



AT A GLANCE

Established in: 1998

DISTANCE

105km from Jashore airport
210km from Dhaka via Mawa
407km from Chittagong seaport via Mawa

ZONE AREA

303 acres

TOTAL PLOTS

192 already allotted to investors
Some 62 more plots under development

RISE IN INVESTMENT

\$97.21m (As of Dec 2021)
\$5.14m (As of Jun 2011)

CUMULATIVE EXPORT

\$718m (FY2019-20)
\$74.5m (FY2010-11)



TOTAL JOBS

8,165 as of Dec 2021

MAIN PRODUCTS

Garments & accessories, jute products, agro-based products, electrical & electronics items, tent, bag & luggage, mannequin heads, wigs, surgical gown

OPERATIONAL UNITS

32 as of Dec 2021

Mongla EPZ finally begins to buzz

SOHEL PARVEZ

While most average towns in the countryside slowly wake up to brace the day, the small port town of Mongla in Bangladesh's southwest region is already bustling with activity by 6:00am each morning.

The narrow roads buzz with the blaring of horns and whirring of electric three-wheelers that are boarded by passengers from all over town and nearby villages.

However, these vehicles are almost always heading towards the Mongla municipal boat terminal, where ferries that carry people across Mongla River are docked.

"It just becomes a big crowd of people of mainly women at the terminal from 6:30am onward," said Mohsin Alam Bhuiyan, an official of Mongla municipality that collects tolls from people crossing the river.

Those who cross the river early in the morning mostly work at factories inside the Mongla Export Processing Zone (EPZ). "The pressure of workers remains high until 7:00am as they want to join work on time. Later, the crowd reduces and movement becomes slow until the evening, when workers start returning home," he added.

Bhuiyan went on to say that the number of workers at the EPZ increased over the last two or three years.

This is a relatively new development for the Mongla EPZ, which has registered increased turnout of workers in recent times after remaining quiet for years since beginning operations in 2001.

The EPZ was launched with the aim to generate jobs in the south-western part of Bangladesh by attracting investors and exporting products

abroad.

During the initial years, a large part of the industrial enclave remained unused and soon became overrun by wild trees and bushes.

Investors were uninterested in the EPZ at first for the absence of a gas connection and proper road infrastructure even though it is located less than a kilometre away from the main jetty of Mongla Port, the country's second largest seaport.

However, construction of the Padma Bridge and increased port activities attracted several investors to establish facilities at the EPZ, which offers land and other services at comparatively cheaper prices than major EPZs in Dhaka and Chattogram.

Today, 32 factories employing 8,165 workers are operating in the Mongla EPZ, which is one of eight operational EPZs under the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza).

Just 10 factories were operational at the EPZ in fiscal 2010-11, creating jobs for 523 workers. Now, the construction of eight other industries are under implementation, according to officials of the industrial enclave.

Beginning with a betel nut processing factory, various products such as garment and garment accessories, bags, jute products, agro products, electronics, wigs, marble columns, tiles and basins are now made in the export-oriented industrial enclave.

In fiscal 2019-20, cumulative exports of the Mongla EPZ was worth \$718 million, up by about 870 per cent from \$74 million in fiscal 2010-11.

At the end of December 2021, cumulative investment in the industrial enclave was \$97 million while it was just \$5.14 million ten and a-half years ago.

The EPZ's authority, which is 210 kilometres from Dhaka via Mawa, has already allotted 178 plots to investors out of the 192 available. The authority has also acquired 62 more plots to meet the growing demand.

Mahub Ahmed Siddiq, executive director of the Mongla EPZ, said investors have been showing increased interests to invest in the industrial zone for the last three or four years.

One major reason behind the growing demand is the addition of new facilities at Mongla Port, where the increasing arrival of ships in recent years has provided impetus to investors.

Besides, the improvement of transport communication for the construction of Padma Bridge and railways connecting Mongla Port with Khulna has given confidence to investors, he added.

As a result of the increased investment, a large number of people who live in the vicinity of Mongla Port have got jobs, and most of them are women.

"One of the biggest advantages at the EPZ is that it is less than half a kilometre from the main jetty of Mongla Port," said Jahangir Alam, production manager of Kotobuki Bangladesh Ltd, which makes car seat heaters at the industrial zone.

"There is also available space for expansion while tariff is lower here compared to the EPZs in Dhaka and Chattogram," said the official of Kotobuki, which supplies its products to automobile makers such as Nissan and Mitsubishi.

The working environment at Mongla EPZ is quite good as well.

"Workers who are mainly from the local community are gentle and disciplined," said Md Mizanur Rahman

Khan, head of human resource at VIP Industries Bangladesh Pvt Ltd, the largest employer and investor of Mongla EPZ. VIP, which began its journey in 2014, has seven operational factories out of its 11 available to make luggage bags for export mainly to India and the Middle East.

Badrunnesa Mili, a resident of Mongla town, said the increased work opportunities provided a big cushion to a large number of families during the pandemic-induced economic slowdown.

Noor Alam, president of the Mongla Nagorik Samaj, a civil society platform, echoed the same.

"Most workers employed in the Mongla EPZ are women and the jobs have economically empowered them. Living standards of their families has improved as their purchasing capacity has grown," he said.

In absence of any bridge over Mongla River, workers have to cram into engine boats to cross the waterbody, which is risky given that accidents have happened in the past, Alam added.

There are other challenges too as high salinity and the absence of a gas connection are two major hurdles for boosting investment.

Mongla EPZ Executive Director Siddiq said a section of workers would be able to join work easily after the rail line connecting Mongla Port with Khulna becomes operational.

He hoped that investment in the EPZ will continue to grow unless another round of Covid-19 hits the world.

In addition, another 2,000 more jobs opportunities will be created after a South Korean factory begins operations at the EPZ.

"We have already allocated a plot to establish the factory," Siddiq added.

Driving change: the knowing-doing gap

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

My journey to obesity started when I was introduced to the executive canteen of Unilever Bangladesh in Kalurghat, Chattogram, in 1993. My weight shot up by 15 kilogrammes within a span of six months despite my efforts to discipline myself.

I am not daring to fish for excuses but I do know some empathy are on my way from my obese brethren. It has been three decades since and I am still battling! All the bestsellers on weight loss, you name it, I have them all sitting proudly on my bookshelf! And, yes, I have read them all too and am a self-acclaimed expert on the subject! I know WHAT to do, I know HOW to do it, but I DON'T do it.



My visible commitments to losing weight are loud and clear. The solutions are also as clear: 1. Eat healthier food, 2. Exercise at least four times a week; and 3. Do not indulge in treats too often. To sum it up, it requires changing your lifestyle.

Despite knowing the exact formula of resolving obesity, what do we do instead? I eat out at restaurants with a firm resolve to stay within limits but end up eating too much. The internal voice whispers the excuse: "I am committed to being connected with friends and family". I eat food high in fat and spice and find solace when I hear the whisper to eat tasty food.

The root of my problem, of course, lies in the gap between knowing and doing. The subject has been studied for years as a concern, both within the workplace and our personal lives.

A few years back,

the term gained further attention when Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton published "The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action". Fortunately, I had the opportunity to get familiarised with the subject during my AMP (advanced management programme) classes at Harvard Business School in 2016.

It is common knowledge among corporate leaders that change is constant and that any organisation needs to cope with changes. Let's take the example of the pandemic that has accelerated the digital transformation in all aspects of our work and personal life. While on the one hand, some adapted to the new way of work, grappling with a new meaning of life, a flexible work environment and coping with symptoms of mental health problems, on the other hand, there are many who became too lazy to act proactively.

Corporate leaders and executives usually know the problems of the organisation and they also know how to resolve them. But in most cases, they don't act on resolving them. Therefore, such organisations fail to reach their full potentials, if not remain in the same position.

Various research and surveys have been carried out globally about the Knowing-Doing Gap and it has been proven right repeatedly.

Even I had carried out a survey on the subject among my Facebook and LinkedIn followers. And the first question I asked was: Do you know the problem in your organisation? Ninety-three per cent responded, saying, 'yes'.

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Fed raises interest rate in battle against inflation

AFP, Washington

The Federal Reserve escalated its battle against the wave of price increases battering the US economy, raising the benchmark interest rate on Wednesday even as it acknowledged the risks posed by the war in Ukraine.

At the conclusion of its two-day meeting, the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) announced a quarter-point rate hike, the first since 2018 and since it cut the rate to zero at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The central bank clearly signaled that the move, already well telegraphed by Fed officials in the weeks leading up to it, would be the first in a series.

"We're not going to let high inflation become entrenched. The costs of that would be too high," Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell told reporters, adding that the FOMC is committed to using its "powerful tools" to prevent that.

The central bank is walking a tightrope to ensure its inflation-fighting efforts don't derail the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic even as Russia's invasion of Ukraine introduces new uncertainty in an economy battered by supply chain snarls and labor shortages.

In a statement, the FOMC said the fallout from the war in Ukraine is "likely to create additional upward pressure on inflation" and also could "weigh on economic activity," although the "implications for the US economy are highly uncertain."

The Fed moved swiftly in March 2020 to prevent the pandemic from sending the world's largest economy into a severe downturn, but as the virus waned and businesses

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A person shops for groceries at Lincoln Market of Brooklyn borough in New York City on March 10. The Labour Department reported that consumer inflation rose 7.9 per cent over the past year, the largest rise since 1982, raising the prices of gas and consumer goods. Grocery costs rose to 8.6 per cent, the biggest year-over-year increase since 1981, and gas prices went up 38 per cent all within a 12-month period ending in February.

PHOTO: AFP

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka seeks IMF bailout

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will seek an International Monetary Fund bailout, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said on Wednesday, to battle record inflation and unprecedented food and fuel shortages as the country runs out of dollars to finance imports.

The South Asia nation is in the throes of its worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948 with long queues forming outside gas stations and rolling daily blackouts imposed across the country. "Subsequent to my discussions with the International Monetary Fund, I have decided to work with them," Rajapaksa said in an address to the nation a day after meeting with an IMF delegation in Colombo.

A huge crowd stormed the president's seaside office over runaway prices with the rising cost of food, medicine and other essential goods causing serious hardship for Sri Lanka's 22-million people.