

AUSTRALIA HAILS QUICK FIX OF PROBLEMS IN ATHLETES' VILLAGE

RIO DE JANEIRO: Australia's Olympic delegation in Rio de Janeiro said on Monday that organizers had made "fantastic" progress in fixing problems with unfinished housing, although officials admitted that only two-thirds of the buildings had passed full safety checks.

Organizers for South America's first Olympic Games built 31 17-story buildings, but only 12 had been given the green light by Monday morning while another eight were in the process of receiving a full safety certification, Rio2016 spokesman Mario Andrada told Reuters.

"Twenty will be ready by today and 31 should be ready by Thursday," Andrada said, a full eight days before the opening ceremony.

The admission came a day after Australia's delegation said it would not move into the Olympic Village because it was "not safe or ready," citing deficiencies like "blocked toilets, leaking pipes and exposed wiring."

The litany of grievances from Australia, which moved members of its delegation into nearby hotels, revived

concern over Brazil's readiness to host a major sporting event in the midst of its worst recession in decades and a deep political crisis.

New Zealand and Italy's delegations both said they had been forced to fix problems with electricity and plumbing, while Argentina said on Monday it had reserved accommodation outside the village for part of its delegation.

The Dutch team said their own staff had resolved many of the issues that beset their building, but they threatened to seek financial compensation for their work. "We will evaluate this situation with IOC and Rio 2016 after the Games," Chief of Mission Maurits Hendriks, said in a statement issued on Sunday night. "This applies, for example, to financial consequences as a result of the measures we are taking and have been taken."

However, the head of the Australian Olympic team, Kitty Chiller, thanked organizers on Monday for responding promptly to her concerns by deploying hundreds of maintenance people and cleaners. "There was fantastic progress

made today," Chiller told a news conference in the Olympic media center. "It's looking like, according to our plan, we will be able to move everybody in on Wednesday."

The newly built village will host more than 18,000 athletes, officials, staff and volunteers over the Aug. 5-21 Olympics and the Sept. 7-18 Paralympics.

Chiller said her team had identified some 200 problems with the accommodation at the weekend - including water running down the walls, dirty floors and a strong smell of gas - but the list was now down to single figures.

Australia, which finished eighth in the medals table in London four years ago, is to bring 410 athletes for the games. It received three of its floors in the athletes accommodation on Monday, and it expects to receive the rest of the 15 floors by Wednesday, Chiller said.

Australian Shelley Watts, competing in the 60-kg female boxing category, said she had been impressed by the official accommodation when she arrived on Monday.

"It looks absolutely amazing. I haven't had to concern myself with any of the leakages of the water or anything, but walking in there I just couldn't wipe the smile off my face," she said. "What Rio has done to be able to create this facility is amazing."

MEMORIES OF WORLD CUP

As many as 500,000 visitors are expected to travel to Brazil for the Games, many of them from the United States. Worries about security, the Zika virus and Brazil's economic crisis could discourage some travelers and VIP guests. Around 28 percent of Olympic tickets have yet to be sold.

The problems at the village are not unlike those that have occurred before other big spectacles in Brazil, such as the 2014 World Cup, when stadium crews were still wielding paint brushes and screwdrivers even minutes before kickoff. The new subway line, which will connect the popular seaside neighborhoods of Copacabana and Ipanema to the Olympic facilities in Barra de Tijuca, has suffered repeated delays and is still

undergoing tests despite a scheduled inauguration next Saturday.

Chiller said that a group of around 10 national Olympic committees - including Britain, New Zealand, Japan and Germany - had worked together to alert the local organizers and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to problems at the village.

Rio's outspoken Mayor Eduardo Paes pledged to fix the problems, but had appeared to make light of the Australians' complaints by saying he would place a kangaroo in front of their accommodation to make them feel at home. "The mayor and I have a date on Wednesday and I believe there will be a ceremonial handing over of the keys. I have arranged a little present for the mayor as well," Chiller said. "I still say that it will be the best village that I have ever been in once these issues are complete." Chiller said the Australian team had paid the cost of putting its members in hotels and some initial cleaning costs to make its accommodation habitable. "We'll work out who pays the bill later on," she added. — Reuters



NEW DELHI: File photo, Indian wrestler Narsingh Yadav displays his medal after winning against South Africa Richard Brian Addinall in the 74kg category wrestling at the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, India. Yadav, who was to represent India in the 74kg category at the Olympics, said his food supplements were spiked after he tested positive for a banned steroid. — AP

INDIAN HOPEFULS CLAIM INNOCENCE ON DOPING

NEW DELHI: Two Indian competitors have proclaimed their innocence after testing positive for banned steroids just days before they were to leave for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio.

Wrestler Narsingh Yadav, who was to represent India in the 74-kilogram category at the Olympics, said his food supplements were spiked, causing the positive test.

Yesterday, shotput medal hope Inderjeet Singh, who had won a bronze at the 2014 Asian Games, was told by India's National Anti-Doping Agency that he had tested positive for a banned steroid.

Singh has been asked to provide a second sample. If that is positive for anabolic steroids, he will have to miss the Olympic Games beginning on Aug. 5. "I was on the way to getting an Olympic medal for my country," a sobbing Singh told reporters Tuesday. "I deny all the allegations of doping that I am accused of." "I have been speaking out against the politics in sports in India and how badly athletes are treated and their poor training facilities, and this has riled many powerful people in the country. Their intention is to shut me up."

Navin Agarwal, the director-general of India's anti-doping agency NADA, denied that the samples could have been tam-

pered, saying the samples are sealed in the presence of the athlete. Yadav said he feared his food supplements were spiked, but he did not reveal who was responsible for it. "I believe that there is foul play involved in this entire episode. Someone has sabotaged my food supplements and water intake," Yadav told NDTV station on Monday. Yadav, who had won a bronze at the 2015 World Championship to clinch a place in the Olympic team, failed successive dope tests when his samples tested positive for anabolic steroids.

"This is a conspiracy against me. I am sure the truth will come out," Yadav said. Yadav said he was supported in his claim by the Indian Olympic Association and the Wrestling Federation of India.

WFI President Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh said Yadav has made a formal complaint against officials of the Sports Authority of India and some others who he accused of acting against him, but did not reveal their identities.

Yadav defeated Sushil Kumar, a two-time Olympic medalist, to get his place on India's team for Rio. Indian officials said if Yadav is disqualified, Kumar was unlikely to go instead because the cutoff for entries was July 18. — AP

GERMAN CHAMP SAVAGES BACH OVER IOC'S RUSSIA STANCE

BERLIN: Germany's Olympic discus champion Robert Harting yesterday launched a savage verbal attack on compatriot Thomas Bach, president of the International Olympic Committee, for the IOC's stance on state-run Russian doping.

"For me, he is a part of the doping system, not the anti-doping system. I am ashamed of Thomas Bach," Harting, who has long been a critic of Bach, told SID, an AFP subsidiary.

"Personally, I detest this person more than ever and am very ashamed that I have to work with him indirectly." The IOC on Sunday declined to impose a blanket ban on all Russian competitors for the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games after a World Anti-Doping Agency probe found evidence of a wide-ranging cheating system directed from the top.

The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) has banned all Russian competitors from the athletic section of the Rio Games, something Harting welcomes as "the correct action. This may be a wake-up call."

But with less than two weeks before the Games start, the IOC has controversially left the decision whether to ban Russian athletes from the other Olympic disciplines down to the individual sports federations.

Bach defended the IOC's decision saying it "respects the right of every clean athlete around the world"—something Harting passionately rejects. The 31-year-old, who won the discus gold at London 2012 and three straight world titles from 2009 to 2013, says he has "no interest in feeling the pain" of any clean Russian athletes.

Harting says the IOC's decision is a set-back in the battle to drive doping from sport and says he "can't understand the decision" which he finds "simply embarrassing."

Harting says under Bach's presidency, the IOC has "reached a new level of disappointment."

Harting is also disappointed that an IOC ethics commission opted not to allow whistleblower Yuliya Stepanova, the Russian 800-metre runner who lifted the lid on systematic doping



BARRA: In this file photo taken on Sunday, July 24, 2016, Russian Olympic Committee head Alexander Zhukov, left, receives the official invitation for the 2016 Olympic games from the International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach during the ceremony celebrating exactly one year ahead of the start of Rio de Janeiro's Olympics, at Barra, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AP

fraud in her country, to compete in Rio as a neutral. Harting will be bidding to defend his Olympic title in Rio despite tearing a chest muscle and suffering an inflamed right knee at the start of the year. He missed the entire 2014 season with a torn knee ligament.

Harting is not the only German annoyed with Bach. In protest at the IOC decision, Hans Wilhelm Gaeb, the 80-year-old former president of the German Table Tennis

Association, says he will give back the Olympic Order, which was awarded to him in 2006 by Bach. "I think the decision is the severest blow to the integrity of sport and the Olympic principles," Gaeb said in a statement to SID. "I don't want to wear the recognition of an organisation which betrays the ideals of sport."

Gaeb branded the IOC's decision not to allow Stepanova to run in Rio as a "shameless act and a unique tribute to power politics". — AFP

TRIAL AND ERROR CALMS WATERS FOR NZ'S ALEH

WELLINGTON: Olympic sailing champion Jo Aleh's preparations for the Rio de Janeiro Games have included plenty of planned trial and error, which has led to a level of consistency that places her and Polly Powrie among the favourites in the women's 470.

New Zealand's Aleh and Powrie are the top-ranked duo in the centreboard 4.7m-long dinghy heading into next month's Games, having finished no lower than fourth in 22-of-24 World Sailing events they have competed at since the London Olympics.

That consistency has not come about by accident, Aleh told Reuters from Auckland on Tuesday as she, Powrie and coach Nathan Handley worked to smooth out the fickleness of sailing, a sport reliant on interpreting ever-changing conditions. "A lot of our sport is all about decision making made on the fly," the 30-year-old Aleh said. "You're presented with a set of circumstances and you have to make a split-second decision."

"The more you've been presented with that in the past, the more likely it is going to be the correct decision... so we have just been slowly trying to work on our areas of weakness."

"I think that's why we have had some bad regattas at times. It was about getting it right or getting it wrong." Team Jolly, as she and Powrie are known in cyberspace, have mostly got it right over the past four years.

Their run of results includes winning their first world title in La Rochelle in 2013 and a silver at the world sailing championships in 2014 in Spain. They also clinched silver at the 470 world championships earlier this year in Argentina and were third at the Olympics test event in Rio last year. "We feel that we have been working towards ticking off the things

we needed to do and by doing that you get pretty consistent results," Aleh added.

"Last time (in London), we were really inexperienced, but this time we have a lot more racing behind us so that even when its going bad we can pull it back."

"We're a solid enough team now that it doesn't matter what happens we will still be there." Aleh has

acknowledged that conditions in Rio, will be tricky and why they, and many of their main competitors like Austria's twice world champions Lara Vadlau and Jolanta Ogar and current champions Camille Lecointre and Helen Defrance from France, spent so much time training there in the last four years. Aleh said the two open water courses in Rio have bigger waves and stronger

winds, while wind for the three inshore courses were less predictable because of the towering hillsides surrounding Guanabara Bay. "Hopefully we have all spent enough time in Rio. There is quite a lot of variety," she said. "But knowing the conditions, knowing how to set the boat up and knowing how to race in it and the more time we had in Rio, the better." — Reuters



EYMOUTH: File photo shows Jo Aleh (black cap) and Olivia Powrie (white cap) of New Zealand celebrate finishing first and winning gold medal in the 470 Women's Class Sailing on Day 14 of the London 2012 Olympic Games at the Weymouth. — AP

SUN LOOKING FORWARD TO LIGHTING UP POOLS OF RIO

BEIJING: China's Sun Yang has suffered a number of setbacks in the build up to the Rio Olympics but the freestyle specialist said his controversial past has made him more determined to defend his Olympic titles in the Rio Games.

Sun served a three-month ban in 2014 after testing positive for a banned stimulant, spent a week in jail for crashing a car driven without a license, and most recently was involved in an altercation at last year's World Championships last year.

The 24-year-old also was also suspended from taking part in any commercial activities by Chinese swimming officials for missing training sessions in 2013.

However, the 1,500 freestyle world record holder said he was looking to learn from his experiences.

"I think I've grown more mature, I won't

have a second chance to experience the prime of my athletic career," the Chinese swimmer was quoted as saying in the China Daily.

"So I am fully investing my time and energy in the pool. "Respect is always earned through hard work. It's not just given, no matter what you won in the past. I am still young and I am still hungry for more titles."

A gold medalist in the 400 and 1500m four years ago, Sun set the fastest time in the 200m freestyle this year at the June international meet in California.

"No one can be 100 percent sure to win gold at the Olympics, but we don't need to question Sun's ability to do that if everything goes well in training," Sun's coach Zhang Yadong added. "I have faith in him to win all his events in Rio." — Reuters