

Lifestyle



Mayank Prajapati, an Indian professional eSports athlete, plays 'Street Fighter V' at his residence in Gurgaon.



Sanindhiya Malik, an Indian professional eSports athlete, plays 'League of Legends' at his residence in New Delhi.

# Asian Games landmark for eSports fires Olympic dreams

**E**Sports' debut as a medal event at the Asian Games starting this week will change attitudes and be a major step towards Olympic recognition at last, gamers and experts say. Gaming was a demonstration sport at the 2018 Asian Games but gold medals will be up for grabs this time in Hangzhou in seven different games. Players will battle in EA Sports FC, PUBG Mobile, Arena of Valor, Dota 2, League of Legends, Dream Three Kingdoms 2 and Street Fighter V.

For Mayank Prajapati, India's medal hope in the Street Fighter beat'em up game, the Asian Games opening on Saturday will mark how far he and eSports have come. He recalled how his father would beat him for sneaking off to play video games. "I played my first game in the late 1990s at an arcade machine at a market with the two rupees I had," the 33-year-old said. "It was my first exposure with Street Fighter and I fell in love with the game."

"I got addicted and often lied to my parents, saying 'I am going for tuition', but spent hours playing," Prajapati, a 3D designer, recalled how his father

once tracked him down out playing video games at night, surrounded by half a dozen cheering children.

"I got a lot of scolding... I think I got beaten up," laughed Prajapati, himself now a father to a two-year-old boy. Prajapati's tale is a familiar one among gamers from different countries. Kim Gwan-woo, who will represent South Korea in Street Fighter V, told AFP in Seoul: "My parents absolutely hated me playing video games."

They remain "dubious" about him going to the Asian Games, he said, but added: "I think they will be very happy if I actually win a medal." South Korea, together with hosts China, are expected to be the dominant force in eSports at the Games.

### Olympic dream?

ESports events at the Games are expected to play out to bumper crowds at the futuristic-looking China Hangzhou Esports Centre—a far cry from players slinking off to dingy arcades against their parents' wishes. Its inclusion at the Games is a milestone for eSports in its quest for recognition as

a "real" sport, said Professor Kang of Shingu College, who was one of the first generation of Korean professional gamers under the alias "H.O.T Forever".

"When I was a player in the late 1990s the initial reaction was, 'Why is a video game on TV?'" Kang told AFP. "But with the hard work of the players and staff, I think we're about 90 percent there in becoming a real sport," he added. Lokesh Suji, vice-president of the Asian Electronic Sports Federation, called the Asian Games a significant step towards the ultimate goal.

"The dream will eventually be realized once it gets included into the Olympics as a fully fledged medal sport," said Suji, also director of the Esports Federation of India.

That does not look like happening in the near future, certainly not in time for next year's Paris Olympics. The International Olympic Committee is desperate to attract younger audiences, hence there will be breakdancing for the first time at the Games next year.

But even though the IOC officially recognized eSports as a sport in 2017,

there is currently no plan to include video games in the Olympic program. One stumbling block is the type of games which would be included because the promotion of violence goes against Olympic values, so that immediately rules out some popular eSports titles.

### On the sly

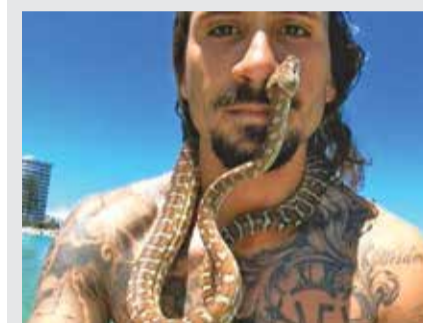
The Olympic dream may still be out of reach, but gamers say that eSports at the Asian Games will result in more fans, players and recognition. Sanindhiya Malik, 21, who is in the Indian team for the League of Legends, used to pretend to be studying on his computer when in actual fact he was competing online. "Sometimes during a tournament I had to hide and play from my parents so that they didn't know," Malik said.

"But after I graduated to representing India, my parents have noticed the recognition that this game can give me. "Even my relatives and friends who earlier questioned my game time have congratulated me—and it feels good." —AFP

## Snake no mistake: Australian fined for surfing with python

**A**s if sharks were not already enough to worry about, an Australian surfer has been seen paddling out with a python coiled around his neck. The intrepid surfer caused a stir on Australia's Gold Coast after footage emerged of him carving through the azure waves while carrying his pet carpet python.

But authorities said he did not possess a permit to have the reptile in public, and fined the man 2,322 Australian dollars (\$1,500). "To take an animal out in public or display it requires a separate permit," Queensland's Department of Environment and Science said Monday in a statement.



"Snakes are obviously cold-blooded animals, and while they can swim, reptiles generally avoid water. The python would have found the water to be extremely cold, and the only snakes that should be in the ocean are sea snakes." Carpet pythons are non-venomous snakes that can grow up to three meters (about 10 feet) long, and wrap around their prey and squeeze it until it suffocates. They mostly eat birds, lizards and other small mammals. —AFP



Alexia Delrieu, 50-year-old "bouquiniste" poses in front of her stands, where she sells antiquarian books and old posters, on the left bank of the Seine River in Paris.



A bouquiniste (bookseller) opens his stalls in Paris.

# PARIS BOOKSELLERS 'OPTIMISTIC' OVER BATTLE TO STAY DURING OLYMPICS



Eric De Tarragon, 60-year-old "bouquiniste" poses in front of his stands, where he sells antiquarian books and old posters, on the left bank of the Seine River.

**T**he famous booksellers that line the Seine in Paris say they are standing their ground over plans to shut them down during the opening ceremony of next year's Olympic Games as a matter of survival. Paris authorities told the "bouquinistes" earlier this summer that some 570 of their 900 stalls would have to move ahead of the opening ceremony on July 26, 2024 due to "a risk of acts of terrorism".

Already struggling to bounce back from shutdowns during the pandemic and a longer-run loss of interest from locals, the booksellers are refusing to miss out on the 16 million tourists expected for the Games. "I have neighbors who, if they don't sell one day, simply don't eat," said Alexia Delrieu, 50, who has run her stall by the Tournele Bridge for more than a decade.

"The good times were 20 years ago or more, before the internet. Now, you have to really work to make mini-

mum wage," added Guido Cuccolo, 71, based on the Quai de Conti. A self-proclaimed "born protester", Cuccolo says he is "optimistic" about winning the battle to stay. The booksellers have become an unlikely cause celebre across France, attracting attention of newspapers on both left and right.

For the local authorities, it is a delicate situation. The stall keepers do not pay rent, and are not entirely reliable with rules about their appearance and opening hours. But they are a beloved symbol of the capital. The vice-president of the Cultural Association of Booksellers of Paris, Pascal Corseaux, said dismantling the boxes would be a "logistical nightmare". "Many of them will not survive," he told AFP. "There is a much simpler solution, which is to bring in bomb squads, seal the boxes and then reopen quickly afterwards," he said. —AFP



Albert Abid, 62-year-old "bouquiniste" poses in front of his stands, where he sells antiquarian books and old posters, on the left bank of the Seine River in Paris. — AFP photos



Alain Papillaud, 74-year-old "bouquiniste" poses in front of his stands, where he sells antiquarian books and old posters, on the left bank of the Seine River in Paris.



Silva Brui, 73-year-old "bouquiniste" poses in front of her stands, where she sells antiquarian books, on the left bank of the Seine River.