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## An historic XXII SEA Games kicks off in Vietnam

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# An historic XXII SEA Games kicks off in

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A spectacular show as first-time host celebrates with debutant Timor Leste

by  
in Hanoi

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IN A 90-minute spectacle on Friday, the history books were re-written as the XXII SEA Games was declared officially open in Hanoi's My Dinh National Stadium.

For the first time, Vietnam plays host to its 10 neighbours in the region's sporting show-piece.

And in another landmark, one-year-old Timor Leste's contingent smartly marched out to warm cheers from the capacity crowd.

Waiting patiently for his turn to march out onto the running track, Singapore's flag-bearer James Wong cut an imposing figure.

And when it was the turn of the Singapore contingent, the Republic's No 1 discus thrower turned to his contingent and shouted: "Come on, let's do it."

Resplendent in their red and cream-coloured outfits, the Singapore athletes were all smiles in Friday's opening ceremony.

A capacity 42,000 cheering, flag-waving crowd jammed into the specially-built national stadium as Vietnam welcomed more than 5,000 athletes and 1,600 officials from 11 participating nations.

With the Games' flame lit and the slogan "Solidarity, honesty and nobility" a recurring theme, Vietnam Prime Minister Mr Phan Van Khai declared the biennial event officially open, with a giant portrait of Vietnamese Communist Party founding father Ho Chi Minh looking on.

"Vietnam is delighted to play host to the XXII SEA Games," said Dr Nguyen Danh Thai, minister and chairman of Vietnam's

Sports Committee.

“For the past two years, the Vietnamese government and people have spared no effort to make this SEA Games a success and hopefully create a good impression of Vietnam.

“Sport is all about peace and friendship, and we hope for a SEA Games of hospitality and honesty. We look for the strong support of fans from all countries.”

The capacity crowd was then treated to a spectacular lights and laser show as hundreds of performers acted out a traditional legend about the evolution of the Vietnamese people.

There are 442 gold medals up for grabs in 32 sporting events held across 11 provinces and cities.

Besides the more traditional track and field, swimming and football events, chess, shuttle cock, pencak silat and petanque will also feature in the competition.

Host Vietnam has a contingent of 690 athletes taking part in all events.

It may have received the loudest cheers on Friday, but Indonesia came with the biggest contingent of nearly 800 athletes.

With 297 athletes here, Singapore’s chef-de-mission Niam Chiang Meng is confident that Singapore can achieve its target of 22 gold medals.

“It is a proud moment for Singapore,” said Niam, during the opening day festivities on Friday. “Vietnam has gone all out to make us feel very welcome at these Games and their hospitality will be cherished.”

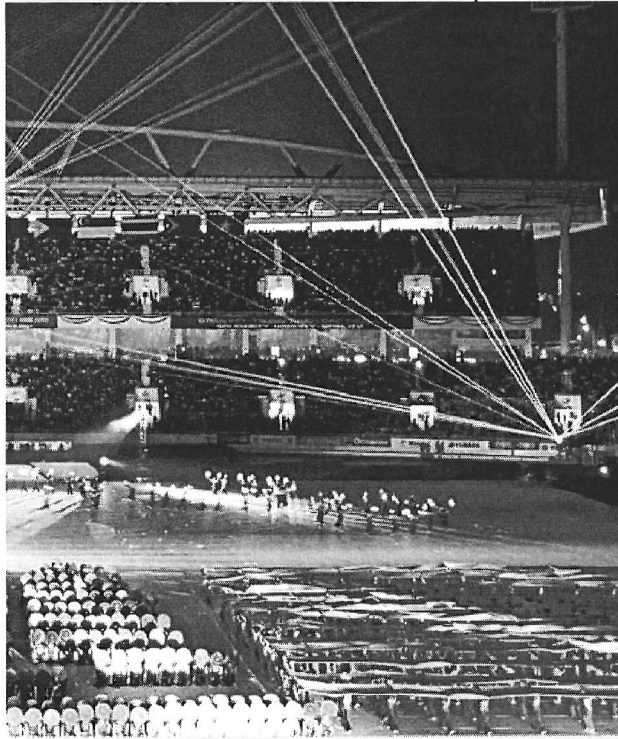
The celebrations went on into the early hours of Friday, with thousands of sports-mad Vietnamese tearing around the streets of the capital on motorbikes, honking horns and waving the national flag.

and





*Clockwise from left: Team Singapore look  
Vietnam's National Stadium. Timor Leste*



*AFP  
Reuters photos*

*ed smart before a spectacular lights display engulfed  
received a warm welcome. AFP and Reuters photos*