

CALCUTTA SATURDAY 30 DECEMBER 2006

**Rush of customers takes shop to new, swank address**

# Bypass shanty to mall stop

ZEESHAN JAWED

In 2001, it was a small shanty shop on EM Bypass, between two entrances to Salt Lake, where taxi drivers would stop by for a cheap cuppa.

Five years later, footfall is a flood and the customer profile has changed dramatically, as cars jostle for space in front of Goutam's, any given evening or night.

"I am just not being able to handle the rush. There are so many cars that my boys are not being able to serve everybody properly," admits Goutam Karmakar, barking out instructions to his boys, ferrying food and beverage to the young and trendy hanging out in front of the chowmein-coffee stop.

Soon, he will have more far elbow room and in far more swank surroundings. For, Goutam's will move from the Bypass pavement near the Hudco crossing to a sparkling new address on the opposite flank of the Bypass — Mani Square.

"I will be able to serve a bigger volume of customers by moving to Mani Square... I have booked a 250-sq-ft store," says Karmakar, about his imminent shift to the mall door.



Cars jostle for space and the Goutam's service. Picture by Bishwarup Dutta

Credited with giving a whole new meaning to a drive down the Bypass, the Goutam's man is confident of replicating the success story at Mani Square, where his outlet will be just outside the mall, so that he can keep it open till midnight and cater to the multiplex and nightclub crowd.

"Goutam's has an upmarket clientele... and it enjoys a very good reputation with its customers," says a spokesperson for Mani Square, explaining the rationale of renting out space to the streetfood hangout.

It has been a long journey for Karmakar, who had started out from the pavements of Duttabad Road, close to the Hudco crossing, and even sold cucumber for a living. Today, he owns a house and drives a car, while his son goes to a reputed school.

"His success has even helped many others like me set up stalls along the Bypass... The number of customers have kept on growing," adds the owner of a neighbouring food-stop, who replicated Goutam's model.

So, post-Poila Baisakh, if you go looking for Goutam's, just remember to cross the Bypass for a munch by the mall.