

LIFTING MALLS

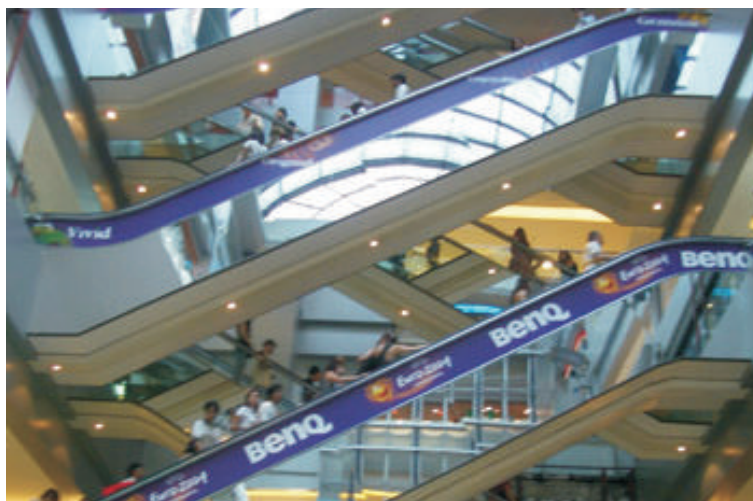
Part - VIII

Global down turn or up turn, nothing can keep people off good and genuine deals, unbelievable that our hosts in Melbourne had actually set their alarm to wake-up at 0500 hours on Boxing Day (the day after Christmas). This coming after a very long sumptuous Christmas Day (&

Night) should be good enough proof for any retail strategist. In anticipation of the customer rush, the outlets had start opening by 0500 hours itself. Though the crowds just about matched a typical weekend at a typical mall in India, the difference was obvious in terms of the higher foot fall conversion rates. The sales – persons and the cashiers had their hands full and rarely had a spare moment unlike the malls in India where boredom amongst the staff of a number of outlets is common. It was more like the “Big Bazaar Sabse Bada Din”. My host informed me that the crowd was lesser than previous years and blamed it on the economy. He also clarified that even this crowd wouldn't have happened if it hadn't

been for the generous doles paid out by the Australian Government to boost the end of the year revenues. Australian newspapers of December 27th suggested that most outlets had reported growth of 10% over previous years..

I am not an economist, but this seems to be the approach the Indian Government needs to adopt in the current global down turn. Rather than the short term quick fixes, more money should be put in the hands of the people, of course not as dole, but by increasing employment opportunities



through aggressive infrastructure development. After all we have huge catching up to do in terms of even the basic requirements.

While my host went about exploiting the big deals (the discounts were up to 50% and appeared genuine), I went in pursuit of my favorite past time. As anywhere else in the world, the food courts were doing roaring business, it didn't really matter that it was still early hours of the day. It didn't really matter that most would have eaten beyond limits just a few hours back.

A stark difference between malls abroad and in India is the approach to photography. While most malls in India have "no photography" signs put up, malls abroad do not really bother as long as you are not invading an

individual's privacy. I can't believe that we are so deprived of creativity and original ideas in India that we believe that everybody is a copy cat and afraid of them too.

In terms of the supporting vertical transportation system, I was really impressed by the arrangement of the escalators. It was clear that the architect / developer had applied their knowledge of "why you buy" psychology well enough. While the number of escalators was economized, the positioning of the escalators ensured smooth and easy access to the upper floors. The lifts were large enough to accommodate up to 8 shopping carts at a time and were well positioned through the mall. It also helped that the shopping carts provided by the large anchor stores could be used through the mall and at any of the other outlets. The parking lots extended the height of the mall enabling easy horizontal movement. With numerous vehicle exit ramps, ingress and egress wasn't a long drawn out affair. It was just perfect convenience for a shopper. The proof - I ended up spending over a couple of hundred dollars just on an impulse.

I was also impressed by the contents of the warning / safety notices posted on the escalators. The contents in simple words and pictorial representations more or less summed up the requirements of travelling on an escalator. Probably the only aspects missed out were the references to "Stepping on and off carefully" and "Check shoelaces and





loose clothing” before riding. The notices were also aesthetically acceptable.

However the placement of the warning notice made it obviously clear that the mall owner and the escalator supplier had placed the notices with intention of meeting a local code as well as pre-empt potential lawsuits. You didn't need to be an expert to realize that there was really no chance that the escalator rider could read the notice in its entirety prior to commencing on a safe escalator trip. And if by any chance the rider in his own

misplaced sense of caution did decide to stop to read the warning notice the chances are that he would get seriously injured. In a heavy crowd scenario he would surely cause a stampede.

In the 2 hours I observed the escalators, I was really glad that people were wise enough to just walk by the notice. I will not be surprised if before long some rider does actually decide to stop and stoop down to read the notice, get hurt and sue the mall owner and the supplier for a couple of million dollars. I left the mall with a disappointment that the underlying approach across the world to ensuring safety was based more on a means to laws / codes compliance and preventing lawsuits than achieving the true objective.

A number of the articles I have written for Storai have had a focus on the safety of users and the need to train users on safe practices. Irrespective of the fact that responses from the constituents were not encouraging, the fact is that the initiatives that we had taken on along with our responsibility of earning a living were grossly inadequate. With the recognition that a lot more had to be done in a more organized manner we have now set up the “Elevator and Escalator Safety Trust (EEST). The primary objective of EEST which has been set up as an independent and non-profit entity will be to develop and distribute informational and educational materials and to conduct informational and educational programs for the general public on the safe and proper use of elevator and escalator equipment. EEST will have process and advisory support from the Elevator and Escalator Foundation of the USA (EESF) and Elevator World. The

main focus segment as has been the case for EESF will be the second standard students across the country. We have very ambitious plans for EEST and hope to have the organizational structure in place by the first quarter of 2009. With support from the E&E industry and the various constituents we hope that EEST will succeed in its target of reaching 500,000 children in 5 years – it will be a step towards ensuring the safest means of transport remains such. 😊

About the author:

TAK Mathews is a Chartered Engineer, a member of the International Association of Elevator Engineers, of the National Association of Vertical Transportation Professionals (USA) and of the National Association of Elevator Safety Authorities International. He is the Principal Consultant at TAK Consulting (formerly TAK & Associates), India's only fully integrated and independent Vertical Transportation Consultancy.

