

Lahore Daily Times 5.8.04

# Govt plans to take over Cosmopolitan Club

■ Punjab govt to cancel club's year-long lease ■ Club closed because of rift among members ■ Govt exploiting club's internal dispute, says secret

By Khawaja Naseer

**LAHORE:** The Punjab government has decided to take over the Cosmopolitan Club, the city's oldest club, in Bagh-e-Jinnah and cancel its lease, sources told Daily Times on Wednesday.

The sources said that at a meeting with the club members on August 2, Punjab Chief Secretary Kamran Rasool had directed the agriculture secretary to take necessary steps to take over the club.

The Cosmopolitan Club was closed two months ago because of a rift among club members, reportedly over the issue of the club's registration. The sources said that the club's new governing body, led by its president Senator Dilawar Abbas Shah, had registered the club with the Punjab Cooperative Department under the Society's Registration Act of 1925 on May 29.

They said that the former club's governing body, led by Justice (r) Fazal-e-Mahmood, was of the view that since the club had been functional for over 100 years as an "association of friends", the government should assume it is a registered body. They said that the situation

took a turn for the worse because of the rift between the two groups over the possession of the club building on June 8, 2004. Following the Home Department's directions, a police team sealed the club and arrested some armed men in the club premises, the sources added.

Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi directed Industries Secretary Major (r) Fiaz Bashir to compile a report on the issue after listening to both groups. Both groups also moved a civil court to get the club reopened and the case is still pending.

Several members from both groups also contacted the chief secretary asking him to open the club's tennis courts, changing rooms and the card room. They also gave assurance to the secretary that they would avoid any clash in the club.

The club, spread over five acres in Lawrence Gardens, was leased in 1927 by the then Punjab governor, Sir Halley, to some of the city's most influential people, including Sir Mian Muhammad Shafi and others for sports. Noted dignitaries including Justice (r) Saad Saud Jan and Justice (r) Shabir have been members. The Punjab health secretary, the Balochistan inspector

general of police, a former education minister and number of other notable personalities are currently members.

The club houses 11 tennis courts, two bridge rooms, one snooker room, a TV lounge and a badminton court. The estimated yearly budget of the club is around two million rupees generated, by its 300 members. The club pays Rs 23,000 yearly in lease fee and it charges a monthly fee of Rs 300 from its members in addition to Rs 350 from its tennis club members.

The sources said that club members had a series of meetings with the chief secretary to reopen the club but he directed the agriculture secretary to take possession of the club at the August 2 meeting. They said that the action would be carried out after notes by the chief secretary on the issue were approved.

The industries secretary, Major (r) Fiaz Bashir, told Daily Times that the club and all similar bodies should be registered with the provincial government under the Society's Registration Act of 1925. He said Senator Shah had registered the club with the Cooperative Department being run

under the supervision of the Industries Department. He said that Mr Shah had also submitted the details of his office bearers, but Justice (r) Fazal-e-Mahmood did not want the club registered, arguing that the club had been functioning since the last century so it did not need to register.

Regarding reopening parts of the club, Mr Bashir said the club was sealed on recommendations by Senior Superintendent of Police (operations) Aftab Cheema and that there was a threat to law and order because of the clash between the two groups over the possession of the club. He said the club could be reopened if both groups assured him they would avoid fighting. Talking to Daily Times, Mr Shah said that it was a tragedy that the city's oldest club had been sealed "without reason". He said the bureaucracy was creating misunderstandings to gain control of the club.

He said that his group had legalised the club by registering it with the relevant department but the other party wanted to run the club. Mr Shah said the inquiry being conducted by Mr Bashir should be finalised soon and the



club should be reopened. Club Secretary Muhammad Shahid said the government was exploiting the rift among members to take control of the club. He said the chief secretary directed the agriculture secretary in his presence to take over the club's control.

Justice (r) Fazl-e-Mahmood is available for comment.

The agriculture secretary said he was involved because the club is situated in Bagh-e-Jinnah, which is under the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Department.

# in Club

dispute, says secretary



Justice (r) Fazl-e-Mahmood was not available for comment.

The agriculture secretary told Daily Times he was involved in the matter because the club is situated in Bagh-e-Jinnah, which is the property of the Agriculture Department.