

Envisioning Ecosystems



In the world of development, the Chairman and Managing Director of MARG, is touted as a visionary. **AKHILA KRISHNAMURTHY** in conversation with GRK Reddy...

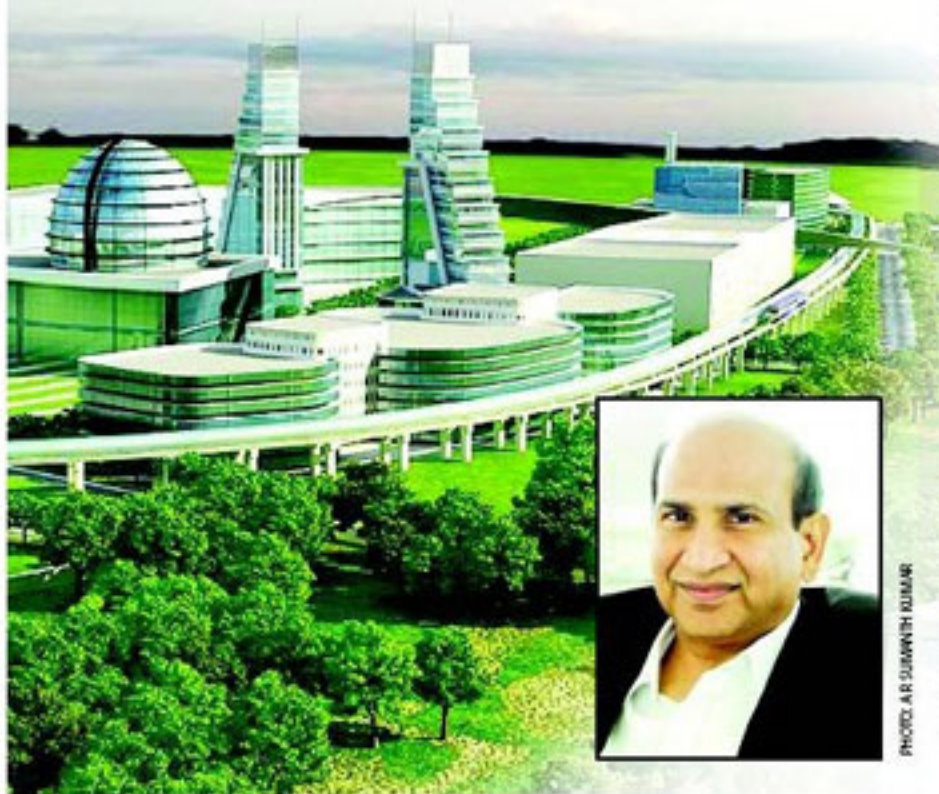


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You often use the word ecosystem. In Chennai, you are a pioneer in creating one. What was the inspiration?

In the early 90s, when we interacted with various IT companies while setting up an IT Park on the now famous OMR (Old Mahabalipuram Road), we realised that India was going to be the next big thing. The core of Fortune 500 companies was literally being worked out of India. That got me thinking. I realised we had a very sound educational system, family values and culture. The only deterrent was infrastructure. We needed to create that.

Back in the 90s, leading multinationals were setting up back offices here and needed large spaces for people to live, work and learn, and more importantly, on a scale that could really nourish the talents of those who inhabited it. The city didn't have the chassis or capability to withstand the pace of development. It was time for a paradigm shift; it was time to approach and treat things differently.

So, you decided to create a mini-city of sorts, right?

Yes, I felt the need of the hour was to address the future, long-term requirement of a city. In the world we live in, sustainability is imperative. We had to look at creating spaces that are socially, financially, economically and needless to say, environmentally conscious. That's precisely what we are doing with Swarnabhoomi.

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GRK Reddy
Mag

The concept of a mini-city is almost a movement of sorts. It requires a significant shift in the mindsets of people. How is the city responding to it?

Any movement is born out of an underlying need. For the last decade or so, people have been talking extensively about sustainability for instance. Also, this model has taken form and shape over the last ten years across the country. In Chennai, in particular, the OMR and Sriperambudur corridors have assumed importance, thanks to the IT, ITES and the automotive sectors. This growth has largely triggered off the need for a trend like this. It is bound to find its way and culminate into something huge.

These things take time, right?

Yes. Plus, in the evolution stage, it is a must to visualise the future in the next 20 years and work backwards. Else the models don't work.

Which we guess is what you are doing?

Exactly. We have been researching old models, identifying their limitations and placing them in the present-day context keeping in mind two essential aspects - human life and nature. We recognise that the environment you live and grow in has the potential to shape the mind.

Celebrating the spirit of human life, you talk a lot about it. Can you elaborate how that translates into development?

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On one level, we are talking about new urbanism; on another, the need to return to our roots, nature, et al?

We are talking about the returning to the roots of civilization, which is, in a sense, quite the same, universally speaking. The fundamental principle of starting a civilization is harmony - emotional, financial, social, etc. Even in our own Indian context, the Vedas and the texts before them, spoke about sustainability. I think somewhere along the course, we lost track. We are trying to revive that.

You don't call Swarnabhoomi a township, right?

Calling that contains it into boundaries, like a gated community. What we are doing instead is creating an ecosystem that integrates its surrounding were seamless development occurs and where each and everyone who lives, works and learns in it, feels a part of it.

