



## Mumbai's potholed roads become art, call to arms

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**They enrage everyone from the poorest pedestrian to the richest luxury car owner. Now Mumbai's potholed roads have become a subject for an art exhibition -- and there are hopes the authorities will take note.**

The upcoming show is to feature hundreds of photographs of the worst examples from across India's financial capital, where roads regularly crumble into water-filled craters even after the first monsoon

downpour.

"It happens year after year after year," said the show's curator, Kanchi Mehta.

"I live in south Bombay and it's supposed to be one of the better areas. But there's potholes everywhere, even on the road by the chief minister's bungalow," she told AFP, using Mumbai's old name.

"It's embarrassing. I feel like I'm travelling on a road in a small village."

Mehta hopes the "Smooth Runnings" exhibition, due to open later this month at the BMB Gallery, will stir strong emotions about the issue and catch the eye of the local council, which has overall responsibility for road maintenance.

Many of the badly rutted roads are merely patched up from year to year with sub-standard materials by companies only concerned with securing repeat repair contracts.

Yet there is a growing awareness that the issue has implications beyond car tyres and pedestrians being splashed with rainwater by passing traffic.

"I think it's a shame that we cannot get our basics right at the time when India is talking about becoming an economic powerhouse," photographer Ameya Gokarn, whose work is part of the exhibition, told the Mid-Day newspaper.

The World Bank has warned that India's fast-growing economy could be hampered without massive investment in transport infrastructure.

India has the second-largest road network in the world behind the United States, measuring 3.5 million kilometres (2.2 million miles), but just under half of it is paved.

Journey speeds on highways -- most of which are two lanes -- can be frustratingly slow at about 50 kilometres (30 miles) an hour in a car and 35-40 kilometres for buses and trucks.

Traffic in cities has grown by 15 percent a year for the last decade, reducing the average speed during rush hour to little more than walking pace in some places.

As in areas such as water, power and housing, analysts say that road-building and maintenance have failed to keep up with growth fuelled by the recent economic boom and population increases.

New projects are regularly hit by cost and time overruns while most construction firms are small, family owned businesses reliant on unskilled daily wage earners, without access to proper equipment and materials.

Larger firms with specialist engineers and workers are overstretched and investors from India and abroad are deterred or delayed by bureaucracy, the World Bank said in a 2008 report.

The editor of India Infrastructure magazine, Shubhra Puri, welcomed the government's recognition of the problem.

Roads minister Kamal Nath has set a target to construct 20 kilometres of roads every day as

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part of a 500-billion-dollar building plan.

He told India Today magazine recently: "Wealth does not create roads. Rather roads create wealth."

But Puri said corruption, a lack of forward planning to anticipate future capacity, weak regulation, protracted land acquisition disputes and too many agencies controlling roads were still affecting improvements.

"It's going to take a lot of time to change. It's not going to be done in the next two to three years," she said.

"Over time I'm sure we will be in a better position but everyone has to really scale up their contribution to make a difference."

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