

25 Tour de France top form guide with 5 stages to go



26 Sun eclipsed at world swim as Milak crushes Phelps record



27 Besieged Bale scores as Real Madrid rally for friendly win over Arsenal



TOKYO: A man walks in front of the Olympic Rings displayed in the Tokyo's Nihonbashi district yesterday, as the city marks one year before the start of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. — AFP

Tokyo marks one year till 2020 Olympics

'I can truly say I have never seen an Olympic city as prepared as Tokyo'

TOKYO: Tokyo promised a high-tech Olympics complete with robots as it marked a year to go until the 2020 Games yesterday, hoping to leave behind some bumps in the road including an ongoing corruption investigation. Organizers have battled everything from fears over deadly heat to persistent questions about the cost of the Games and how Tokyo won its bid.

But as the one-year countdown began, they touted speedy progress on venue construction and pledged a historic Games. "I can truly say I have never seen an Olympic city as prepared as Tokyo, with one year to go before the Olympic games," said International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach at a ceremony yesterday. "All the elements that make a truly outstanding Olympic Games are in place," he added, predicting "an amazing experience" for athletes.

Officials pointed to "unprecedented" ticket sales and applications by 200,000 people for just 80,000 volunteer positions as evidence of building excitement for the Games. "The six years since Tokyo was picked have zipped by, but I'm glad that preparations have gone very smoothly," Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, before the symbolic handing-out of invitations to

national Olympic committees. Tokyo 2020 President Yoshiro Mori said Bach praised the speed of the city's preparations as "an Olympic record".

High-tech showcase

Half of the new permanent venues have been completed, and organisers say construction of the rest is on track. Tokyo residents lined up for hours to try out Olympic sports at one of the events to celebrate the landmark. Twelve-year-old Yukimasa Nakahara queued from 5:30 am with his mother for the chance to pitch baseballs. "I'm looking forward to the Olympics... We've won tickets for a baseball game for the bronze medal," he told AFP with a big smile.

While cooler weather this summer has assuaged fears raised by a deadly heatwave last year, organizers say they have a raft of safety measures planned in case temperatures soar. Tactics from misting towers to flower beds — which don't radiate heat, and which organizers say also have a "psychological" cooling effect — will be tested this week at a beach volleyball event. With the countdown under way, organizers have also been stepping up efforts to promote the Games as a showcase for

Japan's high-tech know-how.

Japan's reputation as an industrial innovator has flagged since the last time it hosted the Games, in Tokyo in 1964, when it wowed the world with bullet trains. But government and businesses are hoping to dazzle visitors with everything from driverless airport transport to robot greeters and mascots. The organizers have even teamed up with two Japanese astronauts who will send messages of support from the International Space Station to those carrying the Olympic torch through the country.

Millions apply for tickets

The torch relay, featuring a rose-gold cherry blossom-shaped torch, will start from a sports centre in Fukushima that housed workers battling to remove radioactive waste after the 2011 tsunami. It will pass through other areas of north-east Japan devastated by the disaster, with authorities hoping to demonstrate the region's recovery.

Organizers also want the Games to be the "most sustainable ever" and are making everything from medals to podiums from recycled materials. Designs for the medals were unveiled yesterday, featuring a rough outer ring

similar to a meringue encircling a smooth shining centre. Organizers said the design was intended to resemble stones that had been polished — a symbol of the daily striving of athletes preparing for the Games.

The preparations haven't all been plain sailing for the organizers, with persistent questions over the cost of the Games, despite cuts of more than \$4 billion. The last version of the budget, released in December 2018 stood at 1.35 trillion yen (\$12.1 billion), unchanged from 2017. Organizers have also faced a series of embarrassing sideshows, including the resignation of Japan's Olympics minister in April after a string of gaffes. That came just a month after the head of Japan's Olympic Committee Tsunekazu Takeda said he would step down as French investigators examine payments made before Tokyo was awarded the 2020 Games.

But the clouds appear to have done little to dull enthusiasm for the Games, at least in Japan. Organizers say more than 7.5 million residents registered for a lottery to buy tickets during a first round in July. Demand was so high that the registration period was extended and organizers will hold a follow-up in August for those who were unsuccessful the first time around. — AFP

Going for gold: Tokyo 2020 medal designs unveiled

TOKYO: Tokyo Olympic organizers yesterday unveiled medals designed to reflect the "energy" of athletes as the city marked a year to go until the opening ceremony of the 2020 Summer Games. The medals, which will be made from recycled materials collected from old electronics, are intended to "resemble rough stones that have been polished and which now shine," organizers said.

The gold, silver and bronze awards each have a rough, almost meringue like surface on the outer ring, encircling a smooth, shining centre. "The medals collect and reflect myriad patterns of light, symbolizing the energy of the athletes and those who support them," the organizers said. The medals were unveiled at a ceremony marking the year-to-go countdown until the Tokyo 2020 Games, with International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach praising the city's readiness.

"I can truly say I have never seen an Olympic city as prepared as Tokyo, with one year to go before the Olympic Games," Bach said. "All the elements that make a truly outstanding Olympic Games are in place," he added, predicting "an amazing experience" for athletes. The Olympic medals design was chosen from more than 400 entries from professional designers and design students. "I never dreamed that the design I submitted only as a memorial to this lifetime event would be actually selected," designer Junichi Kawanishi said. "I hope the medals will be seen as paying tribute to the athletes' efforts, reflecting their glory, and symbolizing friendship."

Ryohei Miyata, who chaired the board that chose Kawanishi's design, said the medals showcased Japanese metal molding tech-



TOKYO: This undated handout photograph released yesterday by Tokyo 2020 shows the back side of medals for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. — AFP

niques. The medals will come on ribbons that use traditional Japanese chequered patterns and graphics that symbolizes kimono layering techniques. Miyata said there is "a beautiful balance between the design of the medals and their ribbons. It makes me want to strive for a medal myself." The medals, which will weigh in at between 556 and 450 grams (20 ounces and 16 ounces) each, are being manufactured from metal extracted from mobile phones and other small electronics donated by the Japanese public as part of a campaign to make Tokyo 2020 eco-friendly. — AFP

Want to stay relevant? Fight me, Pacquiao tells Mayweather

MANILA: Manny Pacquiao challenged Floyd Mayweather to face him again in the ring yesterday as the retired American star taunted the Filipino great about fighting on into his forties. Pacquiao, 40, who beat Keith Thurman on a split decision at the weekend, bit back at Mayweather on social media after the American accused him of trading on his name.

"You come to my fight and then use my name in a post but I'm the one that is trying to stay relevant? if you want to be relevant again... #MayPac2," Pacquiao tweeted. Mayweather, who retired at 40 in 2017 with the unprecedented win-loss record of 50-0, had earlier claimed that Pacquiao's "entire legacy and career has been built off its association with my name". "It's about time you all stop using my brand for clout chasing and clickbait and let that man's name hold weight of its own," he posted on Instagram.

"When we finally fought, I won so easily that everyone had to eat their words!" added Mayweather, alongside a picture of his 2015 defeat of Pacquiao. But Mayweather, who was ringside in Las Vegas as Pacquiao became the oldest welterweight world champion in boxing history, stayed silent about a rematch as he answered the Filipino in a later post. "Bottom line, I make more money than you... I beat you mentally, physically and financially!" he wrote. "Remember, you fight cause you have to, I fight when I want to!" Mayweather is one of just seven pro fighters to have beaten Pacquiao, the only boxer to have won world titles in eight weight divisions. — AFP