

WC off to wow

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your help, cooperation and understanding," she said before ceremonially putting her palm to a scanner to declare the World Cup open.

The truth of the World Cup in Bangladesh had been seemingly missing for many over the course of the past few months, what with a variety of teething issues. But if ever there was a rising crescendo that led to an emphatic release, it was yesterday at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) which played host to the brightest opening ceremony in a World Cup of cricket in living memory. At the risk of hyperbole, it should be made clear that this was no Beijing 2008 or Guangzhou 2010. But at the end of a thoroughly entertaining night of song and dance, Bangladesh can hold their heads high at managing to put on a show right out of the top drawer. This is truly an event we can be proud of in years to come.

For once, things ran almost to schedule and by the time the young artistes Mila, Kona, Elita, Balam, Hridoy Khan, Arnob and Ibrar Tipu got to stage for the welcome song, the stadium was already packed to the rafters with a boisterous crowd who had been lining up for hours.

There was no sign of relent however and the energy emanating from the 25,000 plus who had managed to bag a ticket, only grew exponentially when all fourteen captains of the participating nations entered the stadium in specially decorated rickshaws. Ricky Ponting, of Australia was the first in line, and his ear-to-ear grin and enthusiastic waving to the crowd was a ringing endorsement of the novelty and success of the skit. The entrance of Shahid Afridi and MS Dhoni sent the crowd into delirium, and if at all possible, the decibels rose even further when Shakib Al Hasan became the final captain to emerge on his own decorated rickshaw for a circumnavigation of the stage.

For many, this might have been the highlight of the night, but the organisers had other tricks up their sleeve. The Bangladesh Development Bank, previously Shilpa Bank Bhaban, building, on the eastern side of the BNS was made into a giant screen of its own, with projections and a live act combining to put together the first-ever 'aerial cricket match'. The one over feat of daredevil and clever lighting was breathtaking in its scope and by the reactions it elicited it was fair to say that the crowd had never seen anything of the like before.

And yet, there was more. With headline act Bryan Adams waiting in the wings, all three host nations put on skits showcasing their own culture, heritage and history. India's number which began with an archer shooting an arrow of fire into the sky and Sri Lanka's which depicted a boat sailing through the seas were both excellent, but the biggest cheer was predictably saved for Bangladesh whose segment was preceded by legendary singers Sabina Yasmin, Mumtaz and Runa Laila. And it was Mumtaz who showcased her massive popularity by having the thousands at the stadium dancing to renditions of her most popular numbers. Otherwise, the Bangladesh skit was quite comprehensive, taking into account the Language Movement of 1952 and the Independence War of 1971. The highlight of that segment however, was the projection of Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's famous March 7 speech on the giant screen of the Bangladesh Development Bank Bhaban.

It elicited a giant outpouring of nationalistic feeling among the crowd, which had been threatening to burst out ever since the

national anthem had been played out at the start of the show amidst glorious green and red lighting and collective goosebumps.

After that, it was over to the able hands of Canadian singer Bryan Adams. The pop legend regaled with his timeless "Summer of 69", "18 till I die" and aptly "Let's make a night to remember" and had the crowd rejoicing at the celebrated numbers. The show ended on a high with the Indian trio of Shankar, Ehsaan & Loy ringing out the theme song of the World Cup 'De Ghumaa Ke' in all three languages of the host countries: Bangla, Hindi and Sinhalese.

It was an event of a magnitude not seen in the short history of Bangladesh and so in the words of the song, it was a "night to remember".
GIANT SCREENS ACROSS CAPITAL
Our staff correspondent adds: Dhaka City Corporation has taken an initiative to telecast live all World Cup matches on big screens through projectors at 14 different places in the capital.

The places are Dhupkhola playground, Basabo playground, Shiddeshwari playground, Abahoni playground, Mohammadpur Town Hall, Mirpur Section-14, Ansar Camp, Uttara Friends Club field, Indira Road, City Club playground, Oriental Club field, Sayedabad bus terminal, Gabtali bus terminal and Mohakhali bus terminal.

Apart from setting up the screens, sponsored by different companies, a private company's proposal to show the matches through mobile LED screen on trucks at 10 different spots in the capital is also under consideration, said a DCC official.

The spots are Motijheel, Kakrail, Gulshan-1, Gulshan-2, Mirpur-1, Banani, Uttara, Dhanmondi, Karwan Bazar and Mohakhali.

Besides, the existing two LED screens at Kakrail and Gulshan-2 will also show the quarterfinal, semifinal and final matches, the official added.

Clinton urges Bahrain to show restraint

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton voiced concern over unrest in US Gulf ally Bahrain and urged restraint when she spoke yesterday to Manama's foreign minister, a US official said.

In the phone call with her Bahraini counterpart Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmad al-Khalifa, Clinton "expressed deep concern about recent events and urged restraint moving forward," a State Department official told AFP.

Bahrain's military deployed armored vehicles in the center of the capital Manama and vowed to restore order yesterday after a violent police raid on anti-regime protesters left four people dead and scores wounded.

Clinton and Sheikh Khaled also "discussed political and economic reform efforts to respond to the citizens of Bahrain," the US official added.

Inspired by protests that toppled presidents in Tunisia and Egypt, thousands of people have taken to Bahrain's streets to call for a change of regime and a "real constitutional monarchy" in the Sunni-led but Shiite-majority country.

The White House said Wednesday it was watching the unrest in Bahrain "very closely" and called on the pro-Western kingdom to allow peaceful anti-government protests.

Bahrain serves as headquarters for a pillar of American military power, the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, which commands a rotating flotilla of vessels charged with safeguarding oil shipping lanes in the Gulf and countering Iran.

Three killed

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Two of the dead, Al Amin, 30, and Md Arif, 25, were the labourers for unloading sand from the lorry.

Amin died on the spot and Arif after being rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Identity of the third, a man aged about 50, could not be known. Tangled with the locomotive wheels, he was dragged about a kilometre, Abul Khayer, assistant sub-inspector of Kamalapur Railway Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Of the injured, Siraj Mian, 32, a stand-in for the regular driver, was taken to DMCH immediately after the accident and later moved to a Narayanganj hospital, said Md Hossain, one of the four owners of the truck.

Another labourer, wounded in the crash, was admitted to a hospital in Sreepur. The truck owner could not say his name.

The lorry headed for Thakurtala of Sreepur and the Jamalpur-bound commuter train hit the vehicle at about 7:30am, Hossain said.

Witnesses said there was no gateman or signal on the level crossing and the lorry driver.

Contacted, a Bangladesh Railway official said there is no mention of the level crossing in railway records, and they consider it unauthorised.

This is why the crossing has been left without a gateman and a barrier to close the road when a train is scheduled to pass, he argued.

Whenever a new road crosses any rail line, local administration and people request the railway authorities to appoint a gateman there, he noted, seeking anonymity.

According to railway sources, more than 230 of the 350 rail crossings across Dhaka division are unrecognised by the railway authorities.

Abdus Salam, a sub-inspector at Sreepur Police Station, told The Daily Star that the Thakurtala road, where the incident took place, has been designated as highway for over seven years.

But the railway authorities have yet to set up a gate or appoint a gateman at the crossing where traffic flow is very high, he said.

Another railway official told The Daily Star that it is illegal that vehicles run through the rail crossing.

Railway officials said they would visit the spot on February 22. On inspection, they might authorise it and appoint a gateman.

BR reports show about 51 persons were killed and another 149 injured in 590 rail accidents across the country in 2010.

Unguarded level crossings, frequent mechanical and human error, dilapidated rail tracks and outdated signalling system were the main reasons behind the accidents, railway officials said.

Khaleda

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foreign cricketers and guests.

BNP chief's Press Secretary Maruf Kamal Khan alleged neither the sports ministry nor Bangladesh Cricket Board had invited her properly.

"They [the authorities] just sent an invitation card to Khaleda Zia's parliament office but none from the ministry or the cricket board contacted us," he said.

She did not get any ticket for the world cup matches to be played in Bangladesh, Maruf said.

Khaleda, the leader of the opposition in parliament, enjoyed the extravaganza on television at her brother's Gulshan house, where she has been staying since leaving the cantonment house, said her Gulshan office sources.

"The tournament is being held in Bangladesh. I welcome and greet all the participating teams," she said during a meeting with leaders of Jatityatabadi Mohila Dal and Swechchhasebak Dal, front bodies of BNP, at the office.

"The people have a lot of expectations. I hope our team will emerge champion and we will receive them warmly," said the former prime minister.

Tax-payers made

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in the abyss of the crashing index. Who is sure what would happen to the Tk 300 crore?

And why these banks were not investing? For some simple reasons like it might not be wise to invest now when the market is still volatile. But now they will be walking the gallows. Who can say for sure if they would make gains?

If not, the fundamental question that now arises is what does this action mean? The market was manipulated beyond its limit, everyone knows. While the index went up and away, no-one bothered to correct the situation, and many of the policymakers thought it was a sign of "confidence" in the economy. But finally when the inevitable happened, there was a lot of blood-letting and embarrassment political and personal.

So does the latest action mean the government feels a kind of moral obligation to keep the index up, because it did nothing to stop manipulation in the first place? If that is the answer -- then at whose cost? The answer is pure and simple the taxpayers will have to foot the bill, they have to pay for the manipulators who bungled the market.

If the market falls again and the banks lose money, the ultimate losers will be the depositors and the tax payers who always bear the losses of state-owned enterprises. But that fact is being overlooked due to impulsive and immediate political expediency. Banks and ICB cannot make the best decisions under diktats.

And what signal the market got again? You bash up a few cars and buildings, burn up a few tyres, the index will climb. Investors who flocked to the market should have known it was a risk market, and incurring loss could be the ultimate result.

But as it now seems, the stock market turned into a fixed income bond market. There is only one way to go -- north.

Intriguing is also the Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) latest decision in an emergency meeting to set up a Bangladesh Fixed Income Fund with Tk 200 crore initial capital, and Tk 500 crore future capital. The goal is to prop up the market. Does anybody not know that a fixed income fund is meant to be invested in bonds and the likes, and not in shares?

We all know that a major market correction is overdue and that process started. It is for no-one's interest to try to stop it. Do we again want an above 8,500 index? Would the

"small investors" in front of Dhaka Stock Exchange ever stop even if the index rises again to 8,500? Would they not again march the streets and burn cars if it falls?

Is the government trying a soft-landing through these measures? It does not look so. Rather in the melee of the crash and chaos, such emergency measures are overshadowing many things like the fundamental change and reform of SEC, and going after the culprits who manipulated the market in various methods like book-building, share splitting, and direct listing. Why did SEC give approval for IPO to dubious companies which were rejected by DSE itself? We are hearing grotesque stories about how everything happened. Now someone needs to pick the truths. The newly formed probe body is a hope. But can it finish the task given the enormity of it?

All said and done, did we think about the impact of subsidising the market losers on the macro-economic balance in a year of high inflation? If keeping the budget deficit slim is the key answer to fighting inflation this time, then subsidy decisions have to be prudent.

Girl missing

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Demra (DND) dam on Wednesday night.

Ayesha Akhter Tumpa, a student of class-X of Segun Bagicha Rahima High School had been missing since she went out in the evening of Valentine's Day.

Tumpa went out at about 6:00pm to hang out with her friend Sayidur Rahman Sayeed, an HSC student of Sheikh Borhan Uddin Post Graduate College, and did not return home since then, said her family sources.

Tumpa's father Amanatullah Chowdhury, a businessman, filed an abduction case on the following day accusing Sayeed of abducting his daughter.

Police arrested Sayeed from Dhaka University's Shib Bari and took him for interrogation.

Sayeed said Tumpa came to meet him last Monday and they spent some time together going to places in the city. Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge (OC) of Shahbagh Police Station told The Daily Star.

Then she bade him farewell at about 9:00pm and headed towards home, the OC quoted Sayeed.

Police recovered her body around 10:30am on Wednesday from a canal at DND Dam in Rasulbagh area.



Amar Ekushey Boi Mela attracts a small crowd yesterday as cricket fans lucky enough to get tickets were at Bangabandhu Stadium while many others were glued to TV screens to watch WC cricket opening ceremony.

PHOTO: STAR

A rare day for Boi Mela

RAKIB AHAMMED

While it was a common phenomenon to wade through a sea of book-lovers at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela, it was a rare sight to find it almost devoid of people yesterday evening.

Hundreds of visitors rushed out of the fair, minutes before the inaugural ceremony of the World Cup Cricket 2011 at the Bangabandhu Stadium which took off around 6:30pm.

Sellers in different bookstalls said crowd was quite thin since the gates of the fair were opened at 3:00pm.

"We did not expect to get a lot of visitors though, due to the opening of the big event," said Payel, publisher of Joyeta Publication.

Throughout the day, heated discussion went on among fair-goers, writers and

publishers alike, surrounding their favourite topic: cricket.

Seven-year-old twin brothers Mishu and Shishir visited the fair in the afternoon wearing the official jersey of the players of Bangladesh Cricket Team.

"We are leaving the fair to watch the opening ceremony of the World Cup Cricket on television," said Mishu.

Publishers and Bangla Academy officials seemed anxious that the month-long fair may see a comparatively thinner crowd now due to cricket matches.

"Usually, we experience the highest sale in the last 10 days of the fair, but this time things may turn out to be different," said Payel.

Some publishers, however, believe that cricket matches will not prevent the booklovers from haunting the fair premises.

Muggers

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Meanwhile, in Gendaria, another gang of muggers stabbed to death Chunnun Bepary, 50, a fruit vendor and made away with his cash and cell phone.

Locals rescued the critically wounded Bepary from SK Das Road round 6:30am, and rushed him to DMCH where he also died soon afterwards.

Besides, in Sabujbagh, 22-year-old Mohammad Sohel was stabbed indiscriminately by muggers who snatched Tk 95,000 from him at South Mugda under Sabujbagh at around 11:00pm. Critically injured, Sohel was still undergoing treatment at DMCH as of yesterday.

Sundarbans

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for tigers as this beast of prey here can hunt within the radius of only 15 square kilometres, one of the smallest home range in the globe.

This reflects that a tigress here has ample supply food and the forest can potentially support a much healthier population of tigers. It also implies that this mangrove habitat can help secure the future for the endangered species.

The findings emerged through a joint study using geographical positioning system (GPS) by the Forest Department of Bangladesh and Minnesota University. The report was published in Oryx, an international journal.

A similar study was conducted on the adult tigresses in Russia, India and Nepal. Of the countries, Nepal has the same home range as Bangladesh.

According to the study, a tigress in India has to prowl around 16 to 27 sq km for a hunt while in Russia up to 400 sq km, said a press release of Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh, co-implementer of Project Tiger Bangladesh.

The researchers collared two Sundarbans tigers and monitored them for six months. Of the two, one was comparatively old and died after six months into the monitoring while the other was released back to the wild after removing its collar.

Naser Hossain, Assistant Conservator of Forest was the co-author of the study with Dr Adam Barlow of the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh and the zoological society of London.

UK toughens

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Union, doing away with the provision for them to settle in the UK.

The British Home Office on February 16 unveiled the details of the UK government's reforms in work visa route. The shake-up is part of the new annual limit on non-EU workers, which will take effect on April 6, says a statement of the British High Commission in Dhaka.

"Britain needs to attract the brightest and the best to fill jobs gaps, but this should never be at the expense of workers already here. We have made it clear that employers should look first to people, who are out of work, and who are already in this country," said UK Immigration Minister Damian Green.

"We intend to make the route to settlement tougher. It cannot be right that people coming to fill temporary skills gaps have open access to permanent settlement," said Damian.

The non-EU workers, who want to go to Britain, will need to have a graduate level job, speak an intermediate level of English, and meet specific salary and employment requirements.

At the end of last year, the British government announced that nearly 20,700 visas will be made available in 2011-12 to skilled workers applying through Tier 2 of the Points

Based System, as well as 1,000 visas under a new Exceptional Talent route.

Under the new system, employers will have to apply for a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) from the UK Border Agency for a specific post if they wish to bring someone to the UK; a change from the current system that gives businesses an annual allocation.

The UK also announced that employers, who wish to fill a vacancy with a salary of £150,000 or more will not be subject to the limit on the number of CoSs that may be allocated.

The annual limit of 20,700 CoSs will be divided into 12 monthly allocations. At least 4,200 CoSs will be made available in April considering the possible demand in the first month of implementation. After that, the limit will be set at 1,500 places a month. Any places that are unused each month will be rolled over to the following month.

The Intra Company Transfer route, which is no part of the annual limit, will also be changed in three ways: the job will have to be in an occupation on the graduate occupation list, only those workers paid £40,000 or more will be able to stay for more than a year, and workers paid between £24,000 and £40,000 will be allowed to stay in the UK for no longer than 12 months.

Yunus on leadership

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founded despite pressure from the government.

Yunus, 70, who won the Nobel prize in 2006 for his work making small loans to poor entrepreneurs, was told by Finance Minister AMA Muhith to "stay away" from his Grameen Bank while it is being investigated by the government.

"We established Grameen Bank through a special ordinance, with rules that are specific, according to which my current term as managing director is fully valid," Yunus told the news agency Thursday by email.

"The government has three representatives on the (Grameen Bank) board and they have unanimously approved these rules," he added.

Yunus said that in the interests of stability at the vastly popular bank -- which has more than eight million customers, all of whom co-own the institution -- a leadership transition would have

to be handled carefully.

"When the time comes, any transition will essentially require a friendly environment and support from the inside and outside stakeholders of the bank to ensure that we continue to be totally committed to our mission for and with the poor," he said.

Muhith's calls for Yunus to go are the latest in what his supporters, including former Irish president Mary Robinson, said Wednesday were a series of "politically orchestrated" attacks on the microfinance pioneer.

According to Bangladeshi rules, the retirement age for private bank executives is 65 so Yunus should leave now as he is five years beyond the limit, Muhith said this week.

A Norwegian documentary released in December accused Yunus and Grameen of malpractice and the Nobel laureate has seen his bank become the target of a government investigation.