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TECH INDUSTRY

AI OR DIE

AS AI UPENDS THE GLOBAL TECH ORDER, INDIAN IT GIANTS
FACE A STARK CHOICE: ADAPT FAST OR FADE AWAY

MOST ADMIRED

CEO



MATHEW
JOB

RAHUL
BANERJEE

DR. SANJAY
AGARWAL

DR. SUDHIR
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PANKAJ
LIDOO

VIPIN
LIDOO

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BANSAL

SANDIPP
VIJJ





Building Beyond Concrete: How Sanjay Agarwal is Redefining Infrastructure Leadership

Dr. Sanjay Agarwal
Director &
Advisor, IJM India
Infrastructure Ltd

After 38 years of shaping India's infrastructure backbone, Dr. Sanjay Agarwal has launched SA Associates to share the wisdom that built 5,000 lane kilometers of highways and transformed cities across the nation.

In April 2024, when Dr. Sanjay Agarwal stepped down from his executive role at IJM Group, the Indian construction industry took notice. But this wasn't a retirement—it was a reinvention. The civil engineer who had spent nearly four decades building India's infrastructure was pivoting to build something equally valuable: the next generation of industry leaders.

"Ethics are paramount and the essence of success," Agarwal emphasizes, a philosophy forged through decades of navigating complex projects across India and Southeast Asia. It's this unwavering commitment to integrity that distinguished his tenure at infrastructure giants IRCON and IJM Group, where he oversaw projects that literally paved India's path to progress.

The numbers tell part of the story. Since 1999, projects under Agarwal's leadership have produced more than 5,000 lane kilometres of highways. His portfolio includes vast townships spanning acres in Hyderabad, Vijayawada, and Nagpur, alongside numerous Build-Operate-Transfer and EPC highway projects. But statistics alone don't capture the strategic acumen required to deliver such scale while maintaining quality and ethical standards.

A 1986 graduate of Manipal Institute of Technology, Agarwal built his reputation on an uncommon combination: technical excellence married to people-centric leadership. His approach to team-building—filling leadership gaps through effective communication and collaboration—created what he calls "effective leaders with whom people want to work." In an industry often criticized for opacity and inefficiency, this human-centred approach set him apart.

Now, through SA Associates, Agarwal is monetizing his most valuable asset: experience. The venture offers seven core services ranging from advisory and industry networking to mentoring, liaising, and investment guidance. There's also a practical edge—crushing and mining operations in Saharanpur and Hyderabad provide tangible infrastructure support alongside strategic consulting.

"My role as Director and Advisor allows me to shape the future of infrastructure through mentorship," Agarwal explains of his continued relationship with IJM while building SA Associates. It's a delicate balance—honouring past commitments while forging new paths.

The business model is shrewd. Rather than competing directly with former employers and partners, Agarwal positions himself as the connector, the sage advisor, the door-opener. His decades of networking with top industry leaders and government authorities across India and Southeast Asia create value that younger firms simply cannot replicate. In infrastructure, where relationships and regulatory navigation often matter as much as engineering prowess, this institutional knowledge is gold.

The timing is strategic too. As India pursues ambitious infrastructure goals under various government initiatives, companies need experienced hands to navigate increasingly complex projects. Foreign firms entering the Indian market need local expertise. Domestic players scaling up need mentorship. SA Associates sits at this intersection of need and knowledge.

Whether this transition from builder to advisor proves as transformative as his construction legacy remains to be seen. But Agarwal's track record suggests he understands something fundamental: infrastructure isn't just about concrete and steel—it's about the frameworks that enable progress. And sometimes, the most valuable thing you can build is a bridge between ambition and achievement.