

BOXING

MANNY PACQUIAO 'IN NEGOTIATIONS' TO FIGHT AMIR KHAN

MANILA: Philippine boxing hero Manny Pacquiao yesterday said he was "in negotiations" to face British fighter Amir Khan, after weeks of conflicting reports over his next bout.

"My team and I are in negotiations with Amir Khan for our next fight. Further announcements coming soon," Pacquiao, 38, said on his official Twitter feed.

Pacquiao's post follows various accounts from different sources over who he will be facing next and where the fight will be held. Last month, Pacquiao's American promoter Bob Arum was widely quoted as saying the Filipino would next face Australia's Jeff Horn in April, although Pacquiao's aides insisted nothing had been confirmed.

A business adviser of the fighter nicknamed "Pac-man" said this week that his next opponent would "most likely" be Khan in Dubai, but other aides declined to comment.

Pacquiao, the WBO welterweight champion, tweeted on February 11: "See you in UAE for my next fight. #TeamPacquiao". He also posted a poll on his Twitter feed asking his 108,000 followers to choose either Horn, Khan, American Terence Crawford or Briton Kell Brook as his next opponent. The poll has since been taken down. Pacquiao announced a brief retirement last year but made a successful comeback against Jessie Vargas in Las Vegas in November, saying he still felt like a youngster.

Pacquiao initially said he was retiring to focus on his new role as Philippine senator, after winning elections last year on the back of his sporting fame. — AFP



TOKYO: This file photo taken on November 25, 2016 shows WBO welterweight world champion Manny Pacquiao posing for the media following a press conference at his boxing gym in Tokyo. — AFP

UFC MUSCLES INTO ASIA WITH EYES FIRMLY ON CHINA

SINGAPORE: The world's biggest mixed martial arts organisation, the Las Vegas-based UFC, yesterday announced its long-awaited return to Asia with a Singapore show and an "ambition" to debut in mainland China. Ultimate Fighting Championship, which has shot to sporting prominence by making global stars of fighters such as Conor McGregor and Ronda Rousey, said it would host three events in Asia and two in Australia and New Zealand, though only confirming the Singapore date on June 17. While UFC has previously hosted two events in the southern Chinese semi-autonomous city of Macau, UFC Head of International and Content Joe Carr said its sights were now firmly fixed on the lucrative Chinese mainland. "We're definitely working on our first event in mainland China," he said at a press conference in Singapore.

"We've had a couple of events in Macau but it's completely different going to a Beijing or a Shanghai. I have nothing to announce but it's definitely a priority and a focus for the organisation. We were successful in Macau and that's fine but our ambitions are mainland China." — AFP



PUNE: Australia's Matthew Renshaw plays a defensive stroke as India's close-in fielders Wriddhiman Saha (L), Ajinkya Rahane (2L), Murali Vijay, (3R), captain Virat Kohli (2R) and Cheteshwar Pujara look on during the first day of the first Test cricket match between India and Australia at the Maharashtra Cricket Association stadium in Pune yesterday. — AFP

CRICKET

RENSHAW, STARC REVIVE AUSTRALIA IN INDIA TEST

PUNE: Australia's Matt Renshaw admitted he feared he had let his teammates down by leaving the fray with an upset stomach before returning to hit a gritty half-century in the first Test against India yesterday. In the opening day of a four-match series between the world's top two sides, Renshaw's innings and some late Mitchell Starc fireworks pulled Australia back from the brink as they reached 256 for nine at stumps.

Starc has so far made 57 off 58 balls and Josh Hazlewood was with him at the crease on one at Pune's Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium. Indian seamer Umesh Yadav claimed four wickets while the spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja took two each. The left-handed Renshaw was the anchor of the innings, top-scoring with 68, although it was Starc who provided the entertainment and caused a rethink in assessments of who had the better of the day. All had seemed calm with Renshaw for most of the morning session but when David Warner fell with the scores on 82, the English-born batsman caused a stir by following his opening partner back to the pavilion.

As news filtered out that he had an upset stomach, the 20-year-old Renshaw became the talk of social media with even the famously tough former Australian captain Allan Border weighing in. "Hope he's lying down half-dead, because as a captain I wouldn't be happy," Border wrote on Twitter as Renshaw lay on his sick-bed.

But after Australian skipper Steve Smith fell for 27 just before the tea break, Renshaw then strode back to the crease to register his second Test fifty in his fifth game. Renshaw said he had been feeling unwell for most of the morning and had tried to tough it out before deciding he had to leg it off the pitch. "It was tough. I wasn't too sure on the ruling, I didn't know you could retire

ill so I thought I just had to get out there and make sure I batted till lunch," he told reporters. "It wasn't an ideal situation and coming back it was probably a bit strange for me, waiting to bat because as an opener you just go straight out there and bat."

SMITH 'WASN'T THRILLED'

Renshaw admitted his captain Smith "wasn't too thrilled" about his retirement just before the break.

"But he understands that when you need to go to the toilet, you need to go to the toilet," he said. "It was probably a couple of hours before I came back but I felt bad knowing that I could be letting the team down—that's why I went back out there. "I wanted to do my bit for the team and try and make sure we had a pretty good day."

Renshaw struck 10 fours and a six during his 156-ball stay which ended when he edged a ball from Ashwin and was caught by Murali Vijay in the slips.

His dismissal was swiftly followed by the departure of Steve O'Keefe and

Nathan Lyon who both fell for ducks off consecutive Umesh deliveries.

Warner, who had tackled the Indian spinners with good feet movement, was the first of Umesh's four victims, falling to a good length delivery that hit the bat en route to stumps just before the lunch break. "There was some movement, there was a bit of reverse swing as well. I tried to keep the ball on the up," Umesh said of Warner's wicket. "It is a turning wicket and reverse swing is always helpful on such pitches."

Lyon's dismissal meant the visitors—who have a dreadful recent record on the sub-continent—had slumped from 119-1 to 205 for nine before Starc put on an unbeaten 51-run stand with Hazlewood. Starc, better known for his fast-bowling, caught the Indian attack by surprise by carting them around the ground in a blistering innings which featured five boundaries and three sixes. It was the ninth Test fifty.

The match is the first in a four-Test series between the world's two top-ranked sides. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

PUNE, India: Scoreboard at stumps on the opening day of the first Test between India and Australia in Pune yesterday:

Australia 1st innings		Total (9 wickets; 94 overs)	256
D. Warner b U. Yadav	38	Fall of wickets: 1-82 (Warner), 1-82 (Renshaw retired not out), 2-119 (S. Marsh), 3-149 (Handscomb), 4-149 (Smith), 5-166 (M. Marsh), 6-190 (Wade), 7-196 (Renshaw), 8-205 (O'Keefe), 9-205 (Lyon).	
M. Renshaw c Vijay b Ashwin	68	Bowling: Sharma 11-0-27-0 (1nb), Ashwin 34-10-59-2, J. Yadav 13-1-58-1 (1nb), Jadeja 24-4-74-2 (2nb), U. Yadav 12-3-32-4 (1nb).	
S. Smith c Kohli b Ashwin	27	India: M. Vijay, L. Rahul, C. Pujara, V. Kohli (capt), A. Rahane, W. Saha, R. Ashwin, R. Jadeja, J. Yadav, I. Sharma, U. Yadav.	
S. Marsh c Kohli b J. Yadav	16		
P. Handscomb lbw b Jadeja	22		
M. Marsh lbw b Jadeja	4		
M. Wade lbw b U. Yadav	8		
M. Starc not out	57		
S. O'Keefe c Saha b U. Yadav	0		
N. Lyon lbw b U. Yadav	0		
J. Hazlewood not out	1		
Extras (lb 6, nb 9)	15		