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PAC tells govt. to stop turf club activities from December 2

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Pending rentals of ₹32.86 cr. to be paid to govt. by Nov. 30

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

With non-renewal of land lease agreement with the State government for the last one decade, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the State Legislative Assembly on Tuesday directed the State government to

take steps for the closure of all activities, including racing, of the Bangalore Turf Club (BTC) in Bengaluru from December 2.

It also directed the government to recover pending rentals amounting to ₹32.86 crore before November 30.

A 15-member PAC, headed by Congress MLA and former Minister H.K. Patil, has directed the Law Secretary to take all necessary steps to settle a legal dispute regarding the BTC in the Supreme Court.

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PAC tells government to stop turf club activities from December 2

The Law Secretary has to submit a report on actions taken to settle the dispute to the committee in the first week of December.

The PAC held lengthy deliberations on the BTC, which is located on 83.14 acres in the central business district in Bengaluru, and directed Rajneesh Goyal, Additional Chief Secretary of the Public Works Department (PWD), to take steps to recover the pending rental from 2010-11 to 2017-18, before November 30. The PAC has conveyed its instructions to Mr. Goyal, who attended the meeting.

An agreement between the State government and BTC ended on December 31, 2009. The then government had sent a notice to the BTC to vacate the land, but the latter declined to budge. The dispute landed in the Supreme Court, Mr. Patil said.

The previous governments led by Chief Ministers Ramakrishna Hegde and S.M. Krishna had recommended shifting of the BTC to the outskirts of the city citing traffic congestion since it was located in



The annual rent to BTC was fixed at ₹10 lakh from January 1 to December 31, 1999 and 10% of its turnover from 2000.

the central district. According to the PAC, the BTC is estimated to owe an annual rent of ₹52,86,99,102 between 2010-11 and 2017-18 to the government.

Speaking to presspersons, Mr. Patil said the Advocate General of the State government in 2013 had told the Supreme Court that the government would maintain status quo on the matter. "A tacit understanding between State's bureaucracy and the BTC members is the major reason for the delay in vacating the stay in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has not issued any stay orders on the dispute," he said.

In 1989, the State govern-

ment had written to BTC to return the land to it, but nothing happened. For the last few decades, several PACs had recommended shifting of the BTC to outskirts of the city. But the governments had not acted on the PAC recommendations in the past, Mr. Patil said.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India, in its report for 1998-99, had mentioned the loss of ₹71.87 crore to the State exchequer and recommended to the government to recover it, Mr. Patil said. The annual rent to the BTC was fixed at ₹10 lakh from January 1 to December 31, 1999 and 10% of its turnover from the year 2000.

'Legally untenable to close operations'

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

A senior member of the Bangalore Turf Club, well-versed with the legal issues of the turf club, said the matter was pending before the Supreme Court as a Special Leave Petition filed by the BTC is yet to come up for hearing.

"The then government had given the land for free and there is no clause on rent. BTC will hold possession of the government land as long as we conduct races. We don't understand why a matter sub-judice before the apex court is being revived out of the blue," he said, and added that discontinuing races at the turf club from December 2 was only a recommendation and it was unlikely to be implemented as it was legally untenable to do so when the matter is pending before the apex court.