

ASG Tushar Mehta made Special Public Prosecutor for 2G cases

New Delhi, Feb 10 : Additional Solicitor General Tushar Mehta has been appointed as Special Public Prosecutor for the 2G Spectrum Scam case to file an appeal against the acquittal of the accused by a trial court in December last year. A notification issued on February 8 says that the Central government has appointed Tushar Mehta as Special Public Prosecutor for "conducting prosecution, appeals/revisions or other proceedings" arising out of the cases relating to 2G spectrum investigated by the CBI before the Special 2G court and the appellate/revisorial court.

It made no mention of the fate of senior counsel Anand Grover who was appointed Special Public Prosecutor by the Supreme Court on September 2, 2014. Grover's appointment followed the incumbent U.U. Lalit's appointment as top court judge. He was representing both the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate.

Prior to Lalit, senior counsel K.K. Goel argued the case in its initial days but he was replaced by A.K. Singh. However, Singh was dropped after he was allegedly heard in a telephonic conversation advising one of the accused how to fight the case and Goel then staged a comeback. After Lalit was sworn in as top court judge on August 13, 2014, Grover's name was recommended by now Attorney General K.K. Venugopal who at that point of time represented the CBI in 2G cases before the apex court. Grover was appointed as Special Public Prosecutor by the apex court bench of Justice H.L. Dattu (since retired), Justice S.A. Bobde and Justice Abhay Manohar Sapre noting that Venugopal had recommended just one name and the court did not intend to question it.

Delhi government failed to utilise 75% health budget in 2017-18: Congress



New Delhi, Feb 10 : The Congress on Saturday attacked the Delhi government for allegedly not utilising over 75 per cent of the budgetary allocation for health sector in 2017-18 as it only spent Rs 666 crore out of Rs 2,627 crore. Addressing a press conference here, former Delhi Finance and Health Minister A. K. Walia said: "During its three-year rule, the AAP government has been underutilising Budget money for a serious issue like health, which has a cascading effect on the Delhi people." He said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government had been "patting its own back for

record budgetary allocation for health, but the ground reality was totally different". Giving figures on what he said was Delhi government's budget utilisation data in three years, the Congress leader said: "In 2014-15, the government allocated Rs 2,390 crore and spent Rs 2,124 crore, while the allocation for health was Rs 3,138 crore in 2015-16, of which only Rs 2,012 crore was spent." "In 2016-17, Rs 3,200 crore was allocated for health, of which Rs 2,096 crore was spent and, therefore, 34 per cent remained unutilised," he claimed.

"In 2017-18, the alloca-

tion for health was Rs 2,627 crore, of which only Rs 666 crore was spent till September 2017, which means over 75 per cent funds remaining unutilised. "Talking about primary health, Walia said: "When the Congress government was voted out in Delhi, there were 602 primary health centres. The

AAP government reduced this number to 491 in 2016-17." He claimed that the AAP government also closed down 111 dispensaries and turned 24 into polyclinics. Slamming the Arvind Kejriwal government, the Congress leader said: "They promised to increase beds in government hospitals to 30,000. But only 806 beds have been added since 2014." In contrast, during the Congress rule from 2008-2013, the average number of beds added was 544 per year," he said. Walia said the registration of patients in Mobile Health Clinics and school health clinics had reduced by 91 per cent in 2016-17 compared with 2013-14. He said the mobile health clinics were on the verge of closure while school health clinics have been reduced to just 53.

He also criticised the Delhi government for setting up only 162 Mohalla Clinics in three years against its promise of 1,000.

Cyber crime reporting portal to tackle cyber crimes against women: Rajnath

New Delhi, Feb 10 : Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said on Saturday that the government has decided to establish a cyber crime reporting portal to tackle cyber crimes against women.

"We will also establish a dedicated cyber crime laboratory to stop crimes against women and children," Singh said while addressing a gathering after inaugurating the 24th All-India Forensic Science Conference here.

He said there is a need to increase cyber forensic capabilities in modern times as cyberspace has added new dimension and new complications.

"Traditional policing is not adequate to control crime in

cyberspace," he said.

"Forensic science can be extremely useful in cyberspace. Our cyber forensic experts played an important role in preventing radicalisation of our youth. I laud the efforts of our cyber experts in counter-radicalisation. There have been incidents when morphed pictures are used to create confusion and tension," he said.

The Union Home Minister said many countries have successfully utilised forensic DNA database in their fight against crime.

"We are also working towards a Forensic DNA Database. Centre is preparing a huge infrastructure for crime control.

We have come up with the crime and criminal tracking net-

work and systems. By connecting this centralised database with courts and forensic labs we will create an Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System," he said.

He said that new technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain technology, cloud computing, 3D printing, robotics and internet as things are posing new security challenges before us. "Forensic experts should transform these challenges into opportunities," he said.

Stressing on a need for standard operating procedures for all forensic labs in order to avoid contradictions in reports, he said that the chain of custody of samples needs to be transparent.

"Our police forces need to be

AIMPLB likely to expel Salman Nadvi for Ayodhya formula

Hyderabad, Feb 10 : The AIMPLB, an apex body of Indian Muslims, is likely to expel its executive member, Maulana Syed Salman Hussaini Nadvi, for favouring handing over disputed land in Ayodhya, where Babri Masjid once stood, for the construction of the Ram temple.

Taking strong exception to the proposal, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has formed a four-member committee to take disciplinary action against Nadvi, an eminent cleric who mooted the proposal during a meeting with spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

The committee comprises AIMPLB President Rabey Hasani Nadvi, General Secretary Wali Rahmani and executive members Arshad Madani and Khalid Saifullah Rahmani and it is expected to take a decision on Sunday.

The deliberations at the three-day crucial plenary, which began here Friday, were dominated by the controversy.

Sources in AIMPLB said Salman Nadvi, who teaches at Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, a leading seminary in Lucknow, may be expelled from the board for not only taking a stand in contravention of its traditional stand on

Babri Masjid but also making allegations against the board's leadership.

Addressing the meeting on Saturday, Wali Rahmani said that "some elements" are trying to misguide people on Babri Masjid issue. In his report submitted at the plenary, he said the board had taken an unambiguous stand that "once a mosque, always a mosque".

Stating that the board is ready for negotiations, he said the same should be based on justice and honour.

The general body meeting of the board being attended by the executive, founder members, general members and special invitees discussed the Babri Masjid issue.

Rahmani briefed the members about the status of the main case in the Supreme Court. He said in his report that the court already expressed the view that the case is related to the title of the land and does not relate to the faith or belief. He told the meeting that the related documents had already been submitted to the court.

With the executive meeting on Friday pulling up Salman Nadvi for his proposal, he stayed away from the plenary meeting on the second day and reportedly left Hyderabad. Earlier,

talking to reporters, he alleged that two executive members Kamal Farooqi and S.Q.R. Ilyas humiliated him.

Salman Nadvi defended his formula saying this would ensure peace and communal harmony. He alleged that there is dictatorship in the board and few people are controlling it.

Talking to IANS on Saturday, Ilyas denied the allegations made by Salman Nadvi against him. "I initiated the discussion but all those who spoke opposed the proposal as it is the well-known stand of the board that the land of mosque can't be sold, gifted or alienated. This is an attempt to malign the board," he said.

Ilyas, who is convenor

of the Babri Masjid committee of the board, said Nadvi should have raised any issue in the AIMPLB meeting before speaking publicly. He said Nadvi's action had damaged the board's reputation at a time when it is holding a crucial meeting here to discuss various important issues.

"If anybody has any issue, he may discuss it in the board. You can't go and talk on behalf of the board. Mr Salman Nadvi is not an ordinary person. He is the executive member of the board. If he doesn't agree with the board, let him resign and then do whatever he wants," said Ilyas.

He also said that if the board failed to take action against Salman Nadvi, it would damage

New disclosures against Tytler will give new twist to riots probe: SAD

Chandigarh, Feb 10 : The Shiromani Akali Dal said on Saturday that fresh disclosures against Congress leader Jagdish Tytler will give a new twist to the re-investigation into the 186 anti-Sikh riots cases by a Supreme Court-appointed SIT.

SAD President Sukhbir Singh Badal told the media here: "The wheels of justice have finally started moving against Tytler as well as other perpetrators. Even the role of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi will be under the scanner for the first time because new evidence links him directly with the Congress leaders who led the mobs that killed the Sikhs in Delhi. This is a big victory for the victims/survivors who have been waiting for justice for 33 years." Hundreds of Sikhs were killed in Delhi and elsewhere in the country after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984.

Badal appreciated the

union government and its Home Minister Rajnath Singh for what he called the resolve to bring the perpetrators of the 1984 killings to book by referring the "new disclosures" in the case against Tytler to the special investigation team (SIT) Chairman Justice S.N. Dhingra (ret'd) for investigation.

On January 11, a three-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by the former Delhi High Court judge was constituted by the Supreme Court to further investigate the 186 cases in connection with the anti-Sikh riots. Tytler had allegedly told a TV channel that he had travelled with Rajiv Gandhi in a car on November 1, 1984, in specific areas of Delhi where the Sikhs were attacked and killed. Badal said he was confident that the case would unravel now since many startling disclosures had come out regarding Tytler's role as a video CD allegedly showing him boasting about killing 100 Sikhs during the riots.

INTERNATIONAL

Israel launches heavy Syria strikes after F-16 crashes

Israel, Feb 10 : Israel launched heavy air strikes in Syria on Saturday, striking it hit air defences and Iranian targets, and the Syrian army claimed to have brought down an Israeli F-16 that crashed in northern Israel in a major escalation of tension. The Israeli military said early assessments indicated the jet had been shot down by Syrian fire, but this was still unconfirmed. It marked the most serious confrontation yet in Syria between Israel and Iranian and Iran-backed forces that have established a major foothold in the country while fighting in support of President Bashar al-Assad in the civil war.

Israel said the F-16 crashed during a mission to strike Iranian drone installations in Syria. It said it sent its jets into Syria after shooting down an Iranian drone over Israeli territory earlier on Saturday.

The military alliance fighting in support of Assad denied any of its drones had entered Israeli air space. In a statement, it said Israel had targeted an air base in the Homs desert that is being used to fly drones in missions against Islamic State.

Such "terrorist action" by Israel would be met with a "severe and serious response," it said.

The Israeli military spokesman said Israel did not seek escalation in the

region, calling its action a "defensive effort triggered by an Iranian act of aggression".

Iran's expanding clout during Syria's nearly seven-year-long war, including deployments of Iran-backed forces near the Golan frontier, has raised alarm in Israel, which has said it would act against any threat from its regional arch-enemy Tehran. Iranian and Iran-backed Shi'ite forces, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, have deployed widely in support of Assad. Iran's military chief warned Israel last October against breaching Syrian airspace and territory.

Israel's air force has targeted Syrian military and Hezbollah targets in Syria on an almost regular basis, but its attacks on Saturday appeared to be the most intense yet.

Referring to the downed Israeli F-16, an official in the pro-Assad alliance said a "message" had been delivered to Israel. "I do not believe matters will develop to a regional war," the official said. In Washington, President Donald Trump's administration has backed Israel's hawkish stance on Iran, and declared containing Tehran's influence an objective of its Syria policy. On a visit to Israel last month, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence called Iran the world's "leading state spon-

sor of terror." U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is also expected to visit the region in the coming week to discuss the crisis in Syria and other issues, and is scheduled to visit Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and other countries.

Hezbollah and Israel last fought a major conflict in 2006.

Tensions have also spike across the frontier between Israel and Lebanon over Israeli plans for border wall, and Lebanese plans to exploit an offshore energy block which is partly located in disputed waters. The Israeli military said 12 targets, including three aerial defense batteries and four Iranian targets that are part of Iran's military establishment in Syria were attacked. "During the attack, anti-aircraft missiles were fired towards Israel, triggering alarms that were heard in Northern Israel," the military said. Syrian state media reported two separate Israeli attacks. In the first one, a military source said Syrian air defences had opened fire in response to an Israeli act of "aggression" against a military base, hitting "more than one plane".

Later, state media said air defences were responding to a new Israeli assault and air defences had thwarted attacks on military positions in southern Syria.

Hundreds gather at Bangkok's Democracy Monument to demand election

Bangkok, Feb 10 : Around four hundred people gathered at a monument to democracy in the Thai capital on Saturday to urge the military government not to delay a national election planned later this year, in one of the biggest anti-junta demonstrations since the military took power in 2014. Elections to restore democracy have been postponed several times with November being latest date set by Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who was appointed by a military-backed legisla-

ture following a coup in 2014. But a change in the election law by parliament last month means the date almost definitely will be pushed back to early 2019, something that has fanned growing discontent among groups who are calling for a swift return to civilian rule.

Authorities deployed fences around the Democracy Monument, forcing activists to gather only in the vicinity. Protesters held mock ballot boxes and signs saying: "Disgusted with dictatorship."

Trump says Democratic memo on Russia is 'very political,' needs redactions

Washington, Feb 10 : A classified memo written by congressional Democrats to rebut a Republican document made public last week is "very political and long" and would have to be "heavily redacted" before it could be released, President Donald Trump said on Twitter on Saturday. Trump on Friday blocked the release of the memo, which seeks to respond to a Republican memo that Trump allowed to be released. The Republican memo claimed FBI and Justice Department bias against

Trump in the federal investigating of Russia and the 2016 U.S. election. "The Democrats sent a very political and long response memo which they knew, because of sources and methods (and more), would have to be heavily redacted, whereupon they would blame the White House for lack of transparency," Trump tweeted. "Told them to re-do and send back in proper form!"

Trump's decision to block the release of the memo infuriated Democrats, who said it showed a

double standard on transparency on the part of the Republican president.

Trump on Feb. 2 allowed the release of the memo written by Republican members of the House Intelligence Committee with no redactions. Democrats said the Republican memo mischaracterized highly sensitive classified information and was intended to discredit special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation of potential collusion between Trump's 2016 campaign and Russia.

Kim Jong Un invites South Korean president for summit: South Korea

Seoul, Feb 10 : North Korean leader Kim Jong Un invited South Korean President Moon Jae-in for talks in Pyongyang, South Korea officials said on Saturday, setting the stage for the first meeting of Korean leaders in more than 10 years. Any meeting would represent a diplomatic coup for Moon, who swept to power last year on a policy of engaging more with the reclusive North and has pushed for a diplomatic solution to the standoff over North Korea's nuclear and missile programme.

The recent detente, anchored by South Korea's hosting of the Winter Olympic Games that began on Friday, came despite an acceleration in the North's weapons programmes last year and pressure from Seoul's allies in

Washington. The personal invitation from Kim was delivered verbally by his younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, during talks and a lunch Moon hosted at the presidential Blue House in Seoul. Kim Jong Un wanted to meet Moon "in the near future" and would like for him to visit North Korea "at his earliest convenience", his sister told Moon, who had said "let's create the environment for that to be able to happen," Blue House spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom told a news briefing. A Blue House official said Moon "practically accepted" the invitation. "We would like to see you at an early date in Pyongyang", Kim Yo Jong told Moon during the lunch, and also delivered her brother's personal letter that expressed his "desire to improve inter-Korean relations," the

Blue House said. The prospect of two-way talks between the Koreas, however, may not be welcomed by the United States.

Washington has pursued a strategy of exerting maximum pressure on Pyongyang through tough sanctions and harsh rhetoric, demanding it give up its pursuit of nuclear weapons first for any dialogue to occur. "This is the strongest action yet by North Korea to drive a wedge between the South and the United States," said Kim Sung-han, a former South Korean vice foreign minister and now a professor at Korea University in Seoul. Moon asked the North Korean delegation during Saturday's meeting to more actively seek dialogue with the United States, saying that "early resumption of dialogue

(between the two) is absolutely necessary for developments in the inter-Korean relations as well," the South said.

It said the two sides held "a comprehensive discussion... on the inter-Korean relations and various issues on the Korean peninsula in an amicable atmosphere," but did not say whether the North's weapons programme was mentioned. A visit by Moon to the North would enable the first summit between leaders from the two Koreas since 2007, and would mark only the third inter-Korean summit to take place. Pyongyang conducted its largest nuclear test last year and in November tested its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile that experts said has the range to reach anywhere in the United States.