

When will the fate of the Olympics be known?

IOC president Bach has repeatedly said it's too early to announce a final decision

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TOKYO

The Olympic flame has arrived in Japan from Greece. Next comes the torch relay around the country, which is scheduled to start on Thursday from Fukushima prefecture in northern Japan.

Organisers have asked crowds to be restrained, but have been imprecise about what that means. Greek officials last week stopped a relay there on the second day and did not resume because of crowd size.

In the face of the coronavirus pandemic, Japanese organisers and IOC president Thomas Bach say that the Games will open on July 24 at the \$1.43 billion National Stadium in central Tokyo.

Bach has repeatedly said it's too early to announce a final decision, saying he's taking advice from a task force that includes the World Health Organisation.

But now there's push back, mostly from athletes and former Olympians who are complaining: they can't train, qualifying events have been cancelled, and the chaos is sure to favour some



Hope springs: The Olympic flame which arrived in Japan on Friday will be on public display in some areas affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. ■ AP

over others. Then there's the question of bringing 11,000 athletes and staff together in the Olympic Village, and 4,400 Paralympians a month later.

Getting the flame to Japan represents a minor victory for both organisers and the IOC. Its symbolic presence could give the IOC space to

postpone the Tokyo Olympics, leaving the symbol behind as a reminder of what's still to come.

What is the deadline for making a final decision?

Bach surely knows, but he is not saying. In an interview with the *New York Times* Bach said cancellation is not

on the agenda. That leaves only going ahead, or postponement, as the options. Empty venues seem to have been ruled out.

Who will make the final decision?

It will be made jointly with the IOC, the city of Tokyo, and the Japanese Olympic

Committee. They are the three that signed the 81-page Host City Agreement, which spells out in enormous details all Games contingencies.

The IOC has all the leverage, though it will have to honour WHO suggestions and the interests of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The IOC has a reserve fund of about \$2 billion and insurance to cover losses. The contract says termination can occur "... if the IOC has reasonable grounds to believe, in its sole discretion, that the safety of participants in the Games is seriously threatened or jeopardised for any reason, whatsoever."

Tokyo is officially spending \$12.6 billion to organise the Olympics, but a national audit says it's at least twice that much.

How important is the torch relay to the IOC and local organisers?

It's important symbolism for the Japanese government and Prime Minister Abe.

He is Japan's longest-serving premier and hopes to use the Olympics to argue that

the Fukushima area has recovered from the disaster nine years ago.

The government has dubbed these The Recovery Olympics. However, many residents are still living in temporary quarters after the earthquake, tsunami and meltdown of three nuclear reactors in 2011.

Getting the relay started from Fukushima also helps major IOC sponsors Coca-Cola and Toyota, who pay millions to give their brands exposure during the relay. Crowds are being asked to be restrained. This will not keep the images of the relay from being transmitted daily around the globe on television. Bach is expected to watch the relay when it reaches Hiroshima on May 18-19.

Any bookmaker taking odds?

An Irish bookmaker says 1-7 Games will not open as schedule on July 24.

A poll by Japanese news agency Kyodo this week showed 69.9% of Japanese questioned do not believe the Games will begin on time.

More countries call for delaying Tokyo Games

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LOS ANGELES

US Olympic chiefs said more time was needed to determine the fate of the Tokyo Olympics as a major US sports federation called for the Games to be postponed over the coronavirus pandemic.

The French swimming federation too on Saturday joined its US counterpart in calling for the Olympics to be postponed, adding to pressure on the IOC. "The current context does not allow the 2020 Olympic Games to be organised properly," the federation said after a videoconference of its executive committee.

The Norwegian Olympic Committee (NOC) too on Saturday asked the IOC to postpone the Games.

In a letter sent to the IOC on Friday, the Norwegian sports body said, "our clear recommendation is that the Olympic Games in Tokyo

shall not take place before the COVID-19 situation is under firm control on a global scale."

In a conference call with reporters, United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) chairwoman Susanne Lyons said there was no need for the International Olympic Committee to make an immediate decision on Tokyo. "At this point in time, we do not feel that it's necessary for us to insist that they make a decision."

But just hours after Lyons' comments, USA Swimming underscored the growing divisions within US sport on the issue by calling for USOPC to request a postponement.

In an open letter to the USOPC chief executive Sarah Hirshland, swimming federation boss Tim Hinchey said US Olympic leaders should

"advocate for the postponement" of the Tokyo Games.

Postpone Olympics, says Sharath Kamal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India's veteran table tennis player Sharath Kamal is in line to play his fourth Olympics in July-August but he wants the IOC to postpone the mega event due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As an athlete, I obviously want the Olympics to happen but it should not happen."

"The epicentre of the virus will keep changing, first it was China, now it is Italy and Iran too is badly affected in Asia. I don't see the scenario being safe for the Olympics to start on time," the 37-year-old told PTI.

"Everyone is talking about social distancing but it is one thing which won't be possible at the Olympics. Thousands of athletes would be staying in the same village," he said.

Indian hockey teams continue to train

Squads are isolated at the SAI Centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU

Isolated inside the SAI Centre here in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's business as usual for the Indian men's and women's hockey players as they prepare for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics in a "safe environment".

The Sports Authority of India Centre, which has been shut for outside visitors, is well-equipped for regular practice sessions and no unauthorised persons are allowed to enter its premises.

"The COVID-19 outbreak has not affected our practice sessions. We are continuously washing our hands and our temperatures are being checked regularly."

"The authorities at our SAI campus are ensuring that we are training in a safe environment," said the

men's team captain Manpreet Singh.

"With the backing of SAI and our coaches, we have been training very hard for the Olympics," he added.

Safe environment

The women's team captain Rani Rampal said her team is fortunate to continue training for the Olympics in a safe environment.

"We are very fortunate to have a facility like the SAI campus here. Everyone is working very hard so that the hockey teams can continue to practice for the Olympics," said Rani.

"Our health is being monitored everyday and we are taking all the necessary precautions."

"The authorities at SAI have helped us to continue to focus on our goal of performing well at the Tokyo Olympics," she added.

WADA's dope-testing guidelines

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MONTREAL

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has issued new guidelines to facilitate continued testing amid the constraints of the coronavirus pandemic.

Noting that the spread of COVID-19 had evolved into

"an even greater health and societal emergency" since its March 6 communique, WADA urged Anti-Doping Organisations to act in accordance with restrictions placed by local health authorities "to ensure proper protection of athletes and doping control personnel, while protecting the integrity of doping control programs, particularly in the lead-up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic."

WADA's latest guidelines advise anti-doping organisations (ADOs) to make sure that sample collectors are free from any symptoms of illness.



Indian tennis players work on future ventures

Trying to make the most of the COVID-19-forced break

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Swinging the racquet will not earn them money all their life, so a few Indian tennis players, forced out of Pro Tour due to the health crisis triggered by COVID-19, are utilising their time to work on career beyond tennis.

Almost all of them are restricted to doing fitness drills at home with courts and gyms out of bound.

Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan is spending time hitting at private courts and handling the marketing of their family resort in Puducherry.

"It obviously is unusual situation. We can hit at a few places where people have private space and obviously the gathering is small. A few players doing that. I am in Puducherry to help with my resort (K resort)," Jeevan told PTI.

The left-hander said he is working on developing a tennis facility at their family

resort to host tournaments in future at a scenic location.

Mumbai-based Purav Raja has also busied himself in shaping up his business. "I am starting 'Restrung India', a racquet customising business. It's about building your own racquet. I am spending some time on this now which was difficult being on road. This is fun, giving Indian players a chance to use best equipment," he said.

"My wife is also helping me in this. But I still have to train and do my daily stuff. I am working on fitness and getting stronger."

Meanwhile, Prajnesh Gunneswaran said, "We are all having to sit around and wait. It's not ideal. I hope this passes quickly. Everybody in the world is struggling. We as tennis players should not say that our livelihood is at stake, it's worse for many others," said Prajnesh.



Making the most of it: Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan is spending time hitting at private courts and handling the marketing of their family resort. ■ FILE PHOTO: V. GREENIVASA MURTHY

Shreyas Iyer enthralled with his card tricks

NEW DELHI: With ample spare time available, Indian cricketer's "in-house magician" Shreyas Iyer is pulling out card tricks to wow fans and keep himself entertained while also promoting social distancing. The BCCI on Saturday tweeted a video of Shreyas performing a card magic trick with his sister Natasha. "Trust our in-house magician @ShreyasIyer15 to keep us entertained when



we are all indoors. Thanks for bringing smiles champ! #TeamIndia," the BCCI wrote on its Twitter handle. The India batsman was seen performing a new magic

trick which he calls "gun trick" with a deck of cards. ■ PTI

Barcelona mulls slashing players' salaries

BARCELONA: FC Barcelona will decide next week whether to temporarily reduce the salaries of some first-team players to tackle the economic impact. According to ESPN, Barcelona CEO Oscar Grau is in talks with LaLiga and other clubs around Europe so that they take concerted measures to address the

impact of the coronavirus, the report said. "It is vital for Barcelona's financial stability," sources from the club said. There might not be any temporary layoffs but according to the report, due to the absence of income, players might need to cut their wages while games remain suspended. ■ IANS

Zaha offers health staff free accommodation
LONDON: Crystal Palace winger Wilfried Zaha has offered free accommodation



to medical staff in his London properties as they treat patients with coronavirus. The 27-year-old Ivory Coast international follows in the footsteps of

former Manchester United star Gary Neville and Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich. Zaha willingly took up the baton saying he had friends working in the National Health Service and he could provide accommodation. ■ AFP

UEFA in a naming gaffe over 'Euro 2020'
LAUSANNE: UEFA was forced into an embarrassing about-turn after it mistakenly tweeted that Euro 2020 would keep its original title

despite being pushed back to 2021. "Although it will provisionally take place from 11 June - 11 July 2021, #EURO2020 will still be known as UEFA EURO 2020," UEFA had confidently said on Twitter on Friday. However, just hours later, it was less assured. "With apologies for the earlier error, to be clear no decision has yet been made on the name of the rearranged EURO to be held in 2021. The earlier tweet was sent by mistake," it

tweeted. ■ AFP
Espanyol's Chinese star Wu afflicted
SHANGHAI: Chinese football star Wu Lei, who plays for Espanyol, has been diagnosed with the coronavirus, the Chinese Football Association said on Saturday. "Wu Lei has mild symptoms and is currently undergoing treatment," the CFA said in a statement, adding it had been given the news by Espanyol. ■ AFP

PK-da guardian angel of Indian football: Bhutia

'He taught us how to stay humble and his teachings went beyond the game'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

P.K. Banerjee wore his greatness lightly and he inculcated that attribute in his pupils, said Bhaichung Bhutia, who called him the guardian angel of Indian football.

Bhutia, one of Banerjee's brightest disciples, recalled the days he spent under the great player's tutelage.

"What I felt truly great about the man was that he was not only a good player and a coach, but also a great human being," Bhutia wrote in a column for the AIFF.

"Off the pitch, he would always give us guidance on how to conduct ourselves. He taught us how to stay humble."

During his coaching days, the teachings of Banerjee went beyond



Baichung Bhutia. ■ FILE PHOTO: VIJAY SONEJI

was more of a guardian angel than a coach for us. And all of that helped us become better and more dedicated footballers and human beings," Bhutia wrote.

Memories

He recalled memories of his playing days under Banerjee, especially the famous 1997 Federation Cup derby between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan.

"One particular instance I clearly recall was the 1997 Federation Cup semifinal between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan at the Salt Lake Stadium. There was a lot of hype around the match, a lot was said in the media in the build-up to that game.

"However, PK-da, in his inimitable way, took the pressure off our shoulders. You must realise, that play-

ing in front of a one lakh thirty thousand odd crowd. As a youngster it wasn't easy. But he shielded us all from that pressure. He allowed us a clear mind on the day, as in all matches."

Pumped up

Pumped up by Banerjee's motivating words, Bhutia went on to score a hat-trick in that game and led East Bengal to a memorable 4-1 win.

Bhutia noted that as a coach Banerjee had the ability to get the best out of his players.

"I have played under the stewardship of a number of top coaches during my career. But the coaches in the early part of your career are the ones that really end up shaping you as a professional football player. PK-da had just that effect on me."

Excellence deserves to be rewarded

But no cash award for World Cups/championships held more than once a year

SHOOTING

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

It was a watershed year for Indian shooters when they topped the medals table in all the four World Cups for rifle and pistol. The icing on the cake was they were also on top of the medals table in the subsequent World Cups Finals in Putian, China.

Not surprisingly, three shooters Elavenil Valrivan, Saurabh Chaudhary and Divyansh Singh Panwar finished the year as World No. 1.

Dampener

It is in the background of such outstanding performance, a clear indication of Indian shooters going as favourites to the Tokyo Olympics, as and when it is held, that the recent government

order, is a dampener for shooters.

"World Cups/championships organised more than once a year will not be considered for cash award," states the recently amended government order for international medal winners.

Not a single rupee

Asian Games and Commonwealth Games gold will fetch ₹30 lakh each, Asian championship gold will get ₹15 lakh, and even SAF Games gold will be worth ₹3 lakh. But a World Cup gold, when you beat the best in the world, will not fetch a single rupee.

One of the pioneers of Indian shooting, Anjali Bhagwat who made the Sydney Olympics final, and was later held in awe by the Chinese, put things in perspective.

"In 2001 and 2002, I got

cash awards for all my World Cup medals. From 2003 onwards, the government started giving it only for one highest medal in the year.

"Later, I don't remember when, they stopped the cash award for World Cup medals," recalled Anjali, one of the first Indian shooters after Mansher Singh in 1997 and Abhinav Bindra in 2001 to win World Cup medals.

Ironically, Anjali had won her first gold medals in 2003, both in the World Cup in Fort Benning and the World Cup Final in Milan.

"When we started winning too many medals, I think, it changed to cash award only for World Cup Finals," said World Champion and Olympic medallist Gagan Narang.

Last year, the Indian shooters kept improving with every World Cup, collecting 16

gold, four silver and two bronze in Delhi, Beijing, Munich and Rio.

In the World Cup Final in Putian, the backyard of Chinese, Manu Bhaker, Elavenil and Divyansh won the individual gold medals.

Unfair

"You should look at the level of difficulty in deciding the quantum of the cash awards. We need to have sport specific awards. When someone becomes World No.1, he or she must have achieved something in the season. It is unfair that you neither reward the achievements, nor the rank," said Ronjan Sodhi, who won many World Cup medals, apart from the Asian Games gold.

The purpose of cash awards is defeated when excellence is ignored, just because it is frequent.