

Metro Rail: A catalyst for local business growth



Construction work of the metro rail near the Mirpur-10 intersection. The photo was taken in January, 2022.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

SHARIFUL ISLAM AND SHAHEEN MOLLAH

When construction of the metro rail from Uttara to Agargaon began in the capital five years ago, the word 'hardship' became synonymous with the residents of Mirpur and the surrounding areas. As the work progressed, the roads were dug up and narrowed by piles of construction materials. Potholes formed on the road and the area was covered in heavy dust, causing immense suffering for the residents of this part of the city.

Commuting on Begum Rokeya Sarani became a nightmare, particularly at Pallabi, Mirpur-10, Kazipara, Shewrapara, and Agargaon due to the construction of metro rail stations. The roads were narrowed and the authorities often had to block one side, causing unbearable traffic jams. Traders and shop owners along the road, particularly at the stations, were worst affected. Some small traders were even forced to close their businesses due to the continuous losses they incurred since construction began in 2016.

Shop owners at the metro rail stations were among the worst affected, as access to their shops was almost blocked for the last five years due to heavy construction work and materials. In the dry season, there was a lot of dust, and during the rainy season, there was mud everywhere. Many residents were unable to endure the suffering and moved to other areas, leaving many apartments in the Pallabi, Mirpur-II, Mirpur-10, Senpara, Kazipara, and Shewrapara areas vacant. However, traders are now hoping that their bad days will be behind them and their business will improve with the opening of the MRT-6. Businessmen in this area are seeing a new light of hope.

When visiting Rokeya Sarani from Agargaon to Pallabi, reporters found that most of the garbage had been removed from the road, most of the walkways under

the metro rail stations had been cleared and fitted with tiles, though construction at some stations is still ongoing. The road is almost repaired. Local businessmen believe that the environment will change even more once the metrorail is fully operational. Many businessmen in the Agargaon, Taltala, Shewrapara, Kazipara, Senpara, Mirpur-10, and Pallabi areas are starting to dream anew.

"We hope that with the opening of the metro rail, our bad days will be behind us. We expect to have many customers, as many people will come to the station and we will slowly recover the losses we have incurred so far," said Nur e Pavel, manager of the garments shop 'Touch and Take' under the metro rail station at Mirpur-10.

"In the last four years, we suffered a huge loss because the entrance to the shop was almost blocked due to construction work on the station. There was also a lot of dust and in the rain, the area was covered in mud, so our regular customers didn't even visit our shop," he added.

The loss was so great that we couldn't afford the monthly rent for the shop for the last one and a half years, even though the property owner reduced the monthly fee by Tk 10,000," Pavel said. "Our owner kept the shop running despite the heavy loss, but the owners of two nearby shops were forced to close their businesses.

Mizanur Rahman, manager of a Bata showroom just under the metro rail station at Shewrapara, had a similar experience. The 3,300 sq ft showroom opened in 2015 with a monthly rent of Tk 6 lakh. The showroom has eight staff, but as sales dropped to one third of around Tk 1.3 lakh daily after construction of the station began, three staff members were laid off.

The owner of the building reduced the rent by Tk 2 lakh upon our request, but we have still been incurring losses," Mizanur

authority demolished the shops they rented for construction of stairways. Kazipara and Shewrapara in Mirpur are known for their furniture business, but many customers were lost due to the construction of the metro rail. Furniture businessman Mohammad Hanif has no regrets, despite the fact that he suffered a lot and his business was doing poorly.

"We have to bear some troubles when any big project is implemented. My business was somewhat bad due to the construction of the metro rail, but now we are hoping for a good business," said Hanif, owner of Nazma Furniture at West Shewrapara.

Manager of Hazi Biriyani Ghar at Mirpur-10, Delwar Hossain Kiron, said they are expecting their business to boom with the launch of the metro rail. "We have already prepared to increase our food items," he said.

Suja Mondol, caretaker of a building on Road No. 8, near the Mirpur-II metro rail station, said there are 14 buildings on both sides of the road. Previously, there were many vacant flats, but for the last two to three months, there have been no vacant flats. He thinks that people are moving to the area because communication

from the area will be easier with the operation of the metro rail.

Many flat owners in the area had to reduce rents as demand for renting flats significantly dropped after construction of the metro rail began. Tenants of a building at East Shewrapara, which has 23 flats, said that seven to nine flats often had no tenants for the last couple of years. As a result, the owner had to reduce the monthly rent of each flat to Tk 11,000 from Tk 13,500 per month," said Delwara Begum, a tenant who moved to one of the flats in the building around six months ago.

Mohammad Abdullah Al Mamun, who runs a kebab shop named "Geneva Kabab" at Kazipara Bus Stand, said that as dust used to cover the area, his customers significantly dropped. He is hoping that as the road is now clear and smoother, more customers will visit him in the coming days. However, he is worried because the owner of the shop has already informed him that he will have to pay a higher fee for the shop, which has around 150 sq ft of space, starting in January. The monthly rent is now Tk 30,000, according to Mamun.

Rafiqul Islam, owner of Noor departmental store at East Kazipara, which sells perfumes, cosmetics, packaged and dry foods, and fruit juice, hopes his business will see a rise as many people have started to move to the area ahead of the opening of the metro rail.

Many wayside vendors also saw a drop in their business as people used to travel to and from the area through alternative routes. They too now see good days ahead as more people will visit through the road.

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