

Ministry challenges CAG's authority

By Business Times Bureau

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The ministry of urban development (MUD) refused to share files pertaining to out-of-turn allotment of government houses for the scrutiny of the comptroller and auditor general of India (CAG).

It told the CAG that since "there is really no audit point involved" in the matter, and "out of turn allotments do not exempt the allottee from payment of the prescribed licence fee", it would not be possible for the directorate of estates to put up files on the subject for CAG scrutiny.

Long queues for official housing has been a subject of considerable wrangling in the last few months. In his report on MUD before Parliament, the CAG has now complained that "the non-production of files is contrary to statutory provisions of CAG's Act, 1971 and the instructions issued by the government from time to time." These, he has said, "enjoin upon the ministry to make available to audit all files required by it,

including files classified as 'secret' and 'top secret'."

Importantly, the CAG has specifically countered MUD's argument on "non-involvement of an audit point", saying: "The decision as to what documents and information are needed for the purpose of audit and reporting rests with the auditors."

The urban development ministry had earlier refused to enter a probe by the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), arguing that official housing is not a service matter, and hence could not be subjected to the purview of the tribunal.

The allotment system has since been taken up by the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, CAG's analysis tabled before Parliament for January to July 1994 has revealed that more than fifty per cent official houses were given away out of turn in the D-II, D-I, and C-II categories. Similarly, a hefty 73.4 per cent of total allotments in the Type-II category were made out of turn in this period. Similar trends have been pointed out in overall figures from 1991-93.