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Alcaraz eyes ATP Finals semis after cruising past troubled Rublev



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Australia rely on title wins and 'extra leg' in World Cup semi-final

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WORLD CUP

Kohli's record ton, Shami's magnificent seven wickets power India to final

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MOTOGP QATAR AIRWAYS GRAND PRIX OF QATAR

MotoGP riders enjoy an adrenaline-filled day with al-Attiyah



MotoGP riders Pedro Acosta, Alexis Espargaro and Jorge Martin are engaged in a deep conversation with Qatari rally legend Nasser al-Attiyah at the Nasser Rally Camp yesterday, ahead of this weekend's MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar.



Nasser al-Attiyah took part in a thrilling buggy race alongside the MotoGP riders.

Dorna Sports and Lusail International Circuit organised exciting pre-event activities with a desert activation held at the Nasser Rally Camp near the beautiful dunes of Qatar ahead of MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023. The thrilling event brought together some of the biggest names in MotoGP, such as Pedro Acosta, Alexis Espargaro and Jorge Martin, and they were joined by Qatari rally legend Nasser al-Attiyah.

Using a combination of flags and trenches, a miniature version of the circuit was crafted, providing a unique and

captivating visual experience in the dunes. Al-Attiyah, a legend in the world of rally racing, took part in a thrilling buggy race alongside the MotoGP riders. Teams were formed, and they raced around the mini version of the Lusail International Circuit set amidst the desert dunes replicating the upcoming Grand Prix.

In addition to the buggy race, an exciting "Arabic Challenge" added a cultural twist to the event. The MotoGP riders were presented with their names written in Arabic on a mini whiteboard. They were given 30 seconds to study the script, and then they had to reproduce their names in Ara-

bic from memory on the whiteboard. This challenge not only tested their memory but also celebrated the rich culture and heritage of Qatar.

The highlight of the day was the "Time Trial of the Mini Lusail Circuit," where each team went head-to-head to set the fastest lap time on the miniature circuit. The competition was fierce, and the riders' determination was palpable as they navigated the challenging terrain. The Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023 will be held this weekend and is set to bring the best of the sport as well as the Sprint Race for the first time at the Lusail Circuit.



FOOTBALL

Qatar open World Cup qualifiers against Afghanistan today

'We are motivated to play good football and will live up to expectations'

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar will begin their bid to qualify for the FIFA World Cup on merit for the first time when they kick off their Preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 campaign for the 2026 edition and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 against Afghanistan at the Khalifa International Stadium today.

Qatar's inaugural participation as hosts of the global showpiece last year ended in the group stage with the highly experienced Carlos Queiroz now in charge of the squad. The former Iran head coach has been hard at work rebuilding the side and has named a blended squad of young talent and seasoned players for today's tie against Afghanistan and against India five days later in Bhubaneswar.

Queiroz has said his mission is for Qatar to defend the AFC Asian Cup title on home soil in January and also seal qualification to the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027. That Qatar are in good hands is undeniable with Queiroz having been involved in the last four editions of the FIFA World Cup as head coach, three of them with Iran. The former Real Madrid tactician, however, has warned his team will not take the Afghanistan side, who advanced to the second round after defeating Mongolia, lightly.

"We started preparations a week ago and I am happy with the commitment and discipline the players have reached," he said at a press conference on Wednesday. "We are motivated to play good football that will live up to expectations and achieve success. We are currently entering a new challenge and we must work towards facing it. Afghanistan will come into the match with all focus and we must respect the opponent and give our best on the field," the veteran Portuguese added.



Qatar's head coach Carlos Queiroz talks to his players during a training session at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's coach Ashley Westwood has urged his players to play for 'self-esteem'. The Scotsman said: "The preparations for us were not worse than they are. We trained together yesterday here in Doha and we look forward to facing the Qatar national team in a positive manner."

He added: "The players are eager to put on a good show and will give everything they have in the match. The motivation here is the wonderful atmosphere in Qatar, the stadium and the facilities."

The other match in the Group A will see Kuwait hosting India in what promises to be an enthralling affair. With Qatar the early favourites in Group, Kuwait and India will be eager to kick off

with a win when they square off at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium today.

Kuwait, who did not qualify for the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, will be driven to deliver in Round 2 of the Preliminary Joint Qualification. AFC Asian Cup winners in 1980 and having made their sole FIFA World Cup appearance in the 1982 edition, Kuwait's mission is to regain their status as one of Asia's premier teams.

India, however, will not be easy opposition with the South Asian side also bent on making an impact. Head coach Igor Stimac said the target is to kick off their campaign with a victory, with the two sides having met in the 2023 SAFF Championship, with both matches ending in 1-1 draws.

FAN TRAVEL PACKAGES ANNOUNCED FOR WORLD AQUATICS CHAMPIONSHIPS DOHA 2024

Doha: The Organising Committee of the World Aquatics Championships and the World Aquatics Masters Championships - Doha 2024 yesterday announced exclusive travel packages for fans from across the world to mark 100 days to go until the start of the Masters Championships.

The packages will give fans the opportunity to watch World Aquatics' flagship competitions, held in the Middle East for the first time, while enjoying Doha's world-class hospitality and welcoming culture during the events.

The World Aquatics Championships will be held between February 2 and 18 and the Masters Championships between February 23 and March 3 following the successful hosting of a number of aquatics events in Doha, including the World Aquatics Swimming Championships (25m) in 2014 and nine legs of the World Aquatics Swimming World Cup series between 2012 and 2021.

Tickets for the World Aquatics Championships Doha 2024 went on sale to fans on October 25 through the official Championships' website and Q-tickets platform. In partnership with Discover Qatar, Doha 2024 is offering a variety of exceptional ticket options for those planning to travel and witness their favourite aquatic athletes in action in 2024.

Fans will be able to choose from an array of three, four and five-star hotel options in the Qatari capital, as well as from a list of exciting and wide-ranging tours and excursions to enjoy away from the action in the water. An optional airport transfer package is also available on the Discover Qatar website.

"We are delighted with the travel packages we are able to offer fans travelling to Doha for the World Aquatics Championships and World Aquatics Masters Championships thanks to our partnership with Discover Qatar. While we

know that everyone will enjoy the world-class competitions during their time in Doha, these packages give them the opportunity to maximise their experience away from competition and enjoy all that Qatar's rich culture has to offer," said Sheikha Asma bint Thani al-Thani, Director of Marketing and Communications, Opening and Closing Ceremonies Committee at the World Aquatics Championships and World Masters Aquatics Championships - Doha 2024.

Doha is a truly multicultural city - home to people from nearly 100 different countries - and an established international destination which attracts millions of tourists each year. The city boasts beautiful, family-friendly beach resorts and luxury spas, world-class shopping malls and traditional Arab Souqs and a thriving arts and culture scene with countless museums and galleries.

This fusion of cultures and the old and new is a hallmark of Doha and will provide aquatic fans with a new experience as the first time the World Aquatics Championships has been held in the Middle East. It is reflected in the tradition of its harbours set against a backdrop of stunning modern skyscrapers and in the rich diversity of its restaurants and witness their favourite aquatic athletes in action in 2024.

Fans can book their travel packages on the Discover Qatar webpage: <https://www.discoverqatar.qa/world-aquatics-championships-doha-2024/overview>

Fans can buy their tickets to attend the World Aquatics Championships - Doha 2024 on Q-tickets platform: <https://events.q-tickets.com/qatar/eventdetails/4005832070/world-aquatics-championships-doha-2024>

SPOTLIGHT

Stage set for Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The inaugural edition of the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show is set to make a grand entrance onto the global stage under the esteemed patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani.

Scheduled to take place tomorrow and on Saturday, the prestigious event will unfold at the iconic Al Shaqab indoor and outdoor arena, marking a significant milestone for Arabian horse enthusiasts.

This equestrian spectacle is poised to be an unforgettable experience, uniting a total of 272 horses, including 70 from outside Qatar. Hailing from Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, these magnificent creatures will compete for top honours in an exhilarating display of skill and grace.

The inaugural edition of the show boasts an esteemed panel of judges who will bring their expertise to evaluate and appreciate the prowess of these equestrian teams, adding an extra layer of excitement to the competition: Renata Schibler (Switzerland), Josy Everars (Belgium), Helen Hennekens-van Nes (Belgium), Marek Trela (Poland), Robbie Den Hartog (Netherlands), Terry Holms (USA), Christine Valette (France), Soheil Sanati (Iran), Bassem Badr (KSA), Mohamed Mohsen (Egypt), Barbara Pfisner (Switzerland), Mohamed Hammad (Egypt).

At a press conference yesterday, Khalid al-Jehani, Breeding & Show Manager at Al Shaqab and Event Director of Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show, said:



Al Shaqab's Breeding & Show Manager and Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show Event Director Khalid al-Jehani (left) and Al Shaqab Protocol & International Relations Manager Dr Fahad al-Hajri during a press conference in Doha yesterday.

"We believe that, within just a few editions, this show will establish itself as a 'not-to-miss' yearly event for Arabian Show Horse owners, both locally and internationally. We are immensely proud to have the support of our sponsors who have made this event possible. The Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show has garnered significant attention from equestrian enthusiasts and experts worldwide,

and the sponsors have played a vital role in shaping this prestigious event."

Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show is classified as a B show by the European Conference of Arab Horse Organisations (ECAHO), allowing winning horses to qualify for international shows of higher classification. This show not only showcases the beauty and grace of purebred Arabian horses but also celebrates the tra-

ditional and cultural significance of owning these magnificent creatures, reflecting the deep-seated love for Arabian horses in the community.

By highlighting the uniqueness of purebred Arabian horses both locally and internationally, the event underpins Qatar's rich Arabian heritage, further strengthening its global presence in the equestrian community. "The event does not cater

only for lovers of equestrian sport. We also want to ensure that all spectators enjoy and experience the festive atmosphere. Thus, besides cafes and coffee corners, we also have a dedicated entertainment zone offering fun and educational activities for children of all ages," al-Jahni added.

The organizers envision that the 1st edition of the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show will mark the beginning of the international competition season in Qatar. This strategic timing will enable horse owners from around the world to prepare their horses for the world championship, a historic event set to take place outside Paris for the first time.

This show promises not only a world-class competition but also a celebration of the timeless bond between humans and these majestic Arabian horses. The two days of this event will be filled with thrilling competitions, breed presentations, and an opportunity for attendees to witness the grace and beauty of the Arabian horse.

The Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show is more than just a competition; it is a testament to Qatar's commitment to the equestrian arts and the promotion of its rich equestrian heritage on the global stage. With the support of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, this event is poised to become a cornerstone in the world of Arabian horse shows.

Meanwhile, Hayyakum will also be held tomorrow and on Saturday at the Longines Indoor arena in Al Shaqab from 4pm-8:30pm. Exciting activities such as gymkhana, pony rides, Arabian horse experiences, art and crafts, archery, and more will on offer for families.

ATP FINALS

Alcaraz eyes semis after cruising past troubled Rublev

'I'm happy to show this level and realise that my level is still there'

AFP
Turin, Italy

Carlos Alcaraz feels like he is coming back to his best form after strolling to 7-5, 6-2 win over an emotionally fraught Andrey Rublev yesterday and keeping alive his hopes of reaching the last four of the ATP Finals. World number two Alcaraz has had problems with his form and fitness over the past few months and was staring at possible early elimination after losing his first Red Group match with Alexander Zverev.

But he looked in much better condition yesterday and comfortably claimed his first ever win in the season-ending tournament, snapping a three-match losing streak to boot. "You could see I've been struggling with my level the last few months, few tournaments. Playing this match in this quality, at this level, it's really helpful for me," Alcaraz told reporters. "I'm really happy to show this level and realise that my level is still there, giving myself a chance in this tournament...After this win, everything has changed in my mind."

The 20-year-old easily dealt with Russian Rublev who once again failed to make his mark in a big match with one of tennis' leading lights, a problem which has dogged his career. Fifth seed Rublev, the reigning Monte Carlo Masters champion, was on the verge of tears after losing his opener with Daniil Medvedev and lost control again after giving away a service game at the start of the second set.

Being one set and a break down was too much for the 26-year-old who started smashing his racket into his left knee, drawing blood as he sat down. Troubled Rublev was still bleeding down his leg after the change of ends and, just as against



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz returns the ball during his round-robin match against Russia's Andrey Rublev at ATP Finals in Turin, Italy. (AFP)

Medvedev, gave into his anger and promptly collapsed.

After throwing away his serve to love in game seven to give Alcaraz the chance to serve for the match, Rublev sat with his towel over his head, clearly trying to hold back the tears before Alcaraz sealed a straight-sets win. Afterwards Rublev brushed off the assault on his own limb as "nothing" but admitted that he is struggling to deal with what has been a hard end to the season. "It's not easy because you always want to finish in a good way. Sometimes, yeah, you get disappointed when it's

not happening," he said.

Rublev isn't yet officially eliminated but he is not counting on getting out of the group having failed to win a set in his first two matches. "To be honest, now I don't expect anything. It's going to be the last match," he added. "At least I will try to do something better than the previous two matches, and that's it. Try at least to finish in a good way."

Alcaraz, meanwhile, will now face Medvedev in his final match with his Russian opponent having a chance to reach the semi-finals

in his clash with Zverev late last night.

World number three Medvedev can book an early place in the next round if he wins in straight sets, while Alcaraz's victory means seventh seed Zverev will be through with a win of any sort.

Sinner edges Djokovic to close in on last four

On Tuesday night, Jannik Sinner edged towards becoming the first ever Italian to reach the last four of the ATP Finals after a thrilling 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/2) win over Novak Djokovic. World number four Sinner needed a straight-sets victory in front of enthusiastic home support in Turin over tennis icon Djokovic to guarantee passage from the Green Group with a match to spare.

And while the 22-year-old couldn't quite make that happen, a superb performance gave him his first win in four attempts over Djokovic, who is bidding to win for a record seventh time at the year-ending tournament. "It means a lot to me," said Sinner on court. "When you win against the world number one who has won 24 Grand Slams it's obviously in the top-top."

Fans made an almighty din for Sinner, chanting his name to the rafters once he claimed victory in an exciting, three-hour contest which ran way past midnight at the Pala Alpitour. Sinner has had the best year of his career and looks to be fulfilling the promise he has long shown, winning four titles this season including the Masters 1000 event at Toronto, and looks on form in Italy.

Both players' fate will be decided in the final round of group matches, with Djokovic facing Hubert Hurkacz who has stepped in for Stefanos Tsitsipas after the Greek pulled out of the tournament with a back injury against Sinner's next opponent Holger Rune.

FOCUS

Qatar Drag Race Championship kicks off today, Roll Race to be held on Saturday

The revving engines and the smell of burning rubber signal the much-anticipated start of the Qatar Drag Race Championship's new season 2023/2024. Qatar Racing Club, under the esteemed patronage of HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, the club's chairman, is all set to host the first qualifying sessions at its renowned drag strip this evening.

Yesterday marked an open track day, allowing racers to test their cars and bikes, evaluating their readiness for the upcoming championship. The meticulous preparation of the track began early last month, following the directives of Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani, the director of Qatar Racing Club.

This world-class racing track, considered among the best globally, underwent maintenance to ensure it meets international standards. Known for hosting competitions that have seen the setting of numerous records in drag racing, the track is now primed to showcase the thrilling battles of the new season.

The schedule for the first round kicks off today with registration and technical inspection starting at 3:30pm. The first qualifying run for all categories will commence at 5pm, followed by the second run at 7pm. Elimination competitions for the (ET) categories for both cars and bikes will follow, setting the stage for an adrenaline-fuelled competi-

tion. Tomorrow, technical inspection reopens for those unable to attend on Thursday except ET classes, beginning at 3:30pm and continuing until 5pm.

The third and final qualifying run starts at 5pm, leading to the elimination competitions at 7pm.

The knockout format will determine the finalists in each category, ultimately crowning the top three winners. The track is also scheduled to open its doors on Saturday for fans of roller races in a competitive evening that marks the first of its kind this year for this type of racing. Registration will begin at 4pm, and the track will officially open at 6pm.

This season will see competitors vying for victory in 14 categories, with 11 dedicated to cars and three to bikes. The championship comprises four rounds, with the first beginning today. The second round is slated for the end of this month, followed by the third and fourth rounds scheduled for next year, with the first in February and the final round in mid-March.

As racing enthusiasts eagerly await the roar of engines and the thrill of competition, Qatar Racing Club promises a season filled with high-speed action and fierce rivalries on the track. Stay tuned for updates as the Qatar Drag Race Championship unfolds its latest chapter at the state-of-the-art racing facility.



MCILROY AIMS TO 'FOCUS' ON THE GOLF AT DP WORLD TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP

Dubai: After dropping a bombshell this week that he was resigning as the player director of the PGA Tour's policy board, Rory McIlroy will aim to win a third DP World Tour Championship, which starts in Dubai today. The Northern Irishman has already wrapped up his fifth Race to Dubai (Order of Merit) title and is assured of a \$2m bonus without hitting a golf shot this week. He will now have to battle the world No 3 Jon Rahm and No 4 Viktor Hovland

for a third DP World Tour Championship title and the \$3m winner's cheque.

McIlroy, who has been the de facto spokesperson for the PGA Tour in its battle against LIV Golf, had said earlier in the year that he wanted to focus on his own game. Yesterday, he was part of a long telephone conversation with other board members - a person close to McIlroy said it stretched for six hours - and sent his resignation to Commissioner Jay Monahan af-

ter that. The world No 2 had met the press before that and gave no inkling of the move. McIlroy refused to comment on his decision yesterday, but ahead of the PGA Championship in May, he said: "I would rather people be talking about me for my golf rather than stuff that I am doing behind the scenes or what I have said in a press conference. But now that the wheels have been set in motion it is time to focus on me and focus on playing great golf and

trying to get back to winning ways."

The \$10.5m season-ending championship, with a limited field of 50 players, has attracted all top-50 players in the Points List for the first time. It is also the first time in the 15-year history of the tournament that the Race to Dubai champion has been determined in the penultimate event of the season.

McIlroy, winner of two Rolex Series events this year, has amassed 5,166.47

points. Second-placed Rahm is 3,081.94 points behind, which means even if he wins this week (2,000 points), he will still not be able to catch his Ryder Cup teammate. Both players have phenomenal records on the Earth course.

McIlroy has finished outside the top-10 only twice and has only five over-par rounds in 12 appearances, including wins in 2012 and 2015. Rahm, the defending champion, has three wins in four starts.

PREVIEW

Australia rely on title wins and 'extra leg' in semi-final

Five-time World Cup winners prepared for a hard slog against Temba Bavuma's South Africa

AFP
Kolkata

Australia skipper Pat Cummins said his players will draw on experience from previous title wins in their World Cup semi-final clash with South Africa, spurred on by Glenn Maxwell's heroics having given them "an extra leg".

Five-time winners Australia went down to the Proteas in the league stage by 134 runs before they won seven straight matches to make the semi-final in Kolkata today.

Australia, who lost an ODI series in South Africa in September, have beaten their rivals twice in World Cup semi-finals.

"You start from scratch every time you play," Cummins told reporters. "They're a team we've played quite a lot and know quite well."

"I think what helps us is we've got a lot of guys that have been in this situation before that have won the one-day World Cup, T20 World Cup, various other tournaments in big moments. So, I think that really helps. You can draw on that in the middle of the contest."

The most dramatic World Cup semi-final between the two teams was a tied match in Edgbaston in 1999 with Australia moving into the final due to a better group stage finish.

Cummins said "the 99 World Cup one, it's kind of folklore, isn't it? I've seen that replay heaps of times, you hear the stories."

Cummins, along with David Warner, Steve Smith, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Marsh, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood was part of Australia's 2015 World Cup



South Africa's captain Temba Bavuma stretches during a practice session at the Eden Garden Cricket Stadium in Kolkata ahead of their ICC World Cup semi-final against Australia. Right: Australia's captain Pat Cummins rests during a practice session at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. (AFP)



triumph at home and their maiden T20 World Cup title win in Dubai in 2021.

At this World Cup, Australia began with two losses including a defeat to India in their opener but have been on a roll since and Cummins takes inspiration from the winning streak.

"You can either build it up as the most important game of your life, or you can business as usual, really," Cummins said.

"And I think with experience, I think just keeping it pretty chilled and business as usual for our group seems to be the way to go. So, you draw back on those past wins but you also just draw back on the last few weeks and know that us at our best is good enough."

Australia have witnessed some brilliant individual performances including an unbeaten 201 from Maxwell in their dramatic win

over Afghanistan and a match-winning 177 not out from Mitchell Marsh against Bangladesh.

Maxwell defied predictions and played through cramps from a dire 91-7 to pull the team to victory in their chase of 292 at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

"As a team you grow an extra leg because you feel like you can win a match from anywhere and having someone like 'Maxi' in your team....he's a superstar, he's a freak, he can win a game from anywhere. Pretty glad he's in our team."

Rain is threatening the contest with downpours forecast in the eastern city today and during tomorrow's reserve day.

"We'll turn up, expect to play a 50-over match tomorrow, any of that shifts on us well. I'm sure in real time we can kind of adjust as needed," said Cummins.

South Africa not playing a 'Mickey Mouse team' in semis, says Bavuma

South Africa skipper Temba Bavuma yesterday warned they are not up against a "Mickey Mouse team" in their World Cup semi-final against Australia amid feverish expectation of reaching their first championship match.

The Proteas won seven of their nine league matches to finish second in the 10-team table to book a final-four clash in Kolkata today. That run included a 134-rout of the Australians at Lucknow four weeks ago.

Five-time champions Australia are coming off seven straight wins at the tournament.

"A lot of people believe that this could be the year that we see ourselves in the final," Bavuma, who remains doubtful to play the semi-final due his hamstring injury,

told reporters. "We'd like nothing better than that. But we also respect the game of cricket. We're not coming up against a Mickey Mouse team. Australia have a lot of experience and confidence in knockout games like this, so we've got to respect that."

Bavuma said the mindset of his team remains confident ahead of the knockout contest.

"From a skill point of view, from a physical point of view, the guys are quite confident," said Bavuma.

"There's a sense of calmness within the team and obviously the normal level of anxiety that you would expect of going into the game tomorrow."

He added: "But I think we'll take a lot of confidence with our performances up until this point."

Bavuma said he will look to play two frontline spinners, Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi

at Kolkata's Eden Gardens. "Obviously, Keshav and Shamsi. We have Aiden (Markram) as well, who also gives us an option there. Then I think it's just finalising in terms of the three seamers, who that may be," he said.

Maharaj, a left-arm orthodox bowler, has claimed 14 wickets in nine matches while left-arm wrist-spinner Shamsi has seven off just three games.

Bavuma also praised wicket-keeper-batsman Quinton de Kock for leading the batting charge with his 591 runs, second only to India's Virat Kohli.

"Quinton's been magnificent for us," said Bavuma. "At one point he was the leading World Cup scorer as well. Knowing Quinton, I don't think he's really paying much attention to all of that. I think his focus is on contributing as best as he can for the team."

SPOTLIGHT

Babar quits captaincy as PCB rings changes

AFP
Lahore, Pakistan

Pakistan cricket underwent a major shake-up yesterday in the aftermath of the team's World Cup flop as Babar Azam quit as skipper with Shan Masood becoming Test captain, Shaheen Shah Afridi taking the reins of the white-ball side while coaches were downgraded.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials said they had sacked Babar as limited-overs skipper but still wanted him to remain in charge of the Test team.

"Today, I am stepping down as the captain of Pakistan in all formats," Babar announced on X, formerly Twitter, after meeting PCB chief Zakar Ashraf in Lahore. "It's a difficult decision but I feel it is the right time for this call. I will continue to represent Pakistan as a player in all three formats."

Azam, 29, had been leading the side since November 2019 but after the failure to reach the World Cup semi-finals in India his position was immediately under threat.



"I am here to support the new captain and the team with my experience and dedication," added Babar. "I want to express my sincere thanks to the Pakistan Cricket Board for entrusting me with this significant responsibility."

Minutes later, Masood was appointed skipper of the Test team until 2025 and Shaheen for white ball cricket without mentioning his tenure although the T20 World Cup takes place in the United States and Caribbean in 2024.

The coaching staff will have a "different portfolio", the PCB said without elaborating.

"The PCB has changed the portfolio of the coaching staff including (director of cricket) Mickey Arthur," it said.

"All coaches will continue to work in the National Cricket Academy while the PCB will announce a new coaching staff for the Australia tour in due course."

Babar said his journey had been a roller-coaster ride which culminated in a record of four wins and five losses at the World Cup.

As well as suffering an eighth defeat in eight meetings at World Cups against arch-rivals India, he also oversaw a first loss to neighbours Afghanistan.

"I vividly remember the moment when I received the call from the PCB to lead Pakistan in 2019. Over the past four years, I've experienced many highs and lows, on and off the field," said Babar.

"But I wholeheartedly and passionately aimed to maintain Pakistan's pride and respect in the cricket world."

Ranked as the number one batsman before the World Cup, Babar failed to score big runs in India, finishing with 320 without a century over nine games.

Babar led Pakistan in 20 Tests, winning ten, losing six and drawing the other four. In 43 ODIs, Pakistan won 26, losing 16 with one no result.

In the shortest format, Babar led Pakistan to the semi-finals of the Twenty20 World Cup in 2021 and a runners-up finish a year later. In 71 T20Is, he enjoyed 41 wins, 23 losses with seven no results.

Pakistan has a tough tour of Australia coming up where they play three Tests, starting in Perth from December 14.

They have lost all of their last 14 Tests in the country with their most recent victory coming back in 1995. Shan, 34, has featured in 30 Tests for Pakistan.

Shaheen, 23, will start his tenure with a five-match Twenty20 international series in New Zealand in January next year.

He led the Lahore franchise to two Pakistan Super League titles in 2022 and this year.

Jockey Sanna in dominating form as My Glory wins Rowdat Rashid Cup

Doha: My Glory clinched the Rowdat Rashid Cup while Ernest Aldrich claimed the Doha Cup title to seal top honours at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) Seventh Al Rayyan Meeting.

The Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday witnessed a busy day 11 races decided including the two feature races.

My Glory culminated the day's action, producing a fine performance to win the Rowdat Rashid Cup for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds.

The Engineer Hassan Ali A M Alabdulmalik-owned and Debbie Mountain-trained colt picked up impressively in the closing stages to win the 1200m contest, completing a double at his second time of asking this season, under jockey Alberto Sanna who had his name on the scoreboard for the third time last evening.



Connections of My Glory along with jockey Alberto Sanna celebrate winning the Rowdat Rashid Cup, the day's feature race at Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) in Al Rayyan yesterday.

Falling half a length short of My Glory was Al Thumama Racing-owned X Force, which had Faleh

Bughanaim in the saddle. Gassim Ghazali-trained Mystical Music under Marco Casamento was third

in the last feature of the day. Earlier, Ernest Aldrich picked up where he left off last season, winning the Doha Cup in the colours of Abdulatif Hussain M Z Al-Emadi. The Bader al-Balushi-trained seven-year-old managed to hold on for victory in the 1700m Conditions for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds, edging Toromona by a neck, completing a treble in the evening for jockey Soufiane Saadi. Hamad al-Jehani-trained Toromona was ridden by Jefferson Smith, while Tomas Lukasek piloted Rashid al-Jehani-trained Hessdalen to third place in yesterday's first feature race.

The 10-race card Eighth Al Rayyan Meeting today at Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club will also witness two feature races - Thoroughbred Guineas and the Barzan Cup - with each race carrying a total prize money of QR350,000.



Jockey Alberto Sanna guides My Glory to win the Rowdat Rashid Cup at QREC in Al Rayyan yesterday. Pictures: Juhaim



MATCH REPORT

Kohli, Shami star as India storm into World Cup final

Two-time World Cup champions India beat New Zealand in high-scoring semi-final in Mumbai



India's Virat Kohli acknowledges the crowd and walks back to the pavilion after losing his wicket, caught out by New Zealand's Devon Conway off the bowling of Tim Southee in the first semi-final of the ICC World Cup in Mumbai yesterday. **RIGHT:** India's Mohamed Shami celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of New Zealand's Tom Latham in Mumbai yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Mumbai

Virat Kohli scored a record-breaking 50th one-day international hundred before Mohamed Shami took a sensational seven-wicket haul as India sealed a place in the World Cup final with a 70-run win over New Zealand in Mumbai yesterday.

Kohli made 117, to surpass the record he had shared with India great Sachin Tendulkar, and Shreyas Iyer a rapid 105 in a commanding total of 397-4 that also featured Shubman Gill's 80 not out.

New Zealand were left needing to break their own record for the highest total by a team batting second to win a World Cup semi-final - a Duckworth/Lewis adjusted 299-6 against South Africa at Auckland in 2015.

But in-form paceman Shami took a career-best 7-57 as New Zealand, the losing finalists at the last two World Cups, were dismissed for 327 despite Daryl Mitchell's 134, his highest score at this level.

India, who've won all 10 of their matches at the tournament so far as they bid for a third World Cup title and second on home soil, will face either Australia or South Africa, who play today, in Sunday's final in Ahmedabad.

"I still believe in pitching it up and getting wickets with the new ball," said Shami. "I dropped a catch off Kane Williamson, I shouldn't have. I felt terrible."

He added: "The last two World Cups, we lost in the semis. Who knows when or if we'll get a chance, so this was one chance we didn't want to let go."

First-change Shami struck twice early on, taking a wicket with his first ball, to leave New Zealand 39-2.

But the Black Caps then enjoyed a revival during a third-wicket partnership of 181 between captain Williamson and Mitchell.

Shami, however, all but ended the chase with two wickets in three balls during the 33rd over.

Williamson fell for 69 when he flicked Shami - who had dropped him on 52 - straight to Suryakumar Yadav at deep square leg.

And 220-3 became 220-4 when Shami had Tom Latham lbw for a duck. "Daryl Mitchell and Kane Williamson batted brilliantly," said India captain Rohit Sharma, who made a dashing 47 at the top of the order. "We knew we had to pull something from up our sleeves. A bit of magic...We tried everything and Mohamed Shami was brilliant."

Mitchell's fine effort ended in when he whipped Shami to Ravindra Jadeja at deep midwicket before the paceman finished the match when last man Lockie Ferguson was caught behind.

"Congratulations to India," said Williamson. "They're a top side at the top of their game...But credit to the guys. I'm proud of the effort to stay in the fight."

Kohli's innings saw him surpass the mark of 49 hundreds he had shared with Tendulkar as his



New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell plays a shot against India. (Reuters)

compatriot looked on from the Wankhede Stadium stands in a capacity 33,000 crowd featuring football star David Beckham.

Kohli put on 163 with Iyer, who made 105 off just 70 balls, including four fours and eight sixes.

"It feels like a dream. Too good to be true," said Kohli at the innings break. Tendulkar hailed Kohli's "skill and passion".

"I couldn't be happier that an

Indian broke my record," wrote Tendulkar, a teammate of Kohli when India beat Sri Lanka in the 2011 final at the Wankhede, on X, formerly Twitter.

There was controversy at the start yesterday following revelations the match was being played on a used, rather than fresh, pitch.

New Zealand thought they had number tree Kohli out for a second-ball duck, lbw to Southee,

SCOREBOARD

India		New Zealand	
R. Sharma c Kane b Southee	47	D. Mitchell c Jadeja b Shami	134
S. Gill not out	80	T. Latham lbw b Shami	0
V. Kohli c Conway b Southee	117	G. Phillips c Jadeja b Bumrah	41
S. Iyer c Mitchell b Boult	105	M. Chapman c Jadeja b Kuldeep	2
KL Rahul not out	39	M. Santner c Rohit b Siraj	9
S. Yadav c Phillips b Southee	1	T. Southee c Rahul b Shami	9
Extras (b1, lb1, w6)	8	T. Boult not out	2
Total (4 wks, 50 overs)	397	L. Ferguson c Rahul b Shami	6
Did not bat: R Jadeja, J Bumrah, K Yadav, M Shami, M Siraj		Extras (b4, lb5, nb1, w19)	29
Fall of wickets: 1-71 (Rohit), 2-327 (Kohli), 3-381 (Iyer), 4-382 (S Yadav)		Total (all out, 48.5 overs)	327
Bowling: Boult 10-0-86-1 (2w); Southee 10-0-100-3 (1w); Santner 10-1-51-0; Ferguson 8-0-65-0 (1w); Ravindra 7-0-60-0 (2w); Phillips 5-0-33-0		Fall of wickets: 1-30 (Conway), 2-39 (Ravindra), 3-220 (Williamson), 4-220 (Latham), 5-295 (Phillips), 6-298 (Chapman), 7-306 (Mitchell), 8-319 (Santner), 9-321 (Southee), 10-327 (Ferguson)	
		Bowling: Bumrah 10-1-64-1 (6w); Siraj 9-0-78-1 (3w); Shami 9.5-0-57-7 (2w); Jadeja 10-0-63-0 (1nb); Kuldeep 10-0-56-1	
		Result: India won by 70 runs	
		Toss: India	
		Umpires: Richard Illingworth (ENG) and Rod Tucker (AUS)	

but their review revealed an inside edge. An unflustered Kohli completed his third of the tournament, as chants of "Kohli, Kohli" rang round the ground with a two off Ferguson, having faced 106 balls, hitting eight fours and a six.

Tendulkar led the applause as Kohli bowed towards his childhood hero.

Dropped on 107, Kohli was eventually out when he pulled Southee low to deep square leg and the dynamic Iyer's second successive hundred ended after he holed out off Trent Boult.

Shami, who took his previous best of 5-18 under the Wankhede lights when Sri Lanka were dismissed for just 55 in pool play, had an immediate success yesterday.

Devon Conway could only edge his late-moving first ball, although it still needed wicket-keeper KL Rahul to hold a brilliant diving catch.

Conway's fellow left-handed opener Rachin Ravindra, the tournament's breakout star with three hundreds in his first World Cup, was also caught behind off Shami for 13.

MASTER KOHLI PAINTS PERFECT PICTURE TO ECLIPSE TENDULKAR'S TALLY OF ODI CENTURIES

Mumbai: India's Virat Kohli said he had painted the perfect picture after confirming his place as cricket's modern-day master batsman with a record 50th one-day international hundred in his team's World Cup semi-final win over New Zealand yesterday.

After equalling Sachin Tendulkar's mark of 49 ODI hundreds against South Africa on his 35th birthday this month, Kohli claimed the record at the Wankhede Stadium with a knock of 117.

Indian Tendulkar made his 49th hundred in his 451st innings and his tally was widely considered to be one that would never be surpassed.

Kohli, however, needed only 279 matches to eclipse his cricketing idol. The 35-year-old ran hard to complete two runs off fast bowler Lockie Ferguson and reach three figures before leaping up and punched the air in delight.

He removed his helmet, kept his bat on the ground and bowed towards the stands where his wife Anushka Sharma and Tendulkar stood and applauded among other Bollywood celebrities.

"It's stuff of dreams, Anushka was sitting right there, Sachin



India's Virat Kohli celebrates after reaching his 50th century, breaking Sachin Tendulkar's record of most number of ODI centuries, in Mumbai yesterday. (Reuters)

"paaji" (elder brother) was there in the stands," Kohli said.

"I mean, it's very difficult for me to explain this, but if I could paint the perfect picture, I would want this to be the picture."

"My life partner, the person I love the most, she's sitting there. My hero, he's sitting there. And I

was able to get the 50th in front of all of them and all these fans in such a historic venue. It was amazing."

Kohli's third hundred of the tournament was enough to help unbeaten India beat New Zealand by 70 runs and seal a spot in Sunday's final in Ahmedabad against

Australia or South Africa.

"This all feels like a dream, honestly. It's too good to be true. It feels surreal. I never thought I'd be here ever in my career," Kohli said yesterday.

"Just to help the team so many times. Again a big game today and I played the role I have throughout the tournament so that the guys around me could express themselves.

"I am glad things came together so nicely and we could put a good total on the board."

Tendulkar was effusive in his praise of Kohli.

"The first time I met you in the Indian dressing room, you were pranked by other teammates into touching my feet. I couldn't stop laughing that day," Tendulkar, who hails from Mumbai, said on social media platform X.

"But soon, you touched my heart with your passion and skill. I am so happy that that young boy has grown into a 'Virat' (massive) player. I couldn't be happier that an Indian broke my record. And to do it on the biggest stage - in the World Cup semi-final - and at my home ground is the icing on the cake."



Former England footballer David Beckham with former India cricketer Sachin Tendulkar before the World Cup semi-final between India and New Zealand in Mumbai yesterday. (Reuters)