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Let the ceremony begin

Fireworks light up the Harbour Bridge yesterday as the Olympic torch relay arrives at the Sydney Opera House. The Olympic flame will conclude its 100-day journey across Australia at the opening ceremony of the 27th Games in Sydney today.

-AFP photo

Greatest gala of sports begins in Sydney today

SYDNEY, Sept 14: It's show-

time! Four years after International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Juan Antonio Samaranch closed the Atlanta Olympics with the traditional call to the world's youth to reassemble in the year 2000 the Sydney Games finally get underway Friday, reports AFP.

The opening ceremony will launch the Millennium Games with the traditional bang when Australia's Governor General Sir William Deane declares the Games open, even if the football tournaments have already started.

The torch relay will end as the beacon is lit, the oath taken and the Olympic flag raised.

The competition proper gets underway Saturday with the first medals won as sporting endeavour finally takes centre stage and the scandal, politicking and logistical problems that have dominated the build-up to these Games take a back seat.

Since Atlanta the Olympic headlines have been hogged by a motley crew including Samaranch, New South Wales

Olympics Minister Michael Knight, Australian IOC vice-president Kevan Gosper - with even the likes of Queen Elizabeth II having a cameo role in a saga where sport was incidental.

Mercifully - barring surprises - the likes of Marion Jones, Michael Johnson, Halle Gershelassie and Ian Thorpe will write the script for the next three weeks.

That must be the hope of Sydney organisers and the IOC alike.

In that time the credibility of the entire Olympic movement has been called into question with institutionalised corruption exposed in a movement founded with the loftiest of ideals in 1894 by French diplomat Baron Pierre de Coubertin.

The 20-year reign of Samaranch saw the IOC transformed from a gentlemen's club to a home for fat cats belying the old adage that there is no such thing as a free lunch - or free holiday, free University scholarship for your daughter

or even - most bizarrely - free Red Indian head-dresses - Salt Lake City's successful bid for the 2002 Games bore the brunt of the allegations but other bidding cities including Sydney were drawn into the scandal.

Australian IOC member Phil Coles was stripped of all Olympic functions when he was linked to the gifts-for-votes scandal although he has since returned to the fold.

Samaranch launched a purge of IOC members - some jumped others were pushed - but the Spanish aristocrat remains at the helm despite allowing the climate of corruption to flourish.

But there has been some progress.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) is finally up and running with the war against cheating finally beginning to look co-ordinated and serious despite the controversial reinstatement of Cuban high jumper Javier Sotomayor.

Some things haven't changed, though.

As the Olympic flag was run down at the end of the Atlanta

closing ceremony many Australians were hoping the next Summer Games would be launched by the President of the Australian Republic.

A referendum was called to determine whether Australia would remain a monarchy or cut its links with the Monarchy seen by its detractors as a colonialist British institution.

Before the vote Buckingham Palace announced that regardless of the result Australian Prime Minister John Howard would open the Games - an unprecedented event as the Olympic Charter empowers only the head of state with that function.

The Monarchists won with a comfortable majority, however, and defeated Republicans, who believed monarchist Howard's phrasing of the referendum question had helped swing the result - pointed out with some logic that the Queen should now perform the task.

In the end a compromise was reached. Sir William will take centre stage on Friday. He may be the Queen's representative in Australia but is himself

See page 11 col 4

New lease of life for top bureaucrats

Government plans temporary extension of age-limit for civil servants

By Nazmul Ashraf

The government is considering a temporary extension of age-limit for entry into and retirement from civil services.

The move to extend the age-limit from 30 to 33 years for entry and from 57 to 60 years for retirement has been recommended by the Parliamentary Committee on Pensions on an experimental basis for five years, committee sources said.

Headed by Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury, the committee forwarded its recommendations to the Prime Minister's Office yesterday seeking immediate implementation.

Other members of the committee include SM Akram and Col. (ret'd) Shaqwat Ali of the ruling party and Choudhury Kamal ibne Yusuf of BNP.

The committee also recommended that the proposed arrangements for age-limits could be continued should those prove to be fruitful.

If executed, the proposed age-limit for retirement is believed to benefit the CSP (Civil Services of Pakistan) officers most and victimise the mid- and junior-level bureaucrats. The move, reportedly orchestrated by the senior most bureaucrats, has angered their junior colleagues in the administration, who fear a promotion logging.

A joint secretary, who spoke on condition of anonymity, claimed that the CSP officers masterminded the move in a bid to prolong their tenure in top administrative positions. The parliamentary commit-

tee finalised its recommendations on Wednesday on the basis of a petition submitted to it about a year ago.

Ajit Kumar Das, an office assistant to the deputy commissioner (DC) of Sunamganj district, filed the petition seeking extension of age limits from 30 to 35 years for entry and from 57 to 60 years for retirement in government services. An Awami League MP from the district, Mohibur Rahman Manik, certified his petition.

The 10-member committee heard the petitioner and sought suggestions from authorities concerned including the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Establishment and the Cabinet Division during the last one year before finalising its recommendations. See page 11 col 7

'Hasina's UN speech may harm her peace efforts'

Bilateral relations to remain unchanged, Pak officials quoted as saying

Pakistani officials said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's speech at the United Nations, last week will not affect bilateral ties, but harm her peace initiative in the region, reports BSS.

Hasina's UN speech will not affect bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan even though a meeting between leaders of the two countries was cancelled, Pakistani dailies quoted the officials as saying.

The daily 'The News' yesterday reported that the Pakistani officials said 'bilateral relations' between the two countries 'will not be affected' because of her speech at the UN, but it 'caused dent in the proposed peace initiative she was supposed to launch at the sidelines of the Millennium Summit.'

Hasina in her speech at the UN on September 8 hit at unconstitutional takeover of power and asked the world body to follow the example of Commonwealth in not recognising those countries where military over-

throws civilian rule. Although the Bangladesh leader did not name any country, it became apparent that Pakistan could not take the speech easily.

The daily said Pakistan 'cancelled' the meeting between Musharraf and Hasina following the latter's address to the UNGA demanding actions against countries where military grabbed power by overthrowing the elected governments and therefore implicitly seeking actions against Pakistan.

The News also quoted the officials as saying 'Pakistan and Bangladesh enjoyed friendly relations and their relations would remain on the same track' and added that Pakistan would work with other countries of South Asia for revival of SAARC which has been left inactive because of Indian unwillingness to take part in the meeting.

Meanwhile, another Pakistan daily lauded Hasina for her forthright comment in the UN speech. ABS Jaffri in a commentary published in The Frontier Post yesterday said the Bangladesh Prime Minister 'ought to be given complete credence for her assertion in the speech which had quite broadly expressed her distaste for military rule.'

The same daily carried a story in which leaders of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) criticised General Musharraf for defending the generals of 1971 at a recent press conference in New York.

Aftab Shahab Mirani, former Defence Minister and PPP leader, while condemning General Musharraf for defending the generals of 1971 who committed corruption, rape, loot and plunder, said those generals should be handed over to Bangladesh to face trial for the allegations against them.

JS session prorogued

Four bills passed on the last day

The 19 session of the seventh Parliament was prorogued yesterday, report agencies.

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury read out the prorogation order from President Shahabuddin Ahmed at 3:15 pm.

Parliament yesterday passed four bills - three providing for neutral polls by the Election Commission to the hill district parishes and the other to protect friendly habitat in urban areas, including upazila headquarters.

The three identical bills relating to hill districts are: The Rangamati Hill District Parishad (Second Amendment) Bill, the Khagrachhari Hill District Parishad (Second Amendment) Bill, and the Bandarban Hill District Parishad (Second Amendment) Bill.

The other is the Preservation of Playground, Open Space, Forest and Natural Water Bodies in Metropolitan, Divisional Cities, District, Municipal and Upazila Towns Bill 2000.

Replying to the criticism of dissenting BNP lawmaker Maj (td) Akhtaruzzaman, who opposed the bills, Works Minister Engr. Mosharraf Hossain said the government is determined to protect every inch of the country's territory.

He dismissed the apprehension that CHT peace accord put the country's integrity at peril.

Making a counter allegation, the minister said, it is BNP and not Awami League that acts on directive from alien masters.

About the last bill, he said the government wanted to protect the open places and water bodies from the greedy grabbers to ensure friendly habitat in urban areas.

BIWTA raises fare on riverine route

BIWTC sticks to previous rate

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has increased water transport fare by 33.33 per cent in view of the hike in fuel prices, official sources said yesterday.

The BIWTA as the regulator of river transports in the country increased the fare to 0.60 poisa per mile per person from 0.45 poisa late last month as the government increased petroleum prices. It conveyed the decision to the Shipping Ministry later, the sources added.

The minimum fare in passenger launch is now Tk 5.

The fare hike is still applicable for private sector water transports. The state-owned Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) has not yet increased the fare

for its passenger services, one source pointed out.

The government recently increased road transport fare by about 50 per cent.

Meanwhile, the increase in water transport fare has led to rise in prices of various goods in the city's wholesale and retail markets.

'Vegetables and fruits in bulk are carried to the city mainly by water transports,' a wholesale trader at Shyambazar said.

Prices of perishable goods like fruits and vegetables have gone up sharply in wholesale markets in the city. Wholesalers have increased prices of various goods by 10 to 25 per cent, retailers in some markets told this correspondent.

Prices in retail markets have naturally risen, they mentioned. One trader said earlier transportation cost of goods by water transports was less than that by road transports, but it is not the case now.

Everybody is to suffer in this situation but people of fixed income group were found to be the worst sufferers.

'We have to go for hike in water transport fare as we are to buy fuel at higher price,' said Mohammad Kalimullah, President of Bangladesh Inland Waterways Passenger Carrier Association.

'We did not increase fare in the last 10 years but this time we were compelled to raise fare as the government increased fuel price,' he added.

Missions flunk on export mission

27 out of 46 fail to meet export target for 1999-2000

By Rafiq Hasan

More than half of Bangladesh Missions abroad failed to achieve their respective export targets for fiscal 1999-2000, according to a commerce ministry report.

Of the 46 missions, 27 failed to achieve target and 19 succeeded.

The country's export target of 5738 million US dollars for the year was however exceeded with the export earning stand-

ing at 5752 million dollars, the report mentioned.

Some of the missions surpassed their export targets while a good number of those were far behind.

The good performers are the mission in UAE which surpassed its target by 79 per cent, that in Morocco by 155.77 per cent, in Oman by 33.04 per cent and in South Korea by 51.78 per cent.

The missions which were far behind the targets include that in Bahrain - 60.06 per cent, Brazil - 40.13 per cent, Egypt - 46.69 per cent, Iran - 31.85 per cent, Jordan - 28.21 per cent, Libya - 83.81 per cent, Malaysia - 30.91 per cent, Myanmar - 56 per cent, Nepal 60.22 per cent, Pakistan - 22.90 per cent, the Philippines - 66 per cent and Vietnam - 45.92 per cent.

The US is the largest buyer of Bangladeshi goods and the Bangladesh Mission in Washington which also covers Latin American countries like Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia surpassed its target by 6.84 per cent.

The mission's target was 2139.71 million dollars but the export to those countries stood at 2286.13 million dollars last fiscal year.

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