

18 Rugby Australia posts big losses, warns of 'significant cuts'



18 Kuwaiti champion thrives on fitness



19 Xavi wants 'total harmony' to return to Barcelona



New Olympic date likely 'this week'



TOKYO: In this file photo taken on March 11, 2020 a woman wearing a face mask walks in the tunnel of a metro station with a poster of Miraitowa, official mascot of the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. — AFP

TOKYO: New dates for the delayed Tokyo 2020 Olympics will likely be revealed this week, organisers said yesterday after the coronavirus forced the historic decision to postpone the Games until next year. Tokyo 2020 chief Yoshiro Mori told reporters they were weighing the pros and cons of a summer and spring Games and he expected a decision from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) soon.

"I think perhaps there will be some kind of communication from (IOC) President (Thomas) Bach this week," Mori told reporters. The Tokyo 2020 Olympics were due to open on July 24 and run for 16 days, but the coronavirus pandemic forced the first peace-time postponement of the Games.

The IOC and Japan had for weeks insisted the show could go on but the rapid spread of COVID-19 prompted growing disquiet among athletes and sporting federations. The Olympics was the highest-profile sporting casualty of the coronavirus that has wiped out fixtures worldwide and all but halted professional sport.

There was some speculation that Japanese organisers could take advantage of the blank canvas to shift the Games to spring, avoiding the heat of the Tokyo summer that had been their main concern before coronavirus struck.

Due to the heat, the marathon has been moved to Sapporo, a city some 800 kilometres (500 miles) to the north of Tokyo where the weather is cooler even

at the height of summer. But given the ongoing pandemic and need for preparation time, the most likely plan would be for the Games to begin on July 23, 2021, public broadcaster NHK said over the weekend, citing sources within the organising panel.

The postponement has handed organisers the "unprecedented" task of rearranging an event seven years in the making, and Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto has admitted the additional costs will be "massive". According to the latest budget, the Games were due to cost \$12.6 billion, shared between the organising committee, the government of Japan and Tokyo city. However, that number is hotly contested with a much-publicised government audit suggesting the central government was spending several times that amount — on items organisers claim are only tangentially related to the Olympics.

The postponement affects every aspect of the organisation — hotels, ticketing, venues and transport being among the major headaches. Hotels have had to cancel bookings, dealing them a bitter blow at a time when tourism is already being hammered by the coronavirus. Some venues that had booked events years in advance will potentially have to scrap them

Wednesday. There is no doubt about it. This is necessary in the current situation.

"It is completely unrealistic to imagine that with the travel restrictions that we currently have an international tennis tournament where hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world would travel. That is unthinkable."

The AELTC did not respond to a request for comment. The postponement of the Tokyo Olympics opened up a two-week window in the tennis calendar in July/August but it is less likely that it will be feasible for Wimbledon, which has only two covered courts and cannot be held past late summer.

French Open organisers stunned the tennis world by unilaterally postponing the claycourt Grand Slam at Roland Garros from May until late September because of the pandemic.

The French Tennis Federation (FFT) came under heavy fire from tennis players around the world at the lack of communication as the new dates clashed with several other events already featuring on the calendar.

to make way for the rescheduled Olympics and there is still uncertainty about whether ticket-holders will get refunded.

Another thorny issue is the athletes' village, which was due to be converted into luxury apartments after the Games, some of which have already found buyers.

The Japanese government had touted the Games as the "Recovery Olympics", designed to show how the country had bounced back from the 2011 triple disaster of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown in the northeastern Fukushima region. The Games are now being billed as the expression of humanity's triumph over the coronavirus. "We are embarking on an unprecedented challenge," said Mori. "But I believe it is the mission of the Tokyo 2020 organising committee to hold the Olympics and Paralympics next year as a proof of mankind's victory" against the virus.

Meanwhile, Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) has said its decision to pull out of the 2020 Tokyo Games was unilateral and made without the knowledge of Canada or the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The AOC said last Monday it could not assemble a team for 2020 because of complications brought by

the coronavirus, the announcement coming quickly after the Canada Olympic and Paralympic committees confirmed they would not send athletes.

The double-withdrawal prompted speculation that the two national Olympic committees may have acted in concert with the IOC to give the global body leverage to postpone Tokyo.

Canada on Friday denied any such arrangement, and the AOC followed suit yesterday. "Any assertions that a decision by the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) to tell its athletes to plan for a Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021 was done in concert with either the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) are completely incorrect," the AOC said in a statement emailed to Reuters.

The AOC said its decision followed a sequence of events, which included the IOC's announcement that the global body was conducting "scenario planning" for Tokyo, with postponement among the options.

The IOC's announcement came a day after Australian authorities announced a slew of measures aimed at containing the coronavirus, including travel curbs and quarantine requirements at national and state borders. "This meant our athletes could not continue their training programs," the AOC said. The effect of the government measures and the IOC's scenario planning prompted a special meeting of the AOC's executive board last Monday.—Agencies

Wimbledon will be cancelled

LONDON: Wimbledon organisers will announce the cancellation of the grasscourt Grand Slam this week due to the coronavirus pandemic, German Tennis Federation (DTB) vice-president Dirk Hordorff has told Sky Sports.

All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) officials earlier said the June 29-July 12 event would not be played behind closed doors and postponement was not without significant risk and difficulty.

"Wimbledon has stated that they will have a board meeting next Wednesday and will make the final decision there," Hordorff told Sky Sports Germany.

"I am also involved in the bodies of the ATP and WTA. The necessary decisions have already been made there and Wimbledon will decide to cancel next



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over the coronavirus. "We are embarking on an unprecedented challenge," said Mori. "But I believe it is the mission of the Tokyo 2020 organising committee to hold the Olympics and Paralympics next year as a proof of mankind's victory" against the virus.

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The men's ATP Tour and the WTA, which runs women's tournaments, require their players to participate at the four Grand Slams, but the new French Open dates are yet to feature on the calendars of either association.

"The unilateral behaviour of the organizers has been criticized by everyone and I can simply predict that the French Open will not be relocated as it was intended," Hordorff said.

He said either the FFT would go ahead with the new dates and feel the wrath of the entire tennis world or they have the option to start working with others to draw up a plan that makes sense for everyone.

"They will be deprived of the points and they will degenerate into a chaos event," he said. "Even those there have understood that and they are slowly crawling back. Solidarity is the order of the day, it is a matter of being together and not going it alone, as the president of the French Tennis Association did." — Reuters

Table tennis shelved until June due to virus

PARIS: Table tennis tournaments will be shelved until June 30 at the earliest due to the coronavirus pandemic and the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, officials said. The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) also announced rankings will be frozen as of March 20.

"The ITTF has also been working hard to manage the 2020 finances with the executive committee agreeing to reduce their expenses and senior staff offering to take a salary reduction, as the ITTF looks into other areas to save overall costs," said a statement. The coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 31,000 people worldwide, prompted the postponement last week of the Tokyo Olympics until 2021. — AFP