

Brand Bangladesh through ICC Cricket World Cup

SUMAN SAHA

Some 16,000 foreign guests are expected to come Bangladesh to see the 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup matches. The host countries -- Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka -- are now busy giving a facelift to the tournament venues. But this mega event is especially significant for Bangladesh. This is the first time the country is going to co-host the cricket world cup.

In addition to being host to the opening ceremony on February 17 at Bangabandhu National Stadium, Bangladesh will host eight matches in Dhaka and Chittagong, including two quarterfinals.

This has given the country a huge opportunity to showcase itself in the global arena. Marketing and cricket experts agree this is the time to brand the nation through the ICC Cricket World Cup.

Nation branding, very much like personal branding, is to a large extent dependent on the self-image of its main character, in the case, this being the citizens.

This is a special case of branding, since sports marketing has become highly sophisticated in recent years. Cricket is no longer only a game; this world cup tournament has secured its place in the top most category of the entertainment industry.

"If we want to portray Bangladesh positively to foreign guests, we analyse the situation to find the strengths and weakness of our country," said Aly Zaker, a famous actor and a leading personality in the

domestic advertising industry.

The government should launch an intensive nation branding campaign by focusing on the positive image of our country, Zaker added.

"We have to develop a nation branding strategy for Bangladesh, supported by unique brand positioning to reduce our identity-image gap as a nation," said Asif Iqbal, a marketing expert and managing partner of Graanchill Creative.

Zaker, who is also the owner of Asiatic MCL, said the country should focus on three issues -- cricket and tourism; friendliness and the warmth of people; and untapped business opportunities, while initiating a nation branding campaign through the ICC Cricket World Cup.

Athar Ali Khan, a former national cricketer, said the country should portray its glorious achievements in cricket in developing a nation branding strategy.

"Cricket itself is a brand," said Khan, "so iconic players, such as Shakib Al Hasan and Abdur Razzak, should be involved in the branding campaign."

Winning the ICC championship title, getting test status and Bangladesh's recent excellent performances in cricket, have to be projected for nation branding, he added.

Khan, who is also a cricket commentator, argued: "If we engage our national cricket heroes in nation branding, Bangladesh would get extensive global exposure because world media will telecast the mega event all over the world."



The World Cup Mascot in front of Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka, counts down to the start of the tournament.

ANISUR RAHMAN

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"We should make use of the complementary national branding tools, like the diaspora network, cultural and sports diplomacy and embassy networks," said Iqbal. The country needs to promote its history and the tourism industry, he added.

The marketing expert also urged the government to position Bangladesh as a virgin and eco-friendly tourist spot.

The Bangladesh Tourism Board must launch a broader ad-campaign focusing on the country's eco-friendliness,

said Zaker. Citing an example on how to brand Bangladesh, Zaker said the government should position the country in the same way Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation undertook it 20 years ago.

'Come to Bangladesh, before the tourist comes' was the slogan launched by the corporation, said Zaker. This slogan got huge success because it depicted a true picture of Bangladesh.

He suggested that Bangladesh Tourism Board incorporate slogans, like 'we have noth-

ing, but we have the longest sea beach in the world; we have nothing, but we have the largest mangrow forest; and we have nothing, but have wider green landscape', in their branding campaign.

The major challenge the hospitality sector of Bangladesh faces is a shortage of hotel rooms.

"We have nearly 4,000 hotel rooms, although it expected that over 16,000 foreign guests will come to Bangladesh to see the Cricket World Cup. As a

result, we can not accommodate everyone," said Zaker.

Bangladesh Cricket Board, therefore, should encourage the host families to accommodate these foreign guests by launching extensive campaigns, with which, we can manage an additional 5,000 rooms at a minimum cost, he added.

The government should also start massive campaigns, so that all the cities sing a song for the Cricket World Cup.

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Festive fireworks light up sleepy Philippine town

AFP, Baliuag, Philippines

Gunpowder coats Angelito Garce as the Philippine pyrotechnics wizard works his magic on a vat of industrial chemicals, turning them into exploding cows, pythons and fountains.

Come nightfall on Friday, his grimy and dangerous toil is expected to help light up the Asian archipelago's skies as millions of New Year revellers set off fireworks for a loud and fiery send off to 2010.

The 16 million-dollar industry is based in the sleepy town of Baliuag and adjoining towns near Manila, where tiny sheds rise amid a sea of green rice paddies to give farmers some work between harvests.

"Our jobs depend on people using fireworks to celebrate," Garce, 44, told AFP as he and 30 relatives and friends worked overtime to meet what could be a last-minute surge in demand.

Garce is considered among the master artisans who specialise in mixing gunpowder with other chemicals, a trade passed from one generation to another in an unbroken string lasting more than a hundred years.

Drums filled with water line the shed's walls in case a fire breaks out -- a firetruck would not fit on the narrow tracks and would likely get stuck in the mud.

Though the work is dirty and potentially life-threatening, the average pay of 3,000 pesos (68 dollars) a week is good money in a country where the daily factory wage is typically less than six dollars.

"Outside these walls are rice fields where you have to toil and wait months before harvest. In here you can make your products in an instant. We get



An employee of Nation Fireworks rolling a popular fireworks locally known as "sawa" (python) for sale in Baliuag in Bulacan province, north of Manila. Come nightfall on December 31, the Asian archipelago's skies will light up as millions of New Year revellers set off fireworks for a loud and fiery send off to 2010.

AFP

paid quickly," Garce said.

Factories such as these employ some 100,000 people in Baliuag and nearby areas of Bulacan province, churning out fireworks of different sizes and calibre.

The louder the explosions, the quirkier the names and the higher the prices they fetch.

Of the street-legal varieties, the "Judas Belt", presumably named after Jesus Christ's disciple-turned-traitor Judas Iscariot, is a string of triangular crackers that pop like a rifle clip emptying in rapid fire.

A longer version has appropriated the Filipino name for python. Revellers wrap them around lamp posts or trees to be set off minutes before the clock strikes midnight to welcome the New Year.

A "fountain" shoots sparks about 2.5 metres (about eight feet) into the air, while a "screaming cow" moos before it explodes in a loud bang.

Locals say a powerful firecracker that can approximate the explosion of a grenade can also be bought on the sly.

Named after the infamous Al Qaeda leader, the (Osama) "bin Laden" is however difficult to find and shopkeepers will not openly admit to selling them.

Prices range from as low as 400 pesos to as high as 12,000 pesos depending on their size and explosive power.

The pyrotechnics industry in the Philippines emerged in 1867, inspired by a Spanish Roman Catholic priest who made small rockets to rouse his parishioners for dawn masses.

He imparted the technology to a man in nearby Santa Maria town named Valentin Santa Ana, who mas-

tered the fiery art and passed it on to his children, according to modern fireworks makers.

His descendants led early moves to regulate the industry after a deadly fire hit a factory in 1966 killing 26 people, but their efforts largely went unsupported.

When the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972 however, he banned the industry in fear that his political foes and dissidents would turn to readily accessible fireworks raw materials for weapons.

The ban drove the industry underground, where artisans unshackled by regulations began to produce ever more powerful firecrackers that attracted many buyers, said Celso Cruz, president of the industry association.

The ban was lifted only in 1992, by which time Bulacan was already a byword. Annual industry sales now hit 700 million pesos, Cruz said.

Benita Ramos, of family-owned Nation Fireworks, said she hoped sales would pick up to match previous years despite the tight economy.

"We have had people buying truckloads of fireworks, but now sales are a little slow," Ramos said, as she waited for customers at the family shop along a busy highway.

Still she said, the industry has been the main lifeline of Bulacan.

"We have helped a lot of people over the years. This is not just a business, but a family tradition already," she said.

Since starting the business nearly 20 years ago she and her husband Armando have lived comfortably, sending their three children to expensive schools.

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