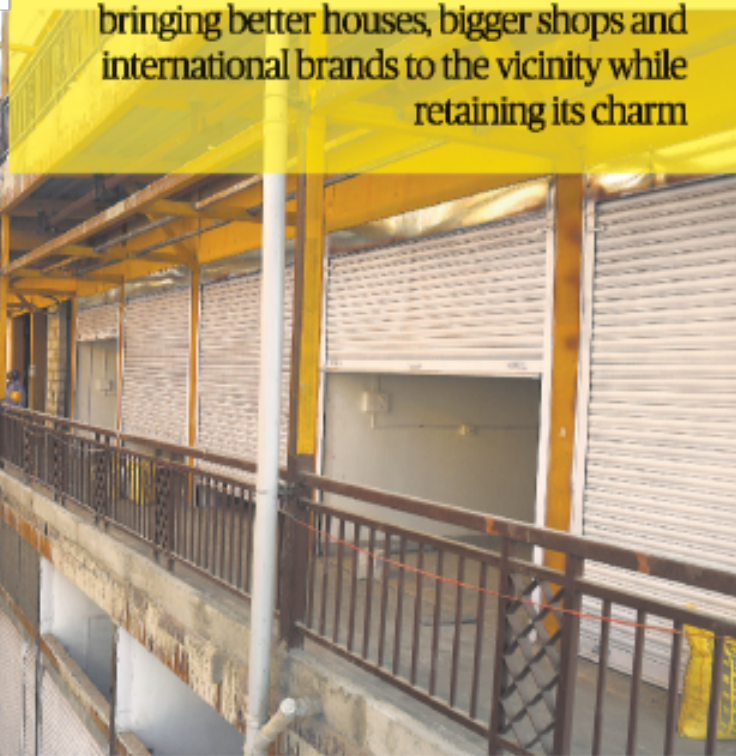




A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Bhendi Bazaar's redevelopment is bringing better houses, bigger shops and international brands to the vicinity while retaining its charm



Smooth transition: Though the temporary shopping plaza set up by the Saifee Burhani Upliftment Trust may have smaller shops, its ideal location ensures the shopkeepers don't lose any customers till the redevelopment is complete. ■ANURANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

cently completed Al Sa'adah.

Mr. Jetpurwala said large brands would often eschew areas like Bhendi Bazaar as there was a dearth of quality real estate and also due to the tenancy laws. "We had our establishment in a 100-year-old building. The leakage and seepage in the older establishment was a huge issue and due to the age of the building there was only so much you could do by way of repairs. The new building has resolved many of those issues," he said.

Mr. Merchant said the new building has attracted global brands that were completely absent in the area earlier. "Residents would either need to go south towards Fort or to Byculla to have access to big global brands. Maybe more will come soon with the new development, which will also cater to the neighbouring regions," he said.

For Mr. Jain, the biggest takeaway is that he left Bhendi Bazaar as a tenant and returned as an owner. "I have had a shop here since 1992 and in 2000, I took up another shop. I will benefit from the first set of residential tenants as well," he said.

Mr. Mithaiwala felt that families moving into the two new buildings will also give the business of in the commercial transit a boost. "There are a few issues of parking and dust but soon these issues would soon be resolved. Our business would not be affected, which was a key concern for us," he said adding that while there will be more competition, they also stood a chance to get new customers here, which was good for all businesses.

AJEET MAHALE
MUMBAI

A bevy of customers line up outside Moayyad Mithaiwala's new outlet in Bhendi Bazaar, which is incidentally just across his old shop that was recently demolished as part of the redevelopment project. "Our business has not been hit due to the move, since most of us have customers that live in the vicinity. If a sweet seller moves out to some other area, the customer is less likely to come there," Mr. Mithaiwala, a third-generation sweet seller in the area, said. His is among 200 shops in the vicinity that have moved into a new three-storey transit for commercial tenants, which resolved most issues raised by them.

A key issue voiced by several shop owners, many of whom have been in Bhendi Bazaar for decades, was the loss of business during the transition period. "The idea of an on-site commercial transit facility ensures minimum displacement of businesses during the construction phase in other sectors while helping the diverse mix of businesses adapt to the traditional street shopping environment that has been proposed," Mustafa Hassonjee, the master planner and architect, said.

Mr. Hassonjee said the idea was to recreate the bazaar and this transit facility would be a sort of replica of what is being planned at a larger scale. "The whole idea is to get back the feel of Bhendi Bazaar, to let the shop owners experience the advantages of covered streets that are planned to be built as part of the design," he said. The transit facility

has a capacity to house around 350 shops and around 200 shops have moved in over the last few months.

Trial and error

Prior to this, The Saifee Burhani Upliftment Project (SBUT) in 2013 had built Mufaddal Shopping Arcade close to the project site to temporarily house shops. However, many commercial tenants said the idea never took off as it wasn't inside Bhendi Bazaar, which hit their businesses. Shopkeepers said their clients would not come to Mufaddal and they had to move to other locations.

Mr. Mithaiwala said the new concept was the correct one, as it resolved several issues "Most of us did not want to move to Muffaddal and people in the vicinity knew this. As a consequence many started asking for rents that were 1.5 to 2 times higher than the market rate, knowing that sooner or later our shops would be demolished," he said. According to Mr. Mithaiwala, while the space in the transit was significantly less, it was a worthy trade off to ensure that they kept their clientele. The construction of the transit also helped curtail the rent costs that were spiralling out of control in the region, he said.

"When we were asked to move out, I was given the option of an alternative site or getting rent. I chose to go to Muffaddal, but it was a disaster as there were no customers," Devendra Jain, a clothes shop owner, said. He sentiments were echoed Farzin Jetpurwala, whose is a fourth-generation resident of Bhendi Bazaar. "We were in Muffaddal for only about six to eight months and it was a disaster. We essentially shut our shop for three years and conducted over phone," he said. Mr. Jain said Muffaddal was okay for people who were into wholesale

business. "For those of us who have retail shops and depend on customers coming in, it was not feasible. Many have been here for decades; our customers were not coming there. I eventually gave up that place and took up a new place in Cooper street, but my business was not doing too well there either," he said.

The right way forward

Mr. Hassonjee said SBUT had mandated the design team to come up with creative ways to temporarily house commercial tenants on the project site itself and had built an on-site commercial transit in Sector I-A of the project, which he stated had been very successful. "This we believe is the right way forward," he said, adding that earlier the transit shops were scattered across the area. "By doing this we were also able to give people a glimpse how they'll benefit in the new master plan," he said. The temporary three-storey structure, where the transit is housed, was completed around November, 2019.

From the entire project's perspective, the new on-site commercial transit will increase the overall speed of work. Mr. Hassonjee said by bringing all the commercial tenants under one roof, they would now be able to swiftly start construction of all sectors of the project and complete the entire redevelopment at a go. The project's first set of residential tenants moved back to Bhendi Bazaar earlier this year into the Al Sa'adah Complex, the first two high-rise towers of SBUT to have been constructed from the ground up as part of the project. The towers have 610 residential and 128 commercial spaces.

Mr. Jain and Mr. Jetpurwala were among the first commercial tenants to move into the Al Sa'adah last year, which currently has over 100 shop owners. The return of residential ten-

ants has given hope to shop owners in the building as well as in the newly built commercial transit of better business in the coming months. At present around 400 residential tenants have already moved in.

Welcome changes

Mr. Jetpurwala, who runs a mattress business, said that walk-ins have improved over the past few months. He is also the owner of the space where Bhendi Bazaar's first McDon-

ald's is housed, which started operations around four months ago.

"This area has all the amenities and eateries but it didn't have any global brands. The entry of brands like McDonald's and Belgian Waffle is changing that," Ali Merchant, a 17-year-old who lives in the vicinity, said. The recently opened brands stick out in the old neighbourhood and are symbolic to the changing face of Bhendi Bazaar, as commercial tenants move back into the re-

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Fourth generation resident