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## Hit by funds crunch, Baroda hockey body seeks VMC help

The Baroda District Hockey Association (BDHA) is gearing up to fight the burden of heavy taxes. Ten days after the Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC) sealed their office for non-payment of taxes amounting to over Rs 15 lakh, the "non-commercial" hockey association is set to write to the Municipal Commissioner, seeking exemption from taxes. Ironically, the association ground will host the Khel Mahakumbh hockey semi-final on December 16.

Acting on a notice dated November 30, the VMC sealed the administrative office of the Association until the body clears the outstanding municipal taxes amounting to approximately Rs 15.37 lakh. This includes the dues towards property taxes and water connections, which the association claims it does not have.

The association says that in the absence of any funds or grants, it is simply left in the lurch. Shyam Prabhakar, BDHA president, says that the body does not charge a single penny from the players. "These taxes have become a major burden on us, especially since the VMC started levying tax on the

ground too. We are a non-commercial association that is involved in training and promoting the national sport of India. We are always willing to organise the ground for any district- and state-level championship matches too. There must be some exemption shown towards the game."

Prabhakar says that the association runs through donations of well-wishers, which are hard to come by. "There is no rule or provision that the government or the Indian Hockey Federation, of which the Association is a member, must give us a stipulated grant. So, whatever we manage to get from regular lovers of the game and sponsors is what we have to run the game with. And it is not sufficient to pay heavy taxes," says Prabhakar.

The BDHA ground, located right across the road from the Navlakhi Ground on Rajmahal road in Vadodara, has been given to the association on a lease by the erstwhile rulers of Baroda state. Prabhakar says the onus of paying the property taxes, however, lies on the association.

Every year, the ground hosts several matches in the form of two league tournaments, four knockout tournaments and several clashes in the Under-14, Under-16 and Under-17 category for

various district- and state-level championships. Even as its administrative office lies locked and sealed as per the VMC command, the ground is scheduled to host the state-level hockey semi-final match of the Khel Mahakumbh on December 16. Official invites for the Khel Mahakumbh clash have been sent out by the VMC.

Prabhakar says, "We are only interested in maintaining the ground well and promoting the game of hockey." Almost 500 hockey players from across Vadodara use the ground to practice the game.

Prabhakar is hopeful that his request will be heard. VMC Commissioner Manish Bharadwaj said he will be able to examine the case only when he receives a formal request. Bharadwaj, however, was aware that the association had been slapped with heavy taxes. He said, "All institutions that have any kind of premises are supposed to pay taxes levied as per the provision laid down in lieu of municipal services extended to them. We will need to examine the rules and see what we can do once we get their request."