

Contents ELEVATOR WORLD India

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28

FEATURES

24 Making Sense Out of Space

by Anish Motwani

Your author discusses a recent project and his firm's design philosophy.

34 Extraordinary Times

submitted by Schindler; photos courtesy of Schindler

Expo 2020 Dubai necessitated rising to many challenges.

54 International Sourcing Exposition for Elevators & Escalators Debuts

by Vijay Pandya and Sheetal S. Patil

VT industry players congregate in Mumbai, and discuss the post-pandemic era's transformed scenario amid new launches.

73 2023 Projects of the Year

Several of the winning projects are highlighted.

FOCUS ON DECODING INDIA'S VT FUTURE

38 Decoding the Future of Vertical Transportation in India

by Rajnikant Lad

40 2023 Expectations for Real Estate Developers

by Shilpa Pandya

46 Expansion of the Economy

by Gopalkrishnan Shanker and R. Eashwar Ramu

42 A Time To Evolve

by Dr. Malini Saba; photos by Gagandeep Kaur

48 Going Up

by Nidhi Aggarwal

50 The Future of VT Sales in India

by Dr. Paresh Kariya

COLUMNS

22 A Common Lift Act for India

by Sheetal Shelar Patil

31 Looking at the Upcoming Union Budget

by Sheetal Shelar Patil

64 Residential Sales Hit a High

submitted by JLL

28 One Evening, Multiple Celebrations

by Sheetal Shelar Patil

32 Getting Around

by Amish Mistry

68 Brilliant Elevators

by Gautam Chattopadhyay

29 Construction Costs

by Ramesh Nair, Argenio Antao, Jatin Shah, Vimal Nadar, Vaishnavi Bala and Pallavi Kukdolkar

52 Bankruptcy Law

by Rohan Singh

70 A Tale of Two Halves

submitted by Savills India; graphics courtesy of Savills India Research

30 On the Fast Track

submitted by CREDAI-MCHI

60 The 2022 CTBUH International Conference

by Dr. Lee Gray, EW Correspondent; photos courtesy of CTBUH

DEPARTMENTS

3 Editor's Overview

16 Regional News

96 Advertisers Index

4 Calendar

94 Product Spotlight

6 Inside India News

96 SOURCE Directory

● A Time To Evolve

A strategic approach that could drive future growth for VT in India while also ensuring a greater emphasis on safety

by Dr. Malini Saba

photos by Gagandeep Kaur

India is the second most populous nation across the globe, and its rapid urbanization is reflected in a shortage of available land for development in prime urban locations. Continuous migration to metropolitan areas, inadequate space to spread out and a high population density have led to congestion in cities. This makes high rise construction a necessity in modern times, as it is the only viable method to meet the increasing growing needs in major metros. Whether it is the cities, their key suburbs or tier-II towns along their periphery, the rising emphasis on skyscrapers has become a noticeable trend during the past decade.

The visible expansion in real estate development, particularly in the residential and commercial segments, offers good potential for incorporating intelligent and sustainable elevating systems and related technology-driven solutions.



High rise at Thane in MMR

While this has been given priority in high-end projects, there is also a need to ensure convenient and hassle-free vertical transportation (VT) across the spectrum. To accomplish this, the overall attitude and approach of stakeholders toward the elevator and escalator (E&E) industry needs to evolve in sync with the rapidly multiplying number of high rises.

Elevators Witness Specific Demand

In buildings across segments including retail, hospitality and connectivity infrastructure, E&Es are the easiest way to get from one level to another. They ensure that people can move quickly through the building, thereby increasing independence and mobility. However, some Indians, particularly women wearing saris, senior citizens and families with young children, are still uncomfortable and, therefore, hesitant to use escalators.

It has been observed that while escalators are given prime positioning at malls, metros, railway stations and airports, elevators tend to be tucked out of the way. Placing elevators in a way that provides easier access for the people who prefer them to escalators needs to be given some thought by architects while planning overall VT requirements.

This can be done while making sure all the stipulated safety rules are met and the elevator is well-maintained, as breakdowns need to be avoided. The framework of the elevator should be durable, have a high-load capacity and be robust; it should not merely be incorporated for aesthetic purposes, although new-age elevators combine attractive form with reliable function. As new ecosystems arise around smart cities with smarter buildings, there is a tremendous opportunity for the most sustainable integration of building design with elevators, escalators and other intelligent building technologies.

Replace Rather Than Refurbish

Work-from-anywhere is a common trend, and many companies have adopted a hybrid work style. To keep expenses low, the majority of offices are rented in older buildings without elevators or with malfunctioning elevators. Many of the older high-rise buildings contain elevators, some of which are even older than the majority of the building's inhabitants. Nobody contemplates or allocates money for the stage when



High rise in Mumbai's western suburbs
the elevator will require an upgrade. However, as time passes, this becomes a necessity.

Unfortunately, many old elevators in old buildings undergo only a cosmetic facelift. Along with the exterior paint job to the structure, the old cabs are either repaneled or replaced with shiny new cabs, while the rest of the equipment, including the motor and ropes, remains unchanged. Even in what at first glance appear to be brand-new buildings, elevators malfunction regularly, with sometimes dire consequences.

Not only are people with chronic conditions, like respiratory or heart ailments, forced to risk their health by climbing high, awkwardly placed stairs, but when these stoppages occur too often, they often have to endanger their lives while exiting the elevator by forcing the doors open when it stops between floors. This is because many old buildings do not have an intercom to notify security, and elevators are one of the few places where cell phone signals are rarely available.

Policymakers need to be aware of this problem and facilitate the process of upgrading to new elevators. A one-time announcement by the government, directing public sector banks to grant low-interest, long-term loans to such societies would enable modern elevators to be installed. The spike in demand would also provide a huge impetus to VT industry growth.

Planning Peak Hour Usage

Have you ever considered how much time we spend waiting for elevators throughout our lives? Utilizing elevators in the most efficient manner possible is essential in minimizing such situations. While the VT systems launched in recent years have facilitated this to a considerable extent by leveraging the latest advances in technology, such as directing people to the nearest elevator that will take them to their required floor, older models can be smartly operated with proper planning.

Continued



Escalator in the Delhi metro



Elevator in the Delhi metro

Something as basic as segregating the elevators between certain floor limits (for instance 0-12, 13-24) can help manage people flow to a better extent and minimize crowds. Blocking multiple elevators for a single VIP can also be avoided by having a dedicated elevator available at the required floor with proper coordination.

Greater Awareness for Ensuring Safety

We all read about incidents involving people who are injured while accessing or exiting E&Es. The reality is that the majority of these accidents can be prevented, or at least minimized, by conducting drills with end-users and ensuring the presence of trained staff at all times. Parents need to teach children that elevators should be treated with the utmost respect, just like the security cabin on the premises. Elevators should not be regarded by them as a toy for joyrides during the afternoon when adults are napping.

Similarly, the tendency to enter or exit elevators while being focused on a cell phone conversation is all too often the reason for many accidents. The willingness to force open elevator doors and climb out even when there is a system in place to connect with security needs to be curbed, as the possibility of getting stuck and the elevator starting suddenly is too fraught with danger to even be contemplated.

Decoding the Future of VT

The combination of prioritizing the integration of advanced technology, along with astute planning, facilitated funding and

enhanced usage awareness, can provide an ideal growth environment for the VT industry in India. A focused approach can yield huge returns to all stakeholders, plus the all-important peace of mind that can be attained with smoothly functioning E&Es.



Dr. Malini Saba is a self-made businesswoman, philanthropist, psychologist, single mother, fitness enthusiast, author, environmentalist, passionate cook, human and social rights activist and global advocate for women and girls. Saba has an extensive business background in international, multi-cultural environments and

broad experience with highly engineered systems, which require a deep understanding of critical business drivers in multiple markets.

Following her accomplishments in the corporate world, the founder and former chairman of "Saba Group" is now focusing on her philanthropic activities and issues close to her heart under the aegis of the Anannke Foundation. As part of her research, Saba is still looking into areas where leadership-driven intervention is needed, as well as new opportunities at all levels. 🌐



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