

# Tokyo 2020 chief doesn't rule out cancelling Games

Toshiro Muto says organisers ready for talks if COVID cases spike



General view of the Olympic Rings outside The National Stadium

● Major sponsors to skip opening ceremony

● More Games athletes test coronavirus-positive

AFP | Tokyo

The chief of the Tokyo 2020 organising committee yesterday did not rule out cancelling the Olympics if COVID-19 cases spiked, as more athletes tested positive for the virus and sponsors ditched plans to attend Friday's opening ceremony.

Asked at a news conference if the global sporting showpiece might still be cancelled, Toshiro Muto said he would keep an eye on infection numbers and liaise with other organisers if necessary.

"We will continue discussions if there is a spike in cases," said Muto.

"We have agreed that based on the coronavirus situation, we will convene five-party talks again. At this point, the coronavirus cases may rise or fall, so we will think about what we should do when the situation arises."

A spokesman for Tokyo 2020 later said organisers were "concentrating 100% on delivering successful Games".

Rising COVID-19 cases in Tokyo have cast a large shadow over an event that, having already been postponed last year because of the pandemic, will now take place without spectators. Japan this month decided

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that participants would compete in empty venues to minimise health risks.

There have been 67 cases of COVID-19 infections in Japan among those accredited for the Games since July 1, when many athletes and officials started arriving, organisers said yesterday.

Japan, whose vaccination programme has lagged that of most other developed nations, has recorded more than 840,000 cases and 15,055 deaths and Games host city Tokyo is experiencing a fresh surge, with 1,387 cases recorded yesterday.

Muto, a former top financial bureaucrat with close ties to Japan's ruling party, is known for his careful choice of words, while officials are facing a domestic public angry about coronavirus restrictions and concerned over a possible spike in cases triggered by Games attendees arriving from abroad.



A volunteer is seen in a stand during training

skip. Toyota Motor Corp dropped all TV ads linked to the Games on Monday.

Bach, who Kyodo news agency said would meet Japan's Emperor Naruhito on Thursday, said yesterday organisers could never have imagined the "unprecedented challenges" of bringing the global event to Tokyo, praising the "heroic efforts" of medical personnel and volunteers around the world amid the pandemic.

Two members of Mexico's Olympic baseball team tested positive for COVID-19 at the team hotel before their departure for Tokyo, the country's baseball federation said yesterday.

The athletes, Hector Velazquez and Sammy Solis, who tested positive on Sunday, have been isolated, as have all team members pending results of more tests, it said.

Kenji Shibuya, former director of the Institute for Population Health at King's College London, said that the organisers' bubble system was already "kind of broken."

"My biggest concern is, of course, there will be a cluster of infections in the (athletes') village or some of the accommodation and interaction with local people," he added.

Organising committee President Hashimoto said members of the public were concerned "because they feel that the current situation appears to show that the playbooks that were meant to guarantee security is not providing a sense of safety."

In a poll in the Asahi newspaper, 68% of respondents expressed doubt about the ability of Olympic organisers to control coronavirus infections, with 55% saying they were opposed to the Games going ahead.



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Organisers, for whom International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach said cancelling the event had never been an option, have promised to keep the Games "safe and secure".

But experts see gaps in an Olympic "bubble" that mandates frequent testing and has been designed to limit participants' movements.

Seiko Hashimoto, who sits alongside Muto as organising committee President, said that safety measures introduced to reassure the Japanese public had not necessarily done so, and that she was aware that popular support for the Games had dropped.

"I really want to apologise from my heart for the accumulation of frustrations and concerns that the public has been feeling towards the Olympics," Hashimoto told the same news conference.

## 'Unprecedented challenges'

The first major test of how an Olympics can be held in the midst of a pandemic may well come in the men's soccer tournament, when Japan face a South Africa side that could struggle to field 11 players due to the coronavirus.

That match is due to take place on Thursday, a day before an opening ceremony that top sponsor Panasonic Corp, as well as Fujitsu Ltd and NEC Corp will

## Olympics chief admits 'sleepless nights' over troubled Tokyo Games

Reuters | Tokyo

Olympics chief Thomas Bach revealed "doubts" and "sleepless nights" over the postponed Tokyo Games yesterday as the opening ceremony nears after a year's delay and coronavirus chaos that has made them deeply unpopular with the Japanese public.

Bach, speaking at the International Olympic Committee session in Tokyo, said the unprecedented step of postponing the Games had proved more complicated than he thought.

The build-up to Friday's opening ceremony has been exceptionally rocky, with Tokyo still under a state of emergency and public opinion consistently against the Games, which will be held largely without spectators.

"Over the past 15 months we had to take many decisions on very uncertain grounds. We had doubts every day. We deliberated and discussed. There were sleepless nights," said Bach.

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THOMAS BACH

crisis," he added.

Bach has drawn scattered protests during his visit to Japan, where the latest poll in the Asahi Shimbun newspaper showed 55 percent of respondents opposed holding the Games this summer.

Four people have tested positive in the Olympic Village, heightening fears that the influx of thousands of athletes, officials and media will add to a spike in cases in Japan.

A teenage US gymnast staying outside the Village was also among the 71 Games-related cases reported so far. Olympic and Japanese officials have staunchly defended the Games, which are being held in a strict biosecure "bubble" with daily testing. Eighty percent of athletes at the Games have been vaccinated.

## 'Fully vaccinated' US women's 3x3 basketball's Samuelson out due to COVID-19

Reuters | Tokyo

US Women's 3x3 basketball player Katie Lou Samuelson said she was devastated after being forced to pull out of the Olympics due to a positive COVID-19 test, despite being fully vaccinated.

USA Basketball said on Monday that Samuelson was placed under their health and safety protocols at the weekend, with Jackie Young taking her place in the squad alongside Stefanie Dolson, All-

Gray and Kelsey Plum.

"I am devastated to share that after getting sick with COVID-19, I will not be able to go and compete in Tokyo," she wrote on Instagram.

"Competing in the Olympics has been a dream of mine since I was a little girl and I hope someday soon, I can come back to realize that dream. I am especially heartbroken as I am fully vaccinated and took every precaution."

3x3 basketball is making its Olympic debut in Tokyo. The three-a-side event runs from July 24-28.

## Tunisian double gold medallist to 'boycott' Tokyo Games

Reuters | Tokyo

Tunisia's double Olympic swimming gold medallist Oussama Mellouli has announced his international retirement, saying he had decided to "boycott" Tokyo despite qualifying for his sixth Games.

The 37-year-old won 1,500m gold in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the open-water marathon in London four years later, when he also claimed a 1,500m bronze medal in the pool. He qualified for Tokyo at an event in Portugal in June.

"After a month of suffering, I lose all hope of reconciliation or of winning my case. So I decided to retire from international competitions and boycott the Tokyo Games," he posted on Instagram.

Mellouli did not give details but media reports referenced a long-running legal dispute with

the Tunisian swimming federation.

Competing in Tokyo would have made Mellouli, who in Beijing beat Australia's Grant Hackett to become Tunisia's first gold medallist in nearly half a century, only the fourth swimmer to compete in six Games.

He was already the first swimmer to win gold in both the pool and open water.

The Tunisian had planned to retire in 2020 but delayed that decision when the Tokyo Olympics were postponed a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mellouli was suspended for 18 months in 2007 after a positive dope test for the banned substance Adderall.

