

Opposition to Olympics escalates as Japan declares its fourth state of emergency

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With the Olympics, the Japanese government declared a fourth state of emergency in Tokyo on July 12, just a few weeks after the third state of emergency was lifted on June 20. Tokyo, one of the world's most densely populated cities, saw a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases immediately after the end of the previous restrictions.

Cases are continuing to increase, with schools among the sites where infections have been detected. The highly infectious Delta variant has been reported at a middle school and a preschool. Tokyo saw 1,149 new cases with a daily positivity rate of 14.2 percent on July 14 and 1,308 new cases on July 15. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government estimates that daily infection numbers will reach 2,406 by August 11. The state of emergency will remain in force until August 22.

Despite the very real danger of the spread of infections, the Japanese government, the Tokyo Olympics Committee, and the International Olympics Committee (IOC) have refused to cancel or postpone the Games. The venues in Tokyo, Hokkaido, and Fukushima will host events without spectators while venues in Miyagi, Shizuoka, and Ibaraki are planning to operate at up to 50 percent capacity.

Opposition to the Olympics is very widespread. An online poll revealed over 90 percent of respondents were opposed to having any spectators at the Games. More than 800 phone calls and emails to the Miyagi prefecture criticized the decision to have spectators at the Games. Over 100 phone calls were made to Ibaraki prefecture opposing its plan to have elementary and middle school students as spectators at the stadium. A comment stated, "The reason for hosting the Games without spectators is because of the high risk of COVID-19 transmission. What is the point of having children attend the Games under such circumstances?"

An international online poll of 28 countries, including USA and France, conducted by market research company Ipsos Group S.A., showed that 56 percent of respondents were opposed to proceeding with the Games. The Olympics are due to open on July 23 and run to August 8.

Over 4,189 people have signed a petition to cancel the planned visit of IOC President Thomas Bach to Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park. On July 3, the Hiroshima-based group—Organization to Stop the Tokyo Olympics—held a public rally, stating, "Thomas Bach and others, who are neglecting human lives, have no qualification to talk about peace." The organizers warned, "If Thomas Bach visits Hiroshima, we will organize a protest on the same day."

On July 12, a number of doctors voiced their opposition to the Olympics. Dr. Aoki stated, "What is urgently needed is to end the pandemic as soon as possible, practising necessary safety measures." She said that to proceed with the Olympics amidst a catastrophic pandemic should be taboo.

Dr. Kako Maeda stressed the impact of the pandemic on the casualized workforce which is referred to in Japan as "non-regular" and is mainly female. Maeda told the media, "What remains for women living in this country after the Olympics is a long-lasting pandemic ... Many women are at the frontline of the pandemic and are affected by it. This is a disaster caused by the government whose sole interest has been going forward with hosting the Olympics."

An online rally conducted by organizers of FLOWER DEMO on July 13 stated, "The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics are about to be enforced. Under the state of emergency, many citizens suffered difficulties, live with the fear of a health care crisis. While more than 10,000 people have been killed by the virus, tens of

thousands of athletes, officials and reporters from overseas will be coming to Tokyo for the Games. What justifies forcing [the holding of] an international event that invites such a large number of people?”

A petition calling for the cancellation of the Olympics on Change.org, started by Kenji Utsunomiya on May 5, now has over 450,000 signatures. Utsunomiya re-submitted the petition to the Japanese government and the Tokyo Olympics Committee after it was revealed that the Tokyo governor ignored the petition the first time it was submitted.

Despite the surging COVID-19 cases and the widespread opposition, IOC President Bach asked Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to allow spectators at the Games if the COVID-19 situation improves. In response, Suga said, “If there is a big change in the situation, we will hold a consultation again and consider how to deal with it.”

Condemnations flooded social media. One user stated, “It’s obviously impossible considering the current situation, but the IOC probably wants to make as much profit as possible. They don’t care how much infection would spread in Japan after the Games.”

Another comment stated, “Thomas Bach is like Hitler. He doesn’t care about the dangers facing people in Japan. He is a person who adheres only to commercial profit interests. The infection in Tokyo is spreading beyond expectations. The Olympics should be stopped immediately.”

When Bach appeared on live TV with Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike on July 15, a man shouted, “President Bach, you are a liar! The airport is dangerous! The Bubble is broken!” He was dragged out of the venue by Tokyo Metropolitan staff members.

The Olympic Committee’s COVID-19 preventative measure known as the “Bubble Method” is meant to isolate athletes and staff from contact with the general public. It was revealed on July 14 that one of the athletes who entered Japan has tested positive for the virus but the Olympics committees have refused to provide any details of the case. So far there have been four cases of COVID-19 infection among athletes and 22 cases among Olympic staff members.

Despite the emergence of the Delta variant which is surging worldwide, the ruling classes in every part of the world are pushing to remove all safety measures in order to pursue profits. The lives of thousands of

people will be at risk as a result of Japanese government’s refusal to cancel or postpone the Olympics and its decades-long defunding of the healthcare system.



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