

Neymar denies flouting social distancing rules

Reuters | Paris

Paris St Germain forward Neymar has denied flouting social distancing rules following his return to his native Brazil after posting pictures on Instagram which showed him sun-bathing and playing foot-volleyball with a group of friends.

The 28-year-old said in a statement that the people in the photographs had travelled with him from Paris in a private jet and were in quarantine with him.

"The photograph... shows Neymar alongside people who are in quarantine with him, people who travelled with him from Paris to Brazil," said his spokesman in a statement published by the Globo media group in Brazil.

"Neymar invited those people to spend the 14 days in quarantine there before joining their respective families."

The statement added that the only visit he had received was from his son Davi Lucca and the striker had avoided meeting other relatives, including his mother, grandmother and sister.

"The house where the player is fulfilling quarantine is completely isolated, and allows peace and serenity for him to continue training," it added.



Neymar

Olympics set for July 23, 2021 start

AFP | Tokyo

The Tokyo Olympics will begin on July 23 next year, organisers said yesterday, after the coronavirus forced the historic decision to postpone the Games until 2021.

The announcement comes less than a week after the organisers were forced to delay the Games under heavy pressure from athletes and sports federations as the global outbreak worsened.

"The Olympics will be held from July 23 to August 8, 2021. The Paralympics will be held from August 24 to September 5," Tokyo 2020 chief Yoshiro Mori told reporters at a hastily arranged evening news conference.

Only hours earlier, Mori had said he expected a decision from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) during the course of the week.

But yesterday evening, he said an emergency teleconference had been held with the IOC and the date finalised.

"We agreed that the timing of the event will be in summer as originally planned, considering the coronavirus... and a certain amount of time needed for preparations, selection and qualification of athletes," he added.

In a statement, the IOC said the new dates would give health authorities and organisers "the maximum time to deal with the constantly changing landscape and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic."

The decision would also cause "minimum" disruption to the international sports calendar, the body said.



A woman walks beneath a Tokyo 2020 Olympics banner in Tokyo

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics were due to open on July 24 this year 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.

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 sug-

gesting the central government was spending several times that amount -- on items organisers claim are only tangentially related to the Olympics.

'Mankind's victory'

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 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.

"Humankind currently finds itself in a dark tunnel," IOC chief Thomas Bach said in yesterday's statement announcing the new date.

"These Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 can be a light at the end of this tunnel."

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YOSHIRO MORI

Messi confirms pay cut for Barca players, criticises board

AFP | Madrid

Lionel Messi confirmed yesterday that Barcelona's players will take a 70 per cent pay cut and make financial contributions to ensure the club's other employees are paid in full during the state of alarm in Spain.

In a lengthy message posted on his Instagram account, Messi also took another swipe at the Barca board, led by president Josep Maria Bartomeu, whom he accused of undermining the players during recent negotiations.

Other Spanish clubs are expected to follow suit in applying temporary pay cuts, as football's hiatus due to the coronavirus pandemic leaves a number of them fighting for financial survival.

Athletic Madrid have said the



Lionel Messi

club will impose salary reductions on staff whose hours have been affected while Espanyol have also confirmed pay cuts, although for sporting staff only.

"For our part, the time has come to announce that, as well as the reduction of 70 per cent of our salary during the State of Alarm, we will also make contributions so the club's employees can collect 100 per cent of their salary while this situation lasts," Messi wrote.

He added: "We want to clarify that our desire has always been to apply a drop in salary because we fully understand that this is an exceptional situation and we are the first ones who have ALWAYS helped the club when asked.

"Many times we have even done it on our own initiative when we thought it necessary or important.

"Therefore, it never ceases to amaze us that from within the club there were those who tried to put us under the magnifying glass and tried to add pressure to do something that we always knew we would do."

Arab MMA legend Fakhreddine calls out BRAVE CF champ Daniel "Gaucho"

TDI | Manama

Mohammad Fakhreddine has been recognized as one of the most vicious fighters in the BRAVE CF roster. After scoring second place in the open weight KHK World Championship against fighters heavier than him, "The Latest" is ready to come back to Middleweight and has a target on his sight: the divisional world champion, Daniel "Gaucho".

Fakhreddine has used his social media platforms to call out his Brazilian rival, who became the first-ever BRAVE CF Middleweight world champion last December, by knocking out hometown hero Chad Hanekom in South Africa. Daniel is 2-0 under the BRAVE CF banner with



Mohammad Fakhreddine looks on after a bout (file photo)

both victories coming by way of vicious KO.

The Lebanese phenom has been famously described as a

vicious striker himself, and his last two victories have come by stoppage due to strikes, including a win against Christofer Sil-

va in which Fakhreddine broke his opponent's leg with kicks.

While commenting on BRAVE CF's Instagram page, Fakhro has asked to be matched up against "Gaucho", claiming he wants the BRAVE CF belt more than anything, and that it would be a fan-friendly bout between two top strikers in the Middleweight division.

The weight-class continues to evolve as mainstays such as Ikram Aliskerov have also returned to the fold after an adventure at Welterweight. The Russian powerhouse has also put his hat into contention for Daniel's first title defense, which will most likely take place after the Coronavirus pandemic is controlled and activities resume all over the world.

Australia deny Canada collusion over Olympic pullout

AFP | Sydney

The Australian Olympic Committee yesterday refuted suggestions it had colluded with Canadian counterparts

to withdraw from the Tokyo Games to pressure organisers into a postponement.

Both countries said last week, in quick succession, that they would not send teams to the

Olympics in July because of the coronavirus pandemic.

A day later, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) postponed the Games until 2021.

The chain of events led to me-

dia speculation that the countries' Olympic Committees had been in cahoots to pressure organisers to call off the Games, or to give the global body leverage to postpone Tokyo.