

# India's marathon

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respects at shrines dedicated to the Hindu deity Lord Shiva.  
But it was not all relaxation, with the premier also expected to review reconstruction projects after floods in Uttarakhnad in 2013 killed some 6,000 people.  
Modi is seeking a second term from India's 900 million voters after leading his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in 2014, with results due on May 23.  
Opinion polls, although unreliable, predict that the BJP may lose seats this time despite its formidable campaigning machine, meaning it might need a coalition to form a new government.  
His main rival is Rahul Gandhi, 48, of the Congress party, the scion of India's famed Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.  
The rival parties have thrown almost daily barbs at each other, accusing each other of corruption, nepotism and fake nationalism.  
As in previous rounds of polling, the polling has been marked by violence, most recently in West Bengal state where tens of thousands of security forces have been deployed following street clashes between BJP and rival supporters of the regional Trinamool Congress party.  
The gargantuan election has also seen a flood of "fake news", including photoshopped images and edited video clips, with both main parties using legions of people to manage social media.  
"The likelihood that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party wins a majority by itself is falling (10%, from 15% previously)," Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy, said Friday in a report.  
Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Chief

Minister N Chandrababu Naidu yesterday met Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and his alliance partner Mayawati in Lucknow, hours after he discussed firming up a non-BJP front with Congress President Rahul Gandhi in the national capital. He also met Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar.  
The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) Chief's efforts come ahead of a mega meet of opposition leaders on May 23, hosted by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, to prepare for the possibility of a less than decisive verdict.  
Naidu, 69, met CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal on Friday and discussed with them the possibility of a tie-up in the post-results scenario.  
"We welcome not only the TRS but any party which is against the BJP. We are welcoming all such parties to be a part of our grand alliance," Naidu had said on Friday, when asked about whether the Congress-led alliance will join hands with Telangana Rashtra Samithi chief K Chandrashekar Rao.  
K Chandrashekar Rao, a bitter rival of Naidu, has been busy with his own mission, to try and organise a non-Congress, non-BJP front. He also met with DMK President MK Stalin, who has openly endorsed Congress chief Rahul Gandhi for prime minister.  
Naidu also met the Election Commission on Friday and accused it of being pro-government and demanded action against the BJP's Bhopal candidate Pragna Thakur for remarks glorifying Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse.  
Earlier this month, Chandrababu Naidu met West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her state and attended two rallies with her.



**Frustrated by losses incurred due to low prices of paddy, farmers form a human chain with sacks of paddy in Gaibandha's Dariyapur yesterday.**  
PHOTO: KM REZAUL HOQUE

# 'Drug peddler' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar  
A suspected drug peddler was killed in a "gunfight" with police at Teknaf upazila in Cox's Bazar on Friday night, hours after the law enforcers detained him from his home.  
The dead -- Md Ibrahim, of Mistri Para area in the upazila -- was a listed yaba dealer and had several cases filed against him, said Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Model Police Station.  
Police conducted a drive near Shah Porir Dvip in the upazila, taking Ibrahim along with them, to recover drugs. Sensing police presence, Ibrahim's cohorts opened fire, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate, the OC claimed.  
At one point of the "gunfight", Ibrahim sustained bullet injuries. Police then rushed him to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead, the OC added.  
Police also claimed to have recovered three locally made firearms and 5,000 pieces of yaba pills from the spot.  
The Daily Star, however, could not independently verify the police claims.

## Frustrated farmers

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They also formed a human chain along the road, holding placards and banners with various demands written on them.  
Farmers would get a fair price if the government procured the rice directly from them, they said.  
Similar protests were held in Sunamganj, Sylhet, and Narayanganj.  
In many areas, farmers were getting Tk 400-450 for a maund of rice, less than half the production cost of around Tk 1,000. On the other hand, prices of agriculture inputs like fertiliser, seeds, diesel, and pesticide are rising every year, farmers said.  
At the human chain in Sunamganj, protesters said the district's total Boro production this year was 13.12 lakh tonnes. Of the amount, the government will purchase just 6,508 tonnes, meaning farmers will have to sell them at a lower price and incur a heavy loss.  
Agriculture Minister Abdur Razaque assured farmers and said the prime minister was worried about the falling rice prices.  
"We're looking at various options to address the issue," he told a seminar in the capital yesterday.  
According to him, procuring paddy directly from farmers will not push up the price.  
"It's very difficult to solve the problem immediately," he said. "Export could be one solution. But this will create a problem in case of a natural calamities."  
Meanwhile in Naogaon, a group of students, teachers, journalists, agriculture officials and members of different charitable organisations yesterday harvested paddy for Abdur Razzak, a marginal farmer, for free.  
Razzak, from Biharinagar, said he grew paddy on his 63 decimals of land borrowing money. But he could not harvest it because he does not have the money to pay the labourers.  
"Labourers are charging very high," he said.  
Upazila Agriculture Officer Selim Reza learnt about this somehow and then discussed the matter with local charity and volunteer organisations.  
He then formed a team to harvest paddy of marginal farmers.  
"Every morning, we will harvest paddy for one farmer in the upazila voluntarily," said Selim.  
Earlier, volunteer groups in Tangail did the same so that farmers could save the labour cost.  
[Our correspondents from Sylhet, Dinajpur, Gaibandha and Narayanganj contributed to the story.]

# Inequality at all-time high

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Bureau of Statistics show that GDP growth has accelerated in recent years, but job growth has slowed and real wage growth has been sluggish at best.  
"The high GDP growth over the past few years has been unable to lead to large scale job creation -- the country is witnessing a phase of jobless growth," Raihan said.  
Poor people are not getting enough scope for productive income-generating employment activities.  
This has resulted in the slow progress in poverty reduction and rising inequality, according to Raihan, also a professor at the Dhaka University's economics department.  
The public expenditure on education and health as share of GDP is very low and has declined in recent years.  
"Such a low expenditure does not help improve the productivity of workers and is not consistent with the effort to reduce poverty and inequality," he added.  
The WB's Hussain echoed the view.  
"There is an increasing inequality of opportunities particularly in access to health care, education, financial services and social protection."  
Health and education outcomes remain much worse for disadvantaged groups.  
Low-income households and small-scale firms often face challenges in accessing financial services due to a lack of financial knowledge, complicated processes, onerous paperwork and other market failures, he added.  
The government's social protection

programmes are too inadequate to reduce poverty and regional disparity, according to Raihan.  
"There is a need for a substantial rise in the allocation for and leakage-free disbursement of the social protection fund," he added.  
Hussain also put a portion of the blame on regressive fiscal policies, particularly taxation policies, that end up benefitting the better off than the poor on the growing inequality.  
Even expenditure programmes that are targeted to the poor suffer from serious leakages appropriated by the wealthier classes.  
"A fourth reason is corruption. Using public office for private gains is something the poor are never in a position to engage in and benefit from."  
Nor are the poor in a position to access privileges that the government gives to particular businesses and interest groups in the form of bailouts, loan rescheduling, tax exemptions, subsidies, licences and so on.  
Inequality is not an inevitable consequence of economic growth. In fact, long-term growth and social stability are two important reasons to focus on equity.  
"A stronger focus on faster inequality reduction, especially in a country like Bangladesh, with still a very large number of poor people, will further enhance the power of economic growth to translate into poverty reduction and better opportunities for all," Hussain added.

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# Man arrested for raping

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MM Murshed, officer-in-charge (OC) of Chagolnaya Police Station, said the victim's father filed a rape case with them after which they arrested Bahar, the prime accused in the case.  
Later, Bahar was produced before a court where he confessed to the rape, said Golam Jilani, the court inspector in Feni.  
In Pirojpur, an elderly man was arrested yesterday for sexually harassing two minor girls in Sohagdal village under Nesarabad upazila.  
The arrestee is Fazlul Haque, 65. Shahidul Islam, OC of Nesarabad Police Station, said the victims are cousins, aged 10 and 11. They were both molested by Fazlul when they went fishing in a nearby pond on Tuesday.  
The same thing happened when they went fishing again the next day, after which the girls told their parents about what Fazlul did.  
One of the victims' fathers filed a case against Fazlul under the Women and Child Repression Prevention Act early yesterday, the OC said, adding that police then arrested Fazlul, who was later produced before a court which sent him to jail.  
In Moulvibazar, Mulayem Khan, 45, was arrested early yesterday for molesting and physically assaulting a housewife in Baramchal village under Kulaura upazila.  
According to police and locals, the victim is the wife of an expatriate worker. Mulayem had been stalking and sexually harassing her for long.

A few days ago, Mulayem allegedly asked the victim to get into a sexual relationship with him, which she refused. On Thursday afternoon, Mulayem went to her house, physically assaulted her and fled.  
The victim filed a case for physical assault with Kulaura Police Station on Friday afternoon. Police arrested him yesterday, said Nur Hossain, sub-inspector of the police station.  
Speaking to The Daily Star, Zakir Hossain, Residential Medical Officer of Kulaura Upazila Health Complex, said the victim, who was undergoing treatment at the complex, had multiple injury marks on different parts of her body.  
Meanwhile in Netrokona, police yesterday arrested an easy-bike driver for attempting to rape a third-grader on Friday in Purba Katuli village under the upazila.  
Md Tajul Islam, OC of Netrokona Model Police Station, said the arrestee, Kamal Mia, 60, had a good relationship with the victim's family. He went to the victim's house, where she was alone, on Friday noon and attempted to rape her.  
Hearing her screams, neighbours rushed to the spot and rescued the girl. But Kamal managed to flee the scene.  
Hearing the news, angry locals caught Kamal and handed him over to police. The victim's grandfather filed a case with the police station accusing Kamal, said the OC.  
Our Feni, Pirojpur, Mymensingh and Moulvibazar correspondents contributed to the report.

"In case of Bangladesh, however, no matter what indicator you use, the conclusion that inequality has increased in recent years is inescapable," he added.  
The trend then raises questions and concerns about the quality of Bangladesh's much-lauded GDP growth.  
"The economic growth in recent years has been far from inclusive," said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM).  
The official statistics show that the country experienced accelerated GDP growth rate since 2013; the GDP growth in recent years has been the highest in the country's history.  
"However, inequality rose significantly during this period -- this is a big concern," he added.  
One reason is the disconnect among economic growth, wage growth and job creation, according to Hussain.  
While estimates from the Bangladesh

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It identified Meghna Dockyard for filling up the river downstream of the bridge and a private economic zone for occupying about 50 acres at Hosendi.  
The commission lamented that taking advantage of authorities' inaction over past three months, the grabbers had an unhindered pace in gobbling up the river.  
"The BIWTA's inaction, on the plea that they could not carry out eviction drives due to the unavailability of excavators, is regrettable and a demonstration of negligence of its duty that has encouraged river grabbing," read the commission letter.  
The commission again asked the authorities to evict Ananda Shipyard and Khan Brothers Slipways and all other grabbers within seven working days and submit a progress report with the commission.  
"... Or, the commission will be compelled to take legal action against the authorities' failure," read the letter.  
The commission had gone for the inspection after The Daily Star report on February 9. It inspected the Meghna, Shitalakkhya, and the Dhaleshwari with officials from the BIWTA and district administration.  
In a report dated February 18, the commission identified specific incident of river grabbing by Khan Brothers Slipways and Engineering Works, approximately 40 acres at Char Betagi in Gazaria.  
The report named about a dozen other cement factories, factories, shipbuilders, group of companies, and power plants as grabbers of a huge

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# Beware of going overboard

FROM PAGE 1  
national catastrophe, transformed into a rainbow after rain for the Tigers in Malahide on Friday.  
The success in their seventh attempt across the short formats of the game was more of a statement than just winning a tri-series final. It was a statement of consistency over the course of four years, a statement of evolving as a team under a true leader, where X-factors are not a big issue and a growing statement of youthful exuberance under the tutelage of the Big Five.  
The win also served as a perfect build-up going into the World Cup, which starts on May 30. Although the fans are dreaming big after the tri-series win, a reality check is the need of the hour and would auger well for the Tigers to freely play good, hard cricket.  
The next objective for the Tigers will be to play well in their two warm-up games against Pakistan and India on May 26 and 28 respectively before their opening World Cup fixture against South Africa at The Oval on June 6.  
The best-case scenario would be to take one game at a time in their nine league matches. The batting looks primed to take the challenge of consistently hitting the 300-plus run mark, which promises to be a par score, if not quite safe, this English summer.  
Yet, the biggest concern for the Tigers is that their bowling unit still left a lot to be desired. The challenge for the bowlers will be to take wickets in the first ten overs of the Powerplay

to stymie the run rate, and also bowl smartly in the last overs when runs are expected to surge.  
Bangladesh do not have a leg-spinner in their kitty. The Tigers are also running the risk of carrying one qualified left-arm spinner in Shakib Al Hasan, who missed the tri-series final due to a muscle spasm in his back. This might be a wake-up call for the Tigers thinktank to opt for a back-up left-arm spinner in a long league format.  
Bangladesh also do not possess an express quick. Most of them are containers rather than aggressors, save Rubel Hossain. But the biggest headache for Bangladesh in the pace department has so far been the indifferent performances from Mustafizur Rahman.  
The left-arm pacer, already famous for his slow cutters, has been struggling to regain his pace since a shoulder operation. He has been designed to take crucial wickets in the middle as well as to stop the avalanche of runs in the death overs.  
The Tigers will be desperately looking for Mustafizur to return to his usual self by the time they take on South Africa and 'The Fizz' in rhythm will certainly hold the key to the Tigers winning more games than they lose in the league phase.  
If they can do that the fans can only dream big. But at the moment the Tigers need to firmly put their feet on the ground before heading off to England to renew their World Cup ambitions, which ended in a quarterfinal defeat four years ago in Australia.

# Act or get sued

FROM PAGE 1  
However, the commission can go to court seeking remedy or for further orders.  
A High Court bench in a landmark judgment on February 3 declared that a river is a "person" and gave the National River Conservation Commission the legal guardianship of all rivers in the country.  
The court directed the government to amend the National River Conservation Commission Act, 2013, incorporating stringent punitive provisions to make the commission effective in protecting rivers and water bodies.  
The grabbers and polluters have moved on to the Meghna after almost killing the four rivers around the capital.  
Commission Chairman Howlader said every level of the government was aware of the grabbing of the Meghna and other rivers. He had raised the issue several times at meetings with national river taskforce led by the state minister for shipping and also at a meeting with principal secretary to the prime minister.  
"There was no response, no satisfactory answer to my concerns," he said, adding, "We will write to the Cabinet Division to know why the river custodians failed to protect rivers ..."  
The commission on May 13 called upon the BIWTA chairman, deputy commissioner of Narayanganj, and director generals of Bangladesh Water Development Board and the Department of Environment to save the Meghna.  
Citing its inspection findings, the commission identified Ananda Shipyard and Khan Brothers Slipways and named about a dozen other business conglomerates to have

grabbed the Meghna in Protaper Char in Sonargaon and the upstream of Meghna Bridge.  
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# Govt pushing Khaleda Zia

FROM PAGE 1  
He said Khaleda's blood sugar levels were not coming under control even after using insulin. "She's also in a very risky condition due to high blood sugar."  
The BNP leader criticised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for what he said her recent remarks that Khaleda was gladly taking payesh (rice pudding) and staging a drama in the name of illness.  
At a programme in London, the PM told her party men that Khaleda would never be freed from jail, said Sircar. "Such remarks by a prime minister over the illness of an elderly and popular politician is unprecedented."  
The BNP leader said the home minister made an "untrue" remark that Khaleda's blood sugar was under control.  
He alleged that there is "no justice in the country as it is now under the grip of an authoritarian ruler". "Keeping Khaleda Zia in jail without

granting her bail is the manifestation of injustice and unfairness of the current regime."  
The former Speaker demanded the government immediately release Khaleda from jail, and allow her to receive proper treatment at a hospital of her choice.  
Replying to a question, he said they have no plan now to apply for Khaleda's release on parole.  
BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed said the government was trying to shift Khaleda to Keraniganj jail from the old Dhaka central jail as part of a conspiracy.  
Mirza Abbas, another member of the committee, said they would take effective steps at the right time to force Awami League to accept their demand of releasing Khaleda.  
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# Meghan gave birth in London hospital

APP, London  
Prince Harry's wife Meghan gave birth at a private hospital in London earlier this month, their son's birth certificate revealed, according to British media on Friday.  
The arrival of the couple's first child Archie was shrouded in secrecy, with newspaper reports indicating the 37-year-old former US actress had wanted a home birth at their residence in Windsor, west of London.  
However, the certificate confirmed the place of birth, in the early hours of May 6, as the Portland Hospital in central London, the Press Association news agency said.  
The document listed the baby's full name as Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor. It also detailed Meghan's occupation as "Princess of the United Kingdom".  
The Portland facility claims to be the only private hospital in Britain dedicated to the healthcare of women and children, offering "world-class" maternity care.  
The Duke and Duchess of Sussex broke with recent royal tradition in the choice.