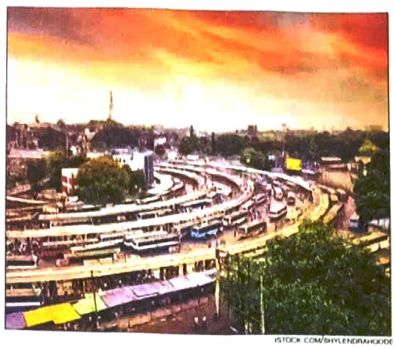
Mathures Paul interviews the Road Kid of India about Rasthe and how it is now headed for Calcutta



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Of the Beaten Track: An App Story

Bengaluru may be called the Silicon Valley of India but unlike the real deal, the city has a fair share of potholes and broken footpaths. What better way to highlight that than an app developed by a local Class X student? Known as the Road Kid of India, 15-year-old Surya Uthkarsha (**in pic below**) came up with Rasthe, through which citizens can report footpaths in bad condition directly to the authorities. Created with AI help, he plans to bring the app to Calcutta. Here's what he told **The Telegraph**.

Q What was the moment that made you decide to build something instead of just being annoyed by it?

Outside my school, there was a footpath covered in rubble and tree debris. Every day, around 300 to 500 students had to step off the footpath and onto the road just to get to school. That saddened me because they were most exposed to danger during that last mile of their journey. I thought, why not build something to fix this problem and maybe even save lives?

Q Civic complaint portals already exist. What does Rasthe do that they can't?

I think Rasthe would be more successful because it is a single-purpose app that channels everything into one specific pain point. The authorities also give it more priority than a channel that is flooded with an overwhelming number of things. This streamlines the process and gets results.

Q You recently added an "after" photo feature. Why was it important?

It was important to build credibility and trust within the system, for the platform, the citizens and the authorities alike. Once there is visual proof that the footpath has been cleared or repaired, it tells people the platform is actually working. It tells people the authorities are taking note of their complaints and it tells us that the citizens are benefiting.

Q When did you start coding or building things?

When I initially started coding and building things, it was a very, very simple personal portfolio site coded in just basic HTML and CSS. This was when I was 11 or 12.

Q You built the first version of the app with help from AI. What exactly did AI do and what did you have to work out yourself?

I provided the initial framework: how I wanted things to be, how I wanted the reporting flow to work and how I wanted the user experience to be. I fed it into the AI. After that, I had to fine-tune every single part to ensure the user experience was great and everything was working as it needed to.

For the backend, I had to hook up storage and figure out a framework to load all 3,000 reports very fast so as not to keep people waiting. I had to do a bunch of research, and again, AI built that out for me.

Q How do you keep AI to a minimum? Where do you draw that line, and why?

I have seen cases where people ask AI to build something, launch it, get a bunch of users and then it breaks. I think we need to use AI in such a way that we understand what exactly is happening. We should hold AI's hand throughout the building process, not give it instructions just once and stop.

AI & You



Q Broken footpaths are common in Calcutta too. Is the app expanding its scope?

We are launching in Calcutta very, very soon. The entire app is already customised, so stay tuned for the launch in the next two to three months.

Q You're still in school. What does a normal week look like for you?

For me, a normal week involves juggling meetings, events, coding, pushing out content, scheduling and a bunch of different things. Alongside homework, exams and all of these extracurriculars, I think I've found the right balance. I've dedicated time to focusing on studies and time to doing other things. I think that has become a routine that has allowed me to allocate my time effectively.

Q Where do you see the app, and yourself, in five years?

I want the app to be closely integrated with the day-to-day framework of the government. I would like to see more recognition for the platform, and I would, of course, hope that every report gets fixed.

Personally, I would want to be someone who's deep in policy and research, backed by the findings and reports we have through Rasthe. I would like to pursue higher studies at a top-notch university abroad and return to serve society.