

## VOMIT, FACEMASKS AS 'EXTREME SMOG' CLOUDS CHINA OPEN

**BEIJING:** A player's complaint that the smog made him vomit and the unflattering sight of fans in face masks have put Beijing's notorious air pollution back in the spotlight after haze hit this week's China Open.

"Hazardous" levels of smog cleared by Thursday, but not before Martin Klizan's angry tirade and pictures highlighting the murky air went worldwide on social and traditional media. In a widely reported Facebook post, since deleted, the Slovakian world number 42 said he coughed uncontrollably and then vomited after his defeat to Fabio Fognini, and vowed never to play at the tournament again.

"Regardless of the result of today's match... it has been such an extreme smog in Beijing today that half an hour after the beginning of the match I started to cough uncontrollably after every point and I had to vomit after the match," the post read.

"There is such an extreme smog in this city, that due to my health, which should be a priority of

every tournament organiser, unfortunately, I will have to leave this tournament out from my calendar for the rest of my tennis career." Klizan later deleted the post, although several fans referenced the message in comments they left on his Facebook page.

New York Times journalist Christopher Clarey put further pressure on organisers when he tweeted: "Air quality should absolutely be a factor in whether a city gets to stage an outdoor tennis tournament...or not."

Tournament officials have not responded to a request for an interview and information about at what level of air pollution, if any, play would be suspended, and what contingency planning was in place. Levels of PM2.5 particulates—small enough to deeply penetrate the lungs—were above 300 micrograms per cubic metre for much of Wednesday, according to the website of the US embassy in Beijing. Measurements over 300 are rated as "hazardous" by the website and carry the

warning: "Everyone should avoid all outdoor exertion." Chinese authorities this week issued a yellow alert for smog, the third highest.

### 'Cuts days from your life'

Air pollution is a chronic problem for China and with a rising number of professional tennis events around the country, players' exposure is also likely to increase. The Women's Tennis Association has eight events in China this year, while the men's Association of Tennis Professionals has three. Most of the matches are played outdoors. The China Open was previously entangled in pollution controversy two years ago, when Swedish player Robert Lindstedt described Beijing as: "The city that cuts off days from your life every time you visit." "I get dizzy when I get up. Yesterday I couldn't recover between points in practice and was breathing heavily the whole hour... It's just not healthy to be here," he added in his blog.

Three players have complained of dizzy spells

this year although one of them, Eugenie Bouchard, suffered concussion in recent weeks, and Petra Kvitova blamed the glandular fever she has struggled with this year. The third, Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, staggered on court in his first-round match on Monday, and had his heartbeat checked with a stethoscope before he lost limply to Austria's Andreas Haider-Maurer.

"I don't know. You know, nothing in me can calculate if it's enough oxygen for me or not. I just play tennis," said Tsonga, when asked if the pollution was to blame. Many competitors have attempted to play down the situation or say that, after several years of visiting China, they are resigned to the smoggy conditions. "Well, (it's) definitely tough. A little bit different than usual. But I think we're all kind of used to it, right?" said Polish fourth seed Agnieszka Radwanska. Rafael Nadal inadvertently coughed before he dismissed the air pollution as "nothing new for us", while Angelique Kerber conceded: "It's a little bit difficult.—AFP

## NISHIKORI FLOORS CILIC IN TOKYO THRILLER

**TOKYO:** Defending champion Kei Nishikori survived a war of attrition against Croatia's Marin Cilic to reach the Japan Open semi-finals yesterday, winning a cliffhanger 3-6, 7-5, 6-3.

Top seed Stan Wawrinka overpowered American qualifier Austin Krajicek 6-3, 6-4 to join him in the last four, though the Swiss required less than an hour to take care of business on a sunny afternoon in Tokyo. Second seed Nishikori was greeted like a rock star by 12,000 screaming fans but Cilic, who beat Japan's golden boy in last year's US Open final, had failed to read the script and quickly seized the initiative with some thunderous hitting.

Serving with such ferocity he knocked the racquet out of Nishikori's hand, the sixth seed broke first with a thumping forehand drive to lead 4-2 before wrapping up the opening set with an ace down the centre. Bidding for his third Japan Open in four years, Nishikori hung tough in the second set and, as cracks began to appear in Cilic's armour, levelled with an acrobatic leaping backhand that his opponent could only dump into the net. Cilic's game unravelled under the onslaught in the decider as Nishikori caught fire, breaking for 3-1 and closing out the quarter-final with an ace after two hours, 11 minutes.

World number four Wawrinka's path to the final was made easier when third seed Gilles Simon of France crashed out 6-3, 6-4 to Luxembourg's Gilles Muller. Wawrinka made no mistakes as he powered past Krajicek in just 58 minutes, and the left-hander had no answer to the rapier-like ground strokes of the French Open champion.

Wawrinka's one-handed backhand—one of the most venomous shots in men's tennis—did much of the damage and he closed out the match with a kicking serve which a deflated Krajicek swatted wide and long. "I felt a bit more relaxed today and confident with my game," said Wawrinka, who is chasing his fourth title of the year and the 11th of his career.

"A one-hour match, it was the perfect day for me today." Controversial Australian Nick Kyrgios, still looking for the first tournament victory of his fledgling career, was scheduled to play Frenchman Benoit Paire in a late match for the right to meet Nishikori in the semi-finals.—AFP



**TOKYO:** Kei Nishikori of Japan hits a return against Marin Cilic of Croatia during their quarter-final match at the Japan Open tennis tournament in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP



**BEIJING:** Rafael Nadal of Spain serves against Jack Sock of the US during their men's singles quarter-final match at China Open tennis tournament in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

## NADAL FIGHTS BACK TO SET UP FOGNINI REVENGE MATCH

**BEIJING:** Rafael Nadal came from behind against hard-hitting Jack Sock on Friday to reach the China Open semi-finals and set up a rematch with his shock US Open conqueror Fabio Fognini. The Spanish great, scrapping to recover his form after a tough year, was frequently outgunned by the American's howitzer forehand but he dug deep to see off the world number 30, 3-6, 6-4, 6-3.

"Yes, it was an important victory for me. Obviously I finished the match playing better than what I started. It's important because I came back," Nadal said. "This year I lost a lot of matches when I had an advantage. So to have the chance to win a match when I start losing this one, so it's important for me, too.

Nadal had not reached a hardcourt semi-final for more than a year, but he will now play Fognini, who stunned him

last month in the US Open third round, for a place in the title match.

"He's a great player. When you play against a great player, especially if you don't play to your best, your chances are lower," Nadal said of the Italian, who beat Uruguay's Pablo Cuevas 6-1, 2-6, 6-2. "If I am able to play my best tomorrow... I am going to have my chances. If not, it's going to be tough. It's simple. Sport is simple." On a cold, bright day, Nadal paid for a slow start when he was broken in the first game. Sock's big forehand kept Nadal under pressure throughout the set, which he ultimately yielded with a double-fault. But the 14-time Grand Slam-winner hit back by breaking first-up in the second set, and he gave a fist-pump of relief and satisfaction when he eventually levelled the match 6-4.

They slugged it out to 3-3 in the third set until Sock blinked first, handing

Nadal three break points, and for once the American's forehand misfired as he shanked a routine shot high into the stands. And it was another miscued forehand which settled the quarter-final as Sock, serving to stay in it, hit one long to hand victory to Nadal on his first match point.

In the women's draw, Ana Ivanovic beat Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-3, 7-5 to set up a semi-final with Tímea Babcsinszky, who recovered from a first-set 'bagel' to beat Sara Errani 0-6, 6-3, 7-5. Fourth seed Agnieszka Radwanska beat Angelique Kerber 6-1, 6-4 to reach the semi-finals, where she will play either Bethanie Mattek-Sands or Garbine Muguruza. In the last men's quarter-final, unbeaten five-time champion Novak Djokovic is playing America's John Isner for the prize of a semi-final against David Ferrer, who beat Taiwan's Lu Yen-hsun 6-3, 6-1. — AFP