Mumbai: traffic bottlenecks refuse to go, no solution in sight

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With the former mill lands now housing Worli and Lower Parel’s densely populated commercial office spaces, parking and traffic are both nightmares in the heart of central Mumbai. Some of the major roads facing critical parking space shortage and daily traffic jams include Senapati Bapat Marg, NM Joshi Marg, Pandurang Bhudhkar Marg, Dr. Annie Besant Road and E Moses Road, among others. And though local corporators of G South Ward say they have been trying through the last four or five years to resolve the traffic bottlenecks, the obstacles ranging from illegal parking to road widening works appear too complex to find a solution to.

Santosh Dhuri, the MNS corporator of Ward No. 187, says his attempts to resolve the issue failed due to opposition from the Shiv Sena. “I had raised the parking issue in the civic body and suggested that we provide alternate day parking on the roads. For my ward, I had given a list of six roads but I could implement it on only two roads. The Sena has not supported the proposal,” says Dhuri, a corporator from the Prabhadevi locality.

Admitting that the mushrooming of commercial offices on the former mill lands has increased the pressure on civic amenities, Dhuri says the parking problem must be addressed urgently considering the likelihood of emergencies. “Anyone can see the vehicles parked on the roads and footpaths leaving no space to walk or drive. In case of emergencies like fire, the fire brigade struggles to reach on time. Who will be responsible if something bad happens,” asks Dhuri, adding that he had placed no-parking boards along the designated roads but found these removed.
“On the existing no-parking roads, the boards were missing. So, I put them up using corporator’s funds but they were removed immediately, reportedly due to a local Sena activist who has a large number of vehicles,” alleges Dhuri.

Senior Sena corporator Kishori Pednekar says the real cause of the traffic pile-ups is actually related to the obstacles faced in road widening. “The widening of the Senapati Bapat Marg has been pending for a long time. It is mainly because of the non-redevelopment of the BDD chawls along these roads. There are around 15 chawls under the pagadi system and there are disputes between the tenants and landlords, which has delayed redevelopment,” says Pednekar, adding that nothing can be done about it.

With the commencement of work on the Metro Rail Route 3 from this year, traffic pile-ups in central Mumbai will only increase. As per the plan of the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation, stations including Siddhivinayak, Dadar, Science museum, Acharya Atre Chowk and Worli are in the G South Ward.

The other related problem is of encroachments on footpaths, mostly by hawkers. “The hawkers have occupied footpaths and carried out illegal extensions. But giving them a designated place is not possible in the absence of a policy,” says Dhuri.

Besides these, issues being faced by G South Ward include the redevelopment of BDD chawls (Worli has the highest number of chawls) and beautification of the centuries-old Worli Fort.

While there are 207 chawls spread across 93 acres in Worli, Naigaum, N M Joshi Marg and Sewri, around 130 chawls are in Worli and on N M Joshi Marg. “There are 121 BDD chawls in my ward. Till some years ago, I used to carry out repair and maintenance work with an NOC from the public works department. Now, it is not given, citing various reasons. So, I’m unable to spend my corporators’ funds here. The chawls are in a dilapidated
condition and require immediate repairs,” says Hemlata Wange, an MNS corporator.

Wange says the chawls have virtually turned into slums in the absence of civic amenities. “I cannot carry out repair works on footpaths, roads and in schools in the area as it does not come under the BMC. So, the area has become like a slum. My demand is that I should be allowed to spend funds to provide basic services as we don’t know when the redevelopment will happen,” she adds.

Highlighting the poor condition of Worli Fort, Sena corporator Hemangi Worlikar says the repairs and beautification will be taken up soon. “The beautification matter has been neglected so far. Some of the stones at the fort have become loose and are falling. Though it looks good from the sea face, it is dirty at the bottom. So, I recently raised the issue with the state archaeology department, which has given a go-ahead for the work,” says Worlikar.

However, the ward is also home to issues such as redevelopment of slums, water and poor medical care in slum areas such as Jijamata Nagar, V P Nagar, Bharat Nagar and others. “My ward has 80% slums. Though the government has approved the redevelopment under the cluster development scheme, it has not yet taken off,” says Ratna Mahale, an NCP corporator.

Besides, the ward also has a large number of cases of dengue and malaria, mainly due to the mosquito breeding spots inside construction sites. Recently, Dhuri distributed fogging machines in the area.

G South, with nine electoral wards, is dominated by the Shiv Sena. Of the nine wards, four corporators are from the Shiv Sena while three are from the MNS. Two corporators are from NCP. In the recent delimitation by the state election commission, the nine wards were reduced to seven due to decrease in population. This has divided many wards, forcing corporators to look for new wards to contest the polls.

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