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# GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

Nadal loses  
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WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

## Lima's four-goal blitz leads UAE to 5-0 rout of Qatar

Heavy loss means Qatar remain in fourth on seven points with direct qualification hopes slipping away

By Sports Reporter

Abu Dhabi

**F**abio Lima scored four goals, including a first-half hat-trick, as the United Arab Emirates handed Qatar a 5-0 thrashing in Abu Dhabi yesterday to consolidate their hold on third place in Group B of the 2026 World Cup Qualifiers.

Lima put Paulo Bento's side ahead in the fourth minute before doubling the lead from the spot in the 45th minute and completed his hat-trick in the fifth minute of first half injury time with a stellar free-kick. He hit the fourth from the penalty spot in the 56th minute while Yahya al-Ghassani scored the UAE's fifth with 17 minutes remaining.

The UAE also defeated Qatar 3-1 in their first clash in Al Rayyan in September. A heavy defeat means Qatar remain in fourth on seven points having failed to build on their last-gasp win over Uzbekistan in Doha last week, which looked to have revitalised the nation's qualifying bid.

Victory moves the UAE onto 10 points from six games, three points behind second-placed Uzbekistan and a further three points adrift of leaders Iran in the battle for the two automatic berths at the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Qatar coach Marquez Lopez, whose job has come under increasing pressure just nine months after leading Al Annabi to Asian Cup title, said conceding early goal ruined his team's plans. "I was not at my best and the team was not at their best, so we lost. We planned to approach the match with a specific strategy but the early goal disrupted our plans and the UAE outperformed us," said the Spaniard.

Lopez, who was aiming to build on Qatar's last-minute victory over Uzbekistan, added: "We were looking forward to another win, but we couldn't capitalise on the confidence gained from the previous match. We paid the price for individual mistakes from several players. Iran and Uzbekistan have an advantage in qualifying directly, while the rest of the teams still have hopes of qualifying directly or through the play-offs," Lopez added.



United Arab Emirates' Fabio Lima celebrates with Harib Abdalla after scoring his third goal against Qatar at the World Cup qualification match in Abu Dhabi. (Reuters)

UAE made the perfect start, al-Ghassani powering down the left side in the fourth minute before delivering a low centre into the feet of Lima that the forward gladly swept in with a first-time finish.

Boualem Khouki blasted his free-kick over the bar as Qatar chased the equaliser while Mohammed Waad went even closer, the midfielder hitting the post when his shot beat Khalid Eisa having been played

in behind the defence following a surging run by Akram Afif.

The woodwork was hit at the other end when al-Ghassani stepped onto his right foot to send a curling shot towards Mousa Barsham's goal, the ball not dipping quite enough to avoid smashing against the crossbar in the 32nd minute.

With three minutes left in the half Bruno Oliveira was denied a second when he



Qatar's defender Tarek Salman vies for the ball with UAE's Yahya al-Ghassani. (AFP)

drove through the Qatar defence, Barsham saving that effort but, from the rebound, Harib Abdalla was brought down by Lucas Mendes and referee Khalid al-Turais pointed to the spot. Lima calmly converted, sending Barsham the wrong way with his penalty.

There was more to come from the Brazil-born playmaker before the end of the half. After Abdalla had been brought down 30 yards from goal, Lima bent a vicious left-foot strike up and over the defensive wall that left Barsham groping at air.

Matters went from bad to worse for Qatar when Barsham brought down al-Ghassani soon after the interval and Lima stepped up again to fire emphatically past the visiting goalkeeper.

Ahmed Fathy hit the crossbar as Qatar sought a consolation but it was at the other end that the next goal came as al-Ghassani capped a fine performance when he slid the ball past Barsham at the end of a counter-attack for the fifth.

The World Cup qualifiers takes a three-month break with Qatar next match against North Korea at home on March 20, while UAE will aim to continue their resurgence when they meet group leaders Iran.



Qatar's Mohammed Muntari (left) and UAE's Khalifa al-Hammadi go for a header at the Al Nahyan Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

GOLF

## LIV stars in strong field for International Series Qatar

Agencies  
Doha

**M**ajor champions Patrick Reed, Louis Oosthuizen and Charl Schwartzel are among 18 LIV Golf stars in the field for International Series Qatar – the penultimate event of the season on both the International Series and the Asian Tour.

The 2011 Masters champion Schwartzel and 2010 Open winner Oosthuizen, both from South Africa, will be joined by Stinger GC teammates and compatriots Dean Burnmester and Branden Grace for the second staging of the event, which takes place at Doha Golf Club from November 27-30 and this year has a \$US2.5m prize purse.

The 4Aces GC star Reed from the United States, the 2018 Masters winner, is one of three former Ryder Cup players alongside fellow American Anthony Kim, a wild card this season, and Belgium's Thomas Pieters of Range Goats GC.

Other prominent LIV Golf stars include Range Goats GC's American Peter Uihlein, the International Series England champion, talented Spanish youngsters David Puig and Eugenio Chacarra, both winners on The International Series in 2023, Crushers GC's Indian star Anirban Lahiri and Caleb Surratt, the promising American from Jon Rahm's Legion XIII.

As the second event in a three-week run in between the US\$2mn LIV Hong Kong Open and US\$5mn season-ending PIF Saudi International powered by SoftBank



FROM LEFT: Patrick Reed, Charl Schwartzel and Louis Oosthuizen will be the star attractions at the International Series Qatar.

Investment Advisers, the Qatar date will go a long way towards deciding The International Series Rankings.

One coveted spot on the LIV Golf roster is available to the rankings champion, while 32 places are also available on the season-ending LIV Golf Promotions event.

International Series Macau presented



by Wynn champion John Catlin from the United States leads the rankings, with in-form Richard T Lee - the recent BNI Indonesian Masters winner - sitting in second. Uihlein, New Zealand's Ben Campbell, Chinese-Taipei's Lee Chieh-po, and MJ Maguire from the United States all have a chance of catching Catlin over the closing stages.



Catlin has a stronger lead on the Asian Tour Order of Merit but still has work to do if he is to secure the title for the first time. Hassan Nasser al-Naimi, Qatar Golf Association (QGA) President and Chairman of the Championship Organising Committee, said: "With the tournament bringing elite-level golf and some of the biggest names in the sport for the second year in

succession, we are witnessing another chapter in Qatar's rich legacy in sports. This event aligns with Qatar National Vision 2030, showcasing our world-class facilities while inspiring future generations.

The pathway to LIV Golf offers a unique opportunity for emerging talent in the region, further strengthening Doha's position as the sports capital and a global hub for world-class events."

Rahul Singh, Head of The International Series, said: "The season is reaching an exciting conclusion, and the fact that it is happening in a three-week run across Hong Kong, Qatar and Saudi Arabia is conclusive proof that we truly are The International Series."

"Anything could happen thanks to the points at stake in these three big-money, back-to-back tournaments. This is everything to the players challenging for the rankings title, and also for those hoping to make it to the LIV Golf Promotions event."

Cho Mynn Thant, Commissioner & CEO of the Asian Tour, added: "Bringing the Asian Tour to the Gulf region is always a highlight and further evidence of our strength as a brand in different important international markets. With so much at stake, it promises to be a wonderful weekend of golf, and Doha Golf Club is a fitting stage for this to play out."

International Series Qatar takes place at Doha Golf Club from 27-30 November to finish in line with the country's traditional Friday-Saturday weekend. For tickets and further information, fans can visit [www.internationalseries.com](http://www.internationalseries.com)



## BORDER-GAVASKAR TROPHY

# Rattled India target rare three-peat in Australia

India have won the last four Test series between the two countries but recent form not encouraging

Reuters  
Perth

**A**ustralia's mouthwatering clash with India sees the two behemoths of the modern game go head-to-head in five Tests over six weeks with the tourists eyeing a third straight series triumph Down Under.

Only England in the 1880s, West Indies a century later and South Africa more recently have achieved that feat, and to do so against the current holders of the World Test Championship title would be a considerable accomplishment.

Home and away, India have won the last four Test series between the two countries but recent signs of frailty in team in transition has had alarm bells ringing from Kashmir to Kanyakumari.

The stunning 3-0 home reversal at the hands of New Zealand a few weeks ago shone a harsh spotlight on the generation that was the first from India to win a Test series in Australia in 2019 and backed it up two years later.

Among the questions being asked by Indian fans is whether batting mainstays Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, both now closer to 40 than 30, can arrest their decline on Australia's quick and bouncy pitches.

Captain Rohit looks unlikely to even play in the series opener starting in Perth on Friday, having decided to put family first and stay at home for the birth of his second child. Training injuries have impacted the list of likely replacements with Shubman Gill fracturing a thumb and KL Rahul taking a nasty blow to his elbow.

The questions over India's opening partnership echo a debate



India's Rohit Sharma receives the Border-Gavaskar Trophy from Sunil Gavaskar after winning the Test series against Australia on March 13, 2023. (Reuters)

that has engrossed Australia since Cameron Green was ruled out of the series with a back injury in mid-October.

Once it was confirmed that Steve Smith would be dropping down the order to replace the injured all-rounder at number four, every possible candidate to partner Usman Khawaja has been proposed, analysed and scrutinised.

Australia's selectors ultimately stuck to the principle of choosing the best batsmen in the country and sorting them into an order later.

Nathan McSweeney will therefore open for only the second time in his career when he makes his Test debut at Perth Stadium this week.

That the debate raged so long and so hard perhaps reflects, however, the absence of question

marks over the remainder of a battle-hardened Australia line-up.

McSweeney is the only player under the age of 30 likely to start the first Test but Smith, Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne remain in the top 10 of the Test batting rankings.

Paceman Josh Hazlewood and his skipper Pat Cummins occupy spots in the top 10 of the bowlers' standings along with spinner Nathan Lyon, while left-arm quick Mitchell Starc is 11th.

The battle for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy may not yet have the cache of an Ashes series but it will now finally be stretched across the full canvas of five Tests.

That might more reflect the financial benefits to Cricket Australia from Indian TV money but it could make the job for the tourists a bit harder. A quick surface remi-

niscient of the old WACA ground has been promised at Perth Stadium, while Australia will be confident of keeping intact their 100% record in day-night matches at the Adelaide Oval in match two.

The Gabba is no longer the fortress for Australia it was once was and the third Test in Brisbane could be a decisive fixture ahead of the traditional Boxing Day and New Year's matches on bat-friendly surfaces in Melbourne and Sydney.

The Australians prevailed when the two teams met in the World Test Championship final last year and the series will have major ramifications for the makeup of next June's title-decider at Lord's, particularly for India.

With no more Tests in the qualifying period after this series, India need to win four matches to avoid

## India-Australia Test series factbox

## FIXTURES

**First Test:** Nov. 22-26, Perth Stadium  
**Second Test (day-night):** Dec. 6-10, Adelaide Oval  
**Third Test:** Dec. 14-18, The Gabba, Brisbane  
**Fourth Test:** Dec. 26-30, Melbourne Cricket Ground  
**Fifth Test:** Jan. 3-7, Sydney Cricket Ground

## AUSTRALIA

**World ranking:** 1  
**Captain:** Pat Cummins  
**Coach:** Andrew McDonald  
**Top-ranked batsman:** Steven Smith (5)  
**Top-ranked bowler:** Josh Hazlewood (2)  
**Australia squad for first Test:** Pat Cummins (captain), Usman Khawaja, Nathan McSweeney, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Alex Carey, Mitchell Marsh, Josh Inglis, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Scott Boland.

## INDIA

**World ranking:** 2  
**Captain:** Rohit Sharma  
**Coach:** Gautam Gambhir  
**Top-ranked batsman:** Yashasvi Jaiswal (4)  
**Top-ranked bowler:** Jasprit Bumrah (3)  
**India squad:** Rohit Sharma (captain), Jasprit Bumrah, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Siraj, Akash Deep, Prasidh Krishna, Harshit Rana, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Washington Sundar.

## HEAD-TO-HEAD

**Test series:** 28  
**Australia wins:** 12  
**India wins:** 11  
**Draws:** 5

## LAST THREE SERIES

**2022-23:** India beat Australia 2-1 in four-Test series in India  
**2020-21:** India beat Australia 2-1 in four-Test series in Australia  
**2018-19:** India beat Australia 2-1 in four-Test series in Australia

missing out on the final for the first time. As South Africa showed when they won three, albeit shorter, series in Australia from 2008, success Down Under usually rests on the quality and durability of your seam bowling. Led by Jasprit Bumrah, India's pace unit have shown they can have an impact on Australian tracks and, of course, are backed up by the world's best slow-bowling all-rounders in Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Back at No. 4, Smith hopes to conjure up the old magic against India

Reuters  
Sydney

**W**hile India frets about Virat Kohli's lean run ahead of the blockbuster Test series against Australia, the hosts have their own batting quandary in the form of Steve Smith.

Following a failed stint as an opener after David Warner's retirement, the 35-year-old will be back at number four for the series opener in Perth and desperate to bat away perceptions that his best days are behind him.

In a 109-Test career that has spanned most of the batting order, number four has been Smith's sweet spot, yielding 19 of his 32 centuries and an astonishing average of 61.46.

The return to his favoured slot has been warmly welcomed in Australia, not least by opener and teammate Usman Khawaja who said Smith would be better off there months ago.

It was a backhanded compliment for a batter who was posting Bradman-esque figures a few years ago and whose defence seemed virtually impregnable.

Smith has rarely, if ever, doubted his own talent but even he was aware that his spell at the top of the order was proving unpopular.

"Marnus (Labuschagne) and Uzzie (Khawaja), they hated me up top, to be honest. They wanted me behind them. So that was a big part of it," said Smith.

To his detractors, Smith has taken on Warner's mantle as a former batting phenomenon holding on too long to his spot in a team crying out for regeneration.

That view strengthened as Smith struggled with 51 runs in Australia's two-Test tour of New Zealand in February and March, even as young all-rounder Cameron Green topped the batting with 238 runs, playing mostly at number four. Green's back injury, which has ruled him out of the entire India series, has taken some heat off Smith to justify his spot in a largely settled top six. But the murmurs will grow louder if his lean period extends into the India series.

Unlike Warner, who signalled his retirement plans well in advance, Smith has shown no indication of when he intends to walk away from the game.



Selectors may be reluctant to push him aside given his imperious record, which includes a batting average of 65.87 against India compared to his career average of 56.97.

On home soil, Smith's value is striking; Australia have never lost a Test in which he has scored a century.

India will prize Smith's wicket highly and their bowlers' ability to shackle him was a key factor in their brilliant 2-1 series victory in the last Test tour in 2020/21.

Though Smith finished second on the batting list with 313 runs behind Labuschagne (426), 212 of his runs came in the drawn Sydney Test.

Smith has had more trouble against India's spinners than their pacers, failing to bat away from Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja eight times each.

His battle with Ashwin, India's leading wicket-taker, will be keenly watched following the spinner's declaration last week that he had "the wood" over the batsman.

Smith is hoping for a better start in the coming series after being dismissed for one run in the first test in Adelaide in 2020 and a duck in the second in Melbourne, both times by Ashwin.

"(I need to) just be proactive against him and not let him settle and bowl the way he wants to," said Smith.

## COMMENT

## Retired Warner warns Australia not to write off India's batting star Kohli

Reuters  
Sydney

**F**ormer Australia opener David Warner is convinced Virat Kohli will be amongst the runs in the upcoming five-Test series and has warned his former teammates not to write off the Indian batting great.

India will be aiming for a third successive series triumph Down Under when the first test starts in Perth on Friday but have concerns about the recent form of batting mainstays Kohli and Rohit Sharma.

Warner, who experienced a few dry spells during his 13-year Test career, said Kohli's 1,352 runs and six centuries in 13 Tests on Australian soil should be a matter for concern for the home team.

"I don't worry about Virat Kohli away from Australia, I worry about Virat Kohli in Australia. He averages 55," Warner told reporters yesterday. "He hasn't had the wickets that batsmen would love to be batting on and that's what scares me about him and Rohit Sharma ... With good batting wickets, hopefully this summer, I think Virat is going to be amongst the runs."

As well as more favourable batting conditions, Warner thought the profile of the series would bring out the best in 36-year-old Kohli.

"I've always said you're not out of form, you're out of runs," Warner added.

"The class and player that he



India's Virat Kohli during a net session at Optus Stadium in Perth yesterday. (@BCCI)

is, he just knows how to flick that switch and turn his mindset to big series, and Border-Gavaskar trophy, he's always had a big series against us. I think that's what Australia would be fearing."

With the globalisation of cricket, the days when touring sides were largely unknown when they arrived on Australian soil are long gone.

"Warner knows most of the touring team well from his spells in the Indian Premier League and

enjoys a close friendship with Kohli.

"Since the IPL started, I think they've sort of grown towards playing alongside each other, loving each other, embracing each other's cultures," said Warner, who despite his caution predicted a 4-0 series win for Australia.

"But when you step on the field, that passion is still there, you still have that fire in the belly when you cross the line."

## South Africa captain Bavuma fit to face Sri Lanka

**C**ape Town: South Africa captain Temba Bavuma has been cleared to face Sri Lanka in two home Tests starting in Durban on Nov. 27 after missing out on the series sweep in Bangladesh last month with an elbow injury. Batter Bavuma has been a key part of South Africa's middle order in recent years and his return is a boost for the side as they seek to earn a place in the World Test Championship.

**W**hile Bavuma has been cleared to face Sri Lanka in two home Tests starting in Durban on Nov. 27 after missing out on the series sweep in Bangladesh last month with an elbow injury. All-rounder Marco Jansen (rested) and fast bowler Gerald Coetze (injury) are also back in the squad after missing the comprehensive win in Bangladesh. "We've picked the strongest possible side to ensure we stay competitive and keep our hopes alive for a place in the World Test Championship final," coach Shukri Conrad said.



Sri Lanka's players pose with the series trophy after winning the one-day international series against the New Zealand 2-0, at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday. (AFP)

## Rain ruins Sri Lanka's final ODI against NZ

**P**allekele, Sri Lanka: The third and final one-day international between New Zealand and Sri Lanka yesterday was abandoned after only 21 overs of play due to persistent rain in Pallekele. As the rain refused to relent, the umpires officially called off the game at 19:45 local time (1415 GMT). The game was a dead rubber with Sri Lanka already having clinched the series 2-0, following their thrilling three-wicket win on Sunday. The victory was Sri Lanka's fifth one-day series win in the year. "We had a very good year," said Sri Lanka skipper Charith Asalanka. "We have put in a lot of hard work this year," he said. "We wanted to give players a fair run and that faith is paying back."

## TENNIS

# Retiring Nadal loses Davis Cup finals opener

The 38-year-old appears emotional during Spanish national anthem

**AFP**  
Malaga, Spain

**R**etiring tennis superstar Rafael Nadal lost 6-4, 6-4 to Botic van de Zandschulp in a Davis Cup quarter-final singles rubber yesterday as the Netherlands took a 1-0 lead against Spain.

The 22-time Grand Slam winner will call time on his career in professional tennis at the end of Spain's participation in the tournament in Malaga, after two injury-ravaged years.

Doubts hung over Nadal's involvement until the official announcement from team captain David Ferrer confirmed he would play in the first singles rubber of the opening finals clash.

The 38-year-old appeared emotional during the Spanish national anthem, and fans filled the arena with chants of "Rafa, Rafa," when it ended.

Nadal had won his last 29 Davis Cup singles matches out of 30 played – after debuting in the tournament in 2004 – and both of his prior clashes with the Dutchman.

#### Probably my last match'

"If I was the captain I would change me probably (if Spain reach the semi-finals), but at the end of the day it's not my decision," Nadal told reporters.

"And I'm sure (the captain) will make the best decision possible for the team... probably that was my last match..."

"I lost my first match at the Davis Cup, and I lost my last one, so we close the circle."

Nadal's involvement in the tie was not certain, with his ca-



Spain's Rafael Nadal and Netherlands' Botic van de Zandschulp shake hands after their Davis Cup match at Palacio de Deportes Jose Maria Martin Carpena Arena, Malaga, Spain, yesterday. (Reuters)

reer ravaged by injuries in recent years, but captain Ferrer called on the 38-year-old to open the finals for Spain before an adoring home crowd.

"At the end of the day he has to make decisions and he made the decision thinking what's the best for the team and not for myself, I respect that," said Nadal.

"We went on court, we lived that moment, trying to do my best, trying to stay as positive as

possible, positive energy, it was not enough.

"Hats off to Botic, he was better than me, now it's not necessary to analyse the match any more."

Nadal appeared emotional during the Spanish national anthem before the match.

"I was having an emotional day, nerves before what could be my last singles match as a professional," added Nadal.

"The emotions hearing the na-

tional anthem for the last time as a professional were very special, mixed feelings makes things a little bit more difficult."

World number three Carlos Alcaraz faces the Netherlands' Tallon Griekspoor in the second singles rubber to try and keep Spain's Davis Cup dream alive and prolong Nadal's farewell.

The winner from this clash will face Germany or Canada in the semi-finals.

## Federer hails 'historic' Nadal ahead of imminent retirement

Tennis great Roger Federer hailed his former rival Rafael Nadal yesterday ahead of the Spaniard's imminent retirement from tennis at the Davis Cup. "Rafa, I have to say: What an incredible run you've had. Including 14 French Opens - historic!" Federer wrote on social media platform X.

"You made Spain proud... you made the whole tennis world proud."

Retired Swiss star Federer and Nadal faced each other 14 times at Grand Slam tournaments with Nadal holding a 6-3 advantage in finals.

The Spaniard also had a 24-16 winning record overall in their 40 head-to-head meetings.

"I keep thinking about the memories we've shared... always cracking each other up," wrote Federer.

"Wearing each other out on the court and then, sometimes, almost literally having to hold each other up during trophy ceremonies."

Federer won 20 Grand Slams, a tally only beaten in the men's game by Nadal on 22 and Novak



Djokovic, who holds the record at 24.

"You beat me - a lot. More than I managed to beat you. You challenged me in ways no one else could," Federer continued.

"You made me reimagine my game - even going so far as to change the size of my racket head, hoping for any edge."

Nadal, a 22-time Grand Slam winner, will bow out from professional tennis after competing with Spain at the Davis Cup.

The 38-year-old has struggled

badly with injury in the last few years, leading him to the decision to retire.

Federer recalled Nadal partnering him in doubles at his own retirement at the Laver Cup in 2022.

"It meant everything to me that you were there by my side - not as my rival but as my doubles partner," added Federer.

"Sharing the court with you that night, and sharing those tears, will forever be one of the most special moments of my career."

The pair met for the first time in 2004 at the Miami Open, shortly after Federer had become world number one and Nadal was just 17. "I thought I was on top of the world. And I was - until two months later, when you walked on the court in Miami in your red sleeveless shirt, showing off those biceps, and you beat me convincingly," said the 43-year-old.

"All that buzz I'd been hearing about you - about this amazing young player from Mallorca, a generational talent, probably going to win a major someday - it wasn't just hype."

Nadal said Monday he was not at the Davis Cup to retire but to try and win it with his country.

However he has not competed in an official singles match since his second-round exit at the Olympics in July.

"I am not here for retiring. I'm here to try to help the team," Nadal explained.

"It's of course going to be my last week on the professional tour, but at the end, we are here in a teams competition. The emotions are going to be for the end."

## FOCUS

## Qatar basketball team leaves for India for Asia Cup qualifiers

The technical team of the Qatari national basketball squad, under the guidance of Turkish coach Hakan Demir, yesterday revealed the roster of players set to compete in the Asian qualifiers for the FIBA Asia Cup Saudi Arabia 2025.

The Qatari team is set to compete in their first game of the second Asian window against India at 3:30pm on November 22, taking place at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi.

Following this encounter, they will go up against Iran on November 25 at Al Gharafa Hall. These games are part of Group E, which also features Kazakhstan.

This announcement follows the team's commendable performance in the King Abdullah II International Basketball Cup, which took place at Prince Hamzah Hall in Amman, Jordan,

from November 16 to 18. The Qatari team achieved a commendable second place in the tournament, securing victories against the Syrian national team with a score of 75-66 and the Palestinian national team with a score of 74-72.

However, they were defeated in the final game by the host nation, the Jordanian national team, with a score of 50-70.

This performance marks a significant milestone in the Qatari team's preparations for the upcoming Asian qualifiers for the 2025 Asian Cup.

The announced list includes 15 players: Omar Mohamed Saad, Mustafa Fouda, Mahmoud Darwish, Khaled Rushdi, Babacar Dieng, Nadim Muslik, Mohamed Bashir, Tyler James Lee Harris, Aladji Boubou Magassa, Ndaye Elhaj Sidou, Abdulla Yassin, Mustafa Ndaw, Mike Lewis, Alen Hadzibegovic, and Donte Grantham.

The team's mission is headed by Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwaiti, Secretary-General of the Qatar Basketball Federation, along with members of the administrative and technical staff: Jassim Ashkanani, team manager, Nabil Juma, team administrator, in addition to the Turkish Hakan Demir (technical manager), Cengiz Karadag (assistant coach), Somit Yetim (fitness coach), Gokteg Dalbazar (coach), Ihadji Abdo (assistant coach), Adel Khadir (therapist), Nicasio Sejano (masseur), and Abdel Fatatah (mission worker).

Iran lead group E standings with four points, same as Kazakhstan, while the Qatari are in third place with two points, same as the Indian team, who are in fourth place.

The performance in the qualifiers is expected to be decisive for Qatar in their quest to qualify for the 2025 Asian Cup.



## SPOTLIGHT

## Slovakia stun Britain to reach BJK Cup final

**Reuters**  
Malaga, Spain

**O**utsiders Slovakia reached the Billie Jean King Cup final as doubles pairing Tereza Mihalikova and Viktoria Hruncakova completed a stunning comeback victory in Malaga yesterday.

Emma Raducanu had given Britain the lead by beating Hruncakova in the opening singles but Rebecca Sramkova hit back for the Slovaks by upsetting Katie Boulter in three sets.

Mihalikova and Hruncakova then outclassed British pair Heather Watson and Olivia Nicholls 6-2 6-2 to send Slovakia into today's final against Italy.

It is the first time Slovakia have reached the final of the women's team event since 2002 when they beat Spain and Matej Liptak's team have done it the hard way, defeating the United States, Australia and now Britain during a superb run in Malaga.

Hruncakova, ranked 238th in the WTA singles rankings, said she had never given up hope despite losing 6-4 6-4 to former US Open champion Emma Raducanu in the opening rubber.

"Emma played absolutely amazing, so I did not feel bad after the match, actually, and I was very hopeful that Rebecca could make a point for us and that we can play a deciding doubles," Hruncakova said on court as her team celebrated.

"And that happened. It was the best doubles of our lives."

For Britain it felt like a massive opportunity missed to win the

competition for the first time and reach the final for the first time since losing to the United States in 1981.

After Raducanu fought off the hard-hitting Hruncakova to seal her third singles win on the spin, Britain's number one Boulter, who like Raducanu had not lost a set in the ties against Germany and Canada, seemed in control.

The world number 24 cruised the first set 6-2 but Sramkova then found another level to seize command of the second.

She led 4-1 and although Boulter clawed it back to 4-4, Sramkova kept her country in the hunt by taking it to a decider.

Sramkova carried the momentum into the third set to lead 3-1 but again Boulter fought back, cheered on by a sizeable British contingent in the small arena, to make it 3-3.

It was Sramkova who kept her nerve though and at 4-5 down, Boulter served a double fault to give her opponent match points and she then struck a ball tamely wide to end the contest.

Mihalikova and Hruncakova then took apart a disappointing British doubles duo to book Slovakia's place in today's showdown when they will again be big underdogs.

Italy will be led by world number four Jasmine Paolini who will also partner Sara Errani, with whom she won gold at the Paris Olympics, in the doubles.

"We are underdogs again but our confidence is growing," Liptak, in charge since 2009, told reporters. "It's a dream, I've been a captain for many years and this was my dream to play in the final."

## MOTORSPORT

## Hamilton to race final three Grands Prix of Mercedes career

**AFP**  
London

**L**ewis Hamilton will race the final three Grands Prix of his Mercedes career after the seven-time world champion raised doubts about his immediate future in Brazil earlier this month.

The British driver, who is moving to Ferrari next season, is understood to have been in Mercedes' factory preparing on the simulator as usual ahead of Saturday's Las Vegas Grand Prix.

The team confirmed the 39-year-old will also address the media, in line with his regular pre-race commitments.

Hamilton endured one of the worst performances of his glittering career at the Brazilian Grand Prix, crossing the line in 10th.

"That was a disaster of a weekend, guys," he said on the podium. "The worst the car has ever been. Thank you for contributing to try and great job to all the guys at the pit-stop."

"If this is the last time I get to perform it was a shame it wasn't great but (I am) grateful for you."

The cryptic message led some to believe that Hamilton was ready to call a premature end to his Mercedes career with three rounds to come. But in a Mercedes press release ahead of this weekend's race in the United States, team principal Toto Wolff said: "We head to Las Vegas ready to tackle the final three races of the season. We are focused on ending this year as strongly as possible and providing some more highlights as we close

out 2024. We are looking forward to the races ahead, to ending our incredible journey with Lewis on a high and to building momentum for 2025."

Hamilton, who has won two races this season to take his career tally to 105, is down in seventh in the drivers' standings, two points behind team-mate George Russell.

**F1 moving Canadian GP to May to 'rationalise' calendar**

Formula 1 announced the Canadian Grand Prix will move from mid-June to May on the 2026 schedule to "rationalise" the circuit's schedule.

The move is expected to see the Montreal event follow the Miami Grand Prix, while the recently-announced extension for the iconic Monaco Grand Prix will shift to the first weekend in June.

The changes will eliminate F1 from criss-crossing the Atlantic Ocean as part of its sustainability and cost-efficiency efforts.

This year, F1 held nine races in Europe, with the Canadian Grand Prix interrupting the stretch with its June 9 date.

## WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

# Japan march on as Palestine draw with South Korea

Indonesia stun Saudi Arabia to boost their hopes of qualification

AFP  
Hong Kong

**J**apan are on the brink of qualifying for the World Cup after a 3-1 win at China yesterday while Son Heung-min scored again as South Korea were held by Palestine. Indonesia meanwhile stunned Saudi Arabia 2-0 in Jakarta to boost their unlikely hopes of reaching the tournament in North America in 2026.

Headers from Koki Ogawa and Ko Itakura put runaway group leaders Japan two goals up at half time before Lin Liangming pulled one back for China early in the second half.

Ogawa snuffed out China's hopes of a comeback with his second to silence a crowd of 45,000 in Xiamen, where fans without tickets gathered outside the ground to watch the action on their phones.

Loud boos greeted the Japanese national anthem before kick-off and the game was briefly stopped in the first half when a fan invaded the pitch. "It was tough at times and we knew that the opening goal was going to be key," said Dutch-based striker Ogawa.

Japan were playing their first senior international in China in nine years and there is a long history of rivalry between the two countries. There was a heavy police presence outside the Xiamen Egret Stadium, where about 750 Japan fans were expected to be in attendance.

"All the players got us this win today," said Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu. "The players on the pitch, the players on the bench and those that weren't on the bench today - it was down to their energy that we won."

The convincing victory gave Japan five wins and a draw in Asian qualifying Group C and took them to within touching distance of a place at the World Cup. The top two teams in each of the three groups will reach the showpiece in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Second place in Group C is wide open after Indonesia beat Saudi Arabia with Marselimo Ferdinand scoring either side of half time. It left Australia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and China all on six points ahead of the Socceroos' late match against Bahrain, who have five.

## NATIONS LEAGUE

## Gvardiol carries Croatia into quarter-finals

AFP  
Paris

**J**osko Gvardiol continued his scoring streak to earn Croatia a 1-1 home draw with Portugal on Monday that allowed them to squeeze into the Nations League quarter-finals. Portugal had already sealed top spot in Group A1. The draw allowed Croatia to finish one point above Scotland who continued their late surge with a 2-1 win over Poland in Warsaw.

In Group A4, Spain, already assured of qualification, beat last-placed Switzerland 3-2 in a match of penalty kicks in Tenerife. Denmark secured second place in the group with a 0-0 draw in Serbia.

In Split, Portugal took a 33rd-minute lead when Joao Felix neatly finished a sharp counter-attack. Rafael Leao then missed the target when clean through. With Scotland winning in Warsaw after a third-minute goal from John McGinn, set up by teenager Ben Doak, Croatia were heading out.

Gvardiol, ghosting at the far post, had a header on 62 minutes disallowed for offside. He repeated the move three minutes later, sneaking in unmarked and onside to squeeze a close-range shot through Jose Sa. Gvardiol, a defender, has three goals in his last six Premier League games for Manchester City.

Almost simultaneously in Warsaw, Kamil Pi-



Japan's Koki Ogawa celebrates after scoring against China during the Group C World Cup qualification match at the Xiamen Egret Stadium, China, yesterday. (Reuters)

In Group B, Palestine – nominally hosts for a game taking place in Jordan – grabbed a surprise 12th-minute lead over South Korea thanks to Zaid Qunbar. The advantage lasted just four minutes, talisman and skipper Son firing in from close range to bring the Koreans level with his 51st goal for his country.

It was all South Korea after that and Son had a goal chalked off for offside late on, but Palestine held on for a valuable point that helps keep them alive. Despite the 1-1 stalemate the Koreans are firmly on course for the World Cup at the top of the group with four games to go.

In Group A, talented 21-year-old Abbosbek Fayzullaev scored the only goal to give Uzbekistan a 1-0 win over North Korea in Vientiane, the capital of Laos. It cemented the Uzbeks' place in the top two in the group, along with table-toppers Iran, who were 3-2 winners at Kyrgyzstan.

The Iranians needed a Sardar Azmoun header to see off Kyrgyzstan 3-2 in Bishkek in another Group A match.

Iran retained their three point lead at the summit with Azmoun rescuing his team with a 76th minute header after a Joel Kojo double had pulled Kyrgyzstan level following first half goals from Mehdi Taremi and Saleh Hardani.

Teams finishing third and fourth in the three Asian groups will go through to a further round of qualifying.

North Korea are rooted to the bottom of Group A and yet to win in six games in this phase of qualifying.

North Korea are rooted to the bottom of Group A and yet to win in six games in this phase of qualifying.



Croatia's Josko Gvardiol (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Portugal. (Reuters)

atkowski rocketed a cross shot into the top far corner of the Scottish goal to level for Poland. In the 73rd minute in Split, left-back Nuno Mendes nearly emulated Gvardiol for Portugal but goalie Dominik Livakovic blocked.

In Warsaw, Andy Robertson headed home in added time to give Scotland a second win in four days, but Croatia comfortably saw out the draw they needed.

Scotland go into a play-off to save their League A status. Poland are relegated. Scotland

coach Steve Clarke said he was happy with his country's improvement.

In Tenerife, Alvaro Morata's clever turn won a penalty just after the half-hour. Yvon Mvogo saved Pedri's low, hard spot kick but, after some pinball, Yeremi Pino, from the neighbouring Canary island of Las Palmas, scored. Joel Monteiro dribbled through the Spanish defence for a spectacular 63rd-minute equaliser.

Bryan Gil stole the ball in the Swiss area to put Spain ahead again five minutes later. Andi Zeqiri levelled again, with a penalty five minutes from time. Deep into extra time, Bryan Zaragoza converted Spain's second spot kick. For both the Bryans it was a first international goal.

In Leskovac in Serbia, the hosts needed to win to overtake visiting Denmark and reach the quarter-finals. On a night when both goalkeepers, Dorde Petrovic and Kasper Schmeichel, were in eye-catching form, the hosts had to settle for a 0-0 draw.

The goalkeeping was less spectacular in Luxembourg in League C, where Northern Ireland blew a two-goal lead in Luxembourg to draw 2-2 but topped Group 3 when Bulgaria threw away a lead and drew 1-1 in Sofia against Belarus.

In Group 2, Romania beat Cyprus 4-1 in a chase to stay top of the group, two points ahead of Kosovo, who beat Lithuania 1-0 in Pristina despite playing the second half with 10 men. In League D, San Marino came from a goal down to beat Liechtenstein 3-1 in Vaduz and edge Gibraltar to first place in Group 1.

## AL-DARWISH RE-ELECTED AS QEMPF PRESIDENT



Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish was re-elected as President of the Qatar Equestrian and Modern Pentathlon Federation (QEMPF) by acclamation during the General Assembly yesterday. Sheikh Ahmed bin Noah al-Thani was also chosen as the Secretary-General of the Federation, while Ali Yousef al-Rumaihi was named Assistant Secretary. Ahmed bin Jaber al-Mulla and Amer bin Mohammed al-Humaidi were named as members of the Board of Directors.

## FOOTBALL

## San Marino clinch historic Nations League promotion

AFP  
Milan

**S**an Marino made history on Monday after coming from behind to beat Liechtenstein 3-1 and obtain a stunning promotion to the third tier of the Nations League. Trailing at half-time, San Marino claimed their second-ever competitive win thanks to strikes from Lorenzo Lazzari and Alessandro Golinucci, and Nicola Nanni's penalty.

San Marino's players charged onto the pitch in joy after securing promotion to League C at the Rheinpark Stadion in Vaduz. The micro state's national team, whose first competitive win came against Liechtenstein back in September, have been promoted after topping Group D1.

"Finishing that first half 1-0 down was an insult to football, but the boys were brilliant and deserved what they've managed to achieve," said San Marino coach Roberto Cevoli.



San Marino players celebrate after their win over Liechtenstein.

## CRICKET

## Qatar beat Thailand by five wickets

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**M**ohammad Ahnaff and Muhammad Tanveer shared a 76-run fourth wicket stand to steer Qatar to a comfortable five-wicket win against Thailand in the opening match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier B at the West End Park International Cricket Stadium in Doha yesterday.

Qatar chased down the target of 123 runs in 17.2 overs with Man of the Match Ahnaff making 50 off 47 balls aided with six fours and one six. Tanveer contributed 48 runs (33 balls) slamming five fours and two sixes.

Earlier, after being put into bat, Thailand rode on the knocks of opener Akshaykumar Yadav (37 runs; 47 balls; 2x4s), Sorawat Desungnoen (26 runs; 19 balls; 1x4; 2x6s), and Nitish Salekar 28 not out (23 balls; 2x4s).

Qatar's left-arm pacer Ikramullah Khan took three wickets for 17 runs while Mirza Baig, Mohammed Nadeem and Saqlain Arshad picked a wicket each to restrict Thailand to 122 for 7.

Meanwhile, United Arab Emirates also made a winning start to their campaign beating Bhutan by 63 runs at the University of Doha for Science and Technology Stadium. Batting first, UAE scored 166 for 6 with captain Alishan Sharafu scoring 50 (42 balls; 3x4s, 3x6s) and Mohammed Waseem making 46 (24 balls; 4x4s, 4x6s). The openers shared a 61-run partnership.

In reply, Bhutan were restricted to 103 for 8 with Thinley Jamtsho being the highest run-getter scoring 28 (24 balls; 2x4s, 2x6s). Off-spinner Dhruv Parashar was the most successful bowler for UAE finishing with 4 for 12 in his four overs while Mohammed Jawadullah claimed 2 for 17.

In another match, Bahrain pipped Saudi Arabia by 3 runs. Put into bat, Bahrain reached a total of 188 for 5 wickets with skipper Haider Ali scoring an unbeaten 67 (51 balls; 6x4s, 2x6s), and Imran Anwar making 53 runs (35 balls; 2x4s, 4x6s).

In reply, Saudi Arabia despite a 55-ball century from opener Abdul Waheed 110 runs (8x4s, 7x6s) failed to reach the target falling short by three runs at 185 for 9.

ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Sub Regional Qualifier B have a total of 7 teams are part - Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bhutan, Bahrain, Thailand, UAE and Cambodia from which the top two will qualify for the Regional Final, where they will be joined by Nepal, Oman, and Papua New Guinea.

## BRIEF SCORES

**Thailand 122-7** (A Yadav 37, N Salekar 28 n.o, S Desungnoen 26; I Khan 3-17) **lost to Qatar 123-5 in 17.2 overs** (M Ahnaff 50, M Tanveer 48; N Senamontree 2-27) by five wickets.

**Bahrain 188-5** (H Ali 67, I Anwar 53) **beat Saudi Arabia 185-9** (A Waheed 110) by three runs.

**UAE 166-6** (A Sharafu 50, M Waseem 46) **beat Bhutan 103-8** (T Jamtsho 28, D Parashar 4-12) by 63 runs.



Qatar's Mohammad Ahnaff plays a shot during the match against Thailand at the West End Park International Cricket Stadium in Doha.