

# Olympic flame in rough winds

Performance-enhancing drugs use by athletes and corruption within International Olympic Council (IOC) ranks have been the dark spots on an otherwise stupendously successful Sydney Games. Perhaps, it is time to rethink the way the Games are set up and played; or else, the very ideal of Olympics would be in jeopardy, writes Dr A R Chowdhury as he calls for major overhaul for the highest governing body of sports in the world

If it is possible for a host city to outshine the Olympic flame itself then Sydney most certainly succeeded. With a spectacular fireworks display that stretched from Olympic Park in Homebush Bay to the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Sydney bade farewell to the Games of the 27th Olympiad on a fine Aussie-style Sunday night. After the cross commercialism, confusion and malaise of Atlanta in 1996, this was exactly what the Olympics needed.

The Sydney Games will be remembered for medals won and lost in the arena and for records broken and for dreams shattered on the playing field. They will be remembered for Australian Aboriginal Cathy Freeman, who lit the Olympic flame at the opening ceremony and a few days later won the 400-metre race, urged on by the spectators at the Olympic Stadium.

They will be remembered for stirring upset victories. Greco-Roman wrestler Rulon Gardner, a farm boy from Wyoming, toppled mighty Russian Alexander Karelin, who had not lost a match in 13 years.

They will be remembered for the achievements of Michael Johnson, who became the first man to successfully defend an Olympic 400-metre title; Aussie teen swimmer Ian Thorpe, who brought magic to the pool; Russian gymnast Alexei Nemov, who won six medals; and US sprinter Marion Jones, who won five. Most of all, the 2000 Olympic Games will be remembered for the way Sydney embraced them. Athens has a tough act to follow in 2004.

Proponents of the Games say that it helps to create mutual understanding and international peace. They argue that the Games are apolitical. But if you step back and think for a moment, you will see that the Games aren't apolitical at all. Politics are inseparable from the Games, and nationalism is a big part of what has made the Olympics such a huge global success. It is the universalism, not the 'apolitical' myth, for which we should celebrate the Olympic spirit. The athletes in Sydney competed under national flags, but ultimately their achievements can be claimed by all of us.

Now that the competition in the Olympics has ended, some nagging

questions have started to be raised. A question that is in everyone's mind is, to what Olympic ideal should today's youngsters aspire? The one that says Olympic officials should accept personal gifts from potential host cities desperate for favourable consideration? Or the one that says weightlifters should try to bypass the rules and the competition by pumping up with performance-enhancing drugs? Or the one that says a 16-year-old gymnast should be stripped of her medals because her doctors gave her medication for cold?

It is time to rethink the way the Games are set up and played. At the very least, organisations such as the International Olympic Committee and national sports bodies should be divorced from the agencies which police athletes for drugs. And drug rules need to be more consistent throughout amateur athletics.

The Games still offer plenty of inspiration and thrills. They remind us that there are sports in the world other than those dominated by professionals -- and that some athletes still know how to comfort themselves with class and dignity. But every allegation of a bribe and every positive drug test further corrode the ideal of amateur athletics that the Games are supposed to represent. And the corrosion is compounded by drug rules that are often confusing and inconsistent, with different sports bodies setting different regulations. Underneath it all, of course, are money and the public's fascination with athletes and televised athletic events. Which leads to endorsement-hungry athletes seeing any edge they can get, to officials with blind eyes and greedy palms who seem more interested in promoting the Games than in policing them. Add to that the pressure to win that is spurred by national pride -- which demands a scorecard of which country has the most medals -- and maybe what should be amazing is not that corruption occurs, but that any semblance of honest amateurism survives. Unfortunately, the Olympic ideal will be in jeopardy unless some serious reforms -- starting with a complete overhaul of the International Olympic Committee -- aren't made soon.



Closing ceremony of the 27th Olympiad in Sydney

## Weaving a dying art

Colourful and intricate weaving of the Monipuri tribe is dying a slow death due to poverty and lack of access to major markets, Nadeem Qadir of AFP writes from Homerjan, a small village in the north-eastern Bangladesh

"POVERTY is our major problem because without funds you cannot produce in large scale and make quality products," said Lakshmi Rani, 40, as she worked on a bright red and green sari.

"Except for two or three among us who are rich, the rest cannot even reach major markets in Bangladesh to sell our products made painstakingly after day."

Chabhi Singh, 90, is bent with age and hardly able to walk, but she was also working on her bamboo and wood loom on the veranda of her clay home.

"This is what I did since my childhood and there was so much demand earlier for our products because of the colour," she said.

"Now, we make saris even if we used to make phanek (lower part of a women's dress) and blouses so that we have a bigger market," she said, her voice hardly audible.

Local tribal leader Samar Jit Singh said most of the local men and women spend some time weaving, but their interest in the art was slowly dying.

"Since earnings are poor, the weavers are slowly opting for other sources (of income) including farming, government service or other professions," he said. Singh himself used to work for the government.

Every Monipuri home in this village and others in Kamalganj sub-district has at least one loom, and almost all tell the same story of their dying trade.

There are only 24,902 Monipuris among Bangladesh's 120 million people and they speak their own dialect. There are 29 major tribes in Bangladesh.

The Monipuris were divided when the Indian sub-continent was partitioned into India and Pakistan in 1947. East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971.

Most of the tribe's members are either Hindu or Muslim and live in the Kamalganj sub-district. Others are scattered in the nearby areas of Sylhet, Habiganj and Sunamganj.

Rani said it takes her seven days to weave a sari, but that she has to think of the designs beforehand.

"There is no pen or paper to draw, but I along with others follow the basic cone design of our forefathers," she said.

Hijam Parimal Singh, a school teacher and one of the Monipuris considered rich, has a small shop in the village and sells his clothes to several stores in the capital Dhaka.

"I have my own looms and I also buy from others and sell them to several stores in Dhaka, but the problem is everyone has to get their cotton thread, mainly from India and colour them at a number of places which raises the price," he said.

A Monipuri sari with a moderately intricate design sells for about 1,500 taka (28 US dollars), but other similar loom-made saris made by Bengalis go for as low as 500 taka (9.25 US dollars).

Bibi Russel, an international fashion model and designer who has launched a campaign to preserve the weaving arts of this South Asian country, told AFP, "Monipuri work is different from others and are the most colourful among the tribal clothes, but I have told them to lower



Bibi Russel looks on as a Monipuri woman weaves on her bamboo and wood loom.

their price to first make headway into the major market."

"Their art is dying and we must help them before it's too late and I can't do it alone," she said while studying the clothes at Hijam's store.

Russel said there were an estimated one million weavers in Bangladesh.

## Trudeau era ends

Abdul Quader Chowdhury writes from Montreal, Canada

PIERRE Elliott Trudeau, the Canadian political giant who led the country twice as Prime Minister but still liked to walk the streets of Montreal and from his law office like a regular citizen, has died on September 28. He was 80.

Trudeau was first elected Prime Minister when Trudeau swept the country as the fluently bilingual Quebecer mesmerised Canadians with his charismatic style. His lifestyle was colourful. Avid wilderness canoeist, international traveller, famous for dating glamorous women including Barbara Streisand, guitarist Lorne Boyd and actress Margot Kidder. Beyond the substance, there was the playful side of the Prime Minister. Under him, Canada was re-fashioned for good and sometimes for bad. It became, like him, a more worldly and a more ambitious place. So much of what Canada is today is his doing: the constitution, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the ideal of bilingualism, the defence of minority populations everywhere across the country, the belief that bravado and brilliance are admirable traits both in people and nations.

He was Prime Minister for 15 years and four months from 1968 until 1979 and from 1980 until 1984, serving the third-longest in this country (after Sir John A. Macdonald and Mackenzie King). From the Official Languages Act in 1969, to the October Crisis in 1970, the 1980 referendum and the patriation of the Constitution in 1982, he dominated the politi-

cal landscape like few of his predecessors. It is impossible to calculate how deeply he affected Canadian life. If he did not succeed in remaking his country into a bilingual, multicultural, efficient federal state, he pushed it much farther along that road than anyone could have imagined in 1968. The late 1960s might have been known for wild rebellion elsewhere in the Western world, but in Canada passions were inflamed over having French on boxes of corn flakes.

The passage into law of the Official Languages Act of 1968, which established French and English as official languages with equal status from coast to coast. The patriation of the Canadian constitution, culminating in the Constitution Act of 1982, which finally put an end to Canadian legislators having to seek formal leave from Westminster before amending the country's constitution.

The unfinished business of Quebec independence, despite two referendums in which the popular vote went against the province's separatist government. In 1980, Mr Trudeau was personally credited with spearheading the 60 per cent to 40 per cent federalist victory. Equally, if not as favourably, he was credited with burying the 1990 Meech Lake and 1992 Charlottetown accords that his successors hoped would paper over the divide separating English and French Canada.

A man who viscerally disdained nationalism, Mr Trudeau

minister who left an unmistakable imprint on the global politics of his day. The attention he received upon his death is evidence of the importance in which he was held abroad. He maintained relations with Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, a pariah in much of the West. But Trudeau's friendship with Castro wasn't blind; he cut off aid to Cuban in 1978 when it sent troops to fight in Angola's civil war.

Trudeau re-established diplomatic relations with China before the US did. And he tried to spark a new dialogue between the East and West before the fall of the Iron Curtain, soothed flaring tempers between the combative Soviets and Americans. Trudeau's statement 'We should be busting our asses for peace' grabbed headlines as he tried to use his one-man East-West initiative to ease tensions between the superpowers. Trudeau's foreign policy was based on putting Canadian interests first. That led him to question Canada's role in NATO, the Commonwealth and its relationship with the monarchy. Eventually, he rejected the idea of moving Canada into the league of non-aligned countries, but he did cut Canada's NATO force in Europe in half. Trudeau allied Canada with developing countries as he pushed his North-South dialogue to improve relations with poor Third World countries, yielding mixed results.

He set up an arms embargo on South Africa over apartheid in 1970 and withdrew trade assistance programmes seven years later. He supported sanctions



Cuban leader Fidel Castro at the funeral of former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau at the Notre Dame Basilica in Montreal.

--AFP photo

against the white regime in Rhodesia -- now Zimbabwe -- angering the British as he threatened to split the Commonwealth. When he retired in 1984, historian Alan Henrikson at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, admired his attempt to reach out to the world's poorest and his

personal peace initiative in 1983-84. Sir Edward Heath, British Prime Minister in the early 1970s, was close to Trudeau. Willi Brandt, West Germany's chancellor, and China's Mao Tse-tung and Deng Xiaoping counted themselves among Trudeau's admirers.

ISRO's highly successful Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), which simultaneously launched

## India awaits countdown to journey to moon

Half a century ago India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said science ought to be a tool to end hunger and poverty. Now, the rapid growth of science and technology is changing priorities. After successfully launching German and South Korean satellites, reports Radhakrishna Rao from Bangalore, India is planning to join a global search for resources -- on the moon.

INDIA took its first step into space in November 1963 by launching a nine-kilogram rocket from a science research rocket at Thumba, a fishing hamlet in southern India.

It has now set its sights on the moon.

The India space agency has already completed preliminary studies and will be able to send a mission to the moon within five years of getting the green signal," Vasundara Raje Scindia, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office told the Indian parliament on August 2 this year.

"The recent discovery of water on the lunar surface rekindled the worldwide interest in the moon," she said, adding that the Indian lunar mission would boost the country's scientific pursuits, particularly in space navigation and robotics.

The Bangalore-based Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) says it has both the human expertise and technological competence to send a probe to the moon by 2005. Its chairman,

"There is no way humans are

### Mission to moon

**Age?** About 4.6 billion years.

**Appearance?** A face in the sky when full, a slice of cheese the rest of the time. Dark and pock-marked from close by.

**What's up there?** Mostly volcanic rock and soil, no clouds, rains or winds. NASA recently said there may be frozen water in the soil.

**So it must be cold?** It can be as cold as minus 170 degrees Celsius. It can also be as hot as 134 degrees Celsius.

**Is it big?** It's the biggest satellite in the solar system - about one fourth the size of the earth.

**Who's up there?** The first man on the moon was Neil Armstrong, July 20 1969.

**What's new about it?** India wants to send a lunar mission by 2005.

**Hasn't that been done before?** Yes, many times - but never by a developing country.

**Is there really a man in the moon?** Can't say, but it won't be an Indian - they are thinking of a flyby or orbital mission.

going to be satisfied with just building satellites for communications, remote sensing, navigation or a space station. There is going to be a deeper outreach into the cosmos. Many countries would subsequently be thinking of colonising the celestial bodies.

These sentiments are a far cry from the vision of the founders of modern Indian science. More than three decades back, Vikram A Sarabhai, the architect of the Indian space programme, declared, "We don't have the fantasy of competing with the economically advanced nations in the exploration of the moon or planets or manned flights.

While ISRO says its research will focus on the unexplored areas of the moon, some scientists disagree.

"Why don't we work on something path breaking? Why do we need to do something that has already been done 30 years ago and many times over," says Dr H S Mukunda, chairman of the Aerospace Department of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.

ISRO scientists argue that the possible presence of water -- essential to sustain life -- could fuel an international race to re-investigate the moon. Moreover the abundance of helium, considered the cleanest fuel, is an added reason for India to study the moon.

They believe other key research areas could include investigation of the particle and radiation environment around the moon and the detailed mapping of the lunar surface and atmosphere with high resolution spectroscopic photography, which give clear, detailed, three-dimensional pictures.

India's scientific community and public feel that just as America's manned mission to the moon changed the direction and complexion of industrial and technological growth in the US, so a lunar probe could be just the shot in the arm Indian science and technology is looking for.

ISRO regards such a probe as a pathfinder for future missions by India to explore the outer world -- a new frontier in the new millennium. -- Gemini News

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