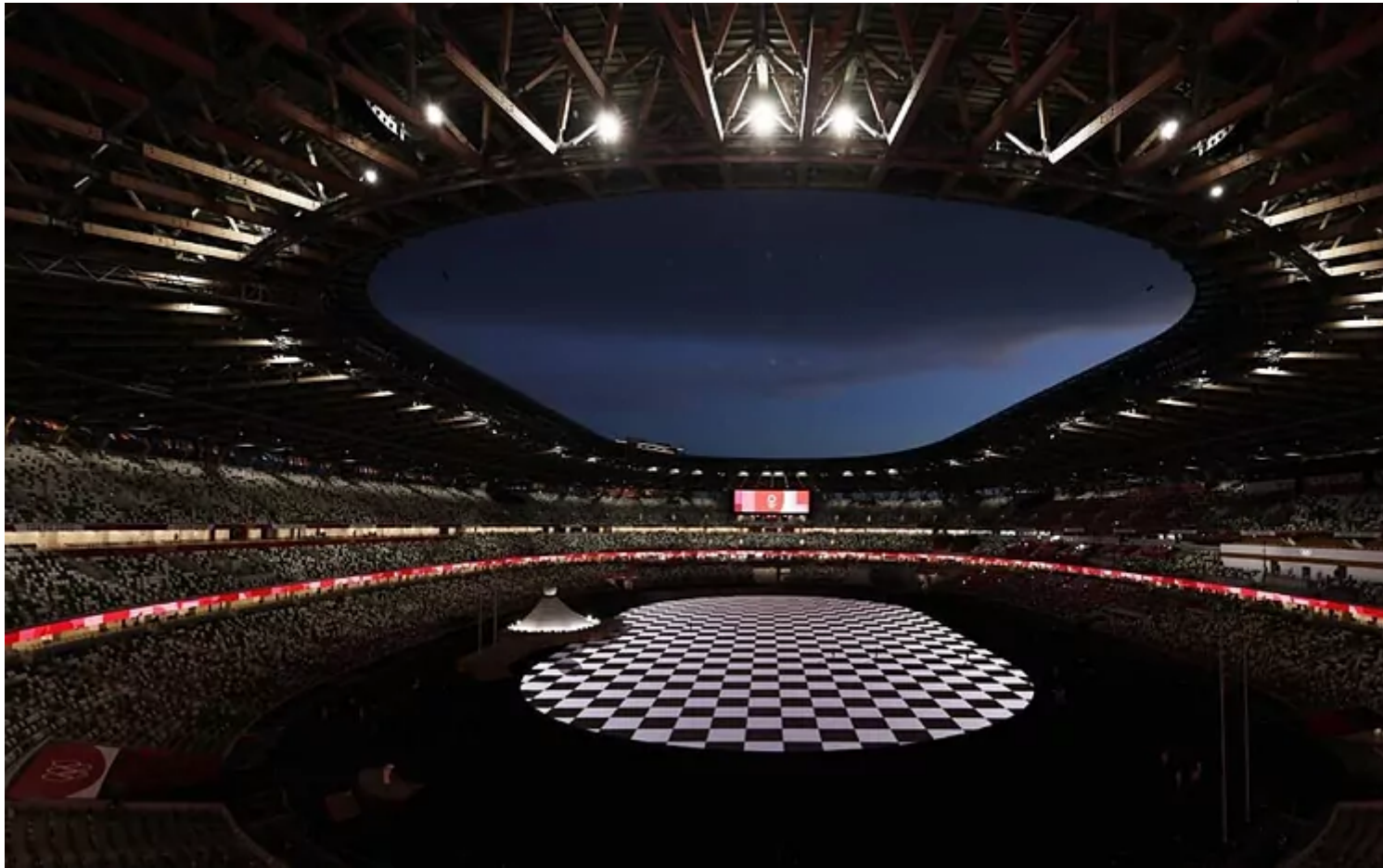


Paralympic Games close, ending an 8-year saga



Paralympic Games close, ending of an 8-year saga?

Tokyo, September 5 (RHC)-- The final act of Tokyo's postponed Olympic and Paralympic Games came on Sunday, nearly eight years to the day after the Japanese capital was named the host city.

The Paralympics ended a 13-day competition period with a colorful, circus-like ceremony at the National Stadium attended by Crown Prince Akishino, brother of Emperor Naruhito. The Olympic Games culminated almost a month ago.

This was an unprecedented Olympic and Paralympic Games, postponed for a year and marked by several incidents and events. There were no fans in the stands at the Olympics because of the

coronavirus pandemic, except for a few thousand in some of the venues outside Tokyo. A few thousand school children were able to attend some Paralympic competitions.

"There were many times when we thought these Games would not happen," Andrew Parsons, president of the International Paralympic Committee, said Sunday. "There were many sleepless nights."

The closing ceremony was titled "Harmonious Cacophony" and featured both able-bodied and disabled performers. Organizers described the theme as a "Paralympics-inspired world: one where differences shine through."

Like the Olympics, the Paralympics were held at a time when Tokyo was in a state of emergency due to the pandemic. As was done at the Olympics, athletes were tested for COVID-19 frequently and isolated in a bubble in order to prevent contagions, although cases increased among the Japanese population which is now 50% vaccinated.

"I think we have reached the end of the Games without serious problems," said Seiko Hashimoto, president of the Tokyo Games organizing committee.

There were, however, details to note.

The Paralympics perhaps left a more tangible legacy in Japan than the Olympics by raising social awareness of people with disabilities and the provision of accessible public spaces.

The Paralympics involved a record number of athletes-4,405-and a record number of countries winning medals. Two Afghan athletes also competed, both of whom arrived several days late after leaving Kabul.

"The Tokyo Games were a model of efficiency and conviviality," said Olympic historian David Wallechinsky in an email to the AP "Had it not been for the difficulties related to covid 19 these would have been the best organized or near the best Olympics of the 19 editions - counting Summer and Winter Games - that I have been to."

An Oxford University study found that these have been the most expensive Games on record. Japan officially spent \$15.4 billion to host the Olympics and Paralympics, double the original estimate. Several government audits suggested that the actual cost is about double that figure. All but \$6.7 billion came from taxpayers.

The pandemic perhaps cost organizers nearly \$800 million in lost ticket sales, a budget shortfall that will have to be made up by more government funds. In addition, local sponsors contributed more than \$3 billion to the operating budget, but received very little in return in the absence of fans.

For its part, the International Olympic Committee, which lobbied for the Tokyo Games and generated between \$3 billion and \$4 billion in broadcast rights revenue, is preparing in advance for the next three summer Olympics; Paris in 2024, Los Angeles in 2028 and Brisbane, Australia, in 2032.

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