

## Tamil Nadu to free

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Jayalalitha told the state assembly later that the government would send the cabinet decision to the federal government for approval.

"If there is no reply within three days from the centre, the state government will release all the seven... in accordance with the powers vested with the state government," she said.

Among the prisoners to be released are the three men whose death sentences were commuted on Tuesday by the Supreme Court - Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan. They have been in jail for more than 20 years and on death row since 1998.

The court ruled that they should be spared the death sentence, as it was inhumane to keep them for so long under the threat of execution.

Nalini Sriharan, an Indian Tamil woman who will also be released, was also given the death penalty by the trial court in 1998, but the authorities commuted this to life imprisonment in 2000.

Three other convicts - Robert Pious, Jayakumar and Ravichandran - who are serving life sentences for involvement in the assassination would also be among those freed, authorities said.

## Illegal sand lifting

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due to acute manpower crisis.

The practice of earth lifting cannot be stopped until the locals become aware of it, he said.

He added that he had requested the union parishad chairmen to create awareness in this regard.

## Rasel placed on

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ministry's permission to bring sedition charges.

Sub-inspector of Tangail Model Police Station Abdullah Al Taibir, also IO in both the cases, produced Rasel before the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in the afternoon and sought 15 days' remand in each case.

There was no lawyer for Rasel to move a bail prayer, court sources said.

"Rasel is a high profile criminal. He might be taken to the TFI (Taskforce for Interrogation) cell in Dhaka for interrogation," a senior police officer in Tangail told The Daily Star.

Rab arrested Rasel, 21, a seventh semester student of Tangail Textile Institute, from a student mess in Majhipara area of the district early Tuesday on the charge of spreading the "al-Qaeda message calling upon the Muslims in Bangladesh to wage intifada (popular uprising)".

Speaking to media at Rab headquarters on Tuesday, Rasel admitted that he had disseminated the clip through his Facebook page and blogs.

The law enforcers also recovered three mobile phone sets and jihadi books from Rasel's mess room where he had been living for the last three years.

They also raided his village home at Sarishachala in Gazipur's Kaliganj upazila on the same night and seized two laptops and many jihadi books.

He was then taken to the Rab headquarters in the capital and produced before the media.

Rasel was again brought to Tangail at about 11:30pm on Tuesday.

## Driver, helper

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sadar upazila.

Alam and Shahidul, two brothers from Jhautola area of Chougachha upazila, were accused as they scattered vegetable stems on the road for drying up and this caused the road to get slippery amid drizzle, the OC added.

The bus carrying 60 students of Benapole Govt Primary School skidded off the road and fell into a ditch in Jhautola area around 8:00pm on Saturday.

Seven students, aged between six and 13, died and 20 others were injured.

The accident took place on their way back to Benapole from Mujibnagar in Meherpur after a picnic.

## US girl, 15, gunned down as prank goes wrong

AFP, Chicago

A girl was shot dead when a weekend prank went horribly wrong and a man opened fire on a car full of teenagers in the US State of Arkansas.

Seven teenagers had squeezed into one car, driven over to a classmate's house and tossed leaves on a vehicle parked in the driveway, the Little Rock police department said in a statement on Tuesday.

They then drove back 45 minutes later and threw eggs, toilet paper and mayonnaise on to the car, but Willie Noble, the father of the classmate -- who now faces murder charges -- was waiting for them.

Noble told police he had "fired his handgun to scare them," according to the police statement. The incident occurred on Saturday.

# Sri Lanka looks to South Africa amid rights pressure

AFP, Colombo

A Sri Lankan delegation headed to South Africa yesterday to study the work of a post-apartheid truth commission as pressure mounts on Colombo to address allegations of war crimes against ethnic Tamils.

Health Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva was leading a five-member team which would see what lessons it could learn from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up after the demise of the white supremacist regime in South Africa two decades ago, his spokesman said.

"The delegation will spend two days studying the TRC and also keep the South African President (Jacob Zuma) informed about the reconstruction work we have done in the northeast," the spokesman Viraj Abeysinghe told AFP.

The visit comes amid a push by UN human rights chief Navi Pillay for an international investigation into claims that Sri Lankan troops killed up to 40,000 civilians in the final stages of a war with separatist rebels.

Most of the fighting during the 37-year conflict with Tamil Tiger rebels

was concentrated in the northeast, large parts of which were reduced to rubble by the end of the war in 2009.

Pillay is due to formally ask the UN Human Rights Council next month for the probe while noting that Sri Lanka has failed to honour promises to investigate credible allegations, according to a leaked report published in Colombo at the weekend.

The South African TRC worked on the basis of restorative justice rather than punishing those guilty of gross human rights abuses, a model that Sri Lanka has expressed interest in replicating.

At a Commonwealth summit hosted by Colombo in November, Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron warned that he would push for an international inquiry into Sri Lanka's rights record unless President Mahindra Rajapakse's regime ensured accountability by March 2014.

Rajapakse has already rejected Cameron's deadline and insists that the army did not kill any civilians while routing the rebels, who had been fighting for an independent homeland for the ethnic minority Tamils.

# Mridul was asked

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Syed Mashfiqul Islam recorded the statement under Section 164 in a case filed by Mridul's brother in connection with the kidnap.

While torturing him, the kidnapers asked him why he had filed a case over snatching gold to the tune of 80 tola from his driver in the capital in October last year, Mridul told journalists.

The goldsmith had filed the case on December 3 last year against three people which included an officer named Major Rajibil Amin of the Rapid Action Battalion-2.

Mridul, however, said he could not recognise the kidnappers as he was kept blindfolded almost the whole time.

Describing his kidnap, he said on February 11, when he stepped out of his residence to go to his shop around 10:30am, a group of men, introducing themselves as Rab and DB personnel, picked him up in a black microbus, placed a mask over his face, tied his hands and held his head down so that people could not see him in the vehicle.

"After around half an hour, they shifted me to another vehicle. After a while they again changed the car, which stopped after two or three hours of the journey. Then the kidnappers took their lunch and again rode for three to four hours before transferring me to a fourth vehicle, which halted after a while," Mridul continued.

"The kidnappers then pulled me out of the car, dragged me up a few flights of stairs into a room. There they kept me handcuffed. I could hear the sounds of airplanes, motor vehicles and train whistles from the room," he said.

On Friday afternoon, he was taken

# Give more space

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The Foreign Secretary was accompanied to the meeting with Biswal by Bangladesh Ambassador to USA Akramul Qader, Deputy Chief of Mission Muhammad Abdul Muhith, and Director General (Americas) at the Foreign Ministry Mahfuzur Rahman.

Atul Keshap, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South & Central Asian Affairs, accompanied Biswal at the meeting, which was followed by a luncheon.

The Bangladesh foreign secretary also had meetings with senior Adviser for Myanmar Judith Cefkin and a number of officials of the Department of Labour, USTR and State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour.

The foreign secretary briefed the US officials about the priorities of the present government, particularly law and order, economic advancement and growth in business, democracy and good governance and regional integration, security and stability.

He said the present leadership in Bangladesh believed in a consensus-based political process and was always forthcoming in providing necessary space to the political parties as well as civil society.

The foreign secretary reiterated the government's commitment to protect the lives and properties of the people of Bangladesh. He also apprised the US officials of various programmes undertaken to protect labour rights and ensure workplace safety in the RMC sector.

The two sides extensively discussed regional integration and various

to another room and hung by his hands. Then the kidnappers started beating him.

"When I asked them what my fault was, they kept asking why I had filed the case," Mridul said.

After a few minutes, however, he lost consciousness.

"When I regained my senses, they took me to another room and gave me electric shocks. Then they started beating me again, below my knees," Mridul went on.

"One of them asked me what I did.

When I told them that I was a businessman, they asked why then I was getting so much news coverage," said Mridul.

Later, they left Mridul at a paddy field at Kangsanagar in Comilla in the early hours of Monday.

**ACCUSED IN MRIDUL'S CASE MISSING: FAMILY** Meanwhile, the family members of Fahad Chowdhury Dipu, who was accused in the mugging case filed by Mridul Kumar Chowdhury, yesterday alleged that Fahad had been missing since January 15.

They claimed that a group of unidentified people kidnapped Fahad from Motijheel area on January 15 and he had not returned home yet.

At a press conference at Chittagong Press Club yesterday, Fahad's elder brother Kamruzzaman Chowdhury Titu said Fahad, 29, was a stone trader and came to Dhaka on business-related work. On January 15, a group of six to seven men came out of a Nissan Patrol sedan car and picked up Fahad from Kamalapur Balurmah area around 10:30am.

They urged the administration to take immediate steps to find out Fahad, who hails from Sandwip upazila and currently lives at Halishahar in Chittagong.

## CEC claims

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said, "Local government elections are non-partisan in nature. So it is not of much importance if any political party raises any allegation.

"Rather, a candidate can raise allegations. We have taken their allegations seriously."

The CEC also said, "We requested the candidates to place their allegations before the returning officers so that they could take immediate action. We have directed all electoral officials to act as per law."

"We took all necessary measures to hold the polls fairly and peacefully. We think we have succeeded in doing that," the CEC said.

About the voter turnout, he said, "It is not possible to say anything about it just now. We will be able to inform you of the matter it after the completion of the ballot count."

Voting in some polling centres was suspended due to violence, including in Bogra, Barisal, Dhaka, he said, adding, "I cannot inform you of the exact figure [of such centres] just now."

However, EC sources told The Daily Star that voting in at least 12 centres had to be suspended.

## Mridha, 2 other

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ACC Assistant Director Rashedur Reza, the investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet in August 2013.

The three accused have been on the run since the filing of cases against them over corruption. The court issued arrest warrants on different occasions but police failed to get hold of them.

Railway authorities in October 2010 published an advertisement in a national daily, seeking applications for the posts. As many as 68 of 177 applicants were asked to take the recruitment tests. Some 39 candidates sat the exams held at two centres in Chittagong and Rajshahi.

The graft watchdog during an investigation found that results of the examinees were altered in answer and tabulation sheets. Candidates, who failed the test, were selected for the job in return for bribes, according to the charge sheet.

The commission filed another five cases with the police station, accusing the three of corruption in recruitment to other posts.

Mridha was suspended on April 15, 2012, a week after he was caught with Tk 70 lakh inside the Palkhana Headquarters of Border Guard Bangladesh. The money had allegedly been collected from railway job seekers.

The then railway minister Suranjit Sengupta had to resign following allegations that the money was being taken to his Jigatola residence. Suranjit has all along refuted the claim.

The cash haul led to exposure of widespread irregularities in recruitments to different tiers of the railway.

## Indian court sentences three to death for fatal gang-rape

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian court yesterday sentenced three men to death for abducting and raping a 19-year-old woman whose mutilated body was found days later, reports said.

The court in New Delhi said the three men, all aged in their 20s, should receive the harshest sentence for the 2012 attack because their crimes fell into the "rarest of rare" category under Indian law.

"Death to all three," presiding judge Virender Bhat was quoted by the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency as saying.

The father of the woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, welcomed the judgement, saying he has been so consumed with fighting for justice for his daughter that he has been unable to hold down a job.

"I fought a lone battle for two years, and it has paid off," the father, 45, who was in court to hear the sentences, told AFP.

The government toughened laws on sexual violence against women in March last year, following outrage at the fatal gang-rape of a student on a Delhi bus in December 2012.

Four adults were sentenced to death last year over that attack, a crime that sparked seething anger about the treatment of women in India.

The new laws allow for the death penalty in cases where a rape victim dies from the attack or is left in a vegetative state.

The woman, who worked as an assistant with a private company in the megacity of Gurgaon on Delhi's outskirts, was dragged into a car near her home in February 2012 before being gang-raped, PTI said.

An attorney in the case told the court that acid had been poured into the eyes of the victim and a broken liquor bottle had been forced into her private parts, the news agency

## Ruling party unruly

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candidates forcibly took away ballot papers from polls officials and tore those. They also locked in a clash with a pro-BNP candidate's supporters, causing suspension of voting for about an hour.

Khadija Khatun, assistant presiding officer at the centre, said stick-wielding men locked them in a room and clashed with "party men" around 10:00am. She, however, could not say which party they belonged to.

Unruly men snatched and vandalised polling materials at Korpur Bilateral High School centre in the same upazila. Presiding officer Abdus Sabur said the miscreants carried sharp weapons.

Khorshed Alam, returning officer of Bogra, said voting was postponed in four out of the 49 centres in the upazila due to such incidents.

In Chittagong, supporters of chairman aspirant Ataur Rahman, also president of Mirsarai upazila AL, allegedly tried to cast votes in two centres -- Baman Sundar Fakir Ahmed High School and Mitanala Ramdoyal Bohumukhi High School -- in Mirsarai.

At Baman Sundar centre, five youths entered a booth around 12:00noon and forcibly cast ballots. Presiding officer Babu Ratan Kumar said they seized the ballot book with 52 ballot papers sealed by the youths.

At Mitanala, some 100 stick-wielding youths attacked the centre around 2:00pm but could not enter the booths, as polling officials closed the doors. Badal Kumar Pal, presiding officer at the centre, said the attackers could not cast any vote as additional police force rushed to the centre.

All the BNP-backed candidates and the party rebels as well as AL rebel candidates for all the posts pulled out of the race over alleged vote rigging in two upazilas of Barisal and one upazila of Bhola.

The upazilas are Gournadi and Bakerganj of Barisal and Lalmohon of Bhola.

The Barisal BNP called a half-day hartal in Gournadi and a daylong shutdown in Bakerganj for today.

While visiting the Sharikal School polling centre in Gournadi upazila, Barisal Divisional Commissioner Nurul Amin and Deputy Inspector General of police Abdur Rahim found AL-backed chairman candidate's men putting seals on ballot papers, said Abul Kalam, officer-in-charge of Gournadi Police Station.

Four people were arrested in this connection.

Assistant sub-inspector Nasiruddin was suspended while constables Nurul and Shahid were closed for negligence of duty there. Ashim Kumar Biswas, presiding officer at the centre, was removed.

In Bakerganj upazila, polling agents of BNP-backed candidates were barred from performing their duties in most polling centres. Nazrul Islam, polling

agent of BNP-backed chairman candidate Khalilur Rahman, was beaten up inside the centre for challenging fake voters at Dhapar Kathi DK Union School centre.

AKM Ehsan Ullah, Barisal police superintendent, said Assistant Sub-inspector Dulal and Constable Selim were suspended due to negligence of duty at a centre in Bakerganj.

In Meherpur, at least five activists of AL and BNP were injured in separate clashes at Bamanpara centre under Sadar upazila around 11:00am.

A mobile court jailed AL activist Atahar Ali for 10 days and fined him Tk 20,000 for trying to create anarchy at Sonapur polling centre. The court also jailed AL activist Anarul Islam for four days and fined him Tk 2,000 for trying to stop voters from voting.

In Jhenidah, the authorities suspended voting at Mathurapur Govt Primary School polling centre in Shailakupa upazila, after ruling party men allegedly snatched ballot papers and boxes from the centre.

The BNP will enforce a daylong hartal in two upazilas there today.

Anwar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Shailkupa Police Station, was closed for negligence.

Meanwhile, a mobile court jailed a union chairman for three months and fined him Tk 50,000 for driving out the agents of a pro-BNP candidate.

Another AL supporter Atiar Rahman was awarded six months imprisonment for assaulting a polling officer at Srirampur Govt Primary School centre under Kaliganj upazila.

In Pabna, the BNP has called a daylong hartal for today in Sujangar upazila.

BNP-backed chairman candidate Hazari Zakir Hossain Chunnu quit the election, alleging that AL men ousted his polling agents from 40 out of the 63 polling centres in Sujanagar. Moreover, some 50 BNP activists were injured by AL men at different centres.

In Sylhet, voting at a polling centre in Biswanath upazila remained suspended for an hour till 3:20pm as AL men snatched 359 ballot papers.

The assistant returning officer of the centre admitted the fact, and said voting at the centre had been suspended for an hour.

In Kishoreganj, at least three people, including two policemen, were injured as Juba League activist with sharp weapons attacked them over an altercation at Dakkhin Nanasri Primary School centre under Karimganj upazila, said Akhtaruzzaman, OC of Karimganj Police Station.

In Narsinghdi, detectives arrested two people with arms from a centre in Palash upazila.

In Jamalpur, mobile courts sentenced eight people to different terms for casting fake votes at different polling centres in Sarishabari upazila.

Police fired two rubber bullets at Sengua Govt Primary School centre, as ruling party men tried to occupy the centre.

# First cheer BNP's

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after the January 5 parliamentary polls held amid a boycott by the BNP-led alliance.

But all parties unofficially took part in yesterday's election.

The picture was different in the January 5 polls, the deadliest election in the country's history with a loss of 18 lives. Turnout in the parliamentary election was also low with around 40 percent voters casting ballots in 147 constituencies.

There was no casualty in yesterday's election though it saw a few incidents of violence. People exercised their franchise in a festive mood. Voter

turnout was quite impressive, and could be more than 60 percent.

Yesterday's results will give a boost to the winning camp in the next phases of the local body polls. Elections in 117 upazilas will be held in the second phase on February 27, 83 upazilas in the third phase on March 15, and 92 upazilas in the fourth.

In the previous upazila elections held on January 22, 2009, the AL backed candidates won most of the chairman posts.

But they couldn't do well in municipality and city corporation polls held since 2011.

# Twin suicide bombings target Iran centre in Beirut

AFP, Beirut

A double suicide car bombing targeted an Iranian cultural centre in Beirut yesterday, killing at least four people in the latest attack linked to the conflict in neighbouring Syria.

The attack was quickly claimed by the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, a jihadist group inspired by Al-Qaeda which previously claimed a double suicide bombing aimed at Iran's embassy in Beirut.

Jihadists have carried out a string of attacks in Lebanon targeting both Iran and the Shiite Hezbollah movement, which provide vital support to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime as it battles a Sunni-led rebellion.

Lebanon's army confirmed the attack was a double suicide car bombing, and Health Minister Wael Abu Faour said four people were killed and 103 wounded.

The explosions sent a large plume of smoke over the area and caused widespread damage.

Emergency teams carried wounded people away from a charred street strewn with rubble, as local residents armed with fire extinguishers helped firefighters put out blazes.

The arms of a wounded man hung limply off the sides of a yellow stretcher as he was carried from the scene.

"I was driving my car with my wife to the university when we were hit by the

force of the blast and I found pieces of human flesh on my face," Yousef al-Tawil, a professor at the Lebanese University, told AFP.

Dozens of children at a nearby orphanage witnessed the explosion, with some sustaining cuts and crying, bewildered in the chaotic aftermath.

The Abdullah Azzam Brigades, an Al-Qaeda-inspired group, claimed the "double martyrdom operation" on its Twitter account and pledged to continue its attacks against Iran and "its party" -- a reference to Hezbollah.

"We will continue... to target Iran and its party in Lebanon, in its security and political and military centres, until our demands are achieved," the group said.

"First: that the Party of Iran withdraws its forces from Syria. Second, that our prisoners are released from Lebanese prisons."

Hezbollah acknowledged last year that it has dispatched forces to bolster Assad's troops against a Sunni-dominated uprising that began in March 2011.

The group says its involvement is necessary to protect Lebanon from Sunni extremists, but critics accuse it of embroiling Lebanon in its neighbour's conflict.

Sunni extremist groups have said they will target Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran, until it withdraws from Syria, and the Shiite group has seen its strongholds hit in multiple bomb