



China opens its arms for dreamers

THE STEEL NEST GOES ALL RED: Fireworks will spin out of the Bird's Nest tonight when the 29th Olympiad takes off in Beijing. Explosions in the form of athletic brilliance, sportsmanship and bonding between nations are expected when the Games return to Asia after 20 years.

AL-AMIN

So the smog is gone, the censorship on sensitive sites has been lifted, the human rights situation in Tibet is addressed and heard and the flame of peace and fraternity is all set to glow the "Bird's Nest" on this August day in front of a world audience.

The occasion is the jamboree of sports that happens every four years and this time the place is Beijing, which spreads its arms to greet more than ten thousand athletes from around the globe who will exhibit the human endeavour for excellence in a two-week spectacle called the Beijing Olympic Games 2008.

Olympic as it has always been is more than just a sporting extravaganza and China, which for the first time will be open to the world, would get an unique opportunity to show their spectacular progress in closed doors and with an ideology that the rest of the world has redundant.

Although it remains to be seen how much China, one of two biggest polluters on earth, could fulfil their pledge for a Green Games, it however showed the world why steel still remains one of the most important ingredients in progress with the construction of the state of the art National Stadium in Beijing -- a web of 42000 tonnes of steel that looks like a bird's nest.

The National Stadium, which will play host to the opening and closing ceremonies, the track and field events and the men's soccer final, has already captured the imagination of the world for its unique structure. The "Water Cube" next to it reflects the taste of next generation hi tech swimming

complex. The saucer like Tianjin Stadium where first round matches of soccer will take place is truly an architectural wonder.

China has certainly put a Viking effort for a successful holding of the biggest show on earth where 302 gold medals will be up for grabs in 41 disciplines including a highest 47 in athletics.

Presently the Americans are the leaders in terms of winning medals. However Beijing might produce a new leader in the Games with expectations running high in hosts China that they will topple the United States from the top of the Olympic medal table.

At Athens four years ago, China finished with 32 gold, 17 silver and 14 bronze medals to finish second behind the United States.

In the drive to beat that mark and satisfy nationalist pride, the host nation is expected to field 600 athletes, 193 up from what it sent to Greece.

Bangladesh's participation in the Olympics is filling up the numbers like many other nations, who have never won a medal, let alone a gold, in a competition where a fraction of a second or a centimetre makes a world of difference. Like in Athens four years ago Bangladesh are sending five athletes whose prime objective would be to make their presence felt in the ceremonial march past during the opening ceremony and then get hit out in the heats in their respective events. If you are a dreamer then you will have to have a wild dream that our ace female swimmer Dolly Akhter, suddenly getting a wild card entry into the finals of 50m free-style and much to the surprise of the world, wins it in dashing style.

Why laugh it out? Olympic is a stage for dreamers who put their efforts year in year out to

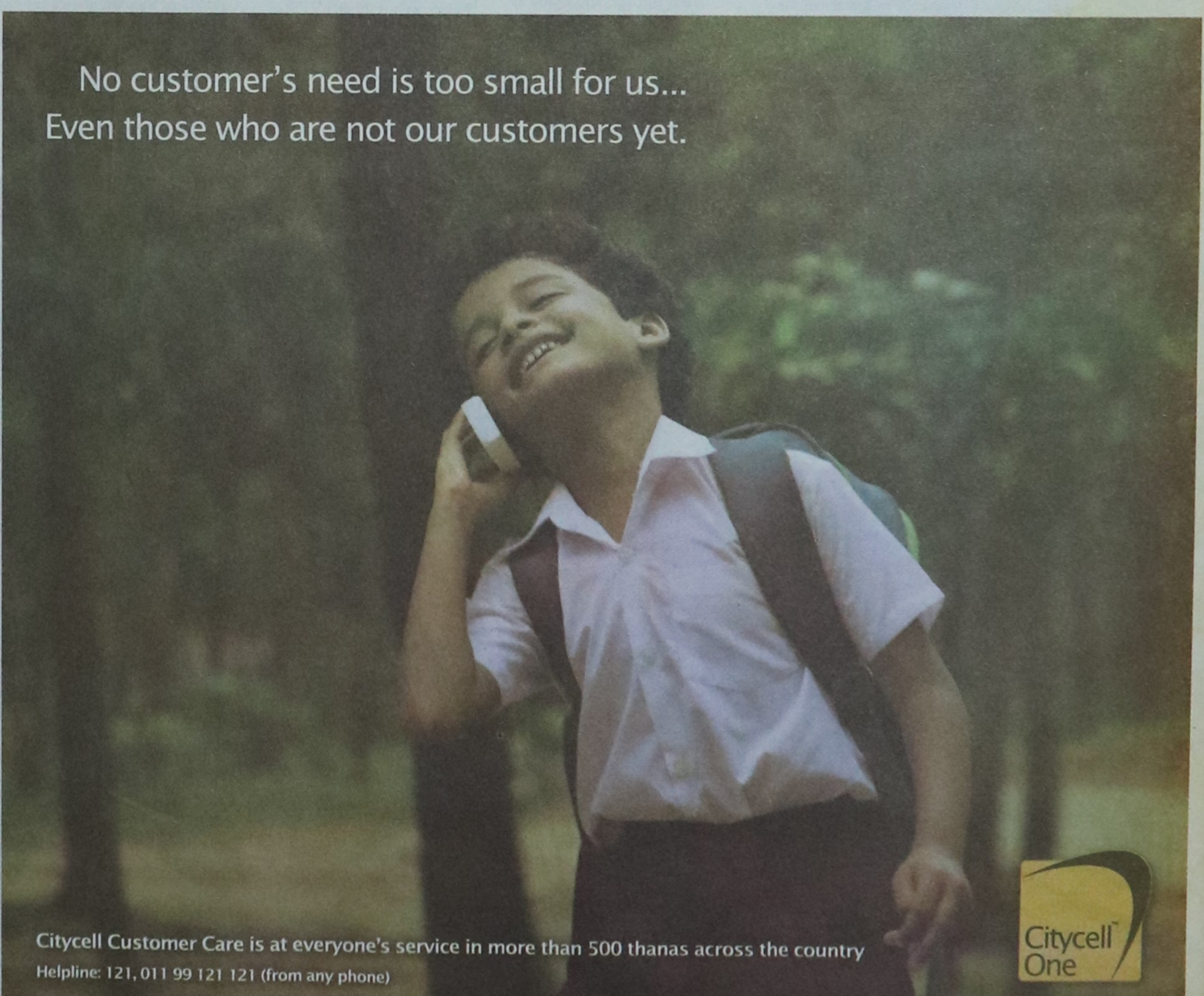
fine-tune their skills to attain that ultimate glory and then stand tall on the podium with tears of joy pouring down the cheeks when her or his country's national anthem is played. Isn't it the best thing a nationalist can do for her or his country?

Although Olympic preaches morale values and fairness, it has also been fighting against the cheats that is growing alarmingly with every passing Games. And like Athens, Beijing is destined to encounter dopers (athletes who use performance-enhancing drugs) despite a crusade waged by the games' ruling body, the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

It is better to look on the bright side of it. Let's hope if American swimmer Michael Phelps matches the feat of legendary Mark Spitz's seven gold and watch out for pole vault queen Yelena Isinbayeva breaking another barrier. On the football field eyes will definitely be focussed on two exciting components of the game -- Lionel Messi of Argentina and Brazilian Ronaldo. While Ronaldo, after an unimpressive season with Barcelona, will have his fingers crossed to rediscover his brilliant self to present Brazil their first Olympic gold, Messi, who defied Barcelona's desperate effort to keep him away from the Olympic duty, will definitely be there to wed in the glory. On the tennis court, the world is set to witness a dream "fifth Grand Slam" final provided that modern day gladiators Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal lock horns in yet another final bout after the epic Wimbledon final.

Athletics is called the blue riband event of Olympics. But let's hope every medal is won by a gentleman and not by a cheat. Let the show begin and let the slogan "One World One Dream" come true.

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