



**ARMED AND READY:** An armed RAB man takes position during a security dress rehearsal in preparation for the Argentina-Nigeria friendly at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

# Utmost security

## Football

ANISUR RAHMAN

Keeping the Argentina-Nigeria international friendly on Tuesday in mind, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is going to stage a dress-rehearsal through today's open practice session of Argentina at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS).

Regarding Tuesday's match and today's practice session, the highest-level security measures from the government have been taken in a bid to ensure the flawless movement of both Argentina and Nigeria national football teams from the airport to hotel and from the hotel to stadium.

Approximately 15,000 spectators will be allowed to catch a glimpse of the magical Lionel Messi and his Argentina teammates in the practice session which is scheduled to get underway at 6:30pm and the ticket-holders have been requested to enter the stadium before 6:00pm as the gates of 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 18, 19 and 21 will remain open for them and gate 15 will be kept for the former national booters and football coaches while gates 10 and 11 will remain open only for the school students.

Of the four entrances to the stadium premises, three gates will remain open for

the spectators while the football teams of Argentina, Nigeria and national-flag carrier vehicles will enter the premises through gate-2 on both days. Even vehicles of invited guests or members of parliaments will not be allowed to cross zero point adjacent to the General Post Office.

"Spectators are much eager to watch the practice session, which is virtually a dress-rehearsal for us before Tuesday's international friendly between Argentina and Nigeria as the spectators will be checked at two points (main-entrance of stadium arena and the second one is at the designated gate mentioned on tickets) and the movement of vehicles surrounding the stadium arena during the practice session and on the match day will be controlled," said security committee chairman and BFF vice president Badal Roy at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

Roy also informed that the BNS have already been handed over to the security personnel for three days from Sunday to Tuesday and all shops have been kept closed for three days. A lot of police will be deployed inside and outside the stadium during the practice session and on the match day, he added.

"Regarding the Argentina and Nigeria match,

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## Fest for the elite

### Football

ATIQUE ANAM

Football, the beautiful game as is lovingly called around the globe, is probably the game that most people can associate themselves with. It is the game enamoured by millions and attended by the masses wherever in the world it is played.

The same scenario is usually reflected in Bangladesh too as we see the commoners attend the league games at the Bangabandhu National Stadium or other stadia week in week out, due to sheer love for the game. However, unfortu-

nate as it is, most of those familiar faces will be missing from the stands when arguably the most supported team in the country, Argentina, will be playing against Nigeria in a FIFA international friendly at the BNS on September 6.

The organiser Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has done it deliberately in an effort to inject some money into its dwindling fund. Yet unfortunate is the fact that the effort to entice the elites did not work as half the tickets for the match-day still remained unsold till yesterday.

It is a quite a stunning revelation in the context of the demand

for complementary tickets that people are asking from the BFF.

"We are getting hundreds of requests for complementary tickets. And to be honest those who are asking for free tickets can easily afford to buy more than one ticket," fumed a disgruntled BFF official yesterday.

"It is understood that people love to have anything for free. But I think the tendency to get anything for free in our country is far greater than anywhere else," quipped another BFF official.

Looking for evidence? Just walk inside the BFF Bhaban you will find people flocking like anything to get hold of a free ticket. On Sunday hundreds of school kids

protested in front of the BFF house in demand for a complementary ticket for the practice session.

It was a very noble initiative by the BFF as they decided to allow school children, and specially those who have active interest in football, to have free tickets to the Argentina team's practice session. But that nobility was marred in the end as many small-end school students were deprived of the tickets while a lucky few, having close association with the federation, got in through the back door. The scene was chaotic, to say the least, at the BFF as thousands of students protested for not getting the tickets despite showing valid ID cards.

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**Ticket selling staff of Apon Communications, the official ticket rights holder for Argentina's practice session, sell tickets in front of the Press Club yesterday.**

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Welcome aboard BG 092

### Football

MOHAMMAD ISAM

The Argentina football team will get their first taste of Bangladeshi hospitality when they board a special Bangladesh Biman flight (BG 092) this morning to arrive in Dhaka from Kolkata.

The national carrier will take extreme care as they undertake this very special flight, a pride for the nation.

Biman had initially planned to send a chartered GMG flight but then considered a Fokker from their own fleet. The authorities then decided to send a Boeing-737 with a capacity of 160 to 174 passengers after they realised the demand for a bigger aircraft.

They had also wanted to send an Airbus A310 but since it was grounded for some technical difficulties, Biman went back to the Boeing aircraft.

It will arrive at the Dum Dum Airport in Kolkata early this morning to pick up Lionel Messi & Co and it will be piloted by Captain Ishtiaque Hossain and the airline's most

experienced crew. According to a colleague, Ishtiaque learned of his duty after returning from a regular flight from Sylhet yesterday.

It was also learned that another Biman pilot, excited at the prospect of meeting his footballing heroes, gained permission to be on board as a non-operating crew, a regular occurrence in flights.

According to a Biman official, the Argentine team management had booked all economy class tickets for their 30-minute flight, but the airline upgraded a dozen squad members including skipper Lionel Messi into the business class.

Due to the very short period of the flight, the Biman crew (a large one to deal with the needs of the special guests) will cut two cakes to celebrate the occasion and to commemorate the little magician from Rosario.

The Argentines arrived in Kolkata earlier in the week to play an international friendly against Venezuela. After winning the game 1-0 against their southern American rivals, they will arrive in Dhaka to take on Nigeria on Tuesday before leaving for their different destinations on September 7.

## No hilsa for Messi

### Football

SAKEB SUBHAN

A visit to the city's oldest 5-star hotel, the newly named Ruposhi Bangla, will tell you what is about to happen today. A cardboard cut-out of the Argentina team graces the main entrance to the hotel and decorative lighting covers the whole complex, in honour of the monstrously popular Argentina football team, who will stay at the hotel prior to their FIFA friendly against Nigeria at the Bangabandhu National Stadium tomorrow.

Measures to welcome their world famous guests are impressive given that Argentina's stay at the hotel was only confirmed one day before the Eid holidays.

"We were informed of their arrival a day before the Eid vacations, so it was a bit of a rush to get everything ready for their arrival," said Shahidus Sadeque, Marketing Communications Manager at Ruposhi Bangla, adding that they were confident of their ability to handle such VVIP guests. "We are excited about their visit, and are confident that, as the country's oldest 5-star hotel, we will be

able to entertain such high-profile guests. During the cricket World Cup earlier this year we hosted international teams, so it should not be a problem."

The entire Argentina entourage -- with players, management team, support staff and journalists -- total in excess of 40 persons. They are scheduled to land at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 10:50 am today, and Ruposhi Bangla will be ready to receive the Albicelestes at 11:30 am.

The former world champions will first be received by 10 Bangladeshi women footballers, and then by the hotel management. Ladies of the hotel staff will be decked out in traditional Bangladeshi dress, and together with traditionally attired children will shower flower petals on the Argentine team as they enter the hotel.

The ninth and tenth floors of Ruposhi Bangla have been dedicated to the Argentina team, while the eleventh floor venue, 'Top of the Park' has been converted into a dining area exclusively for the Argentineans. These floors have been given a distinct Argentine feel, with framed photos of the team's triumphs lining the wall.

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PHOTO: STAR

**A group of former footballers pose for a photo at the BFF House yesterday. They are part of the 40-strong team of former and current footballers who will receive the Argentina and Nigeria teams at the airport today.**

## Gaffer's lifetime opportunity

### Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Abdul Gaffer is over the moon with joy and expectation at being nominated as the liaison officer of the Argentine team. The former national footballer and a stalwart midfielder of Abahani in the 80s, Gaffer migrated to Florida in the United States eleven years ago and has been settled there since. He only came to Bangladesh a month ago and was excited at having been given this lifetime opportunity.

"I am so very excited at the opportunity to be the liaison officer of the Argentine team. I think this will be the best moment in my life and even greater than my playing career."

The former national footballer was spending time yesterday at the BFF along

with former national team captain Arif Khan Joy, who has been nominated as the liaison officer of the Nigeria team.

"I will try to make sure that I do my job as well as possible and satisfy the team. This is a lifetime opportunity and I will make sure everything goes well and that I can cherish the experience for the rest of my life."

Both Gaffer and Arif were spending time in anticipation at the BFF, but Gaffer's thrill was much greater as he would be having the opportunity to be with Messi for the course of the two days. And he was mindful of the fact that he had domestic demands to satisfy.

"I will try to obtain Messi's autographed jerseys and if possible others' as well. My two sons and a nephew back in Florida have specially told me to bring Messi's souvenirs for them. I can not go back if I can't obtain these."

### SPORTS POLL

#### WEEKLY QUESTION

Where do you plan to greet Lionel Messi?

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### What to WATCH

#### TEN Sports

Zimbabwe v Pakistan

First Test, Day 5

Live from 2:00pm

US Open

Men's & Women's 4th Rd

Live from 9:00pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News