

# Let the show begin

ANISUR RAHMAN



The nation is ready for a sporting carnival. The curtain of the 11th South Asian Games finally opens today with the organisers Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) excited at the prospect of putting up a show that the region extravaganza, also known as the South Asian Olympics, has never seen before.

When the Games starts at the new-look Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka, which has a rich heritage of 400 years, will hold a unique distinction of hosting the event for a record third time after staging the second and the sixth editions in 1985 and 1993 respectively.

Colombo of Sri Lanka, Islamabad of Pakistan and Kathmandu of Nepal had the experience of staging the regional showpiece event twice each.

The eleventh SAG is also unique for various reasons, as it will see a maximum number of 23 disciplines including three new ones - cricket, handball and golf. It has been evolving in a spectacular journey that started with only five disciplines in Kathmandu in 1984.

And to give it a look of Olympics, the Games torch for the first time started its journey from the Adams Peak of Sri Lanka.

Besides, the Games will be held in 15 venues across the country unlike the last two editions that Bangladesh staged before only in Dhaka. Three cricket matches will take place in Rajshahi, some football matches will be held in Chittagong while Wushu and Cycling will be held in Sylhet and Khulna respectively.

However, most of the disciplines take place in Dhaka, which has already turned into a sports city with festoons, banners, billboards

and posters. The Games will also act as a perfect dress rehearsal for an even bigger event in February next year -- the opening ceremony of the 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup.

The arena of the Bangabandhu National Stadium, which will hold the gale opening and closing ceremony, has taken a different look with the construction of a new Wood-Floor Stadium, a Boxing Stadium and a Handball Stadium in close vicinity of the country's premier venue.

Organisers, however, failed to provide some venues as early as possible to the athletes depriving them of getting enough time to get used to with the new facilities.

Athletes will be the centre attraction of the Games and all attention will certainly be on the hosts' athletes, who have been training for one year, a time they had never got before any previous Games.

Keeping the long preparation in mind, the organisers have set their sights on 100 medals including 17 gold, a feat Bangladesh had never achieved before. Their best was 62 medals including 11 gold in the sixth edition on home soil that saw them claimed the third position in the medal standings for the first time.

However, Bangladesh's dream may be thwarted by giant sports nation India, who never finished behind anyone in the eight-nation meet. Besides, India will be more hungry this time as part of their build-up for the Commonwealth Games at own den in October next year.

The South Asian Games sage has been of Indian dominance. Only at 1991 in Colombo and in 1989 at Islamabad Pakistan and Sri Lanka bagged 44 and 42 gold respectively against India's tally of 64 and 61 gold respectively.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



WAITING IN ITS WINGS: Kutumb (magpie robin), the mascot of the 11th South Asian Games, is set to entertain the athletes and officials of the eight participating nations when the regional showpiece event gets underway at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Rahman does hosts proud

Golf

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's Siddikur Rahman clinched the American Express Bangladesh Open Golf title at the Kurmitola Golf Course yesterday.

The local favourite, who took a solo lead after the third round on Wednesday, eased to a comprehensive seven-stroke win on the final day, when he posted a 69 to end up with a tournament total of 16 under 272.

Rahman is the second Bangladeshi to lift the Aircel-PGTI title after Jamal Hossain's Molla's fairytale at this very ground last year.

Rahman, who had earlier won the Aircel-PGTI title thrice but not on home soil, began his round in spectacular fashion, chipping-in for birdie from the left side of the green on the first. He built on the good start with birdies on the

third and seventh where he made a couple of crucial chip-putts. He then bogeyed the eighth and ninth as a result of missing some short putts.

He, however, held on to his advantage by putting up a solid effort on the back nine. He made seven pars on the back nine besides sinking birdies on the 11th and 18th. Two magnificent approach shots from over 100 yards that landed within four feet of the pin earned Rahman birdies on the 11th and 18th.

"It's a very special win for me because it came on my home course and before my home crowd. This win has placed me first on the Aircel-PGTI Order of Merit for the first time and that gives me lot of satisfaction. I now hope to cash in on this good start and make the most of my opportunities in the 2010 season, be it on the PGTI or in Asia," said a jubilant Rahman, who ran away with a winner purse of approximately Taka 4,83,000 (Indian Rupee 3,23,300).

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



Siddikur Rahman (L) receives the American Express Bangladesh Open trophy from City Bank director Tabassum Kaiser at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

## Tigers fly to New Zealand

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket team left Dhaka last night for New Zealand to face another tough task after defeats in all their tri-nation matches and a two-match Test series against India.

During their tour Down Under, Shakib Al Hasan's men will play a T20 match, three ODIs and a Test match against the Black Caps.

Pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is going to make his comeback to international cricket in the series after a seven-month break.

The Tigers will open their campaign with a T20 match on February 3 at Seddon Park, Hamilton while the three one-day matches are scheduled for

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

## Sharmin, Rony all but out

SPORTS REPORTER

When the 11th South Asian (SA) Games begins here today, two of Bangladesh's gold medal hopes are all but sure of watching the proceedings as mere spectators.

Shooter Sharmin Akhter, who won 10m air rifles gold in the Islamabad Games in 2004, has been enduring a lean patch for long and yet to find herself among the top three with Sharmin Akhter Ratna, Sadia Sultana and Tripti Datta are all set to represent the nation in both individual and team events of 10m air rifles.

Despite poor showings,

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

## U-19s again Plate champs

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh finished their ICC Under-19 World Cup mission with a consolation Plate Championship title when they outplayed Ireland by 195 runs in the final at the McLean Park in Napier yesterday.

Pacer Kamrul Islam clinched a hatrick as the first bowler in the competition after brilliant batting from captain Mahmudul Hasan and Muminul Haque to script the massive victory which confirmed their third such success after 1988 and 2004.

But Bangladesh didn't go down under to become champions of the bottom-side teams, rather the young Tigers had a dream of reaching the last four for the first time in the meet after impressive build-ups. But the dream of the charges of Minhazul Abedin was shattered following two close defeats against West Indies and favourites Pakistan in group stage.

Kamrul achieved the feat in his fifth over

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

## Ctg crush Sylhet

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Elias Sunny and Iqbal Hossain bowled Chittagong to an eight-wicket victory over Sylhet on the third day of the 11th National Cricket League at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Resuming the day on 40 for five, Sylhet were bundled out for 141 runs in their second innings to set a 122-run winning target for their opponents.

One down Rezaul Karim hit unbeaten 65 off 90 balls with eight fours and a six while Nazimuddin remained not out on 40 off 48 deliveries that featured five fours and two sixes as Chittagong posted 123 for 2.

Earlier lone resistance came from Alok Kapali in the Sylhet innings, but his 102-ball 66 was not

after removing Ireland's last three batsmen on successive deliveries to shoot the Europeans out for 112 in 38.5 overs after being set a daunting task of chasing a 308-run target.

Kamrul, who finished with figures of 4.5-0-21-3, clean bowled Shane Getkate and Eddie Richardson and then completed the rare distinction by having last-man Craig Young caught by his captain Mahmudul.

It was however the fourth wicket partnership between Mahmudul and Mominul that laid the foundation for a massive victory as the pair added 109 runs during their exciting display of aggressive batting.

Muminul smashed five fours and a six during his 100-ball 81 while Mahmudul hit 52 off 64 balls that featured four boundaries and a six.

And after some late cameos from Shabbir Rahman, who scored 47 off 24 balls with two fours and three sixes and Nur Hossain, who hit 31 off 12 balls with one four and three sixes, Bangladesh amassed 107 runs from the last 52 deliveries.

## SA Games Early start for football

SPORTS REPORTER

The football battle of the 11th South Asian (SA) Games gets underway in Dhaka and Chittagong this morning although the meet will be officially declared open through a gala opening ceremony at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in the evening.

Bangladesh women's football team will start the campaign taking on Nepal in one of two opening day matches at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium, which will also host the first match between India and Sri Lanka at 10:30am.

Away at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong, India meet Afghanistan at 3:00pm while defending champions Pakistan face Sri Lanka at 6:00pm.



BTV

South Asian Games

Opening Ceremony

Live from 4:00pm

STAR Sports

Australian Open

Men's Semifinal

Live from 10:00am

STAR Cricket

Australia v Pakistan

Fourth ODI

Live from 10:30am

# Golden dreams

The South Asian (SA) Games is once again coming to Bangladesh. And this will be the third time that the country is going to hold the regional gala, nicknamed the South Asian Olympics. Since this is the biggest event for many of the athletes of South Asia, participating countries have been preparing themselves in the grandest possible manner. And the hosts have been doing their own in the same way. Many related sports federations have been having camps in and outside the country for over a year now. And through their performances over this period of time, some of the players have made us dream of golden glory:

Mizanur Rahman

Event: 87kg (Taekwondo)

Best success in SAG: Gold

Appearance: Third time



Shakhawat Hossain Shohel

Events: Individual and team (Golf)

Best success in SAG: Nil

Appearance: First time



Golf has been included for the first time in this SAG and hosts Bangladesh are hoping for both individual and team events gold because of the performance of the country's amateur golfers in recent past. Shohel is one of them, who won the All Indian Open Championship in 2009 beside triumphing in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The 25-year-old golfer from Noakhali is determined to present the individual gold medal to the nation.

Emadul Haq Milon

Event: 70m recurvebow and team (Archery)

Best success in SAG: Nil

Appearance: First time



Milon came into limelight after winning gold medal in the 16th Asian Archery Championship last year and after Sajjad he is considered as second favourite for the event. The 18-year-old, who took up the sport two years ago, has been doing better in practice with an average score of 335.

Sumita Rani

Event: 100m hurdles (Athletics)

Best success in SAG: Silver

Appearance: Third time



After having put up a national record with 13.80 seconds in the Summer Athletics Championship last year, Sumita has been gradually improving and the Noakhali lass took 13.60 seconds in practice to brighten her chance to win gold medal on home soil. Sumita had to be content with the silver in Colombo in 2006, trailing India's Anuradha Biswal by seven microseconds.

Asif Hossain Khan

Event: 10m air rifles (Shooting)

Best success in SAG: Gold

Appearance: Third time



Asif came into limelight after clinching gold medal in the 2002 Commonwealth Games and then carried his good form into the 2004 Islamabad Games to win gold medal in his first appearance in the regional meet, but he has been struggling with his poor performance ever since. However, the 24-year-old shooter from Pabna recently showed signs of improvement by collecting his best ever score of 597 out of 600 in practice and the country will look to him for a gold this time around also.

Rubel Rana

Events: 50m, 100m backstroke

4X100m Medley Relay (Swimming)

Best success in SAG: Gold

Appearance: Third time



Rubel clinched the 100m backstroke gold in the Islamabad Games, but had to be content with the 50m backstroke silver in Colombo because of falling short by 12 microseconds. The 27-year-old swimmer from Kushtia, who has been swimming since 1995, is now thinking of doing even better than the Colombo Games.

Abdur Rahim

Event: 64kg (Boxing)

Best success in SAG: Bronze

Appearance: Second time



Rahim started boxing in his childhood in Jessore and he is now a 23-year-old man, who won silver and gold medals in different competitions in India and Nepal before taking part in the Colombo SAG where he had to be satisfied with bronze losing to Indian counterpart. But, Rahim is now dreaming of gold medal in his own backyard because of intensive training in Italy, Thailand and Bangladesh.

SEE PAGE 1