

RIO OLYMPIC, PARALYMPIC CEREMONIES TO BE LOW-BUDGET

RIO DE JANEIRO: The opening and closing ceremonies for Rio Olympics and Paralympics will be low-budget productions compared to three years ago in London, or in Beijing in 2008. The austerity reflects the reality of Rio's Olympics, which open in just over 10 1/2 months and are caught up in the economic and political upheaval besetting Brazil. The country is mired in a recession, inflation has reached 10 percent and there are calls to impeach President Dilma Rousseff.

Fernando Meirelles, the Brazilian filmmaker and part of the creative team, estimated Tuesday that Rio will spend one-tenth what London did on four major ceremonies. "I would be ashamed to waste what London spent in a country where we need sanitation; where education needs money," Meirelles told reporters. "So I'm very glad we're not spending mon-

ey like crazy." London is reported to have spent about 80 million pounds (\$104 million at 2012 exchange rates) on the four ceremonies.

Meirelles, who directed the film "City of God," said the budget for the ceremonies had always been tight, although Rio organizers have clearly been cutting in the last year. Rio is spending about 39 billion reals (\$10 billion) in public and private money to prepare the games. In a letter obtained last week by The Associated Press, the governing body of swimming FINA complained to organizers and Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes about reduced seating in the swimming arena from 17,000 to 13,000. The water polo venue was also moved to cut costs.

In the letter, former Olympic gold-medal swimmer Alexander Popov said Rio's swimming preparations were "a step back in relation to previous edi-

tions of the Games." He added that the cuts may have "its repercussion on the athletes." Meirelles said "high-tech" was being eliminated from the ceremonies. He listed drones, complex aerial equipment and disappearing stages as items that Rio would do without. The emphasis will be on the basics. "We don't have high culture," Meirelles said. "Of course we have some pianists, some maestros and some orchestras, but that's not us. We come from the roots. The beauty of Brazil comes from the roots."

Faced with other needs, Meirelles also questioned the value of Rio's Games. "I'm not sure if I would approve an Olympics in Brazil, if this is a priority for us," he said. "But we're there and this is a great opportunity for the country, and we're going to do the best we can." Meirelles divulged little about the ceremonies. He talked about showing a vision of the

country "and what I hope it will become." He said he'd try to steer away from clichés, but not all of them.

"Having an Olympics in Rio without any mention of Carnival would be crazy," he said. "Carnival's not a cliché. People live Carnival." Andruha Waddington, another award-winning filmmaker who is part of the creative team, promised the ceremonies would reflect all of Brazil's roots - from its indigenous people to the 5 million African slaves who arrived in chains - 10 times more than arrived in the United States. "I can say it will be from A to Z in the show," Waddington said. "And we will talk about this diversity. We are confident the show we will be outstanding without an outstanding budget." Pressed for details, he also clammed up. "We should hide as much as we can," he added. "The surprise factor is very important." — AP

RED BULL WARN THAT F1 QUIT THREAT IS SERIOUS

SUZUKA: Red Bull are serious about pulling both their teams out of Formula One if they cannot obtain a competitive engine for 2016, their motorsport consultant Helmut Marko said yesterday. The Austrian, who is close to the energy drink company's billionaire owner Dietrich Mateschitz, told the official Formula One website (www.formula1.com) that the prospect could not be ruled out.

"There is an option to stop F1. That is a scenario. If we don't have an engine that allows us to compete at the very front we will prefer to stop," declared the former grand prix racer. "If we don't have a competitive engine there is no future in F1 for Red Bull Racing. The curtain may go down after (the season-ender in) Abu Dhabi. That is Mr Mateschitz's opinion," added Marko. "He knows that it costs the same amount of money to race at the front or, like we are now doing, in the 'premium midfield'-and he is not willing to do that for another season."

Red Bull have Australian Daniel Ricciardo and Russian Daniil Kvyat as their drivers while sister team Toro Rosso have the exciting young pairing of Dutch teenager Max Verstappen and Spaniard Carlos Sainz. Mateschitz has already said

the fractured partnership with Renault, who powered Red Bull Racing to four successive drivers' and constructors' championships from 2010, will not continue next year. "Renault couldn't provide us with an engine that enabled us to run at the front. It's that simple," said Marko. Red Bull have failed to persuade champions Mercedes to supply them while Honda, returning this year with McLaren, have the least competitive engine of all.

While there has been speculation that Volkswagen-owned Audi could eventually take over Red Bull's team, leaving the energy drink company as sponsor, that is not a short-term solution. "I don't think that they (Audi/Volkswagen) have a ready engine concept in their drawers. Yes, the rumors are there - and, of course, it would be great if another engine manufacturer would join. But right now that is all crystal ball reading," commented Marko. That leaves Ferrari, and Marko said they had discussed the situation but a deal had yet to be agreed and Red Bull wanted a similar engine to the one used by the Italian team rather than anything less powerful. Ferrari have won three of the 13 races so far this year, with Mercedes otherwise dominant. — Reuters



MINNEAPOLIS: Minnesota Lynx's Rebekkah Brunson (32) and Maya Moore (23) react to a foul call against the Los Angeles Sparks during the second half of Game 3 of a WNBA basketball Western Conference semifinal series on Tuesday, Sept 22, 2015, in Minneapolis. The Lynx won 91-80. — AP

LIBERTY, LYNX ADVANCE IN THE WNBA PLAYOFFS

NEW YORK: The New York Liberty and Minnesota Lynx are moving on in the WNBA playoffs after both won decisive Game 3s in the conference semifinals on Tuesday. In the West, Maya Moore had 20 points and eight rebounds to help the balanced Lynx reach the conference finals by defeating the Los Angeles Sparks 91-80. Tina Charles and the New York Liberty are headed to the Eastern Conference finals for the first time in five years thanks to a strong effort from Sugar Rodgers and the reserves.

Charles scored 22 points and Rodgers added 20 to help the top-seeded Liberty beat the Washington Mystics 79-74 on Tuesday night and advance out of the first round of the playoffs for the first time since 2010. "It means a lot to take that first step," said Charles, who also had 12 rebounds. "When I came home to New York this was my goal to win a championship, and now we've made it out of the first round."

The Liberty don't have too much time to rest as Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals will be here Wednesday night against the Indiana Fever because the Pope is coming to New York and will be at MSG on Friday. "It is what it is," Charles said. "At this point of the season you don't worry about rest, you worry about the next game." With Charles struggling from the field in the first half and Epiphanny Prince missing 10 of her first 11 shots, Rodgers, Kiah Stokes and Candice Wiggins came off the bench to spur New York. Trailing 72-71 with 1:46 left, Stokes hit a layup off a nifty assist from Rodgers.

After a steal on the other end by Rodgers, she hit a layup with 58 seconds left to give New York a three-point lead. Ivory Latta hit two free throws with 42.5 seconds left to cut Washington's deficit to 75-74. With the shot clock running down, Prince hit a 15-footer, only her second basket of the game to make it a three-point game with 20 seconds left. Washington had one final chance but Latta's 3-pointer was blocked by Stokes with 5 seconds left and New York held on for the win. "I'm proud of our players, the playoffs you never know any given night who's going to do it for you," New York coach Bill Laimbeer said.

"Every player needs to be ready, 1 through 11," Stokes said the team took to heart that in the double overtime loss in the playoff opener Washington's bench outperformed New York. "We knew and we wanted to make sure it didn't happen again," said Stokes, who had eight points and 14 rebounds. New York's reserves outscored Washington 40-19. "Their bench did a heck of a job," Washington coach Mike Thibault said. "Their bench played better than their starters. Sugar Rodgers was good, Wiggins was good, Kiah Stokes was good. Give them credit."

Washington scored the first 14 of the first 16 points in the third quarter to turn an eight-point halftime deficit into a 51-47 lead. Emma Meesseman had six of those points for the Mystics. Charles wouldn't let the Liberty go away. After missing 11 of her first 16 shots, the All-Star hit a jumper from the top of the key and then had a putback. Wiggins hit consecutive 3-pointers to

tie the game at 57 heading into the final quarter.

The Mystics jumped out all over New York hitting five of its first seven 3-pointers to go up 25-13 with 16 seconds left in the first quarter. New York looked like the second top seed in the East ready to fall in the opening round after Indiana knocked off No. 2 Chicago on Monday night. Stokes had a putback just before the buzzer that made it a 10-point game and gave the Liberty momentum heading into the second quarter. Rodgers and Candice Wiggins helped New York score 16 of the next 18 points to take control of the game. Rodgers' layup made it 28-27 with 5:11 left in the period and gave New York its first lead of the game. She was just getting started, scoring 10 of the Liberty's next 13 points sending the Liberty crowd into a frenzy.

A 3-pointer by Wiggins was the other basket during that spurt. She ran down the court pumping her fists after the shot swished through the net. While the attendance couldn't match the 10,000 that showed up for Game 1, the crowd did include WNBA President Laurel J. Richie, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and No. 1 New York fan Spike Lee, who sat courtside.

The Fever were also in the crowd as they came to New York on Tuesday afternoon to be ready to play tomorrow. The Liberty led 45-37 at the half. New York center Carolyn Swords didn't play after injuring her foot in Game 2 on Sunday which the Liberty won by 18 points. The Mystics were victorious in the opener, winning in double overtime. — Agencies



TOKYO: McLaren Honda Formula One drivers Fernando Alonso (right) and Jenson Button play racing video games in front of an audience of Japanese fans at the Honda headquarters in Tokyo yesterday. The Japanese Grand Prix will be held at Suzuka circuit in Mie prefecture from September 25-27. — AFP

MERCEDES SEEKING REASSURANCE AT JAPANESE SUZUKA GRAND PRIX

SUZUKA: Mercedes go into Sunday's Japanese Grand Prix hoping to show that their baffling lack of pace in Singapore was just a one-off but Lewis Hamilton and team mate Nico Rosberg need some convincing. "I don't have any confidence. I don't have any information to give me that confidence," world champion Hamilton told British reporters when asked how confident he was that Suzuka would be different. "I'm hoping it's a one-off but it was a strange weekend to say the least. "Our car has not got slower. I think some other people might have brought an upgrade package... but that doesn't explain it," added the Briton. Eclipsed in qualifying after 11 poles in 12 races, Hamilton suffered his first retirement of the season in Singapore and saw his lead over Rosberg cut to 41 points with six rounds remaining.

On a tight and twisty circuit, the previously dominant Mercedes was a second and a half slower than Sebastian Vettel's winning Ferrari. The heat and slow nature of the track may have played to rivals' strengths, but there will be worried faces among the championship leaders until at least Friday practice at Suzuka and possibly beyond. The Japanese circuit is both fast and demanding, with the flat-out 130R curve a stand-out feature, and should be much more to Mercedes' liking. If Ferrari are quicker there too, then the fight is really on.

"To be so far off the pace all of a sudden, to not understand it, that's really bad because then how are you going to improve it?," asked Rosberg, who finished fourth, after Sunday's race. "You just hope that at the next track it's going to come towards us again. The chances are extremely good, because at all other tracks we've been so fast, but who knows?" Red Bull principal Christian Horner, whose team

have been rebuffed by Mercedes in their quest for a new engine partner, expected to see the champions pick up speed but hoped a different scenario might evolve.

Senna mark

"It's quite confusing to see them so far off but maybe some of the new changes that have been introduced tyre-wise may have had an effect, who knows?," he said. "I'm sure we'll see maybe business as usual next weekend. If it's not, then it's obviously something that's been introduced that's affecting their performance."

Singapore was Hamilton's chance to equal the 41 wins of his late hero Ayrton Senna and he has every chance of doing that on Sunday, even if from one more start than the great Brazilian triple champion. In other respects, he and Mercedes will be starting over after falling just short of the all-time records for most individual and team pole positions in a row. But the Briton, winner of seven races this season and still firmly on course for a third title, can consider himself fortunate. "The car broke down... and I didn't lose a huge amount of points to the guy who's right behind me. It could have been a lot worse, so I'm looking at the glass half-full," said Hamilton.

The Suzuka weekend will be a tough homecoming for Honda, whose return as engine partners to McLaren has been painfully uncompetitive, even if Jenson Button and Fernando Alonso can count on plenty of local support. The race could also be a farewell from Button, a winner at Suzuka in 2011, to his Japanese fans if speculation that he is set to quit the sport at the end of the season are accurate. It will also be emotionally charged for the entire paddock, returning one year on from the late Jules Bianchi's horrific accident. — Reuters

WOZNIACKI DOWNS KONJUH TO REACH QUARTER-FINALS

TOKYO: Number one seed Caroline Wozniacki outclassed Ana Konjuh of Croatia 6-2, 6-2 at the Pan Pacific Open yesterday, advancing to a quarter-final against German fifth seed Angelique Kerber. The Danish former world number one, winner here in 2010, took one hour and 22 minutes to complete the night match. "Overall, I am happy with the victory," said Wozniacki, who is currently the world number six. Kerber has won six of her past 10 meetings with Wozniacki, including the April final of the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in Stuttgart, Germany. Swiss teenager Belinda Bencic edged past former US Open champion Samantha Stosur in a grueling second-round thriller.

The 18-year-old, ranked 15th in the world, spent two hours and 16 minutes to win 6-7 (7/5), 6-3, 6-4, surviving constant pressure from the big serves and sizzling returns of the 22nd-ranked Australian. The victory means Bencic will play her first match against Spanish third seed Garbine Muguruza in the quarter-finals. "It was very tough for me to return," Bencic said. "I am really happy that I was able to win such a difficult match." Early on in the match, Bencic beamed visibly frustrated with her mistakes, suffering three double faults in the first set while Stosur demonstrated her finesse with seven aces. But Stosur decelerated in the second set as Bencic found her rhythm to end the set 6-3.

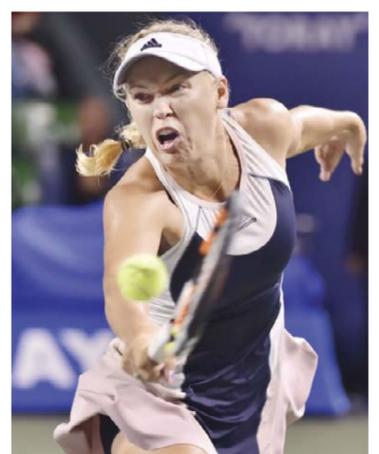
The Australian veteran came back late in the third set, when she narrowed a 4-0 deficit to 4-3, causing her teenage opponent to have a chat with her coach who is also her father. The young star in the end managed to maintain her momentum to grab victory. "I tried to

be relaxed, but of course it was a tight game. I just wanted to talk with my dad what to do in next two games so I can win the match," Bencic said. "It was a difficult situation mentally. It's good that I stayed calm in that." In other matches Muguruza, the world number eight, outperformed Czech Barbora Strycova 6-3, 6-4. Kerber came behind for a 5-7, 6-1, 6-0 victory against American Madison Brengle.

Halep advances

In another development, top seed Simona Halep of Romania defeated Timea Babos of Hungary in straight sets in second-round play Wednesday in the WTA Guangzhou International Women's Open, as all remaining seeded players advanced. Halep, ranked number two in the world, downed Babos 6-4, 6-0. The Romanian was defeated in the semifinals of the US Open this month by eventual champion Flavia Pennetta of Italy. Number three seed Sara Errani of Italy beat China's Zhang Kai-Lin 6-7 (6/8), 6-4, 6-2, losing the first set in a tiebreaker. Serbia's Jelena Jankovic, seeded fourth, downed Francesca Schiavone of Italy 7-5, 4-6, 6-4, while number five seed Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia eliminated Poland's Urszula Radwanska in straight sets 6-0, 6-1. Sixth seed Monica Niculescu from Romania beat Sweden's Rebecca Peterson 6-3, 6-2. China's top player Zheng Saisai, seeded eighth, downed Anett Kontaveit of Estonia 6-1, 7-6 (13/11) after taking the final set in a lengthy tiebreaker.

Denisa Allertova of the Czech Republic defeated Serbia's Bojana Jovanovski 6-3, 7-6 (7/5). Belgium's



TOKYO: Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark returns a shot against Ana Konjuh of Croatia during their second round match at the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Yanina Wickmayer beat Puerto Rico's Monica Puig 6-3, 6-4. Puig had upset number two seed Andrea Petkovic of Germany in the first round. The other seeded player to lose so far was Danka Kovinic of Montenegro, at number seven, who was defeated in the first round by Jovanovski 6-4, 6-2. Players are battling for prize money of \$250,000. — Agencies