

# Under starter's orders as the air clears

Bob Holmes writes from Kuala Lumpur

After a series of scares over smoke haze, financial cutbacks and water shortages, Malaysia is ready to play host to a Commonwealth Games that it has said will be the "biggest and best". Gemini News Service watches the event reach the home straight.

WHEN Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad proclaims "let the Games begin" in Kuala Lumpur's magnificent 100,000-seat stadium, it will come as a considerable relief that Asia's first Commonwealth Games has made it to the starting blocks.

The 16th Games has had to contend with a trimmed-down budget in the wake of the region's economic crisis, a clash with another major athletics event, a water crisis and local indifference.

Most dramatic of all, smog from forest fires in neighbouring Indonesia threatened to cast a pall over the event.

Film and photographs of the blanket of smoke were seen around the world last year.

The sight of Malaysian school children wearing masks was enough for many leading athletes to express doubts about the wisdom of competing if the Games were held in such conditions. There were rumours of a mass no-show and even a switch of venues, with Australia allegedly on standby.

Happily, the fears appear unfounded. The skies over Malaysia have been clear for months and forecasters say the haze is unlikely to return. Nevertheless, the scare damaged confidence, which the Games organisers have been struggling to shore up ever since.

Their efforts have not been helped by the trimming of the Games' budget and government cutbacks on a number of major infrastructure projects.

Many of the projects scheduled for completion before the event have been abandoned or put on hold, leaving eyesores to spoil Kuala Lumpur's "garden city" image.

The saddest reminders of unfulfilled dreams are the concrete stumps of the ambitious People-Mover system, an adjunct of the Light Rail Transit network designed to deal with Kuala Lumpur's growing traffic congestion. Though the People-Mover will be completed one day, construction was halted when it was realised it would not be ready for the Games.

Fortunately, when the economic downturn hit Malaysia, most of the Games' venues were at least 80 per cent complete. So, too, was the new airport, which opened in July with far fewer teething troubles than Hong Kong's.

Even the second line of the Light Rail Transit system will open before the Games, together

with a dedicated line linking the main Games complex with the city centre.

Earlier this year a dry spell meant about 1.5 million city residents had to endure rationing, with water available only on alternate days or at certain times of the day. But rain and reorganisation have improved matters, and the government has guaranteed that the Games will not be affected.

Now the eyesores are being camouflaged by landscaping and building beautification work. In any case, Kuala Lumpur need not be unduly concerned about its appearance; it might not look as good as the government hoped, but most of the expected 65,000 overseas visitors will be impressed anyway. The architecture is still impressive and the city leafy enough to take most people's breath away.

Ironically, it is the locals that organisers need to impress. With more than 70 per cent of tickets unsold, the Games has failed to generate much excitement.

The sales campaign has been lacklustre. People complain that they do not know where to buy tickets. The problem is now being addressed, but it may be too late to guarantee a full house.

Uncertainties over the participation of big names such as Olympic 100m champion Donovan Bailey have not helped.

Malaysia moved the athletics programme back a couple of days to avoid a clash with the Athletics World Cup in South Africa on 11-13 September — which takes precedence for many stars — and gave athletes a longer period of acclimatisation. But it was not enough for the Canadian runner, who said he was dropping out because he "needed a break".

Malaysia has built a reputation for hosting sporting events with friendliness and flair, but it has never undertaken anything of this magnitude. At times the organisation has appeared to be creaking, with transport the biggest worry.

A pre-Games dry run in July revealed a few glitches, including leaking roofs, visiting athletes being left unattended at the airport and poor media relations.

"All of these will be dealt with," insists Sports Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, who has held the event together through all the difficulties.

"Nothing," he says, "will be allowed to mar the Games," and he says it repeatedly. You know he means it.

Dr Mahathir's words, when Malaysia was awarded the Games, are also worth recalling.

"I see it as an important and major step in helping us realise the nation's aspirations of becoming fully developed by 2020." He has since had to revise his target, but the desire to put

World No 1 Martina Hingis of Switzerland is unhappy after losing a point in her Canadian Open semifinal against Monica Seles on Aug 22. Seles won 4-6, 6-3, 6-2.

— AP/UNB photo

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## The growing Games

**CANADA**  
I - 1930 Hamilton  
11 countries 400 competitors  
V - 1954 Vancouver  
24 countries 662 competitors  
XI - 1978 Edmonton  
48 countries 1,500 competitors  
XV - 1994 Victoria  
67 countries 3,000 competitors

**BRITAIN**  
II - 1934 London  
16 countries 500 competitors  
VI - 1958 Cardiff  
35 countries 1,130 competitors  
IX - 1970 Edinburgh  
42 countries 1,383 competitors  
XIII - 1986 Edinburgh  
20 countries

**MALAYSIA**  
XVI - 1998 Kuala Lumpur  
70 countries 4,200 competitors

**JAMAICA**  
VIII - 1966 Kingston  
34 countries 1,050 competitors

**AUSTRALIA**  
III - 1938 Sydney  
15 countries 464 competitors  
VII - 1962 Perth  
35 countries 863 competitors  
XII - 1982 Brisbane  
47 countries 2,143 competitors

**NEW ZEALAND**  
IV - 1950 Auckland  
12 countries 590 competitors  
X - 1974 Christchurch  
38 countries 1,276 competitors  
XIV - 1990 Auckland  
57 countries 2,900 competitors

**1911 London:**  
First Empire Sports - forerunner of the Commonwealth Games.  
Five events only.

\*Affected by South Africa boycott

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## Inter-college h'ball from today

The Power inter-college handball tournament '98 begins today at the Mirpur Shaheed Suhrawardy National Indoor Stadium, reports UNB.

State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader will inaugurate the 11-day meet, organised by Bangladesh Handball Federation.

Notre Dame College will take on BAF Shaheen College in the opener at 5 pm.

Twelve teams, split into four groups, will take part in the tournament, initially on league basis. Later, the group champions will play in the semifinals, billed for September 1.

The final and the third place-deciding match will be held on Sept 4.

All the matches will be held at the Outer Stadium handball ground excepting the inaugural, third place-deciding and final matches which will be held at the Mirpur Shaheed Suhrawardy National Indoor Stadium to avoid rain.

### GROUPINGS

Group A: Notre Dame College, BAF Shaheen College, and Shaheed Ramtazuddin School and College.

Group B: Rifles School and College, Shaheed Suhrawardy Govt College, and Dania College.

Group C: Dhaka Polytechnic Institute, Mirpur College, and RK Chowdhury Degree College.

Group D: BCIC College, Tumkur Govt College, and New Model Degree College.

## No play on Day 2

Star Sport Monitor

Rain washed out play on the second day of the three-day match between Hampshire and Sri Lanka at Southampton on Sunday.

Hampshire declared at their overnight rest for eight.

On Saturday, a solid 156 from White and a half-century by Kendall helped the hosts build a handsome total after Sanath Jayasuriya picked up three wickets in a 14-over spell that cost 42 runs.

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the opening day of a three-day match between Hampshire and Sri Lanka on Saturday:

**HAMPSHIRE:** First innings

White c Tillekeratne b Arnold 156

Kenway lbw b Wickramasinghe 39

Kendall c Jayawardene 58

b Wickramasinghe 39

Smith run out 11

Keesh b Jayasuriya 3

Masarenhas b Jayasuriya 0

James c Jayawardene 6

Villavarayan 11

Garaway c Hathurusinghe 19

b Jayasuriya 35

Morris not out 0

Maru not out 0

Extras (lb-2, lb-3, nb-10) 15

Total (for eight wickets) 347

Fall of wickets: 1-77; 2-195; 3-208; 4-213; 5-213; 6-232; 7-291; 8-343

To bat: S Francis

Bowler: (to date) O M R W

Pushpakumara 4 0 13 0

Wickramasinghe 21 6 53 2

Villavarayan 21 5 54 1

Hathurusinghe 11 2 39 0

Bandarathilleke 10 2 28 0

Chandana 11 1 62 0

Jayasuriya 14 3 42 3

Jayawardene 7 1 37 0

Arnold 4 2 4 1

Tillekeratne 2 0 10 0

## Fantastic Frankie!

DAKAR, Aug 23: World and Olympic silver medalist Frankie Fredericks produced the most dominant performance of the African Championships here on Saturday by coasting to the 200 metres title, reports AFP.

The Namibian despite the lack of opposition, ran 19.99 second to take the gold in the second fastest time of the year.

Only Ato Boldon, the world champion from Trinidad and Tobago, has run faster this year.

— AP/UNB photo



American Andre Agassi makes a forehand return in his RCA Championships semifinal against Ramon Delgado of Paraguay on Aug 22.

— AP/UNB photo

## It's Andre against Alex



INDIANAPOLIS,

Aug 23: After posting two-set victories over their respective foes in Saturday's semi-

final round, Andre Agassi and Alex Corretja predicted a tight battle in Sunday's final of the RCA Championships, reports AP.

Agassi, the fifth seed, advanced with a 7-6 (8-6), 6-3 victory over Paraguay's Ramon Delgado. Corretja, the sixth seed from Spain, eliminated 15th-seeded Todd Martin 6-2, 7-6 (7-4).

Their respective victories set up what promises to be an outstanding serve-and-volley match between players who are not afraid to run. Agassi has won the four previous matches with Corretja, including a 5-7, 6-3, 5-7, 6-0, 6-2 victory in the 1995 US Open.

"Alex hits the ball with heavy topspin and moves like a gazelle," Agassi said. "But if I play well, if I execute, I should

be all right."

Corretja echoed those sentiments, but not necessarily in Agassi's favour.

"I think he's on fire; he's been playing really well during the whole summer season," Corretja said of Agassi, who has won 19 of his last 21 matches. "But in the same boat, I think I will have a good chance if I keep concentrating on my game."

Agassi was able to keep Delgado away from the net in the second set after Delgado rushed the net 25 times in the first set.

"He was establishing to me that if he does get in control of the point, he's going to be willing to finish it off," Agassi said. "It just looked like he ran a little bit out of gas at the middle of the second set."

"Once he started to shift down a gear, then I was managing to control some points, and he wasn't in position to come in as much."

Agassi got the boost he needed in the first set. Trailing 3-2, he double-faulted to fall

behind love-40 in the sixth game. With the crowd cheering him on, Agassi came back to win after going to deuce three times. He held serve again in the 12th game after falling behind 40-15.

"A lot of these matches do boil down to a few crucial moments," Agassi said. "It's just about playing well at the right time."

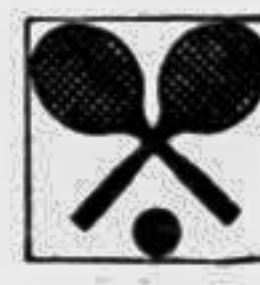
Delgado agreed, saying, "I had my chances, but he played unbelievably points when he was down."

Corretja used a strong baseline game to deny Martin's play at the net.

"In the first set, I just played perfect tennis," Corretja said. "Once I equalized again in the second set at 4-all, I just saw myself in good shape to just finish the match in two sets."

"He made it real difficult for me to win points on my serve all day," Martin said. "Just not being real sharp, came back to haunt me."

## Seles surprises Hingis



MONTREAL, Aug

23: Fifth seed Monica Seles continued her remarkable run in Canada by rebo-

unding to upset top seed Martina Hingis and reach the final of the Canadian Open for the fourth consecutive year, reports Reuters.

The three-time defending champion lifted her level of play in the second set to pull out a 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 victory over the Swiss world number one.

"I became a little more intense and just went for my shots a little bit more and they went in today," said Seles, who will go for her fourth straight Canadian Open title today.

### Women's cricket

Aussies assume control

WORCESTER, Aug 23: Two century stands put Australia in control of the third cricket Ashes Test Saturday, the visitors reaching 279 for one in reply to England's modest 243 all out with two days to go, reports AP.

Belinda Clark and Lisa Keightley put on 127 for the first wicket, and Clark and Karen Rolton compiled 152 for the second.

Clark scored her second Test century from 160 balls with 10 boundaries and at stumps she had moved through to her best at this level — 128 not out.

Rolton, who was dropped on five and 77, was not out 88 at the close.

Against third seed Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in a rematch of this year's French Open final, won by the Spaniard.

Sanchez-Vicario needed two hours and 23 minutes to overcome second seed Jana Novotna 4-6, 7-6 (7-4), 6-2.

Seles looked to be in trouble after dropping the first set. But from 3-1 in the second set, Seles turned up the heat and never looked back.

"She knew it was not over and she can raise her level," Hingis said of Seles. "Some players have trouble to do that, but not her."

"I was trying but she would always have a better answer," added Hingis, who saw her three months title drought extended.

"Martina played flawless tennis in the first set, Seles said.

"I lost the first set on one break and then I won the second on one break. I just tried to hang in there and then my serve started getting better," added Seles. "That definitely helped me win today."

A couple of old-timers — Sanchez-Vicario, 26, and Novotna, 29 — put on a god show in the late semifinal in which the Czech Wimbledon champion suffered something of a meltdown in a contentious second-set tie-break.

Novotna had rallied from a 1-4 deficit in the second set and took the first point of the tie-break before dropping the next five.

It was a horrible tie-break, said Novotna, who frequently argued line calls with Canadian chair umpire George Rutschiff during the second set decider.

Novotna received a warnings

at the end of the set for making an obscene gesture to Reuters.

"There were bad calls one after another. Novotna complained. 'From then on I couldn't trust the umpire any more and it broke my concentration. It's tough to focus if you have to argue with the umpire in between (points).'"

## Contiguglia replaces Rothenberg

WALEA, Maui, Aug 23 (Reuters/Internet): Dr Robert Contiguglia, a kidney specialist from Denver, was elected to a four-year term as president of the US Soccer Federation at its annual general meeting at this Hawaiian resort town on Saturday.

Contiguglia, 56, succeeds Alan Rothenberg, who served a pair of four-year terms in which he presided over a successful World Cup in the United States in 1994 and the founding of Major League Soccer, the US premier league, two years later.

Under USSF bylaws, no one can serve as president for more than two terms.

Contiguglia received 425 votes (57.6 per cent of the ballots cast) to defeat Larry Monaco, who had been the USSF executive vice president. Monaco garnered 313 votes (42.4 per cent).

## The Daily Star TV Guide

**Monday 24th August**  
(All programmes are in local time but subject to last minute change.)