructure. The rest is history. Sanjay spearheaded 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.





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good leader

CEO *Insights* TOP 10
LEADERS IN CONSTRUCTION
& INFRASTRUCTURE 2022

Sanjay Agarwal,
COO & Director,
IJMII

An Industry Legend with more than 36 years of inbound and outbound experience, Sanjay boasts spearheading some of the iconic projects in the country, including a township spread over 114 acres in Vijayawada, a 9.93 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. Sanjay completed his schooling in 'Gorakhpur', a small town in Uttar Pradesh. He completed his Bachelor of Civil Engineering from MIT- Mangalore university in 1986.

Hobbies: Music, Traveling, & Observing
Favorite Cuisine: Desi & Chinese
Favorite Books: Any 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

In 2008, Sanjay announced voluntary retirement from IJMII and established Team universal Infratech, (TUIPL) to provide services to the construction industry, which became an award-winning company. Over the past 14 years, TUIPL has completed various infra Projects PAN India having a cumulative value of more than Rs.2200 crore with more than 300 dedicated employees. In 2019, IJM Corporation acquired TUIPL, and a part of the deal was Sanjay looking after IJMs Construction Operations in India as COO of IJMII. Within a year, he was appointed as the whole-time director. CEO Insights team recently got in touch with this legendary leader and had an exclusive conversation with him. Below is an excerpt from our interview with Sanjay.

WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION BEHIND VENTURING INTO THE CONSTRUCTION & INFRASTRUCTURE INDUSTRY? TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY; ALSO, WHAT DRIVES YOU TODAY?

My father being an Indian Railway Engineer, I grew seeing him engaged in mega rail projects like bridges, tunnels, railways, and many more, which fascinated & inspired me. The unforgettable experience of accompanying him at project sites during the early stages of my life inspired me to be a construction man like him.

For the same reason, after graduation, I was so thrilled with my first job opportunity in an Indian Railway Construction company as an assistant manager that I passed on the opportunity to complete my Master's from South Dakota University (US). I worked on projects like Kapurthala Coach Factory (Punjab), a major rail bridge over the river in Tatanagar, road & elevated flyover in Jakarta, and in the process, gained hands-on project experience, which opened up an opportunity in the year 1994 for me in the Malaysian Construction industry. I joined a top-tier piling company (PILECON Geotechnics Bhd) as a project manager and executed more than 20,000 piles in specialized conditions such as facilitating the top-down construction of the very first high-rise building in Kuala Lumpur and offshore piling for Dry Dock at Johor Bahru. In the aftermath, I was cherry-picked by IJM in 1996. The leaders then had a very strong vision about infra growth in India, and thus I was groomed and mentored to support the IJM Construction Zest in India.

In 1999, before the start of the millennium, I ventured into highway construction in India. The sector had just started opening up, and we secured six projects of NHAI & state governments in JVs as

lead partner constituting almost 400 km in length, before leaping for India's first big size BoT project (150km) – Tada-Nellore section of NH5 & Vijayawada-Nandigama NH9 in the year 2001. A successful toll operation commenced in a record time of 26 months in 2003. The above success provided us with immense confidence & drive to dream big; thus IJM became BoT leader between 2000 – 2008.



Our goals in the foreseeable term are around making the supply chain more regional & putting back the human asset as the most important factor for an agile business to succeed

All these accumulated years of rich hands-on experience and dream of being an entrepreneur inspired me to establish my own company TUIPL as a service provider to the big infra-companies. This includes IJMII, PNC, GVK, Era, Indu, and AAI, apart from high-rise building works for Punj Lloyd, Prestige, and India Bulls, to name a few on a PAN India basis before IJM offered to buy the majority of our share in the year 2020.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE IJM INDIA INFRASTRUCTURE AS AN ORGANIZATION? WHERE IS ITS POSITION IN THE MARKET, AND WHAT IS ITS USP?

IJM India is a wholly-owned subsidiary of IJM Corporation Berhad, a Malaysia-listed conglomerate with a 1.5 billion turnover, with almost more than two decades of success & presence in the Indian infrastructure market, specifically in build operate transfer mode in the highway sector. Our growth & sustainability is a direct result of strong leadership, drive for excellence, good governance, strong delivery capabilities, and dedicated, talented teams that aspire to develop one solution after another.

Most of our bigger works are secured by our parent company, which is then executed by IJMII, an organization people always envy, because we are

the number one premier BoT operator in the country with impeccable talent & resources, and equipment at our disposal and with a motto 'Delivering Today – Building Tomorrow'. In a nutshell, clients are always comfortable working with IJM as they know for sure that we will deliver the projects despite any odds within stipulated parameters.

HOW HAS BEEN YOUR RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES POSED BY COVID-19 AND THE NEED FOR NEW STRATEGIES? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ROLE IN TACKLING THOSE CHALLENGES?

The coronavirus pandemic has thrown up new challenges that we have never faced before, making us learn new things. Post-Pandemic, the primary challenges as a contractor are uncertainty such as financial, economic, social, and psychological impact, apart from disruptions in the supply chain and lack of migrant workers. Our goals in the foreseeable term are around making the supply chain more regional & putting back the human asset as the most important factor for an agile business to succeed. As contractors, we focus on online channels for monitoring employees' well-being, ordering construction materials, securing critical materials & long lead items, managing scarce resources more accurately, and maintaining cash flow.



In the long term, we desire to establish a central monitoring function that can rapidly identify & respond to resource-allocation needs across the portfolio. In addition to systematic assessment of the parts of the portfolio that may be affected by COVID-19, these capabilities can include real-time transparency on project process, material inventory, subcontractors, services, and costs. We want to continue measuring and ensuring the safety of informal laborers, provide increased remuneration to the skilled workforce for early completion, and use technologies more to overcome these times of crisis.

IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY SO FAR, WHICH ARE THE MILESTONES THAT BESTOWED YOU WITH UTMOST SATISFACTION – BOTH AS AN INDIVIDUAL AND A LEADER

One of the biggest milestones in my life is venturing & building a successful enterprise from the ground up with all the experience I have received over the years; not only that but also collaborating with IJM to scale up the business was one of the wisest decisions. By going forth with the decision, I obtained a lead position that fulfilled my professional & materialistic dreams with full integrity and dedication since the start.

BEING THE COO OF THE COMPANY, HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ALIGN THE COMPANY'S OPERATIONS WITH THE CHANGING MARKET BEHAVIORS? WHAT IS THE ROADMAP THAT YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR THE COMPANY?

Leaders must agree on the company's mission, vision, and values. As a COO, my job is to communicate the company's purpose, direction, values, and overall mission statement to our employees to serve the foundation on which every other alignment effort will be built. Every organization has areas for improvement. Meeting with people at every level and asking the right questions help align with the company's operations in the ever-changing market. Interaction allows us to gain insights when it comes to decision-making. It helps to aggregate & categorize information to more clearly understand organization-wide versus unit-level issues and enables us to measure and articulate key challenges in a non-controversial way.

As far as the future is concerned, apart from building a solid order book in these changing times with a mix of PPP-EPC-Own property development works, it is also important to invest in the best talents which will improve standards across the organization, as the saying goes, "COOs are only as effective as the people they lead". With a solid talent base, you can focus on training them and providing them with opportunities to lead and carry forward the company legacy & succession plan.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO THE UPCOMING LEADERS STARTING ANEW IN THIS INDUSTRY?

'Ethics is paramount & essence of success' for a good leader. As an aspirant, one should be able to fill in the leadership gaps, fix big issues, and execute core strategy in concert with senior leadership. Most importantly, a COO needs to be an effective communicator and collaborator with whom people want to work and a quick decision-maker as waiting for decisions to be made can seriously delay projects. [CEI](#)