



The Chinese women track cycling team train at the Olympic velodrome in Rio de Janeiro yesterday in a bid to tune-up before the start of the Rio Olympics.

PHOTO: AFP

Rio carnival begins

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

The carnival capital of Rio de Janeiro will host a glittering Olympics opening ceremony party at the iconic Maracana Stadium on Friday, hoping to draw a line under a turbulent seven-year build-up dogged by recession, drugs scandals, crime and infrastructure stumbles.

Jamaican sprint king Bolt will compete under the gaze of the Christ the Redeemer statue, sailors and swimmers will duel near Sugarloaf Mountain while the golden sands of Copacabana will host beach volleyball.

But the party will kick-off after the most trouble-plagued build-up to an Olympics in history, with a biting recession, double-digit unemployment, soaring crime and a public health crisis caused by the Zika virus just a few of the social problems ravaging the city.

A political crisis led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, meaning the Brazilian leader will miss Friday's ceremony. Interim president Michel Temer will take Rousseff's place, but could face a hostile reception from the crowd.

"In a way the Olympics is good for Brazil to help us develop, but the country is very sad, full of violence and unemployment," Carlos Roberto, 56, a dockyard worker told AFP as the Olympic flame passed through the city.

Anticipation for the sporting battles has been eclipsed by the fallout from the Russian

doping scandal that has divided the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the World Anti-Doping Agency.

The IOC's decision not to impose a blanket ban on Russia following revelation of a state-sponsored doping program opened the door to legal turmoil that left the precise make-up of the Russian team in limbo.

On Thursday, the IOC confirmed the Russian team would be made up of 271 athletes, with 118 eliminated because of the drug scandal.

Russian Olympic Committee president Alexander Zhukov said the team was "probably the cleanest in Rio" because of all the tests and checks they have undergone.

The first gold medal should be awarded on Saturday in shooting.

All eyes will be on American swimming star Phelps, the most decorated Olympian in history, when he returns to the swimming pool in the first week.

Track and field will see Jamaican star Bolt aim to defend his 100m, 200m and 4x100m crowns by clinching all three for the third straight Games.

Gymnastics meanwhile could see the world find a new darling with America's teenage star Simone Biles while new sports making their debut in Rio will include seven-a-side rugby and golf.

Brazilians get one over Argentina

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Rio De Janeiro

Brazilians do love their football. And it seems they do love to hate Argentina, or at least Argentine football teams.

The Brazilian Olympic team did not play in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday; the young Selecaos were playing at the Mane Garrincha Stadium in Brasilia.

Yet the 60,000-capacity Joao Havelange Olympic Stadium at Engenhao in Rio was half-full for a game which pitted Argentina, Brazil's perennial arch-rivals, against Portugal -- a team that Brazilians consider their second choice.

And while the Neymar-led Brazil team stuttered to a tame draw against South Africa, much to the disappointment of the hosts, those in attendance at the Rio fixture had a ball as Argentina suffered a heavy defeat to Portugal. Five-time world champions Brazil have yet to win an Olympic gold medal in football while Argentina have captured it twice

in 2004 and 2008. Yet at the end of the day, the mood at the stadium was that of a victory for Brazil even though it was only Portugal who had won.

The Olympic Stadium, which is home to the Botafogo Football Club, was abuzz with Brazil fans long before the game began. They came in numbers; they came using all sorts of transports. Many of them wore the yellow of Brazil; some of them wore the maroon of Botafogo, while some others wore the Red of Portugal.

There were Argentina fans too. Being very close to Brazil, a sizeable number of Argentines come to visit Brazil every year, and this being the Olympics, that number has increased manifold. And they had a sizeable representation at the game too, yet they were far outnumbered by the Brazil fans rooting for Portugal.

Every time an Argentine player touched the ball or ventured into the opposition area, a small cheer was drowned out by jeers while the Portuguese forays were met with boisterous appreciation.

The young guns of the current European Champions dominated the first half, but failed to break the deadlock. Gonzalo Pacioncia then opened the scoring on 66 minutes with a low drive, sending the partisan crowd into a frenzy. And when Argentina goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli let Pite's tame effort slip into the net, the party just got louder.

There was this group of four people who were chanting in Portuguese. The rhymes sounded nice, but it seemed that someone was being derided. A little help from another man revealed the gist of the chant, the censored version of which is: Maradona is no match for Pele, and Messi is a woman.

However, at the end of the day it was only friendly banter from the Brazilians, and spurred on by their passion for football, at their Argentine guests. From the looks of things, no offence was taken by those on the receiving end and at the end of the game, both parties left with smiles on their faces and a raging passion for football.

House full at the RUB

AMINUL ISLAM from Mymensingh

Mymensingh's football fans gave the lie to fears of a poor turnout as they filled out the 15,000-seater Rafiq Uddin Bhuiyan stadium during the opening match of the JB Bangladesh Premier League's Mymensingh phase yesterday.

The enthusiastic spectators from 13 upazilas of Mymensingh and its adjoining districts thronged to the venue to enjoy the Sheikh Jamal and Chittagong Abahani match, braving the heat, humidity and security checks without complaint.

Jamalpur businessman Monwar Pasha said that he visits Mymensingh whenever a big tournament is held and that he watched several matches of the Sher-e-Bangla Gold Cup in 1991.

Sherpur journalist Hakim Babul enjoyed the event along with 12 friends, who came to Mymensingh on a hired microbus.

"Once I was a footballer but now there is almost no opportunity to watch a big match, so I didn't want to waste this opportunity," said Shyamol Chakraborty, a bank official who enjoyed the match with his son Arpon.

Ankon Mitra, an HSC student from Tarakanda, said that he was going to enjoy a big match for the first time in his life while Baki Billah, an Honours student from Netrokona, believes holding different sporting events is an urgent need to draw young people's attention for building a nation with sound health and mentality.

Maksoda Akhter, a college lecturer, enjoyed the match with her six-year-old daughter and was overwhelmed.



Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus carried the torch of the Rio Olympics some 200 metres through Campo Grande in Rio during the torch relay on Thursday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

A shining light bears the torch

SPORTS REPORTER

As television actors and actresses, celebrity chefs and even a Brazilian supermodel relayed the Olympic torch across Brazil, Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus's emergence to bear the ancient symbol of the Games was an unusual, yet welcome, sight.

On Thursday, the torch made its journey to the western and northern edges of Rio de Janeiro before visiting the glamorous beach neighbourhoods of Copacabana and Ipanema. The relay started at the athletes' village as athletes from every continent ran with the torch.

First to carry the torch was local surf legend Rico de Souza and football legends Cafu, Carlos Alberto Parreira and Mário Zagallo also had their turns as did British cyclist Chris Hoy and Ukrainian pole-vaulter icon Sergey Bubka.

Professor Yunus, often seen dressed in traditional garbs, opted for a fresh look as he donned an Olympic tracksuit as the beats of Brazil rocked the backdrop. In the type of location he has worked to elevate throughout his life, the pioneer of micro-finance was passed the torch at Campo Grande, one of Rio's underprivileged suburbs, where he walked for about 200 metres.

Yunus also reinforced his global message during his walk, holding up three fingers to signify the three zeroes he has urged everyone to work towards: zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero net carbon emissions.

In the evening he was invited as a guest of honour at a dinner hosted by International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach -- who had chosen Yunus to join the mission of spreading the spirit of the Rio Games -- which was attended by 450 leaders of the sports world and distinguished guests.

Fizz to go under knife on Aug 11

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman will undergo a shoulder surgery on August 11 in England, a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official revealed yesterday.

Renowned surgeon Andrew Wallace will be conducting the operation, BCB director Jalal Yunus told The Daily Star yesterday. A well-known surgeon, Wallace has operated on the likes of Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag in the past.

"We have chosen him because he is the best. He has operated on some very famous cricketers in the past and we are confident that Mustafizur is in good hands. Also, he managed to provide us with an appointment next week. We want this to get over with as soon as possible," added Yunus.

According to his profile on the website of Fortius clinic, he is the principal orthopaedic shoulder surgeon to professional rugby clubs in the south of England and to the English Rugby Football Union and has treated elite athletes from Premiership football clubs, the England and Wales Cricket Board, the Board of Cricket Control for India, the British Olympic Association, the British Judo Association and the English Institute of Sport.

Mustafizur, who had scalped a four-wicket haul in his first game for Sussex, suffered an injury after the second game. He has been waiting in England since last week for a decision regarding his surgery from the BCB.

According to the BCB's medical team, Mustafizur is expected to take around five months to recover from the surgery. Going by that judgement, the left-arm is set to miss England's tour of Bangladesh, which is scheduled to begin in October.

He will also be in a race against time in order to be fit for Bangladesh's tour of New Zealand which will begin with the ODI series from December 26.

Earlier, the BCB had consulted with many doctors before finalising on Wallace. They had initially wanted Lenerd Funk, a Manchester-based doctor, to perform the surgery. However, Funk was unavailable before the 22nd. The BCB had also sent Mustafizur's medical documents to Greg Hoy in Australia, who has previously operated on Tamim Iqbal and Anamul Haque.



Brazil superstar Neymar (R) is challenged by South Africa's Abbubaker Mobara during the Group A men's football match of the Rio Olympic Games at the Mane Garrincha Stadium on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

A riveting stalemate

SPORTS REPORTER from Mymensingh



Domestic football returned to a full-house in Mymensingh for the first time since the inaugural Super Cup final seven years ago and players from Sheikh Jamal DC and Chittagong Abahani did not disappoint the 15,000 gathered. Despite the match ending in a goalless draw, both sides put in scintillating performances in the JB Bangladesh Premier League at the Rafiq Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium yesterday to enthrall the crowd.

The day before the start of the first match of the Mymensingh phase, there was an inkling that there would be a poor turnout. However, enthusiastic spectators dispelled those notions as they flocked to watch the match between two of the country's top clubs, who came here for the first time in 12 years since the Nitol-Tata National Football League in 2004.

The environment in Mymensingh resembled a perfect atmosphere as raucous supporters of both sides feverishly beat drums and blew vuvzelas whenever either team went on the attack. The spectators even lavished praise on individual pieces of brilliance, such as when a player danced past

an opponent or a defender made a tackle.

Both of the teams gave it their all on the pitch, coming close to breaking the deadlock numerous times until the final whistle. Unfortunately, this was the second time a match in the league failed to produce a goal since Mohammedan and Feni Soccer's match in Chittagong.

The spectators may not have seen any goals in the match, but they will surely be going back home with memories of individual brilliance, such as those from Sheikh Jamal captain and defender Yeasin Khan, substitute striker Wedson Anselme, Chittagong Abahani winger Mohammad Ibrahim and the port city side's goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana.

Sheikh Jamal seemed a more motivated side compared to their displays in the past three matches following a meeting with the club president, which seemingly injected more passion into the the Dhanmondi side, who clearly had the upper-hand throughout the match.

However, it was Chittagong Abahani goalkeeper Ashraful who kept his team in the fight after thwarting two efforts from Landing Darboe and Rakib Sarker in the 20th minute and having a brilliant match,



Despite concerns that there would be a lack of spectators as the Bangladesh Premier League shifted to Mymensingh, fans turned up in numbers and packed the Rafiq Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

while Sheikh Jamal's Yeasin was arguably the best performer on the pitch, making a goalline save and thwarting two dangerous efforts with some sublime defending.

After resumption, Wedson, who is suffering from an ankle injury, took to the field and captivated the spectators with his dashing runs and skills which in turn provided Darboe and Emeka Darlington

two good scoring chances. However, Landing was denied by the woodwork while Emeka squandered a chance to tap into an open net after losing his balance.

With a second draw from four matches, Chittagong Abahani are now on top of the table with eight points, while holders Sheikh Jamal are in third with six points from four matches.