

Dhanmondi's

DINING DELIGHTS

From just another neighbourhood to a destination for foodies

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In the 1990s, Dhanmondi was just another quiet neighborhood in Dhaka, with the occasional tinny tinkle of rickshaws on Satmasjid Road. If you craved something to renew your taste buds, Bailey Road, Gulshan, or Banani were the places to go.

Shamima Seema, now 36, laughs at this memory.

"Remember a local restaurant in Dhanmondi named Macdonald? Not the original one and no Big Macs – just spring rolls lying beside the fried fish they used to serve!"

Another option in Dhanmondi at the time was Jing Ling, a local Chinese eatery in a largely flavourless dining scene.

But everything started changing in the 2000s.

Rifles Square, now known as Shimanto Square, opened and became one of the most popular hubs for shoppers. Besides, new schools and private universities popped up, and Dhanmondi Lake became a popular leisure spot for loud, boisterous youngsters.

They needed everything within easy reach and Bailey Road was no longer good enough.

"I remember it well," Seema recalls of her school days when restaurants like Karai Gost, Baburchi and Xinxian began to appear. "The food was great,

Association (BROA).

Apart from this, there are about 100 other restaurants, the association also observed. In all, 7,000 to 8,000 people are employed in this zone, it added.

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On a broader scale, there are 4.81 lakh restaurants across the country employing about 30 lakh people, according to the BROA.

About two crore people are either directly or indirectly linked to industry, as per BROA data.

Rawshan Trisha, who works at a private organisation, said this area has mostly budget-friendly restaurants and small food carts, which are convenient spots to pass time with colleagues and friends.

This is the reason she frequents Satmasjid Road, she added.

Abul Ahsan Anowar, owner of The Pan Pacific Lounge, a multi cuisine buffet restaurant, said he started his business on Satmasjid Road in 2000.

He then opened another restaurant in 2022 in the same area and added a third in 2024.

Anowar said the stretch of road from Jhigatola to Dhanmondi 27 is now completely a food zone. Since the business is growing day by day, he increased investment.

"There are all kinds of restaurants

of offices, schools, colleges, malls and other shops. This brings more customers to restaurants.

The area is surrounded by mostly budget friendly restaurants as young people tend to choose such places to pass time, he said.

"Young people and couples are mostly seen in our restaurant," he said, adding that the response of customers started getting dropping after a fire broke out in a restaurant complex on Bailey Road.

from this building have already left last month because of losses," he added.

Khan said the turnout of young customers was increasing again so they hoped to escape the slow growth soon.

Regarding safety issues, he said "We arrange workshops on food and fire safety and customer service. All our staff are quite experienced, so safety is easy to ensure for us."

Hridoy Paul, manager of Takeout, said the restaurant opened in 2014 and has a staff of 12 staff. The popularity of

line with European standards, they have to invest about one crore. And to open a restaurant with a capacity of 200 to 250 people, they have to invest Tk 1.5 to Tk 2 crore, he said.

Many young people are now becoming entrepreneurs, and they are coming into the restaurant business. It is a business with huge potential, he added.

Anowar also said that Satmasjid Road is becoming more and more bustling as the days go by.

"Business was bad for several months after the Bailey Road incident. But now almost all the restaurants, including ours, are operating their business by following 100 percent fire safety and the guests are also very happy," he also said.

The members of the BROA pay tax according to the rules, he said, adding that the association always tells members to operate according to the rules.

To start a business, 14 certificates must be collected from 14 departments. It would be very good if it was a one-stop service, he added.

Imran Hassan, secretary general of the BROA, said Dhanmondi zone has customers of all classes, including the elite, middle class and lower middle class.

"There was a restaurant called Sticky Finger in Dhanmondi. It's closed now like many others that could not survive the competition," he said.

However, since 2010, there has been a significant growth of the restaurant business on Satmasjid Road, he added.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

At least 44 people, including 26 women and three children, were killed and 22 critically injured in a fire that broke out at the seven-storey Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall on Bailey Road in Dhaka in February this year.

The tragedy made customers worry about safety issues in congested space, he mentioned.

"However, we have taken many steps to meet safety standards by ensuring emergency exits and giving our staff fire training," he added.

Ahmed said the business was not going as smoothly as before. High inflation and political uncertainty have had a negative impact on the business.

And inflation has shown barely any signs of letting up.

In October this year, inflation hit a three-month high of 10.87 percent, driven by soaring food prices, particularly for rice and vegetables, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Munna Khan, cashier of the Park N Smirk restaurant, said the restaurant opened in 2016 and currently has a staff of five.

"Our restaurant owner owns a floor in this Kearsy Crescent Tower, so he decided to use it to open a restaurant as this area is known for restaurants," he said.

"Recently our business is more middling than before. At least 3 restaurants

this area was a key reason for opening a branch here, he said.

Currently the response of customers is not as positive as before and the profit margin is low, he claimed.

The current economic situation, price hike of daily essentials, and burgeoning competition in this field are reasons for the slow growth of business, he added.

"We arrange two monthly workshops for our staff to let them train regarding fire safety and food and customer services," he added.

Abul Ahsan Anowar, also president of the BROA of Dhaka South, said if someone wants to open a coffee shop in the area, they have to invest Tk 30 to Tk 40 lakh.

If they want to open a coffee shop in

but the prices would drain the wallet all at once," By college, everyone knew about Lailati, Al Baik and Dhaba."

In 2002, Boomers Café arrived, marking a new era of vibrant café culture, and adding another layer to Satmasjid Road's continued transformation from just another neighborhood to a must-visit destination for foodies.

Satmasjid Road in Dhanmondi, lined with budget-friendly restaurants that welcome customers for regular hangouts, has become a hub for eateries in the last two decades.

Many entrepreneurs have opened their ventures here, generating employment. Apart from this, many who started businesses without adhering fully to the laws have been forced to adopt stringent safety standards, making the area a trustworthy stomping ground for customers.

From Satmasjid Road to Dhanmondi 27, there are more than 245 listed restaurants, according to the Bangladesh Restaurant Owners'

on Satmasjid Road. You will find any kind of food you want to taste," he said.

Anowar said there are very few venues offering entertainment in Dhanmondi. So, people can either go to restaurants and sit idly while also eating or roam around the Dhanmondi lake while enjoying the scenic beauty.

There are several universities, colleges and schools nearby, which contributed to the growth of the restaurant business, he added.

However, Anowar added that persistent inflation, which has hovered above nine percent since March last year, as well as the sudden political changeover, had some negative impacts on the business, he said.

Nasim Ahmed, manager of Crush Station, said their restaurant opened around 2017 and currently employs 13 people, mostly students.

As for why he chose the location to open their first branch, the manager said this area has been popular among people of Dhanmondi for so long because it is home to a number

