

The show begins with a bang

ATIQUÉ ANAM



The 11th South Asian Games, the biggest sporting extravaganza of the region, got underway at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday with a spectacular opening ceremony marked by great fanfare and enthusiasm. A spectacular cultural show, a scintillating aquatic display caught the audience gripped while the dazzling pyrotechniques lit up the night sky of Dhaka bringing the perfect ending to a three-and-a-half hour spectacle.

The opening ceremony started with the march past by the athletes from the participating eight countries. Afghanistan led the march while hosts Bangladesh finished it amid huge cheers from the crowd. Famed shooter Asif Hossain Khan carried the red and green flag to lead the 453-strong Bangladesh contingent.

Noted singers Sabina Yasmin, Andrew Kishore and Shuvro Dev performed the welcome song of the Games while being driven on a caravan round the track.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, also the chairman of the organising committee of 11th SA Games, urged the athletes to uphold the spirit of modern Olympic movement "Faster, Higher, Stronger" in his welcome speech.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina officially declared the Games open setting free pigeons. Thousands of colourful balloons and pigeons turned the afternoon sky into a sight to behold.

The torch of the Games which started its journey from the Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka a week ago was nested by legendary footballer Kazi Salauddin. The torch entered the stadium in the hands of sports organiser Lutfunnesa Haque Bakul. It was then relayed through the length of the stadium by noted sports personalities of the country including cricketer Roquibul Hassan, shooter Atiqur Rahman, swimmer Bazlur Rahman, boxer Mosharraf Hossain. Lastly, Salauddin was elevated to the torch stand where he kindled the torch of the Games.

Then oath of the Games was conducted by Bangladesh football team's captain Aminul Haque and the fastest woman of the country Nazmun Nahar Beauty.

Games mascot, Kutumb, took a trip round the athletics track accompanied by its predecessors Duranto and Mishuk.

The athletes, having taken their seats in the gallery, the

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DAZZLING DISPLAY: Fireworks lit up the night's sky during the opening ceremony of the 11th South Asian Games at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Straight Drive

SUNIL GAVASKAR

India were simply too good for Bangladesh

India have geared up nicely for the clash with South Africa by winning the two Test series quite comfortably. The shock of the world class batting side being dismissed for only 243 in the first innings of the first Test was just what the team needed. The likes of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal will tell you that they need a hard tough match in the early rounds of a major tournament to get the focus going and that's exactly what happened with India. After that minor hiccup, they were back to their best and made sure that their vice-captain was not embarrassed by being bowled out twice. Bowlers all over the world have found out that when they ask questions of Sehwag they get a straight answer. He may not always score the big runs but there is no denying that there will be no fudging. He will either blast the ball or will get out and seldom has he been out when the bowler has surprised him. It happened in the second Test where Shahadat surprised him with one that reared

awkwardly. It was a surprise because Shahadat does make a huge grunting sound at delivery which would make the batsmen feel the ball is going to come at 150kmph speed but it just comes around the 130kmph speed. The one that got Sehwag was at 139 which was a good 10km more than the previous ball faced, so the surprise. Of the positives that Bangladesh will take from this series is that they did not allow Sehwag to get a century against them. Of course Indian cricket supporters are hoping that Veeru has kept the huge ones for the South Africans.

Gambhir, Dravid, Tendulkar duly got the runs and tons expected of them and it is a tribute to their focus that they did not take the Bangladesh attack lightly and went about the business of scoring runs most professionally. They make a formidable line-up and with Laxman also scoring in Chittagong the batting was just too much for the hosts.

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Masrafe's departure delayed

SPORTS REPORTER

Fast bowler Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's departure for New Zealand for the T20 & ODI series was delayed due to his fever.

Mortaza was scheduled to leave Dhaka last night along with teammates Shahadat Hossain, Mahmudullah and Aftab Ahmed to join the squad in New Zealand. Mashrafe was ruled out from the tour of West Indies in middle following his knee injury and he subsequently missed the tour of Zimbabwe and one-day tri-series involving India, Sri Lanka and two Tests series against India at home.

Booters ready for Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER



Hosts Bangladesh will look to put up a spirited show when they take on Nepal in their first Group A match of the football event of the South Asian Games at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The match kicks off at 6:20pm after the first match between Maldives and Bhutan at 3:30pm at the same venue.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh want to put their disappointing performance against India in the SAFF Championship semifinal behind as the Bangladesh under-23 squad almost comprised of the same players who looked dead and buried against the eventual winners of India.

After taking charge of Bangladesh, Serbian coach Zoran Djordjevic has been working on increasing the confidence

level of the players though he got only two weeks to be prepare his boys for the event, in which Bangladesh emerged champions in Kathmandu in 1999.

Bangladesh were eliminated in the previous two events in the 2004 Islamabad Games and the 2006 Colombo Games from the group stages and they are now looking forward to go match by match putting on good show in front of the home crowd.

"How much time we got for practice is not a factor because all the booters were playing before joining the camp and we are looking forward to presenting a good show for the home crowd," said captain Aminul Haque, who is all set to play his first SA Games though he was included as one of three senior players.

"If we can perform according to our plan, the result must come in favour of us after the regulation time of 90 minutes,"

said the country's number one goalkeeper.

"We are not only focused on the opening match, we are thinking of every match. But at the moment we are going match by match and I believe our performance will get only better as the matches progress," said the Mohammedan custodian.

Zoran repeatedly has emphasised on the need of fighting attitude in the training and the players are now well aware of what the Serbian coach wants from them said Aminul, adding that the players are physically and mentally ready to take challenge.

The 57-year-old coach also analysed all video footage to find out the mistakes the boys had made during the SAFF Championship and tried to rectify those.

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THE SA GAMES EVENTS

Event	Date	Venue
Football	Jan 29 - Feb 8	Dhaka-Chittagong Bangabandhu Stadium
Athletics	Feb 6-9	Bangabandhu Stadium
Shooting	Feb 2-7	Gulshan Shooting Complex
Swimming	Feb 5-8	Swimming Complex, Mirpur
Cricket T-20	Jan 31-Feb 7	Dhaka-Rajshahi
Kabadi	Jan 31-Feb 4	Dhaka Kabadi Stadium
Table Tennis	Feb 5-9	Dhaka Wooden Floor
Boxing	Feb 5-8	Boxing Stadium
Archery	Feb 5-8	BKSP
Taekondo	Feb 6-8	NSC Gymnasium
Weightlifting	Jan 31-Feb 2	NSC Gymnasium
Hockey	Jan 30-Feb 7	Hockey Stadium
Badminton	Jan 30-Feb 4	Dhaka Wooden Floor
Basketball	Jan 31-Feb 5	Dhanmondi Indoor
Volleyball	Jan 30-Feb 4	Mirpur Indoor
Handball	Feb 1-6	Handball Stadium
Cycling	Jan 30-Feb 2	Khulna
Golf	Feb 3-6	Kurmitolla
Judo	Jan 30-Feb 1	BKSP
Karate	Feb 5-9	Mirpur Indoor
Squash	Jan 30-Feb 7	Dhaka Club
Wrestling	Feb 5-8	Kabadi Stadium
Wushu	Feb 4-8	Sylhet

Fairytale v reality

Serena v Justine: Women's singles final today

AFP, Melbourne

Justine Henin's fairytale is set to collide head on with Serena Williams's reality when the pair resume their fierce rivalry in the Australian Open women's final on Saturday.

Henin is making her much-heralded comeback to Grand Slam tennis at this year's Open, where she is hoping to emulate fellow Belgian Kim Clijsters' feat of winning the 2009 US Open on her return to tennis.

If she wins on Saturday it

will be the 27-year-old Henin's eighth Grand Slam title and her second Australian Open, and only the second time a wildcard will have claimed a Grand Slam (Clijsters was the first).

If Williams triumphs, the American will claim her fifth Australian Open crown and equal Billie Jean King's record of 12 Grand Slam singles titles.

Henin has battled her way through to the final, only really looking comfortable during her 6-0, 6-1 semifinal win over China's Zheng Jie.

She admits she didn't expect to still be here this late

in the tournament but now that she is, she is at last daring to dream of glory.

Standing firmly in the way of that dream is defending champion Williams, one of the most remarkable competitors in the history of women's tennis.

The two women have met 13 times since 2001, with Williams having a 7-6 advantage.

The last time they played was in the final in Miami in 2008, which Williams won 6-2, 6-0, helping convince a jaded Henin to walk away from the sport.

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Colourful rally in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A big colourful rally was brought out from Nirala in the afternoon on the occasion of the inauguration of the eleventh South Asian Games (SAG) yesterday.

The impressive rally headed by KCC Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque was joined by Police band party, minor girls clad in red and green spotted saris, high ranking officials of district administration and Police department. Later at 4:45pm national flags of the eight South Asian countries were hoisted at Zero point where the impressive colourful rally ended.

Zero point is the venue where cycling event of the 11th South Asian Games will begin from today and continue till February 2 with participation of competitors from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan.

Women cyclists of these six countries will take part in the competition on the inaugural day. They will cover thirty miles in the competition from zero point.

Necessary measures have been taken to ensure security of competitors and roads. The road map has also been drawn up which includes the districts of Bagerhat and Gopalganj.

Roger-Andy showdown

AFP, Melbourne

Roger Federer cruised into his 22nd Grand Slam final with an effortless straight sets win over listless Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga at the Australian Open on Friday.

The Swiss top seed had no problems disposing of the 2008 runner-up and 10th seed, winning 6-2, 6-3, 6-2 in just one hour 28 minutes on Rod Laver Arena.

Federer will chase his

fourth Australian Open title and 16th Grand Slam against British fifth seed Andy Murray in Sunday's final.

Tsonga looked a pale shadow of his best form as Federer did what he pleased to claim his 18th appearance in the last 19 Grand Slam finals.

The Frenchman had won their last encounter, in three sets at Montreal last August, but it was never a contest at their third career meeting.

"I'm very happy, you

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PHOTO: AFP

Swiss superstar Roger Federer plays a forehand return against Jo-Wilfried Tsonga of France in the semifinals of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. Federer won 6-2, 6-3, 6-2.

Khulna thrash Barisal

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Khulna continued their excellent run in the National Cricket league when they handed a 179-run defeat to Barisal at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Chasing a mammoth target of 363 in the fourth innings, Barisal were bundled out for 182 runs on the fourth day of the match yesterday.

Murad Khan of Khulna wreaked havoc taking six wickets for 64 runs. No Barisal batsman could manage a significant score, with the highest 34 coming from the bat of paceman Shohag Gazi while opener Anhur Newaz Himel scored 27.

This was the third consecutive victory for Khulna and the third consecutive defeat for Barisal.

Barisal started the day on 35 for no loss after Khulna declared their second innings on 232 for eight late on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the other match between Dhaka and Rajshahi at

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BTV

South Asian Games FOOTBALL

Maldives v Bhutan Live from 3:30pm

Bangladesh v Nepal Live from 6:15pm

STAR Sports

Australian Open Women's Singles Final Live from 2:00pm

English Premier League Birmingham v Tottenham Live from 8:55pm

STAR Cricket

Pakistan v Australia Under-19 Cricket World Cup Final Live from 3:30am

ESPN

English Premier League Liverpool v Bolton Live from 8:55pm

Burnley Chelsea Live from 11:25 pm



PHOTO: STAR

A Bangladeshi player (L) challenges her Nepali counterpart during their South Asian Games women's football encounter at the Bishreshtha Shaeed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Bangladesh lost the match 1-0.