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Fearing for the fate of Faletti's

By Shoaib Ahmed

LAHORE: Faletti's Hotel that has spanned 123 years famous and not so famous memories went into private hands on Tuesday.

Faletti's Hotel was established in British India in 1880 and was one of the prestigious hotels in Pakistan until the establishment of the modern hotel in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

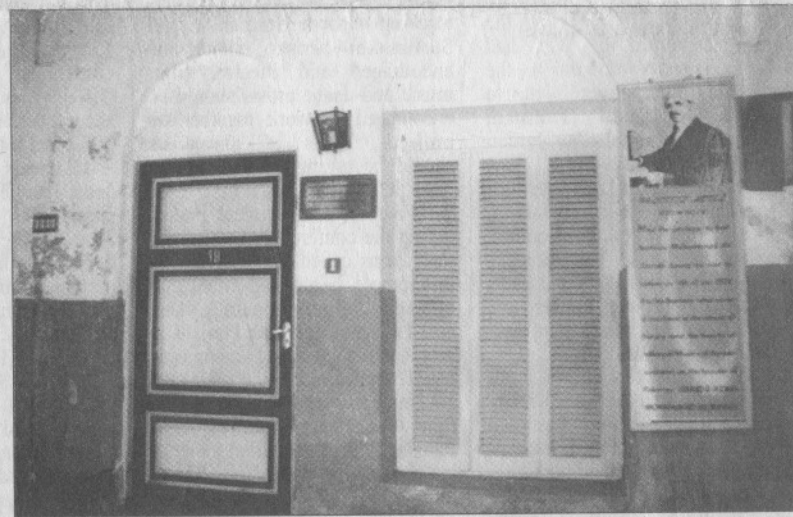
Faletti's was where the founder of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Muslim law expert Justice Alvin Robert Cornelius in room 2 and Hollywood legend Ava Gardner in room 55 all laid their heads down to rest. For the people of Pakistan, it's room number 18 that has special meaning since that is where Mr Jinnah stayed. And though the new owners have said that they would preserve the Quaid's room, millions of eyes will be watching to see if the promise is kept. It is unlikely that if a fancy new shopping arcade or multi-star hotel is built in its place it would lure as many people as Faletti's did.

There were attempts in 1998 and 2001 to auction the hotel situated in the commercial hub of the city

The Secretary of the Lahore Conservation Society, painter and



(Left) A view of the main entrance to Faletti's hotel. (Right) The famous room 18 where Muhammad Ali Jinnah stayed. DAILY TIMES



conservationist, Dr Ijaz Anwar told Daily Times on Tuesday that Faletti's Hotel is protected property under the Punjab Special Premises Act. No portion of it can be demolished or altered, according to the Act. It is an important landmark of Lahore where many historical events took place. He said Justice Cornelius lived in it till his last day. Mr Jinnah stayed in it when

he came to plead the case of Ghazi Alamuddin Shaheed.

But it is not just the actual building that needs to be preserved. This surrounding area has many beautiful trees, which the Wafaqai mohtasib ordered to be preserved in answer to a petition by Kathrine Abbasi-Kureshi.

It would also be disastrous in the

long term if commercial buildings were erected around the Hotel because they would be likely to invite more traffic, congestion and pollution. He said that the Lahore Conservation Society would strongly oppose any such designs on the building. "The policy of privatisation has not been followed transparently in this deal and this might as well become a case

suitable for the future accountability courts," he claimed.

The Hotel has 44 residential rooms, a banquet hall, a restaurant and other facilities such as a tourist office, post office, travel and tour operating agencies, car rental and currency exchange counters. Its walls and floors are decorated in Burma teak and its lawns have trees that are centuries old.