



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Enjoy World Cup screenings, responsibly

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Public screenings are a quintessential part of the Bangladeshi World Cup ritual. These screenings are entertaining and exciting for fans, but often cross boundaries, causing many problems in the process.

Public screenings are often organised in busy intersections or residential areas. As fans gather on the roads, the traffic comes to a standstill, putting commuters in an awkward position. The excessive noise produced from these screenings and the fans in attendance also causes a lot of problems for people living in those areas.

A few nuanced steps can go a long way towards solving these issues.

Match screenings should be done away from residential areas. As each broadcast attracts thousands of fans, organising them in big parks and open spaces makes more sense. Additionally, law enforcement presence can maintain law and order by ensuring fans don't vandalise flags, which is a sign of disrespect or harassing opponent fans. Such presence ensures a safe and congenial environment for public match screenings.

For smaller screenings, restaurants offer a potential solution. Fan groups can book restaurants in advance so they can enjoy the screenings without much hassle or being bothered by the cold weather.

If the screening is a big one, fans can hire convention centres instead of crowding the roads. It will be particularly effective for midnight games, as residents won't have to put up with the noise problems. It might keep the screening atmosphere relatively peaceful as well, as fans will be bound to follow the civic rules diligently. It negates the prospect of clashes between rival fans.

The enthusiasm regarding football is at an all-time high, especially among the youth. Naturally, they are the ones offering the feistiest support during these

screenings. University halls are also ideal for screenings, although they will be limited to the university's students and staff only. Nevertheless, the success of Daffodil International University's screening of Argentina-Mexico and Dhaka University's broadcast of Brazil-Switzerland, making waves in the world of football, shows the untapped potential of university halls as unofficial fan zones.

As far as fans are concerned, they have a big role to play in making the screenings a success. I have seen Brazil fans in my neighbourhood vandalising German flags after Germany lost to Japan. It is disrespectful to Germany and contradictory to the ethos of the World Cup.

Fans should be respectful of other people's choices and avoid defacing foreign flags and rival fans. They should respect each other's boundaries and enjoy themselves without creating any nuisance for others. Fireworks should be avoided as fans might get burned by stray fireworks. Even a minor miscalculation can be deadly.

Watching the games together, organisers should be mindful that the sound pollution is within acceptable limits. This doesn't imply fans can't celebrate goals or victories. Rather they should be careful and make sure they don't bang door-to-door or scream their lungs out after midnight. Many are fast asleep during these times. Besides, there might be sick or elderly people living in those areas as well, and loud noises can be detrimental to their health.

For avid fans, it's natural they will enjoy themselves to the fullest during public screenings, but they must ensure it's done sensibly and make sure civic boundaries are not crossed.

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The struggles of finding sportswear for women

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When I think about girls doing sports, I think about a ball tangled in a net. Or a shuttlecock taking flight, only to get caught up in a tree branch. What I'm referring to is nuisance – things that are not central to the game but end up becoming obstacles to reaching goals. Of all the countless obstacles between a woman and sports, one is her clothes. Especially when appropriate clothes are hard to find.

A quick walk around the first floor in Bashundhara City makes the gender disparity in sportswear pretty clear. Out of the 18 activewear shops, only 2, Puma and Lee Cooper, have clothing for women. In Lee Cooper, the women's section is a single small rack sitting quietly in the corner. The total number of items for women were exactly two dozen. The numbers were higher in the adjacent Puma outlet but still didn't match up to that of the men's section.

The trend remains the same for online marketplaces, too. In one particular website specialising in sportswear, the men's category showcased 71 products, while the female category had only 31. The ratio is worse on e-commerce platforms like Daraz that do not specialise in sportswear.

This makes it extremely difficult for women to find the items they're looking for. Dipra Marjan, who plays football, complained, "Till date I couldn't find a ready-made jersey that would fit me well – neither too long nor too short."

Given the constricted range of options available for women, they are compelled to make do with men's clothing. But having to cherry pick the smaller sizes from men's sections is challenging as those items were not made with a woman in mind.

Sportswear options are reduced even further for women who choose to wear the hijab. Finding loosely fitted trousers is a common struggle as most of the stores only feature fitted leggings and joggers. The length of sleeves and shirts also make covering up more difficult.

The struggle of finding even the most basic items certainly lowers a woman's expectations. But a Bangladeshi brand named Dour took me by surprise. On their website, they listed 134 items of activewear for women, which included their sports hijab. SheActive is another brand that has a decent collection of sportswear for women. But both brands are outliers and their products also come with limitations.

Regarding the design of the hijabs, Nusrat Jahan Irina, a student of North South University, said, "I wouldn't opt for any of them as they simply are not good looking enough." Dipra Marjan stated similar reasons for not opting for a sports hijab. These challenges have forced women to come up with their own creative solutions. Irina goes for oversized men's T-shirts with sleeves underneath to cover her arms. Dipra opts for a full-sleeved inner-wear underneath her jersey.

The availability of basic amenities is a minimal requirement to build an environment conducive to female sports. Evidently, it's not a level playing field, if women are lucky to get a playing field at all. From having the fields occupied with only males to racks in sports shops dedicated to the same, women constantly have a higher hurdle to cross.

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PHOTO: DOUR