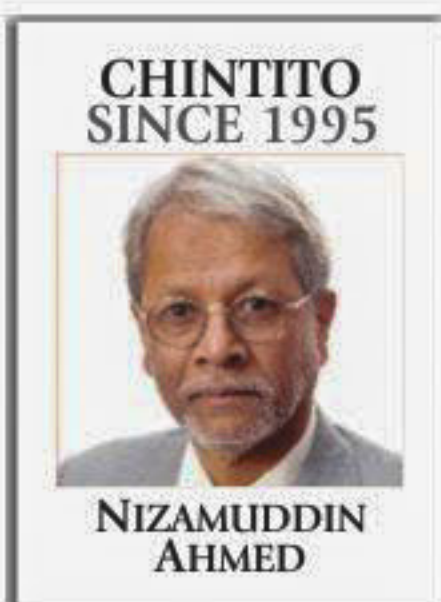


Sports is about more than just participating



CHINTITO SINCE 1995
NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

It is natural to assume that Australia's Gold Coast is strewn with auros accolades for the picking. A little exploration would have revealed that close to four and a half thousand athletes from 71 countries and territories were vying for the 275 sets of medals this summer Down Under.

The 41-member Bangladesh delegation, merely 23 of them athletes (13 women) in batches, was the first contingent to reach Queensland about a week before the XXI Commonwealth Games, presumably to acclimatise themselves with the local conditions. It didn't quite pay off well.

Of the six events (shooting, swimming, boxing, weightlifting, wrestling and athletics) we participated in, officials, being realistic, pinned medal hopes only on shooting, given that most of our laurels in past Games came from that event. That prompts the question: What impelled the Bangladesh Olympic Association to send contestants in the other five events?

A sports headline in *The Daily Star* on April 9 read: "Fastest man and woman frustrate". That was the whole truth. The Bangladeshi man stood 53rd out of 65 sprinters and the woman 38th among a bevy of 41 in the 100m sprint. In the women's 200m, we fared even worse, because our celebrated fastest sprinter stood 36th out of as many in the contest; that's actually last. The mind is bogged to understand if 20 to 30 other countries could resist the temptation of sending their "fastest" man and woman to the competition, we should have rather promoted artistic and rhythmic gymnastics, para

powerlifting, and cycling mountain bike, and we do have enthusiasts in each. The results would have been equally disappointing, if not less frustrating, because there is nothing "laster" than last.

With timings close to respectively 11 and 13 seconds, the outcome of either was hardly surprising, and should have been a foregone conclusion sitting at the BAAF Mirpur office. But the news item explained with a shade of optimism laced with sympathy that they had clocked fractions better at the National Championships as recent as last December. Here arises the matter of calibration of our timers with the Games standards; every fraction of a second counts towards glory or despair.

Our officials, sports judges, coaches and participants may have taken the Games motto "Share the Dream" too literally. Dreams have to be big and yet realistic. Dreams to be shared have to

be seen when awake. Did they expect that the other 50 sprinters would fall flat on their face and our own perched on the victory stand?

These *deshi* torpedoes (we are rather generous with our admiration) have been holding on to their king/queen labels (I told you) for four to five years, and rightfully so, but that stagnation tells the complete story about the state of our athletics. Records have stood firm for over 20 years. It appears that others are not finding any interest, nor a level playing field to try hard enough. There lies the responsibility of the officials—some entrenched in the helm of affairs and even the committee for decades. To flourish internationally, a country must have self-respecting and knowledgeable officials who can set priorities, even to the extent of insisting that athletes not good enough to participate should not make up the numbers.

Gone are the times when a country

participated in a spirit of camaraderie. Gone too should be the perception to fancy international participation as a gift for some home achievement or any unrelated socio-political affair. International competition is serious business, and has been for several decades now, especially with television (and slo-mo) making it possible for the world to ridicule any misconception.

The truly dignified are crestfallen by failures at global encounters. Would it not be laughable if Vanuatu (pop. 282,117), Cook Islands (pop. 17,380), Solomon Islands (pop. 623,281), British Virgin Islands (pop. 31,196) or Dominica (pop. 73,925) wanted to play a competitive cricket match against Bangladesh (pop. 166,368,149)? Some of us may not have even heard of these countries, but they have each won a medal at the recent Commonwealth Games. Indeed we got two silvers at Queensland, of course in shooting.

In swimming, our two men and the lone woman managed ranks between 20th and 38th, mediocrity at their best. That may not look half as bad if you knew that the timing of the gold medallists in their respective events was more than three to seven seconds faster.

Heartiest congratulations to Abdullah Hel Baki for his Silver in the men's 10m air rifle and Shakil Ahmed in the men's 50m pistol. By a twist of fortune, on any another day those could have been golds. However, save two other shooters, who reached the quarterfinals, others languished between 10th to 20th positions. Their experience is perhaps the nation's expensive gain.

In swimming, our two men and the lone woman managed ranks between 20th and 38th, mediocrity at their best. That may not look half as bad if you knew that the timing of the gold medallists in their respective events was more than three to seven seconds faster. That's imaginably like 20-0 in football.

In weightlifting, our male competitor "did not finish," aww...! Of the four women, one was sixth out of 13, and the rest were last or near about. Why, why did we send them?

Our wrestler in the men's freestyle 74kg was eighth out of 15 after he won the first round 4-0 against the entry from Kiribati (pop. 118,414), but went down 0-5 to a Nigerian in the next. What's the point?

About boxing, much more should be said, because boxing coach Abdul Mannan did not attend the scheduled technical committee meeting the day before the beginning of the bouts. As a result, the two Bangladeshi boxers were not allowed to take part. We have not heard in the media of punches being thrown at the truant coach, or did he have a reason? Even if he had any health issues, he should have shared that with the team management and saved our honour. "After the Games the whole incident will be investigated," was the General Team Manager Ashiqur Rahman Miku's response.

India is an example of in-depth all-round preparation, making possible a bull's eye prediction with punditry. Ten days before the Games, a report on "Chances of Indian athletes at 2018 Commonwealth Games" predicted 25 gold medals, 21 silvers, and 24 bronzes. In April they bagged 20 silvers, as many bronzes, and whopping 26 golds.

Compared to our neighbours, our dismal performance is a matter of collective shame. We share the same subcontinent, with common roots of history, language and culture, similar disposition of physique, taste for food, music and films, and therefore the contrast in achievement is of great concern this side of Benapole. The difference clearly highlights the inadequacies in our training team, facilities, and dedication of the athletes, and lack of effective long-term scientific planning.

I must end by drawing a silver lining. After the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games, four Bangladeshi athletes disappeared (*The Guardian*), and after the 2006 Melbourne Games, a lone Bangladeshi runner went missing (ABC news). This time around, our entire contingent returned, I think.

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Bangladeshi shooter Umme Zakia Sultana Tumpa competes in women's 10m air rifle shooting final in the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games at Belmont Shooting Complex in Brisbane.

PHOTO: AFP

Mirage of privacy in an Internet universe

Never was a world-changing technology named more aptly than the 'World Wide Web', and the aptness was proved again with Facebook and its privacy-slaughtering shenanigans smattering like slime on the looking glass of news of recent days.

RAJA MURTHY

THE benefits of unprecedented connectivity come with vulnerability to manipulation and exploitation, as exposed in Facebook's data misuse scandal involving the British political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica.

Global Internet users—numbering over four billion in 2018—face illegal data harvesters, identity thieves, privacy violators and varieties of cheats prowling the information pathways we travel daily, the broadband journeys intertwining, interconnecting in the increasing online daily life of the mundane world.

What a world! This global village with happy online "magic" that we take for granted, where oceans are bridged with a mouse click, where more information is created and shared than ever before in history and more work done through intercontinental networking of

out billionaires like Facebook chief executive officer Mark Zuckerberg, cheats and their tricks increase.

Facebook's recent troubles came as no surprise, not if you maintain a sneak-cheat list of personally banned websites like I do. European laws demand publishers ask for permission to install cookies, but the slithery sneak-cheats not only sneak in but hide in computers.

They are exposed when I often clear my browser of cookies and site data (In a chrome browser, click on "Settings" > "advanced settings" > "privacy" > "content settings" > "Cookies and site data" > "Remove All").

The cookie box should clear after clicking "Remove All", except for the browser data. But cookies of cheating websites sneakily linger, like a perverted visitor who does not go when bidden but hides under the bed to spy.

These sneaky cheats store their spyware in

"private" as talking, working and relaxing in the high street of the global village?

Is online shopping 100 percent safe as buying with cash in the neighborhood store? How many of us bother to even use freely available encryption tools, such as Tor and Tails from Julian Assange's WikiLeaks? Anyway, are online chambers of secrets and whispers through encrypted emails only mirages of privacy?

Not much can be hidden where satellites can beam to the world images of your house through Google Street View (instantstreetview.com). Earthcams (earthcam.com) bring street views of global cities, and the most complex password can be for the determined hacker the "open sesame" of the Arabian Nights tale—with the 21st century Ali Baba and the celebrated thieves only shifting operations online.

Here they lurk and plunder the unwary. Nothing can be hidden; those who experience

I find basic rules of life apply online as they do offline. Having little to hide helps beat sneaky online spies, like those using text files to hide in computers. We exorcise the hidden cheats while also exorcising paranoia over privacy that robs enjoying to the fullest the wonder world of the Internet.

subtler truths of nature understand that we are never, ever alone.

I find basic rules of life apply online as they do offline. Having little to hide helps beat sneaky online spies, like those using text files to hide in computers. We exorcise the hidden cheats while also exorcising paranoia over privacy that robs enjoying to the fullest the wonder world of the Internet.

The Internet too has its dark side, like other things of life. It makes sense to make best use of the most beneficial technological revolution of our times, while taking precautions to not fall into webs of thieves.

But a beneficial online life needs also avoiding self-created traps of paranoia. The foundations of the Internet are rooted in freedom, and whatever it takes is worth the effort to be free.

Raja Murthy is a senior Mumbai-based journalist. Copyright: *The Statesman/Asia News Network*

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