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India not ruling out Gill playing in series opener against Aussies



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GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

'Lasting legacy':
Serena joins chorus marking Nadal's farewell

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SPOTLIGHT

FIA President meets with Qatar's Prime Minister to discuss country's motorsport and mobility activity

Ahead of the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Grand Prix 2024 taking place later this month, Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) President Mohammed Ben Sulayem met with Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, and the Minister of Sports and Youth, HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani.

Top of the agenda was Qatar's key role in global motor sport alongside the country's innovation and education in mobility. Advocacy and impact of sustainability in the region was discussed at length – a key consideration for all parties who confirmed their mutual commitment to advancing sustainable practices and raising awareness. The ongoing collaboration between Qatar, the FIA, and Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) ensures the continued growth of motor sport, and success in the mobility and transport sectors, across the region and globally.

From the end of November to mid-December, the world's eyes will be drawn to Qatar and the Lusail International Circuit in the year of its 20th anniversary. From hosting the penultimate race, Formula 1 Qatar Airways Grand Prix 2024, to witnessing top karting talents from across the Middle East and North Africa compete in six thrilling categories at the MENA Karting Championship Nations Cup.

The FIA is committed to increasing ac-



Qatar's Minister of Sports and Youth, HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani with FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem.

cessibility and diversity across motor sport, ensuring equal opportunities for equal talent, with the global grassroots programme crucial to ensuring the ongoing success of motor sport in the Middle East. Alongside sporting matters, the parties discussed the FIA's continued support in mobility and transport in the region.

Sulayem said "My thanks to the Prime Minister of Qatar, HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani

for his generous welcome. We had a very productive meeting to discuss the future of global motor sport and mobility. It was also good to discuss a number of grassroots development initiatives across motorsport and mobility with the Minister of Youth and Sports, HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani."

"I am proud of the close relationship that has been built by the FIA and our regional Member Club Qatar Motor & Mo-



Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani with FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem.

torcycle Federation, and the partnership we have fostered to ensure ongoing innovation and collaboration in the region. I look forward to the upcoming events taking place in Qatar and spending more time in this vibrant country."

"Welcoming Mohammed Ben Sulayem to Lusail Circuit reflects the strength of Qatar's motorsport journey in 2024," said Abdulrahman bin Abdullah al-Mannai, President of QMMF and Lusail Interna-

tional Circuit. "Hosting other prestigious events such as the International BAJA, the International Rally, the World Endurance Championship, and the MENA Karting Championship Nations Cup underscores our commitment to advancing excellence in motorsport. Our focus on sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity aligns with Qatar's vision to inspire progress and nurture talent, ensuring the region's enduring impact on the global motorsport landscape."

FOOTBALL

Lopez laments 'individual errors' in UAE thrashing

Qatar will meet North Korea in their next match on March 20

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar head coach Marquez Lopez lamented his team's struggles after their side was thrashed by the United Arab Emirates in the FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifier in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

Fabio Lima scored four goals including a first-half hat-trick while Yahya al-Ghassani was the other scorer as Paulo Bento's side claimed an emphatic 5-0 win over the reigning Asian champions.

"The UAE team earned a deserved victory, and I congratulate them," said Lopez in a post-match press conference. "Our plan relied on a defensive approach and counterattacks, but Fabio Lima's early goal disrupted our strategy, leading to numerous individual errors that cost us. Despite our attempts to regain control, we couldn't find the opportunity to make a comeback."

"Our team was not fatigued; the issue lay in our tactical planning and execution. Individual mistakes led to the goals we conceded, and both the team and I, as coach, were not at our best. By the 80th minute, with the score at five in favour of the UAE, it was evident that further attempts were futile. We were aware of the UAE's strategy to exploit individual errors, and they executed it well, showing strength in their offensive game," added Lopez.

The heavy defeat dealt a significant blow to Qatar's direct qualifying hopes leaving them fourth in Group A with seven points, nine behind group leaders Iran and six adrift of second-placed Uzbekistan. UAE strengthened their grip on third place climbing to 10 points while Kyrgyzstan (3 points) and North Korea (2 points) remain at the bottom of the standings.

"Iran and Uzbekistan have great chances of qualifying directly while the rest of the teams in the group still have hopes of qualifying directly or through the play-offs," said Lopez.



Coach Marquez Lopez reacts during Qatar's loss to the UAE in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

Qatar will meet North Korea in their next match on March 20, 2025.

Meanwhile, UAE coach Paulo Bento was ecstatic with his team's dominant show against Qatar. "We prepared well to face Qatar, knowing they have a strong team with exceptional players and a high-level coach," said Bento. "We considered every possible scenario since predicting their strategy was challenging."

"We succeeded in capitalising on our chances and scored goals – something we struggled with in the match against Uzbekistan, despite performing well. Unfortunately, we missed

many easy opportunities then."

Meanwhile, Iran's journey in the qualifiers thus far has been one to cherish for head coach Amir Ghalenoei. Tuesday's 3-2 win against Kyrgyzstan kept Team Melli top of the group on 16 points, three ahead of Uzbekistan with United Arab Emirates a further three adrift.

With qualification to the FIFA World Cup 26 well within reach now, Ghalenoei was pleased to see the attacking strength of his side but admitted knows defensive improvements are a must. "We managed to get a good win on a difficult day," said Ghalenoei.

FOCUS

Qatar set to host World Military Equestrian Championship

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Military Sports Federation has completed the arrangements for hosting the 24th World Military Equestrian Championship – Show Jumping, which will start from November 27 till 30.

The championship is organised under the umbrella of the International Military Sports Council (CISM) under the slogan 'Friendship through Sport' and in co-operation with Al Shaqab, a member of the Qatar Foundation.

Announcing the details of the championship, Brigadier Atiq Shaddad al-Ghanim – Vice-Chairman of the Organising Committee, said that awarding the organisation of the championship to Qatar confirms the confidence of the International Military Sports Council (CISM) in Qatar's organisational capabilities and its success in all the competitions it hosts, especially since it has organised many successful international championships.

Noting that the championship is also an opportunity for the participating delegations to learn about the Qatari culture, as there will be some cultural activities accompanying the championship, especially for the delegations, as visits will be organised to many tourist areas in the country, as well as an opportunity to exchange cultures between peoples.

Brigadier al-Ghanim explained that the organising committee of the championship has completed all arrangements for the championship, which is the largest in its history in terms of the number of participating countries.

For his part, Major Khalid Hammad al-Attayah – Director of the Championship, said that the event will witness the participation of 15 countries, and it is for individuals and teams, and each country will participate with three riders, and the championship will be held according to the point's collection system at a height of 120-125cm.



Major Khalid Hamad al-Attayah - Director of the 24th World Military Equestrian Championship.

He added that the riders of the Qatari team are ready to participate in this championship and their ambition is to finish on the podiums, especially after their good participation in the last participation of the military team, which won silver in team event and gold in the individual in the Arab Military Championship.

Qatar will welcome riders from Saudi Arabia, Syria, Oman, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkiye, Italy, France, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Ecuador, and Brazil. The championship is not only an arena for competition but a platform for cultural exchange and friendship among military athletes, exemplifying Qatar's commitment to international sports diplomacy and its dedication to excellence in equestrian sports. Since its founding in Cannes, France, in 1948 by Belgium, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, CISM has grown into a global organisation with 141 member nations, including Qatar, which joined in 1974.



BORDER-GAVASKAR TROPHY

India not ruling out Gill playing in series opener

'Fingers crossed for that improvement. We'll wait to take a call on him up until the morning of the Test'

Reuters
Perth

India will give Shubman Gill every chance to prove his fitness to start the opening Test against Australia at Perth Stadium with the batsman showing improvement after fracturing his left thumb, bowling coach Morne Morkel said yesterday.

Gill, 25, sustained the injury while fielding at slip last week as India were gearing up for the match, which starts tomorrow, with squad sessions instead of a tour game against a local side.

"Shubman is improving every day. Obviously he picked up a nasty blow in that intra-squad warm-up game. I think with him it's going to be a day-to-day process," Morkel told reporters.

"Fingers crossed for that improvement. We'll wait to take a call on him up until the morning of the test match."

With skipper Rohit Sharma set to miss the match following the birth of his second child, Gill's absence could heap more pressure on India's less experienced batsmen on fiery Australian pitches but Morkel backed them to rise to the occasion.

"It's going to be great learning for these young guys, who can front up against a quality test bowling attack. Australia aren't going to bowl you many bad balls," Morkel said.

"But in saying that there's good leadership within the group that can help and settle the nerves with that. As a group, we're all excited for the challenge."

Seamer Mohammed Shami is not part of the squad for the five-match series having only returned to action this month after suffering an ankle injury at last year's 50-overs World Cup and a knee



India's Virat Kohli (left) talks with Jasprit Bumrah during a practice session at the Optus Stadium in Perth yesterday, ahead of first Test against Australia. (AFP)

issue during his recovery. The 34-year-old claimed seven wickets in a domestic match last week but will not be rushed back to national duty.

"We're definitely keeping a close eye on Shami. He's a world class bowler," Morkel said.

"We need to understand he's been out of the game for almost a year. We have to respect him and his body. It's a massive win that he's back playing and picking up wickets."

Meanwhile Australia's seasoned seamer, Josh Hazlewood, commended Indian batting powerhouse Virat Kohli for his impressive past performances in

Australia. Acknowledging Kohli as a pivotal wicket, Hazlewood emphasised focusing on all skillful Indian players who could potentially turn the game.

Hazlewood is also relieved India is without the services of Cheteshwar Pujara for the series.

Pujara was the highest run-getter in the India vs Australia Test series Down Under in 2018-19 with 521 runs in four Tests as India won their first-ever Test series in Australia. He also scored 271 in the 2020-21 series Down Under, helping India to clinch their second consecutive BGT in Australia.

"I am happy that Cheteshwar Pujara is not here. He is obviously someone who bats time and spends a lot of time at the crease and makes you earn his wicket every time. Has done really well in Australia on previous tours. I mean there are always first-class young players coming into the team. There is so much pressure to perform in the Indian team. With so many guys nipping at the heels all the time, so overall the playing XI is a mix of unbelievable players. So it does not really matter, they are all big players," Hazlewood said at the press conference yesterday.

Warner has backed Nathan McSweeney to score the most runs in the test series against India despite the uncapped batsman's lack of experience as an opener.

South Australia captain McSweeney will march out to the middle with Usman Khawaja in the first Test, having claimed the opening spot vacated by Steve Smith, who is returning to his favoured number four slot.

McSweeney had not opened the batting in a first class match until playing India A this month in Melbourne where he scored 14 and 25.

Warner said McSweeney would be able to adapt to the opening role and looked a good fit for Khawaja, who also started his career lower down the order.

"I think he's got the technique, he's got the patience to partner up with Uzzy (Khawaja) to allow himself to score big," Warner, who retired from tests after the Pakistan series in the last home summer, told reporters in Melbourne.

"I've pencilled him in to be the highest run scorer this year, so I'm looking forward to that."

"I think they've both got the



India's bowling coach Morne Morkel speaks at a press conference at the Optus Stadium in Perth yesterday. (AFP)

same sort of patience, which is going to be good for them and hold the middle order in good stead."

At 25, McSweeney will be an outlier in a team of thirty-some things and pundits worry about the impact a wave of retirements will have on the side in the coming years. Warner noted Australia needed to think about succession planning, particularly with players like 37-year-old Khawaja approaching the end of their careers.

However, he also called for selectors to be patient with the new generation and give McSweeney time to prove himself at the high-level.

"It's not just these five test matches, it's the signs that you see (McSweeney) as a talented batsman for the future," he said.

"You've got to give guys a crack. I know there are other guys that have been there - Marcus Harris, Cameron Bancroft - but it'd be exciting just to see him score some runs first to establish himself. But if he doesn't, just give him some time, give him maybe two summers."

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'MONKEYGATE' TO GABBATOIR: FIVE CLASSIC AUSTRALIA V INDIA TESTS

Australia and India have been facing each other in Test cricket since 1947 and renew their rivalry in Perth on Friday, playing a five-match series for the first time since 1991-92. Some of the most competitive clashes have come since they began contesting the Border-Gavaskar Trophy - named after the first two batsmen to pass 10,000 runs - in the 1996-97 season. AFP looks back at five memorable Tests:

Tendulkar conquers Warner: Sachin Tendulkar and spin king Shane Warne had many epic battles. In 1998 at the Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai, Warne drew first blood by having the batting master caught for four in the slips, then he ran through the middle order to restrict India to 257 in their first innings. In reply Australia made 328, helped by Ian Healy's 90. This set the stage for Warne v Tendulkar round two, and it was the batsman who came out on top on a dusty, spin-

friendly wicket. He produced one of his most dazzling innings, taking apart Warne and fellow spinner Gavin Robertson in a magnificent unbeaten 155 from 191 balls that changed the course of the match. India declared and set Australia 348 to win, and they were bundled out for just 168 on the final day with Tendulkar, not surprisingly, named man-of-the-match.

Laxman's epic stand: The second Test at Eden Gardens, Kolkata, in 2001 was all about one of India's greatest comebacks and is regarded among the most exciting matches of all time. After Australia posted a big total of 445, with Matthew Hayden making 97 and Steve Waugh 110, their bowling attack led by Glenn McGrath skittled the home side for 171. The follow-on was enforced with India in real danger of going 2-0 down in the series before VVS Laxman (281) and Rahul Dravid (180) knuckled down in a memorable and

gritty 376-run stand for the fifth wicket as India made 657-7 before declaring. Australia were left with a victory target of 384, but six wickets from Harbhajan Singh steered India to an unlikely 171-run win.

'Monkeygate' scandal: Perhaps the most controversial and spiteful Test between the two nations, the 2008 Sydney encounter was dubbed "Monkeygate", marred by umpiring errors and accusations of racism. Ricky Ponting's men won by 122 runs for a record-breaking 16th consecutive Test victory with just seven balls remaining in a breathless finish after part-time spinner Michael Clarke took three wickets in five deliveries.

But it is infamously remembered for Harbhajan Singh being charged with racial abuse and banned for three Tests for allegedly calling Andrew Symonds - who has West Indian ancestry - a "monkey" during the third day's play.

The row saw India threaten to pull out of the tour and on appeal the ban was lifted and the charge downgraded to abusive language, leaving relations between the teams tense.

Spinners rule in Bangalore: Australia took a 1-0 lead into the fiery Test in Bangalore in 2017 and when Nathan Lyon bagged 8-50 to bamboozle the Indian batsmen for 189, it looked like the tourists would go 2-0 up. But in a bad-tempered few days, Ravindra Jadeja picked up 6-63 to ensure the tourists led by just 87. A stylish 92 from Cheteshwar Pujara coupled with six wickets for Josh Hazlewood then saw India all out for 274 to set Australia 188 to win. They crumbled for 112 with Ravichandran Ashwin becoming the fourth bowler in the match to claim six wickets - the first time this had happened in Test history. The landmark was overshadowed by Virat

Kohli accusing Australia of consulting their dressing room over DRS decisions from the field. Asked whether Australia cheated, a fired-up Kohli replied: "I didn't say that, you did."

'Gabbatoir' conquered: Australia went into the deciding Test at Brisbane of the four-match series in 2020-21 having not lost at the Gabba in 32 years. Beseet by injuries, India were heavy underdogs. The hosts won the toss and, helped by a Marnus Labuschagne century, compiled 369 before India responded with a gritty 336. Australia - in Nathan Lyon's 100th Test - were restricted to 294 in the second innings, but they still set India a mammoth 328 to win. A battling 91 from Shubman Gill gave them a solid platform but it was a dashing Rishabh Pant who stole the show with a thrilling unbeaten 89 to complete a three-wicket victory with three overs to spare on the final day.

CRICKET

Qatar beat Bhutan for second win

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar defeated Bhutan by six wickets to claim their second consecutive victory in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Sub Regional Qualifier B yesterday.

The home side displayed an all-round performance after electing to field at the University of Doha for Science and Technology ground.

Left-arm medium pacer Amir Farooq was the star picking three wickets for only 16 runs as Qatar bowled out Bhutan for 111 runs in 20 overs.

Ikramullah Khan (3-24), Muhammad Jabir (2-22) and Mohammed Nadeem (1-3) were the other wicket-taking bowlers for the hosts. Ranjung Mikyo Dorji and Gakul Ghalley scored 21 runs apiece for Bhutan.

Later, opening batsman Imal Liyanage fired a 28-ball-51 as Qatar achieved the target with ease in 16.4 overs. Mohammad Ahnaf, who scored 50 in Tuesday's win over Thailand, remained unbeaten



Action from Qatar-Bhutan match held at University of Doha for Science and Technology ground in Doha yesterday.

on 19. Farooq was named man of the match for his heroics with the ball. Qatar will take on Cambodia in their next match on Saturday.

Meanwhile, in other matches yesterday, Thailand defeated Cambodia by 16 runs at West End Park International Cricket Stadium while United Arab Emirates recorded a 17-run win over Saudi Arabia at the same venue.

After winning both their re-

spective opening matches, UAE and Qatar are leading the standings with four points each followed by Bahrain and Thailand on two points apiece. Bhutan, Cambodia and Saudi Arabia are yet to score a point.

Teams securing the top two places in the competition will qualify for the Regional Final, where they will be joined by Nepal, Oman and Papua New Guinea.

QTerminals supports F1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix for second year

QTerminals Group has announced its continuing partnership as the event supporter for the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2024, scheduled from November 29 to December 1, 2024 at the Lusail International Circuit.

This marks the second year of the partnership that will span three years from 2023 to 2025, reinforcing the group's dedication to promoting major sporting events in Qatar and the region and elevating Qatar's profile as a key player on the world stage.

"Building on our success from last year, we are eager to reconnect with the community once again this year, aligning with the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 to promote a vibrant society and a diversified economy," said Neville Bissett, Group chief executive officer of QTerminals Group. Amro al-Hamad, executive director of Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and chief executive officer of Lusail International Circuit said "together, we aim to elevate



the Lusail International Circuit experience, bringing world-class events and facilities to Qatar while further strengthening the nation's position as a hub for motorsport in the region." QTerminals Group operates Hamad Port, the group's flagship facility and is dedicated to promoting community initiatives and sports activities both in Qatar and across its international operations in Ukraine, Türkiye and the Netherlands. In addition to motorsport, QTerminals is the

long-term title sponsor of the QTerminals Qatar Classic Squash Tournament, the gold sponsor of the Qatar TotalEnergies Tennis Open and the official sponsor of The Minister of Transport Padel Championship Cup. Recently, QTerminals expanded its sports involvement by becoming the official training partner of Feyenoord Football Club in Rotterdam and the main partner of the Feyenoord Women's football team from 2024 to 2027.

Serena joins chorus marking Nadal's farewell

RAFAEL NADAL FACTFILE

Name: Rafael Nadal
Date of birth: June 3, 1986
Place of birth: Manacor, Spain
Professional debut: 2001
Career earnings: \$134.9 million
ATP titles: 92
Grand Slams: 22
Australian Open: (two titles) 2009, 2022
French Open: (14 titles) 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022
Wimbledon: (two titles) 2008, 2010
US Open: (four titles) 2010, 2013, 2017, 2019
Olympic gold: 2008 (singles), 2016 (doubles)

Davis Cup: (four titles) 2004, 2009, 2011, 2019
Weeks as world number one: 209
Year-end world number one: 2008, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2019
Current world ranking: 154
Win/loss record: 1080-227

OTHER INFORMATION
• Missed numerous Grand Slams due to injury: Australian Open in 2006 (left foot) and 2013 (stomach virus); Roland Garros in 2003 (elbow) and 2004 (left ankle); Wimbledon in 2004 (left ankle), 2009 (knee),

2016 (left wrist) and 2021 (left foot); and US Open in 2012 (left knee), 2014 (right wrist) and 2021 (left foot).

Personal
• Married to Maria Francisca Perello; son, Rafael born Oct 7, 2022
• Uncle, Miguel Angel, played football for Barcelona, Real Mallorca and Spanish national team. Played in the 1994, 1998 and 2002 World Cup.
• Appeared in Shakira's music video for a song in 2010
• Centre Court at Barcelona was renamed "Pista Rafa Nadal" in 2017

Malaga, Spain: Serena Williams said it had been an honour to witness Rafa Nadal's tennis journey and that he would leave the game a "lasting legacy" following the Spaniard's defeat in the final match of his glorious career. Nadal, who won 22 Grand Slam titles over the course of a career spanning more than two decades, announced his retirement last month and was a surprise pick for Spain's opening singles match in their Davis Cup quarter-final against the Netherlands. The 38-year-old lost 6-4 6-4 to Botic van de Zandschulp and Spain eventually fell 2-1 to exit the team tournament in Malaga.

"Congratulations on a career that most won't dare to dream of," Williams said on Instagram alongside a video of her wearing Nadal-branded merchandise. "I feel so fortunate to have been able to play when you were playing and being great.

"You inspired me to be better, to play harder, to fight, to never give up, and to win more. No excuses, just play the sport. You legacy will never die. Wow to see your career from the beginning to today was an honour champ! Long live Rafa!"

Nadal's Davis Cup teammate Carlos Alcaraz said Nadal had been his inspiration.

"Thanks to you I have become a professional tennis player," Alcaraz added.

"It has been a blessing to be able to live your career as a child for whom you were an idol and then as a teammate! The best possible ambassador who leaves an eternal legacy."

World number two Iga Swiatek reacted to a video of the Spaniard tearing up with a crying emoji and said: "Too much", while American Coco Gauff added: "Today, I'm from Spain #Rafa."

Australian tennis great Rod Laver said that watching Nadal compete had been a privilege.

"Your legacy will endure as one of the greatest to ever grace the game," Laver said. "Thank you for the countless unforgettable moments and for setting a standard of excellence that will inspire generations to come." German Boris Becker, a six-time Grand Slam champion, said he was crying as he typed out his message on social media.

Spain's Rafael Nadal attends a tribute to his career at the end of the quarter-final doubles match between Netherlands and Spain during the Davis Cup Finals at the Palacio de Deportes Jose Maria Martin Carpena arena in Malaga, southern Spain, on November 19, 2024. Nadal's glittering career in professional tennis came to an end as Netherlands eliminated Spain in the Davis Cup quarter-finals. (AFP)



TENNIS

Germany reach Davis Cup semis

'I'M PROUD TO HELP THE TEAM GET THE FIRST VICTORY'

Reuters
Malaga

Germany beat Canada 2-0 yesterday to reach the Davis Cup semi-finals where they will face the Netherlands who advanced with a stunning upset of hosts Spain.

Without world number two Alexander Zverev, Germany went ahead when Daniel Altmaier beat Gabriel Diallo 7-6(5) 6-4 and Jan-Lennard Struff fought back to overcome Denis Shapovalov 4-6 7-5 7-6(5) and seal victory in the tie.

"Playing in the finals is amazing, I haven't played Davis Cup the whole year and I'm proud to help the team get the first victory. I think we are in a great position now," Altmaier said on court.

"The mental side is crucial. It's a huge motivation for me. My fighting spirit helped me to win the first set and then I was getting into a better rhythm."

Germany avenged their 2022 quarter-final loss to Canada who went on to claim their first Davis Cup title with victory over Australia.

Defending champions Italy will be led by world number one Jannik Sinner in their last-eight clash with Argentina today and the United States face Australia for a place in the semi-finals.

Meanwhile Spain's Davis Cup captain David Ferrer said he had no regrets about fielding Rafa Nadal in their quarter-final singles opener against the Netherlands



Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff returns a shot to Canada's Denis Shapovalov in the quarter-final singles match during the Davis Cup Finals in Malaga, southern Spain, yesterday. (AFP)

erlands on Tuesday after the 22-times Grand Slam champion fell to defeat in the last game of his career.

Following Nadal's 6-4 6-4 defeat by Botic van de Zandschulp, world number three Carlos Alcaraz levelled the tie by beating Tallon Griekspoor 7-6(0) 6-3.

However, Alcaraz and Marcel Granollers were defeated in the decisive doubles by Wesley Koolhof and Van de Zandschulp.

Ferrer told a press conference in the early hours of yesterday in Malaga that he was still process-

ing the emotions of what had been a "strange" day.

"The decision (to play Nadal) was difficult. Nadal and Roberto Bautista were very evenly matched, but I decided on Rafa because he was improving every day in training," he added.

"He is leaving something special behind... he has left his mark. Someone so great and with such humility is hard to find. May he go away from the sport with happiness, proud and at ease."

Nadal announced last month that he was retiring after the Dav-

is Cup Finals, and Alcaraz became emotional while talking about a player he described as both an inspiration and a mentor.

"Rafa has taught me the passion with which you have to live tennis," Alcaraz told a press conference.

"I'm lucky to have him around. I wish I had come to the circuit earlier. I have taken unforgettable moments with me. Thanks to him I wanted to be a tennis player."

"If, at the end of my career, I have done half of what he has done, I'll be more than happy."

Sabalenka eyes Serena-like dominance in the power game

Melbourne: A sparkling 2024 in which Aryna Sabalenka swept the hardcourt Grand Slams and clinched the year-end world number one ranking has left the powerful Belarusian dreaming of dominating the women's game as Serena Williams did for so long. Once best known for a propensity to lose her cool on court, Sabalenka has transformed her game to become a ruthlessly effective player capable of blowing opponents away in a style reminiscent of Serena in her prime.

After her major breakthrough at last year's Australian Open, the 26-year-old retained the Melbourne title in January before adding the US Open crown to her trophy cabinet in September, leapfrogging Iga Swiatek in the rankings last month.

Sabalenka's New York run meant she had reached at least the semi-finals at nine of her last 12 Grand Slams - form reminiscent of Serena's 10 last-four appearances between 2014 and 2017 when the American landed six of her 23 major titles.

"I always wanted to dominate the tour like Serena did, like Iga was able to do for so long," Sabalenka told *Arab News* ahead of the season-ending WTA Finals, where she sealed the year-end top spot despite a semi-final loss to Coco Gauff.

"It's really inspiring... but I'm trying to focus on myself, on im-



proving myself, to make sure that I have all of the tools to dominate the tour as they did."

A sign that Sabalenka was more at ease with the suffocating pressure at the top of the game came when she made a tradition of signing the bald head of her trainer before matches on her run to her second title in Melbourne in January.

She won over American fans in her US Open title clash with home hope Jessica Pegula, producing spectacular shot-making that showcased power and poise thanks to the drop shots she added to her growing arsenal.

"Five years ago if someone told me I'll finally learn how to do this shot, I'd be laughing," Sabalenka said. "I don't have touch. I'm so bad at it. Now I have this shot in my pocket. It brings a lot of pressure on opponents, because now they know they have even more variation."

Italy beat Slovakia to win BJK Cup

Malaga, Spain: Italy won the Billie Jean King Cup for the fifth time as Jasmine Paolini beat Rebecca Sramkova to secure a dominant 2-0 win over Slovakia yesterday.

World number four Paolini triumphed 6-2, 6-1 in the second singles rubber to follow up Lucia Bronzetti's 6-2, 6-4 victory against Viktoria Hrucakova.

Italy were runners-up to Canada in last year's final but went one better in Malaga to become world

champions for the first time since 2013. The victory capped a stunning year for Paolini who finished as runner-up at Roland Garros and Wimbledon.

Slovakia, who won the competition in 2002, had never lost a BJK Cup tie in Spain.

The underdogs defeated USA, Australia and Great Britain on a stunning run to this year's final, but Bronzetti breezed past Hrucakova in under 90 minutes.

SPOTLIGHT

Asian Athletics Association President: Asia poised for a new era of success



QNA
Doha

President of the Asian Athletics Association, **Dahlan Jumaan al-Hamad**, has said Asia is entering a promising new phase in the development of athletics, supported by the association's strategy of dividing the continent into five regions - East Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia - to ensure the effective implementation of development standards.

In an interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Hamad highlighted studies presented to the World Athletics, which point to Asia's bright future in athletics, thanks to its wealth of athletic talent and tailored development programmes for athletes and coaches. He expressed optimism that Asia would

emerge as a leading continent in athletics across all levels.

Al-Hamad pointed out the significant progress achieved through the association's precise execution of its development plans. This includes the first phase's success, which saw Asian athletes excelling in major events such as the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest, the 2024 Paris Olympics, and the World Junior Championships in Peru in September. He noted that Asia now rivals Europe in several field events, citing Olympic champions like Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem and India's Neeraj Chopra in javelin throw. He predicted more emerging champions in various field events in the near future.

He pointed out that the success of an Asian athlete winning an Olympic gold medal in javelin a feat previously dominated by European athletes demonstrates Asia's rich talent pool and

its ability to capitalise on development programmes.

Al-Hamad stated that the association's plans for its 2027 cycle are designed to enhance the sport and advance athletes' skills across different disciplines.

He stressed the importance of focusing on younger age groups and identifying talent early, noting that champions can emerge from small villages or school programmes.

Providing adequate support and care for these talents is crucial to their development and success on all levels. The Asian Athletics Association's programmes aim to nurture talent across the continent and pave the way for global recognition.

The association has established specific standards to elevate technical performance by enhancing coaching capabilities with modern training methods

and improving athletes' skills in track and field events. These standards will be applied uniformly across Asia's five regions.

Al-Hamad also highlighted the significance of the presence of President of World Athletics, Sebastian Coe, at the Asian Athletics Association meetings held in Doha.

This underscores Asia's prominent position on the global athletics map and reflects the association's collaborative efforts with regional leaders and technical and administrative committees to advance the sport.

He concluded by praising Qatar's unwavering support for its nationals serving in international and continental sports organisations, adding that this commitment to promoting sports underscores Qatar's leadership role and contributes to achievements on all levels.

HORSE RACING

Lemon Ginger wins Al Thakira Cup



Connections of Lemon Ginger celebrate after the four-year-old bay gelding won the Al Thakira Cup at the Al Rayyan Racecourse. PICTURES: Juhaime

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Lemon Ginger, in the silks of Hassan Ali Alabdulmalik, produced a remarkable run to win the Al Thakira Cup at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Debbie Mountain-trained four-year-old bay gelding absolutely bolted up in the hands of Arnaud to score an incredible 13 lengths victory in the 1700m Local Thoroughbred Premium Maiden race. Ali Abdul al-Boenain's Awaayid came second. Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, presented the trophies to winners.

In the penultimate race of the day, Jockey Alberto Sanna rode Gassim Ghazali-trained Haya to victory in the 1700m long race for the thoroughbred conditions (Fillies & Mares) for three-year-old+. The three year-old filly beat Miracle Nation by a five and a half lengths to emerge as the winner.

Meanwhile Jockey Soufiane Saadi completed a double on the card as he guided Khalid al-Mohannadi's Blazing Sunset to two and a half-length victory in the 1700m race for the thoroughbred handicap (65-85) for three-year-old+. In the second race of the day, Saadi guided Al Bida Racing's Taymoor Al Shahania to victory in a thrilling race to win by a neck.

Jockey Lukas Delozier also completed a double on the day as he won Local Thoroughbred Novice Plate for three-year-old+ on Tafawok, in the colours of Injaaz Stud.

Delozier was in the winners' enclosure earlier in the day when he guided His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Galeb Al Shahania to victory in the 1700m contest for the Local Purebred Arabian Novice Plate for three-year-old+. The Rudy Nerbonne-trained four-



Jockey Arnaud De Lepine guided Lemon Ginger to Al Thakira Cup victory yesterday.

year-old Colt defeated Julian Smart's ward Muqtarib by a half a length.

RESULTS: 5TH AL RAYYAN RACE MEETING - AL THAKIRA CUP

WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

1. Al Thakira Cup - Local Thoroughbred Premium Maiden (Class 6)

Lemon Ginger, Deborah Amanda Clare Mountain, Arnaud De Lepine

2. Thoroughbred Conditions (Fillies & Mares) (Class 2)

Haya, Gassim Ghazali, Alberto Sanna

3. Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85 (Class 4)

Blazing Sunset, Rashid al-Jehani, Soufiane Saadi

4. Local Thoroughbred Novice Plate (Class 5)

Tafawok, Jihad El Ahmad, Lukas Delozier

5. Local Purebred Arabian Novice Plate (Class 5)

Galeb Al Shahania, Rudy Andre Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier

6. Purebred Arabian Handicap 55-75 (Class 5)

Taymoor Al Shahania, Mohamed Khaled Elahmed, Soufiane Saadi

7. Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate (Class 6)

Al Mustafiz, Julian Colin Smart, Gavin Matt Ryan

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Argentina beat Peru as Brazil held to draw by Uruguay

Colombia suffered an upset 1-0 defeat to Ecuador at home

AFP
Montevideo

A magnificent volley from Lautaro Martinez was enough to give world champions Argentina a 1-0 win over Peru while Brazil were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Uruguay in South American World Cup qualifying on Tuesday.

Argentina remain on top of the CONMEBOL standings with their qualification for the 2026 tournament surely just a matter of time. It was far from a vintage performance from Lionel Scaloni's team, but a moment of magic from Inter Milan's Martinez proved decisive at the 'Bombonera' stadium in Buenos Aires.

Lionel Messi floated in a cross from the left and Martinez leapt into the air, leaning back as he cracked a thundering left-footed volley past Pedro Gallese. Argentina's eighth win from 12 games leaves them on 25 points at the top of the table, five points ahead of Uruguay who earned a valuable point at Brazil.

Five-times World Cup winners Brazil laboured for long stretches of the game in Salvador and fell behind to a fine finish from Uruguay's Real Madrid midfielder Federico Valverde in the 55th minute. But seven minutes later Brazil equalised when a headed clearance fell kindly to Gerson who smashed home a perfectly-struck volley.

Gabriel Martinelli went close to a winner when he showed a deft touch to switch feet before a volley which brought a fine save out of Sergio Rochet. The draw leaves Brazil in fifth on 18 points, a point behind fourth-placed Colombia who suffered an upset 1-0 home defeat to Ecuador in Barranquilla.

Veteran striker Enner Valencia stunned the home crowd with an outstanding solo effort in the seventh minute, the former West Ham United forward breaking away from three Colombian defenders and powering into the box before slotting home. Colombia forward Jhon Cordoba then missed a golden opportunity to level the score, stumbling off balance and missing from point blank range after being set up by James Rodriguez.

Cordoba was central to the 34th minute incident that left Ecuador short-handed for the rest of the game. The gangly striker raced clear and rounded Ecuador keeper Hernan Galindez



Argentina's forward Lautaro Martinez celebrates next to captain Lionel Messi after scoring against Peru at the La Bombonera stadium in Buenos Aires on Tuesday. (AFP)

before going down as Piero Hincapie closed in on him.

The referee ruled that Hincapie had tripped the forward and despite lengthy appeals and a VAR review the decision stood. Galindez was then alert to keep out the resulting free-kick from Rodriguez and the keeper then had a busy end to the half as Colombia peppered his goal.

Liverpool winger Luis Diaz headed a Daniel Munoz cross against the post and Galindez did well to smother Cordoba at close range. Colombia grew increasingly frustrated as Ecuador's defence held firm in the second half with Galindez parrying to keep out substitute Jhon Duran and the unfortunate Cordoba blasted the loose ball high and wide from a tight angle.

Elsewhere Tuesday, Paraguay earned a 2-2 draw at Bolivia with the home side going ahead in the 15th minute with a confident strike from

Ervin Vaca. Newcastle United forward Miguel Almiron levelled for Paraguay in the 71st minute with a clinical finish after a smart passing move across the box.

Bolivia restored their lead nine minutes later with a Miguel Terceros penalty after Gustavo Gomez brought down Lucas Chavez in the box. Both benches got involved in protests and Bolivian sub Adalid Terrazas and Paraguay's Diego Gomez, who had been substituted, were both shown red cards.

Paraguay grabbed a point in stoppage time in some style with a magnificent solo effort from Julio Enciso who dribbled from deep before unleashing a thundering drive from 20 yards out. Ninth-placed Chile have a lot of work to do if they are to make one of the six automatic qualification spots but boosted their faint hopes with a 4-2 thrashing of Venezuela.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar's football legacy will be on display at Intercontinental Cup

With the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 set to take place between December 11-18, FIFA and the participating clubs completed a week-long visit to Qatar to familiarise themselves with stadiums, training sites and places of accommodation.

Continental club sides from around the world will contest the FIFA Derby of the Americas Qatar on December 11, the FIFA Challenger Cup on December 14 and the FIFA Intercontinental Cup on December 18.

Roberto Grassi, FIFA Head of Youth Tournaments spoke about Qatar's preparedness to host the tournament. He said: "Qatar have world-class sporting facilities for football and plenty of other sports. They have also developed hosting capabilities and a pool of expertise and talented people that have worked across all the events, including the World Cup. This legacy still lives here today and will be on full display during the FIFA Intercontinental Cup."

Stadium 974 will host two matches, before the much-anticipated final match at the iconic Lusail Stadium - marking the two-year anniversary of the historic FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 final.

Engineer Jassim al-Obaidly, Stadium 974 Venue Manager for the Local Organising Committee (LOC) said: "Stadium 974, like all other Qatar 2022 venues, has been built to the highest technical standards, and was specifically designed to deliver a stunning fan experience during matches. Its design reflects the innovative vision that guided all of the facilities we have here in Qatar."

The final match will take place at Lusail Stadium, a 89,000-seater revered by football fans around the world after it hosted what is regarded as the greatest FIFA World Cup final of all time.

Engineer Ali al-Dosari, LOC Lusail Stadium Venue Manager, said: "Lusail Stadium is one of the world's greatest stadiums. It is an arena that captured the world's imagination in Qatar 2022, and then again during the Asian Cup 2023. The venue will surely be a wonderful host to the final match of this tournament, creating new lifetime memories for fans from around the world."

Tickets for the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 are only available on <https://www.fifa.com/en/tickets> Follow @FICQatar on X, formerly known as Twitter, and Instagram for all tournament related updates.



FOOTBALL

Guardiola set to extend stay as Man City boss: Reports

Pep Guardiola is set to extend his stay in charge of Manchester City by signing a one-year extension to his contract, the *Athletic* reported. Guardiola has won six Premier League titles and the club's first ever Champions League since arriving at the Etihad in 2016.

The former Barcelona and Bayern Munich coach's current contract expires at the end of the season. There had been speculation that Guardiola's time could be coming to an end with City facing an uncertain future due to an ongoing hearing over 115 breaches of the Premier League's financial regulations.

The club's director of football Txiki Begiristain, a close ally of Guardiola, has confirmed his departure at the end of the season. The *Athletic* reported that the 53-year-old will pen a one-year extension to his deal with the option for another year.

Guardiola also signed his two previous contract extensions at City during the November international break. The English champions return to action on Saturday, looking to snap an unprecedented losing streak for their manager. Guardiola has lost four consecutive games for the first time in his coaching career. Hit by the loss of Ballon d'Or winner Rodri to a season-ending knee injury, City have fallen five points behind Liverpool at the top of the Premier League after defeats to Bournemouth and Brighton.

They also lost 4-1 to Sporting Lisbon in their last Champions League outing and were eliminated from the League Cup by Tottenham. But the retention of one of the most decorated coaches in football history would be a massive boost to the morale of

City players and fans. Guardiola has won 15 major honours in total during his eight full seasons in Manchester, which also includes two FA Cups, four League Cups, one Club World Cup and one UEFA Super Cup.

SPURS APPEAL AGAINST LENGTH OF BENTANCUR BAN FOR SON SLUR

Tottenham have appealed against the length of Rodrigo Bentancur's seven-game suspension for his controversial comments about teammate Son Heung-min.

Bentancur was banned by the Football Association on Monday, ruling him out of six Premier League fixtures and a League Cup quarter-final against Manchester United.

The 27-year-old Uruguay midfielder was charged with misconduct in September over a television interview he gave in his home country in June, with his reference to South Korea star Son's race making it an aggravated breach.

However, Tottenham are unhappy with the amount of games Bentancur will miss and released a statement confirming their intention to appeal.

Bentancur was asked during an interview to show the shirt of a Tottenham player, and replied: "Sonny's? It could be Sonny's cousin too as they all look the same."

He apologised on Instagram to Son for his remarks, and Son accepted that apology in a statement on the same platform.

Bentancur was also fined £100,000 (\$126,000), with the disciplinary panel insisting it should have been "reasonably foreseeable" to him that his remarks about Son would be widely distributed.