

Locals resist developer to save playground

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There is a designated playground for Block D, Section 6 at Mirpur on the map preserved at National Housing Department (NHD), but the playground is about to be wiped out from the face of the earth as a new imaginary plot emerged out of nowhere on a 'revised' map right next to the playground!

Locals recently found out about this heinous conspiracy to deprive the community of the last existing playground in the neighbourhood when a land development firm made an attempt to take possession of the playground claiming that it had obtained a Power of Attorney from one Mohammad Younus, the original lessee of the land.

The plot the lessee was claiming is an imaginary plot next to the playground shown on a 'revised' map by NHD and it (the new claimed plot) virtually coincides with the playground, alleged the locals.

The playground is known as Mukul Fouz playground and it is the lone playground in the neighbourhood to serve the children in

an area where at least three and a half lakh inhabitants live. Around 40 cultural and social organisations of the area and the whole community have no other open space to go to for holding their social or cultural programmes as land grabbers had already gobbled up other designated playgrounds in adjacent areas of Mirpur.

Mukul Fouz applied for a permanent lease on the designated playground land and has been conducting its activities on the playground ever since the children's cultural organisation was established in 1976. Many political leaders, even the incumbent Dhaka city mayor, during their visits to the playground on different occasions assured that the playground would be leased out to Mukul Fouz, said Ashiqur Rahman Bhuli, vice president of Mukul Fouz.

On the night of January 15, the community heard an announcement over the loudspeakers of a nearby mosque that a building development company was taking possession of the Mukul Fouz playground.

Hundreds of locals including children and women form all

walks of life rushed to the scene and locked into a violent clash with the workers of the development firm named Olive Crown Resources Ltd.

The resistance from the community drove away the developers from the playground, but the clash left many injured. Two criminal cases were filed with Pallabi Police Station.

Although the community's united resistance saved the playground for the time being, locals wonder how long they will be able to hold on to their beloved playground as the police are presumably working for the development firm.

Many parents told Star City that they were not feeling comfortable to go to the playground with their children anymore since the police patrolling the playground are harassing them and misbehaving with the community leaders who organised the resistance. They also fear that the police might incriminate them with the cases filed following the clash.

Pallabi police however denied harassing the locals and said both sides lodged cases and police are there only to ensure

law and order in the area.

Olive Crown Resources Ltd., the development firm, in a press conference at National Press Club on January 22 alleged that Mukul Fouz had illegally grabbed the land and claimed it as a playground -- which in fact is a plot.

Nazrul Islam, director of the firm told Star City that his firm obtained a Power of Attorney from Mohammad Younus, the 'original lessee' of the land. He said that Mukul Fouz is illegally occupying the plot and Mukul Fouz activists attacked workers of his company when they went there to claim the plot.

Mohammad Younus, a retired PWD engineer, claimed to be the lessee of the land and said he along with three others got a lease on the land in 1978 and officially received the plot from the housing estate. Mukul Fouz had illegally grabbed the plot, he alleged.

When asked why he or his partners did not start construction on the plot within the stipulated two years after obtaining the lease on the plot in 1978, he said he failed to start construction work on the plot due to financial



STAR PHOTO

Local people in Section D of Mirpur celebrate after preventing a developer from grabbing a playground.

cial shortcomings.

Habibur Rahman, sub divisional engineer of the NHD-1 (Dhaka), said Mukul Fouz

applied for the lease of the particular land, but it had already been leased out to Mohammad Younus. Therefore, Mukul Fouz

does not have any legal right on the land.

Rahman showed this correspondent a layout plan of Mirpur area that was 'revised' on August 3, 1983. According to the plan, there is a playground next to plot number '6/1'.

Plot number '6/1' was apparently created later on the revised plan as the nucleus plot number 6 was the only plot next to the playground on the original layout plan, he observed.

The problem is, plot number '6/1' totally overlaps the playground and if that plot is handed over to the lessee, the playground will disappear, Rahman explained.

When asked how a plot can be shown on the map where it coincides with the playground, Rahman admitted, "The map is flawed."

Rahman observed that as per the conditions of the lease, it should be void since the lessee did not start any construction on the plot in the last 26 years. The lessee could have extended his time limit for the construction work, "... but now the time seems really long."

Locals of Section 6, Mirpur alleged that the housing estate officials somehow manipulated the original map and then prepared leasing documents for the retired PWD engineer. They also claimed that the playground was showing on the copy of the playground survey conducted between 1998 and 2002. The community is preparing to take legal action against the people responsible for obliterating the playground from the map.

Abu Bakar, a permanent resident of the area, said in the first plan of 1964, there were designated small playgrounds in every block of Mirpur, but land grabbers gradually occupied those. Now Mukul Fouz playground is the only one left.

Bakar also said the same lessee of the plot tried to take possession two times, but the people foiled both attempts. "We are united to protect the playground and it is not easy to take away the playground from us."

12x6

8x2