



PHOTO: SAJJAD HOSSAIN

There's only one way in and out

Entry, exit point of Uttar Kalshi area passes through factory, barring movement of 30,000 locals

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

It was the most horrific day of Jhumu Begum's life when she had to endure labour pain for two hours straight at night, without being able to reach the hospital.

Jhumu lives in Dhaka's Uttar Kalshi area with her husband. The area falls under DNCC's ward-2, and only one road gets in and out of there.

However, the road passes through Mirpur Ceramic Factory, the gate of which is closed for most of the day. It only opens for seven hours every day, during which, residents have to get their work and errands done and return home again.

"My husband and I tried to pass through the gate at 4:30am but found it locked. The guard did not respond to our calls for help. After an hour of trying, we were told the gate would not open until 7:00am," said Jhumu.



During a recent visit, this correspondent saw the notice on the factory's gate mentions that the gate is open from 7:00am to 10:00am and 4:00pm to 8:00pm. Cars, auto-rickshaws, minibuses, and battery-run rickshaws are not allowed to pass through the gate.

This has been the situation for nearly eight years now, in a 51-year-old locality. The area is also surrounded by three housing projects, who have put up boundary walls on all the sides.

"Eight years ago, we had a clear road that made it easy for us to move around at any time. However, with time, many apartment buildings have been constructed, blocking other entrance points," said Dulal Hossain, a resident.

"We cannot move freely. To leave or enter the area, we have to face questions from the security guard of the factory," said another resident Rasel Mollah.

These problems have also affected the local businesses in the area. Dilip Kumar, a resident who runs a shop in the area, said, "I was transporting goods on a pickup van. The security guard at the factory gate stopped me and said the vehicle will not be allowed in. I had to unload the van and take the goods in one by one."

Another resident Kamal Hossain said, "Sometimes the gate remains closed for an indefinite period, mostly during visits by the factory owner."

"Five entry roads have been closed since 2015. Three housing projects have encroached on all four sides of our locality. The road belongs to the factory, so we cannot do anything about it," said Azad Hossain, a service holder.

"A separate road is the need of the hour," said another resident Jalal Hossain.

Resident Parvin Begum said, "My children have to go through a lot of difficulties every

day to reach school. The closure of the factory gates makes it hard for them to get to school on time and causes a lot of stress for them and me as a parent."

Babul Dewan, a private job holder, said "It's a constant fear that I have to deal with, the thought of being locked out and not being able to see my family. It's a daily struggle that takes a toll on me both mentally and physically."

Talking to this newspaper, Shahidul Islam, chief security officer of Mirpur Ceramic Factory, said the residents of their factory area have no other option but to use the factory road. "Over the years, the factory has been through many thefts, which is why we need to stay vigilant. A new road has to be built as soon as possible," he said.

This correspondent could not get in touch with the factory owners for comments.

Contacted, Sajjad Hossain, councillor of ward 2, said housing societies in the area are willing to provide land for the construction of roads, playgrounds, and graveyards.

He said for the construction of the road to begin, the housing societies must hand the land over in writing to DNCC. "Without this written agreement, DNCC would not be able to proceed with the construction of new roads, playgrounds, and graveyards," he added. He said the land will be obtained within this year.

The councillor also requested the officials of Mirpur Ceramic Factory to not obstruct the road for the people and to provide transportation assistance to the residents.

He said DNCC is aware that the lack of proper roads in the area is causing difficulties for locals. However, since the land is private property, the process of obtaining it has been delayed.

He also assured that the city corporation is working to address the issue.

Freedom of movement a basic right

Says Adil Mohammed Khan on the issue of DNCC ward-2

Adil Mohammed Khan, professor of urban & regional planning at Jahangirnagar University, said a lack of alternative roads is a direct result of unplanned urbanisation.

This has led to the construction of buildings, blocking transportation routes and creating a bottleneck.

"In the past, urban planning was done in such a way that it did not create any obstacles to people's movement. There was a mutual understanding and cooperation among people. But in modern urban planning, this seems to be lacking," he said.

Adil, also executive director of the Institute for Planning and Development, said, "Freedom of movement is a basic right. It is the responsibility of the city authorities to ensure this freedom."

"The main task of the DNCC is to ensure the road for the movement, but despite knowing the problems, they have not taken any initiative to address the issue."

The ward councillor should take initiatives so that residents' basic right to movement is not being violated.

"The authorities should prioritise the needs of all residents, including those from low-income backgrounds, and ensure that their rights are protected," he added.

Adil also highlighted the need for the city corporation to take immediate action to resolve this issue and provide alternative routes for locals.

"The main task of the DNCC is to ensure the road for the movement, but despite knowing the problems of the roads, they have not taken any initiative to address the issue," he said.

He also mentioned that the lack of proper infrastructure and transportation planning leads to increased air and water pollution and causes a decline in the overall standard of living.

"The residents of this informal settlement, who mostly come from low-income backgrounds, are unable to advocate for themselves and are suffering," said Adil.



We cannot move freely. To leave or enter the area, we have to face questions from the security guard of the factory.

RASEL MOLLAH
Resident of the area



This has been the situation for nearly eight years now, in a 51-year-old locality. The area is also surrounded by three housing projects, who have put up boundary walls on all the sides.

"The only road to the hospital was closed and I had no other options but to spend the night at home, crying in pain. I eventually gave birth to my child at a nearby private hospital at 7:30am," she added.

Jhumu is not alone in this. Around 30,000 people live in this area, and almost every family has a story of being locked inside the vicinity during emergencies.

"My husband took me to the gate at 2:00am after I started having labour pain. After waiting for almost two hours, the guard finally opened the gate," said another resident Kohinur Begum.

Another resident Asma Begum had to wait for almost an hour at the gate while going through labour pain. The gate was finally opened with the permission of the factory owners. "There are no hospitals and medical services available in our area," said Asma.