

Barshim, Samba spearhead Qatar squad at Worlds

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar will field a formidable 12-man contingent at the upcoming World Athletics Championships, set to take place in Tokyo, Japan.

Team Qatar comprises a mix of seasoned champions and emerging talents, as the athletes strive to make their presence felt on the world's biggest stage of athletics.

Qatar's most celebrated athlete, three-time consecutive gold medalist in the high jump (London 2017, Doha 2019, Eugene 2022) and the bronze winner in Budapest two years ago, Mutaz Barshim will lead the contingent at the one-week track and field gala which kicks off on September 13.

Barshim, the former Olympic champion and current bronze medal holder with the second-highest jump in history (2.43 meters) to his name, will be one of the favourites for the podium this time, while Qatar will have more medal hopes in track events.

After skipping the Diamond League and several international contests and his own What Gravity Challenge in Doha due to recovery from a minor



Mutaz Barshim and Abderrahman Samba will lead Qatar's contingent.

injury and to focus on the Worlds, the 34-year-old made his only appearance this year at the West Asian Clubs Championships at the Suheim Bin Hamad Stadium in April.

Former World Championships bronze medallist (Doha 2019) Abderrahman Samba, ranked fourth in the

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world this season, will also aim for a podium position in the men's 400 metres hurdles event, which will see a star-studded line-up that sees Norway's World record holder Karsten Warholm, American Rai Benjamin and Olympic medallist Alison Dos Santos of Brazil.

The three-time Asian Games gold winner Samba proved he is back in serious business ahead of the Worlds when he came second at the Zurich Diamond League Final last month, behind Warholm, who delivered a meet-record run.

Qatar will field two more athletes in the one-lap hurdles event, in the reigning Asian champion, Bassem

Hemeida and Ismail Doudai Abakar, boasting a formidable presence in the event.

Hemeida is currently ranked 24th in the world and has shown consistent improvement, while rising star Abakar will also be looking to impress.

In the 400 meters, Ammar Ismail Yahia Ibrahim will represent Qatar. The world No. 31 has a season-best time of 44.90 seconds, has the potential to challenge the fancied contenders.

With plenty of arsenal in their possession, Qatar will also have high hopes on the men's 4 x 400 meters relay team.

The team, which includes the formidable quartet of Ismail Doudai Abakar, Ashraf Hussein, Bassem Hemeida and Ammar Ismail, has the potential to spring a surprise and challenge for a place on the podium.

Ibrahim Abass M Chuot will compete in the 800 meters, while Oumar Doudai Abakar will be looking to make his mark in the 110-meter hurdles.

In the pole vault, Seifeldin Heneida Abdesalam will be in action at the iconic National Stadium in Tokyo, rounding up a star-studded line-up for Qatar.



Qatar eye U-23 Asian Cup spot in clash against Bahrain

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DOHA: Qatar will look to secure a spot in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup finals when they face Bahrain today at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in the final round of Group H qualifiers.

The Qatari side currently leads the group with 6 points, following dominant wins over Brunei (13-0) and India (2-1).

A third straight victory would guarantee them a place in the tournament finals for the sixth time in their history.

Head coach Ildio Vale is counting on the team's momentum, built on strong possession, tight defensive organisation and quick transitions.

Key players such as Jassim Al-Sharshani, Al-Hashemi Al-Hussein, and striker Mustafa Al-Sayed, who netted four goals against Brunei, have been instrumental in Qatar's campaign. Others like Noureddine Ibrahim, Marwan Baramel, and Abdulaziz Mohammed have also made notable contributions.

Bahrain, meanwhile, sit on three points after a 10-0 win over Brunei, having lost their opener to India 2-0. They must win to keep their qualification hopes alive.

The AFC U-23 Championship qualifiers feature 44 teams split into 11 groups. Group winners and the four best runners-up advance to the finals, along with host nation Saudi Arabia.

Tunisia book World Cup berth

JOHANNESBURG: Mohamed Ben Romdhane scored in added time to give Tunisia a 1-0 win in Equatorial Guinea yesterday and qualification for the 2026 World Cup in North America.

Victory for Tunisia gave them an unassailable lead in Group H and they become the second African nation to secure a place at the tournament after Morocco. Tunisia have 22 points from eight matches, 10 more than second-placed Namibia, who have one match in hand but cannot match the total of the Carthage Eagles.

Ben Romdhane, a midfielder with Egyptian and African club giants Al Ahly, struck in the 94th minute

after being set up by Firas Chaouat.

Tunisia started the match in Malabo with players based in nine countries, including Hannibal Mejbri from Premier League outfit Burnley.

The Eagles are coached by former defender Sami Trabelsi, who captained Tunisia at the 1998 World Cup in France.

In other early matches, Morocco maintained a 100 percent record in Group E by winning 2-0 in Zambia.

Mozambique beat Botswana 2-0 in Maputo -- a result that means leaders Algeria cannot qualify from Group G later yesterday even if they win away to Guinea. — **AFP**

Al Attiyah seals historic 20th MERC title despite second place in Lebanon Rally

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DOHA: Qatari rally legend Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah added another golden chapter to his illustrious career by securing a record-breaking 20th FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) title, following a gripping second-place finish at the 2025 Rally of Lebanon.

Despite missing out on a potential victory in one of the most thrilling finales the Lebanese rally has seen in recent years, the veteran's runner-up finish behind local hero Roger Feghali was enough to mathematically seal the championship with one round remaining in Cyprus.

It was Feghali, the undisputed king of Lebanese tarmac, who ultimately claimed his record 18th Rally of Lebanon win after a titanic two-day battle with Al-Attiyah. Driving his Toyota Yaris GR, Feghali trailed Al-Attiyah by 6.7 seconds overnight but clawed his way back to within 1.4 seconds heading into the final stage.

Al-Attiyah, competing in his Škoda Fabia RS run by Autotek Motorsport, looked set to edge out his rival until a slow right-rear puncture on the final stage dashed his hopes of a maiden Lebanon win. Feghali capitalized, clocking the fastest time on the final test to clinch victory by 9.2 seconds.

"This is always a fantastic rally and it was a tremendous battle between myself and Roger," said Al-Attiyah.

"We pushed hard all the way. I was obviously disappointed to have the puncture on the last stage, but it's a great feeling to have won the championship now for the 20th time."

Crucially, Feghali was not registered for MERC points, allowing Al-Attiyah and his



Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera to collect maximum regional points for a fifth consecutive rally. Carrera had already sealed the Co-drivers' Championship before the start of the event.

This landmark title also marks a personal triumph for Autotek Motorsport's Ken

Skidmore, who has engineered all 20 of Al-Attiyah's MERC titles.

Skidmore's record also includes championship wins with the late Misfer Al-Marri and the shared 2023 crown between Al-Attiyah and Oman's Abdullah Al-Rawahi.

Elsewhere, Qatar's presence was felt across multiple categories in Lebanon:

Veteran Nasser Khalifa Al-Atya sealed the FIA Master MERC Driver title, finishing 15th overall alongside Lebanese co-driver Ziad Chehab in a Ford Fiesta.

The pair also scored valuable points toward Al-Atya's push for a top-three finish in the overall standings. Chehab remains in contention for second in the Co-drivers' Championship, behind Carrera.

Mohammed Al-Marri, a graduate of the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) Academy, continued his impressive MERC4 campaign, finishing ahead of India's Payyakkal Panikkaveetil. With teammate Rashid Al-Mohannadi having already secured the MERC4 title in absentia, Al-Marri is now poised to complete a Qatari 1-2 in the championship.



De Jong joins Barcelona sickbay after picking up knock on international duty

BARCELONA: Frenkie de Jong is expected to miss Barcelona's upcoming home match against Valencia due to a groin injury sustained in a 2026 World Cup qualifier when playing for the Netherlands, the Catalan club announced yesterday.

Midfielder De Jong limped off late in Thursday's 1-1 draw with Poland, and was then absent from the Netherlands' 3-2 win in Lithuania on Sunday.

The Dutch top Group G with 10 points after four of eight qualifiers, while De Jong's club Barcelona are two points behind leaders Real Madrid and Athletic

Bilbao ahead of this weekend's fourth round of La Liga.

"Frenkie de Jong has suffered a slight injury to the external obturator muscle in his right leg," the Spanish champions said in a statement on their website.

The injury likely rules the 28-year-old out of at least Sunday's encounter with Valencia after he had started two of the first three games prior to the international break.

Fellow Barcelona midfielder Gavi is being rested and may need knee surgery, while left-back Alejandro Balde is nursing

a biceps problem in the Barca treatment room.

Ahead of the return of club football, the Catalan giants have an even bigger headache with their revamped Camp Nou stadium as yet unlicensed for reopening.

Their temporary home at the former Olympic Stadium at Montjuic is hosting a Post Malone concert this weekend.

Barcelona may therefore be forced to play at their 6,000-capacity training ground, but the Estadi Johan Cruyff is as yet unequipped with VAR facilities. — **AFP**

UEFA WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS
GROUP B
Kosovo 2-0 Sweden
Switzerland 3-0 Slovenia
GROUP C
Belarus 0-2 Scotland
Greece 0-3 Denmark
GROUP I
Israel 4-5 Italy
GROUP L
Croatia 4-0 Montenegro
Gibraltar 0-1 Faroe Islands

Wathnan Racing’s RB Mary Lylah secures UAE President Cup win in Turkiye

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DOHA: RB Mary Lylah, fresh from her breakthrough at the top level in the Gr.1 (PA) Liwa International Stakes at La Teste, confirmed her excellent form by winning the Gr.3 (PA) UAE President Cup at Istanbul Veliefendi in Turkiye on Sunday.

The race, run over 2000m, was the 12th leg of the Arabian Purebred Classic Series.

Trained by Alban de Mieulle, ridden by Daniel Tudhope, and carrying the colours of Wathnan Racing, the 5-year-old mare showed once more her consistency and toughness, securing the 12th win of her career.

In a race led by Kocek, RB Mary Lylah travelled in fifth, racing two wide. Positions remained unchanged until the final bend, where she began to improve.



Wathnan Racing’s representative receives the trophy after RB Mary Lylah won the Gr.3 (PA) UAE President Cup at Istanbul Veliefendi in Turkiye. RIGHT: Daniel Tudhope guides RB Mary Lylah to victory. PICTURES: TURKISH JOCKEY CLUB



Leverkusen name Hjulmand as Ten Hag's replacement

BERLIN: Bayer Leverkusen yesterday appointed Dane Kasper Hjulmand (pictured) as coach, replacing Erik ten Hag, who was fired after just two league games in charge.

The former Denmark coach has been appointed on a contract until 2027.

“It is an honour to be entrusted with such a team”, Hjulmand said in a statement, adding: “I’m motivated to shape the future of the club.”

The appointment ends a chaotic fortnight for Leverkusen, who sacked former Manchester United manager Ten Hag on September 1, just two games into the Bundesliga season.

Ten Hag replaced Xabi Alonso, who took Leverkusen to an unbeaten league and cup double in 2023-24 -- the club’s first-ever Bundesliga title -- before moving to Real Madrid in the summer.

Leverkusen sporting director Simon Rolfes admitted to an error in hiring Ten Hag but said letting him continue would have been “an even bigger mistake.”

Runners-up last season, Leverkusen collected just one point from their opening two matches.

Ten Hag hit back in a statement, calling the sacking “unprecedented” and “a complete surprise”.

Hjulmand is expected to be on the bench for Leverkusen’s home match against Eintracht Frankfurt on Friday.

Hjulmand emerged as one of several candidates to take over the vacant position, alongside one-time Barcelona coach and player Xavi, former Spurs manager Ange Postecoglou and Raul, the Spain striker who recently coached Real Madrid’s second team. — **AFP**

Tri-series win confidence builder for Pakistan, says coach Hesson

DUBAI: Pakistan coach Mike Hesson believes his team’s victory in a tri-series tournament with Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates will serve as a “confidence builder” for the Asia Cup starting in Abu Dhabi today.

Pakistan thumped Afghanistan by 75 runs on a tricky pitch in Sunday’s final in Sharjah, with Mohammad Nawaz claiming a hat-trick in a career-best five-wicket haul.

“We have beaten Afghanistan in conditions that suited their spin attack, which was a real confidence builder,” said Hesson.

“Heading into the Asia Cup this was also very important for us.”

Since Hesson took over, Pakistan have white-washed Bangladesh 3-0 at home and then lost to the same opponents 2-1 in an away series.

Pakistan also won 2-1 against the West Indies in Florida before losing just once, to the Afghans, in five tri-series matches.

“An eight-team Asia Cup is great for Asian cricket and it’s a true test, it expands the game in the region, and it allows us to see players we don’t face often.”

The 17th edition of the Asia Cup will kick off with a Group B match between Afghanistan and Hong Kong in Abu Dhabi today.

Six-time Asia Cup champions Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are the other teams in the group. Eight-time champions and title holders India, Pakistan, Oman and the UAE are in Group A.

“Our pool is challenging with Oman, UAE and India, so we need to adapt quickly. The key is not to get distracted by external pressures,” said Hesson, who coached New Zealand to the ODI World Cup final in 2015.



Shisospicy runs away with easy Gr.2 victory at Kentucky Downs

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DOHA: Shisospicy (Mitole), the talented 3-year-old filly, confirmed her class with a dominant victory in the Gr.2 AGS Music City Stakes over 1300m at Kentucky Downs in the US. The race, for 3-year-old fillies only, drew a field of 12.

Trained by Jose Francisco D’Angelo, ridden by Irad Ortiz Jr. and racing in the colours of Morplay Racing LLC & Qatar Racing Ltd., the filly was already a Gr.3 winner after her wide-margin triumph in the Mamzelle Stakes over 1100m at Churchill Downs earlier this year. With this latest performance, she has now risen to become a Gr.2 winner.

Breaking sharply from the stalls, Shisospicy went straight to the front, but soon had company

as Gata Brazil (Into Mischief) pressed her on the outside. The pair set a strong pace, but as they reached the final bend, Gata Brazil began to weaken. Shisospicy, still travelling strongly, was left alone in front, with all her rivals under pressure behind her.

Once into the home straight, she quickened again, moving further clear with every stride.

She never looked in danger and crossed the line an impressive three lengths ahead. Cloe (Tiz The Law) finished second to give trainer D’Angelo a 1-2, while the British challenger Tabiti (Kingman) ran on for third.

Bred by Bill & Corinne Heiligbrodt, Shisospicy is out of Mischief Galore (Into Mischief), a triple winner, once on dirt over 1200m and twice on turf over 1000m at three.

Wathnan Racing’s Haunted Dream breaks through in Gr.3 Singspiel Stakes at Woodbine

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Haunted Dream (Oasis Dream), a 6-year-old gelding, captured his first Group victory when landing the Gr.3 HPIbet Singspiel Stakes, run over 2200m, at Woodbine, Canada, on Sunday. The contest brought together a field of six runners.

Trained by Hamad Al Jehani, ridden by Rafael Manuel Hernandez and racing in the colours of Wathnan Racing, Haunted Dream came into the race on the back of a solid third in the Gr.3 Betfred Rose Of Lancaster Stakes at Haydock. Stepping onto Canadian soil, he delivered a decisive performance to reach a career best.

After a good start, Haunted Dream settled in fourth along the inside rail behind early leader Roscar (Oscar Performance).

Passing the stands with one circuit to go, he raced keenly as the pace steadied. Legal Catch (Distorted Humor) soon pressed the



Haunted Dream was ridden to success by Rafael Manuel Hernandez. PIC: MICKAEL BURNS

leader, taking over narrowly, while Haunted Dream remained tucked in fourth.

At the end of the back straight, the tempo lifted as the two leaders increased the pressure. Still travelling well, Haunted Dream angled four wide on the final bend to improve his position. Once into the home straight, he quickened smartly, striking the front inside the final 150 metres. He stretched clear to win by a length and a half.

Tosen Wish (New Bay) finished second, while Dancin In Da’Nile (Pioneer of The Nile) stayed on for third.

Alcaraz says completing career Slam his ‘first goal’

NEW YORK: Carlos Alcaraz says winning next year’s Australian Open to seal a career Grand Slam is his main objective after securing a sixth major title in New York on Sunday.

Alcaraz beat chief rival Jannik Sinner 6-2, 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 to claim his second US Open crown and would become the youngest man to win all four majors if he lifts the trophy in Melbourne next January.

“It’s my first goal, to be honest,” said the 22-year-old Alcaraz, who has not made it past the quarter-finals in four trips to Australia.

“When I just go to the pre-seasons to what I want to improve, what I want to achieve, Australian Open is there.

“It’s the first or second tournament of the year, and it is always the main goal for me to complete a career Grand Slam, calendar Grand Slam. So it’s going to be great.”

Alcaraz’s compatriot Rafael

RECENT US OPEN MEN’S CHAMPIONS

2025: Carlos Alcaraz (ESP)
2024: Jannik Sinner (ITA)
2023: Novak Djokovic (SRB)
2022: Carlos Alcaraz (ESP)
2021: Daniil Medvedev (RUS)
2020: Dominic Thiem (AUT)
2019: Rafael Nadal (ESP)
2018: Novak Djokovic (SRB)
2017: Rafael Nadal (ESP)
2016: Stan Wawrinka (SUI)

Nadal holds the record as the youngest man to win all four majors. He achieved the feat at the age of 24 in 2010 when he won the first of his four US Open titles.

“Obviously I’m going to try to do it next year, but if it is not next year, hopefully in two and three and four. So I will try to complete it,” said Alcaraz.

He will reclaim the world number one ranking from Sinner on Monday, returning to the top of the men’s game for the first time since September 2023.

“When you achieve the goals you set up yourself at the beginning of the year, it feels amazing,” said Alcaraz.

“Since I got the chance to recover the number one, it was one of the first goals that I had during the seasons, just to try to recover the number one as soon as possible or end the year as the number one.

“For me, to achieve that once again, it is, as I said, it is a dream. Doing it

the same day as getting another Grand Slam feels even better.”

Alcaraz dropped just one set throughout the tournament and continued his recent mastery of Sinner, getting revenge for his loss to the Italian in the Wimbledon final.

“The performance today was perfect,” said Alcaraz’s coach Juan Carlos Ferrero.



Carlos Alcaraz poses with the trophy.

Ferrero. Alcaraz and Sinner are the torch-bearers of the current generation, sweeping the last eight majors between them and taking 10 of the last 13. Novak Djokovic has won the other three.

Ferrero knows Alcaraz has the talent to Hoover up considerably more silverware in the years to come but is doing his best to ensure his protégé keeps working hard at his craft.

“The potential to win many titles, many Grand Slams, is there, but we take nothing for granted. Nothing is automatic; you have to make it happen,” said Ferrero.

“I don’t think too far ahead. I can’t stop to think about whether Carlos is going to win 20 Grand Slams; you have to take each day as it comes.

“He’s 22 years old; we can’t think he’s perfect, far from it. He has a lot of things to improve on.” — **AFP**

Deschamps plays down rift with PSG over Dembele, Doue injuries

PARIS: France coach Didier Deschamps (pictured) calmed suggestions of a rift between the national team and Paris Saint-Germain after the European champions were left fuming after Ousmane Dembele and Desire Doue picked up injuries on international duty.

Dembele, PSG’s leading scorer last season and one of the favourites to win the Ballon d’Or, has been ruled out for between six and eight weeks after coming off hurt in France’s 2-0 win over Ukraine in World Cup qualifying on Friday.

Doue was injured in the same game and is expected to be sidelined for a month, dealing a major blow to PSG as they prepare to begin their defence of the Champions League title.

The club wrote to the French Football Federation (FFF) on Sunday calling for a “more transparent and collaborative coordination protocol to be put in place between clubs and national teams”.

PSG, whose squad had a significantly shortened



close-season break after going all the way to the final of the Club World Cup in July, said they had provided the FFF with “concrete” medical information about how much workload their players could withstand. They said that their recommendations were ignored.

Deschamps insisted that the French team’s medical staff “did things in a very professional and progressive way,

as we do with all the players, taking into account how each player feels”.

“Even if they are eager to play, that feeling is always a very important element for us,” added the French coach, who was speaking before Les Bleus host Iceland at PSG’s Parc des Princes stadium today.

“PSG are not our adversary, and never have been. The clubs never have been, even if our interests go in different directions, and that is normal.

“I have been on the other side of the barrier. Our only opponent is Iceland,” Deschamps said, insisting

that there are always exchanges between his team and the clubs.

He used the examples of Manchester City’s Rayan Cherki and Arsenal defender William Saliba, who picked up injuries and were told they would not need to come to the French team’s training base for further assessment despite having being called up.

“I am not going to make them come when we are perfectly aware it’s not possible, because our doctor was sent the images from their scans,” said the coach. — **AFP**