



Qatar faces acid test in World Cup opener

AFP, Doha

Qatar will finally get their home World Cup under way on Sunday, 12 years after the nation's successful bid put into motion wide-ranging preparations which cost billions of dollars.

It is widely accepted the Gulf state has spent \$200 billion on hosting football's biggest event and Qatar will get its first glimpse at the final product at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor when the hosts take on Ecuador.

Organisers say that 2.9 million of the 3.1 million tickets have been sold and they will be expecting a 60,000 sell-out on Sunday.

The home team's players have also been preparing tirelessly, spending months outside Qatar in isolated training camps, in an attempt to reach the knockout phase on their World Cup debut.

"Our situation is different (compared to other teams) and we have to work with what we've got," coach Felix Sanchez told a press conference on the eve of the tournament.

"It's true it's a massive sacrifice, many time away from our families and abroad and this shows the commitment of the players to compete and it all starts tomorrow."

The Group A match, which was moved forward from Monday to allow Qatar to play in the opening game, will be an acid test for the hosts both on and off the pitch.

FIFA and the tournament organisers will be hoping the kick-off can help put several controversies in the shade.

Qatar has faced criticism over its human rights record and the environmental fallout from holding the event.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino had called on World Cup teams to "focus on football" in a letter earlier this month and accused critics in Western countries of "hypocrisy" on Saturday.

Qatar will be wary of following the dozen years of work and spending with the embarrassment of becoming only the second host country to crash out in the first round.

To avoid joining South Africa in that exclusive club,

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Football unites all like no other sport and a World Cup event escalates excitement among locals in leaps and bounds, as evident at the FIFA Fan Festival's opening at Al Bidda Park in Doha on Saturday, ahead of the FIFA World Cup which kicks off at the Al Bayt Stadium in Doha today through the match between hosts Qatar and Ecuador.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Struggle for right to vote starts now'

Fakhrul tells Sylhet BNP rally; city dwellers suffer for lack of transport, mobile internet

DWOHA CHOWDHURY and MINTU DESHWARA

The BNP's only aim is to end the regime, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told yesterday's rally in Sylhet city.

Sheikh Hasina must resign, parliament must be dissolve and an interim caretaker government should take over, he said.

"Sylhet has a long history of struggle. This is where the Liberation War began. President Ziaur Rahman led the war from the front and Saifur Rahman fought to reform the economy. Your history is that of winning wars. And the war of reclaiming people's rights starts from this holy land now. We will win," he told the crowds on Sylhet Alia Madrasa premises.

Despite the transport strike in Moulvibazar, Sunamganj and Habiganj in the last few days and suspension of bus services in Sylhet since Friday morning, thousands of people from different districts arrived in the city on boats,

motorcycles and even on foot.

But the general public suffered on the roads in Sylhet due to the transport strike allegedly centring yesterday's BNP rally.

"The general people, farmers, workers, van pullers, boatmen -- they are not at peace. Oil price increased once again yesterday, sugar price increased, vegetable-salt-egg everything is pricier."

Hundreds of people had to take long walks on the streets devoid of vehicles or wait for hours to find transport. Only a few rickshaws could be seen occasionally.

On the Alia madrasa premises, large groups of BNP supporters arrived in the morning, joining the thousands who spent the night at

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Chhatra Dal man killed in 'police firing'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A local activist of Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal was allegedly shot dead by police in Bancharampur upazila of Brahmanbaria during a BNP procession yesterday.

Rafiqul Islam Nayan, 28, was killed in "police firing" during a clash between the law enforcers and BNP yesterday afternoon.

Sources at Dhaka Medical College Hospital said that he was shot at close-range with a shotgun and that he died of a pellet injury to the stomach. The sources said there was an entry wound in his belly but no exit wound.

BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi visiting the

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POWER, FUEL CRISES Things will be better from next month: PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People will not have to suffer much for electricity and fuel crises from next month, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday.

Mentioning that most of the developed countries were trying to save energy, she said, "We too had to suffer for some days. Inshallah, there will be no more suffering from next month."

Hasina, also the president of the ruling Awami League, expressed her optimism while addressing her party's advisory council meeting at the Gono Bhaban.

At the meeting, advisers suggested that AL President Sheikh Hasina evaluate the party's tested and senior leaders and give them priority in nominations and party posts, sources said. They advised issuing party tickets with the consensus of grassroots.

They said if acceptable and tested leaders got party tickets and posts, then the grassroots will unite.

At the meeting, former Rajshahi University vice chancellor Prof Abdul Khaleque alleged that infiltrators were getting party posts and tickets, which is embarrassing for dedicated leaders, said meeting insiders.

Council member Mohammad Shahabuddin Chuppu said the government should allow the BNP to stage their political programmes as it is their constitutional right. But if the party wants to create anarchy, the government should deal with the BNP with an iron hand, the sources quoted him as saying.

Another council member Mohammad Zamir alleged that some envoys stationed in Dhaka were speaking about the country's internal issues.

He suggested that the party should come up with stern replies to the envoys who are making such remarks.

Advisory Council member Mashiur Rahman told the meeting that rumours were being spread over the financial condition and foreign exchange reserves and suggested that Bangladesh Bank and the finance ministry should come up with authentic information to tackle the rumours, said meeting insiders.

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Chittagong Stock Exchange PLC
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