

SPORT

Curtain falls on SA Games

SPORTS REPORTER from Guwahati

The curtain was drawn on the 12th South Asian (SA) Games yesterday at the Indira Gandhi Athletics Stadium in Sarusajai, Guwahati with athletes bidding adieu to each other with the hopes of meeting in the next edition in Nepal two years from now.

This edition marked a successful competition as the highest number of athletes competed for the highest number of gold medals (239) in the Games' 31-year history. The Games also produced 12 new records, with hosts India keeping hold of their dominance on the eight-nation event with 188 golds, followed by Sri Lanka (25), Pakistan (12), Afghanistan (7), Bangladesh (4) and Nepal (3).

"We are happy because the 12-day Games came to a successful end with the cooperation from all government officials and people of Assam and Meghalaya. The delegates also expressed their happiness with our hospitality and arrangements," Tarun Gogoi, chief minister of Assam, said in his speech.

Bangladesh's state minister for youth and sports Biren Sikder, alongside government officials from other countries, were entertained by performances from local bands as well as cultural performances at the start of the show.

The Games officially came to an end when Sarbananda Sorowal, chairman of the 12th SA Games organising committee and sports minister of India, stated: "I declare the 12th South Asian Games closed."

Following Sorowal's announcement the torch of the Games was put out and a dazzling fireworks display lit up the sky. Afterwards, Nepal Olympic Association president Jibon Ram Shrestha received the flag of the Games from his Indian counterpart N Ramachandran.

"We feel proud to be the host of the next South Asian Games. We have successfully held two editions and we are hoping to host another successful Games," said Satya Narayan Mandal, Nepal's sports minister.



A brilliant competition ended with a bang as a dazzling fireworks display lit up the night sky at the close of the 12th South Asian Games at the Indira Gandhi Athletics Stadium in Guwahati yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Women shine bright

SPORTS REPORTER from Guwahati



Though there was very little hope of gold medals for Bangladesh from the 12th Asian Games

which was jointly hosted by Guwahati and Shillong, the country produced its second best results beyond its boundaries with four gold, 15 silver and 56 bronze medals after the 1995 SA Games in Madras where they had won seven gold, 17 silver and 34 bronze medals.

Bangladesh always fared better when they hosted the regional multi-sport extravaganza, but they struggled to produce good results away from home. This time too, they struggled to defend their previous edition's medals but had at least something to

cheer about on the back of a short period of preparation.

Bangladeshi athletes were supposed to defend 11 gold medals after the disciplines like karate, golf and cricket, in which Bangladesh won seven gold medal from Dhaka SA Games, were excluded from the 12th edition, but they failed to defend those gold medals despite bringing a mega 521-member contingent, the third highest after hosts India and Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh eventually finished fifth, thanks to some brilliant performance by the female athletes. Swimmer Mahfuza Khatun Shila, weightlifter Mubia Akter Simanta and shooter Shakil Ahmed salvaged the blues to have bagged gold from afresh events of their respective disciplines, Bangladesh had virtually to surrender all 11 gold medals - one each in men's football and men's

weightlifting, two each in women's taekwondo and wushu (one each in men's and women's) and men's boxing and three in shooting (two in women's and one in men's) - they bagged in Dhaka SA Games in 2010.

Country	G	S	B	Total
INDIA	188	90	30	308
SRI LANKA	25	63	98	186
PAKISTAN	12	37	57	106
AFGHANISTAN	7	9	19	35
BANGLADESH	4	15	56	75
NEPAL	3	23	34	60
MALDIVES	0	2	1	3
BHUTAN	0	1	15	16

Out of Bangladesh's four gold, 15 silver and 56 bronze medals, female athletes won three gold, 10 silver and 24 bronze medals to outshine their male compatriots.

The female athletes also played a part in winning two more silver medals in mixed events comprising both female and male athletes in archery.

The performance of women weightlifters and wrestlers were outstanding in their maiden appearance as the women weightlifters won one gold, two silver and two bronze medals in events while women wrestlers won three silver and five bronze medals in eight events. Women's kho kho team and women's handball team also produced silver medals in their maiden appearance. Female boxer Shamima Akter had a 'historic fight' with five-time amateur champion Mary Kom and had to be content with a bronze medal in her first international appearance.

Interestingly, Bangladesh won at least a medal in 19 out of 21

disciplines they took part while cycling and volleyball athletes had to return empty-handed. "Time is over for underestimating female athletes as they have proved that they can produce good results in the games," said sprinter Shirin Akhter, who however did not win any individual medal from the games but was part of the bronze-winning team in one of women's relay event.

"The way the male athletes have been going backwards is a bad sign for the country's sports and if we don't take proper steps to develop them, then we will go behind Nepal and Maldives," said BOA's training and development committee member secretary Rafiqul Islam yesterday.

"It is not possible to change the poor state of sports until the government comes forward with a proper plan," opined the former swimmer.

Miraz gets recognition

SPORTS REPORTER

With the conclusion of the ICC Under-19 World Cup, many websites have started making their best eleven - a team of the tournament type deal, with eleven of the best players featuring - and a constant fixture in those teams has been Bangladesh Under-19 captain Mehedi Hasan Miraz.

Reputed websites ESPNcricinfo and The Times of India's cricket-based website Cricbuzz have both selected Mehedi Hasan Miraz in the team of the tournament.

Not only that, citing Miraz's leadership, they both decided that Miraz would be at the helm of their teams.

The only other Bangladeshi to feature - albeit only in CricInfo's list - was pacer Mohammad Saifuddin. He was praised for his bowling at the death, with his yorkers being highlighted.

Warne's theory of human evolution

AGENCIES, Sydney

Shane Warne has proposed a strange theory about where humans came from.

Currently participating in the reality show 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here', Warne told a fellow contestant that "we started from aliens."

Speaking to dancer Bonnie Lythgoe, he said: "If we've evolved from monkeys, then why haven't those ones evolved?"

He added: "Because, I'm saying, aliens. We started from aliens."

Lounging in South Africa's Kruger national park, the former Australian cricketer explained his theory by saying: "look at those pyramids, Bonnie. You couldn't do them. You couldn't pull those ropes, huge bits of brick and make it perfectly symmetrical. You couldn't do it. So who did it?"

Uphill task for Tigresses

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's women's side face an extremely difficult ICC World Twenty20 campaign in India next month after being pitted in a group that includes the three best T20 teams in world cricket at the moment - India, West Indies and England.

Currently ranked 10, the Bangladesh women's cricket team has a lot of catching up to do. Because of their lowly ranking they barely get to play their desired number of international fixtures, which is one vital aspect in which they are behind most of their competitors.

However, talking to Bangladeshi skipper Jahanara Alam, who recently took over from Salma Khatun, one gets

the feeling that she is not at all bothered by these statistics.

Jahanara is proud of her team and believes that the women in green can use this mega event to show the world how much they have improved.

"When we played the last World Cup (2014), we played as the hosts. However, this time we qualified for this event and we are playing this event based on merit. So we are very confident," said Jahanara, while referring to the qualifying tournament last year where Bangladesh reached the final and ensured a place in the final 10.

"Because we are not in the top eight we don't get to play too many matches. The BCB [Bangladesh Cricket Board] tries very hard to arrange a few games for us, but the fact is that all the other boards are involved with the others, so there is nothing much we can do.

"So in this World Cup we need to

show everyone that we have improved and at least improve our ranking to seventh or eighth," said Jahanara.

The women's side will play two practice matches ahead of the World Cup, after which they will start their campaign against favourites India in Bengaluru on March 15. Two days later they will face England in the same city. They will then travel to Chennai to play the West Indies before going to Delhi to face Pakistan.

More than anything, the biggest gain for the side would be the huge amount of experience that they will attain by playing so many matches in the next month.

Despite the lack of practice matches, Jahanara reckons her team is ready for the big game.

"I won't say the kind of practice that we have done is enough, but we have been given excellent facilities and with the two matches we will play prior to the World Cup, we should be ready in due time," she said.

This will be the first time Jahanara will be leading the side in a major event and it was clear that she was quite excited about it.

"It is obviously a great experience to lead the side. But I won't say that this is an extra pressure because all the players in our side are seniors and you can say that they are all captains. I just have to give the right instruction at the right time and the rest follows," she said.

Jahanara ended the press conference on the same note as she began: with confidence. In her ending statement she indicated that she expected the country to support the women's team as much as the men's side.

"Cricket is cricket, be it the men's team or the women's team. Everyone in the country expects us to do well and we actually believe that we can."



Bangladesh pace sensation Mustafizur Rahman (C) enjoys a light moment with batsman Mohammad Mithun yesterday, the last day of the Chittagong leg of the Tigers' T20 training at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Tigers back in capital

SPORTS REPORTER



The Tigers returned to the capital last night after gruelling training sessions at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong.

After three days' break, the cricketers are expected to be back to the serious business of completing their final preparations before taking on India on February 24 in the opening match of the Asia Cup at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

After a drawn T20 series against Zimbabwe, where coach Chandika

Hathurusingha conducted experiments on team composition ahead of the Asia Cup and the ICC World Twenty20, the Tigers stayed on at Khulna to have their first camp for the regional tournament, and after a week's break travelled to Chittagong on February 7.

"The players went through tough sessions in Khulna and Chittagong. I believe the team is taking its best preparation for the two major events and hopefully you will see the result in the Asia Cup and the World Cup. What I observed was that emphasis has been placed on specific areas during training," informed team manager Khaled Mahmud over phone

last night.

"They practised in match scenarios like how they would need to bat in the first six overs or the last four overs. There has been specific planning regarding how we can improve our strength in T20 cricket. And if the players can execute those plans in the middle we will see a different Bangladesh team in T20 cricket," he added.

Bangladesh will miss the services of opener Tamim Iqbal in the Asia Cup as the Bangladesh Cricket Board approved the left-hander's paternal leave, but so far the good news is that everybody in the team was fine in terms of fitness.



Bangladesh women's cricket captain Jahanara Alam (L) receives the new team jersey for their ICC World Twenty20 campaign bearing the Cute logo, which is a product line of Mousumi Industries Limited, at the BCB Media Center in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB