



# Who's who?

As road-building in India continues to gather pace, the initiative is being urged forward by commitment from the public and private sectors. Here, we profile a few of the key figures who are getting the country moving again

Words | **Charu Bahri**





### R. S. Gujral, secretary (Road Transport & Highways)-cum-chairman, National Highways Authority of India

Raminder Singh Gujral has been working in the Indian Administrative Service for over 35 years. At present he is secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and also chairman of the National Highways Authority of India, a body constituted by an act of Parliament in 1995 and responsible for the development, maintenance and management of national highways.

As chairman he is responsible for the formulation and implementation of projects pertaining to all the national highways and various corridors of the National Highways Development Programme and also policies concerning the transport and road safety programme. Prior to holding this position, Gujral was director general (Foreign Trade) in the Ministry of Commerce. He has held various positions in the government.

Gujral holds graduate degrees in Law and Economics, and a postgraduate degree in Business Administration from IIM, Ahmedabad. He also holds a master's degree in Arts (International Finance and Trade) from Fletcher School, Tufts University, Massachusetts USA.

National highways account for only 2.2% of Indian roadways, and a fifth of these are one lane. Contrast this with the staggering 40% of traffic they carry, and it isn't hard to fathom why India's interstate road network is creaking under the load of vehicular movement. What makes the problem worse is that many roads are plagued by gaping potholes that cause road traffic accidents and losses of produce, and slow down truckers.

Some stretches of the road network have seen considerable change in the past decade. Projects such as the ambitious Golden Quadrilateral – 6,000km of four-lane highways linking Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai and Mumbai – and the North-South and East-West corridors have been rolled out. Wherever these projects have been completed, they are playing a major role in pushing the country's economic engine into overdrive. Four-lane highways have cut travel times and opened up new employment opportunities for communities living nearby.

In the coming years, further improvements to the network are expected to deliver higher living standards to Indians en masse, thus ensuring they benefit from the country's spectacular growth story. All this development is happening due to the initiative of the public sector and the interest of the private sector. Here we profile a handful of leaders who have made significant contributions in connecting India and improving motoring conditions. ■



## G. R. SHANMUGAPPA, PRESIDENT, ALL INDIA MOTOR TRANSPORT CONGRESS

G. R. Shanmugappa, president of the All India Motor Transport Congress, is a man of few words. Still, just one call from him can cause millions of truckers across the country to switch off their engines and bring the nation to a standstill. Shanmugappa is driven by the welfare of the truckers and transporters he represents. He never forgets the interests of the common man either, because this leader traces his humble beginnings to Pudupettai, a small village in Tamil Nadu. At a young age, with only Rs2 in his pocket, he set out to eke out a living as a porter on the platform of the Bangalore railway station. He later joined Brooke Bond as a labourer.

Four decades on, Shanmugappa owns four companies – Blend Pack (manufactures blending machines for Unilever), Rohini Enterprises, Rohini Packers and GRS Packers – that make use of 100 trucks. An equal-opportunities employer, Shanmugappa counts many women among his staff. Former president of India, APJ Abdul Kalam has appreciated Shanmugappa for being a role model for those he leads.

Best management practices and the qualities of humility and straightforwardness – Shanmugappa counts these as his recipe for success. He is credited with getting the New National Permit scheme implemented and winning concessions on toll issues.



## C. P. Joshi, union minister, Road Transport and Highways

Current road transport and highways minister and seasoned congressman C. P. Joshi seems a tad more practical than his predecessor Kamal Nath. After taking over the ministerial position in January 2011, he agreed with Nath that project awards are the key to achieving the 20km a day road-building target. Joshi has prudently set a three-year timeline to pull off this feat. In the interim, a model concession agreement will be rolled out; financing issues will also be addressed, with the National Highways Authority of India raising Rs10,000 crore through debt-free infrastructure bonds.

Joshi has made it clear that he plans to follow the recommendations of the BK Chaturvedi committee to address the debt repayment burden of the authority. This will mean awarding 65% of road projects on toll, 20% on annuity and the remainder as engineering procurement construction (EPC) contracts. The nodal body may also see more private sector participation in the coming years, if Joshi brings technocrats on board.

The minister's priorities are weeding out corruption and making the system of awarding contracts more transparent by introducing e-tendering for road projects, adopting participatory social communication platforms such as Facebook to encourage public feedback on the quality of construction, and ensuring road safety – for which he must be applauded.



## Lalit Jalan, CEO and full-time director, Reliance Infrastructure

Lalit Jalan holds the distinguished position of having been the youngest ever CEO at Reliance, when he joined its polypropylene business in 1995 at the age of 39. Now CEO and full-time director of Reliance Infrastructure (RInfra, part of the Reliance – Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group), he is putting his experience to good use in steering forward India's leading private-sector utility and infrastructure company. This alumnus of Wharton's B-school, the University of Pennsylvania and IIT Kanpur leads teams executing projects worth Rs40,000 crore, of which just over a quarter are highway contracts. A relatively new entrant in the roads sector, RInfra has in a span of four years emerged as the largest concessionaire of the NHAI, with 11 road projects in hand in north, south and west India. Jalan's vision for the roads business is driven by the opportunities lined up for private players. Be it acquiring land for projects, shifting utilities at project sites, or finding professionally qualified manpower for new projects being rolled out – the company will be doubling the 6,000 people its road division employs – beating challenges are all in a day's work for this business leader. He also prioritises adopting futuristic highway systems such as the Enterprise Toll Management System, and providing users with a host of services.



### Parvez Alam, chief operating officer – E & C, Hindustan Construction Company Ltd (HCC)

Parvez Alam has come a long way since joining HCC as a fresh civil engineering graduate in 1982. Over three decades he has acquired a rich experience in engineering, design and construction, with a portfolio that spans the infrastructure spectrum. Now COO of its Engineering & Construction Division, Alam exudes an infectious zeal to deliver the best, on time, team-playing skills to the organisation.

Landmark road projects commissioned under his leadership and guidance include the Mumbai-Pune expressway, which has halved the travel time between the two cities, and the historically significant 89km cross-mountain Mughal Road, which scales 11,000ft in the Kashmir Valley. Other iconic HCC road projects include the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, which has redefined commuting in the country's commercial capital, and the Badrapur-Faridabad elevated highway, which has won awards for its outstanding construction design and quality. HCC is currently executing 11 national highway projects across the country that will take its highway tally well beyond the 3,000km it has already constructed.

"Commercial vehicles in developed nations run almost double the daily distance covered by commercial vehicles in India," says the visionary COO. "We need a good network of roads and highways to bridge this gap."

### Satish Parakh, managing director, Ashoka Buildcon Ltd

First-generation entrepreneur Satish Parakh has been the driving force behind Ashoka Buildcon's evolution as a pan-India roads and bridges infrastructure development company. Since joining the company as a junior civil engineer, he has risen to be its managing director and one of its promoters, and holds directorial positions in 29 group companies,

Under his leadership, the Ashoka group has acquired and demonstrated project execution and project development skills such as accurate traffic forecasting, superior project evaluation, and project completion within cost estimates and ahead of time

schedules, with minimal O&M costs. The group is currently operating 18 BOT (build, operate, transfer) projects, has five BOT projects under construction and has already handed over three to the government after the concession period was completed. Ashoka Buildcon has constructed over 1,572 lane-kilometres on a BOT basis, 1,154 lane-kilometres on an EPC basis and is presently constructing 2,531 lane-kilometres.

"We aim to execute every project as a long-term national asset and remain committed to deliver best quality with value for money," says Parakh. To this end he has introduced latest techniques and state-of-the-art environment-friendly plants especially imported from Austria, Korea and Sweden to produce crushed aggregates, hot mixes and ready-mix concrete.



### DR SUBHAMAY GANGOPADHYAY, DIRECTOR, CENTRAL ROAD RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Dr Subhamay Gangopadhyay became director of the Central Road Research Institute in 2009, three decades after joining the organisation as a young scientist. Under his leadership, the institute's revenues are growing by more than 20% annually. A national Accelerated Pavement Testing Facility has been established at a cost of Rs16 crore to fast-track the evaluation of the performance of pavements. Now CRRRI Technical Reports are being disseminated to share the institute's technical findings. Dr Gangopadhyay is emphasising institute-industry technical meetings and collaboration to deliberate the utilisation of research on roads and further research to develop more products for the sector. A post-graduate course on the

Engineering of Infrastructure and Disaster Mitigation has also been launched.

Prior to taking over the top job, this alumnus of the University of New Brunswick (Canada), the University of Calcutta and IIT - Kanpur headed the institute's Traffic Engineering and Transportation Planning division, where he greatly enhanced the results of traffic and transportation studies taken up in cities across the country.

Going forward, Gangopadhyay would like to create a manual on the development of highway capacity in Indian conditions, as well as initiate studies on the sustainability of transportation systems and road infrastructure to redefine traffic management and road design paradigms.

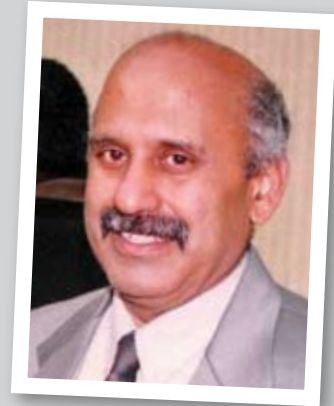




## M. MURALI, DIRECTOR GENERAL, NATIONAL HIGHWAY BUILDERS FEDERATION

National Highway Builders Federation director general M. Murali leads the nodal agency representing highway developers from the front. Three decades of experience across the tyre, paper, steel and road transport industries has given this mechanical engineer a keen understanding of working conditions in various parts of the country and across the public and private sectors, which he puts to good use in ensuring the apex body he heads achieves its targets. Describing his current assignment as one of most interesting and challenging of his career, Murali's mantra for success is, "There is no substitute for hard work; we need to knock on doors to seek as many opportunities as possible."

Knock he has, for in recent years Murali has steered forward the campaign to remove the clause restricting the number of bidders for road projects at the RFQ stage; negotiated the exemption of service tax on road-widening projects; restored the exemption on excise duty on pre-cast items used at worksites; and championed the cause of reform of the bidding process by insisting the government institutes a committee (the BK Chaturvedi Committee was the result) to design a model RFQ document applicable for public-private partnerships. Going forward, he would like to see improvements in the dispute resolution mechanism and fiscal and taxation-related issues.



## K. V. Rangaswami, board member & president, Construction Division, Larsen & Toubro Limited

K. V. Rangaswami is a board member and president of the construction division of US\$11.7 billion Larsen & Toubro Limited (L&T), India's largest engineering, technology and construction company. This civil engineering graduate from IIT-Madras started his innings with L&T as a junior engineer in 1965 and gradually moved up the leadership ladder by virtue of making outstanding contributions. L&T has constructed more than one-tenth (1,500km) of the road networks and 15km of

bridges forming the high-density traffic corridors of the Golden Quadrilateral and the North-South and East-West projects, part of India's ambitious National Highways Development Programme, which envisages building 13,151km of world-class highways to ease the flow of traffic and accelerate national development.

L&T Infrastructure Development Projects Limited – the trend-setter of the country's PPP-modelled road development projects – constructed the Coimbatore bypass, India's first BOT road project as far back as 1997. Today the company has 15 projects across the country in its portfolio, valued at more than Rs13,000 crore. Beyond doubt, modern highways built by L&T have and will continue to touch the lives of millions of Indians.



## Kamal Nath, former union minister, Road Transport and Highways

Seasoned congressman Kamal Nath is best known for his 18-month stint as the high-profile minister of Road Transport and Highways. When Nath took over the top job in mid-2009, the pace of road construction was a crawl – a measly 3-4km of roads were being constructed every day. At that rate of expansion, there was no way the congested road network would live up to expectations for it to spur India to double-digit economic growth. Nath revved up the daily output from 10 to 12km, urging contractors to come forward to bid for more highway infrastructure projects to reach his target of readying 20km of highways per day. Ironing out the hurdles in the way of this dream milestone became his number one priority, as did awarding projects across the board to have 20,000km of work in progress at any point in time. Less would not suffice to meet the targets. Nath described his vision as "well-thought out" during an interview with the BBC.

Earlier this year, a Cabinet reshuffle saw Nath unceremoniously shunted out of the surface transport ministry to the urban development ministry. Still, he succeeded in selling his dream during his tenure to countless infrastructure big-wigs who jumped onto the highway construction bandwagon – no mean feat indeed.