

Asian Games

In 1951, the First Asian Games were inaugurated in New Delhi, in the presence of Jawahar Lal Pandit Nehru, first Prime Minister of India. Eleven countries, 478 athletes, took part in six sports - athletics, basketball, cycling, football, swimming and weight-lifting.

In 1982, the Ninth Asian Games were inaugurated in New Delhi, in the presence of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India and the daughter of Pandit Nehru. This time 33 countries took part, with more than 5000 athletes, and set an Asian Games record of a programme of 21 sports, including four new disciplines - equestrian, golf, handball and rowing.

Thus the Ninth Asian Games, opened in the presence of IOC President H.E. Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, underlined the enormous strides made by sport in Asia over these past 30 years, and for India, they must have represented an evocative occasion. India, in fact, played a dominant part in creating the Asian Games and the governing Asian Games Federation, which came into existence in February 1949.

G. D. Sondhi, member of the IOC in India, since 1932, wrote to the Maharaja of Patiala, President of the Indian Olympic Association, in 1947, suggesting that during the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, they might contact delegates and interest them in the formation of an Asian Games Federation. With the approval of His Highness, Sondhi talked with several delegates and found them enthusiastic. As the Games were to be international in character, the blessing of the IOC was sought and obtained.

In brief, however, everyone concerned was so pre-occupied with preparations for the Games of the XIVth Olympiad in London in the summer of 1948, that nothing practical was achieved before then. However Mr. Sondhi called a meeting at the Mount Royal Hotel in London, on 8th August, 1948 - one of two critical dates in the formation of the Asian Games Federation. Six countries were represented by ten delegates, and a sub-committee was appointed to draw up a constitution and bye-laws for the "Asian Athletic Federation".



Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, lights the symbolic torch of the 9th Asian Games, watched by Mr. Buta Singh, President of the Organising Committee, and Raja Bhalendra Singh, IOC member for India.

The sub-committee suggested that a federation should be formed and that Asian championships on a modified model of the Olympic Games, should be held every four years, beginning in 1950. 12th and 13th February, 1949 became historic dates in the annals of Indian and Asian sport. For the first time representatives of as many as nine countries met for a sports conference in Asia - in New Delhi. They approved a constitution and created the Asian Games Federation. Representatives of Afghanistan, Burma, India, Pakistan and the Philippines signed the constitution without reservation and thus became the first members of the Federation. The representatives of Ceylon, Indonesia, Nepal and Siam signed subject to ratification by their governments or National Sports Associations.

The first office-bearers were President : H. H. Yadavindra Singh, Maharaja of Patiala (the brother, incidentally, of the present IOC member in India, Raja Bhalendra Singh) ; Vice-President: The Honourable Jorge B. Vargas (Philippines) ; Honorary Secretary-Treasurer : Mr. G.D. Sondhi.

The Games of 1950 were not able to be held, but in 1951, New Delhi and India, began the

Asian Games which Indians had done so much to make possible.

The Ninth Asian Games, of 1982, in addition to underlining India's immense contribution to sport in Asia, represented other substantial achievements for this country.

In just two years, new roads and flyovers were constructed and no fewer than 17 stadia or sports venues were either constructed or renovated, making New Delhi one of the world's best-equipped cities for sports facilities. And the crowning jewel of these must be the 75,000 seat Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium, in which the Games' ceremonies took place.

There is no doubt that these facilities and the success of the Games will be a major incentive for the youth of India, and perhaps of the entire continent. Sarda Buta Singh, India's Minister of Sport, was chairman of the Special Organising Committee of the Games, and wrote, *"Stadia are basically empty shells of bricks and mortar. But they will throb into life and character with the congregation of youth who will translate these stadia into temples of physical culture"*.

At the sporting level, the Games were outstanding in that Asian Games records in



almost every measurable sport were broken, every day it seemed.

Another striking element of the Games was the "competition", much publicised by the international Press, between Japan, the dominant nation in the Asian Games since their inception, and the "awakening giant", China, in the winning of medals. Japan as so often before dominated the swimming events, with the 15 year old schoolgirl Kaori Yanase emerging as perhaps the outstanding athlete in the Games.

She won gold medals in 100 metres freestyle, 200 metres freestyle, in the 4 x 100 metres relay freestyle and the 4 x 100 metres medley, emerging as the fastest woman swimmer in Asia and the first Asian woman to break the one-minute 100 metres barrier, with 58.62 seconds.

China, on the other hand, dominated the gymnastics, diving and rowing competitions among other achievements. High Jumper Zhu Jianhua came within one inch of the world record with 7 feet 7 3/4 inches (2.33 metres), for a new games record. The world record, set in 1980 by Gerd Wessig (GDR) is 7 feet 8 3/4 inches (2.36 metres).

Most important of all perhaps was that of 33 countries competing, no fewer than 20 won medals, with a world record falling to South Korea's Kim Jin Ho, who scored 336 out of a possible 360 points in the women's 60 metres archery event. The previous record of 334 points was set by Valentina Koupan (USSR) in 1978.

