



# MIRPUR metamorphosis

## From a backwater to an economic hotspot

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

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Mirpur was best known as a garment manufacturing hub, a crime zone with rough roads, dirty alleyways, rundown buses, a capital of slums called home by apparel workers and a poor township marked by nondescript houses.

And people, who have been living in that part for decades or were born and raised there, used to say jocularly that they were going to Dhaka whenever they visited the city centre. Residents in other parts of the city would have thought twice before they agreed to attend social events in Mirpur.

Mirpur's old identity has disappeared in the past two decades or so and it is now perhaps the fastest-growing part of the capital, with new skyscrapers, condominiums, shopping malls and retail stores. Opportunities to cash in on its phenomenal growth abound.

Mirpur, now a burgeoning business and residential zone, is surrounded by Shah Ali, Pallabi, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and Darus Salam.

Even before Mirpur wore the new look, it already had the biggest zoo in the country, attracting thousands of visitors every day. The botanical garden woos nature lovers. The Rokeya Sarani, stretching from Taltola to Mirpur-10, has long been the biggest hub of furniture shops.

The country's largest sari market known as Benarasi Palli, a cluster of shops selling decorative traditional garment items, is located in Mirpur.

constructing the country's first metro rail right through the middle of Mirpur. Metro rail services have eliminated the notorious traffic jam that the dwellers of Mirpur had suffered for decades.

ABM Golam Mawla's family used to live in Karachi before Bangladesh's independence as his father worked there. Before the Liberation War, his family moved to Mirpur and bought a piece of land.

"If you were looking to buy a good-quality panjabi a decade ago, your options were the markets in New Market and New

school, opened its Mirpur campus in 2010 to cater to the needs of quality education for the students who live in the neighbourhood and nearby areas, said Nurun Nahar Mozumdar, the principal of Scholastica's senior campus at Mirpur.

Mirpur is a hotspot of economic activity. "People belonging to the middle-class live here. As a result, economic activity is high in the area," said Kamruzzaman Kamal, director of marketing at PRAN-RFL Group, a corporate giant with its presence in food and beverage, plastic products and agricultural machinery.



Elephant Road. For shoes, it was Gulistan. But now, all the top brands have outlets here," said Golam Mawla, a 61-year-old resident of Pallabi, a residential area.

"There was a time when not many people could be found outside of their houses after 9:00pm. Now, the streets are even crowded in the middle of the night," he added.

In and around Mirpur, there are good-quality schools and hospitals. The

"It was an underdeveloped area. However, in the last 15 to 20 years, Mirpur has developed massively," he added.

Mawla also said the growing popularity of Mirpur is evident from its rocketing property prices.

Around 1995, flats in Mirpur used to be sold at Tk 5,000 to Tk 6,000 per square foot. Now, it is as much as Tk 15,000, he added.

Real estate giant bti's first project in Mirpur was completed in 1998. "The project was taken to find out the taste of the people. Transport communication was not as easy as it is today," said FR Khan, managing director of bti.

Soon after the establishment of Mirpur DOHS, the demand for housing has continued to increase, he said. So far, bti has built 25 buildings in the neighbourhood.

"Now I get lost when I go to Mirpur. So much has changed in the last two or three decades," Khan added.

Abdun Nur Tushar, a physician and a TV personality who has been living in Mirpur for 51 years, recognises the progress the locality has been witnessing in the last few years. But there are flaws too.

"Playgrounds are being grabbed. Earth-filling is going on in waterbodies unchecked. Mirpur's Amin Bazar has been turned into a dumping ground for waste," he said.

"When I came to Mirpur, the air and water quality was good. There were trees on both sides of the road. Those are just past now," he added. "If the quality of life does not improve, what will we do with the branded shops?"

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BIRDEM Hospital, the National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital, the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation, the National Institute of Kidney Diseases, the National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital, the National Institute of Mental Health, and Dhaka Shishu Hospital, are easily accessible to Mirpur residents. Scholastica, a top English medium

## Retail giants rush to Mirpur to cash in on growth spurt

SUKANTA HALDER

Retail giants and realtors are increasingly flocking to Mirpur and its surrounding areas to tap the opportunities being offered by the growing swathe of the capital.

One of them is Bata Shoe Company Bangladesh, the local operations of the multinational company. The company has opened 12 stores in Mirpur since 1991 when its first outlet was established in the area.

"There was a time when high-end products were not sold in this zone," said Arfanul Hoque, head of retail at Bata. "But the situation has changed as people's buying capacity has increased and there are a growing number of customers."

Aarong, a popular lifestyle brand, opened its first outlet in Mirpur in 2010. There are currently two Aarong outlets in the area. Mirpur was chosen as it offers a chance to reach a larger group of customers.

Initially, the current branch of Pizza Hut at Mirpur-2 was only a delivery spot. Then, after getting a good response from customers, it started offering the dining facility in 2023.

Mominul Islam Maruf, manager of Supreme Diners, says there were three restaurants at Mirpur-1 in 2010. One of them used to clock sales of Tk 1 lakh a day.

"Now, the sales volume has gone down because of intense competition," he said.

Sony Cinema Hall, once a relic of the past, has been upgraded to Star Cineplex's Sony Square, a popular hangout for food and entertainment.

Mesbah Uddin, head of media at Star Cineplex, says a few years after the first theatre was opened at the Bashundhara City shopping mall, it was observed that a huge number of movie-goers were from Mirpur.

That prompted the company to initiate a search for the location. Finally, Sony Cinema in Mirpur was chosen.

"We were doubtful initially whether the people of Mirpur would spend Tk 500 to Tk 600 to watch a film. But they have proved us wrong."

Restaurant chain Pizza Inn opened one of its outlets at Sony Square seven

years ago and received a positive response as there was no high-quality restaurant at that time.

Later, several other restaurants were set up in the same building. Still, Pizza Inn is faring well, said Abdur Rahman Chowdhury, a manager of the outlet.

Agora Limited started its journey as the first superstore in Bangladesh in 2001. Twelve years later, it opened a store in Mirpur. At present, it has four outlets there.

Shwapno, the largest grocery chain in Bangladesh, runs 26 outlets in Mirpur, according to Sabbir Hasan Nasir, executive director of ACI Logistics, the owner of the chain. Shwapno arrived in Mirpur in 2009 by opening its first outlet at West Kafirul.

In recent years, retailers selling electrical and electronic products, automobiles and home appliances have set up their stores in the locality.

Walton Hi-Tech Industries, a powerhouse in the local market for consumer electronics, rolled out its first store in Mirpur in 2003. Today, it has 20 stores.

"Mirpur is one of the leading sales zones of Walton products in the country," said Augustin Sujan, additional director of Walton.

Mirpur is a perfect location for the food business as more residents are choosing to eat out, said Mizanur Rahman, assistant general manager of Biryani chain Kachchi Bhai.

It opened its first branch five years ago and currently has three in total.

As people are flocking to Mirpur for low-cost housing, the demand for real estate has climbed. Mirpur, once known for urban squalor, has emerged as a real estate hotspot. To try its luck, BASIC Builders, one of those realtors, started its business in 2008 and constructed 20 buildings in Mirpur.

"After surveying several areas before starting the project, it seemed to us that Mirpur was going to be the next Gulshan because the area has wide roads. You can find such wide roads in Banani and Uttara," said Abdul Latif, managing director of the real estate company.

