

Blanco, Larissa star in TV soap

Cuahtemoc Blanco has played for Mexico at World Cups, got into rows with team officials and hosted a television show but never before been a fireman. That will be the 37-year-old's role in a television drama series as he makes his acting debut. The charismatic Blanco, one of Mexico's greatest players, will be acting opposite Paraguayan model Larissa Riquelme who caused a stir wherever she went during the World Cup as she followed her national team to the quarterfinals.

-AGENCIES



Same weather, different opposition for Kiwis

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

The New Zealand cricket team that arrived last night is wondering what has changed from their trip here two years ago. They left these shores in October 2008 with all the trophies but their last match, the second Test, was drowned in rain. Even their only practice match ahead of the series got called off due to the weather and poor drainage at the Fatullah Stadium. Only the three-match one-day series and the first Test in Chittagong dodged the weather.

The late monsoon is in full flow at the moment and after last evening's all-encompassing douse, there is serious doubt over the two practice matches to be held at the BKSP in Savar. The cricket ground is already under water and according to curator Shafiqul Islam Belal, it will be a washout if there's another down-

pour in the area. Thunderstorms are already projected for the weekend when the first practice game is scheduled to be held.

Apart from the horrible weather and the fact that Daniel Vettori is still the main man for the visitors, a few things have definitely changed.

Back then, Shakib Al Hasan was an upstart, an all-rounder whose credentials were limited to a one-day century and a few wickets. Mohammad Ashraful was the captain but now, one of them has climbed to the top as a bowler, while the other is almost out of sight.

Like the weather conditions, the preparation ahead of the 2008 series was terrible too. Fourteen players including national team regulars like Shahriar Nafees, Dhiman Ghosh, Forhad Reza and Alok Kapali left for the rebel Indian Cricket League a few weeks before the series began.

It threw the Tigers into turmoil with accusations being thrown left and right,

but it turned out to be a decent series cricket-wise. They won the first one-day and pushed the Black Caps all the way in the first Test.

There are no dramas this time and in some ways, this current Bangladesh team is a true reflection of the sudden change that took place in that period.

The home side has spent the last month and a half in a training camp under two new specialised coaches along with Jamie Siddons and with a sports psychologist in tow. The noise out of the camp has been good so far with some of the batsmen praising the length of net sessions (but that is expected). The bowlers had started to improve even before Ian Pont arrived while fielding coach Julian Fountain has been the busiest man in Mirpur.

In the last nine months, the Tigers have only won a single one-dayer against England, though they have won praise from all quarters with their showing in the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Shahed returns to nat'l fold

20-member football squad announced

SPORTS REPORTER

Promising midfielder Shahedul Alam staged a comeback to the national fold when Croatian coach Robert Rubcic declared a 20-member squad for the Asian Games to be held in China in November.

Shahed last played for the national side in the SAFF Championships under the guidance of interim national coach Shahidur Rahman Shanto following the sacking of Brazilian coach Edson Silva Dido, who had picked Shahed for the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers.

But the promising midfielder was dropped from the SA Games squad when Serbian coach Zoran Djordjevic was in charge. However, he was selected for the 32-member preliminary list for the Asian Games chosen by the national team management committee with the consultation of local coaches.

Apart from Shahedul, and the three senior players -- Aminul Haque, Wali Faisal and Enamul Haq -- the others were members of Bangladesh's U-23 squad of the SA Games.

SQUAD

Aminul Haque, Mazharul Islam Himel, Mintu Sheikh, Rezaul Karim Reza, Ariful Islam, Mamun Mia, Nasrul Islam, Wali Faisal, Atiqur Rahman Mishu, Shahedul Alam, Imtiaz Sultan Jitu, Shakil Ahmed, Abdul Baten Komol, Zahid Hossain, Zahed Parvez Chowdhury, Zahid Hasan Emily, Enamul Haq, Touhidul Alam Sabuz and Mithun Chowdhury.

Standby: Nehal, Sujon, Sweet, Manik and Raju.

Kamal sees bright times ahead

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president AHM Mustafa Kamal has said that his main objective is to take the game to the grassroots.

The BCB boss revealed his plans for the coming years while talking with the reporters at Sheraton Hotel on Tuesday, on the occasion of his first year in office at the country's most affluent sports body.

After a long statement where he made a number of promises, Kamal faced a volley of questions from the reporters about the 2011 World Cup preparations, interference in team selections, allegations about appointments in the local organising committee (LOC), and the lack of activities in some of the standing committees. Kamal, also a ruling party lawmaker, however portrayed a bright picture in response to all the questions.

"You people will decide about my success and failure as a BCB president in the last one year but I am yet to achieve one of my major goals which is to take the game to the grassroots. There is no alternative other than decen-

tralisating the game," said Kamal.

"The board already endorsed the constitution of the divisional cricket association and also allocated the budget for them. The constitution will be placed before next month's EGM (October 24) for approval and then all we need is the government's endorsement," he added.

He informed that they were planning to assist the divisional cricket association in many facets to make sure they can run their activities smoothly.

"We have a plan to provide astro turf to 15 to 20 Zilla School grounds across the country and we are also planning to assist the clubs which can have a big contribution to the improvement of cricket in the country," said Kamal.

The biggest challenge for Kamal is to successfully hold the World Cup where Bangladesh has been awarded the opening ceremony and eight matches including two quarterfinals.

"I think everything is going well and will be ready on time. We are monitoring everything," he said.

Kamal also raised the question about whether there were any construction equipments missing in Chittagong. "As per our information there was nothing missing."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Cricket Board president AHM Mustafa Kamal (2nd from L) listens to a question during a press briefing at the Hotel Sheraton yesterday.

Vettori warns against complacency

Cricket

ANI, Wellington

New Zealand skipper Daniel Vettori has asked his players not to be complacent ahead of their five-match one-day series against Bangladesh.

New Zealand scored an easy 3-0 sweep when the two sides met in New Zealand in February, but Vettori said Bangladesh would be a completely different proposition on their own soil. He said Bangladesh gave a tough fight in the ODI series against England, which they hosted on their return home.

While Bangladesh again went down 3-0, "they pushed them hard the whole series," NZ Herald quoted him, as saying.

"If we go over there expecting to walk over them like we did here, we'll be in for a bit of

fright. But if we respect them and hopefully play to our potential, then we should beat them," Vettori said.

New Zealand also wants its players to get familiar with conditions in Bangladesh, which will co-host the World Cup next February and March.

Two of the quarterfinals will be staged at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, where all five matches of the upcoming series will take place.

"We're going to play games over there during the World Cup and probably important games. We want guys to feel pretty familiar, so when we turn up there on a short stay, World Cup time, they will know what to expect," Vettori said.

The tour marks the return of Vettori, Brendon McCullum and Jesse Ryder, who all missed the tri-nations tournament in Sri Lanka in July.

Welcome gift

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace shooters Sharmin Akhter Ratna and Syeda Sadia Sultana had wonderful gifts for them on the eve of their departure for the Commonwealth Games. Two local business houses Sheltech Private Limited and Envoy Textiles Limited have come ahead to sponsor the two shooters for next one year.

Both shooters were happy with this sponsorship and claimed this type of acclamation always inspires an athlete and they would leave no stones unturned to bring laurel for the country.

Toufiq Seraj, managing director of Sheltech and Kutubuddin Ahmed managing director of Envoy Group handed over the cheques to the athletes at their office yesterday. Sharmin received Tk. 1,20,000 from Sheltech while Sadia received the same amount from Kutubuddin on behalf of Envoy Group.

Sharmin won two gold medals while Sadia bagged one gold and one silver in the SAF Games earlier this year.

Asiad cricket teams named

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Tuesday announced the men's and women's cricket teams which will participate in the 16th Asian Games in Guangzhou, China.

Former national skipper Mohammad Ashraful will lead the strong Bangladesh men's team while Salma Khatun will lead the women's side.

Cricket is among the five debut sports in the Asiad, which will be held from November 12 to 27, and will be played in the Twenty20 format.

MEN'S SQUAD

Mohammad Ashraful (captain), Shamsur Rahman (vice-captain), Naeem Islam, Faisal Hossain, Shahadat Hossain, Mahbulul Alam, Nazmul

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Delhi's monkey strategy

AFP, New Delhi

Delhi authorities are to deploy a contingent of langurs -- a large type of monkey -- at Commonwealth Games venues to help chase away smaller simians from the sporting extravaganza.

From Wednesday 10 langurs will be put on duty outside several Games venues in the Indian capital, with the swimming complex seen as particularly vulnerable to monkey misbehaviour, an official said.

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has a regular team of 28 langurs which are used to scare away their weaker

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Hopes pinned on golden Ratna

SPORTS REPORTER



The focus is diverted fully on Sharmin Akhter Ratna of the Bangladesh shooting squad for the upcoming Commonwealth Games, beginning on October 3 in India.

The Bangladesh shooting team comprises of 12 shooters including 2002 Commonwealth gold medallist Asif Hossain Khan but Bangladesh's hopes for success revolve around shooter Ratna after the girl from Magura grabbed three golds; two in the South Asian Games and one in the Commonwealth Shooting Championship early this year.

"Ratna has proved herself after having made the impossible possible and now she is in good form and we are expecting something special from her in the Commonwealth Games," said Bangladesh Shooting Federation general secretary ANM Istiaque Ahmed at a press conference at the National Shooting Complex in Gulshan yesterday.

Ratna has been doing excellent in practice as she once scored 400 out of 400 and has been consistently scoring 398, her highest score on way to clinching the 10m air rifles gold medal in the SA Games.

She however disappointed the nation in the ISSF World Championship in Germany after

making only 394 (98, 98, 99, 99 in four shots) and finishing 38th out of 134 participants in the qualification.

However, Ratna was more cautious on making promises and she said that winning a gold medal would depend on the competition day, the mental condition of the shooter and lastly on luck.

Ratna is supposed to carry the national flag in the march past during the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games but the shooting federation wants to exempt her from the duty.

"We have already appealed to the Bangladesh Olympic Association to make Ratna free from the duty of carrying the national flag because she feels pressure and considering the matter, we want her exemption from that duty," said Istiaque.

However, the shooting federation has little hopes on a star of yesteryear. Asif Hossain Khan. The 2002 Commonwealth gold medallist finished only 54th among 75 participants at the ISSF World Championship with a score of 588 out of 600.

Hinting inconsistency from Asif, Istiaque said, "He has not been consistent for a while and it has turned into a bad habit." Istiaque also informed that Asif often hides his scores.

Apart from Ratna and Asif, there is another shooter to rely on for success is Syeda Sadia Sultana, who in partnership with Ratna won the team gold medals in both the SA Games and Commonwealth Shooting Championship.

Clock ticks down on Delhi

AFP, New Delhi



The clock ticked down on the Delhi Commonwealth Games on Tuesday with signs that conditions in the much-criticised athletes' village were finally improving as hundreds of competitors arrive.

Australia, one of the countries that had slammed the village last week, said organisers were working hard to improve the state of facilities just five days before the start of the event.

"It's pretty good," Lynsey Armitage, a member of the Australian lawn bowls team, told reporters. "I've been here for the last two days. The dining hall is fantastic."

South Africa too said the first contingent from its 150-strong squad would move into the village on Tuesday after the facilities had been

passed as fit by the team leader.

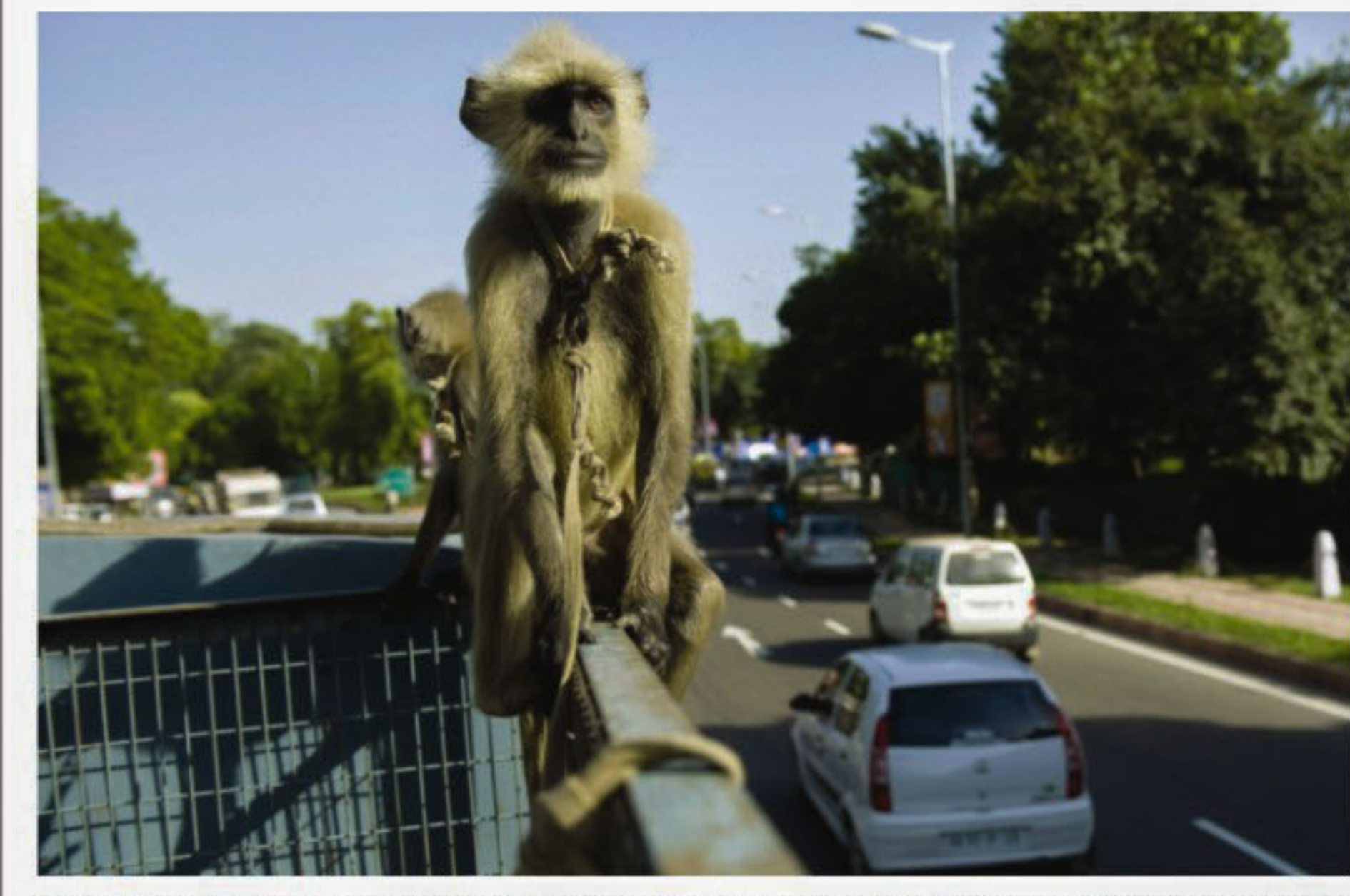
"The athletes are very happy with the reception they've got so far," spokesman Mark Keohane told AFP referring to the first batch of competitors who arrived Monday and spent their first night in a hotel.

There was possibly more bad news for the athletics competition, however, which has already been hit by pull-outs and no-shows from the biggest world crowd-pullers such as Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt.

Caster Semenya, the South African 800-metre gold medallist, was expected to lend some star-power to the Games' line-up, but her coach was quoted as saying Monday that she was struggling with a back injury and was now a doubt.

The showpiece multi-sport event, which opens on Sunday, had teetered on the brink of collapse last Tuesday when some nations threatened to pull out amid worries about

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8



POLICING THE STREET? A langur sits on a New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) truck yesterday. Delhi authorities have a contingent of langurs at Commonwealth Games venues to help chase away smaller simians from the sporting extravaganza.

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL
TODAY'S QUESTION
 Will Liverpool make it into the top four this season?
 Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote
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 Rubin Kazan v Barcelona
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 Inter Milan v Werder Bremen
 Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

TEN Action+
 UEFA Champions League
 Valencia v Man United
 Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

ESPN
 Sportscentre India
 Sports News
 Live at 8:30pm