CAG pulls up Diggy for squandering govt money: <span ...
Suchandana Gupta TNN
The Times of India (1861-2010); Nov 25, 2004; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Times of India
pg. 13

CAG pulls up Diggy for squandering govt money

Sharmila Tagore Among Beneficiaries Of Largesse

By Suchandana Gupta/TNN

Bhopal: Why should the Madhya Pradesh government pay veteran actress Sharmila Tagore Rs 2 lakh to renovate her house? But the fact is former chief minister Digvijay Singh gave the Censor Board chairperson the amount in June 2002 for some "construction work", and that too for a house owned by her outside the state.

The 2002-03 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India has raised serious objections to state funds being given to the actress and 21 others. Listing the recipients in a chart, the report observed, "It was anticipated that financial assistance outside the state would be provided for the purpose of larger public interest like overcoming natural calamities like earthquakes, floods or damage to properties. However, it has been observed that the assistance was provided to individuals and institutions having very limited public cause."

The others who received discretionary grants include Surekha Panandhikar (Rs 2.14 lakh for the release of a book), Kalpana Ramteke (Rs 1 lakh), a New Delhi-based NGO (Rs 3 lakh for an annual function) and the president of the Aero Club of India (Rs 5 lakh for encouraging aeroflights training).

CAG noted that between 1998 and 2003, Digvijay gave away discretionary grants worth Rs 8.09 crore in 2,969 cases "without adhering to prescribed scales and objectives". It added that Rs 5.52 crore was sanctioned above the prescribed monetary ceiling. The report explained that going by the Book of Financial Powers, 1982, grants could be sanctioned by the chief minister for public purposes and in public interest—to individuals for medical treatment, education, as reward for honesty and bravery, incentive to meritorious and poor students, financial assistance for the marriage of daughters of widows and released bonded labourers, to orphans/handicapped personnel and to institutions other than those of political and religious nature. However, Sharmila Tagore does not qualify for grants under any of the categories.

The report further observed that the CM did not specifically have the authority to release grants to individuals and institutions located outside the state. On behalf of the CM, the state had argued that "the rules empowered the CM to sanction grants by relaxing the rules."