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Cry against high-rise plan at playground

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THE nation read with dismay the front-page report (NST, March 28) of the blatant disregard for nature and the environment.

Ironically, another report of an equally damaging nature was carried in page 27 of Times Extra, which highlighted a plan to put up a 16-storey building where a 20-year-old open space now exists, in Section 8 of Petaling Jaya.

I congratulate Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Minister of Housing and Local Government Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh and the media for highlighting these issues. At least some of us have "eyes that see" but I hope many more will have "ears that hear" the pleas and cries of the ordinary people.

What I find confounding is that the Menteri Besar of Selangor Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib seems to have no knowledge of what is going on.

In both cases, the political functionaries at the executive level who approved the "developments" were local authorities.

Violations of the public and community interests have been well highlighted by the Press.

Why then is it so difficult for the State Government to support development that is in the public interest?

The case of Section 8 is a violation of the Menteri Besar's specific instructions, or at least what was reported in the newspapers.

On March 18, the New Straits Times reported that Dr Ting had told the State and local authorities not to re-gazette land earmarked for sports and recreation, for commercial purposes.

The next day, the NST reported that most State Governments were taking steps to fulfil this directive.

On March 19, it was reported that:

"In Shah Alam, the Selangor Government has directed land offices in all districts to identify their respective open areas, playgrounds and ungazetted lands to avoid problems when approving development projects. Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said the directive was to identify to whom the open areas belonged and gazette land that had never been gazetted."

According to the report, the Section 8 open space was never gazetted. Why? Only the State Government can answer this.

Even more disturbing is why the two-decade old playground was suddenly alienated to private developers?

Why is public land being arbitrarily alienated?

Whose decision should it be to "develop" public interest open spaces?

Why did the local authority, in this case the Petaling Jaya Municipal Council, approve such a violation of public and community interest in favour of commercial development?

I hope someone can answer these questions.

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