

## Famous Lucknow school wants golf club to vacate land

La Martiniere College, among India's oldest schools, wants the Lucknow Golf Club to vacate its land.

The 164-year-old school, founded by French general Claude Martin in 1844, had leased out 54 acres out of its sprawling estate to the golf club. Now the club mints money through the fee its charges from its members, but the educational institution receives only a small rent.

According to official records, the club pays a monthly rent of just about Rs.10,000, while membership fees total millions of rupees.

However, it was not the low rent that prompted the school authorities to ask the club to vacate the land. 'The club has violated the terms of the lease by raising permanent concrete structures,' an official said.

The lease of the club expired March 12 after which the school conveyed its intention to not renew it. On April 8, the school announced its decision through a public notice in a newspaper.

The notice stated: 'The lease granted to the Lucknow Golf Club, 1 Kalidass Marg, Lucknow has expired. The notice for eviction and vacant peaceful possession, as per law was issued April 3, 2008. The cheque issued by the lessee, the Lucknow Golf Club, on the ostensible presumption of continuance of the lessee, has been duly returned.'

The notice further appeals to 'all friends and well-wishers of La Martiniere College to induce the Golf Club authorities to gracefully vacate the premises peacefully in accordance with law.'

Dominated by a lobby of influential bureaucrats and businessmen, the club has been making efforts to maintain its hold over the prized land, on which besides a grand building, a swimming pool has also been built.

Insiders also allege major 'internal conflicts' over 'pilferage and misuse' of funds.

While insisting that the club's lease had not expired, its secretary Devesh Rastogi claimed: 'In keeping with the terms of our lease deed, which lays down a hike of 25 percent every 10 years, we had sent a cheque for Rs.156,250 for the current year which has been returned.'

He went on to add: 'I do not understand what the school is going to do with so much land; after all it has got a total of about 150 acres out of which only 54 acres is leased out to the golf club.'

Significantly, despite its stature and fame, La Martiniere has been charging a very low fee from students, primarily to live up to the ideals laid down by its founder who was firmly against the idea of letting it turn into a commercial institution ever.

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