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ASIA CUP RISING STARS

The ultimate goal is to win the trophy, says India A skipper Varma

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SPOTLIGHT

Sheikh Joaan meets Asian sports federation leaders

By Sports Reporter
Doha

HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), met yesterday with presidents of Asian sports federations and heads of delegation visiting Doha for technical coordination meetings and site visits as part of preparations for the 21st Asian Games – Doha 2030.

The meeting took place as part of the first Technical Coordination Meeting and Site Visit Programme involving the OCA, Asian Federations and Technical Delegates, aimed at strengthening cooperation and advancing technical preparations for the Games.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Ahmad Abdulla al-Buenain, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha 2030 Asian Games Organising Committee; Dr. Husain al-Musallam, Director General of the OCA and Vinod Kumar Tiwari, Deputy Director General of the OCA.



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia, speaks at a technical coordination meeting for the 21st Asian Games – Doha 2030.

The meeting reviewed the latest developments in preparations for the Doha 2030 Asian Games, alongside discussions on the sports programme and key aspects of technical coordination and organisational requirements for the Games.

The visiting delegation also held a separate meeting with Dr. al-Buenain to discuss the next phase of technical coordination and opportunities for further collaboration.

The programme provided Technical Delegates, federation presidents and heads of delegation with an opportunity to engage directly with the Doha 2030 team, exchange views on sport-specific requirements, and discuss athlete experience and operational considerations essential to the successful delivery of the Games.

As part of the programme, the delegation visited several key sporting facilities and Games-related locations across Doha, including Aspire Academy, Education City, Katara, Lusail and the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

Sheikh Joaan highlighted the importance of the coordination meeting and preliminary technical visits in reviewing the Doha 2030 Organising Committee's preparations, identifying priorities at an early stage, and ensuring that the requirements of each sport and the needs of athletes remain central to the planning process.

Sheikh Joaan said: "This visit also provides an opportunity to review the Organizing Committee's preparations, address priorities early, and ensure that the needs of every sport and, above all, our athletes remain at the heart of our planning."

For his part, Dr. al-Buenain, said: "This first Technical Delegates Coordination Meeting represents an important step in strengthening our cooperation with the OCA, Asian Federations and Technical Delegates. Their expertise and feedback are essential to ensuring that our preparations meet the requirements of each sport and place athletes at the heart of our planning.

"These discussions and site visits provide a valuable opportunity to exchange knowledge, address technical requirements and work closely with our partners as we continue preparations for Doha 2030."

The meetings and technical visits form part of the ongoing preparations for the Doha 2030 Asian Games, reflecting the Organising Committee's commitment to close collaboration with the OCA, Asian Federations and the wider Asian sporting community to deliver a successful edition of the Games.

FOOTBALL

LOC announces readiness to host U-17 World Cup

This marks second of five consecutive editions Qatar will host

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The tournament's Local Organising Committee (LOC) announced its readiness to host the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 at a press conference held in Doha, Qatar. This marks the second of five consecutive editions of the U-17 World Cup that Qatar will host through to 2029.

The U-17 World Cup provides a platform for the next generation of football stars to showcase their talent on the global stage. The tournament gets underway today, when the Qatar will begin its campaign against Panama at 6:30pm. The final is set to take place at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium on December 13.

The LOC announced that all tournament venues are fully ready. A total of 104 matches will be played by 48 teams. Most matches will take place at the Competition Complex in Aspire Zone, which provides athletes with a world-class tournament experience built in line with the highest international standards.

As part of hosting a fully inclusive experience, tournament venues feature accessibility provisions such as wheelchair accessible seating as well as accessible routes. A mobile sensory room will also be available in the Fan Zone for use by fans with sensory needs.

A number of environmental sustainability measures have also been put into place. These include waste recycling and reduced energy and water consumption.



Qatar players during a training session at Aspire Zone yesterday, on the eve of their FIFA U-17 World Cup group stage match against Panama.

FAN ZONE

The Fan Zone will offer an exceptional festival-like atmosphere for the whole family, with activations combining football, culture and entertainment. The Fan Zone will operate on matchdays from 2pm to 9pm, with entertainment activities starting at 4pm.

From football games and workshops to cultural performances, family members of all ages will find something to enjoy before and between matches. The Fan Zone will also feature cultural performances celebrating Qatari heritage and workshops in collaboration with multiple stakeholders.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, students from 14 schools will showcase football-inspired artwork and projects and participate in workshops promoting teamwork and respect.

The Fan Zone will also include a number of local and international outlets, offering fans a wide selection of food and beverage options.

TICKETING

Ticketing options for the U-17 World Cup are designed to allow fans to attend more than one match on the same day.

This includes the Day Pass and Prime Pass. The Day Pass, priced at 20QR, provides access to multiple matches and the Fan Zone. The Prime Pass, priced at 35QR, includes Day Pass benefits and a reserved seat for one match at either main pitch.

Disabled fans can purchase accessibility tickets, priced at 20QR, by emailing accessibility.tickets@sc.qa. Accessibility tickets include an accessible parking pass and one complimentary companion ticket.

Tickets for the final at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium are priced at 30QR for Category 1, 15QR for Category 2, and 15 QR for accessibility tickets.

Tickets are available exclusively through roadtoqatar.qa and delivered digitally via the Road to Qatar app.

TRANSPORTATION

As with previous tournaments, the fan experience begins the moment fans set off for a match and continues until they return home. In coordination with the relevant authorities, the LOC has implemented a comprehensive plan to facilitate access to stadiums and manage the movement of fans and vehicles around venues, while taking daily traffic in the area into consideration.

Fans are encouraged to use the Doha Metro and consult the Mobility Guide through the Road to Qatar app for the most suitable station and stadium entrance.

Fans travelling to the Aspire Zone Competition Complex can use Al Aziziyah Station on the Gold Line. For fans attending the Final at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium can use Al Riffa Station on the Green Line.

Accessible transportation options include accessible Doha Metro stations, wheelchair-accessible Karwa taxis and dedicated parking spaces.

Sheikh Joaan attends meeting of GCC Olympic Committee Presidents



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, participated in the 38th meeting of the Council of Presidents of the National Olympic Committees of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in Bahrain, with the participation of the presidents of the GCC National Olympic Committees. The meeting discussed the items on its agenda aimed at developing the framework for joint GCC sports cooperation and adopted the appropriate decisions. The meeting reviewed the report on the fourth GCC Games, which were hosted by Doha last May, and approved the statutes of the GCC sports federations. The meeting emphasised the importance of supporting efforts to unify GCC positions and strengthen cooperation in advancing shared sporting interests at the continental and international levels.

Qatar open U-17 World Cup campaign against Panama today

Doha: The FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 kicks off today, with Qatar beginning its campaign against Panama at Ibrahim Khalfan Pitch at Aspire Zone's Competition Complex. The other teams in Group A are Egypt and Greece.

Qatar is hosting the tournament for the second consecutive year, with 48 teams competing across 12 groups and a total of 104 matches. This is the first of five consecutive editions to be staged annually in Doha through 2029, following a decision by the FIFA Council last year.

The matches will be played at stadiums in the Aspire Zone through to the semi-finals, as well as the third-place play-off, while the final will be held at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium on December 13.

Seven other matches will be played on the opening day. France will face Haiti, New Caledonia will take on Ecuador, South Korea will meet Uganda, Saudi Arabia will play Uruguay, Mozambique will face Denmark, Egypt will meet Greece, and Argentina will take on Australia.

Qatar are making their ninth appearance in the tournament and will hope to produce a stronger showing with a new generation of players aiming to make a deep run. Their immediate target will be to secure qualification for the round of 32.

The team has completed its preparations for the tournament, with Spanish coach Alvaro Mejia naming a 21-player squad. The squad includes three goalkeepers: Mohamed Mirghani, Hossam Al-Abd and Bakri Mohamed.

The outfield players are Iokunle Samuel, Ahmed Adel, Ahmed Wael, Adham Adnan, Diaa El-Din al-Arabi, Taha Nasir, Sami Darani, Shaher Wael, Abdullah Babiker, Ali Mohamed, Omar Ayman, Omar Mohamed, Matthew Esparza, Mohsen al-Hajri, Mohamed Fadl, Cristiano Soria, Hadi Khalil and Youssef Islam.

Mejia expressed his hope that Qatar will produce strong performances in this edition, stressing that the tournament provides young players with an opportunity to showcase their talent against some of the world's best teams. He also expressed confidence in the squad's ability to perform at its best, adding that the experience would help uncover a new generation of talent for Qatari football.

Qatar made its tournament debut at the inaugural edition in China in 1985, where it exited in the group stage.

CRICKET

SANDPAPER CONTROVERSY

Bancroft points at entire Australian team

Reuters
Sydney

Cameron Bancroft yesterday claimed that the entire Australian team had known about ball-tampering during a 2018 tour of South Africa, adding that he had lied about the extent of the plot to protect Cricket Australia's investigation into the incident.

Bancroft and fellow batsmen David Warner and Steve Smith were banned over the plan to rough up the ball with sandpaper, following an investigation by CA which found that knowledge of the plan was confined to those three players.

Australian batter Usman Khawaja's recently released autobiography contradicted the conclusion of the initial CA investigation, however, reigniting the controversy and casting a shadow over Australian cricket.

"It was not just the three of us - Steve Smith, David Warner and I - who knew about me using sandpaper on the ball in South Africa. It was the whole team," Bancroft wrote in a lengthy column published in *The West Australian*. "When I was questioned during Cricket Australia's investigation, I did not give a complete and truthful account. "I withheld important details, including when the use of sandpaper began, how long it went on for, and the involvement and awareness of others. I did this to protect Cricket Australia's investigation and not implicate others around me."

CA, which announced yesterday it would be opening an independent forum to allow all players to give their accounts of the incident, said it would take the time to consider Bancroft's comments.

"We respect that Cameron Bancroft has told his story, and we will take time to consider his comments," the cricket board said in a statement.

"We expect that there will be many dimensions to the events of 2018, which is why we have established the forum for individuals to give their version of events.

"We are finalising the terms of reference and will commence the process as soon as possible."

'FINAL STRAW'

The four Australia bowlers who played in the 2018 test -- Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon -- issued a joint statement in 2021 denying any knowledge of the plot.

Bancroft claimed the idea to use sandpaper was Warner's, but that the conversation had taken place



"within a wider team environment".

"I regularly spoke to the bowlers about how the ball was behaving. I had to," he added.

"I recall conversations with all the fast bowlers Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Marsh about whether it was reverse swinging enough."

Cummins had denied any involvement in the sandpaper plot last week, and his manager Neil Maxwell denied any contradiction with Bancroft's statements.

"Whilst we feel for Cam and everything he's been through, there's nothing in the statement that hasn't been answered by Pat in his press conference," Maxwell told Australian outlet CODE Sports yesterday. Bancroft said the "final straw" that pushed him to break his silence was Cummins' press conference last week, in which the Australia captain denied any involvement in using sandpaper and said the allegations in Khawaja's autobiography were "utter nonsense".

"What I saw, experienced and lived with - not only him, but everyone else on that tour in South Africa - is not the public account he gave in his press conference and in the years previously when he has spoken on this time," Bancroft wrote.

"In addition to what Usman already mentioned I have key recollections which affirm what he is saying. My cricket career has been destroyed and I have never been able to play for my country since Justin Langer was coach in 2019.

"But I have reached a point where continuing to protect an incomplete account of events feels more damaging than the truth."

Bancroft's international career was the worst affected of the trio involved in "Sandpapergate", with the 33-year-old making only two more appearances for Australia after the Test series against South Africa.

SECOND TEST

Pakistan have upper hand after Sri Lanka slump

The home team still hold 150-run lead after Sri Lanka lose 3 wickets

AFP
Rawalpindi

Pakistan's spirited pace attack brought them within sight of a series-clinching victory as Sri Lanka struggled to 74-3 in their second innings at the end of day two of the second Test in Rawalpindi yesterday, still more than 150 runs behind the hosts.

Fast bowlers Saqib Khan, Aamer Jamal and Razaullah took a wicket each to put Sri Lanka on the back foot after Pakistan posted 325 in their first innings at Pindi Stadium.

That total handed the home team a big lead of 227 over Sri Lanka after the home pacers had skittled the tourists for a paltry 98 on Tuesday.

At stumps, Dhananjaya de Silva and Pasindu Sooriyabandara were at the crease on 24 and 18, respectively, with Sri Lanka still needing 153 runs to avoid an innings defeat. Saqib jolted Sri Lanka in the fourth over when he dismissed Lahiru Udara for seven, before Razaullah trapped the experienced Dinesh Chandimal leg-before without scoring.

It became 39-3 when Kamindu Mendis (16) was caught in the slip off Jamal.

"We have the batters to fight and the way the two batted in the last session gives us hope," said Lahiru Kumara.

Earlier, fast bowler Kumara took his second five-wicket haul with 5-95 but could not stop Pakistan adding 204 runs to their overnight total of 121-3.



Pakistan's Razaullah celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Dinesh Chandimal during the second day of the second Test at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. *(AFP)*

Azan Awais had not added to his overnight 47 when Kumara had him caught behind in the third over of the day.

Kumara then struck twice in successive overs, dismissing Saud Shakeel for 24 and night-watchman Saqib lbw for 37.

Asitha Fernando trapped Salman Agha for 21 as Pakistan lost four wickets in the morning session but increased their lead by 100.

It was wicketkeeper batter Ghazi Ghori who helped Pakistan recover from 193-6 with a gritty 54, the top score of the innings.

Ghazi added an invaluable 42-run stand for the eighth wicket with Jamal, who scored 12.

At 261-8, Sri Lanka's hopes of wrapping up the innings were dashed by a 56-run stand between Ghazi and Razaullah as they countered the second new ball with confidence.

Razaullah hit a quickfire 32-ball 42, studded with three sixes and four boundaries, before he became Kumara's fifth wicket.

"We bowled well but at the end we gave away too many runs which allowed Pakistan to take a big lead," Kumara said.

Pakistan head coach Mike Hesson, however, praised Sri Lankan pacer Kumara for his efforts.

"Kudos to Lahiru for the way he ran and bowled with guts," said Hesson. "A few cameos from Ghazi and Razaullah took us above where we wanted."

BRIEF SCORES
Sri Lanka 98 and 74 for 3 (De Silva 24*, Saqib 1-6) **trail Pakistan 325** (Ghori 54, Awais 47, Razaullah 42, Kumara 5-95) **by 153 runs.**

FOCUS

Wicketkeeper Das breaks record, South Africa take command after day four

AFP
Johannesburg

Bangladesh wicketkeeper Litton Das broke the world Test record for most dismissals in an innings but could not prevent South Africa from taking command on the fourth day of the first Test at the Wanderers Stadium yesterday.

Bangladesh were struggling at 100 for five in their second innings when bad light ended play, still 57 runs short of South Africa's first innings total of 557.

Das stumped South African counterpart Ryan Rickelton and Kagiso Rabada to take his total of dismissals in the innings to eight following six catches earlier in the innings.

Fast bowler Rabada starred with bat and ball as South Africa achieved dominance.

South Africa started the day on 386 for seven, still 16 short of Bangladesh's first innings total of 400.

Batting at number nine, Rabada made an aggressive career-best 72 as he and Rickelton (102) shared a free-scoring eighth wicket partnership of 117, enabling South Africa to take a first innings lead of 157.

Rabada then bowled with high pace and control to take two wickets to plunge Bangladesh into trouble in their second innings. He dismissed two of the touring team's most dangerous batsmen. Tanzid Hasan, who scored a composed 67 in the first innings, was caught behind for four in Rabada's opening spell.

First innings centurion Towhid Hridoy went on the counter-attack, scoring 23 off 23 balls before he fell to a vicious bouncer in Rabada's second spell, ballooning a top edge to Rickelton as he tried to get out of the way.

Das beat the previous record of seven dismissals shared by Wasim Bari of Pakistan, Bob Taylor of England, Ian Smith of New Zealand and two West Indians, Ridley Jacobs and Joshua Da Silva, who all took seven catches.

Despite breaking the world record, Das had cause to regret one which got away. He dropped Rickelton on nought on the second day on Monday. South African captain Temba Bavuma, who retired hurt with a calf injury on Tuesday when he had 49, finished with 68 not out after returning to the crease on Rickelton's dismissal.

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh 400 and 100-5 (M Islam 32; Rabada 2-29, Harmer 2-30). **South Africa 557** (Ackerman 157, Hamza 83, Bavuma 68 not out, Rickelton 102, Rabada 72; Taskin 2-124, Mahmud 4-118, Mehidy 2-165) **trail by 57 runs**



Bangladesh's Litton Das stumps out South Africa's Kagiso Rabada on day four of the first Test in Johannesburg yesterday. *(AFP)*

SPOTLIGHT

Duckett slams slick century as England hammer Australia to win ODI series


England's Ben Duckett celebrates after scoring his century against Australia in Hobart. *(AFP)*

AFP
Hobart, Australia

Ben Duckett smashed 133 and Sonny Baker took four wickets as England hammered Australia by 97 runs to win the third one-day international at Hobart yesterday and with it the series.

After losing the first ODI in Perth, England emphatically bounced back at Adelaide and were in full control again, posting 328 then dismissing the hosts for 231 in the 46th over.

On a day when Australian cricket was again consumed by allegations around the "Sandpapergate" ball-tampering scandal, England skipper Harry Brook won the toss and opted to bat.

Duckett was the anchor, keeping his cool as wickets fell around him with a seventh ODI century, off 94 balls. Will Jacks chipped in with 59.

"Not an ideal start to the series. We've notoriously been quite slow into getting into series as well, so that's something to talk about going forward," said Brook.

"But the way we bounced back in Adelaide and the performance we put up today was outstanding, and the boys should be extremely proud."

Australia made a horror start to the run chase, losing openers Travis Head (four) and skipper Mitchell Marsh (one) inside the first two overs.

Head fell fourth ball, edging Gus Atkinson to Joe Root at slip with Marsh going six balls later to Baker, this time taken in the slips by Brook.

Josh Inglis (14) followed them back to the sheds, nicking Baker to wicketkeeper Jordan Cox to leave Australia flailing at 34-3.

Matt Renshaw helped steady the ship and was looking good on 55 when he was caught and bowled by spinner Liam Dawson.

When Alex Carey was run out for 37 and Cameron Green retired hurt with blood streaming from his mouth after being hit on the grill, it looked grim for Australia at 119-5.

Baker ended with 4-45 and Dawson 3-42.

"Well played to England. They've certainly outplayed us in the last couple of games," said Marsh.

"I think there's lots of areas for improvement for our team and we've got work to do."

England were aggressive in their batting with opener Tom Banton, who blasted a century in Adelaide, smacking a quick-fire 44 to set the tone before Marsh grabbed a stunning catch backpedalling to remove him.

Duckett took up the mantle, with support from Root.

Root (12) came undone against the part-time spin of Renshaw, who bowled him with only his fourth ball after Marsh brought him on to change things up. A late flurry led by Jacks ensured the visitors passed 300.

BRIEF SCORES
England 328 (Duckett 133, Jacks 59, Banton 44, Edwards 4-31, Renshaw 3-51) **beat Australia 231** (Renshaw 55, Carey 37, Baker 4-45, Dawson 3-42) **by 97 runs.**

HORSE RACING

Toromona strikes again with Doha Cup win

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Toromona continued his impressive season with a second consecutive victory, claiming the feature Doha Cup at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's 12th Al Rayyan Race Meeting yesterday.

The eight-year-old gelding produced a strong finish to win the 1,700m Thoroughbred Handicap (85-105) by three-quarters of a length. Owned by Rashid Awajan al-Khayarin, Toromona was ridden by Faleh Bughenaim, who combined with trainer Hamad al-Jehani to record a treble on the eight-race card.

The gelding had also won the Thoroughbred Handicap (75-95) (Class 3) during the season's opening meeting, the Al Ghariyah Cup, on October 14.

Saad Ali al-Kubaisi, Deputy Director of QREC Registration and Studbook Department, presented the Doha Cup.

Al-Jehani also celebrated victories with Yaqoob, who edged the Purebred Arabian Handicap 55-75 by a head under Soufiane Saadi, and Battle Drum, who recorded a convincing 4¼-length success in the Thoroughbred Maiden, also partnered by Saadi.

Dukhan Alseej secured the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 60-80 by three-quarters of a length for trainer Maayouf bin Hashim al-Shamari and jockey Salman Fahad al-Hajri.

Umm Wishah won the Purebred Arabian Handicap 45-65 by 2½ lengths for trainer Ahmed al-Jehani and jockey Arnaud De Lepine, who also combined to guide Ghalia to a 3¾-length victory in the Purebred Arabian Maiden.

SK Azam claimed the Local Thoroughbred Handicap 0-45 for trainer Owaida Salem Al Hajri and jockey Szczepan Mazur, while Dhi Qar Zakhir started the meeting with a seven-length win in the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 0-65 for trainer Jassim al-Ghazali and jockey Saleh Salem al-Marri.

RESULTS
12th Al Rayyan Race Meeting - Doha Cup
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

1 - Doha Cup, Thoroughbred Handicap 85-105
Toromona, Hamad al-Jehani, Faleh Bughenaim
2 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 60-80
Dukhan Alseej, Maayouf bin Hashim al-Shamari, Salman Fahad al-Hajri
3 - Purebred Arabian Handicap 55-75
Yaqoob, Hamad al-Jehani, Soufiane Saadi
4 - Purebred Arabian Handicap 45-65
Umm Wishah, Ahmed al-Jehani, Arnaud De Lepine
5 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 0-45
S K Azam, Owaida Salem Al Hajri, Szczepan Mazur
6 - Purebred Arabian Maiden
Ghalia, Ahmed al-Jehani, Arnaud De Lepine
7 - Thoroughbred Maiden
Battle Drum, Hamad Al-Jehani, Soufiane Saadi
8 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 0-65
Dhi Qar Zakhir, Jassim al-Ghazali, Saleh Salem al-Marri



Jockey Faleh Bughenaim guided Toromona to the Doha Cup victory at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURE:** *Juhaim*

ATP FINALS

Alcaraz closes in on last four with Medvedev win

TOP SEED ZVEREV BEATS SHELTON TO PUNCH SEMI-FINAL TICKET

AFP
Turin

Carlos Alcaraz moved to the brink of qualifying for the last four at the ATP Finals as he brushed aside world number five Daniil Medvedev 6-2, 6-4 yesterday.

The seven-time Grand Slam champion needed just over 70 minutes to beat the Russian in Turin. "A little bit of problems, you know, physically, in the match," Alcaraz said on-court after receiving some treatment in the second set.

"But I think everybody could see that I was able to still play good tennis, I could still move well."

By winning in straight sets, the 23-year-old will secure his spot in the semi-finals if Frances Tiafoe defeats Flavio Cobolli later or if the Italian beats the American in three sets. Alcaraz has never won the season-ending Finals, finishing runner-up last year to Jannik Sinner.

But with Sinner injured and the Spaniard entering this season's edition on the back of a nine-match winning streak that earned him indoor titles in Vienna and at the Paris Masters, Alcaraz is considered the favourite to lift the trophy this year.

Since returning in August from a wrist injury that kept him off the tour for four months and prevented him from defending his French Open title, Alcaraz has won three of the five tournaments he has entered. After easing past Tiafoe in his opener in Turin 6-2, 6-2, the third seed carried that ominous form into the first set against 2020 Finals winner Medvedev.

Alcaraz broke the Russian in successive games midway through the first frame to claim the opener.

He continued by breaking Medvedev in the very first game of the second set and proceeded to serve out, despite a brief stoppage to have his left thigh taped up.

"I didn't want to force myself to the limit physically. I was a break-up at that time. And I just tried to keep up my serve... play chill, smoothly, relaxed and just happy about it," Alcaraz said.

"So, I'm going to look at it with my team and I will see."

Medvedev, 30, is still in with a chance of advancing after winning his opening match against Cobolli in straight sets.

Later in the Ivan Lendl Group, seventh seed Tiafoe will meet French Open finalist Cobolli.

World number one Alexander Zverev is the man to beat in the John McEnroe Group and became the first player to book his spot in the semi-finals after beating Ben Shelton 6-2 7-6(4).

The German, who won two Grand Slams and topped the rankings in his most successful year to date, delivered a dominant performance to extend his perfect record against Shelton to 7-0. He next plays France's Arthur Fils in his final group match. Shelton, playing in his second straight season finale, is 1-1 in the group and will play Rafael Jodar in his last match.

"I was not aware of the (qualification) scenario," Zverev said. "If I focus on myself and play good tennis, the result will take care of itself in a way... It's about playing good tennis."

"I feel like I did that today. I did that against Rafa (Jodar) two days ago and that's the outcome of it." Zverev also beat Jodar in straight sets in his group opener on Sunday.

He got off to a perfect start against Shelton, breaking the American in the very first game to take a quick 2-0 lead. Shelton tried to bounce back, attacking Zverev's serve, before being broken once more as the German went 4-1 up.

The top seed displayed impressive consistency throughout and quickly wrapped up the first set. Both players then held serve throughout the second set to force a tiebreak.

Zverev, who lost only one point on his first serve in the second set until the tiebreak, came out on top with a stunning forehand passing shot on his first match point.


Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return to Russia's Daniil Medvedev at the ATP Finals in Turin yesterday. *(AFP)*

SPOTLIGHT

South Africa to probe treatment of swimmer Smith

Reuters
Cape Town

South Africa's sports minister has ordered an inquiry into the treatment of Olympic swimming gold medallist **Tatjana Smith**, who has announced she will be representing the Netherlands in future.

Smith, who raced previously under the surname Schoenmaker before getting married, is South Africa's most decorated Olympian with four medals, holds dual citizenship and has changed allegiance after persistent complaints about Swimming South Africa officials.

Minister Gayton McKenzie has apologised to her for the treatment, which included withholding her prize money from the 2023 World Aquatics Championships.

She claimed $35,000 in prize money from Fukuoka, Japan was held back from her for 12 months and, when eventually paid, did not include interest, which she received only after engaging lawyers. "She's been treated in the worst possible way. They should be ashamed," McKenzie said. "Tatjana has been treated like an enemy of this country."

McKenzie has asked the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) to investigate. "If I could, I would come out there, and I will fire all



of them immediately. That's how I feel," he said. "But I can't. Even if I want to, we shall be suspended by World Aquatics. The law says SASCOC must deal with this first.

"If this is how they treat the greatest Olympian in our history, how are we treating our emerging stars? What is all this telling every young swimmer about what they can expect if nothing changes?" the minister said.

Smith retired in 2024 but reversed her decision this year with her sights on the 2028 Olympics. The 200 metres breaststroke gold medallist in Tokyo and 100m breaststroke champion at the Paris Games, she is going for the 50m title in Los Angeles.

"To South Africa, when I was a little girl, my biggest dream was to represent my country at the Olympics," Smith said in a tearful video statement on social media this month announcing her nationality switch.

Derulo to headline Sunday night at Formula Qatar Grand Prix



As excitement builds ahead of the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026, Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has announced that American singer-songwriter Jason Derulo will take to the Lusail Live stage on Sunday, November 29.

His headline show promises an unforgettable night for fans attending the race, combining high energy live entertainment off the track with world class racing. Derulo has built one of pop music's most enduring careers, with Billboard Hot 100 No. 1 hits including "Whatcha Say" and "Savage Love," more than 250mn singles sold, and over 300mn followers across platforms.

He closes out a standout 2026 in Doha, following the global success of "Mi Chico (Jason Derulo x Melody x DJ Goja)," which spent six weeks at No. 1 on Billboard's US Afrobeats chart, surpassed 368 million streams, and sparked a viral dance trend that has generated more than 2 billion views.

The track will feature on his upcoming album, The Last Dance (Part 2), scheduled for release in early 2027. Fans can look forward to a high- energy performance featuring the global hits that have kept him at the forefront of pop music for nearly two decades.

In the build up to the performance, Sunday at the Qatar Grand Prix will feature the FIA Formula 2 Feature Race and the Formula 1 Drivers' Parade, followed by the Grand Prix, the highlight of the weekend.

Fans attending the Grand Prix from November 27 to 29 can catch Derulo live with a three-day general admission ticket at Lusail Hill priced at QR600. Three-day Grandstand tickets are also available in the Main Grandstand (QR2,000), the North Grandstand (QR1,500) and the Turn 2 and Turn 16 Grandstands (QR 1,000).

University students can enjoy 20% off (from QR480) and senior citizens aged 60 and above can enjoy 25% off (from QR750), with valid ID. Access to Derulo's performance is included with all 3-days ticket types. With Novikov at Premiere Hospitality and Lusail Hill Lounge now sold out, the F1 Experiences Champions Club remains available, offering access to the concert. Fans can secure their place by visiting tickets.lcsc.qa.

LUSAIL CIRCUIT ANNOUNCES DOHA OASIS, RAYYAN WATER AS OFFICIAL PARTNERS

Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has announced Doha Oasis and Rayyan Water as official partners of the circuit. As part of the agreement with Doha Oasis, the multi-experience lifestyle destination in the heart of Doha has also been named Event Supporter Partner of three major international race events hosted at LIC.

The partnership comes as Doha Oasis celebrates its fifth anniversary, bringing together two Qatari destinations that welcome visitors from across the globe.

Together, they reflect Qatar's growing position as a global destination for sport, tourism and lifestyle.

The partnership gets underway at the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix, taking place at LIC from November 27 to 29.

Throughout the race weekend, Doha Oasis will welcome fans in the circuit's Fan Zone with a dedicated activation, showcasing its offerings and experiences to visitors.

In 2027, the partnership continues with the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar which is scheduled to be held from March 12 to 14, followed by the Qatar 1812 KM FIA World Endurance Championship from March 25 to 27. Doha Oasis will mark the race season with its campaign "The Race Has a New Heartbeat", carrying the energy of race week from LIC into the city and inviting fans and visitors to extend their experience at Doha Oasis.

Race fans can stay at Banyan Tree Doha, the destination's five-star luxury hotel, and dine across more than 16 dining concepts, including MICHELIN Guide-listed Dar Yema. Between race days, they can shop at Printemps Doha, the largest luxury department store in the Middle East, or play at Doha Quest, home to two Guinness World Records for the tallest indoor roller coaster and the tallest indoor drop tower.

LIC extends tie up with Rayyan Water until 2028

LIC also expanded its local collaborations by welcoming Rayyan Water on board as a major partner through 2028.

Prior to the recent signing agreement, Rayyan Water has been a recurring Official Water Partner of the circuit. Having served as Official Water Partner of the MotoGP Grand Prix of Qatar 2026, keeping fans hydrated throughout the action, Rayyan Water will also support the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026. The collaboration then continues in 2027 and 2028, with Rayyan Water as Event Supporter Partner for all three major events. LIC CEO Abdulaziz Ali al-Mohannadi said: "Our partners play a pivotal role in how fans experience a race weekend at LIC, and Rayyan Water has long been part of that story. We are delighted to welcome them as an Official Partner, and we look forward to working together across the next three seasons to make every fan's time at the circuit more comfortable and more memorable."

Alrayyan Mineral Water Bottling Co. Chairman Khalifa Khalid al-Rabban said: "Supporting world-class sporting events such as Formula 1, MotoGP and the FIA World Endurance Championship reaffirms our commitment to providing fans and visitors with quality hydration while being part of experiences that bring people together."

ASIA CUP RISING STARS

Ultimate goal is to win trophy, says captain Varma

Pakistan's Samad confident of another strong showing as holders



Tournament Director Mohammed al-Ameer is joined by captains of the eight teams taking part in the Asia Cup Rising Stars. The tournament, which will start in Doha from today, will end on November 29. Pakistan are the defending champions.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Captain Tilak Varma confidently said India A has arrived in the Qatari capital seeking to lift the winner's trophy at the Asia Cup Rising Stars which begins today.

The hugely popular eight-team tournament commences at West End Cricket Stadium where Hong Kong face Bangladesh A while Sri Lanka A will take on Afghanistan A.

Defending champions Pakistan Shaheens, Nepal A, the UAE and India A are in Group A.

The November 19-29 tournament will be played at two venues: the West End International Cricket Stadium and the Doha University of Science and Technology Ground.

"The ultimate goal for us is to win the trophy," said Varma, India's World Cup winner, during a press conference.

"We unfortunately lost the previous A-team T20 series here in Doha, so we are eager to come back stronger and win this time," Varma warned.

"It is a great honour to captain the Indian team. I have also gained experience serving as vice-captain of the senior team, and I want to use that experience in these A-team matches," Varma said.

The India A squad also has explosive batsmen Abhishek Sharma, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Rinku SIngh.

Varma said India A players in Doha have played enough cricket in the longer format to tackle the conditions and rivals at the 50-over tournament.

"If you look closely, every player has played enough matches in domestic cricket and performed well enough to be selected for this tournament," Varma, 24, said.

"I believe they have the experience needed to adapt to the 50-over format. The conditions here might be slightly different, but we want to adjust as quickly as possible. The team that adapts better to the conditions will have a better chance of winning. We are confident that our players will perform well."

Pakistan, who won the title last year after beating Bangladesh, will be captained by Abdul Samad, who has played six ODIs.

When asked to comment about Pakistan's clash with India on Sunday, Samad said: "I feel it is like any other game of cricket. We are focused on giving out our best in this tournament. I am confident you will see good results. I intend to lead from the front."

He added: "Our first match will be against the UAE. Our focus is on that game. Pakistan won this tournament last year. We hope to delight our fans again. The players know their roles. It's a 50-over tournament. Most of our players have played the long format recently, and that will help the team's cause. "

Sri Lanka A captain Pavan Rathnayake told the press conference, "Every player in our squad is looking forward to the tournament. We are a determined lot. We aim to give our best. We have three tough matches ahead in the first round against strong opponents like Afghanistan and Bangladesh. While we recognize the challenges, our sole focus right now is on getting off to a strong start in our opening game and building momentum from there."

Nepal skipper Sandeep Lamichhane said: "It's an absolute privilege for our squad to be here, This tournament is a massive platform, especially for associate nations who fight tooth and nail for every opportunity at this level. With limited spots available, simply qualifying means everything to us. But we aren't here just to make up the numbers, we want to leave our mark and inspire the next generation back home."

Tournament Format:
- 8 teams divided into two groups playing a single round-robin system.
- The top two teams from each group advance to the semi-finals.

Group Lineups:
- Group 1: Pakistan A (Shaheen), India (A), Nepal, United Arab Emirates
- Group 2: Sri Lanka (A), Bangladesh (A), Afghanistan (A), Hong Kong (China)

FOOTBALL

Pochettino arrives in Manchester braced for relegation cauldron

Reuters
Manchester

Mauricio Pochettino arrived at Manchester United yesterday morning, after an overnight flight took their new manager from his final match in charge of the US team into a relegation battle at a club desperately seeking a revival in fortunes.

Pochettino posted a photo of Manchester from the air on Instagram, signalling the end of his seven-hour journey from Cincinnati.

A private plane had whisked him away shortly after the US beat Haiti on Tuesday, and the 54-year-old Argentine was driven straight to United's training centre at Carrington.

Pochettino has precious little time to settle into his new surroundings, however, with an away Premier League game at arch-rivals Liverpool looming large on Sunday.

United announced Pochettino's appointment on Friday, following Michael Carrick's sacking, with the manager delaying his arrival to lead the US in their two-legged CONCACAF Nations League quarter-final.

His focus must swiftly switch from international football to the daily grind of club management, where a harsh spotlight will follow his every move and a drastic change in form is needed, and quickly. United have not won the league title since 2013, when long-serving manager Alex Ferguson retired, and the 20-times English champions have registered one win in 10 league games this season to lie 18th in the table, their lowest position at this stage of a top-flight campaign since 1986-87.

That was the season Ferguson took charge, and 40 years later Pochettino arrives in similar circumstances.

Ferguson was given time at United, whose wait for another league title had reached almost two decades upon his arrival. Two days after taking charge, Ferguson's side lost at Oxford United and dropped into the relegation zone.

Manchester United finished 11th that season, and had to wait until 1993 for Ferguson to deliver the title, although he did win a European Cup Winners' Cup, FA Cup and League Cup along the way.

Pochettino, whose only league title as a manager came at Paris St Germain, is unlikely to be afforded such patience.

US midfielder DaMarcus Beasley, who spent a season on-loan at Manchester City, joked with Pochettino in a post-game interview on Tuesday that "Manchester will always be blue".

"No way, you will see," Pochettino replied. "Give me time, give me time and that is going to start to change, for sure."



Kompany on cusp of return after illness

After being hospitalised last month with meningeal irritation, Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany has returned to work and will meet the press today, the Bundesliga champ have indicated. The Belgian was rushed to hospital after collapsing on the training pitch in Munich last month, before being diagnosed with the illness. But after his return to the training ground this week Bayern's pre-Bundesliga press invitations stated the former Man City star, 40, will be back on media duty ahead of his side's league meeting with Cologne tomorrow. Kompany was visibly sick and walked with a limp during Bayern's 6-1 home win over RB Leipzig in mid-October. He was in doubt for their home Champions League clash with Arsenal four days later, but took to the dugout for the 2-2 draw, two days before his training-pitch collapse.

FOCUS

Tashima open to meeting French rival over FIFA presidency bid

AFP
Tokyo

Kozo Tashima said he was prepared to hold talks with rival French candidate Philippe Diallo about their bids to become FIFA president.

The 68-year-old Tashima, who has served on the FIFA Council and is the Japan Football Association's honorary president, will attempt to unseat current FIFA chief Gianni Infantino in the March election. Infantino is under pressure after his aborted plan to open up FIFA's premium competitions, such as the World Cup, to private investors.

Tashima said he wanted to make FIFA a "more trusted organisation" after Japan's FA officially submitted his candidacy for president of world football's governing body ahead of the Wednesday deadline.

Tashima also said he wanted to bring Japan's "strong sense of ethics" to football's top job. Diallo, the president of the French Football Federation, was a late entrant to the race this week and has the backing of European football's governing body UEFA.

Tashima gave a cautious welcome to the Frenchman's suggestion of talks. "Mr. Diallo has indicated that he wishes to speak with me. It's clear we need to talk," Tashima said in an interview.


Japan Football Association president Kozo Tashima. *(Reuters)*

"But we must consider one thing: is the mere fact that our programmes are similar, enough for us to decide to work together, or unite? Or should we think tactically, asking what the most effective strategy would be to defeat Infantino?"

Earlier, Tashima, who has served as a football player, coach and bureaucrat and has a reputation for being a safe pair of hands, set out the basis of his bid.

"We will share with the world the importance of fair play, respect and integrity – the core values at the very heart of football and of sport itself," he said in a statement released by the JFA.

"With a strong sense of mission and firm resolve, I will take on this challenge so that FIFA can become a healthier and more trusted organisation and contribute even more to the further development of football worldwide."

In opposing Infantino, Tashima is going against his own confederation after the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) announced last month that it was backing Infantino for re-election.

Tashima was JFA president from 2016 to 2024 and also served on the AFC executive committee. Infantino also has the backing of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), while South American governing body CONMEBOL is largely supportive. Diallo said Tuesday he has support from countries beyond Europe.

Swiss former Tottenham Hotspur defender Ramon Vega has also stated his intention to run for president. Arsene Wenger, the French former Arsenal manager and FIFA's current chief of global football development, had at one point been seen as a potential candidate who could get Europe's backing but he will not stand.

The election will take place at the FIFA Congress on March 18 next year in the Moroccan capital, Rabat. FIFA has a total of 211 member associations, with each having one vote in the presidential election.

NATIONS LEAGUE

Last-gasp Haaland shoots Norway into quarter-finals

AFP
Paris

Erling Haaland fired Norway into the Nations League quarter-finals on Tuesday with a last-gasp penalty which completed a stunning comeback from two goals down to win 3-2.

Manchester City striker Haaland stroked home from the spot in the sixth minute of injury time in Copenhagen as Norway leapfrogged their hosts into second place in Group A, on head-to-head record as both teams finished on nine points. Both teams ended the group stage six points behind winners Portugal, who got their first win of the post-Cristiano Ronaldo era with a 3-2 success against Wales.

The winner was one of two goals from Haaland, who also started the fightback in the 37th minute – and had a goal disallowed – after early strikes from Rasmus Hojlund and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg gave Denmark a commanding lead in front of passionate support.

Haaland was given the chance to nick a spot in the last eight from the Danes, who only needed a draw to go through, after a handball from Joachim Andersen which was spotted by the VAR officials just as the hosts thought they had survived another in a series of scares. Denmark had been on the back foot ever since Haaland halved the deficit when a howler from Denmark goalkeeper Mads Hermansen gifted possession to Martin Odegaard.


Norway's Erling Haaland scores a penalty past Denmark's goalkeeper Mads Hermansen during the Nations League match in Copenhagen. *(AFP)*

It was Odegaard who forced home Norway's leveller with six minutes remaining and set up a grandstand finish which was completed with Haaland's dramatic winner. Norway will join Portugal in Friday's draw in Nyon, where the four group winners will be seeded and each play against one of the four second-placed teams. Haaland's winner made Portugal's win over Wales irrelevant to their group placing, but Carlos Forbs' classy strike in the 70th minute made sure of a positive finish for Jorge Jesus' team. Forbs' first international goal decided a hugely entertaining encounter in which Wales, already guaranteed to finish bottom of the group, put in a performance which belied their position.

Wales will take part in the play-offs to decide the final promotion and relegation spots between Leagues A and B, and on Tuesday's evidence they have a fighting chance of staying in the top tier. David Brooks quickly replied to Bruno Fernandes' superb opener for Portugal and Wales had their tails up when Sorba Thomas slid the hosts in front in the 40th minute.