

Through these testing times India has seen a major drop in its air and noise pollution levels, Venice has dolphins playing in their harbours, boars running around their streets, and the pollution levels have dropped all over the world"

ROHIT SHARMA

'Zindagi rahi toh hi khel payenge'

Ace wrestler Bajrang has waited long for a chance at an Olympic medal, but realises that it's not the right time for the Games

AIFF should initiate PK lecture, says ex-coach

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
KOLKATA, MARCH 22

FORMER INDIAN football team captain and coach Syed Nayeemuddin feels that the All India Football Federation (AIFF) should start an annual PK Banerjee Lecture in memory of the departed legend. Three-time I-League winning coach Armando Colaco concurs. The AIFF technical committee chairman Shyam Thapa says he will take the proposal to the Federation general secretary Kushal Das.

PK passed away on Friday and usually the AIFF is not good at remembering the former greats. But PK, the two-time Olympian and an Asian Games gold medal winner, wasn't just another former footballer. A good majority in the Indian football fraternity wants the AIFF to preserve the legacy of the FIFA Order of Merit holder.

"Starting a PK Banerjee Memorial Lecture is the least the AIFF can do. He was one of the greatest in Indian football and like the Indian cricket board has the Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi Memorial Lecture, the AIFF, too, should take a leaf out of the BCCI's book and honour the legend," Nayeem, the only footballer to win the Arjuna and Dronacharya Awards, told *The Indian Express*.

"We as former footballers feel neglected by the AIFF. The way the Indian cricket board looks after the former players – pensions and other support – our football federation doesn't do that. Support from the AIFF is very, very important for the ex-players. So I think something should be done for the legend, PK Banerjee. It's very important," he added.

He enlists his credentials, unfamiliar to the younger generation of the country. "PK Banerjee is a legend and he deserves all the credit. He was not only a great player for India, but also a great coach. So his greatness should be compensated. The AIFF can name a tournament after him. I have a feeling that the AIFF will do something in his honour and I do welcome the idea of starting (an annual) PK Banerjee Memorial Lecture," Colaco, who took Dempo SC to the AFC Cup semifinals and also coached India, observed.

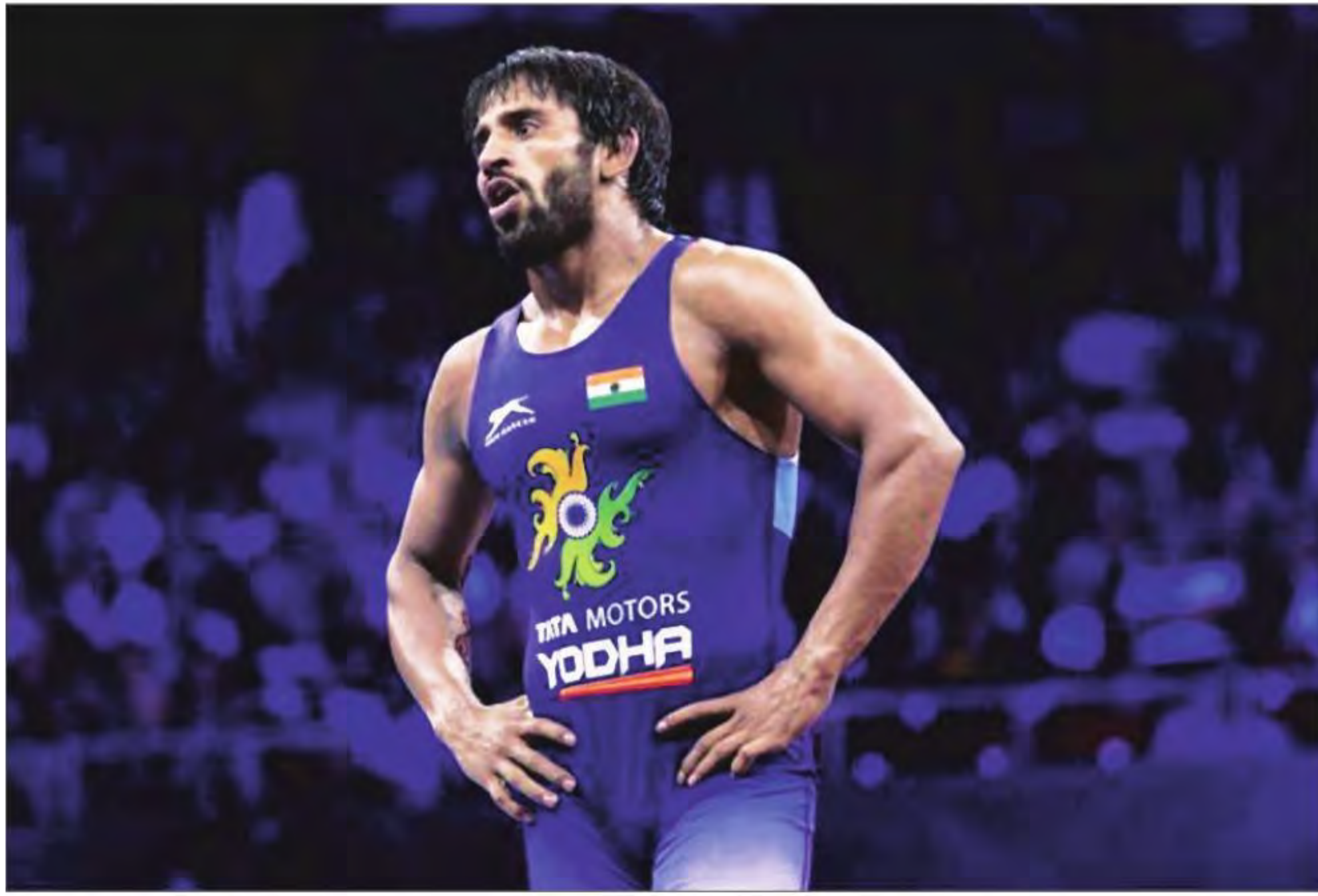
Colaco described PK as "inspiration personified". "That's what I have found. It's an asset in modern-day football. Sometimes when in the first 45 minutes things don't go well, you need somebody in the dressing-room who can inspire you."

Thapa, who was nurtured by PK at East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, welcomes the idea. "I think we should do it. I will talk to Mr Kushal Das. At the next AIFF meeting, whenever it (is scheduled), I will put forward this proposal," he tells this paper.

According to Das, it's for the AIFF's executive committee to take a call. "This is a decision, which will be taken by the executive committee, not by me. If the executive committee of the AIFF decides, it can be done."

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SYED NAYEEMUDDIN
FORMER INDIA COACH AND CAPTAIN



Bajrang Punia, India's finest contemporary wrestler, reckons it is better to postpone the Tokyo Games, given the precarious times. File

To be honest, I am not thinking about the Olympics right now. At the moment, we have to be careful from the virus. That doesn't mean I have stopped training. I have been training everyday but simultaneously, it's important to take care of our health too," he says."

BAJRANG PUNIA
WRESTLER

for everyone. People in the USA, China, Russia, Iran, Italy... not just for us Indians. Even the Russian and Iranian wrestlers are training at home right now," he says.

On Sunday, his personal coach Shako Bentineidis returned home to Georgia. "So nowadays, I just do some physical training. There's a basement in my apartment, a small area, but I jog there for some time to warm up, then do around 500 to 700 sit-ups and a few stretching exercises," Bajrang says. "I have a sparring partner (Jitender Kumar) but we don't have a mat so there is no chance of mat practice."

The other reason not to spar is to make sure there's physical distancing between him and his training partners. Given that wrestling requires intimate contact between the two competitors, Bajrang is avoiding any risk. He and his training partners have virtually locked themselves up in their apartment, leaving only when unavoidable.

He knows athletes are not immune from catching this disease. "We are humans as well. So it's not like we won't get affected by this. This disease, as they say, spreads from human contact. And wrestling is a contact sport. So we have to be extra careful."

Hope, agony and defiance

With the clamour escalating to postpone the Games, some athletes are getting more vocal about re-scheduling the mega event, some are devastated at the prospect, some are waiting and watching while some claim they are unaffected by the situation

THE GUTTED

MIRABAI CHANU: Having missed the Asian Games due to a back injury, the weightlifter is keen to make amends. So she is understandably

dismayed at the prospect of the Games getting postponed. Moreover, a spate of qualifying events, some of which she had planned to compete to keep herself match-fit, has been cancelled, leaving her disheartened.

"If the Olympics doesn't happen all our efforts for the last four years will all go to waste. I don't want it to cancel, I am praying to god every day. Even if it's postponed there will be a lot of problem."

The hopeful

MANU BHAKER: Like any impressionable youngster before her Games debut, Manu Bhaker is enthusiastically awaiting the Olympics. But she has accepted the possibility of rescheduling, though she has been training as hard as ever.

THE PRAGMATIST

NEERAJ CHOPRA: The javelin thrower has been ordered by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) to remain self-isolated for 14 days after

returning from a training stint in Turkey for an event in Patiala. So there is little training, but he's not frazzled. Rather, he says he is enjoying the rare break, which he calls a "forced leisure time."

"This is a completely different leisure time, not mixing with anybody, away from the world outside am enjoying my spare time listening to music, speaking on phone with family and friends, and reading a bit also."

THE UNAFFECTED

HOCKEY TEAM: Men's hockey coach Graham Reid insists his team is unaffected by the virus scare, despite a clutch of warm-up games

being shelved. The 32 campers in Bangalore, he says, are keeping themselves in the groove by training regularly.

"We are isolated but we can carry out our normal schedule. Things are very smooth. We can't control the virus but we can control our environment. We have 32 campers here and we can play competitive hockey against each other. We are playing internal games."



Abandon four-day games: Cook

London: Former England captain Alastair Cook has suggested the four-day County Championship may have to be curtailed or abandoned completely so officials can salvage "the most profitable parts of the English summer" following the coronavirus outbreak.

Friday saw the England and Wales Cricket Board announced that no professional cricket would be played in England and Wales before May 28. The County Championship, which comprises four-day first-class matches – and which Cook helped Essex win last season – was due to start on April 12. The Champion County match, the annual curtain-raiser for the year, was to be played between the Marylebone Cricket Club and Essex later this month in Sri Lanka, but had been called off.

County Championship matches do not generate as much money as limited overs fixtures or internationals but are seen as vital as preparing players for five-day Tests, still widely regarded as the pinnacle of the game. "I could have retired from all cricket when I quit the international stage in 2018 but I stayed on because I loved playing for Essex and that means the County Championship," wrote Cook, England's all-time leading Test run-scorer in his Sunday Times column.

"None of this is ideal but we all have to see the bigger picture – for our sport and the country as a whole," Cook wrote.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Puducherry cricket board opens dorm doors for patients

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, MARCH 22

CRICKET ASSOCIATION of Pondicherry has offered the dormitories in its cricket campus to be used for Coronavirus patients. In a letter to Lt. Governor of Puducherry Kiran Bedi, P Damodaran, former president of CAP and state cricket nominee for BCCI meetings, offered the services.

"We had built a dormitory for two cricket teams to stay comfortably i.e. 30 cricketers and dining, kitchen etc in our cricket campus in Tutupet, Pondicherry. We stopped cricketing activities due to outbreak of corona virus. We can offer these facilities to house up to 30 corona infected patients if need be with necessary medical tie-up through Laxmi Medical College, Pondicherry," Damodaran stated. Pondicherry has witnessed one positive corona case so far.

The CAP was inducted into the BCCI fold after Supreme Court appointed Committee of Administrators followed apex court orders to implement Lodha committee recommendations which gave power to each state to become a member and field one cricket team. Damodaran has said that state can use these services free of costs during any emergency situation. The Indian board had suspended all its domestic cricket including cash-rich Indian Premier League after the



The facility at Tutupet can house at least 30-40 people.

Indian government suspended all visas of foreign nationals.

Closure of cricket

BCCI secretary Jay Shah had announced the closure of cricket in the country. "In view of the ongoing Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) outbreak, the BCCI announced that all matches of the Paytm Irani Cup,

Senior Women's One-Day Knockout, Vizzy Trophy, Senior Women's One-Day Challenger, Women's Under 19 One-Day Knockout, Women's Under 19 T20 League, Super League and knockout, Women's Under 19 T20 Challenger Trophy, Women's Under 23 knockout, Women's Under 23 One-Day Challenger have been put on hold till further notice."

MP cricketer's father stranded in Iran

Mumbai: Anand Rajan, a Madhya Pradesh player who played for two Indian Premier League teams (Deccan Chargers and Sunrisers Hyderabad), has been anxious for a while as his father is stranded in Iran, a country struggling to cope with Coronavirus.

"As Indian government has brought back many Indians from Iran, I am hoping father comes back too," Rajan told *The Indian Express*. Iran has faced more than 20000 positive cases and 1556 have died due to Coronavirus till Saturday.

With Iran almost entirely cut off from the world, he is encountering various problems. "My father told me that the embassy will only clear travel of those people whose medical examination they conduct by themselves. I was told that the embassy doesn't have the necessary medical kit to deal with this, so time is running out. With no international flights allowed for next one week, we don't know what will happen," Rajan said.

Rajan is a medium pacer who played 40 first-class games for MP and repre-

sented Deccan Chargers and Hyderabad Sunrisers in the IPL. He has tweeted the Indian embassy in Iran for help and was promised that his father would be contacted but nothing has transpired till Saturday, he says.

He tweeted to the embassy in Iran, but is waiting for a response. "I tweeted to the Indian Embassy in Tehran, they said they will get in touch with my father but nobody got in touch till Saturday. At the moment he is fine and is staying inside his house in Qazvin which is some two hours' drive from Tehran. Back at home here there is some fear in our family as you can understand," Rajan said.

The Indian government has evacuated Indians from Iran, Japan, Milan and other parts of the world and kept them under isolation on return. Rajan, who played for India under-19, says his father has been working in Tehran for the last eight years and that he is fine now and has no symptoms of illness. "The sudden crisis has made us all worry. We want him back. At least he will be with us."

DEVENDRA PANDEY