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Mumbai: Nepean Sea Road Residents Plan Protests Against PDP Fire Truck

Oct 02, 2017, 18:24 IST | Hemal Ashar



Dussehra morning's meeting, which saw a large number of SoBo citizens engage in an animated discussion to 'Save the Priyadarshini Sports Complex' at Nepean Sea Road, will resume today, on Gandhi Jayanti, where a definite plan towards saving the park is expected to be chalked out and presented to the citizens for information and action.

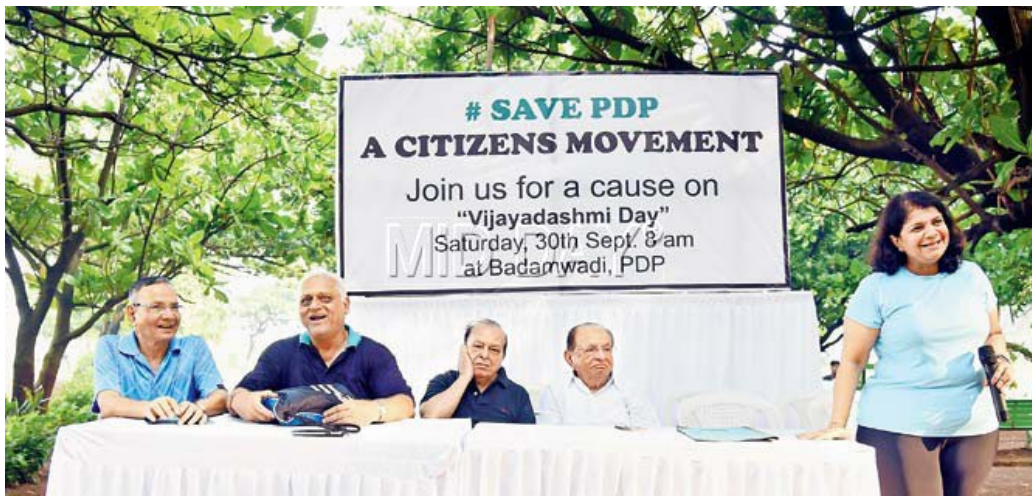


The fire engine stationed inside the park

The citizens had gathered at the Badami lawns inside Priyadarshini Park (PDP). Their target was a fire engine that bamboozled its way into the park on June 14, with all efforts since to have it shunted out proving futile.

Stop the takeover

Susie Shah, general secretary, Malabar Hill Citizens Forum, in charge of maintaining the PDP, said, "Since the fire engine forced its way into the Park, a number of political representatives, namely Shiv Sena's Arvind Sawant and BJP's Jyotsna Mehta, tried to help, but in vain. We have no option but to start a massive citizens' movement to stymie plans for a takeover of the Park."



Susie Shah of the Malabar Hill Citizens' Forum speaks at the meet. Pics/Shadab Khan

The catalyst for this meeting though was not just the backtracking of politicians on their assurances of support. According to Shah, the Development Plan (DP) of 2034 shows that an empty plot next to PDP, a Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation plot, which the Forum had pinned its hopes on to house the fire facility, after politicians' assurances, is being reserved for a "commercial complex".



An angry local tells people to come together to save PDP

Just the beginning

Most locals, who use the Park as a green lung, see a darker plan by the authorities. The solitary fire engine tucked away in a makeshift shed near the children's park, they think, is merely a precursor to a full-fledged fire station inside the Park — this means more fire engines, at least four, and residential quarters for the firemen.

"In short," said Shah, "a large part of the Park will be taken over for the facility. We cannot allow this; it has gone beyond maintenance, it is about destruction."

Meeting minutes

Nutritionist Naini Setalvad, who lives in Jal Darshan opposite the Park, said, "The Park is being encroached upon; let us get up and do something about it."

"There is place in Walkeshwar for fire engines to be parked; so why here? We need to come together to stop this. We can move mountains if we are one," said Kantilal Kothari, 85, who frequents the place for morning walks.

Another walker, Kaajal Shah, said there was a need to "value what had been created, like this park", while walker Kumar Jain added, "We will shorten our life spans if we allow the park to be taken away."

Durga B Shinde rounded off the 45-minute meet with "These (referring to the fire engine and possible takeover) are cancerous invasions in a green refuge."

The way ahead

Interactive sessions were held through the weekend, where the Forum invited citizens to give suggestions about the way ahead. While one resident stated that not a single person from the area should vote for the BJP next time, others shouted that the issue shouldn't be politicised.

There were discussions on whether it was feasible to resort to a raasta roko or morcha or a silent agitation.

Even a walk holding placards towards CM Devendra Fadnavis' home was discussed as a possible way to stop the Park being used as a firefighting station.

A solid plan of action will take shape early this week. While everybody is for a fire station in the area, residents fear if they don't agitate now, the Park will "slip through their fingers piece by piece".

One citizen present at the meeting evinced some amusement as he was wearing a mask of the demon Raavan. There was some truth in that attire though. It was evident that all "stakeholders", as people who access the park were called, know now that it is their responsibility to shoot those powerful, burning salvos that stop the destruction and encroachment of the Park, just like Lord Rama's burning arrows felled the heads of Raavan.

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