

Asiad hockey India upstage S Koreans

BANGKOK, Dec 14: India averted an explosive semifinal clash against arch-rivals Pakistan with a stunning 2-1 upset over defending champions South Korea in the Asian Games men's hockey here today, reports AFP.

The fired-up Indians scored both goals in a brilliant four-minute burst before the interval through Balbir Singh Dhillon and Mukesh Kumar.

The Koreans narrowed the margin in the 50th minute through Keon Wook-Kang, but found the Indians in the way as they pressed for the equaliser in the last quarter.

India's fourth win not only lifted them to the top of pool but ensured they do not meet Pakistan — the likely pool winners — in Thursday's semifinal.

India's semifinal opponents will be known later today when Pakistan take on Japan in their last league match.

Japan need a win to join Pakistan in the semifinals, a loss or even a draw will take Malaysia past Japan into the last four.

The Koreans, looking for their third Asiad title, also moved into the semifinal by coming second in Pool B with three wins from four matches.

It's a situation quite familiar to the Koreans, who lost to India in the league of the last Asian Games in Hiroshima four years ago.

But they went on to defeat Pakistan in the semifinals and then hammered India 3-1 in the final to repeat the gold they won at home in Seoul in 1986.

The Indians earned six penalty corners in the first session, against South Korea's one, and were rewarded for their effort when Dhillon put them ahead in the 27th minute with a spectacular reverse hit from the left of the circle.

Four minutes later Mukesh made it 2-0 following a penalty corner scramble, but the Koreans fought back strongly in the second session with six corners.

Paes withdraws

BANGKOK, Dec 14: Only South Korea's Lee Hyung-tak had to struggle Monday night as Korea, Japan, India and Uzbekistan each put two men in tennis quarterfinals at the Asian Games, reports AP.

Lee served 12 aces and converted four of six break points on his way to a 7-6, 2-6, 6-0 victory over Taiwan's Lin Bing-Chao. He was joined in the quarterfinals by teammate Yoon Yong-il, a 6-3, 6-3 winner over Iran's Ramin Raziani.

India's best hope, Leander Paes, who stands 91st in the ATP rankings, had to drop out of the games with an injury. He was the only Asian in the rankings' top 100.

But India still gained quarterfinal places when Mahesh Bhupathi beat Bryan Junio of the Philippines 7-6, 6-2, and Srinath Prahalad ousted Taiwan's Chen Wei-ju 6-4, 7-5.



Chinese Li Xuemei (C) crosses the finish-line in the women's 100m to clinch the gold at the Asian Games yesterday. She took 11.05 seconds to become the fastest. —AFP photo

Li, Koji fastest in Asia

BANGKOK, Dec 14 (AP): Japan's Koji Ito rebounded from a slow start to claim honours Monday as Asia's fastest man, and looked on the bright side of not joining the exclusive club of sprinters faster than 10 seconds.

"At least I excited everyone," he said after winning the 100 meters in 10.05. He had raised hopes by setting an Asian record of 10.00 in Sunday's semifinals.

Sri Lanka's runners were excited too, after winning their nation's first two Asian Games gold medals in 24 years — within less than an hour.

On the track, Ito was the slowest of the eight finalists out of the blocks, costing him any chance of becoming the first non-black athlete to crack 10 seconds for the 100.

Thailand's Seeharwong Reanchai edged Japan's Yasukatsu Otsuki for the silver medal in a photo finish after both clocked 10.31.

In the women's 100, favoured Tillekeratne held off Qatar's Ibrahim Faraj in the men's 400, winning 44.99 to 45.32.

This is the first time that Sri Lanka has won a gold medal in 24 years," Faraj said. "I am extremely happy, not only because I have won the gold but it was my coach who had won the last gold in 1974."

Coach Sunil Gumawarde was a member of the 1974 winning 4x100-metre relay team.

Aside from Li's victory in the women's 100, China had gold medals in the women's 10-kilometre walk, by Liu Hongyu, and the heptathlon, where Shen

Shengfei amassed 5,817 points for the seven events. Kazakhstan's Svetlana Kazanina was second at 5,775.

That boosted its total for the Games to 82 golds.

South Korea's second-place total climbed to 38 as Lee Yong-sun won the women's javelin event and cyclist Ji Sung-hwan beat Olympic bronze medalist Takanobu Jumonji of Japan in the men's 1-kilometre time trial.

Japan had 33, gained gold Monday from Ito and victory in the solo synchronized swimming by Miya Tachibana, the world championship bronze medalist.

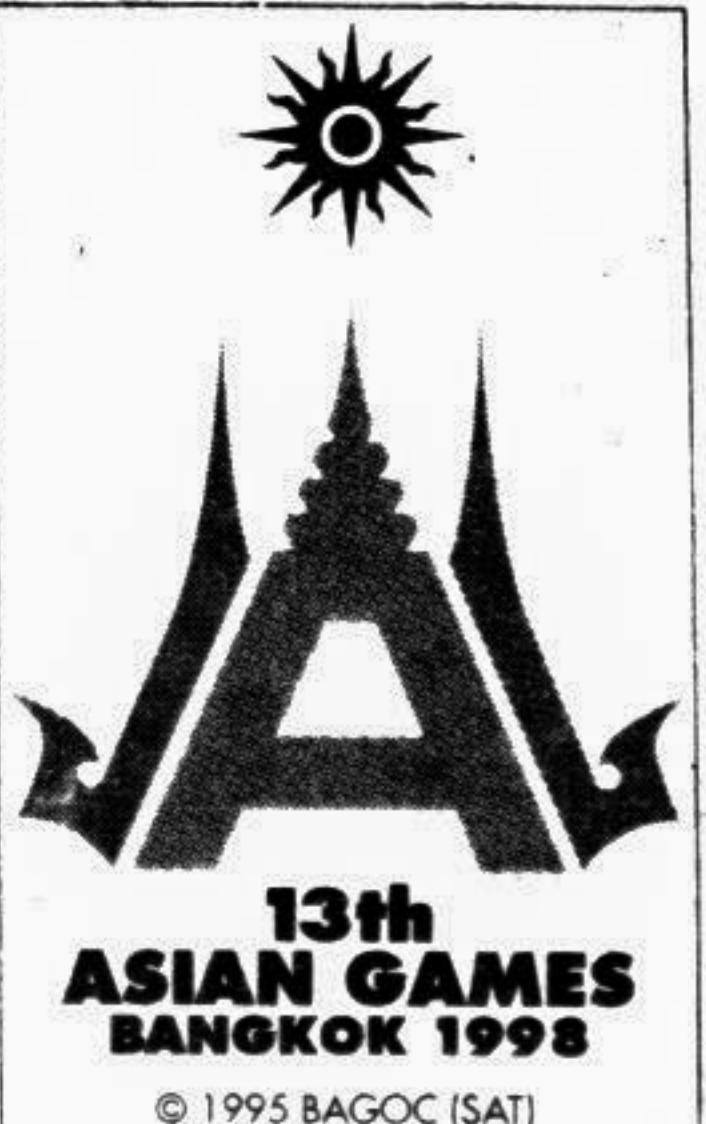
India and Qatar won their first gold medals of these games, in the women's and men's 1,500-metre races.

India's Jyotirmoy Sikdar outsprinted China's Wang Qinglin to win the women's 1,500-metre race.

Organizers angered jeering Indian fans by playing the wrong anthem at Sikdar's medal ceremony, so 10 minutes later they brought the medalists out and played the right anthem.

Qatar's Mohamad Taib won the men's 1,500 for the third successive games. He slowed down near the end, waving his rivals closer, then turned around and made a rude gesture down the track.

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Victorious Villa back on top

BIRMINGHAM, England, Dec 14 (Reuters/ Internet): Aston Villa returned to the top of the English Premier league on Sunday after fighting back from 2-0 down to beat Arsenal 3-2 at Villa Park.

In the day's other match, Michael Owen had a penalty saved as Liverpool lost 1-0 at Wimbledon — their eighth defeat in 11 games.

Villa came into the game on the back of a run that had brought just two points from their previous four games and they conceded top spot to Manchester United, who drew 2-2 at Tottenham Hotspur on Saturday.

They looked unlikely to regain the initiative when Dennis Bergkamp, back after a four-game absence, fired Arsenal into a 2-0 halftime lead with well-taken goals in the 14th and 45th minutes.

The start of the second half was delayed for 15 minutes after a member of the RAF Hawks parachute team, dressed as Father Christmas attempted to land in the centre-circle. But the parachutist struck the roof of the main Trinity Road stand and plummeted almost 30 metres on to the perimeter of pitch, suffering two broken legs and other serious injuries.

Villa, which qualified for the quarterfinals of the European cup in midweek and appears to be finding its feet after an erratic start to the season, was always on its heels in the first hour of the match.

Danish midfielder Martin Jorgensen and Johnathan Bachini both came close to giving the home side a first half lead and striker Paolo Poggi had the ball in the back of the net two minutes after the interval only to be ruled offside.

Lucescu made two tactical



substitutions, throwing on Nigerian Taribo West for Fabio Galante and adding Roberto Baggio to his front line.

West had been dropped after he threw his shirt at Lucescu in disgust last weekend when he was substituted in the first half of Inter's unconvincing 1-1 draw with Salernitana.

The Brazilian stepped on to a pass from Roberto Baggio following a scramble in the Udinese penalty area and stroked a left foot shot past goalkeeper Luigi Turci from close range.

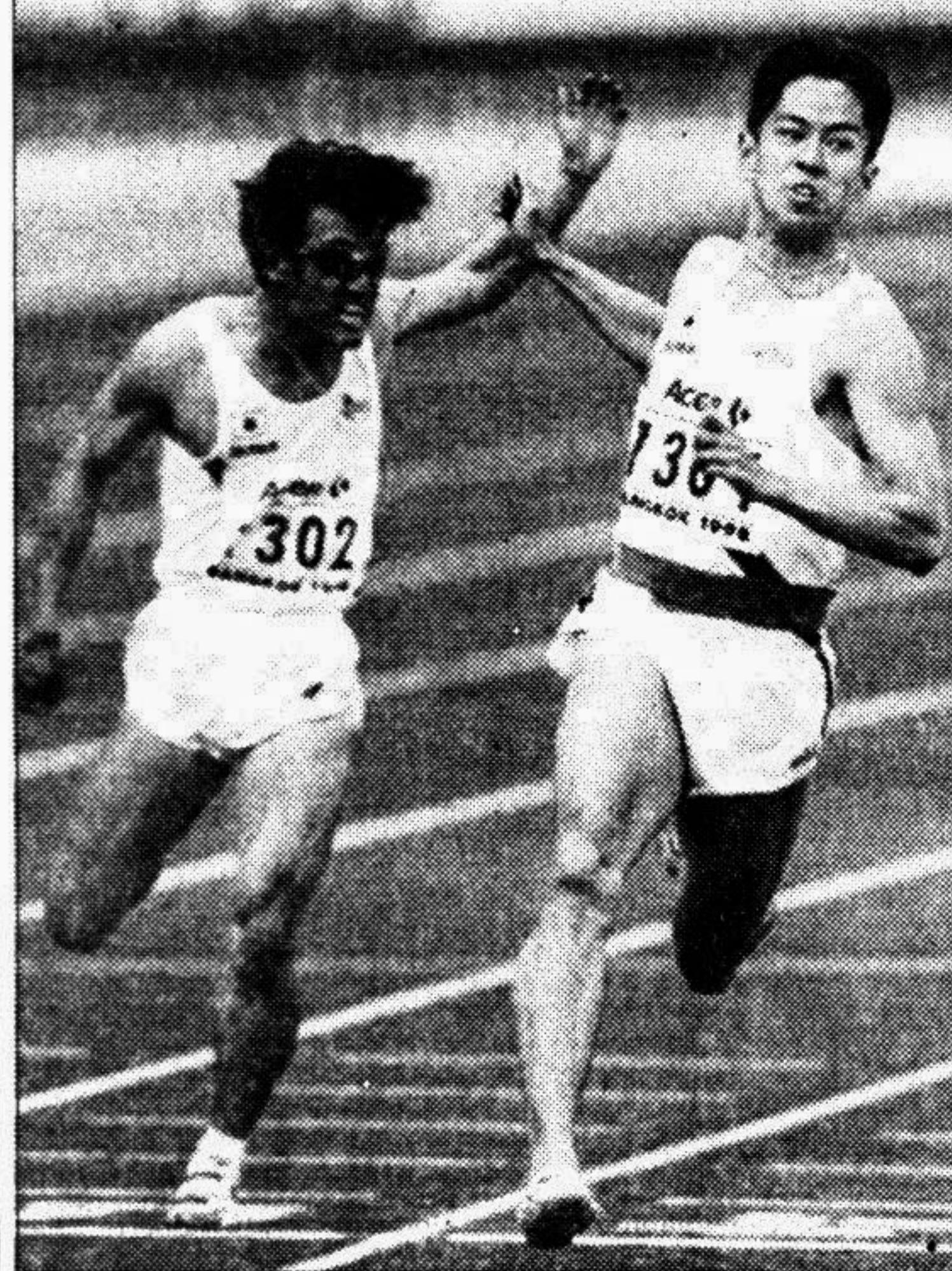
His fourth league goal of the season gave Romanian Mircea Lucescu his first Serie A victory since he took over from Luigi Simoni as Inter coach at the start of the month.

It also lifted last season's runners-up to within four points of leader Fiorentina, which was due to host reigning champion Juventus later in the day.

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Koji Ito (R) of Japan wins the gold in men's 100m at the Asiad yesterday. —AP/UNB photo

Ronaldo Inter's saviour

Argentine Hernan Crespo gave Parma a first half lead after Roma goalkeeper Antonio Cimatti had parried a shot from Enrico Chiesa after 39 minutes.

Roma had two penalty appeals turned down before midfielder Carmine Gattieri pulled them level on 59 minutes.

Roma's archrivals Lazio hammered Sampdoria 5-2 at the Olympic stadium thanks in part to a hat-trick of freekicks from Yugoslav defender Siniša Mihajlović.

Mihajlović's compatriot Dejan Stanković grabbed Lazio's fourth and Chile's Marcelo Salas added a fifth in injury time to take the Italian Cup holders into sixth place.

Juve bubble burst

ROME, Dec 14 (Reuters/ Internet): Italian champions Juventus may have waved farewell to their title following a 1-0 loss at league leaders Fiorentina on Sunday.

"Juventus says farewell... to itself, its memories, its dreams... to the title," forecast Rome daily "La Repubblica".

"Perhaps this was a night when a small, very small piece of the championship title was decided, certainly it was a night when Juventus almost certainly lost it," commented sports daily, "Corriere Dello Sport".

In losing their third consecutive Serie A game, Juventus continued a negative league run which has seen them pick up only two points in their last six games and leaves them in joint seventh on 18 points, 10 behind Fiorentina.

To find the last time that the champions went six games without a win, you have to go back nine years. The last time Juventus lost three consecutive league games was in the autumn of 1992.

Having staged a fortuitous last-gasp qualification for the European Cup quarterfinals, Juventus were expected to resume their league challenge all the more motivated.

But they lost again, although clearly not helped by the seemingly harsh 43rd-minute sending-off of defender Paolo Montero.

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi said: "This is a bad moment for us... however, the team is getting better and I don't know if we're out of the championship contest yet."

"One thing I do know is that this Juventus is a side capable of battling its way back to the top."

With only 13 of Serie A's 34 games played, most commentators agree that it is much too early to label Fiorentina as the new champions.

Such caution does not deter the Florence side's inspirational captain Argentine Gabriel Batistuta, scorer of the winning goal on Sunday night and leading Serie A marksman on 13.

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