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Top Prominent
PERSONALITIES
to Watch in 2025

Engineering India's
Tomorrow - The Legacy of

Dr. **SANJAY**
AGARWAL



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C O V E R S T O R Y

Engineering India's Tomorrow -
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At SA Associates, we offer expert advice and networking opportunities for individuals and businesses to unlock their true potential and catalyze growth.

Top Prominent Personalities to Watch in 2025

India's infrastructure space boasts a wide thoroughfare, with thousands of crores worth of projects, skylines of steel, and expressways where fast lanes meet. However, one name stands out in unwavering reverence - **Dr. Sanjay Agarwal, Advisor & Director at IJM India Infrastructure Limited** and [SA Associates](#). His work wasn't driven by seeking glory; it was the real and metaphorical cement upon which India's modern growth story was laid.

Over almost four decades, Dr. Agarwal's journey is less an outline of a career than a template for purpose-driven leadership. From the time-wrinkled site plans of early projects in Asia to the executive boardrooms where policy is shaped, his story is that of a man who not only built structures but also built the confidence of a nation.

A Scholar's Groundwork - Laying the First Stones

The journey commences in the classrooms of Manipal Institute of Technology, where a young Sanjay Agarwal nurtured his passion for civil engineering. Graduating in 1986, he emerged not only with technical proficiency but also with a profound philosophical inquiry: what factors contribute to the creation of enduring structures?

Graduation marks the commencement of a career for numerous individuals, and it marked the inception of a legacy for Dr. Agarwal. What set him apart was not only his profound understanding of engineering principles but also his exceptional ability to seamlessly integrate knowledge and integrity. This virtue would eventually become the bedrock of every project he would eventually lead.

Dr. Agarwal has consistently attributed his early education to imparting him with a dual perspective, encompassing the analytical prowess of an engineer and the emotional intelligence of a leader. These values have become the guiding principles for his actions, irrespective of the magnitude of budgets, the constraints of tight timelines, or the shifting geopolitical landscapes.

Cutting Teeth on Global Soil - The IRCON Years

Dr. Agarwal's early postings at IRCON International Ltd. allowed him to work on ambitious infrastructure projects. His first significant achievement was introducing Asia's largest Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala and overseeing widespread urban development in Jakarta. These projects marked the beginning of his ambition at scale.



“ We provide personalized support to our clients, taking the time to understand their unique needs and objectives.

During these early years, Dr. Agarwal was exposed to mega logistics, cross-cultural management, and global engineering standards. While most seasoned professionals spend decades reaching what Dr. Agarwal accomplished in his first few years, he wasn't just absorbing technical knowledge; he was honing his ability to lead amidst complexity.

Dr. Agarwal recalls Jakarta as a pivotal moment: *"That's when I realized that engineering isn't just about designing; it's also about listening. When you're building for communities, you need to understand their rhythms, behaviors, and aspirations."*

Commanding a Vision - Leadership at IJM India

But the real makeover came in 1994 when he joined IM corporation as Project Leader in Malaysia & thereafter in 1999 posted with ***IJM India Infrastructure Ltd***, an Indian arm of the Malaysian colossus IJM Corporation Berhad. Under his stewardship, the company became a top-tier player in India's infrastructure sector.

In a span of more than 20 years, Dr. Agarwal remained **actively engaged in the creation of infrastructure through the construction of more than 5000 lane km of highways**, major urban roads, bridges, and integrated townships, among others. Among his remarkable accomplishments was the ***Solapur–Bijapur Four-Lane Highway on BoT mode***, which, apart from

being ahead of schedule, made history. ***Building 25.54 km of highway in merely 17 hours and 45 minutes also made it to the world record*** and ***merited appreciation from Union Minister Shri Nitin Gadkari***.

But this was no mistake; it was the consequence of inexorable precision, precise planning & the synchronizing together of a TEAM effort. Behind the scenes were exhaustive contingency plans, pretested workflows and command of supply chains and human resources in all 360 degrees.

Dr. Agarwal always sets standards, not just meeting them. And that entailed doing things that had never been done. Throughout this period, IJM India was awarded numerous quality control, environmental safety standards and delivery speed awards.

His works on urban townships in Hyderabad, Nagpur & Vijayawada were also indicative of his vision to embed smart city features even before the smart city buzz became fashionable. Sustainable drainage, dedicated WTP – STP, & inclusive housing designs are featured in the schemes.

Innovation Meets Intuition - Tech-Driven Transformation

Dr. Agarwal and his company are recognized as the trailblazers in leveraging new technology in the civil engineering sector, as he was amongst the first to advocate for the use of drones for project monitoring and the intense use of Building Information Modelling (BIM) in the road and highway sector of India.

Whereas most on-site workers saw construction as a hands-on industry, he took a hybrid approach, training in boots-on-ground site management and cognitive cloud-based intelligence. Using drones, progress on site could be

followed in real-time with minimal disruption, while ambiguity and inefficiency were drastically reduced. BIM enabled improved coordination in design and a more predictable cost estimate.

He also introduced predictive maintenance algorithms and AI for inventory systems at IJM sites, which reduced material wastage by 15%. His forward-looking approach helped to keep IJM proactive with the lead time they needed to prepare for disruptors like COVID-19.

Shaping People, Not Just Projects

Dr. Agarwal's least-talked-about, yet perhaps most significant, contribution has been in pioneering the creation of people-centric leadership in the infrastructure sector. He says the true measure of an engineer is not simply a question of calculations, but one of character.

For 20 years, he served as a mentor to hundreds of engineers, project managers and site coordinators. He made sure to personally train young recruits, showing them how to run meetings, navigate the regulatory process, handle public stakeholders and work with contractors.

One such mentee, now a regional director, says, "*Dr. Agarwal taught me that precision was not just in design but in dialogue. Everyone wants to feel like a stakeholder.*"

He built an internal culture in IJM India where ethical leadership was not a suggestion but a non-negotiable and where excellence was not expected; it was exemplified.

As he says, "*Leadership is about creating collaborators, not commanding followers.*"

Post-Executive Purpose: Founding SA Associates

In April 2024, after decades of controlling the levers of mega-projects, Dr. Agarwal decided to pivot without too much slowing down. He was the founder of SA Associates, a strategic advisory platform for the infrastructure and construction industry.

SA Associates is a consulting firm and is a great place for creativity, apprenticeship, and revolution. Its offerings include:

- Strategic Advisory.
- Mentorship & Leadership Programs.
- Policy Advocacy.
- Tech & Product Integration.
- Regulatory Navigation & Liaison.
- Mining & Oil & Technology Solutions

In a world of fractured knowledge, SA Associates offers an integrated partnership—mingling tactical reality with strategic thought.

The brand's mission is to scale infrastructure and make it sustainable. Dr. Agarwal sees SA Associates as a driver of change, a company that sets the technology, empowers local contractors, and co-creates smart and livable cities.

The Global Mindset - Bridging Borders and Ideas

As a youth, Dr. Agarwal was exposed to international work projects that would shape his worldview. At present, he seamlessly walks the corridors of Southeast Asia's infrastructure ecosystem, constructing cross-border investment frameworks and tech exchange partnerships.

He has been able to host more than six giant infrastructure dialogues and has been instrumental in road construction models and urban planning innovations. He also advises infrastructure think tanks and is a green infrastructure policy adviser.

His vision of improving the practice of Indian infrastructure with the best practices from across the world makes him a sought-after speaker at global conferences.

Legacy of Ethics and Excellence

If there is any one thread running through his long list of projects and positions, it is made up of the fabric of ethics. His mantra is excellent. "*Ethics comes first, and ethics is the key to success. It is not just a slogan; it is a way of doing business*", he says.

His career is remarkable for its mastery of the combination of speed and sensitivity, scale and sustainability, innovation and integrity.

And in a time when infrastructure is growing increasingly commercial, Dr. Agarwal still upholds the values of fairness toward top liners, transparency to clients, and the treatment of workers that allow him to walk with his head held high. It's nothing less than an ethos, and few leaders in the world today embody it so consistently.

Collaborating with the Public Sector - A Trusted Government Ally

Dr. Agarwal has rarely been treated as a mere corporate honcho; rather, he has usually been seen as a cherished consultant and a government accomplice. His projects frequently overlapped with national and state government policies and programs, such as those of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Public Works Departments, and Urban Development Authorities.

His approach is simple but brilliant. "*Grasp the spirit of the legislation, rally stakeholders behind the mission, and establish transparent execution plans*", he shares.

"*The government is not a hurdle,*" he often says. "*It's a stakeholder in the nation's vision. And if we communicate with clarity and purpose, collaboration becomes seamless.*"



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We understand the importance of networking in today's business world and help our clients unlock their true potential.

Commitment to Sustainability and Green Infrastructure

Decades before '*climate-resilient infrastructure*' became a buzzword, Dr. Agarwal was already building the concept into his planning. In his township projects, as well as highways, he focused on low-carbon building materials, rainwater harvesting systems, fly ash bricks & energy-efficient lighting.

One of his pioneering works in Hyderabad was the introduction of green belt corridors alongside roads for aesthetics as well as ecodevelopment. He also advocated for the concept of using construction waste to create a reusable subgrade base to help minimize the carbon footprint of large-scale developments.

Sustainability is not an afterthought at SA Associates; it's in the DNA of each advisory, partnership and mentorship program. Recently, it has tied up with environmental engineers and green certifiers to help clients get IGBC and GRIHA certifications.

Inspiring the Next Generation: Academia and Public Speaking

"It's always been my personal belief that knowledge not shared is wasted knowledge," Dr. Agarwal said. His sessions, which attendees often say are pivot points in their lives, transcend engineering, discussing leadership, ethics, global competitiveness, and lifelong learning.

In 2025, he is proposing to organize a series of public speaking events called "Built to Last," which would gather young professionals and students for conversations about the changing face of infrastructure in economic and societal development.

He is also actively involved in education through scholarships for deserving students from low-income backgrounds to pursue studies in civil engineering. His transformation from small-town schoolboy to industry powerhouse is a testament to those who believe in grit, discipline, and passion.

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Our services are thoughtfully crafted to help individuals and businesses reach their full potential. Let us guide you towards success and unlock your potential today.

Looking Forward - Shaping the Future of Indian Infrastructure

Dr. Sanjay Agarwal feels the sector needs to transform into resilient, inclusive, and digitally connected ecosystems as India is rapidly urbanizing and developing infrastructure. He sees the future in:

- Modular construction techniques to accelerate timelines.
- Circular economy models in construction waste management.
- Integration of AI and GIS for Intelligent Infrastructure Planning.
- Development of women-led contractor groups to promote inclusion.

KEC's associated firm, SA Associates, is preparing a white paper to recommend a national model for the development of smart corridors, an effort that Dr. Agarwal envisions will redefine traditional engineering and spur more holistic development.

His mantra is just simple. *"Don't just build infrastructure. Build the institutions and ideas that make infrastructure valuable"*, he shares.

Beyond the Blueprints: Personal Reflections and Vision

Dr. Agarwal is one of the successful professionals in Indian infrastructure, and yet he is so grounded. Colleagues say he is a rare combination of intellectual heft and personal warmth, as much at ease talking about geopolitics as he is mentoring a junior engineer.

When asked about what's next, he often smiles and says, *"I'm not building roads anymore; I'm building bridges. Between ideas, between generations, and between nations."*

The future he foresees for SA Associates includes creating centres of excellence, providing customized leadership programs, and devising more sustainable infrastructure strategies for developing economies.

The Future Vision of A Leader of Steel and Soul

In India's rise from poor infrastructure to competitive infrastructure globally, stalwarts like **Dr. Sanjay Agarwal** serve as not just titans for what they have built but how they have built it. With dignity. With direction. With discipline.

He is not a relic of the past. He is a torchbearer of what leadership, especially infrastructure leadership, needs to be in the 21st century, i.e. visionary, ethical, collaborative and deeply human.

His projects will someday inevitably wear and age, but the professionals he's mentored, the institutions he's shaped, and the values he's stood for will persist far beyond.

Dr. Agarwal's journey isn't just a narrative to be read; it is a legacy in the making! 

