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**AUSTRALIAN OPEN | Page 2**

Sabalenka beats Gauff to set up final date with China's Zheng



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Star-studded entry for Qatar International Rally in Feb

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Friday, January 26, 2024  
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FOCUS

# Defending champs Qatar to play against Palestine as Round of 16 cast finalised

Defending champions Qatar will play Palestine in the Round of 16 of the AFC Asian Cup as the preliminary stage of the 24-team tournament ended yesterday.

Qatar, coached by Spaniard Marquez Lopez, are unbeaten in the tournament with wins over Lebanon (3-0), China (1-0) and Tajikistan (1-0).

Palestine, who have impressed with their overall form in Qatar, beat Hong Kong 3-0 in their last match following a 4-1 defeat against Iran. Palestine shared points with the UAE after a 1-1 draw on Jan 18.

Lopez's side is on a 10-match winning streak that includes seven victories at the 2019 Asian Cup held in the UAE.

Indonesia were the final team to check into the Round of 16 following the conclusion of the group stage yesterday.

The Southeast Asian side's place was confirmed following the Group F tie between Kyrgyzstan and Oman ending in a 1-1

ROUND OF 16 FIXTURES			
Sunday		Tuesday	
<b>Australia v Indonesia</b>		<b>Uzbekistan v Thailand</b>	
<b>Venue:</b> Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium (Doha)		<b>Venue:</b> Al Janoub Stadium (Al Wakrah)	
<b>Kick-off:</b> 14:30		<b>Kick-off:</b> 14:30	
<b>Tajikistan v United Arab Emirates</b>		<b>Saudi Arabia v South Korea</b>	
<b>Venue:</b> Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium (Al Rayyan)		<b>Venue:</b> Education City Stadium (Al Rayyan)	
<b>Kick-off:</b> 19:00		<b>Kick-off:</b> 19:00	
Monday		Wednesday	
<b>Iraq v Jordan</b>		<b>Bahrain v Japan</b>	
<b>Venue:</b> Khalifa International Stadium (Doha)		<b>Venue:</b> Al Thumama Stadium (Doha)	
<b>Kick-off:</b> 14:30		<b>Kick-off:</b> 14:30	
<b>Qatar v Palestine</b>		<b>IR Iran v Syria</b>	
<b>Venue:</b> Al Bayt Stadium (Al Khor)		<b>Venue:</b> Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium (Doha)	
<b>Kick-off:</b> 19:00		<b>Kick-off:</b> 19:00	



Qatar captain Hasan al-Haydos celebrates after scoring against Tajikistan during the Asian Cup.

points leaders Australia meet Indonesia. Three-time champions Iran, who were perfect in Group C, will meet Syria while 2007 winners Iraq, who topped Group D, face Jordan.

Bahrain topped Group E ahead of South Korea and their reward will be a Round of 16 clash with Japan while Thailand, who finished second in Group F, face Uzbekistan.

SPOTLIGHT

# Malaysia strike in injury time to hold South Korea

The result meant South Korea finished second behind Bahrain, who edged Jordan 1-0 in the other clash

Malaysia scored deep into added time to hold Korea Republic 3-3 in their AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Group E clash at the Al Janoub Stadium yesterday.

The result meant Korea Republic finished second behind Bahrain, who edged Jordan 1-0 in the other match.

For Malaysia, the result meant ending their campaign on a high note after having suffered defeats to Jordan and Bahrain.

Both teams made changes to their respective defences with Lee Ki-je and Matthew Davies out injured, with Korea Republic giving first starts to Kim Tae-hwan, Jeong Woo-yeong and Kim Young-gwon for the Koreans, while Daniel Ting and Brendan Gan were in the Malaysian lineup.

Despite dominating possession from the first blow of the whistle, Korea Republic took 15 minutes to register their first shot on target, with captain Son Heung-min weaving his way into the penalty box but his shot was tipped over the bar by Syihan Hazmi.

The Koreans took the lead five minutes later as Jeong rose highest to nod home from a corner kick. Malaysian custodian Syihan looked to have clawed the ball out but a VAR check determined that the ball had already crossed the line.

Holding the lead and with Malaysia content to defend deep, the Taeguk Warriors took the pace out of the game with controlled possession for the rest of the half with Cho Gue-sung's header two minutes from half time the only time they came close to doubling their advantage.

Despite Korea Republic starting on the front foot, Malaysia equalised six minutes into the second half when Darren Lok stole the ball off Hwang In-beom. Arif Aiman's initial shot was blocked but Faisal Halim got on the rebound and despite being forced wide, scored from an acute angle into the far bottom corner.

Malaysia took the lead two minutes shy of the hour mark after VAR check confirmed Seol Young-woo's foul on Arif in the penalty box, with the Johor Darul Ta'zim player stepping up to tuck away the ensuing penalty. Korea Republic threw on Hwang Hee-chan into the mix and the Wolverhampton Wanderers player almost restored parity in the 66th minute but saw



Malaysia's players celebrate their team's third goal during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group E match against South Korea at Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakrah, south of Doha, yesterday. (AFP)

his fierce volley from the edge of the box turned away for a corner kick.

The Korean onslaught came to fruition second minutes from the end when Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Lee Kang-in produced a wonderful free-kick that Syihan managed to get his hand to but was unable to keep it out of the net.

Jurgen Klinsmann's side thought they had won the game in the second minute of stoppage time when Junior Eldstal's foul on Oh Hyeon-gyu was picked up by a VAR review and Son converted the spot-kick. However, Malaysia capped a wonderful performance when substitute Romel Morales struck at the very end of stoppage time, sending the ball straight into the bottom corner to snatch a deserved point for his side.

"We did not want to avoid Japan, we wanted to go through in first place, that was our goal," said Klinsmann, who lifted the World Cup as a player in 1990.

"Saudi Arabia is our next one and it will be a battle," he added.

**Saudis top group to set up 'very difficult' South Korea Asian Cup clash**

Roberto Mancini warned his Saudi Arabia players they face a "very difficult match" against South Korea next week in the Asian Cup last 16.

A lively but goalless draw with Thailand yesterday - marked by four disallowed goals and a saved penalty - was enough for his team to top their group. It sets up a clash in Qatar on Tuesday between two of the tournament favourites and a managerial face-off between two legends of the European game in Mancini and South Korean coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

Mancini's Saudi Arabia had already booked their place in the next round, as had Thailand, but Group F top spot was still up for grabs when they kicked off in Doha.

Saudi Arabia, who won their opening two games, were undefeated in their last 12 matches against Thailand in all competitions, with 11 wins.



Saudi Arabia coach Roberto Mancini gives instructions to Mukhtar Ali during the match against Thailand at Education City Stadium yesterday. (Reuters)





Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in action during her Australian Open semi-final against Coco Gauff of the US in Melbourne yesterday. (Reuters)

## Sabalenka edges Gauff to set up Australian Open final against China's Zheng

**Melbourne:** Aryna Sabalenka continued her confident march towards a second successive Australian Open crown with a 7-6(2) 6-4 victory over Coco Gauff in a blockbuster semi-final yesterday to set up a title-decider against Chinese 12th seed Zheng Qinwen. Zheng ended qualifier Dayana Yastremska's remarkable run 6-4 6-4 in the day's second semi but will be long odds to land her first Grand Slam title against the second seed tomorrow and match compatriot Li Na's triumph a decade ago. Sabalenka again looked in almost irresistible form as she avenged her loss to Gauff in last year's US Open final in a high-quality contest to reach the championship match without losing a set for the second year in a row. The American teenager, also looking to land her second Grand Slam title, is one of the most athletic players in women's tennis and tore around Rod Laver Arena to stay in the contest until the Belarusian's power finally overwhelmed her. "It was an incredible match," said Sabalenka. "She's a great player, always tough battles against her. I think the key was that I was able to stay focused no matter what, no matter what the score was, I just keep trying my best, keep fighting for it. "It's one more to go, and I'll do my best." The two reigning hardcourt Grand Slam champions made contrasting starts as Belarusian Sabalenka fired an ace and revved up her forehand to hold before pouncing on two double

faults by Gauff to break. Gauff hit back right away and the pair swapped breaks again but the 19-year-old New York champion continued to teeter on her serve, allowing Sabalenka to settle her nerves after going 6-5 down in a frantic spell to clinch the first set in a tiebreak. The pair were locked together until 4-4 in the second set as Sabalenka countered Gauff's speed with power and the 25-year-old second seed edged ahead with a decisive break when the teenager hit a shot long before sealing victory with two massive serves. "I think it just came down to a couple of points, and that's tennis," said Gauff, who was playing her last Grand Slam as a teenager. "I'm going to dwell on it tonight but ... the sun is going to rise tomorrow. Tomorrow, I don't know, I'm going to try to go to the movies or something, be proud of myself."

**BRILLIANT SHOT-MAKING** While the opening semi-final was between the world number two and four, the second pitched Zheng, the only seed left in the top half of the draw, against 93rd-ranked qualifier Yastremska. The match was just as tight with Yastremska, the first women's qualifier to reach the last four at Melbourne Park since 1978, belying her lowly ranking with some brilliant shot-making, particularly off her rocket of a backhand. Zheng was named most improved player on

the WTA tour and showed why by maintaining a consistently high level with her serve and groundstrokes as her opponent's waxed and waned, particularly after she pulled up clutching her abdomen. She was still troubled by Yastremska's returns into the second set, however, and the Ukrainian put huge pressure on Zheng's serve before the Chinese 21-year-old managed to break for 4-3 and held to stand on the brink of victory. Yastremska held her final service game and got to 30-30 as her opponent served for the match but Zheng summoned up two thumping service winners before holding aloft her arms in triumph. "The feeling is incredible to arrive at my first Grand Slam final," said Zheng, the first Chinese player to reach a major title clash since Li won the 2014 trophy at Melbourne Park. "That's my dream since I was a kid. Right now I'm really happy, but I know there's still another fight to go. I'm trying to control my emotions." Yastremska, who said she felt pain in her abdomen during the warmup before her injury flared up in the first set, was pleased with her run and revealed she had been flooded with messages from Ukrainians. "I think I made them a bit happy. These are tough moments now in Ukraine," Yastremska said, referring to Ukraine's conflict with Russia. "They got some nice moments to enjoy watching me play and I did my best. I tried to bring them a little bit of joy."

### CRICKET

# Jaiswal produces robust knock after England post 246

Indian spinners share eight wickets on the first day of opening Test

Reuters  
Hyderabad

Hosts India bowled out England for a modest 246 and then cruised to 119 for one in reply on day one of the opening Test at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium yesterday. Ben Stokes produced a captain's knock of 70 to help England post a competitive total before they wilted early in the final session. Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal led India's strong reply with a rapid unbeaten 76 while Shubman Gill was on 14 at the close. India lost Rohit Sharma for 24 but would still hope to grab a handy lead, especially after England burnt all three reviews in their desperation for breakthroughs. "I think we did a great job of restricting them on such a good track," India's spin-bowling all-rounder Axar Patel told reporters. "It's only the odd ball, which is spinning, and it's not spinning a lot either. "It's a slow pitch. Our goal will be to bat normally and bat long." For the first time in a men's Test, England went into the match with a lone fast bowler in Mark Wood, opting for a spin-heavy attack instead, which included debutant Tom Hartley. India resisted any such temptation and retained seamers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohamed Siraj, perhaps knowing a three-pronged spin attack could get the job done. That trust was not misplaced as their spin trio of Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin and Patel claimed eight of the 10 English wickets. While the pitch provided significant turn, England's frontline batters were guilty of not converting starts following Stokes' decision to bat on a dry wicket. Ben Duckett (35) and Zak Crawley (20) batted with the kind of aggression that has become the hallmark of the Stokes-led side during their opening stand of 55.



India's Ravichandran Ashwin in action in Hyderabad yesterday. (Reuters)



India's Yashasvi Jaiswal (left) and Rohit Sharma during the first Test against England at Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium, Hyderabad, India, yesterday. (Reuters)

But home captain Rohit turned the match on its head by introducing spin from both ends after the first eight overs. Ashwin (3-68) trapped Duckett lbw with a ball that did not turn and Jadeja (3-88) had Ollie Pope (one) caught by Rohit at first slip. Crawley charged out against Ashwin only to drill the ball to Siraj at mid-off, where the fielder took a low, tumbling catch. Jonny Bairstow (37) and Joe Root (29) added 61 runs for the fourth wicket but India wrested back control after lunch. Left-arm spinner Patel drew Bairstow forward with a delivery that spun just enough to beat the bat and hit the off-stump. Root attempted a sweep against Jadeja and ended up top-edging the ball to Bumrah at short fine leg. England slumped to 155-7 but Stokes counter-attacked even though a boisterous 24,000 crowd egged on India, who have not lost a Test series on home soil since 2012. Playing his first international match since knee surgery in November, Stokes smashed Jadeja for back-to-back sixes bringing up his fifty in 69 balls. Bumrah (2-28) returned to breach Stokes's defence and hasten England's collapse. Hartley shared the new ball with Wood and Jaiswal welcomed the spinner by hitting his first ball in international cricket for a six, a treatment the opener would repeat four balls later. "I felt like we weren't reckless today," Duckett said of England's batting. "I felt we played well at times and people dug in and no one was striking at 150. "We were kind of digging in and rotated

pretty well... We have a bit of a debrief now but I think we're probably pretty happy?"

**SCOREBOARD**  
**England 1st innings**  
Z. Crawley c Siraj b Ashwin 20  
B. Duckett lbw b Ashwin 35  
O. Pope c Rohit b Jadeja 1  
J. Root c Bumrah b Jadeja 29  
J. Bairstow b Axar 37  
B. Stokes b Bumrah 70  
B. Foakes c Bharat b Patel 4  
R. Ahmed c Bharat b Bumrah 13  
T. Hartley b Jadeja 23  
M. Wood b Ashwin 11  
J. Leach not out 0  
**Extras (lb1, nb2) 3**  
**Total (all out, 64.3 overs) 246**  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-55 (Duckett), 2-58 (Pope), 3-60 (Crawley), 4-121 (Bairstow), 5-125 (Root), 6-137 (Foakes), 7-155 (Ahmed), 8-193 (Hartley), 9-234 (Wood), 10-246 (Stokes)  
**Bowling:** Bumrah 8.3-1-28-2, Siraj 4-0-28-0 (1nb), Jadeja 18-4-88-3 (1nb), Ashwin 21-1-68-3, Axar 13-1-33-2

**India 1st innings**  
Y. Jaiswal not out 76  
R. Sharma c Stokes b Leach 24  
S. Gill not out 14  
**Extras (lb1, w2, nb2) 5**  
**Total (1 wicket, 23 overs) 119**  
**Still to bat:** S. Iyer, KL Rahul, K.S. Bharat, R. Jadeja, A. Patel, R. Ashwin, J. Bumrah, M. Siraj  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-80 (Rohit)  
**Bowling:** Wood 2-0-9-0 (2w), Hartley 9-0-63-0 (2nb), Leach 9-2-24-1, Ahmed 3-0-22-0  
**Toss:** England

### FOCUS

## Hodge and Da Silva lead West Indies fightback in pink ball Test at Gabba



Joshua Da Silva of the West Indies bats during day one of the second Test against Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Brisbane

Kavem Hodge and Joshua Da Silva put on 149 runs for the sixth wicket to lead a West Indies fightback against Australia on the first day of the second Test yesterday as the visitors reached 266-8 at stumps. Hodge and wicketkeeper Da Silva were together at the start of the second session with the West Indies in huge trouble at 64-5. The pair dug in and batted for over a session and a half before Da Silva was finally dismissed for 79, trapped lbw by off-spinner Nathan Lyon with the score on 213. Hodge, playing only his second Test, then fell to the second new ball 12 runs later when he edged Mitchell Starc (4-68) to Steve Smith at second slip for an impressive 71. Debutant Kevin Sinclair was not out 16 at the close, with Alzarri Joseph dismissed for an entertaining 32 off 22 balls from the last ball of the day. Hodge and Da Silva mixed resolute defence with some exciting shot-making throughout their partnership to give their side some hope after a disappointing start to the innings. "It was a pretty crucial partnership between Hodge and myself," Da Silva said. "I would have liked to have finished the day a bit better, maybe one of us getting a hundred, but it wasn't to be. Nobody would have expected at 64-5 when I came in that we'd get 266, that's 200-plus runs for three wickets for the rest

of the day, so I'm pretty happy." Starc said when the pink ball started to go soft after the 11th over, bowling became much more difficult. "We started nicely with the new ball but it started to do a lot less in the middle session and they (Da Silva and Hodge) applied themselves really well," he said. "Then we got a couple of late wickets, so it was a really even day." After winning the toss and deciding to bat first on a hot day under clear skies, West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite would have been hoping to get the visitors off to a good start at the top of the order. However, he looked unsettled and fell for four in the eighth over when he played at a Josh Hazlewood delivery outside off stump and got an edge to keeper Alex Carey. Fellow opener Tagenarine Chanderpaul had looked more comfortable at the other end and he and an aggressive Kirk McKenzie started to move the score along. But McKenzie, who scored 21 from 25 balls, tried one big shot too many and got a thick edge off Pat Cummins to first slip, where Usman Khawaja took a sharp chance high to his right. Chanderpaul (21) was next to go when he edged Starc to Smith at second slip to leave the West Indies struggling at 54-3. That was soon 57-3 when Alick Athanaze became Starc's 350th Test wicket, caught behind by Carey for eight. Khawaja got his second catch when Greaves edged Starc to first slip with the dinner break just four balls away.

**SCOREBOARD**  
**West Indies 1st innings**  
Brathwaite c Carey b Hazlewood 4  
T. Chanderpaul c Smith b Starc 21  
McKenzie c Khawaja b Cummins 21  
A. Athanaze c Carey b Starc 8  
K. Hodge c Smith b Starc 71  
J. Greaves c Khawaja b Starc 6  
J. Da Silva lbw Lyon 79  
K. Sinclair not out 16  
A. Joseph c Smith b Hazlewood 32  
**Extras (b4, w2, nb2) 8**

**Total (8 wickets, 89.4 overs) 266**  
**Fall of wicket:** 1-9 (Brathwaite), 2-42 McKenzie, 3-54 (Chanderpaul), 4-57 (Athanaze), 5-64 (Greaves), 6-213 (Da Silva), 7-225 (Hodge)  
**Bowling:** Starc 20-3-68-4, Hazlewood 16.4-5-32-2 (1nb), Cummins 18-0-70-1 (1w), Lyon 22-0-62-1, Marsh 2-0-3-0 (1nb), Green 7-12-0 (1w), Labuschagne 1-0-1-0, Head 3-0-4-0



## Qatar wins Asian Handball title for the sixth time in a row



The Qatar handball team defeated Japan to win the 21st Asian Men's Championship for a sixth time in Bahrain yesterday. Qatar won the final 30-24, while Bahrain finished overall third after beating Kuwait 26-17. Qatar's had previously won the Asian title in the past five editions in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022. Qatar made a strong start in the final finishing the first half at 17-11, before continuing their superiority in the second half to clinch victory and the title. Qatar had earlier qualified for the 2025 World Championship to be jointly staged by in Croatia, Denmark and Norway. The Al Annabi have qualified for the World Championship for a tenth time after their previous appearances at Portugal 2003, Tunisia 2005, Germany 2007, Spain 2013, Qatar 2015, France 2017, Germany and Denmark 2019, Egypt 2021, and Poland and Sweden 2023. Finishing as the runners-up at the 2015 Worlds as hosts has been Qatar's best result so far. Japan, Kuwait and Bahrain, along with Qatar, have also qualified for the 2025 World Championships.

### SHOWJUMPING

# Gaudiano shines again at Doha Tour

Italian rider was in fine form with his horse Nikolaj de Music

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Emanuele Gaudiano continued his winning run at the Doha Tour International Championship after the Italian rider won the 1.50m class during the third and final leg yesterday. At Al Shaqab, Gaudiano was in a fine form aboard his Belgian Warmblood-sire, Nikolaj de Music.

The pair were nearly three seconds faster than second-placed Thailand's Janakabhorn Karunayadhaj and here mare Maxwin Kinmar Agalux. The third place went to Frenchman Simon Delestre and his stallion I Amelusina R 51, the pair which had won the main class in the first leg. The winners of the class were honoured by Ahmed al-Shaibani, Director of the Support Services Department at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club, and Salem Khajim al-Athbi, Director of the Marketing Department at the QREC.

Earlier, Saudi Arabia's Abdulrahman Alrajhi took the top honours in the 1.45m CSI5\* class with gelding, Iniesta V. Alrajhi compatriot Khaled Almoby was second with Diana du Ple-vau Z, while Jordan's Ibrahim Hani Bisharat and Harvard completed the podium.

In the five-star 140cm class, Frenchwoman Cyrine Cherif came first, followed by Qatar's Hamad Tuwaim al-Marri. Another French rider Ines Jolie was third place.

Meanwhile, Qatar's Hamad Nasser al-Qadi came first in the two-star 120cm class. Saudi's Badr al-Fard was second, followed by home rider Sultan Salem al-Nuaimi in third.

In the 130cm class, Qatari riders Hussein Saeed Haidan, Ghanem Nasser al-Qadi and Faleh Suwaid al-Ajmi finished in top three respectively. In the last round of the two-star category, the 145cm class, Italian Roberto Previtali triumphed. Gaudiano was second this time, while Sweden's Evelina Tovik came third.



Emanuele Gaudiano clears a bar with Nikolaj de Music during the third and final leg of the Doha Tour International Championship at Al Shaqab yesterday.



Saudi Arabia's Abdulrahman Alrajhi receives his medal after winning the 1.45m CSI5\* class.

### HORSE RACING

## Zakadir canters to Al Judhay Cup victory



Soufiane Saadi rides Zakadir to victory at Al Uqda Racecourse.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Wathnan Racing-owned Zakadir with Soufiane Saadi in the saddle registered a comfortable victory to secure the Al Judhay Cup in style at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

The Alban de Mieulle-trained horse after a slick run recorded a two-length win as Djedahees under Stephane Ladjadj finishing the 2100m Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden in runner-up position. Al Mustafiz, ridden by Saleh Salem al-Marri, finished third in the feature.

Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) Racing Manager, Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi crowned the winners.

Also yesterday, Ladjadj rode Bolt Action to Thoroughbred Handicap victory while Ivan Rossi guided Greer to Thoroughbred Handicap title during QREC's 14 Al Uqda Meeting that saw a total of seven races.

- Results 14th Al Uqda Meeting:**  
**Al Judhay Cup Day**  
**WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**  
**1 - Al Judhay Cup, Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden** Zakadir, Alban de Mieulle, Soufiane Saadi  
**2 - Thoroughbred Handicap (70-90)** Bolt Action, Gassim Ghazali, Stephane Ladjadj  
**3 - Thoroughbred Handicap (70-90)** Greer, Mohamed Ghazali, Ivan Rossi  
**4 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (65-85)** Kay De Ghazal, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier  
**5 - Purebred Arabian Novice Plate** RM Wadha, Hadi al-Ramzani, Jefferson Smith  
**6 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (45-65)** Burkan Zakhir, Mohamed Hassan al-Matwi, Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi  
**7 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate** Glazunov, Hamad al-Jehani, Tomas Lukasek

### FOOTBALL

## Guardiola slams UEFA president Ceferin over financial probe claims

AFP  
London

Manchester City boss **Pep Guardiola** has slammed Aleksander Ceferin after the UEFA president claimed European football's governing body was right to punish the Premier League champions for financial breaches.

UEFA banned City from European competition for two years in February 2020 for breaching its Financial Fair Play rules, but the ban was later overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport. CAS found that some of the charges against City were "not established" and others were time-barred. Ceferin remains adamant his organisation was correct, telling the Daily Telegraph: "We know we were right. We wouldn't decide if we didn't think we were right."

The Slovenian's remarks came as City await a Premier League hearing after being charged with 115 breaches of their domestic competition's profit and sustainability rules. A furious Guardiola said that by speaking out now, Ceferin had not respected City's ongoing process with the Premier League.



"As the lawyer that he is, as president of UEFA, he should wait – and after do whatever he wants," he told reporters. "He has to respect it and he has to wait. He has a lot of jobs to do at UEFA. A lawyer should respect the procedure. He knows we have the right to defend ourselves."

City will again be without striker Erling Haaland for their FA Cup fourth tie at Tottenham today. But the Norway striker is nearing a return after almost two months out with a foot injury. "He is on the verge of coming back. For Friday he is not ready but he is close," Guardiola said. "The training camp was good, he trained some sessions. The last few days he's trained but it is not perfect and we will wait a little bit more."

John Stones is back in conten-

tion after an ankle injury but fellow defender Manuel Akanji remains on the sidelines. Goalkeeper Ederson is also fit after limping off in City's last game at Newcastle. City have lost on all five of their previous visits to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium without even scoring a goal.

**BOBAN RESIGNS FROM UEFA OVER 'DISASTROUS' CEFERIN RE-ELECTION PLAN**

UEFA's chief of football Zvonimir Boban said on Wednesday he has resigned from his position after the body's president Aleksander Ceferin proposed plans for his possible re-election in 2031. Slovenian Ceferin, 56, put forward a proposition in December, which will be voted on by UEFA's congress in February, for a president to be able to stand for a fourth term.

Ceferin was first elected in 2016 and wants to amend UEFA statutes in order to run for election once again. But former Croatia international midfielder Boban, 55, who was part of AC Milan's successful side in the 1990s, said he totally opposed the plan. Another proposition is to set an age limit of 70 for all members of the UEFA's executive committee.

## LECLERC COMMITS FUTURE TO FERRARI WITH NEW DEAL 'BEYOND 2024'

**Milan:** Charles Leclerc committed his future to Ferrari yesterday after signing a contract renewal with the Italian Formula One outfit. Ferrari did not specify the length of Leclerc's new deal, merely saying that it took him "beyond the 2024 season" when his current contract expires. But in their Italian statement the Scuderia said that Leclerc, who finished fifth last season and way behind world champion Max Verstappen, would be staying on for the "coming seasons".

"I'm very pleased to know that I will be wearing the Scuderia Ferrari race suit for several more seasons to come. To race for this team has been my dream since I was three years old," said Leclerc in a statement. "My dream remains that of winning the world championship with Ferrari and I'm sure that in the years ahead, we will enjoy great times together and make our fans happy."

Leclerc, 26, has been driving for Ferrari's F1 team since 2019, one year after making his debut in the premier racing championship with Sauber. The Monégasque had three years previously been at the Ferrari Driver Academy before winning the F2 championship in 2017. Since



joining the Scuderia Leclerc has won five Grands Prix, claimed 30 podium finishes and started on pole position 23 times.

But he has failed to put up a proper challenge for the world title as Verstappen and Red Bull snatched dominance of the sport from seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in 2021. The closest Leclerc has come to the drivers' championship was in 2022 when he finished second behind Verstappen.

He ended that season 146 points off the pace and last season the gap was even larger, a whopping 369 points separating Leclerc from the Dutchman.

The coming F1 season begins

on March 2 in Bahrain after three days of testing on the Gulf island in February.

Each of the 10 teams entering the 75th edition of the championship has the same driver pairings as last season, the majority of whom have contracts which expire at the end of this year. In the meantime, Ferrari will reveal on February 13 the 2024 car which will be driven by Leclerc and his partner Carlos Sainz, whose contract is up at the end of the season. Ferrari are yet to make an announcement regarding any contract extension for Sainz, who has not had the same long-term stability that has been afforded to Leclerc.



FIA MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

# Star-studded entry for Qatar International Rally

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

WRC stars Mads Ostberg, Pierre-Louis Loubet and Martins Sesks are just three of the names on the impressive entry list for the 2024 Qatar International Rally announced by the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) for next weekend's opening round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

Twenty-two teams and competitors from 17 nations will take part in the three-day event through the northern Qatar deserts. The entry list features eight Rally2 cars, 10 competing for MERC 2 honours, one Rally 4 Fiesta and three SSVs competing in the T4 category, which is permitted in the regulations for regional rally championships.

Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah tops the field in his Autotek Motorsport Volkswagen Polo GTI, as he bids to win his home event for an unprecedented 18th time and a seventh occasion with co-driver Mathieu Baume.

While the opening round of the regional rally series will offer Loubet and Sesks a first opportunity to compete over open desert on fast gravel surfaces against the region's top drivers, Ostberg will be visiting the event for a third time.

In 2022, the Norwegian and co-driver Ilka Minor led overnight and extended their advantage on the first stage of the second day before a rear puncture cost them the lead before the regroup. A heavy impact in the penultimate stage damaged his Skoda Fabia R2 and fractured a water pipe, which led to retirement within sight of the finish. Last year, he and Patrik Barth shadowed al-Attiyah to the finish in second place.

Oman's Abdullah al-Rawahi and Jordanian co-driver Ata al-Hmoud shared the regional rally title with al-Attiyah and Baume in 2023 and they crew the fifth of the Rally2 cars. Qatar's Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and Khalid al-Suwaidi are entered in a



Mads Ostberg (left) with Qatar rally legend Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah.

pair of Volkswagens and Nasser Khalifa al-Atya is entered in a Ford Fiesta MkII. The Qatari trio have called upon the co-driving services of James Fulton, Ross Whittock and Ziad Chehab on this occasion.

In the absence of defending MERC2 champion Meshari al-Thefiri, Jordan's Shaker Jweihan, Husam Salim and Issa Abu Jamous and Kuwait's Jassim al-Muqahawi top the category in Mitsubishi Lancers.

Competition comes from Lebanon's Ahmad Khaled, Jordan's Shadi Shaban and Ihab al-Shurafa, Oman's Zakariya al-Aamri, Qatar's Mohamed al-Atteya and Indian driver Fabid Ahmer.

Payyaakkal Panikkaveettil and Musa

Sherif are contesting rounds of the UAE National Rally Championship together and will tackle the Qatar event for the first time in a two-wheel drive Ford Fiesta. Qatar's Khalid al-Mohannadi and the Italian duo of Stefano Marrini and Filippo Epis round off the entry and will battle it out for T4 class supremacy.

Officials at the QMMF have laid on 13 timed special stages and 201.04km competitive kilometres in a route of 622.53km. Designated spectator points have also been arranged on the stages and will be shared during rally week via the social media platform.

The rally will be held under the chair-



Abdulaziz al-Kuwari in action at last year's Qatar International Rally.

manship of QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai, senior committee member Abdulrazaq al-Kuwari and the QMMF's Executive Director Amro al-Hamad.

## 2024 QATAR INTERNATIONAL RALLY - ENTRY LIST:

1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baume (AND); Volkswagen Polo GTI
2. Martins Sesks (LVA)/Renars Francis (LVA); Skoda Fabia RS
3. Abdullah al-Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al-Hmoud (JOR); Skoda Fabia Evo
4. Pierre-Louis Loubet (FRA)/Loris Pascaud (FRA); Skoda Fabia RS
5. Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (QAT)/James Fulton (IRL); Volkswagen Polo GTI
6. Mads Ostberg (NOR)/Patrik Barth (SWE); Skoda Fabia RS
7. Khalid al-Suwaidi (QAT)/Ross Whittock (GBR); Volkswagen Polo GTI
8. Nasser Khalifa al-Atya (QAT)/Ziad Chehab (LEB); Ford Fiesta MkII
9. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Carlos Hanna (LEB); Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X

10. Jassim al-Muqahawi (KWT)/Thamer al-Mutairi (KWT); Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
11. Husam Salim (JOR)/Nancy al-Majali (JOR); Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
12. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Samer Sfeir (LEB); Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
14. Issa Abu Jamous (JOR)/Saqr Abu Jamous (JOR); Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
15. Payyaakkal Panikkaveettil (ARE)/Musa Sherif (IND); Ford Fiesta Rally 4
16. Zakariya al-Aamri (OMN)/Mohamed al-Mazroui OMN; Subaru WRX-STI
17. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR); Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
18. Ihab al-Shurafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR); Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
19. Mohamed al-Atteya (QAT)/Savvas Laos (CYP); Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
20. Fabid Ahmer (IND)/Milan Cherian (IND); Subaru WRX-STI
21. Khalid al-Muhammadi (QAT)/Mohamed Innab (SAU); Polaris RZR Pro XP (T4)
22. Stefano Marrini (ITA)/Stefano Tiraboschi (ITA); Can-Am Maverick X3 (T4)
23. Filippo Epis (ITA)/Gabriele Zanni (ITA); Yamaha YXZ 1000R (T4)

## MATCH REPORT

# Bahrain edge past Jordan to top group

Despite defeat Jordan went through as one of the best four third-placed finishers

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Abdulla Yusuf hit the only goal of the game as Bahrain handed Jordan a 1-0 defeat at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday to take Juan Antonio Pizzi's side into the last 16 of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 as winners of Group E.

Yusuf struck 11 minutes before half-time to earn the Bahrainis their second win in three games and, with six points, they topped the standings ahead of South Korea and the Jordanians, who have also qualified.

The result means Bahrain will face four-time champions Japan at the Al Thumama Stadium in the next round while Jordan have progressed as one of the best-third placed teams and will face Iraq at the Khalifa International Stadium.

"Now we need to rest and prepare to face Japan, which is a very strong team," said Bahrain coach Juan Antonio Pizzi. "But I believe in the ability of my players and have confidence we will get a positive result."

The Jordanians were on top of the group going into the game but striker Mousa al-Tamari started on the bench as Lhoussaine Ammouta made five changes to the team that earned a 2-2 draw with South Korea in their previous game. Anas Baniyaseen pulled his 14th minute effort wide

of Ebrahim Lutfalla's goal before Bahrain midfielder Mohamed Maroon hit a looping attempt that was comfortably gathered by Yazeen Abulaila in a tentative opening quarter of an hour.

Yazeen al-Naimat went closer still for the Jordanians with a snap shot that flashed across the face of goal moments later. It took until the 34th minute for the deadlock to be broken, with the Bahrainis doing so in style. Yusuf timed his run from the halfway line to perfection, latching on to Komail al-Aswad's pass through the middle to bear down on goal before stroking a right foot shot into the bottom corner of Abulaila's goal.

Four minutes later the Mlada Boleslav striker was released again behind the Jordanian defence but, while Baniyaseen initially recovered, possession found its way through to Marhoon, who somehow chopped his shot over the bar from inside the six yard box.

The Bahrainis came out in the second half looking to add to their lead, with Ali Madan shooting over the bar and Marhoon narrowly beaten to another lofted pass over the top of the Jordanian defence by the alert Abulaila, who thumped the ball to safety.

Jordan rarely threatened, with Ali Olwan going closest when he headed into Lutfalla's hands on the hour mark, while Abulaila was on hand again in the dying moments to keep out Yusuf's free kick as Bahrain took the points.



Bahrain's Abdulla Yusuf Helal scores against Jordan during the AFC Asian Cup Group E match at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday. (Reuters)

## Japan coach admits 'risk' over injured Mitoma

**Doha:** Taking Kaoru Mitoma to the Asian Cup had been "a risk", Japan's coach Hajime Moriyasu said yesterday, with the injured Brighton winger yet to play and no timescale for his return. Japan have reached the last 16, where they face Bahrain but Mitoma has not made any of their three match-day squads so far. The 26-year-old has not played at all since hurting his ankle in a 1-1 draw with Crystal Palace on December 21. Moriyasu said Mitoma's recovery was "coming along as expected" but will not rush him back or put a date on his return.

"I called him up when he was injured and we didn't know what was going to happen at first, so it was maybe a risk," he said, calling Mitoma "a potent weapon". "I don't want to use him until he's ready. I wanted to use him in the third game but it wasn't possible. He has been training more but I didn't want to push it with him."

Brighton coach Roberto De Zerbi has said he was "really surprised" that Moriyasu included Mitoma in his squad, claiming club doctors told him the player needed four to six weeks to recover. Moriyasu said Japan had been in regular communication with Brighton about Mitoma's injury, and suggested De Zerbi was playing to the gallery.

"I think the coach said that on purpose in front of the media," said Moriyasu.

"We had been in touch with them and had constant updates on his fitness. There was no way we weren't communicating with them."

## SPOTLIGHT



Kyrgyzstan's Joel Kojo (right) celebrates with coach Stefan Tarkovic after scoring against Oman at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium. (Reuters)

# Draw eliminates Kyrgyzstan, Oman

Kyrgyzstan and Oman both made exits from the AFC Asian Cup after playing to a 1-1 draw in their final Group F tie at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

A late goal from Kyrgyzstan's Joel Kojo cancelled out Muhsen al-Ghassani's opener with Indonesia the biggest winners as the Southeast Asian side advanced to the round of 16 as one of the best four third-placed finishers. Needing a win to confirm their knockout stage spot, Oman settled quickly and went ahead in the eighth minute through al-Ghassani. Kyrgyzstan goalkeeper Erzhan Tokotaev could only parry Jameel al-Yahmadi's free-kick, with al-Ghassani taking advantage of the ensuing chaos to slot the ball home.

Boosted by the goal, Oman took a firm grip on proceedings with Kyrgyzstan having to work hard to not concede again.

The Central Asian side, however, should have equalised in the 27th minute when

Gulzhigit Alykulov set up Farkhat Musabekov, only for the unmarked midfielder to send his shot high over the crossbar.

The White Falcons survived another scare just before the break when Oman came close to doubling their lead through Ahmed al-Kaabi's free-kick but the attempt was cleared by Kyrgyzstan custodian Tokotaev.

Kyrgyzstan started the second half with more determination and thought they had restored parity when substitute Beknaz Almazbekov's cross into the penalty box was neatly headed into the back of the net by forward Kojo, only to have it overturned by the VAR.

Oman responded with an effort of their own, Salaah al-Yahyaie sprinting down the left flank before presenting Ghassani with an opportunity but the Al Seeb defender was too slow to react, allowing Tamirlan Kozubaev to hook the ball to safety.

Oman ramped up the pressure with Ab-

dul Rahman al-Mushaifri and Arshad al-Alawi both having efforts but it was Kyrgyz Republic who found the back of the net in the 80th minute, Kojo taking advantage of a Khalid al-Braiki error to net the equaliser.

That set the stage for a grandstand finish with both sides trying desperately to find the winning goal to no avail as their respective campaigns came to an end.

## OMAN COACH IVANKOVIC SACKED

Hours after Oman crashed out of the Asian Cup, the country's football association axed team head coach Branko Ivankovic.

Oman Football Association (OFA), in a tweet, confirmed that they have parted ways with the Croatian coach. Oman began their Group F campaign with a 2-1 defeat to Saudi Arabia and followed it with a goalless draw against Thailand.

Oman had scaled new heights in UAE in 2019 when they reached the knockout stage of the Asian Cup for the first time.