



At the Opening Party of the 2019 World Cup at The Mall in London on Wednesday, a 60-minute challenge was played by a representative and celebrity of each country, with Abdur Razzak and Jaya Ahsan teaming up for Bangladesh. While Razzak hit three sixes and two fours, Ahsan missed five and hit just one, bringing Bangladesh's total down to 22.

PHOTO: ICC

Party at The Mall

SPORTS REPORTER from London

"This is may be the best day to showcase London to the world," laughed a volunteer as rain drizzled down in aimless droplets on a grey day at The Mall, barely 500 metres to the east of the iconic Buckingham Palace.

The Mall, not of the shopping variety but in the more traditional sense of a paved walk through a park, was the chosen venue for the Opening Party of the 2019 ICC World Cup on Wednesday evening. It was ideal to showcase London's

many faces. In front of Buckingham palace, ladies and gentlemen were haughtily walking about in their Sunday best -- rain and the fact that it was Wednesday be damned -- while at The Mall Bruno Mars's 24K Magic was blaring out as hundreds of cricket fans of all hues were gathered to help make the party a proper blast. If the rest of London seemed immune to cricket's global showpiece beginning the following day, that was certainly not the case in this corner of the tree-shaded St. James's Park.

And there was a lot to be excited

about for cricket nerds. Despite the gloom, cricket fans would have been fumbling for their sunglasses in the mixed media zone, such was the quality of stars mixing with mere mortals. In no particular order Anil Kumble, James Franklin, David Boon, Mahela Jayawardene Jacques Kallis, Brett Lee, Kevin Pietersen and Sir Vivian Richards (okay, perhaps there is an order to how that list ended) were mixing with mere mortals in the mixed media zone.

What made the opening party even more special was the 60-minute

challenge that followed the 10 captains coming onto the stage after meeting the Queen at the Palace. The ever-popular Andrew Flintoff emceed the challenge, which was played by celebrity representatives of the 10 participating nations, with each nation putting forth one cricketer and one celebrity. The two teammates would take turns hitting as many balls as possible in one minute, and a shot over the spectator-lined boundary would yield six, four if it was along the ground, one if the bat touched ball,

negative one if the player missed and negative four if he or she was dismissed. The most generous cheer came when Pakistan's participants were announced -- Nobel Laureate and activist for women's education Malala Yousafzai strode out with Azhar Ali, lending the event a meaning greater than cricket.

For Bangladesh it was Abdur Razzak and actor Jaya Ahsan. Razzak hit three sixes and two fours, while Jaya missed five deliveries and managed to make contact with just one, bringing the total down to 22.

West Indies brought the house down with a team of Richards and 2012 Olympic silver-medallist sprinter Yohan Blake, with both hitting sixes at will. It was England's pair of Pietersen and reality TV star Chris Hughes who won it with 74, beating Australia's Brett Lee and tennis legend Pat Cash's 69.

For a long time it seemed Bangladesh would come in dead last, but that distinction ended up with India's Kumble and actor Farhan Akhtar, who managed just 19, in the process saving Jaya's blushes.



The World Cup Trophy was brought to the opener between South Africa and England in novel fashion as a trapeze artist landed from a balloon.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BEST QUOTE



It's not about this being the first match. Even if it was the last match, we would be thinking of winning because what we arrived here for is to win, so we will play with the mentality to win. See here, to make the semifinals, we have to win. It's not like we will get some points from elsewhere if we don't win. Against every opponent, the mentality would be to win. If we win then we will go through to the semifinals, otherwise not.

Liton Das of Bangladesh

'I'm hoping for upsets'

There were many cricket legends at St. James's Park on Wednesday's World Cup Opening Party, but one figure attracted the most attention and was the most sought after for interviews during the mixed media zone. Sir Vivian Richards, the West Indies legend nicknamed 'King Viv' was pulverising bowlers as early as the 1970s, before any of the current crop of batsmen palely imitating his aggression were even born. The Daily Star's Sakeb Subhan was lucky enough to be in one of the groups that got to ask the humble Antiguan a few questions about the game of cricket today. The following are excerpts from the Q&A session:

Question (Q): You played the first World Cup here in 1975, how much has the game changed since then?

Viv Richards (VR): Well, the fielding. I think batting and bowling has been the same, but I think the fielding has been massive. The competitiveness in the fielding today, among all the players today... maybe a few players in the past who were really great fieldsmen, but nowadays you have the whole team, you cannot hide guys these days at this level.

Q: You said that batting and bowling has remained the same, but don't you think the batting has started dominating?

VR: Well, I guess when you play on smaller boundaries, I guess that does help. That is a plus. I guess the boundaries compared to yesterday are totally different. When you have 65-yard boundaries, that is a license for batters to have a great time.

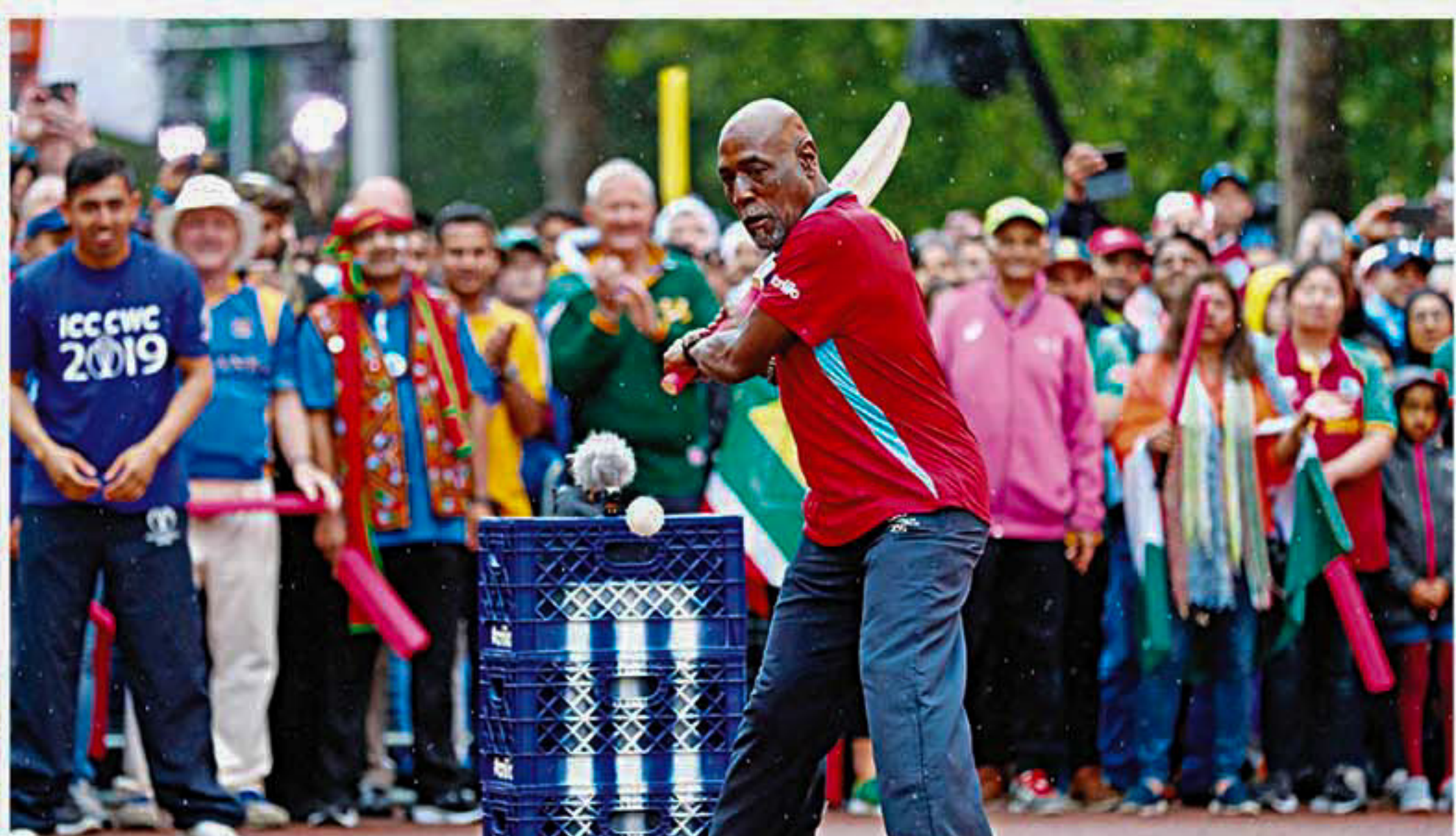
Q: How many sixes would you have hit today?
VR: No, I wouldn't put myself in that position, but this is what the folks want in terms of excitement. But I believe sometimes the boundaries can be extended, which gives every bowler that bowls an opportunity to do well as well.

Q: You are considered one of the greatest, most destructive batsmen in ODI cricket. Do you think you missed out on T20 cricket?

VR: Not really. It's nice to see what's happening in the game. I had an opportunity to spend some time in the Pakistan Super League. It's been great; I've been around some magnificent people. As a cricket fan I've been a lover of great batsmanship. I do appreciate what I am seeing now; as a lover of the game, I am happy to see the direction that cricket is heading.

Q: How are you rating West Indies for this World Cup?

VR: I never ever count us out. You will never ever hear me, even though we may not be having the best time, you never count any team out when it comes to the World Cup. This is



a limited-overs tournament and you have to bring your best. It's the World Cup; it's only played X amount of years. It's an opportunity for individuals... you never know, you may never be here again, so now that you have your chance, you have to grab it with both hands.
Q: Talking of franchise cricket, Bangladesh have the Bangladesh Premier League, so if you have an opportunity to work there, would you?
VR: I had an opportunity, but due to some circumstances I could not make it. I think it was Tamim Iqbal who invited me at the time and I was looking forward to coming because I do believe that Bangladesh are blessed with some enormous talent. Their batsmen are as good as any. It's an emerging cricketing country. From the passion that I do see, it looks like it can only get better.
Q: Can you pick four possible semifinalists for this World Cup?
VR: No, I would never, never (laughs). That's

when you start losing your resume, when you predict and you lose. If Bangladesh has come here believing that they can win, that's the top factor. In one-day cricket on the day anything... conditions can be so dismal that it can be beneficial to your team. You never know, there are going to be some upsets, there will be some upsets and I hoping for that. But I think it will be great for the game.

Q: Any young players you have your eyes on?
VR: There are a lot of young players around. Bangladesh have a whole lot of young, good batters. Windies have some good young batters, power-packed. India... Jesus! We are spoilt for sure, in terms of all these magnificent individuals who will come here to do their duty.

Q: Is there any current pacer you would consider challenging?
VR: There are a lot of guys around. Every guy who bowls a ball stands a chance.



In a World Cup that was presumed to be offering some high-scoring thrillers in England, most people would have thought that the first exciting moment in the mega event would come from a batsman. However, that was not the case as South Africa spinner Imran Tahir was the one to provide first ecstatic moment of World Cup. He had Jonny Bairstow caught behind off just the second delivery of the innings after skipper Faf du Plessis had opted to open with a spinner instead of a pacer, a tactical twist that paid off.