

BECKHAM TO UNVEIL MIAMI MLS CLUB

Former England captain David Beckham will unveil his long-sought Major League Soccer expansion team at a Monday news conference in Miami, bringing a conclusion to a turmoil-filled four-year quest. MLS announced Friday it will "make a major announcement regarding the future of soccer in Miami" on Monday, inviting ticketed members of the public to what is expected to be the announcement of a 25th league club. The team is expected to begin MLS play in 2020 at a 25,000-seat stadium to be built in Miami's Overtown neighbourhood. Just over 11 years after announcing he would leave Real Madrid for the MLS Los Angeles Galaxy in a deal that included the chance to purchase an expansion team at a reduced rate, Beckham will make good on plans he first announced in February 2014. Beckham struggled to get his MLS team off the ground, unable to find an agreeable place for a specially built venue.

AFP



Spending spree or spending with purpose?

Bangabandhu National Stadium braces for Tk 87 crore facelift



(Centre) An aerial view shows the current state of the Bangabandhu National Stadium, the premier multipurpose sporting venue of the country. (Top-L) While the two international dressing rooms look neat and clean and need little refurbishment, the two dressing rooms for domestic matches (Bottom-L) are in shabby condition, lacking decent facilities. Similarly (Top-R) the President's Box looks pretty tidy while there is a lot to be done to the seating arrangements at the general gallery. The pictures were taken on January 22.

PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED

ANISUR RAHMAN

Once this stadium was a basic concrete structure made to seat as many spectators as possible. Yet, over the years, it has played the role of a theatre of dreams, a national obsession, and hosted anything and everything whenever a big sporting occasion came up. Unfortunately, it has never been bracketed as a centre of sporting excellence or one that people can refer to as a 'state-of-the-art' venue. This popular 'go-to place' is our Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS), which was built in the 1950s primarily for cricket, but eventually turned into the country's premier all-purpose sporting venue post liberation. The 'Big Bowl' in the commercial hub of the capital has gone through numerous facelifts over the years. Unfortunately those facelifts were quick-fixes, based on necessity. The venue, named after the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has gone through two major renovations in the past two decades. The custodian of the multi-purpose venue spent Tk 34 crore for renovations to host the opening ceremony of the 2011 ICC World Cup. The venue also witnessed the whopping expenditure of Tk 70 crore for renovations, modernisation and strengthening works since 1998. The fundaments, for all those renovations, was understandably meant to provide spectators the comfort and safety which a modern venue offers. The BNS is now set for another facelift and to this end, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has prepared an estimated budget of Tk 87 crore, the biggest so far. The budget will be placed before the ECNEC (Executive Committee of the National Economic Council) for approval sometime soon.

However, the burning question, as has always been the case, is whether the sports regulatory body is spending the money on improving things that really do require improvement. Have they prepared the head of expenditures after a thorough assessment of the present condition of the BNS? After taking a long look at those expenditure heads and in

consultation with the stakeholders of the venue, we strongly feel that the authorities need to readdress it if they want a real facelift of the premier venue. We have a few points in our argument, which are solely based on the facilities that a modern venue demands.

Firstly, the venue does not have a gym. It is a shame that the issue has not been addressed thus far and was also ignored this time. In the budget, Tk 25 lakh has been reserved for a 480-square-metre gymnasium's equipment and maintenance. But if you are a regular visitor to the BNS, you will not find a gym there. And if you want to have a proper gym you need considerable space and more money to have the necessary equipments for professional athletes.

Secondly, a modern venue has to be equipped with all the tools to maintain the ground. Unfortunately, the BNS does not have the basic equipments such as rollers, grass cutters, vacuums and water sucking machines to do so. And although a sprinkler system at a cost of Tk 4.38 crore is to be installed according to the budget, in order to make the ground more greenish, soft and smooth, the ground should first be elevated a bit from its existing level so that the waterlogging issue during monsoon season is solved.

Thirdly, the BNS is not only a sporting venue but a heritage site of the country. It is the site of so many historic events -- the one-off Test match between India and Pakistan, Bangladesh's inaugural Test against India, the symbolic fight between the legendary Muhammad Ali and a young Bangladeshi boxer, an international FIFA friendly between Lionel Messi's Argentina and Nigeria, and so many football battles between Mohammedan and Abahani in the domestic front. Sadly though, the BNS does not have a museum to showcase such memorable events. And like every venue of international repute, the BNS should have a museum so that its history can be preserved for new generations to take inspiration from. Though there is no space left at the shop-laden BNS, a museum can still be accom-

PROPOSED BUDGET FOR BNS RENOVATION

SECTOR	TK (IN LAKH)
Breaking and removing objects	44.34
Gallery shed construction	2330.36
Gallery chair installation	1347.38
Road carpeting	47.77
Int'l dressing rooms dev	81.82
Floodlight, CCTV Camera	1261.99
CCTV HDIP based camera installation	20.12
PA System	35.54
Generator purchase and installation	161.79
LED giant screen dev	110.19
New Synthetic turf installation	1583.20
Digital ad board	689.75
Equipment for power sub-station	8.00
Security light	47.39
Dressing room dev (for local players)	67.16
Media Centre dev	35.92
Ticket counter (1) construction	16.74
MS gates dev	7.66
Medical room and equipment	34.02
Dope test room	26.52
Seating arrangement in dugout	8.73
Equipment for gym and repair	25.00
Gallery dev	121.04
Ground development	437.49
President's Box dev	75.77
ICC Box dev	22.20
TOTAL	8,647.89 lakh

is mandatory for a modern venue to have designated chairs and entry/exit ways for physically challenged individuals. Since the National Sports Council (NSC) is going to install new chairs, it should think of reserving a seating arrangement at one section of the gallery for disabled spectators.

Fifthly, the existing urinating issue in the stands, which is in a very bad state, has not been addressed in the renovation budget. The BNS is perhaps the only venue in the world which forces the paying public to use urinals in the open and on top of the gallery. It has got about 30 proper lavatories inside the 20,000-capacity gallery, but those are in pretty bad shape. The ideal situation would be to bring back the original lavatory locations, now occupied by shops.

It is not necessary to increase the budget to accommodate these facilities. It can be done within the existing budget by trimming expenses at other ends.

Obviously, gallery improvement and pitch development will be in the priority list of development work and there is no exception for it in the draft expenditure which collectively includes nearly Tk 39 crore. This amount includes costs of installing sheds over all top-floor galleries, installing new chairs, overall gallery development work and constructing a ticket counter while pitch development will cost nearly Tk 4.38 crore, with the sprinkler system installed to water the ground.

The gallery shed will certainly give spectators more comfort. But if the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium (SBNS) is to be followed, it will be nothing but an ordinary one and more of a viewing obstacle if one watches a game from the Club House ends. Besides, in an effort to minimise viewing obstacles for the paying public, a planned and permanent place should be allocated for the broadcasting cameras.

It is surprising that most of the chairs installed just seven years ago at the BNS for the ICC Cricket World Cup have been damaged due to a lack of proper maintenance. However,

more than 30 per cent of chairs in the general gallery are still usable and can save a lot of money. Besides, it is not absolutely necessary to replace the folding VIP chairs (4,800) with new ones. A recent visit gave this reporter the impression that most of the chairs at the VIP gallery, the President's Box and the ICC Box (the cost is estimated at nearly Tk one crore) are in good shape and some repair work is all that is needed.

The BNS has four dressing rooms -- two well furnished and spacious dressing rooms for international games and two tiny ones for domestic matches. Those two domestic dressing rooms are in miserable condition. The budget allotted for the two dressing rooms for domestic games is Tk 67 lakh against the international ones at Tk 81 lakh. Interestingly, the two international dressing rooms only need a minimum facelift against the two neglected ones where there is not enough space to sit, no washroom and no shower facility. Since the BNS hosts two games every day during the football season, it needs four dressing rooms. The need of the hour is to upgrade the domestic dressing rooms and provide those with more space.

Besides, more than Tk 40 crore has been earmarked for spending in areas which can be drastically reduced by not installing a new digital advertisement board and only upgrading the modules of two existing giant screens which were installed in 2010 and 2011. The new PA system will cost Tk 35.54 lakh. Interestingly, you can still find about 34 speakers at the gallery fencing, yet nobody knows whether those are still functional and no one knows what happened to the PA system which was installed in 2011.

A stadium is more than just the sum of its physical parts and more than just a functional building; instead it should be one that is attractive and comfortable. It warrants satisfying certain psychological needs for the athletes, spectators, officials and visitors. We are not against spending, but we are against spending without purpose.

modated, preferably in the space that the Bangladesh Cricket Board used as its headquarters before shifting to Mirpur.

Fourthly, there is no designated space for physically-challenged spectators at the BNS. It

QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

Malinga remains unsold in IPL

Sri Lankan Lasith Malinga, who is the highest wicket taker in IPL did not find a buyer for the upcoming edition of the IPL. In an IPL auction, where fast bowlers who can bowl with pace and fire were the first to be targeted by the franchises, it is indeed surprising that Malinga remained unsold.

Messi strikes late to down Alaves

Barcelona escaped a scare on Philippe Coutinho's first start as Lionel Messi struck with a trademark free-kick to drag the La Liga leaders back from a goal down to beat Alaves 2-1 and restore their 11-point lead at the top.

'No idea' how long he will go on Saif face uphill task at TC Sports

AFP, Melbourne



Age-defying Roger Federer says after winning his third Grand Slam title in a year he has no idea how long he will continue playing.

The 36-year-old Swiss marvel continues to defy the years and attrition rate, reaching his 30th Grand Slam decider and claiming his sixth Australian crown and 20th Grand Slam title.

The world No.2 won back-to-back Australian Opens by beating Marin Cilic 6-2, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 on Sunday, dropping his only sets of a stress-free tournament.

Federer, who downed great rival Rafael Nadal in a classic five-set Australian final last year, eased through this year's event with five of his seven matches finishing on or under two hours and he spent just a total of 13hr 53min on court.

Asked after his Melbourne triumph how much longer he can continue at the summit of men's tennis, he replied: "No idea. Honest, I don't know. I have no idea."

"I've won three slams now in 12 months. I can't believe it myself. I just got to keep a good schedule, stay hungry, then maybe good things can happen."

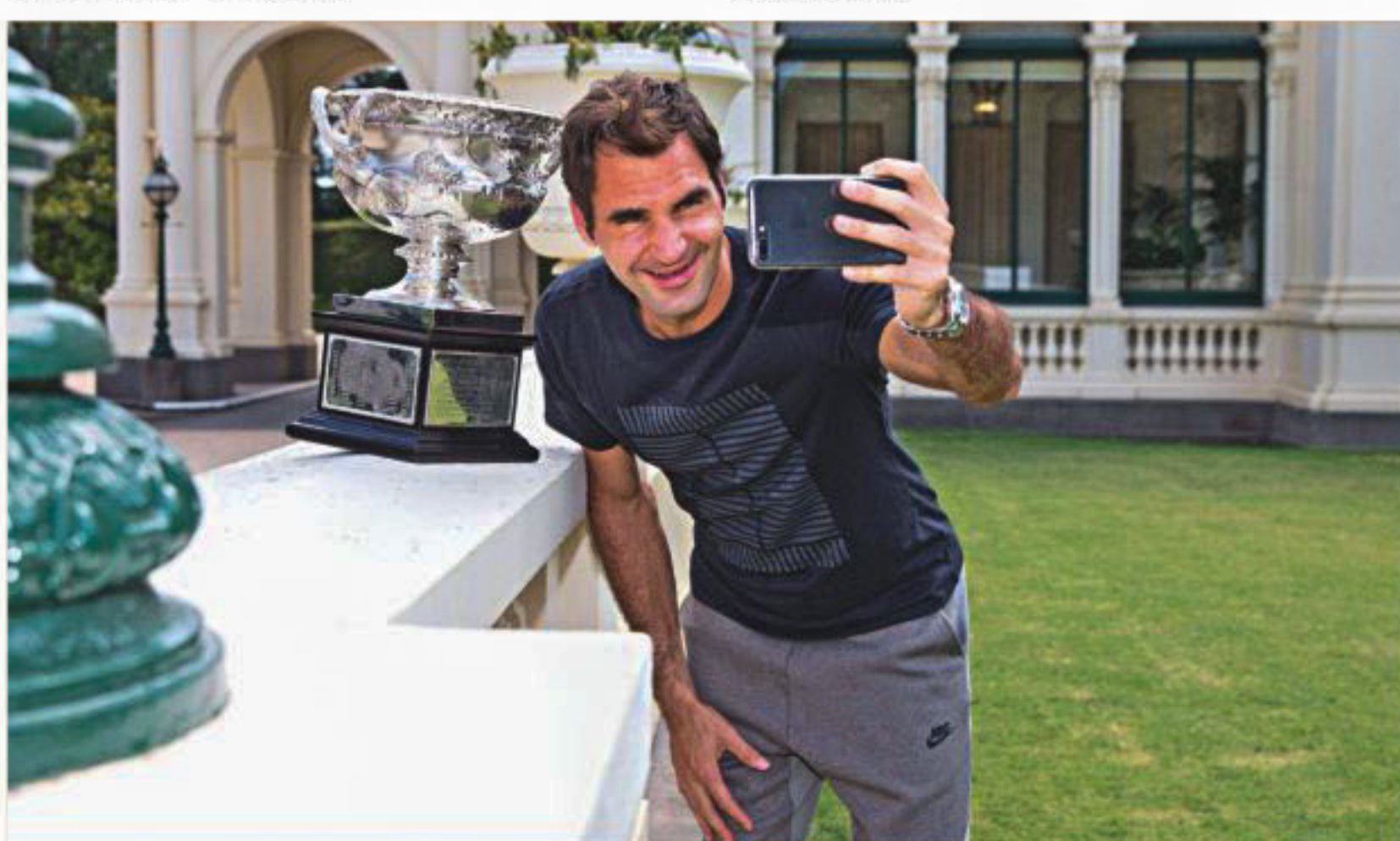
Federer said his age didn't come into it when questions were raised about his continuing longevity.

"I don't think age is an issue, it's just a number," he said.

"But I need to be very careful in my planning, really decide beforehand what are my goals, what are my priorities."

"I think that's what's going to dictate how successful I will be."

But he added: "Exciting times ahead. As a professional, it's what we do. But I'm happy I'm in that position right now."



Swiss master Roger Federer takes a selfie with the Australian Open trophy at the Government House in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Saif face uphill task at TC Sports

SPORTS REPORTER



AFC CUP

Newcomers Saif Sporting Club will look to overturn a one-goal deficit when they take on hosts TC Sports Club in their pre-playoff of the AFC Cup at the National Stadium in Male, Maldives tonight.

The match is scheduled to get underway at 10:00pm (Bangladesh Standard Time).

Saif SC trail by a single goal as they conceded a 0-1 defeat at home last week despite creating a number of scoring chances. Now they must beat their opposition in unfamiliar conditions to ensure a play-off berth in the second-tier club competition of Asia.

A 1-0 win for the visitor in normal time will take the tie into extra time while a 2-0 win for them will see them through.

Getting accustomed to the astro-turf in only two practice sessions will be another challenge for the Bangladeshi outfit, who finished fourth in the Bangladesh Premier League and failed to get past the group stage

in the ongoing Independence Cup.

It will be a difficult job for the charges of Ryan Northmore, who found very little time to prepare for this competition due to the busy domestic schedule. Despite borrowing a number of players from other clubs, they failed to avoid defeat in the home fixture.

"Pitch is different and full squad got a chance for the practice session which was held yesterday [Sunday] and today [Monday] they will have another opportunity to have practice on it [Astro-turf]," Northmore said at a pre-match conference yesterday.

"The players will try to perform to their maximum ability. Hopefully the result will come as all the players except for Zahid Hossain and Mohammad Ibrahim, who have no major injury problem, are likely available for selection," added Northmore.

TC Sports Club coach Mohamed Nizam, meanwhile, is optimistic about going to the next round by posting a win in the home match.

"They (Saif SC) are a good side, but we will start with three points in hand and it is not a pressure for us to play on home soil," said Nizam.