

Risking lives to beat a jam near Prerna Sthal

Noida: Tiles have come off and manholes lie uncovered along the Prerna Sthal footpath on the Noida-Delhi carriageway of the expressway, yet bikers still race onto it every day, using the broken pavement to dodge traffic and save a few minutes

A TOI team on Tuesday saw several riders leaving the main carriageway and moving onto the footpath between gates 1 and 2 of the memorial. They manoeuvred their vehicles and performed a balancing act as they drove between the carriageway's boundary wall and a gaping manhole.

The manhole is located right in the middle of the footpath. It has remained open for months, posing a serious safety hazard not only to pedestrians but also to the bikers who takes this shortcut.

"We know this is unsafe, but there is a traffic jam during peak hours. To avoid this, we sometimes take this route" said Rakesh Kuma, a biker using the stretch.

There is also no deployment of traffic police to prevent riders from encroaching upon the footpath.

Officials of Dalit Prerna Sthal said they were aware of the missing drain cover as well as the misuse of the pedestrian path by bikers. "First, the bikers should take the main carriageway and not the footpath. We will coordinate with the Noida Authority to ensure the drain is repaired and the area is secured at the earliest," said the manager of Dalit Prerna Sthal, Bijendra Singh.

A Noida traffic inspector said that the traffic police have taken note of the issue. "We will write to Noida Authority to fix this. However, blocking the footpath is not viable as it is used by pedestrians," he said.

The Authority's deputy general manager, Vijay Rawal, said that they will fix the manhole soon.

The problem has for several months now. Nearly 5 lakh vehicles use Noida Expressway daily. During peak hours, tailback on the Noida to Delhi arm of the carriageway often extends till Mahamaya flyover as the stretch between Sector 95 and DND Flyway loop in front of the Prema Sthal tapers to make space for its pavement.

In order to curb the snarls, the Authority had planned to partially raze the footpath near the memorial to widen the 600 m stretch of the expressway by 5.5 m, earlier in June.

Rawal said that the Authority's plans to widen the road has gone back to the drawing board. "We noticed that if the road is widened, it will reach the Sthal's gates and this can pose security issues and increase chances of accidents. We are discussing how to take this project ahead," he said.

The Prerna Sthal was developed in 2011 by then UP CM Mayawati. The premises house statues of Bhimrao Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, along with 24 eighteen-foot-high elephant statues that represent the BSP's party symbol, spread over 82.5 acres along Yamuna. The park was constructed at Rs 585 crore and draws nearly 12,000 to 15,000 visitors a month.

The memorial is also in need of maintenance as the outer walls have developed cracks and sustained damage over time.

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