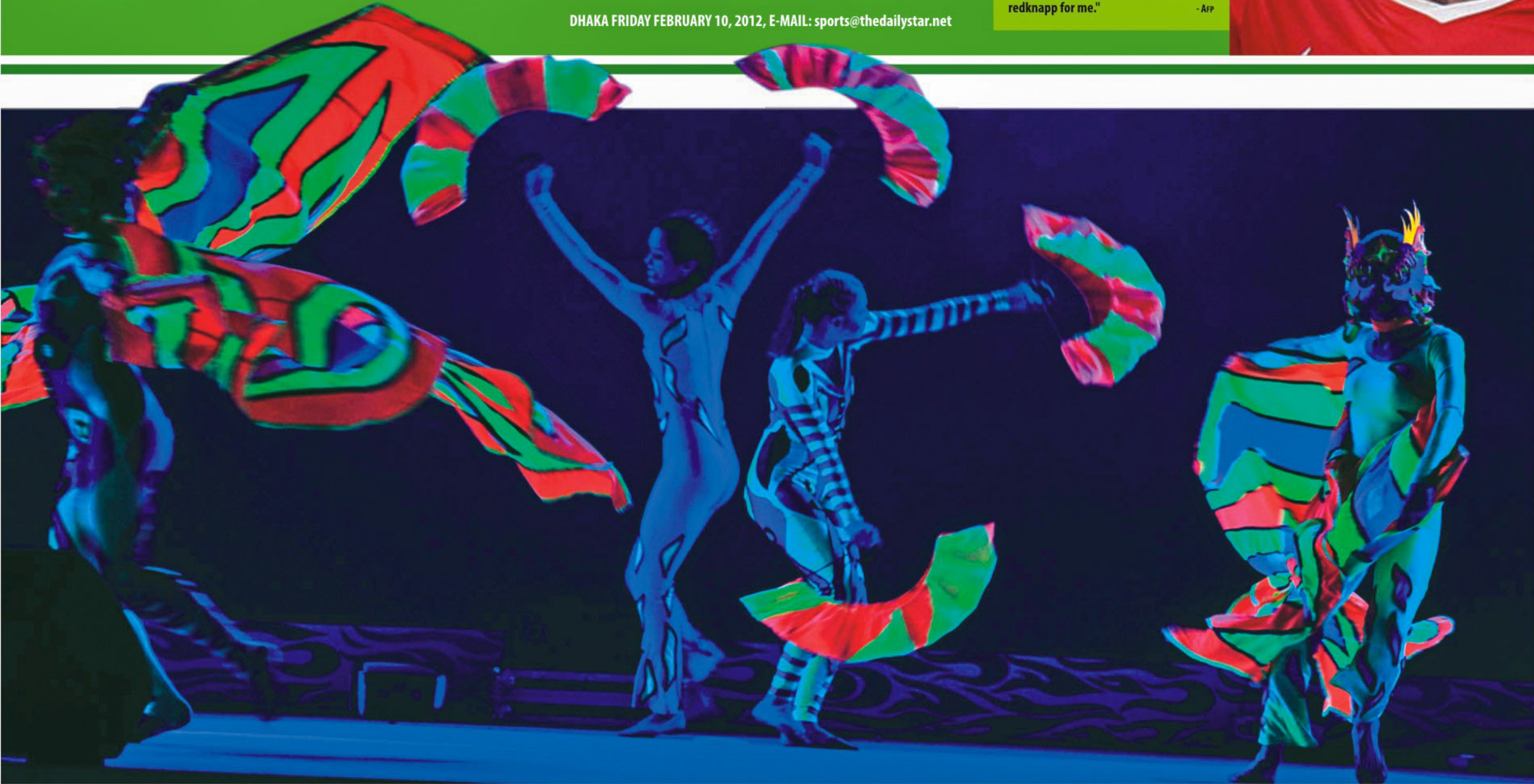


Rooney gutted as Capello quits

Wayne Rooney admitted he was devastated to see Fabio Capello quit as England manager as the Italian's shock departure triggered an outpouring of disbelief from English football stars on Wednesday.

Rooney also made it clear he believes the next England manager should be Tottenham boss Harry Redknapp, who has already been installed as the bookmakers' favourite for the post.

Rooney said on Twitter: "Gutted Capello has quit. Good guy and top coach. Got to be English to replace him. Harry Redknapp for me."



Dancers perform during the colourful opening ceremony of the Bangladesh Premier League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Hot & cold opening

SPORT REPORTER

The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) got underway in rather lukewarm fashion with a more than three-hour opening ceremony that had its share of organisational issues at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The most disappointing aspect was the dearth of spectators at the start of the show with not more than three or four thousand dotting the stands well past the scheduled start. The stands began to fill around half an hour into the show, though coming into the stadium there was not the throngs outside one expected to see for an event of such magnitude. The general complaints heard among the few fans outside the stadium surrounded the high prices of tickets. Even with more people coming in the stadium could not have been more than half-full by the end of the show.

The ceremony started half an hour behind schedule with Ayub Bachchu and a group of children from the Shishu Academy doing a rendition of 'Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Rangano Ekushey February', a tribute to the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement, after which Indian stars Bappi Lahiri and Shaan along with Kumar Bishwajit performed.

Then it was time for the President of People's Republic of Bangladesh Zillur Rahman to inaugurate the show after another round of pensive wait.

BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal and Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith then delivered their speeches as the paltry crowd grew restless. However, a decent display of acrobatics and fireworks brought some much needed life back into an already stalling show. The 'Beautiful Bangladesh' tourism video was shown followed by a classical dance performance consisting of legendary dancers Shamim Ara Nipa and Shibli Mohammad.

By then the stadium had begun to fill up and the show picked up with performances from Mila, Miles and Ayub Bachchu, again performing some of his biggest hits. The last hour of the show saw performances from Bollywood artists Bappi Lahiri and Shaan gracing the stage for a second time. The best was saved for last with a laser show by the International Dance Troupe after a dance performance by

SEE PAGE 17 COL 5

BPL in a spot of bother

Mashrafe receives spot-fixing offer

SPORTS REPORTER

The money-spinning Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20 is set to kick off today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, but it was the spot-fixing allegation that hogged all the spotlight yesterday, even dwarfing the much hyped opening ceremony.

Pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, the captain of the Dhaka Gladiators, has told two Bengali newspapers on Wednesday that a former national cricketer approached him with a spot-fixing offer in the lead-up to the BPL, the new venture of the Bangladesh

Cricket Board (BCB).

The reports said Mashrafe was asked to provide information on whether he would play certain matches and even whether he'd be wearing his sunglasses or cap. In exchange, he was told, he would be paid 15-20 per cent of the earnings from the spot-betting.

When contacted, Mashrafe said: "I don't want to talk about it again. I have told the team management and I am sure they will take the right steps in this regard. From what I've heard, the newspapers have reported it correctly. I haven't seen them but it was said that a player from Biman made the offer.



I will stick with it. Please, I don't want to talk about this anymore." The pace bowler has also threat-

ened to pull out of the team's captaincy if he found anything wrong in his team during the tournament. His disclosure was a talking point of the day.

"We learnt about it and asked the concerned authorities to investigate the allegations. It can happen and that's why we asked all the franchises to appoint a security official to make sure the players are aware of the consequences of this kind of crime," said Gazi Ashraf Hossain, chairman of the BPL governing council.

He also informed that an International Cricket Council (ICC) Anti-Corruption and Security Unit

(ACSU) officer was already in Dhaka for the BPL and would be made aware of this new information. "We will definitely take all necessary action in this regard," he added.

"This is a very serious offence," said BCB spokesman Jalal Yunus.

"We have zero tolerance for these things and will do whatever is needed to nail it down quickly," said the board's media committee chairman, adding that Mashrafe had been asked to reveal the name of the player who made the approach.

Mashrafe is likely to speak to officials of ACSU in a couple of days.



Shakib Al Hasan (C), one of the six captains of the BPL T20, speaks during the meet the press at a city hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

The low-down

SPORTS REPORTER

The much talked-about Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20 will roll into action today.

Hopefully all the negative talk surrounding the BCB's new venture will be swept under the carpet, at least for a while, as the action begins in earnest with the match between Barisal Burners and Sylhet Royals which starts from 2pm at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Chittagong Kings take on Durronto Rajshahi at 6.30pm at the same venue in the other match of the opening day. As a cricket-crazy public looks forward to nineteen days of

high-octane cricket, the buzz among the cricket fans will revolve around the strengths and weaknesses of the six franchises. Here is our take:

BARISAL BURNERS

Barisal have always been the underachieving team in domestic cricket but they could surprise many as the team think-tank bought the players with an eye to making a balanced side alongside icon player Shahriar Nafees; picking seven batsmen and two wicketkeeper-batsmen in in-form Mohammad Mithun and Phil Mustard. The seasoned T20 campaigner Brad Hodge will have the task of holding things together alongside the likes of Mominul Haque and

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

U-18 CRICKET

Faizur, Mahade star on Day 2

SPORTS REPORTER

Faizur Rahman and Mahade Hasan equally shared eight wickets as Dhaka Division tightened their grip on Barisal Division on the second day of the Young Tigers U18 National Cricket Competition at the Shamsul Huda Stadium in Jessore yesterday.

Dhaka took a massive 154-run first innings lead when they dismissed their opponents for 107 runs. Dhaka

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

BU survive, Biman sink

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Biman Bangladesh were demoted to the first division league when they suffered a 26-run defeat to Brothers Union in the relegation play-off match of the Premier Division Cricket League at BKSP yesterday.

The two bottom-placed teams contested the play-off match as Surjo Torun were earlier demoted to the first division league after their failure to appear on time for the match against Kalabagan at BKSP last week.

Brothers Union, boosted by the presence of experienced West Indies batsman Shivnarine Chanderpaul, recovered from Mashrafe Bin

Mortaza's early burst to put up a fighting total of 242 runs in their share of 50 overs.

A 163-run third wicket partnership guided Brothers to recovery from the precarious position of 20 for two.

Aftab hit 84 off 133 balls that contained eight fours and a six while left-hander Omar joined Khaled Latif to repair the damage. Their 138-run fourth wicket stand was however not good enough for Biman to salvage

Mashrafe picked up two wickets for 42 runs in eight overs.

In reply, Biman made a poor start losing three wickets for 45 runs but veteran Javed Omar joined Khaled Latif to repair the damage. Their 138-run fourth wicket stand was however not good enough for Biman to salvage

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

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