

School grounds for colony kids is a failed example: Minister is trying to gloss over his failure to address the issue in his tenure as UD Minister.

- *Proposal is height of irresponsibility, say parents.*
- *Never worked anywhere, failed every time it was attempted*

New Delhi, 17th May, 2012: People's Action has today said that the latest suggestion by Sports Minister Ajay Maken to ask schools to allow children from colonies to play within its premises after school hours is an idea which has been discussed and tried earlier and set aside for its unviability.

“For him to rake it up as a solution to the shortage of city planning is insincere,” said Ashutosh Dixit, Member People's Action and one of the oldest advocates for children's playgrounds in colonies.

“The fact is that there is no policy on playgrounds within colonies and builders have been allowed to build without allocating for play spaces for children. The biggest defaulter on this issue is the DDA”, said Dixit.

DDA colonies have provision of green areas basis 1 park per 5000 population, 1 neighbourhood park for 10,000 populations, 1 community park for 100000 population, 1 district park for 500000 population, 1 city park for 10, 00000 population etc. There is no similar allocation for playgrounds and whereas on persistent questioning they accept that it can be used for play purposes but a qualified denomination has never been attempted.

“The minister should explain why he could not draw up a single scheme to implement such spaces even in newer colonies instead of trying to arm twist schools and defocus the issue”, said Ashutosh Dixit.

According to a former senior official of the DDA, there are 26 stadiums and sport complexes most of them are used only 10%. Why does the Govt. not use these to the full extent where billions of Rupees have been invested? He asked.

Besides stadiums and sports complexes there are 35 focal points .. such as Adventure land Rohini, bhalswa lake, boating lake near Purana Qila, Suraj Kund, Red Fort, Tughlaqabad Fort, Sanjay Lake, Nehru Park etc which should be used for recreation but there is no initiative on this account

Allowing children from colonies to use school playground is a retrofit solution and more like a compromise than any proactive attempt at solving a continuous problem. Schools are within their rights to protest this move and we have spoken to many principals over the years and their concerns are valid.

This proposal does not address some critical questions.

“If a child is hurt in these premises, who will be responsible,” asked one Principal of a school, requesting anonymity. “If a child is 2 or 3 kilometres away from home, who will locate the family, administer first aid. If any untoward incident occurs, or if a child is bullied, threatened or misbehaved with, who will be held responsible? Similarly, if school equipment is damaged or the area vandalized by grown up kids, who will be held accountable,” she asked.

Other school principals echoed similar views, adding that it had become fashionable to load all the shortcomings of governance on private and aided schools in a reference to the recent RTE Act.

Such ideas have never worked anywhere because of these and other contradictions in the proposal. Savita Singh, a proprietor of an educational academy and a sportsperson herself said, “My experience is that this never works. Even I would not have my children go to another school to play in the evenings”, she said.

The proposal also suffers from presuming that all kids are the same age.

“This proposal is the height of irresponsibility,” said Mrs Sumita Joshi a mother of two kids and a south Delhi resident. “Which parent in Delhi will allow their 10 or 12 year old boy or girl to go two or three kilometers away to play? In a city where crossing a road is a brush with death, which parent will allow their kids to go such distances,” she asked adding that this proposal might work for senior kids but should not be suggested for pre-teens under any circumstances.

Atul Goyal, Convenor of URJA said that this issue has been debated many times at RWA forums across the city. “The fact remains that unless the DDA and the UD Ministry draw up water tight norms and build this into bye laws just as green areas are, this problem will continue to fester”, he said adding that the latest proposal by Mr Maken was simply un-implementable.

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