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## Amit Panghal enters quarters of Asian Olympic qualifiers, Gaurav Solanki bows out



Press Trust Of India

AMMAN (JORDAN): Star Indian boxer Amit Panghal (52kg) advanced to the quarterfinals with a hard-earned triumph over Mongolia's Enkhmanadakh Kharkhuu in the Asian Qualifiers to be just one win away from securing an Olympic berth, here on Saturday.

The 23-year-old top seed, who became India's first silver-medallist at the world championships last year, prevailed in a split 3-2 decision after a fast-paced slugfest in which fortunes swung quite wildly.

Panghal will next face a familiar foe in Philippine's Carlo Paalam -- the man he beat in the semifinals of the 2018 Asian Games and the quarterfinals of the 2019 world championships.

The reigning Asian Games and Asian champion had to dig deep to edge past an aggressive and energetic Kharhuu. Panghal was expectedly quick on his feet, displayed a terrific counter-attacking game and his left

hand proved to be especially effective in the first two rounds.

However, the Mongolian sustained the pressure in the final three minutes in which Panghal seemed a bit off-colour. But he managed just enough to pull through and fetch a divided verdict, avenging his loss to the Mongolian in the World Military Games last year. In another intense pre-quarterfinal bout, Commonwealth Games silver-medallist Gaurav Solanki (57kg) was beaten 1-4 by top-seeded Uzbek Mirazizbek Mirzakhaliyov. Mirzakhaliyov, the reigning world champion besides being a gold-winner at the Asian Games and the Asian Championships, dominated the opening round. He was bested by the Indian in the second before roaring back to claim the final round honours and with it, the bout.

In the evening session, London Olympics bronze-medallist M C Mary Kom (51kg) will begin her campaign for a Tokyo Olympics berth by taking on New Zealand's Tasmyr Benny in the second round.

## Fist bumps replace handshakes, sweaty towels off limits in Davis Cup

Agencies

LONDON: Davis Cup qualifying got underway on Friday under the shadow of the deadly coronavirus with fist bumps instead of handshakes, ball boys and girls keeping their distance from sweat-stained towels and two ties even played out in eerily-empty arenas.

With matches taking place from Australia to Japan to Europe and in South America and Hawaii, 12 teams are bidding to join defending champions Spain, 2019 runners-up Canada, semi-finalists Great Britain and Russia, as well as wildcards France and Serbia in the Madrid finals in November.

Two of Friday's encounters had to be staged behind closed doors with spectators banned in Miki, where Japan are hosting Ecuador, and in Cagliari as Italy faced South Korea.

"Conditions were strange," said Italian number one and world 11 Fabio Fognini after cruising past 251-ranked Lee Duck-hee 6-0, 6-3 in just over an hour at the Circolo Tennis venue. "It was not difficult to focus but it was a bit strange to play in front of 100 people. But safety first and then sport," Fognini told davis-cup.com. Italy has been the worst-hit European country with 197 deaths from the coronavirus.

As a result, all sporting events are being played behind closed doors for the next month.

On Friday, only teams, media and support staff were allowed into the arena where world number 79 Gianluca Mager then extended the Italian lead to 2-0 overnight after a 6-3, 7-5 debut win over Nam Ji-sung.

"There's too much silence for a Davis Cup crowd," said Italy skipper Corrado Barazzutti after a day in which players and backroom staff exchanged fist bumps rather than the traditional post-match handshake in an effort to reduce the risk of a virus spread. In Miki, Japan, without their top two singles players Kei Nishikori -- who hasn't played Davis Cup since 2016 -- and Yoshihito Nishioka, slipped 2-0 down to Ecuador.

Emilio Gomez defeated Go Soeda 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) while Roberto Quiroz shrugged off a gap of 186 places in the rankings to beat Yasutaka Uchiyama 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 7-6 (10/8).

"Do not touch" Ball boys and girls wore gloves to handle the balls and used baskets for players to toss their towels.

Japan has reported 360 confirmed cases of coronavirus and six deaths.

It all added to a miserable day for Japan who were without Nishioka, still recovering from an elbow injury which has sidelined him since the US Open.

Nishioka.



# Wasim Jaffer announces retirement from all forms of game

Press Trust of India

MUMBAI : Former India opener Wasim Jaffer on Saturday announced retirement from all forms of cricket, drawing curtains on his illustrious career spanning over two decades.

The 42-year-old Jaffer has played 31 Tests and scored 1,944 runs with an average of 34.11. He has five hundreds and 11 fifties in the longest format, with 212 as his highest score.

"First of all, I would like to thank

The Almighty Allah, who gave me the talent to play this beautiful game. I'd like to also thank my family - my parents and brothers for encouraging me to pursue the sport as a profession and my wife, who left a cosy life of England to create a lovely home for our children and me," he said in a statement.

"A special thanks to all my coaches, right from my school days to professional cricket, for helping me polish my skills. A heartfelt

thanks to the selectors who showed faith in me," added Jaffer, who is the highest run-getter in Ranji Trophy.

The veteran opener is also one of the few Indian batsman, who has a double hundred in the West Indies. He made 212 against the hosts in St Lucia.

Jaffer, who made his Test and ODI debut against South Africa in 2006, is, however, remembered for his feats in domestic cricket, par-

ticularly the Ranji Trophy.

He became the first batsman to score 12,000 runs in Ranji Trophy, the coveted domestic tournament in India.

The right-handed batsman played for Mumbai for most part of his career and then also represented Vidarbha. He is also the first player to play in 150 Ranji Trophy matches.

"My gratitude to all the captains I played under and all my colleagues from whom I learnt so much about

the game and shared some lifelong memories. I would also like to thank all the support staff who were a constant pillar of support in my long journey," said the Mumbaikar.

Known for his stylistic shots, especially the cover drives, Jaffer was nemesis of the bowlers, who tormented them with his patient knocks.

He made his first-class debut in 1996-97 season and then went on to score 19,410 runs from 260 matches.

## PCB Chief Mani Admits Asia Cup Will Be Held At Neutral Venue

Press Trust Of India

KARACHI: Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Ehsan Mani on Saturday said the Asia Cup T20 later this year will be held at a neutral venue, virtually endorsing BCCI President Sourav Ganguly's statement that the tournament will be held in Dubai.

A few days back, Mani had disagreed with Ganguly who had said that India can't play in Pakistan -- the designated host country -- due to security concerns

and that the Asia Cup will be held in the UAE. But, Mani on Saturday made the U-turn from his earlier stated position.

"We have to keep in mind the interests of associate members of the Asian Cricket Council. We can't be stubborn and insist we will host the tournament in Pakistan because India is not willing to come to Pakistan. The option is it will be held at a neutral venue but that has to be decided by the ACC members," Mani told the media in Islamabad.

Ganguly had noted that in 2018 when India was to host the tournament, it was held in the UAE because Pakistan could not play in India.

Asked where the Asia Cup would be held in September, Mani said this will be decided by the ACC when it meets later this month.

"No decision has been taken on whether it will be held in UAE or Bangladesh," he said.

The ACC was due to meet in Dubai last week but the meeting

was postponed because of the coronavirus fears.

The ACC is now due to meet later this month to decide the venue for the event in September.

Interestingly, while appearing before the National Assembly Standing Committee on inter-provincial affairs in Islamabad on Friday, Mani claimed that if Indian broadcasting/production crew was not involved, it would become impossible to show live the Pakistan Super League matches.

He also made it clear that the state-owned Pakistan Television Corporation did not have the facilities or trained manpower to show PSL or international matches live. He also conceded that the opening ceremony of the PSL-5 in Karachi had been a disappointment and was not up to the mark.

A controversy had erupted in Pakistan over the fact that an Indian director/event manager supervised the conduct of the opening ceremony at the National Stadium in Karachi.

### CORONAVIRUS IMPACT

## India's FIFA World Cup Qualifier against Qatar postponed

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: Coronavirus continues to wreak havoc with sporting events as India's 2022 FIFA World Cup qualifiers match against Qatar scheduled for March 26 has now been postponed due to the spread of the deadly virus. All India Football Federation (AIFF) General Secretary Kushal Das told PTI that the match against the Asian Champions in Bhubaneswar has been postponed and a new date will be known next week.

"India's match against Qatar has been postponed. It will be played later this year but the new date is yet to be decided," Das said.

Ask about the status of the match against Afghanistan on June 9, he said. "That match will also be postponed." Das said the new dates of India's remaining World Cup qualifier matches will be known during a meeting between the AFC and AIFF officials in New Delhi on Tuesday.

"The meeting will discuss about the new dates of these matches, besides other matters," he said.

World football governing body FIFA and the Asian body AFC had on Thursday proposed postponing all the upcoming 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup Cup qualifiers in view of the rising coronavirus threat.

"For both FIFA and the AFC, the well-being and health of all individuals involved in football matches remains the highest priority, and as such, a formal proposal to postpone upcoming matches in the Asian FIFA World Cup 2022 and AFC Asian Cup 2023 qualifiers will now be shared with the relevant member associations," FIFA had said in a statement.

Already out of World Cup contention after failing to win a single game, India are also



scheduled to play against Bangladesh (June 4 in Dhaka) and Afghanistan (June 9 in Kolkata).

The FIFA and the AFC had said that they will provide an update on these fixtures in the coming days.

The Indian team was to begin a camp under head coach Igor Stimac in Bhubaneswar from Monday but it has now been cancelled.

"The camp now stands cancelled. There is no point of having the camp as the match against Qatar has been postponed," a source in the AIFF said.

Although the Blue Tigers lost their 2022 World Cup qualifier to Oman in Guwahati, they kept their chances alive after holding Asian champions Qatar to a goalless draw in Doha. But last-minute draws against Bangladesh and Afghanistan followed by a narrow 0-1 away loss to Oman put them out of contention for a next round berth.

India is now seeking to qualify for the 2023 Asian Cup.