

Aichi, Set, Go!

Japan emperor declares Asian Games open after turbulent build-up

● Nagoya hosts 11,000 athletes

● Accommodation problems frustrate teams

● Typhoon threatens further disruption

AFP | Nagoya

The 20th Asian Games were declared open by Japan's emperor yesterday following a troubled build-up to the multi-sport spectacular that has more athletes than the Olympics.

There were a large number of empty seats at the 30,000-capacity stadium in Nagoya, where a subdued crowd saw a colourful opening ceremony on a heart-shaped stage.

Japan's Emperor and Empress were given a respectful reception as they took their seats alongside International Olympic Committee president Kirsty Coventry.

There was polite applause when Emperor Naruhito declared the Games open.

The first gold medal will be won on Sunday morning, likely in the men's individual triathlon, as the continent's finest athletes compete in more than 40 sports before the curtain comes down on October 4.

The event in Nagoya and Aichi prefecture has 2028 Olympics places up for grabs in seven sports and will be graced by global stars and fast-rising prodigies.

But it has been dogged by a series of problems as more than 11,000 athletes and 6,000 officials stretched organisers to the limit as they tried to accommodate all.

To save money there is no traditional athletes' village, competitors instead staying in a combination of temporary container-style huts, hotels and cruise ship the Costa Serena.

There was a record deluge last week which flooded parts of Nagoya and now a typhoon is approaching eastern Japan threatening further disruption in the coming days.

Some athletes were left stranded at the airport when

Bahrain launch packed six-sport programme as medal hunt begins

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's campaign at the 20th Asian Games moves into full swing today, with the kingdom's representatives competing across six sports in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

Triathlete Omar Ali provides the first medal opportunity when he lines up alongside 32 rivals in the men's individual final at 2.30am at Gamagori City Triathlon Venue.

Less than two hours later, the nationals begin their mixed martial arts campaign at Nagoya City Inae Sports Center. Mohamed Alsameea enters the arena at 4am, followed by Dkurban Idrisov at 5am, Mukhammad Nabiev at 6am and Kurban Idrisov at 6.30am.

Five Bahrainis will contest individual swimming events during the morning programme at Toyota Aquatic Center, with the women's relay team also in action. Sana Lefalher opens their challenge in the women's 1,500 metres freestyle timed final at 4.24am.

Stepan Goncharov and Abdulla Jamal contest the men's 100m freestyle heats at 4.44am, before Noor Taha enters the women's 50m breaststroke heats at 4.59am. Goncharov re-



16-player handball team



Swimming contingent in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan

turns alongside Ahmed Helal for the men's 100m backstroke heats at 5.05am, followed by the women's 4x100m freestyle relay heats at 5.19am.

The focus then shifts to team

competition as Bahrain's reigning Asian handball champions open their Group B campaign against Kazakhstan at 6.30am at ENTRIO, Toyoda Gosei Memorial Gymnasium.

Captain Hussain Al Sayyad leads Robert Hedin's squad into the Games after three major triumphs in seven months. Their run began at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh

last November, before they claimed their maiden Asian Men's Handball Championship crown in Kuwait in January and won the GCC Games in Doha in May.

The Asian Games title remains the major prize missing from their recent collection. Bronze in 2014 was followed by silver medals in 2018 and 2022, leaving the Warriors aiming to go one better in Japan.

South Korea, Kuwait and Iran complete Bahrain's five-team group. Their remaining fixtures are against Iran tomorrow at 8.30am, South Korea on Wednesday at 11.30am and Kuwait on Friday at 7.30am, with the top four progressing to the quarter-finals. Hosts Japan, China, Hong Kong and three-time defending champions Qatar form Group A.

Ahmed Naser follows in the men's individual cycling time trial at 7.30am.

Rounding off the programme, Bahrain's four-player table tennis team face Chinese Taipei in their opening Group C encounter at Sky Hall Toyota at 12.30pm. The line-up features Rashid Sanad, Mohammed Abbas Abdulwahab, Sayed Muradha Hussain and Mohammed Nader Al Ali.

All times are in Bahrain time.

transport failed to turn up and several teams have complained about the quality of the huts, including the beds being too short.

In the latest mishap, North Korea's national anthem was played on Friday for South Korea's men's hockey team.

Cheers, empty seats

Two-time Asian Games silver medallist Zahra Kiani was a flag-bearer for Iran and hopes to win another medal in the Chinese martial art of wushu -- by watching how it's done on YouTube.

"I have been training with

movies. I watch videos of Chinese athletes and I try to copy them," she said.

The Olympic Council of Asia said the continent's premier sporting event, featuring 45 countries and territories, had found the perfect host.

"When the world has needed it most, Japan has always answered," OCA president Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al-Thani said, referring to the Covid-delayed Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

He called those Games "a remarkable showcase of resilience, hospitality and commitment".

Apart from Japan's athletes,

the biggest cheer was reserved for China's competitors as they filed into the arena.

China will again expect to top the medals table after winning a whopping 201 golds and 383 medals on home soil in Hangzhou last time.

As always at the Asian Games -- which started in 1951 -- Olympic staples such as athletics and swimming will sit side-by-side with regional favourites like sepak takraw and kabaddi.

There will be eSports, breakdancing and BMX cycling. Padel and MMA will make their Asian Games debuts.



Members of Japan's delegation wave their country's national flag



Members of India's delegation wave their country's national flag during a parade at the opening ceremony



An aerial performer is seen against a giant Nagoya Castle balloon



Members of Singapore's delegation wave their country's national flag

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