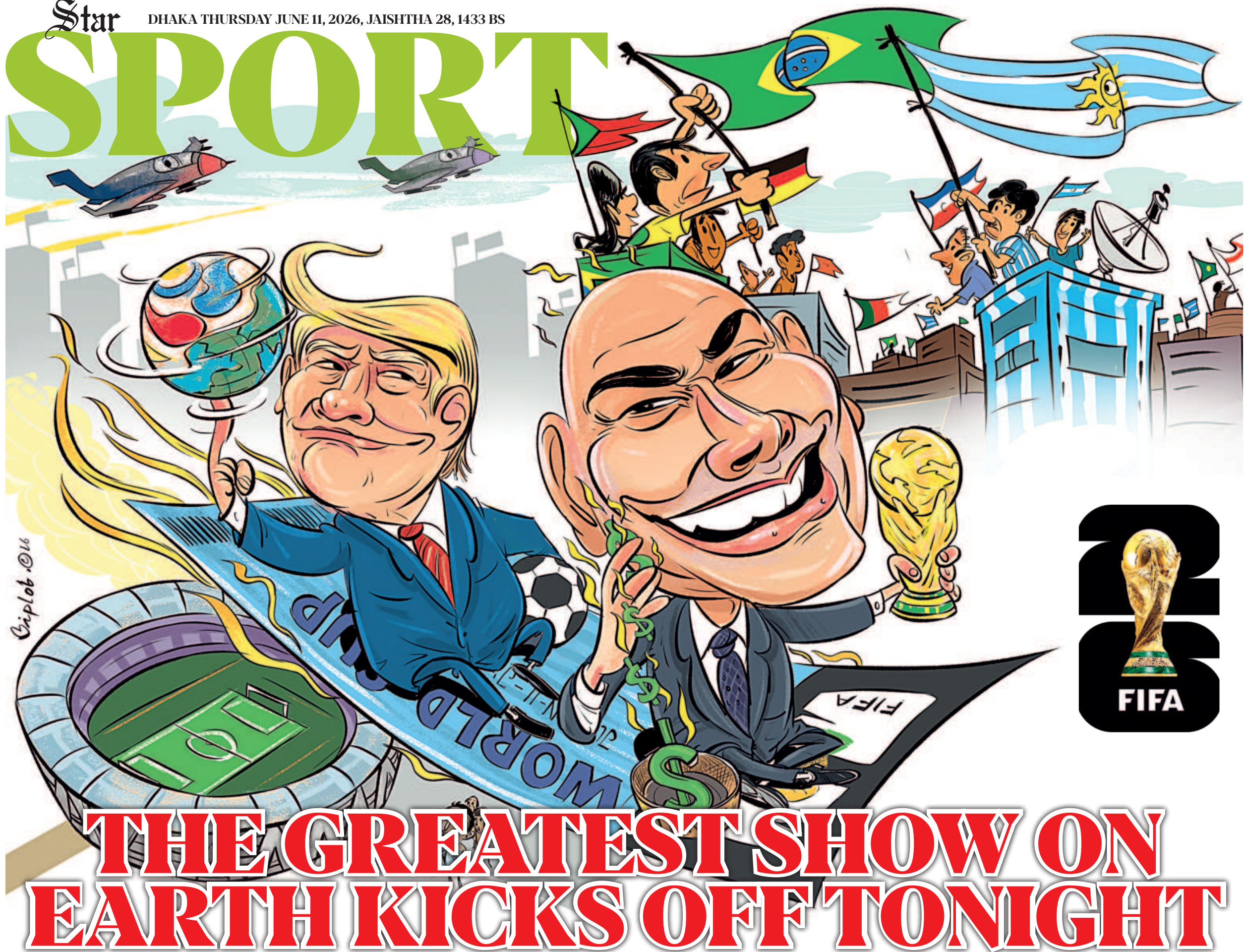




STAR SPORTS DESK

The countdown is over. Football's grandest spectacle begins tonight as the FIFA World Cup 2026 kicks off across Mexico, the United States and Canada.

The 23rd edition of the tournament promises to be the biggest and most ambitious World Cup ever staged.

For the first time, 48 teams will compete, expanding the field from 32 nations and creating opportunities for several debutants.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has championed the expansion as a way of giving "more chances for more teams," though critics argue

The tournament opens in Mexico City with Mexico facing South Africa, accompanied by a star-studded opening ceremony featuring performers including J Balvin, Mana and other international artists. Separate celebrations will also take place in the US and Canada.

Off the pitch, the World Cup arrives amid several major talking points. FIFA has faced criticism over soaring ticket prices, with supporters' groups accusing the governing body of making the tournament less accessible to ordinary fans.

Political tensions have also surfaced, with some Iranian officials denied visas ahead of the

and sports-related industries across the host nations.

For fans, this World Cup carries added emotional significance as it is likely to be the final World Cup appearance for Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, two icons who have defined an era of the game.

Yet while one chapter nears its conclusion, another is about to begin.

New stars will emerge, new stories will be told, unforgettable moments will be created, and one nation will ultimately lift football's most coveted trophy.

As the world comes together once again for the beautiful game, the 2026 World Cup promises not only

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

📅 DATES

June 11 – July 19, 2026 (June 12 – July 20 in Bangladesh)

🌍 HOSTS

United States, Canada, and Mexico; first World Cup hosted by three nations.

🏆 BIGGEST WORLD CUP EVER

Expanded from 32 to 48 teams.

🏟️ MATCHES

Record 104 games across 16 host cities.

🏆 EDITION

23rd FIFA World Cup.
Historic milestone: Mexico becomes the first country to host the World Cup three times (1970, 1986, 2026).

🌍 FOUR NATIONS

MAKING THEIR WORLD CUP DEBUT
Curacao, Uzbekistan, Cape Verde, Jordan

🏟️ TOURNAMENT FORMAT

12 groups. Group winners and runners-up (24 teams) + 8 best third-placed teams advance to the Round of 32. Finalists and semifinalists will play a maximum of 8 matches.

🌏 NINE TEAMS FROM ASIA

Australia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Uzbekistan, Iraq.

🌍 EIGHT TEAMS FROM ARAB NATIONS

Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iraq.

🇧🇷 ONLY NATION TO APPEAR IN EVERY WORLD CUP

Brazil

🏆 MOST WORLD CUP TITLES

Brazil (5)

🏆 ALL-TIME TOP SCORER

Miroslav Klose (16 goals)

that a larger tournament could reduce the high-stakes drama that has traditionally defined the World Cup.

Spanning 39 days from June 11 to July 19, the competition will feature a record 104 matches across three host nations.

competition despite the team's participation.

Economically, the event is expected to generate enormous benefits. FIFA estimates the tournament could contribute around USD 41 billion to global GDP, boosting tourism, retail, hospitality

to celebrate football's rich history, but also to shape its future.

While Bangladesh will not be among the 48 nations competing on football's biggest stage, millions of passionate supporters across the country will once again live every moment of the tournament.

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