

Probe out-of-turn house allotment, SC tells CAG

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The supreme court today directed the comptroller and auditor general of India to investigate out-of-turn allotment of government houses on "special compassionate grounds" between 1991 and '95. The court also asked the Union urban development ministry to verify the number of government houses illegally rented out (sublet) by allottees.

A division bench comprising Justice Kuldip Singh and Justice K. S. Paripoornan passed the order on submissions made by additional solicitor general K. T. S. Tulsi and counsel Kapil Sibal, Ashok H. Desai and Mukul Mudgal, who assisted the court and gave their schemes to deal with indiscriminate out-of-turn allotment of government houses to journalists, social workers, freedom fighters, political parties and artistes.

The court asked the directorate of estate to submit within six weeks the list of government houses sublet along with the names of allottees.

Mr Tulsi also disclosed that the government had agreed to allot a house to the chief justice of India and

the speaker of the Lok Sabha on the expiry of their term at any place of their choice.

When Mr Sibal disclosed that 7,000-odd houses had been allotted under "special compassionate grounds" on "any consideration", Justice Singh asked, "What are those considerations?" This was like 'My heart goes for you', counsel replied, and the judge remarked, "It needs an investigation."

Today's hearing in a public interest petition filed by lawyer Shiv Sagar Tiwari witnessed an unusual scene as some government employees watching the proceedings from the visitors' enclosure started clapping when the court asked Mr Tulsi to pay market rent to those employees who were denied accommodation despite their entitlement. The gallery was vacated immediately.

The court also expressed its concern over the allotment of houses to political parties and "well-off" journalists drawing salaries of more than Rs 8,000, a limit fixed by the government. The court said it would frame guidelines for the allotment of houses to journalists.