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70pc of Kabul roads blocked by VIPs & strongmen!

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KABUL (Pajhwok): More than 70 of roads remain blocked in Kabul when VIPS or high-ranking officials, including the president and his CEO, travel in the city, causing immense traffic problems for the people.

A survey by Pajhwok Afghan News shows roadblocks and barbed wire have been placed in 67 areas of the city, where military vehicles are parked on roads -- a practice that bothers commuters and motorists.

The closure of five main roads, 11 streets, five footpaths and 46 sub-roads in Shahr-i-Naw, Sherpur, Wazir Akbar Khan, Khairkhana Mina, Dar-ul-Aman neighbourhoods is a nuisance for the people.

Many roads are blocked by military and civil officials, embassies, international organisations and NATO-led troops. Vehicles and even passers-by are not allowed at times to use the roads and streets.

High-ranking officials

The Presidential Palace has blocked a one-kilometre road, linking the airport and Shashdarak areas with central parts of the city. As a result, the people have to traverse long distances to reach their destinations.

Barriers have been placed on a 300-metre road in Dar-ul-Aman locality, where the Presidential Palace is located. Last year, President Ashraf Ghani had ordered government officials not to block roads or disturb the traffic system.

Ghani had also warned against road blockades for high-ranking officials, while calling for the removal of omnipresent barriers from capital roads.

Likewise, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Dr. Abdullah has blocked five streets, measuring about a kilometre, near his residence in Karta-i-Parwan locality. First Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum has blocked three streets near his house.

The deputy spokesman for CEO, Javed Faisal, did not comment on the issue, but said Abdullah was the first-ever government leader who did not want roads to be blocked for him.

A one-kilometre portion of roads leading to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interiors is also full of barriers. At a time, few people are allowed to pass through the area.

Near the Foreign Ministry, former president Hamid Karzai has also closed a 100-metre part of the road. Karzai had also issued several decrees, asking officials to remove barriers from roads.

Similarly, 2nd Vice-President Sarwar Danish and Wolesi Jirga member Erfanullah Erfan have blocked a 300-metre street close to the parliament building. President's Special Representative for Reform and Good Governance Ahmad Zia Massoud has blocked a stretch of the road in Karta-i-Parwan locality.

The Ministries of Telecommunications and Information Technology, Water and Energy, Commerce and Industries, Rural Rehabilitation and Development and Hajj and Religious Affairs have blocked several streets and many footpaths.

Parliament

Recently, the main Dar-ul-Aman road has been closed for traffic from 8am to 1:30pm due to MPs going to and returning from the parliament. Last week, some dwellers of Kabul staged a protest against the closure of roads for lawmakers.

The protestors complained they had to cover three kilometre in three hours and the government employees living in the area are marked absent due to belated arrivals in offices.

For the parliament's security, three streets measuring one kilometre have been closed. The chairman of the Wolesi Jirga Complaints Commission, Obaidullah Barakzai, has closed a street behind Silo. Speaker Wolesi Jirga Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy has installed a door in the street where he lives. No one is allowed to enter the street near the Kabul University.

Judicial and security organs

The attorney-general office in Shahr-i-Naw has blocked two meters streets measuring 500 metres. The 10th police district has blocked roads in Shaheed Square and 8th police district in Dana area. By the same token, the 3rd police district has closed a 500 meter street; the 5th department of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and other security offices have blocked roads near the Education Ministry with sandbags.

The police station has closed a road in the De Afghan area and the Police Academy does not allow the people to walk a 100 meters long footpath. In the 6th police district two 300 meters long streets have been closed by lawmakers, including former governor of Paktia Juma Khan Hamdard.

Ex-government officials

Former government officials, including then education minister Ghulam Farooq Wardak and agriculture minister Asif Rahimi, have blocked two entire streets in the 5th municipality district.

Relatives of Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim have closed four streets in Kart-i-Parwan locality. In front of Fahim's house, Abdul Karim Khurram, chief staff to former president Hamid Karzai, also obstructed a 200 meters street.

Faridoon, a serving general at the Ministry of Interior (MoI), has jammed some streets and part of the main road in the 3rd police district. Tufan, a former jihadi commander, has barricaded part of the main road in Company locality.

Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs Gulab Mangal and former vice president Karim Khalili are involved in similar practices, causing trouble for the common people.

In Khairkhana, several powerful individuals, including former vice-president Younus Qanuni, have blocked streets near their residences. Despite concrete barriers placed around his house, Qanuni has blocked a 300 meters long street. A women's commemoration centre has also been blocked by Qanuni, whose gauds have been tasked with barring all and sundry from entering the facility.

Organisations

A number of NGOs block footpaths and do not allow pedestrians enough space. Roadblocks have been placed around Serena Hotel, where the general public faces a lot of problem.

The Central Bank has also closed a 200-meter-long street. Sub-streets in the diplomatic district of Wazir Akbar Khan have been closed by Wolesi Jirga members, restaurants owners and media outlets.

The 15th street has been blocked by the Embassy of Japan and the World Bank (WB), while the Australian mission has closed the 13th street. Fourth to 10th streets have been blocked by the National Radio Television Network (NRTN), Tolo TV, Silk Road Restaurant and Lawmaker Shukria Barakzai.

The Indian Embassy on the MoI Road and Russian Embassy in Dar-ul-Aman locality have also closed a 100-meter street.

What residents say

Kabul residents allege some streets and roads are controlled by powerful individuals. The city literally looks like a garrison, with the ubiquitous presence of security guards and barriers fuelling tensions among the people, they complain.

Ahmad Ramin, a resident of the 3rd police district, claims not only the Wolesi Jirga speaker, but all powerful individuals and officials have blocked roads and streets, which are off-limits to the small fry.

“Some days ago, I wanted to pass by the speaker house, but his bodyguards did not allow me; they asked where I was going. I replied, to my home, they did not give me permission,” he grumbles.

Ramin suggested to the bodyguards to search people before letting them go to their houses through that street, but the guards were unmoved. In addition, blocking of streets and roads has spawned traffic problems, he argues.

“Some days back, security forces blocked the Deh Mazang Square because of a meeting in the Loya Jirga tent. People and patients could not pass the square, with a pregnant woman giving birth to her baby inside a car,” Ramin recalls.

Shafiq Ahmad, an inhabitant of the Sanatorium area near Darul Aman, says the road that previously connected Qala-i-Bakhtyar, Bahadar Khan and Abshar areas, is now blocked by the Attorney General Office.

The blockade has harmed damaged the economic situation of the people, as shopkeepers attract fewer clients. But they continue to pay high rents, Shafiq maintains, asking the authorities to provide people with facilities instead of creating problems for them.

Abdur Raqib Sahibi, a foreign organisation worker and resident of Khaikhana neighbourhood, would reach home from office in 30 minutes before road blockades in his area by NATO forces. Now he reaches home in one hour.

He said a NATO office there has come under three suicide attacks, inflicting heavy casualties and financial losses on local people. Pajhwok Afghan News tried to contact a number of officials who have blocked the roads, but failed to get their views.

Municipality's view

The Kabul Municipality confirms the problem created by officials, but disowns responsibility for removing barriers from roads and streets. Municipality spokesman Abdul Qadir Arzo says: "In the current security situation, some officials need to block streets and roads."

He adds clearing barriers and reducing traffic jams is the responsibility of the traffic department. The Ministry of Interior and National Directorate of Security (NDS) should cooperate with the department in addressing the problem.

Traffic department

Kabul's traffic department expressed concerns about road and street closures in the capital, saying 97 sub-roads had been blocked by some officials. Traffic Director Gen. Assadullah admits road closures have caused many problems for the department.

The department has deputed more officers in areas that witness frequent traffic jams. Some roads and streets in Shahr-I-Naw, Wazir Akbar Khan, Karta-I-Naw, Kart-e-Seh, Mirwais Maidan and other areas of Kabul have been reopened. But nearly 100 more roads remain blocked.

Ministry of Interior campaign

Interior Ministry's deputy spokesman Najib Danish says they plan to start a campaign to clear roads in Kabul with the support of police, intelligence agents and Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers in the near future.

Danish supports protection of the diplomatic enclave and international organisations. "For security reasons, we listen to them, but other thoroughfares and sub-roads will be cleared soon," he promised, without giving a specific date.