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SPOTLIGHT

QOC Ramadan tournament concludes with thrilling competitions

The 16th edition of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) Ramadan tournament 2025 concluded in grand fashion on Monday, following an exhilarating competition held from March 9 to 17 at the Lusail Shooting Complex.

The tournament was infused with a dynamic sporting spirit and a fierce competitive edge, attracting an esteemed presence of QOC employees and their families.

This unique event seamlessly blended athletic excellence with family camaraderie, all within the cherished traditions of Ramadan.

The closing day was attended by Jassim Bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary-General of the QOC, accompanied by Mohammed Issa al-Fadala, Director of the Sports Affairs Department at QOC.

Together, they honoured representatives from the Qatar Volleyball Association, the Qatar Shooting & Archery Association, the Qatar Cycling & Triathlon Federation, the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, Al Thumama Complex Management – Qatar's guests from Palestine, and Al Naseem Medical Center.

This recognition was a heartfelt tribute to their invaluable technical, logistical, administrative, and medical contributions, which



played a pivotal role in the tournament's resounding success and widespread admiration.

The atmosphere was good as the awards ceremony unfolded. Al-Buenain crowned the Sports Events Department team as the Beach Volleyball champions for the second consecutive year, following their commanding 2-0 victory over the President's Office team in the final. Player Hamad Gumaa was honoured as the tournament's Best Player for his stellar performance.

In the women's shooting competition, Hamad Lahdan al-Mohannadi, Director of the Support Services Sector at QOC, presented the individual category title to Noora al-Rahma, while the duo

Amna Murad and Roqaya Murad clinched the top spot in the doubles category. The ceremony was further enriched by the presence of Sheikh Fahad bin Khalid al-Thani, President of the Qatar Boxing and Wrestling Federation, who awarded prizes to Abdulhadi al-Shahwani, the men's individual shooting champion, as well as duo of Abdulhadi Mohsen al-Shahwani and Khalifa Mohsen al-Shahwani, who secured first place in the doubles category. Mana al-Jaal and Hamad al-Jaal earned the silver medal in the same category.

Sheikh Khalifa bin Khalid al-Thani, Director of the Sports Sector at QOC honoured the winners of the padel (men's doubles) competition. Sheikh Hassan Salman

al-Thani and Abdulaziz al-Baloshi won first place, while Adel al-Hashemi and Hamad al-Hashemi took second place, showcasing remarkable skill and determination in an electrifying contest.

The tournament's final day featured an inspiring participation of Qatar's guests from Palestine, spanning various age groups. They engaged in an array of sporting and recreational activities, including cycling, badminton, and an Olympic cultural event aimed at fostering sports awareness and instilling Olympic values among participants and their families.

Sheikh Khalifa said: "In this extraordinary edition of the QOC Ramadan Tournament, we took an exceptional initiative by inviting



Qatar's guests from Palestine to partake in a variety of sports and recreational events. This gesture embodies the values of love and fraternity that we strive to reinforce during the holy month of Ramadan."

He added: "We are committed to constantly evolving our ideas and initiatives. With every new edition, we expand the scope of participation, ensuring inclusivity beyond QOC employees to reach a wider community, in collaboration with numerous sports federations and social institutions."

Sheikh Khalifa highlighted the broader impact of the event: "By the grace of God, this tournament succeeded in bringing QOC employees and their families together

in a warm and festive Ramadan atmosphere, strengthening their bonds beyond the workplace. This sense of unity translates into a positive morale boost and enhanced performance in their professional environment."

Mana al-Jaal, Director of the QOC Ramadan Tournament, said: "I appreciate the participation of QOC employees and Qatar's guests from Palestine. The competitors delivered remarkable performances across all events, reflecting an exceptional level of competitiveness and excellence. Moreover, the organising committee introduced special incentive prizes to encourage employees to embrace sports as an integral part of their daily lifestyle."

FOCUS

Bach's successor needs cool head to guide Games: experts

'The next IOC president is going to have to possess political savvy, tact, a strong temperament and a steady hand'

AFP
Pylos, Greece

Whoever succeeds Thomas Bach as president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) today will need to be "cool under fire" with some members believing the very existence of the Olympic Movement is at stake.

Seven candidates are vying to become the most powerful person in sport governance and replace Bach, who steps down after a stormy 12-year tenure when he had to contend with Covid, a Russian doping scandal as well as Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"I believe this is the most significant Olympic election in nearly half a century," Michael Payne, a former head of IOC Marketing, told AFP.

"Some IOC members are even predicting that the very future of the Olympic Movement is at stake."

Payne, who in nearly two decades at the IOC was credited with renewing its brand and finances through sponsorship deals, said the Movement has "never been stronger" thanks in part to "perhaps the greatest Games ever" in Paris last year.

However, he added the "future outlook is fraught with risk."

"The IOC has not faced such a troubled geopolitical outlook in many years," the 66-year-old Irishman said.

"How the IOC navigates an ever more fractured political world, maintaining universality and how the IOC engages with a rapidly changing marketing and broadcast market will define the Movement's future."

Martin Sorrell – who founded advertising giant WPP and sat on the IOC's Communications Commission – said the next president



Seven International Olympic Committee presidential candidates pose with the outgoing president Thomas Bach. (@QNA_Sports)

required a particular skillset as there is "immense volatility in the world."

With the next Summer Games in Los Angeles in 2028, Bach's successor will have to deal with the unpredictability of US President Donald Trump.

"The next IOC president is going to have to possess political savvy, tact, a strong temperament and a steady hand," Sorrell told AFP. "The next president will have to be able to go to the White House and kiss the ring."

"He or she will also have to be cool under fire as there are three big geographical and geopoliti-

cal challenges ahead – Russia/Ukraine, China and the Middle East with Iran."

'BIG DAMN DEAL'

For another former IOC marketing executive, Terrence Burns, the next president must meet the challenge of "politicians' predictions to use the Olympic Games as a political tool."

"I think the next IOC president must pass what I call the 'joint press conference test,' meaning, who can you envision sitting across or next to today's world leaders and holding their own?" he told AFP.

"The IOC must remain independent, and I think that is going to be more and more challenging."

While Payne believes Trump will be "incredibly supportive" of the LA Games, he envisages "sleepless nights" ahead for the IOC president.

"(Trump's) foreign policy and sudden executive orders counting down to the Games risk creating issues," said Payne.

"It is going to take special diplomatic and political skills and agility to ensure that all 205 nations turn up in LA in 2028 and protect the universality of the Olympic Movement."

Sorrell says the "two big buckets are geopolitics and technology" and "we are seeing it in spades here."

"I would not underestimate the political and technological shifts the new president will have to deal with," said the 80-year-old Englishman. Burns, who since leaving the IOC has been a member of six victorious Olympic Games hosting bids, concurs with that.

"AI (Artificial Intelligence) is – not probably, but is – upending everything from education to governance," he said. "A few years ago, the stable economic and geopolitical construct that ushered in

the modern, peaceful world was a 'given' – now it is not."

Burns add that this ups the ante for the challenges that lie ahead for Bach's successor.

"All this to say the next IOC president will face challenges as well as the pace of them that his/her predecessors could never have imagined," he said.

"So, yes, this election is a big damn deal in the Olympic world and for global sport in general."

Juan Antonio Samaranch Junior, Sebastian Coe and Kirsty Coventry are the frontrunners among the seven candidates to replace Bach.

FOCUS

Djokovic player union files lawsuit against tennis' governing bodies

AFP
Miami Gardens, United States

A tennis union co-founded by **Novak Djokovic** yesterday announced a series of legal actions aimed at the sport's governing bodies, alleging "anti-competitive restraints and abusive practices".

The Professional Tennis Players' Association (PTPA) said it was suing both tour organisers, the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) and the Women's Tennis Association (WTA).

The International Tennis Federation (ITF), and International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) were also named as defendants in a series of actions in the United States, United Kingdom and the European Union.

Both the ATP and WTA responded by vowing to defend themselves against the claims with the men's tour saying the PTPA has "consistently chosen division and

distraction through misinformation over progress".

The PTPA was set up by Djokovic and Canadian Vasek Pospisil in 2020. Some 20 players were named as part of at least one of the actions.

"The lawsuits expose systemic abuse, anti-competitive practices, and a blatant disregard for player welfare that have persisted for decades," said the PTPA statement.

"The ATP, WTA, ITF, and ITIA operate as a cartel by implementing a number of draconian, interlocking anti-competitive restraints and abusive practices."

"Tennis is broken," said Ahmad Nassar, Executive Director of the PTPA. "Behind the glamorous veneer that the defendants promote, players are trapped in an unfair system that exploits their talent, suppresses their earnings, and jeopardises their health and safety."

The statement listed alleged abuses they are targeting.

It said the defendants "collud-

ed", "fixing prize money and suppressing player earnings" forcing "an unsustainable schedule" and exploiting players financially.

The bodies show a "disregard for players" by making them "compete in 100-degree (Fahrenheit) heat, endure matches that ended at 3am, and play with different and injury-inducing tennis balls".

The PTPA also cited image right ownership, sponsorship restrictions and the "draconian system of ranking points". The statement also complained that tennis violates player "privacy rights".

Players are subjected to invasive searches of personal devices, random middle-of-the-night drug tests, and interrogations without legal representation," it said.

The ATP said that it was continuing to make change, with player input and hit back at the union.

"While the ATP has remained focused on delivering reforms that benefit players at multiple levels, the PTPA has consistently chosen division and distraction through

misinformation over progress," the statement read. "Five years on from its inception in 2020, the PTPA has struggled to establish a meaningful role in tennis, making its decision to pursue legal action at this juncture unsurprising."

"We strongly reject the premise of the PTPA's claims, believe the case to be entirely without merit, and will vigorously defend our position. The ATP remains committed to working in the best interests of the game - towards continued growth, financial stability, and the best possible future for our players, tournaments, and fans," the tour concluded.

The WTA also defended their approach to the game and said that PTPA's action "is both regrettable and misguided, and we will defend our position vigorously in due course."

In addition to Djokovic and Pospisil, the seven-member PTPA executive council also includes players, Hubert Hurkacz, Ons Jabeur, Bethanie Mattek-Sands, Taylor



Townsend and Zheng Saisai. Australian Nick Kyrgios, France's Varvara Gracheva and American Reilly Opelka have joined the PTPA's case in the United States, while Frenchman Corentin Moutet and Japan's Taro Daniel have joined the case in the United Kingdom

CRICKET

Big-hitting NZ crush Pakistan in Dunedin T20

THE HOME SIDE REACHED 137-5 WITH 11 BALLS TO SPARE



New Zealand's Tim Seifert bats during the second Twenty20 match against Pakistan at University of Otago Oval in Dunedin yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Dunedin

New Zealand's openers went on a six-hitting blitz yesterday to thrash Pakistan by five wickets and go 2-0 up in their Twenty20 series.

The home side reached 137-5 with 11 balls to spare in Dunedin to take control of the five-match series after Pakistan posted 135-9 off 15 overs in a rain-reduced second match.

New Zealand's highlight was a ferocious opening stand between Tim Seifert and Finn Allen in which seven of the first eight scoring shots were sixes.

Remarkably, Seifert played out

a maiden off Shaheen Shah Afridi's opening over before Allen cleared the small University Oval boundary three times in the second over, bowled by Mohammad Ali. Seifert then smashed 26 off Afridi's second over, including four sixes.

Seifert, who top-scored with 44 in the nine-wicket win in Christchurch on Sunday, departed on 45 off 22 balls.

Allen fell soon afterwards for 38 off 16, with the openers hammering five sixes each.

White-ball specialist Allen said both batsmen are naturally big-hitters and took a simple mindset into the run chase.

"We just looked to be positive, try and get ahead of the chase early and make it easy for our

middle order to finish it off," said Allen, who was confident they could run down the target.

"It's kind of hard to assess in a 15-over game but defending out here is pretty tough. Those are small boundaries so the ball tends to fly a bit here, so I think maybe 170 would have been competitive."

Four New Zealand wickets fell in the space of four overs midway through the chase before Mitch Hay's unbeaten 21 made the outcome safe.

Earlier, captain Salman Agha top-scored with 46 off 28 balls, launching a recovery after Pakistan were sent in and lost opener Hasan Nawaz without scoring for the second time in the series.

They were 19-2 in the fourth

over before the skipper embarked on a knock that featured four fours and three sixes. Shadab Khan was aggressive in the middle order with 26 off 14 balls and Afridi was not-out 22 off 14.

Four New Zealand bowlers took two wickets, including seamer Ben Sears and all-rounder Jimmy Neesham, who were both recalled, in place of Tim Robinson and Kyle Jamieson.

New Zealand can wrap up the series if victorious in game three in Auckland on Friday.

BRIEF SCORES
New Zealand 137 for 5 (Seifert 45, Allen 38, Rauf 2-20) **beat Pakistan 135 for 9** (Agha 46, Sodhi 2-17, Duffy 2-20, Sears 2-23) **by five wickets**

SPOTLIGHT

England board opposed to Saudi Arabia-backed T20 league idea

Reuters
Melbourne

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive Richard Gould said they would not support a proposed global Twenty20 league bankrolled by Saudi Arabia as there was not enough room in the calendar for it.

A *Sydney Morning Herald* report on Saturday said the event would be backed by the sports arm of Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund and feature eight teams playing in four different locations.

"With the busy international calendar, a host of established franchise leagues around the world, and existing concerns about player workloads, there is no scope or demand for such an idea," Gould told the same newspaper.

"It's not something that we

would support." The ECB is keen to protect its own 100-ball format league, The Hundred, having raised \$1.27bn last month after selling franchise stakes to private investors.

The Indian Premier League remains the benchmark in franchise cricket, while Australia, Pakistan, West Indies, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates also have their own T20 leagues.

The Australian Cricketers Association has backed the proposed league saying it was mandated to "pursue initiatives that benefit our members".

"The ACA's early interest in exploring this concept is motivated by a desire to develop and normalise best-practice collective bargaining and an international gender-equity pay model for male and female cricketers," the player's union was quoted as saying in the report.

COMMENT

De Villiers backs balanced RCB to break IPL duck this season

Reuters
Bengaluru

Team balance and Virat Kohli's reassuring presence in the top order have convinced AB de Villiers that his former club Royal Challengers Bengaluru can win their maiden Indian Premier League title this year.

One of the league's most glamorous sides often boasting some of the most explosive batters in the world, RCB made three finals but fell short on each occasion to remain an IPL under-achiever.

They will enter their 18th season under a new captain, Rajat Patidar, while Englishman Phil Salt will be Kohli's opening partner.

"I really think they made some incredibly good moves in the (player) auction," De Villiers, who spent 11 seasons with RCB, told an online press conference yesterday. "It's an incredibly good, balanced team."

"Look at the batting lineup - it's pure power, then a mix of power and control. I do feel this squad has got what it takes to go all the way."

Liam Livingstone, Jacob Bethell and Tim David beef up RCB's middle order while Australia's Josh

Hazlewood will combine with the crafty Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the pace department.

De Villiers said Kohli had been subject of "unnecessary criticism" over his strike-rate and said the veteran batter had plenty to offer.

"He might have called retirement on T20 internationals but I feel there's plenty left in the tank for Virat, especially with that batting lineup RCB he's got this season," the South African said.

"I don't think Virat is going to feel a lot of pressure. He can just really go out there and play what he sees in front of him, and that is when Virat is at his absolute best when he plays the situation."

Salt's aggression will take the pressure off Kohli and let him control the innings as the team's "batting captain", De Villiers said.

"All Virat needs to do is keep doing what he's been doing for so many years - control the game," he added. "He's got the best instinct of any player out there. He knows when to up the ante a bit and when to lower it, when to take more risk and when to take less risk."

"I think he needs to be the captain of the batting department in this tournament, and really just keep things together and play smart cricket."

NBA STAR LEBRON 'HAPPY TO HAVE HELPED' ANDREEVA TO INDIAN WELLS WIN

Indian Wells, California: NBA star LeBron James said he was happy to have helped Mirra Andreeva after the Russian teenager credited one of his past interviews where he talked about the importance of mental strength for inspiring her to victory at Indian Wells on Sunday.

Andreeva beat world number one Aryna Sabalenka 2-6 6-4 6-3 in the final to clinch her second straight WTA 1000 title after winning the Dubai Championship last month.

Andreeva said in an interview with *Tennis Channel* on Monday that she had taken James' comments to heart.

"He was saying that even if you don't

play 100% or even if you don't feel 100% physically, I'm going to choose to be 100% mentally," she said.

"He said that's what makes us champions, so I kind of tried to do the same..."

James, the NBA's all-time leading scorer and four-times champion, congratulated the 17-year-old on her win and urged her to keep going.

"Congratulations! Happy to have helped," James wrote on Instagram late on Monday.

"But honestly YOU did THAT!! All your hard work, drive, and dedication toward your craft. KEEP GOING! strive for greatness."

Swiatek surprised at 'harsh judgements' after Indian Wells ball boy incident

World number two Iga Swiatek said she was not proud of the way she vented her frustration at Indian Wells, where she nearly hit a ball boy after smashing a ball into the ground, but added that she did not expect to receive "such harsh judgements".

The five-times Grand Slam champion was criticised heavily over the incident, which occurred during her 7-6(1) 1-6 6-3 semi-final defeat by eventual champion Mirra Andreeva on Friday.

"It's true - I expressed frustration in a way I'm not proud of. My intention was never

to aim the ball at anyone but merely to release my frustration by bouncing it on the ground," Swiatek posted on Instagram on Monday.

'I immediately apologised'

"I immediately apologised to the ball boy, we made eye contact, and nodded to each other when I expressed regret that it happened near him."

"I've seen many players bounce balls in frustration, and frankly, I didn't expect such harsh judgements."

Swiatek added that the second half of last year was extremely challenging for her. The Polish superstar accepted a one-

month suspension in November having tested positive for banned substance trimetazidine (TMZ).

"When I'm highly focused and don't show many emotions on court, I'm called a robot, my attitude labelled as inhuman," Swiatek said.

"Now that I'm more expressive, showing feelings or struggling internally, I'm suddenly labelled immature or hysterical," Swiatek said.

"That's not a healthy standard - especially considering that just six months ago, I felt my career was hanging by a thread, spent three weeks crying daily, and didn't want to step on the court."

ATHLETICS

Ingebrigtsen targets 1,500m world double

Reuters
Oslo

Despite the incredible success he has enjoyed so far in his career, Jakob Ingebrigtsen has never won a world title in the 1,500 metres and that is something he is determined to put right, indoors and out, in Nanjing and Tokyo this season.

The Norwegian arrived in China at the weekend for next week's world indoor championships and will return to Asia in September for the outdoor edition at Tokyo's National Stadium, where he won Olympic gold in the event in 2021.

"That's definitely the goal for the season," he told reporters from China yesterday. "I try to do as well as I can, try to participate as much as possible, but ultimately the 1,500 metres is my main event

and my favourite event. So that's always going to be the main focus and the main goal.

"I've been fortunate enough to have visible improvement in my personal best in the last couple years, and I'm still a big believer that I can continue that going for many years in the future."

Ingebrigtsen won silver behind Samuel Tefera in the 1,500 at his only previous indoor worlds in Belgrade in 2022, missing out on last year's edition in Glasgow because of an Achilles injury.

In the last two outdoor world 1,500s he was beaten into silver in almost identical circumstances by British duo Jake Wightman, in Eugene 2022, and Josh Kerr in Budapest 2023.

The 24-year-old also failed in his attempt to retain his 1,500 title at the Paris Olympics last year, but did go home with a gold in the

5,000 to add to the back-to-back outdoor world titles he won in the longer event in 2022 and 2023.

He has been in impressive indoor form this year, setting world records for the mile and 1,500 in France in February and taking the 1,500-3,000 double for the third time at the European Championships in the Netherlands earlier this month.

"I feel strong, I feel good. I'm improving," he said. "I think that's a good way to kind of conclude that we're definitely on the right path and doing some right things and hopefully improving in general.

"I think, if not better, I'm definitely as good as I've been before. And, of course, I think I've improved a little bit."

Ingebrigtsen competes as often as he can and in Nanjing he will be targeting the men's 1,500-3,000 double – a feat achieved only once

at the world indoors by Ethiopian great Haile Gebrselassie in 1999.

"I really thrive in a competitive environment. That's how I've always been," he added.

"If it weren't for the competition of it, I would definitely not be able to be so dedicated and structured in my training, because everything is with a goal in mind, and that goal is ultimately a competition."

As Gebrselassie did during his celebrated career, Ingebrigtsen has ambitions to take on the challenge of longer distances both on the track and the road. From now until the end of September, however, his focus is resolutely on more success on the track.

"I never look at my competitors and say that I'm going to beat them," he said. "I'm going to try to do as well as I can, and if I can do my best, and do 100%, of course I will win."



Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen celebrates after winning the final of the men's 1,500m event during the European Athletics Indoor Championships at Omnisport in Apeldoorn, on March 7, 2025. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Bach says peace is the watchword for Olympism

Moving speech by outgoing International Olympic Committee chief

AFP
Olympia, Greece

Thomas Bach focused on how peace is the essence of the Olympics but also how fragile it is in a speech yesterday at the opening of the final International Olympic Committee session he will preside over after 12 years in power.

The seven candidates vying to succeed the 71-year-old German as IOC president were in the audience gathered in a marquee as the rain poured at Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympics.

Bach's successor will be elected tomorrow but he will remain till June to ensure a smooth handover, something not accorded to him when he replaced Jacques Rogge in 2013.

"The Olympic Games and the values they represent have endured for millennia," said Bach.

"And yet, the course of human history reminds us of their fragility."

Bach himself has had a turbulent ride including a Russian doping scandal at the 2014 Sochi Winter Games, Russia's invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 and the Covid pandemic.

The latter forced the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Summer Games to 2021 and affected the 2022 Beijing Winter Games.

Bach, speaking at a ceremony which mixed speeches by Greek dignitaries and entertainment including a rousing rendition of "Zorba The Greek", said the rain was a good omen.

He said the heavy rain at the



Outgoing International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach delivers a speech during the Opening ceremony of the 144th IOC Session at the Ancient Olympia archaeological site, birthplace of the ancient Olympics in southern Greece, yesterday. (AFP)

Paris 2024 Games opening ceremony was followed by a successful fortnight of competition.

"Nothing can go wrong," he said drily, referring to the Session.

Bach's more serious message was about the original Olympic Truce (the ekecheiria), how warring nations laid down arms for just over two weeks and how the concept was revived by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, seen as the creator of the modern Games.

"Then as now, the idea of promoting peace through sport was

in stark contrast to the prevailing Zeitgeist," said Bach.

"When we see today how Coubertin went against all the divisive and bellicose trends of his time, we can only admire even more his courage and audacity."

Bach, who won fencing team gold in the 1976 Montreal Games, had to balance the strong emotions aroused over Russia's invasion of Ukraine when it came to Russian participation in Paris last year.

Ultimately some were permit-

ted to – if they met certain conditions – but only as neutral athletes.

"The athletes even came together before the opening of the Olympic Games to make a moving call for peace," he said.

"This call for peace included athletes whose countries are presently divided by war and conflict.

"The athletes showed us how our world would be, if we all were to live in this Olympic spirit of peaceful co-existence."

FOCUS

IOC session opens in Greece as presidential election looms



A group of dancers performs during the opening ceremony of the 144th IOC at the Ancient Olympia archaeological site, birthplace of the ancient Olympics in southern Greece, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Ancient Olympia, Greece

The International Olympic Committee kicked off its session in Olympia, site of the ancient Games, yesterday that will culminate with the election of a new president tomorrow.

Outgoing President Thomas Bach, in his speech at the Olympic academy near the ancient stadium, made only a fleeting reference to tomorrow's key vote where seven candidates will take a shot at world sport's most powerful and influential job.

The IOC is the world's wealthiest multi-sports organisation with revenues of about \$7bn per four-year cycle.

"This is a exactly what this session is about. A sacred pilgrimage to our ancient past," Bach told an audience that included IOC members and Greece's President Konstantinos Tasoulas.

"An homage to our modern origins and to our founder. And a manifestation of our faith in the future, when we will elect a new president," said Bach, who is stepping down in June after 12 years in charge.

The candidates hoping to win the top job are international cycling chief David Lappartient, current IOC vice-president Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr, World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe, multiple Olympic swimming champion Kirsty Coventry, who is Zimbabwe's sports minister, and Prince Feisal al-Hussein of Jordan.

International Gymnastics Federation head Morinari Watanabe and Olympic newcomer and multimillionaire Johan Eliasch, who heads the International Ski and Snowboard Federation, complete the list of candidates.

While there is no clear front-runner, as was the case in 2013 when then-favourite Bach swept to victory, Coe, Samaranch and Coventry, long seen as Bach's preferred choice, are considered to have an edge over the other candidates.

Just over 100 IOC members, including federation chiefs, national Olympic committee presidents, royalty and billionaires among others, will cast their votes tomorrow.

The new president is elected on an eight-year term with the possibility of re-election to a second four-year term for a maximum of 12 years in total.

UK ATHLETICS PLEADS NOT GUILTY OVER DEATH OF PARALYMPIAN

London: UK Athletics and a 77-year-old man have pleaded not guilty to manslaughter over the death of a Paralympian who was hit on the head by a metal pole during training. Abdullah Hayayei, 36, who represented the United Arab Emirates, was pronounced dead at the scene at Newham Leisure Centre, east London, on July 11, 2017.

He was training to represent the UAE in discus, javelin and shot put at the World Para Athletics Championships in London when part of a throwing cage fell on him.

Keith Davies, head of sport for the 2017 World Para Athletics Championships, pleaded not guilty to a charge of gross negligence manslaughter and a health and safety offence when he appeared at the Old Bailey court in London yesterday.

UK Athletics Limited, the national governing body for athletics, also pleaded not guilty to a charge of corporate manslaughter and a health and safety offence. An eight-week trial was set for October 12, 2026 at the Old Bailey.

Davies was released on unconditional bail.

Kenya orders arrest of track star Tirop's husband for her murder
Nairobi: Kenya yesterday issued an arrest warrant for top athlete Agnes Tirop's husband who is suspected of murdering her, after he failed to appear in court for a second time. Tirop, hailed as

one of Kenya's most promising new track stars, was stabbed to death aged 25 in October 2021 in an incident that shocked the athletics world.

Her husband Ibrahim Rotich, 45, was due to appear in Eldoret court in western Kenya but prosecuting lawyer Leonard Okaka said he was "nowhere to be traced".

Rotich also failed to appear in court last month. Tirop was a double world 10,000m bronze medalist and 2015 world cross country champion who also finished fourth in the 5,000m at the Tokyo Olympics.

She also smashed the world women-only record in the 10km road race in Germany in the month before her killing.

Rotich denied killing Tirop, whose body was found at her home in the athletics training hub of Iten in western Kenya.

Eldoret high court judge Robert Wananda issued an arrest warrant yesterday, asking police to bring Rotich to court on April 8.

Rotich was released on bail in November 2023 after being held in custody for two years.

Under the bail conditions, he was barred from leaving his home county of Uasin Gishu, of which Eldoret is the main town.

Prosecuting lawyer Okaka called for him to have forfeited his 400,000 shillings (\$3,000) cash bond.

MOTORSPORT

F1 boss Domenicali holds talks with Thailand on hosting Grand Prix

AFP
Bangkok

Formula One boss Stefano Domenicali held talks with Thailand's prime minister yesterday about possible plans to bring a Grand Prix to the kingdom.

The Italian ex-Ferrari boss who has just extended his contract to lead the sport until 2029, is keen to examine new markets as the sport soars in popularity, and Thailand has suggested it may be interested.

Most of Formula One's 24-race schedule is locked in for several years, but gaps are set to open up and Domenicali suggested at the weekend that Thailand could be a contender to join the circuit.

After the talks, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said Thailand would move ahead with a feasibility study to examine the

pros and cons of hosting F1 – including the costs and where the race would be run.

"It's not just about the honour of hosting the race, but also a significant opportunity to develop urban infrastructure, welcome tourists from around the world to Thailand and develop industry and service sectors," she posted on social media platform X.

REGULAR FIXTURE ON THE MOTOGP CIRCUIT

Thailand's northeastern Buriram track has become a regular fixture on the MotoGP circuit, hosting the season opening race earlier this month, but the kingdom has never hosted Formula 1.

Government spokesman Jirayu Houngsub said the prime minister told Domenicali that Thailand would work with F1 officials to see how a Grand Prix could work in the kingdom.

Domenicali visited Bangkok in April last year for talks with then-prime minister Srettha Thavasin, who pitched his vision of bringing a race to the sprawling, traffic-clogged Thai capital.

Thai officials said at the time they envisaged a street circuit, possibly around Bangkok's historic centre, as the kingdom looks to boost its image internationally through a host of "soft power" initiatives.

But Thailand is not the only country knocking at F1's door – historic hosts France and Germany are seeking a return to the calendar, while the Turkish Grand Prix, last held in 2021, is also seen as a likely candidate.

The Asia-Pacific region currently hosts four races – in Australia, China, Japan and Singapore – while Thailand is represented on the grid by Alex Albon of Williams, who finished fifth in Melbourne.

MOTORSPORT

Nasser al-Kuwari announces retirement after 25-year career

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatari co-driver **Nasser Saadon al-Kuwari** has announced his retirement from rally competitions, marking the end of a distinguished 25-year career. Al-Kuwari, who has partnered with 31 drivers from various countries, achieved notable success throughout his career, winning multiple regional and international titles.

Earlier this year, al-Kuwari finished fourth in the Challenger category at the gruelling Dakar Rally and also secured fourth place in the same category at the Middle East Baja Cup after the first round in Hail, Saudi Arabia, alongside his brother, Abdulaziz. Al-Kuwari's other key achievements include winning the Middle East Rally Championship seven times, the Qatar Rally Championship ten times and the Kuwait Rally Championship six times, along with several other regional and international titles.

In an Instagram post, al-Kuwari described the decision as the most difficult one he has ever made while reflecting on his career. "Today I am taking the most



difficult decision of my life so far. I have decided to retire from my motorsports career after spending the past 25 years in rally cars. Over those years, I have partnered with 31 professional drivers and represented Qatar in the best possible way I could. I have won seven Middle East champion-

ships, ten Qatar National Championships, and six Kuwait National Championships. Now, I will have more time to spend with my kids, family, and my career at beIN Sports," he wrote.

The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) issued a statement expressing gratitude for al-Kuwari's contributions to the sport in Qatar and the region. "The QMMF extends its sincere thanks and appreciation to champion Nasser al-Kuwari for his outstanding contribution to shaping the history of motorsport in Qatar. He has played a vital role in developing the sport both locally and internationally, elevating Qatar's name in global competitions. His retirement marks the end of a distinguished era, and we are grateful for all he has contributed to the field. We wish him the best of luck in his future endeavours," the statement added.

Al-Kuwari comes from a family of rally enthusiasts, having produced multiple rally drivers who went on to represent Qatar. Al-Kuwari and his brother, Abdulaziz, followed in those same tracks. Al-Kuwari's grandfather was the first Qatari rally driver in 1975, while his father started rallying in 1983, and all five of his uncles were rally drivers as well.



After more than 12 years, the al-Kuwari brothers, Nasser (left) and Abdulaziz, reunited to win the Jordan National Rally in their first joint race.

FOOTBALL

Newcastle hero Burn focused on England duty

The 32-year-old's goal helped Newcastle finally end their 56-year trophy drought

AFP
Burton upon Trent, United Kingdom

Dan Burn has cut short his celebrations of Newcastle's historic League Cup triumph as the defender focuses on his first England call-up. Burn headed Newcastle's first-half opener in their stunning 2-1 win against Premier League leaders Liverpool in the League Cup final at Wembley on Sunday.

The 32-year-old's goal helped Newcastle finally end their 56-year trophy drought, setting off wild celebrations at Wembley and back home on Tyneside. It was the culmination of a remarkable week for Burn, who had received his maiden call-up into the England squad on Friday.

As a boyhood Newcastle fan born just a few miles from the city, Burn could have been forgiven for wanting to make the most of the party that followed the Magpies' long-awaited success. But the centre-back knew he was due to report for England duty on Monday morning.

So he wisely opted against joining the partying to keep him fresh ahead of Thomas Tuchel's first game in charge of England in Friday's World Cup qualifier against Albania at Wembley. "It was strange. As soon as I left the stadium on Sunday my focus completely switched to this," Burn said at England's training base.

"I had my family and the kids and we



England's Dan Burn (left) and Anthony Gordon train at the St George's Park. (Reuters)

ended up getting on the bus about 12 o'clock back to the hotel. It was getting a bit rowdy and I was just ready to go to sleep. There will be time to celebrate. I know the club's put stuff out about there being a parade, so

I think that's when I'll celebrate. But I've waited a long time for this opportunity and didn't want to spoil it."

Burn, released by Newcastle's academy at the age of 11, has enjoyed a late rise to

prominence after labouring in obscurity for much of his career. Permanent and loan spells at unheralded lower league clubs including Darlington, Yeovil, Birmingham and Wigan were all valuable experiences for the giant defender, who eventually seized his chance at Brighton before joining Newcastle in 2022.

"It's probably made me very resilient," he said. "I don't think I've had a straight-line trajectory in my career - I started really late and it's been very up and down."

He added: "I feel I've been doubted a lot over my career. I doubt many people who watched me play at Darlington would say that I'd be sat here doing a press conference for England."

Despite his impressive form for Eddie Howe's side, Burn felt his England chance had passed him by when he did not make it into Gareth Southgate's squad for Euro 2024.

"I think I have been overlooked, but I understood it," he said.

Now Burn has his sights on capping a fairytale spell by earning a place in England's 2026 World Cup squad. "Once you've been passed over during so many international breaks, you sort of accept the time has passed, but luckily the new manager has taken a chance on me," he said. "Obviously it's every kid's dream to play in a World Cup or even to play for your country, so to know I've got that opportunity, if I take it, it's special."

Qatar to face Egypt in U-23 friendly opener today

Doha: The Qatar U-23 national football team will kick off their international friendly tournament against Egypt at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha today. Croatia, Thailand, Australia and the United Arab Emirates are also taking part in the event.

The tournament, running until March 25, promises thrilling international football action.

In addition to Qatar's match, the tournament will also see Croatia take on Australia at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, while the UAE will face Thailand at Saud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium in Al Wakrah.

These fixtures are set to offer fans a dynamic blend of talent from across the globe.

The Qatari team has been preparing for this tournament with a focused internal training camp that began on March 12. During this camp, the coaching staff has emphasised the importance of these friendly matches as part of the team's overall preparation for the AFC U-23 Championship qualifiers, scheduled for September 2025.

A few days ago, Portuguese head coach Elidio Vale unveiled the roster for the tournament. The 29 players selected include talented young athletes from top Qatari clubs, such as Jassim al-Sharshani, Mohammed al-Ishaq, Nour El-Din Ibrahim and Marwan Sharif, among others. The full squad is set to showcase the depth and potential of Qatari football at the international level.

India could potentially host Italian Super Cup, says Serie A commercial director

Bengaluru: Serie A might consider India as a potential host for the Italian Super Cup, in an effort to broaden the tournament's global audience, the Italian league's commercial and marketing director Michele Ciccarese has said.

The Italian Super Cup, which is played between the winners and the runners-up of the previous season's Serie A and Coppa Italia, was hosted in Saudi Arabia in January where AC Milan defeated Inter Milan 3-2 to win the trophy for the eighth time.

When asked about India's potential to host the Super Cup, Ciccarese confirmed that it aligned with the league's strategy. "What we do is to bring our international trophy like the Super Cup in all over the world, for a simple reason, to engage a wider audience and bring the best of that culture," Ciccarese said during the RCB Innovation Lab Indian Sports Summit. "So, that's exactly what we might do, and take the conversation forward to ... come here and play in India."

India's bid to host the 2036 Olympics is an attempt to position the country as a global sports hub. Ciccarese suggested that the influence of the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket competition could promote the country and bring attention to the achievements of other sports, drawing parallels with the "Made in Italy" project.

"Made in Italy is how we engaged with all the 20 Serie A clubs, and each club provides one of the important players to promote, not only the city, but the clubs, the territory, the production chain and everything that is around that club," he said.

"That's exactly what we are suggesting, or maybe potentially to create a cross-market activation with the IPL together in order to help grow the grassroots, to have the right presence in the 2036 Olympics for Indian football."

SPOTLIGHT

Courtois wants to move forward ahead of return

AFP
Tubize, Belgium

Belgium goalkeeper **Thibaut Courtois** says he explained his decision to refuse to play for the national team under former coach Domenico Tedesco "in front of the squad" after his return to the fold. The Real Madrid number one had a public falling out with Tedesco after not being named captain for a game against Austria in June 2023, saying he felt "insulted".

But the 32-year-old is set to return on Thursday in a Nations League relegation play-off against Ukraine after being named in new coach Rudi Garcia's first



squad. "When I arrived (at the training centre), it was good to be able to speak in front of the players because a lot of false

things have been said," Courtois told reporters. "Let's not talk about it anymore. I'm relieved... I made mistakes. I was probably going through a difficult period mentally. I'd had a long, hard season (in 2023) with injuries. I felt there were problems with the coach."

Courtois, who has 102 caps for his country, said he was disrespected by Tedesco. "I didn't feel any respect," he added. "The coach never came to see me. I'd never seen that in 16 years. I exploded at that moment because I didn't understand."

Belgium have struggled since a group-stage exit at the 2022 World Cup, when they were affected by reported infighting, which led to then-coach Roberto Martinez stepping down. Many of the

Belgium side which topped the world rankings from 2018 until 2021 have retired, including former skipper Eden Hazard.

The Belgians were eliminated from Euro 2024 in the last 16 by France, with Koen Casteels in goal in Courtois' absence. "This story, which has been making headlines worldwide, has hurt the squad. So it's good to clear the air," said midfielder Youri Tielemans.

Frenchman Garcia has signed a contract through to the end of next year's World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada, but his first task is to keep Belgium in the top flight of the Nations League. It is the former Lille and Roma boss's first job since a disastrous stint at Napoli last season.

FOCUS

Wood targets New Zealand history at World Cup

AFP
Wellington

Chris Wood has fired Nottingham Forest into surprise Champions League contention and now the striker wants to score the goals to help New Zealand make history at the World Cup.

New Zealand are strong favourites to qualify out of the Oceania region over the next week and reach the World Cup for only the third time. At the country's two previous appearances at the finals, in 1982 and 2010, they have failed to win a match in six attempts.

With Wood captaining the side and leading from the front, he told local media on Tuesday that the current squad can finally deliver a World Cup victory. "That will be our goal if we're there, to win a game and progress out into the group stages," the in-form



33-year-old said.

"It's the mentality of proving it, and I believe we can. The squad is only getting bigger and better, and moving on to bigger and better clubs. They're proving around the world that they're good enough and capable enough of playing in the best leagues in the world."

Wood is enjoying the best season of his career, hitting 18 goals in the Premier League and rubbing shoulders in the scoring charts with Alexander Isak and

Erling Haaland. His exploits have helped propel Forest into third place in the table and if they stay there it would guarantee Champions League football.

Other New Zealanders playing in Europe include Marko Stamenic at Olympiacos in Greece, Tyler Bindon at Reading and Matt Garbett with Breda in the Netherlands. The 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico has been expanded to 48 teams, ensuring a team from Oceania will gain automatic qualification.

To seal their place, New Zealand must first beat Fiji on Friday in Wellington before a decisive qualifier against either New Caledonia or Tahiti on Monday. "This team is probably one of the best ones that (we've had) in history," said Wood, who has scored 41 goals in 80 games for New Zealand. "But they have to prove that on the pitch to class themselves as one of those. Making a World Cup is the way to do that."