

Parel bridge repaired even as people use it

Commuters say CR should have blocked access instead of rushing through repairs

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Workers from Central Railway (CR) repaired the corroded base of a pedestrian bridge at Parel station even as people used the staircase, an instance that shows rail officials' indifference towards public safety, commuters said.

CR should have blocked the access to the bridge, which needed a patch-up welding job, instead of hurriedly carrying out the repairs, they said.

"A team of workers were welding steel plates on the corroded columns even as people climbed the staircase. What is the need for such hurry? Shouldn't railway officials cordon off the area and carry out the repairs properly?" said commuter Aniket Jaiswal.

The narrow bridge at the CST-end is usually crowded and commuters fear that even a minor incident could set off a stampede. In fact, police constables were earlier deployed on the bridge to monitor the movement of crowds. Commuters have also expressed concerns about the old structure's sturdiness.

"The fact that repairs were carried out while people were using the bridge indicates that it was an emergency. The staircase is in a poor condition and we fear that it might give away anytime," said commuter Anagha Shinde.



The hurriedly carried out work at Parel station on Thursday. The passenger flow at Parel has increased significantly, but the facilities there have not been upgraded

Subhash Gupta, a member of the Divisional Railway Users' Consultative Committee, said that CR should inspect all pedestrian bridges. "There have been two recent slab collapses on railway bridges, one in Mulund and the other in Kalyan. The Parel bridge sees heavy pedestrian movement and necessary repairs should be carried out immediately," he said.

A senior CR official said that pedestrian bridges on the suburban train network were inspected periodically. "There was no risk at Parel to-

day (Thursday), but we strengthened the foundation and columns of the bridge as part of routine maintenance," the official said.

The passenger flow at Parel station has increased significantly with the area emerging as a business district. But the facilities at the station have not been upgraded. Parel has the highest number of hospitals in the city, including Tata Memorial and KEM, and many patients and their relatives board trains from the station.

Flustered with insane peak season flight fares? This probe might help

CCI launches probe into soaring air fares, airlines deny cartelisation, blame demand-supply wheel instead

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The Competitions Commission of India (CCI) said on Thursday that it has launched a probe into the alleged cartelisation of airlines following complaints about steep surges in fares during festival seasons. CCI chairperson Ashok Chawla said: "The matter is being probed and a report will be submitted soon," avoiding any mention of a similar inquiry that was wound up a few years ago due to lack of evidence.

A Fort-based travel agent said that tickets for places like Delhi, Goa and Bangalore are currently available at a price 30-50 per cent higher than the regular fare. Such hikes are usually observed during peak travel seasons like summer and Diwali breaks or year-end vacations.

According to CCI officials, with summer breaks on in most schools, airlines have not only upped their ticket prices but also increased other charges related to cancellation and booking of premium seats like window or aisle seats. An official involved in the probe said: "The probe involves looking at the airlines' pricing mechanism. We seek to establish how pricing keeps changing across airlines on a given sector. We cannot disclose the methodology at this stage."

Jitendra Bhargava, former executive director, Air India, shot down allegations of cartelisation. Bhargava said: "One must understand that the first 20 per cent of seats are sold below



value. The next 40 per cent are close to or on the mark of profit. It is only once 60 per cent of occupancy is achieved that fares start swelling.

This occurs due to demand and supply dynamics and has nothing to do with cartelisation. Had there been cartelisation, wouldn't airlines be earning profits?"

All major airlines agreed to the probe, with the Federation of Indian Airlines (FIA) saying that fares offered are transparent enough. An FIA official said: "All member airlines follow a dynamic pricing model in which ticket prices are tied to demand."

D Sudhakar Reddy, president, Air Passenger's Association of India, also requested the CCI for a probe. Reddy said: "Air fares always go up just before the holiday season. We believe that cartelisation has been on for the last three-four years."

Paver blocks dumped on Colaba shore

'CONTRACTORS HELPING DESTRUCTION OF WETLANDS': For a week truckloads of discarded material is being disposed of in the mangroves, which helps encroachers

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Residents of Colaba are up in arms against illegal dumping of paver blocks along the shoreline. According to the local people, truckloads of used paver blocks - which were replaced by either shot-blasted cement tiles or cement concrete stretches all over Colaba - have been dumped along the coastline, damaging mangroves too. Even as the residents led by local citizen corporator Makrand Narvekar have complained to the BMC and other authorities, the dumping has continued for over a week.

According to Narvekar's complaint, contractors appointed by the BMC's roads department remove the paver blocks from pavements and road junctions and dump them along the sea. Narvekar has written to Municipal Commissioner Ajoy Mehta and City Collector Shaila A, since foreshore land belongs to the collector.

"This is a grave environmental violation," Narvekar said about the dump-



ing. "We have been complaining to the authorities but to no avail. The paver blocks have been dumped by the BMC contractors. No one else uses paver blocks in the city, so they can't possibly belong to any other agency. Once the dumping is over, encroachers use the paver blocks to reclaim land and build hutments."

Mirror had last month reported that the BMC had decided to phase out in-

terlocking paver blocks from all roads and footpaths. The paver blocks, singularly responsible for turning the city's pavements into a nightmare to negotiate, especially for the elders, are being replaced with stronger shot-blasted cement tiles on footpaths, while cement or asphalt will be used for quick-fix road repairs.

"It's great that the BMC is replacing paver blocks with better tiles. However,

it must ensure that the old paver blocks are disposed of properly," said Ghanshyam Hegde of the local citizen group My Dream Colaba. "They can't destroy wetlands like this. The BMC must ask the contractors to show how many tonnes of paver blocks were removed and where they have been disposed."

BMC officials said that contractors have to record the amount of paver blocks that have been removed and they have to be disposed off according outside of city limits. "It is the responsibility of the contractor," said a BMC official who did not wish to be named. "We will check the contractor's inventory and see how many paver blocks he has dumped and at what location."

The Bombay High Court had last year banned reclamation of wetlands, including through illegal dumping of debris along the seashore.

Contractors Ms RK Madhani and RPS Infra Projects are doing road work in the BMC's A ward, which includes areas like Colaba, Cuffe Parade, Fort, and parts of Marine Drive. They did not respond to repeated calls and messages, and neither did Chandrakant Chore,

assistant municipal commissioner, A ward. Collector Shaila A said promised to look into the matter "if there is a specific complaint". She added: "We will conduct a site inspection and if there is any illegal dumping of paver blocks or debris, we will take action."

D Stalin of the NGO Vanashakti claimed that the authorities were turning a blind eye to several complaints of mangrove destruction due to illegal dumping. "It looks like the state is either not serious about the destruction of our wetlands. The number of such instances is on the rise," Stalin said.

Vanashakti had filed a writ petition in the high court to stop such rampant destruction and reclamation of wetlands in various parts of Maharashtra's coast, including Mumbai, Thane and Navi Mumbai.

"The BMC and the city collector should conduct a joint inspection of the site and then decide whose fault it is," Narvekar said. "The contractor must be penalized and an offence must be registered against him for such illegal dumping and destruction of mangroves in the heart of south Mumbai."