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South Africa close on 287-4 after Ackerman's maiden ton



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Power of positive thinking helps Andreeva to WTA Finals title



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FOOTBALL

Qatar face tough South Korea test after Australia setback

The pressure surrounding the game extends beyond the result, with Lopetegui's Qatar future uncertain

By Sahan Bidappa
Doha

Qatar face another stern test today when they take on South Korea in an international friendly at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium, with Julen Lopetegui's side seeking a convincing response to Friday's heavy defeat by Australia.

The 3-0 loss to Australia exposed a number of Qatar's shortcomings, particularly in a first half in which they were overwhelmed and conceded all three goals. Lopetegui will now want to see a markedly different performance against another of Asia's leading sides, with greater defensive organisation, intensity and purpose expected from his players. The South Korea fixture offers Qatar an immediate chance to put those failings right.

Lopetegui's team struggled to cope with Australia's pace and physicality and rarely imposed themselves on the game. Against South Korea, they will face another technically accomplished opponent, one capable of exploiting any defensive uncertainty but also providing a useful measure of Qatar's ability to respond to adversity.

South Korea are ranked 32nd in the world and possess considerable quality throughout their squad. Their attacking threat is led by captain Son Heung-min, who is expected to retain his place despite a frustrating outing in the 3-2 defeat by Saudi Arabia in their previous match in Al Rayyan.

The pressure surrounding today's game extends beyond the result, however, with Lopetegui's future with Qatar the subject of increasing speculation. The Spaniard's position has come under scrutiny and there has been talk that the South Korea match could be his final game in charge of the national team.

For Lopetegui and his players, the most immediate concern will be to produce a performance that restores confidence.

A strong display would not erase the disappointment of Friday's defeat, but it would provide evidence that Qatar can learn from their mistakes and respond quickly when faced with another high-level opponent.

South Korea, meanwhile, arrive in Doha looking to finish the year on a positive note after their defeat by Saudi Arabia. Interim coach Robert Moreno said on Monday that maintaining South Korea's identity would remain central to his approach, even if tactical adjustments are made according to the opposition. "First of all, I think it is important to maintain the national team's identity and ideas," Moreno said. "We may tweak a few things depending on the opponents but I think our overall identity has to be consistent."



South Korea's interim coach Robert Moreno looks on as captain Son Heung-min goes through the grind in training in Doha yesterday.

Son endured a difficult evening against Saudi Arabia, missing opportunities and struggling at times to influence the game, but Moreno remains confident his captain can make a decisive contribution.

"Although those looks did not lead to goals, the fact that he created those chances at all is a positive," Moreno said. "If he can have just a little luck on his side and can score goals, then he will be a tremendous help to our team."

Moreno is also expected to use the friendly to give opportunities to younger players, with 21-year-old defender Shin Min-ha and 19-year-old midfielder Son Jeong-beom in line for their senior international debuts.

"Since this is a friendly match, we would love to have as many players take the field as possible," Moreno said. "If we see young players who we think can help the national team by gaining international experience, then they should play."



Qatar will look up to Akram Afif to add some sparkle against South Korea today.

South Korea have won two, drawn one and lost two of their five matches under Moreno, conceding seven goals in defeats by Uruguay and Saudi Arabia.

Their latest loss, however, did not tell the whole story. South Korea produced 15 attempts against Saudi Arabia, with six on target, and Moreno felt the performance deserved a better outcome.

"We have been trying to create a structure where we can have a quicker transition from offence to defence," he said. "I don't think we played too poorly in the last match but the outcome told a different story. We will try to be better in the next match."

Moreno's own position remains uncertain. Appointed on an interim basis in September, his contract expires on November 27. The Korea Football Association had initially indicated that his first six matches would be assessed before a decision on whether he could remain in charge through the Asian Cup, although the tournament has since been postponed from January 2027 to December 2027.

The Spaniard acknowledged the difficulties of working with limited preparation time but insisted that should not become an excuse.

"Of course, we have had some limitations with time but I don't want that to sound like an excuse," Moreno said. "We have some high quality players here and we are all aware of our situation."

South Korea have been training with a full squad in Qatar since last Tuesday, giving Moreno more time to work on his ideas than he had during their previous international fixtures. That preparation will now be put to the test against a Qatar side equally determined to make a statement.

SPOTLIGHT

Doha 2030 Flag Tour concludes at Aspire Dome and 3-2-1 museum

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Doha 2030 Asian Games Organising Committee marked Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) Day with the final leg of the Doha 2030 Flag Tour. The visit began at Aspire Dome, where Aspire Academy students met the Asian Games Flag and participating athletes, before continuing to the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, marking the symbolic conclusion of the Flag's first journey through Qatar.

Since its launch in October, the Flag Tour visited schools, universities and institutions across Qatar, connecting the Flag's arrival from Aichi–Nagoya 2026 with the young people, athletes and communities who will shape the journey towards Doha 2030.

The final Flag Tour leg brought together two important parts of Qatar's sporting story: Aspire Academy, which plays an important role in developing Qatar's sporting talent, and the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, which celebrates the history of sport in Qatar and the wider region.

Together, the visits created a symbolic link between Qatar's sporting legacy and the next chapter ahead, as Doha 2030 looks towards welcoming athletes, fans and communities from across Asia.



The final Flag Tour event was attended by a number of Qatar athletes.

The final Flag Tour event was attended by a number of Qatar athletes, including Abubaker Haydar (athletics), Mishari Nawaf and Rashid Nawaf (padel), Ahmed Tijan, Cherif Younousse, Malak Mohammed Hashem and Sara Mohammed Jabbar (beach volleyball), as well as para-athletes Sara Masoud (athletics), Abdulrahaman Abdulqader (Athletics) Ali Arshid (athletics), Shamil Shahov (Swimming) and Qatar national goalball team players Noureldin Ashraf and Mohamed Al Kahlout. Representatives from the Qatar Olympic Committee and the Doha 2030 Asian Games Organising Committee also attended the event.

Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, OCA Vice President for the 2030 Asian Games and Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee, said: "OCA Day is an opportunity to celebrate the power of sport to bring Asia together. It is particularly meaningful that the Doha 2030 Flag Tour concluded today at the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, a place that reflects Qatar's sporting journey and its connection with the wider Olympic and Asian sporting community. Through the Flag Tour, the journey towards Doha 2030 has met young people, athletes and communities across Qatar, reinforcing that the Games will be shaped by the people who will experience them."

Dr Ahmad Abdulla al-Buenain, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha 2030 Asian Games Organising Committee, said: 'Over the past weeks, the Flag has travelled through Qatar, meeting the people and institutions who will shape the journey towards Doha 2030. The visit to Aspire Academy recognised the important role it plays in developing Qatar's sporting talent, while the final stop at the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum connects the legacy of Doha 2006 with Qatar's preparations to welcome Asia in 2030. We look forward to continuing this shared journey with athletes, partners and communities across the continent'.

The Doha 2030 Flag Tour formed part of the wider journey towards the Asian Games Doha 2030 and reflected the spirit of The Games We Live For, bringing athletes, young people and communities together through sport.

SPORT

MOTORSPORT

F1 must push to open up careers: Hamilton

Reuters
London

Lewis Hamilton has called on Formula One to be more proactive in creating career opportunities for young people after his foundation published a report on Monday saying the sport was at risk of missing out on engineering and technical talent.

In its report titled "Igniting Inclusion", Hamilton's Mission 44 foundation called on Formula One to invest at least £50 million ($66 million) over five years to help young people from underrepresented backgrounds gain a pathway into motorsport careers.

The report said Formula One should publish data on who enters, leaves and is promoted within the sport by gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic background, and that teams should provide a number of paid, accessible, early-career roles.

"Formula 1 is inspiring millions of young people around the world. But inspiration means nothing without opportunity," Ferrari's Hamilton said in a statement.

"We can't tell young people to dream big and then not open the doors when they try to make those dreams a reality. F1, the FIA and every team must push harder and move faster," the 41-year-old added.

"We need real investment, more opportunities and greater accountability."

Hamilton, a seven-times world champion, acknowledged the work undertaken by Formula One to adopt a Diversity and Inclusion Charter and provide engineering scholarships since he established Mission 44 in 2021.

"In 2025 season alone, more than 500,000 young people engaged in education, STEM and inspiration programmes globally and over 1000 structured skills and talent development opportunities across our sport," a Formula One spokesperson said in a statement.

"We are committed, alongside the F1 teams, the FIA and broader members of our sport to continue build on this foundation and look forward to sharing the next phase of our work."

The sport's governing body has launched several initiatives and set up scholarships to create pathways for careers in the sport, including engineering and technical roles, committing £2.4 million in funding over three years.

"We recognise there is more to do, and we will continue working with our member clubs, teams and partners to build clear pathways for the next generation of talent," an FIA spokesperson said.

Last month, Formula One published its first sport-wide social impact report, which said 500,000 young people across 71 countries had benefited from educational outreach programmes in 2025.



CRICKET

Hosts South Africa reach 287-4 after Ackerman's ton

Das, 92 overnight, completed his eighth Test century with a six





South Africa's Marques Ackerman reacts as he celebrates after scoring a century on day two of the first Test against Bangladesh in Johannesburg yesterday. **Right:** Bangladesh's Litton Das displays a birthday card as he celebrates a century next to Mehidy Hasan Miraz. *(AFP)*

Reuters
Johannesburgh

South Africa opener Marques Ackerman scored his maiden Test century to help South Africa to 287-4, trailing Bangladesh by 113 runs at the close of play on the second day of the firstTest at the Wanderers yesterday.

Ackerman, thrust into the openers' role during last month's Australia series, scored 157 off 164 balls as the home side made a quick scoring response after bowling Bangladesh out for 400.

Ackerman had not opened the batting before his Test debut last month but made light work of the new role as he and Hamza Zubayr added 202 runs for the second wicket. He used his feet to good effect, cutting and pulling and showing a wide array of strokes to ensure a fast run rate of 4.6 an over.

Hazma, brought into the side as a potential solution to the troublesome number three role, repaid the selectors' faith with a brisk 83 off 129 balls.

He looked headed towards a century when Bangladesh brought on left-arm spinner Mominul Haque who dragged Hamza forward and induced an edge sharply taken by wicket-keeper Litton Das.

Bangladesh's vaunted quick bowling attack battled throughout the day but there was late reward for Hasan Mahmoud when Matthew Breetzke got a feint edge and was dismissed for two.

South Africa, whose opener Aiden Markram (4) was caught behind in the second over, had captain Temba Bavuma (19) and Ryan Rickelton (7) not out at stumps.

Bowler Dane Paterson took four wickets in the opening session to help dismiss Bangladesh for 400.

Das, who was 92 overnight, completed his eighth Test century with a six off Marco Jansen in the fourth over of the day. He made 120 before pulling a miscued stroke to mid-wicket.

BRIEF SCORES
South Africa 287 for 4 (Ackerman 157, Hamza 83, Mahmud 3-62) **trail Bangladesh 400** (Hridoy 137, Litton 120, Rabada 5-70, Paterson 4-92) **by 113 runs**

SPOTLIGHT

After successful Dakar 2026, Senegal needs to do more

AFP
Dakar



A sigh that says "Africa Welcomes, Dakar Celebrates" is seen in Dakar, Senegal. *(Reuters)*

The crowd's cheers crescendoed to a deafening roar with every point scored by 16-year-old Senegalese taekwondo competitor Ameth Diop, who kicked and punched his way to a bronze medal at the Youth Games in Dakar last week.

The continent's first-ever Olympic event, the 2026 Youth Olympic Games, wrapped up Friday after igniting a palpable fervour in the Senegalese capital, a passion normally reserved only for football in the west African country.

Despite taking home 12 medals at the Youth Games and the country's major investment in Olympics infrastructure, Senegal will need to do more, experts say, if it hopes to maintain the momentum and create Olympians at the main Games.

Olympic victories are historically rare in the region: Senegal has only ever had one - a silver at the 1988 Seoul Games in the men's 400m hurdles by Amadou Dia Ba.

The five countries with which Senegal shares a border - Mauritania, Mali, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea - have each had none.

MEDAL 'FROM TIME TO TIME'

"I'm coming out of this competition with a new spirit and a lot of knowledge", Diop, the youth taekwondo athlete, told AFP and other media Wednesday.

He spoke following the medal ceremony at the renovated Iba Mar Diop Sports Complex in Dakar's bustling Medina neighbourhood, where vendors hawk everything from cuts of meat to toiletries.

Propelling the next generation of Senegalese athletes onto the winner's podium, however, will require more than just knowledge and spirit, Nalla Soce Fall, expert in social psychology of sport at Senegal's Gaston Berger University, said to AFP.

"If you want to get medals on a regular basis, you have to invest a lot in training, coaches, taking care of athletes and building a lot of infrastructure for sports," Fall said.

Otherwise "you will have from time to time one medal, and you will wait for 20 or 15 years before getting someone in a final".

Two years ahead of the Youth Games, Senegal implemented a programme that included domestic training camps for its young athletes as well as several months of practice in China or other countries.

It is a factor that Fall said "of course" contributed to Senegal's massive haul of five golds and seven bronzes, its first Youth Olympics medals ever.

Senegal was additionally one of the three African countries, including Egypt and South Africa, in the top 10 overall medal count.

But, Fall warned, youth sports are deceptive because participants have trained relatively shorter periods of time.

Creating an Olympian takes eight to 10 years, he said, and those benefiting from regular access to competitions, excellent facilities and superior coaches will pull ahead.

Senegal is working with China to build a high-performance, multi-sport complex in Thies in the country's west, but the endeavour is still in the project phase, according to the sports ministry.

TALENT 'ALWAYS THERE'

"Talent is always there," Samuel Owiti, an associate researcher at the University of Lausanne, whose work focuses on sports talent identification and development, told AFP, attributing low medal counts to a "lack of resources".

His native Kenya, which famously excels at middle- and long-distance running, actively boosts those sports compared with football, he said.

Conversely, Senegal's "academies (and) good talent development pathways within football" are why "they are really shining" in the sport.

Senegal won the Africa Cup of Nations in 2021 and again in 2025, only for the African confederation, CAF, to later strip it of its latest title. Senegal has appealed the decision.

Shah elected ICC chairman for second term

DUBAI: India's **Jay Shah** was re-elected unopposed for a second term as chairman of the International Cricket Council at the governing body's board meeting in Bali, the ICC said yesterday. Shah, the son of India's powerful home minister Amit Shah, will oversee cricket's return to the Olympics at the 2028 Los Angeles Games during his second two-year term.



The sport's only other appearance at the Olympics was in 1900.

"Cricket's return to the Olympic Games at LA28 presents an extraordinary opportunity to introduce our game to new audiences and inspire a new generation of players and fans," Shah, 38, was quoted as saying in an ICC release.

Cricket at the Los Angeles Games will feature T20 competitions for both men's and women's teams.

FOCUS

Tait, Kusal want push for Pakistan-Sri Lanka series result

AFP
Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Sri Lankan skipper Kusal Mendis and Pakistan bowling coach Shaun Tait urged their teams to push hard for a result in the second and final Test starting today in Rawalpindi.

A combination of bad weather and less penetrative bowling on a seemingly grassy pitch left the first Test without a result.

Sri Lanka twice spurned chances to force a result as they let go a strong position of 404-4 in reply to Pakistan's 434-9 declared, slumping to 446 all out.

They then had Pakistan 57-3 on the final day before dropping crucial catches as the hosts closed the match on 284-8.

Kusal said his team wanted to put pressure on Pakistan.

"We were looking to establish a decent lead to put pressure on the Pakistan but credit must go to Saqib Khan, who bowled exceptionally well and restricted us," said Kusal.

Kusal and Dhananjaya de Silva hit hundreds and added 249 for the fifth wicket, but Sri Lanka lost their last six wickets for a mere 42 runs. It was Saqib who derailed Sri Lanka with figures of 7-130, becoming the fourth Pakistani to take seven wickets on debut.

Kusal said the wicket for the second Test is green.

"The wicket looks quite green and has similarities to the surface we played on in the first Test so we will assess the conditions before making a final decision."

Sri Lanka may be tempted to bring one from spinners Prabath Jayasuriya or Keshara Nuwantha.

Pakistan is considering handing Test cap to rookie 19-year-old pacer Ali Shabbir for Razaullah. Tait hoped Pakistan players would make an extra effort to win their first Test series this year.

"That extra push is needed," said Tait, a former Australian pacer. "I am happy with the way bowlers bowled during the majority of the last Test and want some extra push."

Experienced batter Saud Shakeel missed centuries in both innings with scores of 93 and 97.

Skipper Babar Azam's Test century drought continued with 42 innings without a three-figure knock.



Pakistan captain Babar Azam arrives for net practice at Rawalpindi Cricket Ground ahead of the second and final Test against Sri Lanka. The second Test starts today in Rawalpindi.

FOCUS

Positive thinking helps Andreeva claim WTA glory

Reuters
Indian Wells

Mirra Andreeva said a stream of positive self-talk helped her overcome her nerves and stay composed in the biggest moments as the teenager beat Elina Svitolina to win the WTA Finals title on Sunday.

"I was just basically trying to use a lot of positive words to try to encourage myself," the Russian told reporters after beating Ukraine's Svitolina 7-5 6-3 to complete an unbeaten run on her tournament debut.

"When I'm in that kind of mindset, it's just so much easier to play."

Andreeva said she responded to errors in practice by telling herself she would make the next shot, then congratulating herself when she did. The routine made her warm-up feel smoother and gave her a way to manage the pressure of a final against a player who had improved markedly as the tournament progressed.

"I felt like it was easier to deal with nerves," she said. "Why not keep the same mindset for the match?"

The 19-year-old said the approach prevented her from dwelling on missed opportunities or mistakes during a contest marked by long, physical rallies.

"That's also why maybe I didn't get as nervous in the important moments," she said.

Andreeva and coach Conchita Martinez had expected veteran player Svitolina to produce a sharper performance than she did in their earlier one-sided meeting.

The plan was to continue playing aggressively while denying her opponent a foothold in the match, and it worked as Andreeva held her nerve to reach the finish line under sunny skies in the California desert.

With her tour-leading 55th match win of the year, the French Open champion became the youngest winner of the event since Maria Sharapova in 2004, earned her fourth title of the year overall and climbed to world number two.

And she said she is ready for more.

"I'm so pumped," she added.

"I'm still so full of energy and yeah, we're going to do a great celebration dinner tonight."



Mirra Andreeva celebrates her win against Elina Svitolina of Ukraine in the WTA Finals title clash at Indian Wells Tennis Garden. *(AFP)*

ATP FINALS

Alcaraz starts with statement win over Tiafoe

'I feel like I'm better than the opponent in every aspect of the game'

AFP
Turin

Carlos Alcaraz looked in ominous form yesterday as he began his bid to win the ATP Finals for the first time by cruising past Frances Tiafoe in straight sets, 6-2, 6-2.

World number three Alcaraz took just over an hour to deal with American Tiafoe and show why he is the favourite to win the whole thing in Turin, where he was the beaten finalist last year.

Since returning in August from a wrist injury that kept him off the tour for four months Alcaraz has won three of the five tournaments he has entered, most recently the Paris Masters.

Alcaraz, 25, can book his place in the semi-finals tomorrow by beating Italian Flavio Cobolli, who in the absence of former world number one Jannik Sinner is the crowd favourite.

"Sometimes I feel really comfortable," Alcaraz said.

"I feel like I'm better than the opponent in every aspect of the game.

"If I qualify to the semi-final or not, I think it's a great experience, a great week, getting experience," he added.

Tiafoe had a nightmare debut match at the season-ending tournament, the 28-year-old having no answer to Alcaraz's speed and power. Only briefly in the second set did he look like challenging his opponent, a seven-time Grand Slam winner, when at 3-2 down he wasted three opportunities to break back.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return to USA's Frances Tiafoe at the ATP Finals in Turin yesterday. *(AFP)*

In the Sunday's late match, in the John McEnroe group, Shelton secured his first-ever victory at the tournament. His debut appearance in 2025 ended with three defeats.

"It means a lot," Shelton said. "Especially doing it in the first match of the round robin, giving myself a little bit of momentum."

In the first set, Shelton overpowered Fils, the first Frenchman to qualify for the ATP Finals in 10 years. The 22-year-old Fils then began to extend rallies. He forced his first break point of the match in eighth game and took it. He then saved two break points in the next game to tie the match. Serving for the match in the final set, Shelton faced two break points but saved them with ferocious aces before pounding his way to the win with booming forehands.

"That was really intense, especially in the first set," Shelton said. "I don't know that I've played that many rallies out there on tour on a court this fast. So it was physical, really physical. A tough contest."

"I was breathing hard after pretty much every point, and I'm excited to get started in a match like that. Everything wasn't perfect, but my overall level was good and I thought it was a great match I will be able to build on this week."

He will face Zverev tomorrow.

LPGA TOUR

Duncan claims maiden win with Annika title

AFP
Miami

Lindy Duncan proved that perseverance pays off after capturing the first LPGA Tour title of her career with a two-shot victory at The Annika in Florida on Sunday.

Duncan, 35, snagged her maiden LPGA title in her 222nd start after shooting a closing three-under-par 67 at Pelican Golf Club in Belleair to finish on 16 under.

That left the journeywoman professional from Fort Lauderdale two shots clear of South Korea's Choi Hye-jin, who finished on 14 under after a final-round 68.

Another South Korean, Ryu Hae-ran, shared third place with Japan's Yuri Yoshida on 13 under with Spain's Julia Lopez Ramirez in fifth on 12 under.

Duncan's rollercoaster final round saw her open with two birdies either side of a bogey on the second, before she added another birdie on the seventh. A bogey on 12 dropped her to 14 under but back-to-back birdies down the stretch on the 16th and 17th ultimately proved decisive.

"I'm just still kind of speechless," Duncan said afterwards as she reflected on her long journey to a first title.

"Don't really know what to say. 222 starts. That's a long time. That's kind of a cool number, so I kind of like that."

Duncan later thanked friends and family for encouraging her to continue playing during the darkest moments of her career.

"I think a lot of people were believing in me even when I was starting to lose the belief in myself," she said.

"And they encouraged me to work on the right things and to open my mind and to be open to change because they could see the way that I was playing was not from a place of joy or freedom.

"It was from a very tense place. I was very hard on myself and still have to work on that like every day."



Lindy Duncan of the United States poses with the trophy after winning The Annika driven by Gainbridge at Pelican in Belleair, Florida. *(AFP)*

Spaniard Lecuona to replace injured Bagnaia for Ducati at Portugal MotoGP

Iker Lecuona will stand in for Francesco Bagnaia at the Portugal MotoGP this weekend as the Italian remains sidelined with a foot fracture, Ducati said on Monday.

"The doors of the Ducati Lenovo Team open to welcome Iker Lecuona, who will step in for Pecco Bagnaia," said the Italian team in a statement.

The 26-year-old, who normally rides with Ducati's satellite team Gresini, will ride as a teammate for reigning world champion Marc Marquez, who can retain his title in Portimao on the penultimate race weekend of the season. Two-time world champion Bagnaia crashed out of the sprint race in Qatar just over a week ago having been sent flying off his bike by Fermin Aldeguer and has been forced to have surgery on his right foot.

Bagnaia is expected to be fit to take part in the final race of the season in Valencia later this month.

The 29-year-old sits ninth in the riders' standings in his final season with Ducati, before switching to Aprilia in the close season to partner countryman Marco Bezzecchi.



SPOTLIGHT

Lusail launches basketball programme for first time

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Lusail Sports Club has announced the launch of basketball activities for the first time in its history, marking a significant step in its efforts to expand its sporting portfolio, promote athletic diversity and create more opportunities for the local community.

The new initiative forms part of the club's strategic vision to broaden participation across different sports, particularly among young people in Lusail. The introduction of basketball follows growing interest and requests from members of the local community, highlighting the club's commitment to responding to residents' aspirations and providing accessible opportunities to engage in organised sporting activities.



As part of the initiative, Lusail Sports Club has appointed Abdulrahim Ashraf Abu Eissa as head of the basketball department. He will be responsible for overseeing the establishment and launch of the programme, as well as managing its future development in line with the club's strategic objectives.

The introduction of basketball represents a new chapter in the club's development, with a focus on attracting emerging talent, nurturing young athletes and providing participants with a structured environment in which to develop their skills and pursue their sporting ambitions.

The basketball programme is also part of a wider expansion strategy through which Lusail Sports Club plans to introduce additional sporting disciplines in the coming period. Among the planned initiatives is the launch of a men's futsal programme, further strengthening the club's presence across different sports.

Through these developments, the club aims to establish a more comprehensive sporting environment that caters to the interests of the Lusail community while contributing to the wider development of sport in Qatar.

Lusail Sports Club reaffirmed its commitment to working closely with relevant sports authorities and stakeholders to advance its sporting ambitions and support the country's broader development goals, in line with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030.The launch of basketball underlines the club's determination to continue expanding its activities, encouraging greater community participation and creating new pathways for the next generation of sporting talent in Qatar.

FIFA PRESIDENCY

UEFA backs FFF president Diallo to challenge Infantino

French Football Federation set to ratify Diallo's candidacy today

AFP
Paris


Philippe Diallo, the 63-year-old son of a Senegalese boxing champion, has been French Football Federation president since January 2023.

European football's governing body UEFA has given its "unanimous" backing to French Football Federation chief Philippe Diallo to stand against incumbent Gianni Infantino in March's FIFA presidential election, it said in a statement yesterday.

The body said that Diallo had been "invited...to stand as a candidate in the FIFA presidential election in March 2027" and that European national associations had "unanimously pledged their full support".

The deadline for rival candidates to declare themselves is tomorrow. UEFA, which boasts 55 member associations, said Diallo "has accepted the invitation to stand" and that his candidature is set to be confirmed at a meeting of the French federation (FFF) today.

Under its Slovenian president Aleksander Ceferin, UEFA has led the opposition to Infantino since his announcement in late July of a project to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors.

Infantino quickly abandoned the proposal in the face of widespread uproar, but UEFA has since gone to a court in Florida in an attempt to gather evidence for a potential complaint of "criminal mismanagement" against the FIFA president in Switzerland.

UEFA had been struggling to find a credible candidate to stand against Infantino in the election, which will take place at the FIFA Congress on March 18 next year in the Moroccan capital, Rabat.

Arsene Wenger, the French former Arsenal manager and FIFA's current chief of global football development, had been seen as a potential candidate that could get Europe's backing.

One source within football governance said that Wenger had been UEFA's "Plan A" and that Diallo had never been seen as a solution before it became clear the ex-Arsenal boss would not be a candidate.

CONCACAF chief Victor Montagliani had previously been mooted as a candidate, but the Canadian later announced his desire to stand for a new term as the head of his confederation, which covers North and Central America and the Caribbean.

The Asian Football Confederation, which consists of 47 member associations, announced last month that it was backing Infantino for re-election.

Diallo said in September that the FFF was withdrawing its backing for Infantino in the election, following similar announcements from other European associations.

"We believe that the trust placed in the FIFA president has been betrayed, and that the way in which the governance of world football is envisaged no longer reflects us," he said at the time.

Diallo, the 63-year-old son of a Senegalese boxing champion, has been president of the FFF since January 2023.

He was initially appointed to the post on an interim basis when previous chief Noel Le Graet was forced to stand down following a series of controversies.

Diallo, from Saint-Nazaire on France's Atlantic coast, was then elected to the role by a large majority in June of that year, before being re-elected in December 2024 for a new four-year term. Kozo Tashima, honourary president of the Japan Football Association and a member of the FIFA Council, said at the start of this month that he also intended to stand against Infantino.

Swiss former Tottenham Hotspur defender Ramon Vega has also stated his intention to run for the top job at world football's governing body.

Infantino, a former UEFA secretary general, has been in charge of FIFA since 2016.

'Couldn't get worse': Klopp calls for change in FIFA leadership

Germany coach **Jurgen Klopp** has called for an end to Gianni Infantino's time as FIFA president, saying he "did not think things could get worse after Sepp Blatter."

Speaking in Berlin ahead of Nations League clash with the Netherlands, Klopp said the next candidate for football's global governing body should have the game's interests at heart.

"I've been following football for many years. There are people who are much more knowledgeable about this than I am. But I think most people now agree a change would make a lot of sense," Klopp said.

"I didn't think things could get worse after Sepp Blatter, but someone has managed to do just that."

President of FIFA from 1998, Blatter resigned in disgrace in 2015 amid corruption allegations. Charges were brought against Blatter who was eventually cleared in two trials, but was banned from football by FIFA's ethics committee. Klopp added: "Regarding Gianni Infantino, surely the next person to come along can do a better job."

Swiss Infantino succeeded Blatter as FIFA president in 2016. He has come under heavy criticism for a series of decisions and proposals, including his plan to sell off part of the commercial rights of the World Cup and creating and then awarding the inaugural FIFA Peace Prize to US President Donald Trump. "There are people who truly care about the future of football – people who aren't driven by financial interests," said Klopp. "If someone like that were to step up – if someone like that were to become president –I think that would be a significant improvement. There are surely people who care deeply about the future of football and have no financial interests in it."

The next election for FIFA president takes place in March 2027. Only former Swiss footballer Ramon Vega and Japan's Kozo Tashima have announced their intention to run against Infantino.



FOCUS

Palace appoint Frank in quest for Premier League survival

AFP
London

Crystal Palace appointed **Thomas Frank** as their new manager yesterday, handing the Dane the daunting task of lifting the struggling club off the bottom of the Premier League table.

The former Brentford and Tottenham boss succeeds Pierre Sage, who was sacked last week after 16 games in charge. The Frenchman was unable to build on the legacy of his predecessor Oliver Glasner, who oversaw the most successful period in the club's history.

Glasner led the south London club to their first-ever major trophy, beating Manchester City to win the FA Cup in 2025, and won the UEFA Conference League last season.

"It's an honour to sit here and be in charge of this fantastic football club. I'm really, really looking forward to it," Frank said in a Palace statement. "Crystal Palace is an iconic club in England and in the Premier League. I will do everything I possibly can to help and support the players and everyone around the place and I'm really looking forward to meeting them."

Frank, who has signed a two-and-a-half-year deal, enjoyed great success during seven years at Brentford, leading the Bees into the top flight for the first time in 74 years in 2021 and establishing the club in the Premier League.

His work in west London earned the 53-year-old a move to Tottenham in June 2025 but he lasted just eight months as Spurs struggled. Palace hope Frank can rekindle the highs of his time at Brentford with similar resources at Selhurst Park.

"I'm delighted to be able to welcome Thomas to Crystal Palace," said Palace chairman Steve Parish. "He has a proven track record of both creating winning teams and improving players, making him the perfect fit for our club."

Sage paid the price after four straight league defeats left Palace at the bottom of the table. He was hindered by the departures of Maxence Lacroix to Chelsea and Daniel Munoz, who reunited with Glasner at Nottingham Forest.

Palace have the worst defensive record in the Premier League, shipping 24 goals in 10 matches. They will be hoping for an instant improvement as they prepare to face relegation rivals Coventry and Hull in their next two league games.

They also sit 21st in the 36-team Europa League table with four games of the league phase remaining.



Lukaku retires from international football

Belgium forward Romelu Lukaku yesterday retired from international football after scoring 94 goals in 135 games for his country, saying he was "at peace" with his decision.

Lukaku featured in four World Cups for the Red Devils and helped them reach the quarter-finals of this year's tournament before losing to eventual winners Spain. The 33-year-old, who now plays for Turkish club Fenerbahce, made his debut in 2010 as a teenager and was an unused substitute in Sunday's 4-1 Nations League win over Italy.

"These 16 years I gave all I had for the national team. It was a nice ride and I enjoyed every single moment," Belgium's record goal scorer said on Instagram.

"To the Belgium fans, thank you for the support you gave our team. I am proud to have represented my country in 4 World Cups and 3 European Championships. I will never forget those moments. I'm at peace with my decision to stop here," Lukaku said.

The former Chelsea, Manchester United and Inter Milan forward was part of Belgium's so-called 'golden generation'.

Lukaku, alongside Kevin De Bruyne, Thibaut Courtois and Eden Hazard, finished third at the 2018 World Cup, a best-ever finish for Belgium in the tournament but they failed to lift a trophy during the period. "I played with amazing teammates that I will always be grateful for," Lukaku said. "I want to thank them all. I want to thank all the coaches as well for pushing and trusting me to help the team," he added.

BASKETBALL

FIBA delegation completes four-day visit to Qatar 2027 World Cup sites

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Local Organising Committee (LOC) for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 hosted a delegation from the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) for four days of site visits and working meetings in Doha, from November 9 to 12, as preparations advance for the tournament, which tips off on August 27, 2027.

The visit formed part of the ongoing coordination between the LOC and FIBA. It enabled both teams to review venue preparations, confirm operational requirements and align planning across the tournament's functional areas.

The delegation visited all four competition venues, Lusail Arena, Al Janoub Arena, Al Attiyah Arena and Duhail Arena, for detailed walk-throughs and working sessions with the LOC's functional area teams.

The site visits covered competition facilities and equipment, broadcast infrastructure and cabling, media facilities, marketing and commercial display areas, venue dressing, hospitality, ticketing and seating, and licensing. LOC and FIBA teams verified allocated spaces, assessed requirements and agreed next steps for each venue.

The scope of the visit reflects the LOC's integrated approach to hosting, with planning that extends beyond the arenas to the full experience of teams, officials, media, partners and visiting fans.

Dr. Ahmad Abdulla al-Buenain, Director General of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Local Organising Committee, said: "We are continuing our preparations to host the first FIBA Basketball World Cup in the Middle East and North Africa, building on Qatar's extensive experience in organising major sporting events. Our ambition is to deliver an exceptional edition of the tournament that reflects Qatar's standing on the international sporting stage and provides a comprehensive experience for teams and fans."

He added: "The FIBA delegation's visit reflects the close coordination between both parties and marks an important step in reviewing the technical and operational readiness of the venues and facilities, while identifying priorities for the next phase to ensure preparations remain on schedule."

The FIBA World Cup Qatar 2027 will take place from August 27 to September 12, 2027, bringing together 32 national teams for 92 games. It will be the first edition staged in the Middle East and North Africa, and the first to be held entirely in one city, with all games played in Doha.

Drawing on its experience of hosting major international sporting events, its world-class infrastructure and its compact setting, Qatar is preparing to offer teams and fans a seamless tournament experience that combines elite competition with the chance to discover the country's culture, hospitality and attractions.


The delegation visited all four competition venues – Lusail Arena, Al Janoub Arena, Al Attiyah Arena and Duhail Arena, for detailed walk-throughs and working sessions with the LOC's functional area teams.

The LOC will continue to work closely with FIBA, its partners and national stakeholders to deliver a tournament that celebrates basketball, brings people and cultures together and leaves a lasting legacy for the sport in Qatar and the region.