



Japan's Emperor Akihito (L) and Empress Michiko wave to the crowd after making the opening declaration at Hiroshima Stadium yesterday. — AFP photo

Colourful ceremony marks 12th Asiad opening

Hiroshima's paeon for peace

HIROSHIMA, Oct 2: The city reduced to rubble by an atomic bomb nearly 50 years ago launched one of Asia's largest-ever sporting events Sunday with a powerful plea for world peace, reports AP.

Japanese Emperor Akihito declared the 12th Asian Games open at 2:39 pm (0539 GMT) after a procession of participants into Hiroshima's new 50,000-seat stadium.

Nearly 5,000 athletes from 42 nations and territories will be competing over the next two weeks for a total of 337 gold medals in 34 sports. China, overwhelming victor at the last Asiad, is certain to reap the largest medal harvest.

The opening festivities began with an upbeat concert by young singers from four Asian nations and ended with a spectacle of light and dance depicting mankind moving from despair toward hope and peace.

Figures wearing dark mantles, suffering from repeated ordeals, were supplanted by young women in bright attire on a field splashed with glitter and light. A joyous, mass dance ended the 4 1/2-hour ceremony.

In one of the opening speeches, Hironoshin Furuhashi, president of the organizing committee, said he hoped the Games theme of Asian harmony would help create "an attractive and dynamic Asia for the 21st century" and that Hiroshima's "message for the pursuit of peace will be heard throughout Asia and all the world."

Both the emblem and mascots of the Games are variations on the dove of peace, while the torch for lighting the Games flame was started from both the flame of the 1990 Games in Beijing and from the "Flame of Peace" in a Hiroshima park dedicated to the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Helicopters fluttered overhead and security on the ground was tight. Radical leftists, who oppose Japan's monarchy, had threatened to disrupt the opening ceremony, and on Saturday dozens of radicals demonstrated against the emperor's visit to Europe, due to begin after Sunday's ceremonies.

The emperor's late father, Hirohito, was the symbolic leader of Japan during World War II and announced the nation's surrender days after the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japanese cities in August 1945.

The first all but obliterated

Hiroshima, leaving some 140,000 dead. But the city has since been rebuilt into one of Japan's loveliest, and views the Games as proof of its rebirth.

The Hiroshima Games are the biggest in the Asiad's 43-year history. North Korea, under international pressure for

allegedly trying to develop nuclear weapons, is the only eligible country not at the Hiroshima Games. The roster of nations is also joined for the first time by five former Soviet republics in central

Asia, while war-torn Cambodia is returning after a 20-year absence.

The only significant political shadow hanging over the Games is a China-Taiwan controversy over the presence here of Taiwan Vice premier Hsu Li-Teh.

After earlier threatening to boycott the Games if Taiwan president Lee Teng-Hui came, China still protested strongly over Hsu's visit. China claims he is at the Games for political maneuvering against Beijing and should have been denied entry by Japan, which has diplomatic relations with China but not with Taiwan.

Taiwan says Hsu is here to learn from Taiwan's bid to become the Games host in 2002, and that Beijing is the one injecting politics into sports. Beijing does not object to the presence of Taiwan's team, which uses the name "Chinese Taipei" rather than Taiwan.

With a number of world record holders in swimming and track and field and strong competitors in a dozen other sports, China is again expected to dominate Asia's version of the Olympics.

In the 1990 Games, China won 183 gold medals, followed by South Korea with 54 and Japan with 38.

China has sent 570 athletes to Hiroshima, about the same number as South Korea but fewer than the host team's 680 athletes.

The ceremony, seen by

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44,000 spectators in warm autumn weather, opened with a peace concert by pop singers Ryu Fan and Wei Wei of China, GOONGNang of Thailand and Yukihide Takekawa of Japan. The Philippine group Smokey Mountain belted out the song "We Can Change the World" while a brass band played Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

This was followed by a colourful depiction of winds and bridges linking the people of Asia, and by 676 children cavorting with PoPo and CuCu, the Games mascots.

Another spectacle portrayed storms, serenity and contrasting seasonal moods of the Seto Inland Sea, which borders Hiroshima, and climaxed with a march of samurai warriors to the throb of 105 drums.

The entry march of the teams featured the flowing robes of the Arab world, kilts of the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan and the kimonos of the Japanese women who carried the country name placards of all but the Iranian team.

Apparently in keeping with the wishes of the fundamentalist Moslem nation, a male marched in front of the Iranians with the placard.

Some of the warmest applause went to Cambodia, China, Taiwan, host Japan and the one-man Palestinian team.

ASIAN GAMES NOTEBOOK

HIROSHIMA, Oct 2: The debut of five former Soviet republics at the Asian Games has considerably boosted the number of participants in Hiroshima, reports AP.

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have sent more than 800 competitors to the Games and expect to be in contention for several gold medals.

Kazakhstan, which has sent a delegation of 352 has the biggest representation and hopes to win 100 medals, while Uzbekistan has set itself a target of at least 50.

Anatoly Kulnazarov, head of the Kazakhstan delegation, has predicted his team will finish fourth in the final medal standings behind China, Japan and South Korea.

Uzbekistan made a great start on Saturday when they defeated Saudi Arabia 4-1 in their opening game of the soccer tournament.

BANGLADESH BONUS

Any competitor from Bangladesh winning a gold medal at the Asian Games will be rewarded with a \$25,000 cash bonus and a house by the nation's government, the official newspaper of the Games reported Sunday.

Asiad News said the offer stands for any of the 60 Bangladesh athletes who will compete in eight of 34 events at the Games.

Bangladesh participated in the Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada, last month but failed to win a medal.

THAI PROGRESS

Thailand will host the 1998 Asian Games in Bangkok, the fourth time the Asiad will be held in the Thai capital.

Maj Gen Charouk Arirachakaran, secretary-general of the Olympic Committee of Thailand, said Sunday the local organising committee already is well advanced in its preparations.

The South Korean port city of Pusan is competing with Taipei, Taiwan, and Jakarta, Indonesia, for the right to be the 2002 Games host.

FILIPINO BONDING

The seven members of the Philippines boxing team are easy to spot in the Athletes' Village — they all shaved their heads before flying out of Manila.

"We did it to show that we are united and to win the fight in Hiroshima," said bantamweight Anthony Igusquisa. The boxers have adopted the slogan: "Go, Kalbo (shaved head), Gold."



A bird's eye view of the opening ceremony of the 12th Asian Games in Hiroshima yesterday. Some 7,800 students, musicians and dancers took part in the ceremonial. — AFP photo

Remembrance of war

HIROSHIMA, Oct 2: Watching the opening ceremony of the Asian Games from one of the best seats in the stadium on Sunday was a wheelchair-bound Iranian who once dreamed of being present as a basketball player, reports Reuter.

An exploding mine in 1980 in the war against Iraq blew away both the legs of Mehrdad Agin and cut short his promising sports career.

"My first thought when I woke up in hospital was that I could never play basketball again," the 33-year-old said as he gazed at athletes marching into the stadium from 42 nations.

"But I now play wheelchair basketball," he said, joking his team would be a challenge for the Dream Team of US players led by Michael Jordan which decimated the opposition at the 1992 Olympics at Barcelona.

"But remember that they are professionals," he said.

Agin, who joined the revolutionary guards in Islamic fervour, fished out of his pocket a photograph of his two young daughters.

He said the Iranian government paid him a generous monthly allowance for his war wounds as it did for his friend beside him at the Games, Morad Ali Shirany, who was an international wrestler before he lost a leg in the war.

Agin runs a private publishing company in Tehran and visits every Asian Games.

He said his anger against Iraq has now been diluted by the passing of time.

He even wished they were back after their expulsion from the last Games at Beijing in 1990 for invading Kuwait, another Games participant.

"I have nothing against the people, only the government," he said.

Agin said he was particularly keen to come to Hiroshima because of its experiences with war.

"All war is horrible," the bearded Agin said, referring to the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima at the end of World War Two.

Robinson stuns McKenzie

CARDIFF, Wales, Oct 2: Steve Robinson stunned Duke McKenzie with a left hook to the ribs in the ninth round to score a knockout and hold to his World Boxing Organization featherweight title Saturday and stop his opponent winning a fourth title at different weights, reports AP.

The short left had McKenzie sinking to the floor 10 seconds from the end of the round just as the challenger looked like getting on top of the fight at Cardiff Ice Rink.

McKenzie, former holder of world titles at featherweight, bantamweight and super-bantamweight, was outpunched in the early stages by the Welshman, making his fourth defense, but appeared to be getting on top at the time of the knockdown.

The two fighters were slugging it out in the center of the ring when Robinson (125-10, 56.48 kilos) produced a short left that had McKenzie (125 pounds, 56.25 kilos) sagging to the floor.

The London-born fighter failed to make the count.

Robinson now is 19-9-1 and McKenzie is 36-5-0.

Eltingh's 2nd ATP title

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 2: Jacco Eltingh of the Netherlands picked up his second ATP title of the year when he defeated Andrei Olhovskiy of Russia 7-6 (7-1), 2-6, 6-4 in the final of the dollar 400,000 Malaysian Open on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Eltingh, whose first ATP success this year was when he won the OTB International Open Tennis at the end of August in Schenectady, New York, boosted his bank balance by dollar 54,000 on Sunday while Olhovskiy collected dollars 31,800.

The Dutchman, ranked 39th, in the world and seeded second, had problems with his service in the opening set but gradually found the pace and direction he needed to recover before dominating the tiebreak 7-1.

But Olhovskiy recovered from that setback to take the second set 6-2, setting up the decider.

The decisive break in the third set came in the seventh game when the 24-year-old Dutchman went 4-3 ahead. He then held his own service to take a 5-3 lead before eventually taking the third set 6-4.

Eltingh admitted afterwards: "I had some problems with my serve. It was a bad second set but I took my chances well in the final set. It's been a tough week and it's nice to win the title at the end of it."

World, Fu Mingxia's oyster



HIROSHIMA, Oct 2: With two world championships and an Olympic gold to her name, Fu Mingxia's place in the annals of diving already is assured, reports AP.

And she's only just turned 16.

Fu was 12 when she won her first world championship. She took gold a year later at the 1992 Olympics and last month retained her world title with a stunning final dive.

"Even though I'm not very old, I've been diving for more than 10 years," she said in an interview. "You could say I'm a veteran."

But at the 12th Asian Games opening Sunday, Fu will have a reminder of what it's like to be a beginner. Her coach, Xu Yiming, is making her dive in the 3-metre springboard competition, not the 10-metre platform where she won her titles.

"Even though she's not used to it, she still has to dive," Xu said. "I want to watch her, see how she performs."

Xu said he hopes to enter Fu in both the 3-metre and 10-metre events at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, upon which Xu has focused his energies since his team dominated in Barcelona two years ago.

"The whole world pays a lot of attention to the Olympics, even the American government," he said. "My biggest responsibility is the Olympics."

Xu said he is using the Oct 2-16 Asian Games as training for Atlanta, entering a team that mixes stars like Tan Shuping, the 3-metre springboard women's world champion, with lesser known divers who need more experience in international competition.

The youngest is Wang Rui, an eager-faced, 13-year-old

whom Xu discovered when she was 8. Wang won on the 10-metre platform at China's national games last year and is replacing Fu in that event in Hiroshima.



FU MINGXIA

Every year, Xu selects a group of children, whom he calls "Seedlings," for his rigorous training regimen, developed over more than 20 years with the Chinese national team.

"They are my building materials — kids who are unskilled but who I think have potential," he said.

At a training centre in Beijing, Xu gradually weeds out those who don't make the grade, and many don't. A typical day begins with exercises at dawn and a morning of classes, followed by 4-5 hours in the pool, and more when

school's out.

Xu says it's necessary for breeding champions. He denied he is depriving the kids of their childhood and says he gets letters daily from children begging to join his team.

"Their lives are much more interesting than a normal kid's," he said. "When they think back, they will feel proud to have represented their country."

They also are likely to be richer. China rewards its champions well and companies often offer them lucrative advertising contracts.

Xu spends much of his time teaching the divers how to cope with the pressures of competition.

During training sessions, Xu bangs cymbals, plays tape recordings of crowd noises, and hurls buckets of water at his divers to teach them to ignore distractions, he said. He also teaches them not to look at the scoreboard until after their final dive.

"I tell them that when they compete, they must compete against themselves," he said.

The fruits of Xu's training are evident in Fu, who looks much more mature than her 16 years.

But Fu did not ooze confidence about her chances in the 3-metre board competition: "I'm a newcomer, this is just training," she said.

For dear doves' sake

HIROSHIMA, Oct 2: Asian Games organisers saved the doves released at Sunday's opening ceremony from a grilling, reports AP.

Spectators thought the flame had gone out when women's basketball player Aki Ichijo and steeplechaser Yasunori Uchitomi lowered their torches into the steel bowl.

But Shigeki Saegusa, the ceremony's editorial director, said the eight second delay before the flames shot into the air was deliberate.

"There was no technical hitch. We didn't want to put the birds at risk," he said. "We had learnt the lesson from Seoul."

Many of the doves at the 1988 Seoul Olympics signed their feathers when they wheeled over the flame.

Chief of Nepal's delegation dies

HIROSHIMA, Oct 2: The chief of Nepal's delegation to the Asian Games died shortly after the Games opening ceremonies Sunday, organisers said, reports AP.

Nareesh Kumar Adhikari, 46, was taken from the Athletes Village to a nearby hospital after suffering breathing difficulties, said Shuso Nomura, head of the Games medical department.

A statement issued by the Games' organisers said Adhikari was pronounced dead at 3:40 pm (0640 GMT). It said he was on his way to the opening ceremonies when he experienced the breathing difficulties.

He was taken back to the village, where he collapsed, and then to the Hiroshima Municipal Asa Hospital, where he died.

The cause of death was not immediately known.

Adhikari headed Nepal's 70-member delegation to the Games, Asia's version of the Olympics.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Mid-March honoree
6 Gift-wrap feature
9 You can't stand to have one
12 Chihuahua
13 Thurman of "Henry & June"
14 Spring-steen's birthplace
15 Calvin's Hobbes, e.g.
16 Potential steel
18 Club fellow
20 Eat in style
21 Yon maiden
23 Moray, for one
24 Stashes
25 Madonna's ex
27 Ardent lover
29 Caesar's nonpraiser
31 Street wall
35 Famed operatic soprano

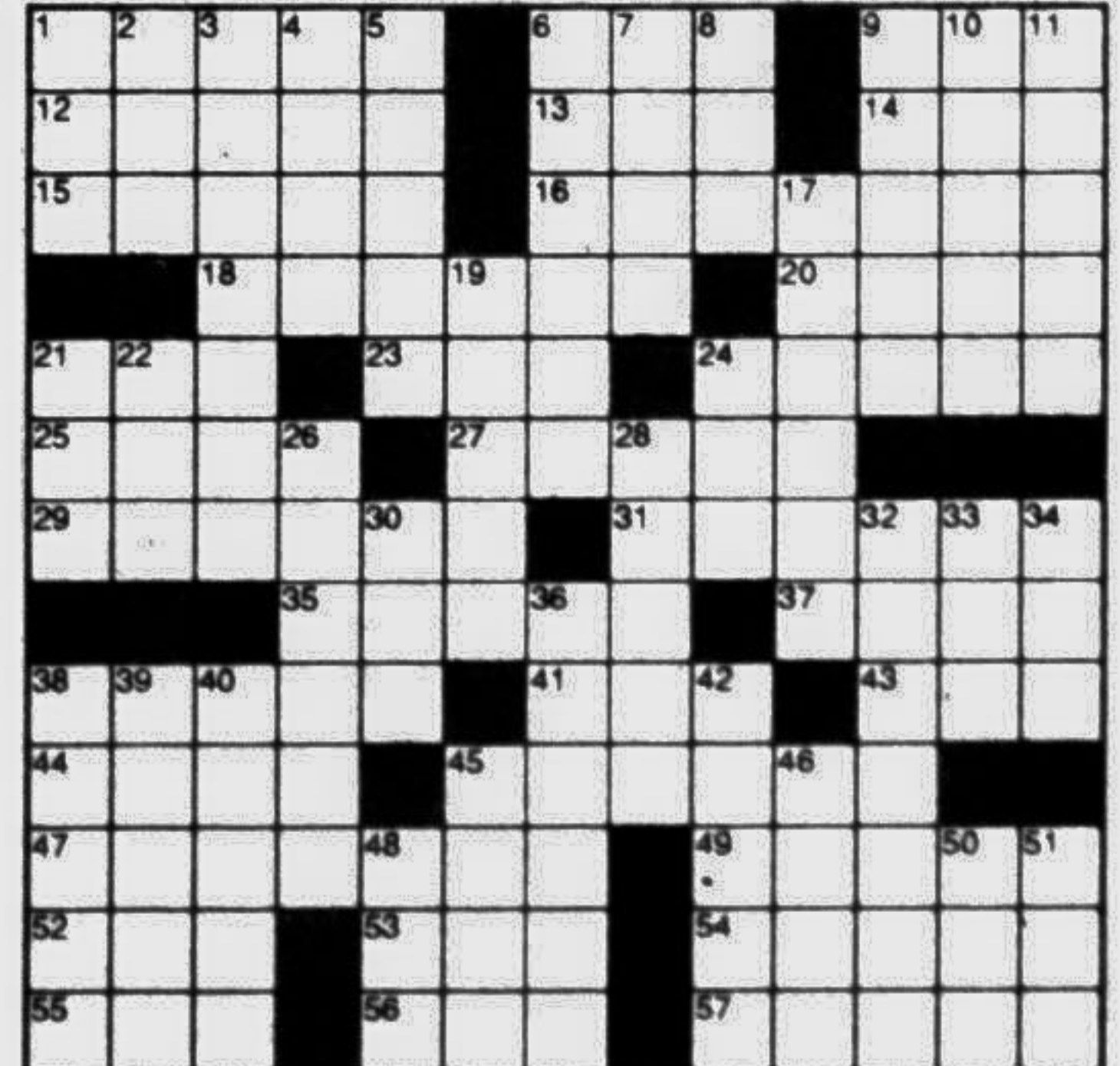
37 Ox link
38 Menotti lad
41 Succor stand
44 One's performance
45 Third-party arrangement
47 Nonsense flora
49 Collegiate period
53 The old West?
54 African terrain
55 Spot

56 Kramden's concern
57 Over DOWN
1 Perched Pa.
nuclear accident site
3 Color
4 "The Morning Watch" writer
5 Leader of the Mel-Tones
6 Elvis' hometown
7 Arab bigwig
8 Choke

9 Startling
10 Unanimously
11 Glazier's supply
17 Utter foolishness
19 Aviator Markham
21 Hot tub
22 Chick's mom
24 The ship
26 Absentee
28 Kern field
30 Zlich
32 Very excited
33 Mamie's man
34 Profit
36 Cilia
38 Tray contents
39 Roger or Dudley
40 Seaweed
42 Impetus
45 Jacob's twin
46 Micro-wave abbr.
48 Diplomat: abbr.
50 Dutch commune
51 Normal: abbr.

Solution time: 26 mins.

BARIS GIG SMOG
ALLOT ROC HOHO
NEAR ENO INTO
DEMEAN WANTON
ADO PER
PUCK BOARDERS
ISA LIC ACE
PANATELA FLAX
BIO PART
CHERRY UNITAS
HARM ALL DOTE
OKRA PEC AGOG
WEAN SAO YAMS



CRYPTOQUIP

G U W W J D G Q N Q C A Z
R T N D J M W J J D P G D Q Y R N Z
A D M U G T W P R O O W J R
A R Y Q C C W L L Q N J F

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: LOCAL TELEPHONE OPERATOR HAS CONNECTIONS.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: J equals D

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.