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By Dilip Chawar

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The public accounts committee (PAC) has charged former Union urban affairs minister Sheila Kaul of disregarding statutory norms of official audit in connection with out-of-turn allotment of government accommodation. Finally, Prime Minister D.V. Narasimha Rao had to intervene to ensure that a proper audit is carried

out, it has said in its latest report.

The report sates that Ms Kaul initially refused to send the relevant files to the comptroller and auditor-general of India (CAG) although every ministry is required to produce the documents demanded for audit, even if the document is classified as secret or top secret.

After Mr Rao's intervention, the minister changed her stand and informed the CAG that the decision not to handover the files had been

"reconsidered" and that the files required for inspection would be produced.

Opposition MP and chairman of the PAC Ram Naik said that in the recent reshuffle, Ms Kaul was replaced by R.K. Dhawan and the minister of state P.K. Thungon was replaced by Ms S.S. Ahluwalia.

The allotment of government accommodation is covered by a set of regulations. One such regula-

tion stipulates that allotments should be made on first-come, first-serve basis. However, this regulation has been observed more in the breach, the report points out. For instance, applications for Type-III quarters made in 1964 were still pending in 1995 although out-of-turn allotments in this category during the year were to the tune of almost 40 per cent.

The CAG examined the allotments made from 1991 to '94 and

discovered that accommodation was given to individuals who had not even completed five years of service although applications of people who had clocked over 27 years of service were still on the waiting list. To top it all, during the period of audit review, the ministry sanctioned 166 out-of-turn allotments and none of the beneficiaries had completed even five years of service.

It is a well-known fact that official accommodation is rented out

at nominal rates while the market rate is much higher. The PAC questioned the ministry's representative, who admitted that government houses were used for marriages and other social purposes. For instance, the ministry deposed in a note to the PAC that "bungalow No. 215 at Rouse Avenue in Delhi was used for marriage purposes.... now in its place, bungalow Nos 203 and 211 are being used for this purpose."

The PAC's report is full of such

shocking facts. It reveals that the government stands to recover Rs 6.5 crores as rent from various allottees, including several VIPs.

As a member of Parliament, Mr Naik had been pursuing the matter of official allottees sub-letting apartments. After he became chairman of the PAC, the question was raised again. The PAC was told that on receipt of his letters, a squad of six officers from Delhi was sent to Bombay. The squad carried out inspections in the first

week of April 1995 and discovered that of the 264 quarters inspected, 252 were found fully or partially sub-let.

The Union government provides official accommodation in 23 capitals and cities across the country to its employees, MPs, supreme court judges and other specified categories. It is estimated that at the end of 1995, against the demand of over 1,83,000 quarters, only over 91,000 would be available.