

Encroachments hide 18th century monum

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By Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE, April 24: Scores of illegal dwellings have come up over the years on the Auqaf land in the surroundings of Sharfun Nisa Begum's tomb at Begumpura, hiding the monument from the eyes of the world.

Houses have been constructed on eight kanals of land that was leased out by the Auqaf Department in 1989 to four people, including a former *khateeb* of Badshahi Masjid, Maulana Abdul Qadir Azad. Other beneficiaries of the Auqaf largess included Mahfoozur Rahman, a former director of its Ulema Academy; Muhammad Tariq Khan, an employee of the department; and one Gowaria. They were all granted 99-year leases for Re1 per marla.

The lessees sold a large part of the leased land to the people who have built houses on it in utter disregard of the law prohibiting construction within 200 feet of a protected monument.

The lessees have also put up signs to attract buyers for the remaining land although the lease was, cancelled in 1992.

The Archaeology Department (Northern Circle) director, Qasim Ali Qasim, told *Dawn* the government had cancelled the leases in 1992 and directed the Lahore Development Authority to "restore the monument and lay a garden around it." He said his department had moved a court in



THE tomb of Sharfun Nisa in Begumpura. — Dawn

the early 1990s to seek eviction of encroachers from the tomb. "The case is still pending with the high court after the lessees appealed the civil court's judgment," he said.

The premises, popularly known as *Sarw Wala Maqbara*, are in the Auqaf Department possession. To the British who served in the city, too, it was known as the Cypress Tomb. The building is main-

tained by the Archaeology Department.

Mr Qasim said the leases were cancelled in 1992 after a Britisher, who had served in the city for 20 years, wrote a letter pointing out that during his posting in Lahore for about 20 years, the Cypress Tomb was free from encroachments. "It had been awfully encroached upon when I visited it."

The Archaeology Department

director said the Antiquities Act, 1975, barred "construction, alteration, demolition and encroachment" within 200 feet of the monuments. Besides, the law prohibits leasing, transferring and mortgaging the premises of a monument.

Known as a pious lady, Sharfun Nisa Begum always kept a copy of the Holy Quran and a bejewelled sword with her. Allama Iqbal has mentioned her in his



PREMISES of Sharfun Nisa's tomb occupied by Abdul Qadir Azad Badshahi Mosque, and Mehfozurrehman Naeemi, former chairman of

Javeed Nama.

She was the younger wife of Khwaja Abdus Samad, Lahore's governor during the reign of Mughal emperor Furrukh Siyar (1713-1719 AD). She was the stepmother of Nawab Zakariya Khan, who served as governor under emperor Muhammad Shah (1719-1748 AD).

At the place where she lies buried, there was a raised platform of considerable height

where she said her prayers and recited the Holy Quran.

She was buried in a chamber on the platform so that no stranger should catch a glimpse of the grave. A copy of the Holy Quran and the sword were laid in the burial chamber, which is about 16 feet high.

The tomb was surrounded by a beautiful garden and a pond which has since disappeared. Towards the top, at the neck of

ment



ir Azad, former khateeb of the historic
rman of the Ulema Academy. — Dawn

s and the tomb's dome, there are
square yellow tiles inscribed
umber with holy verses in black. The
t no mosaic work is also missing from
mpse the top of the dome. Legend has
Holy it that after the fall of the
aid in Mughal empire, Sikhs vandalized
ch is the tomb, but, to their utter frus-
tration, found only the Holy
Quran and the sword. It was the
pond British who repaired the tomb in
ared. 1881-1882. Today it is in dire
ck of need of urgent renovation.