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PSG eye more history against resolute Flamengo in Intercontinental Cup final

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Another piece of silverware in a stellar year would further underline Paris Saint-Germain's dominance in 2025 as they chase the FIFA Intercontinental Cup. But the task is far from straightforward, with in-form CR Flamengo standing in their way in tonight's final at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.

Coach Luis Enrique has arrived in Doha with a full-strength squad, aiming for a six-trophy haul after already securing Ligue 1, the Trophée des Champions, the Coupe de France, the Champions League and the UEFA Super Cup with PSG this year.

"Make history with Paris, that was our aim last season. Keep making history is now the goal of this season," Enrique, brimming with confidence, told a crowded press conference on the eve of the final.

"We'll have to be ready and switched on all game. Each action could be important and decisive. We are ready. This season, I think the team has shown the same attitude as they already had last season."

PSG are featuring in the Intercontinental Cup for the first time, with Enrique relishing the chance to compete in the final.

"I think this final is a great opportunity. We're aware of the importance of the game, of the good fortune we have to be playing in the Intercontinental Cup final. It's important as a



team and as a club to have the chance to play in this game," he said.

The PSG coach, however, is aware that facing Flamengo will not be easy, as the Brazilians are enjoying an extraordinary year. The Rio giants, reigning champions of both the CONMEBOL Copa Libertadores and Brazil's Serie A, have lost only one of their last 13 matches.

While PSG took a direct route to the final as Champions League winners, Flamengo have already clinched two trophies in Qatar to reach the title clash. They defeated Mexico's Cruz Azul 2-1 in the FIFA Derby of the Americas, before beating Egypt's Pyramids FC 2-0 in the FIFA Challenger Cup.

"What we have shown over the last four months is our ability to overcome different situations. It'll be a close game.

Flamengo are a very good side, so it'll be a difficult match," Enrique said.

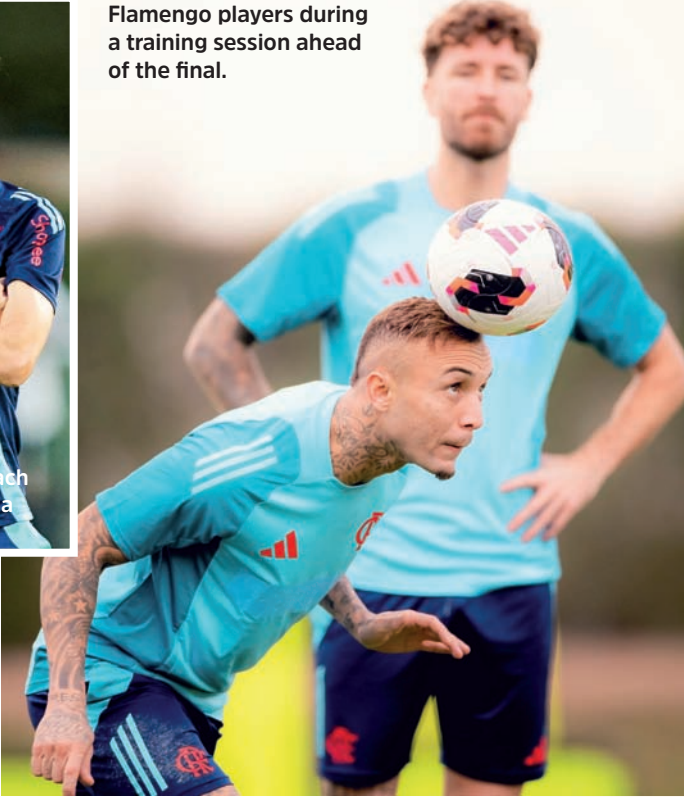
"Flamengo are in a good moment, they have won a lot of trophies. I like the way they play football. I remember their performances in the Club World Cup this season; they played some great matches. They're a top-quality team with and without the ball."

Ousmane Dembele, who missed PSG's Ligue 1 match against Metz earlier this week due to illness, trained for the second consecutive day along with teammates Marquinhos, Vitinha, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Nuno Mendes and Desire Doue.

Answering a query from *The Peninsula*, Enrique, who led Spain at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, praised the football atmosphere in Qatar, which is hosting back-to-back finals



Flamengo players during a training session ahead of the final.



including tomorrow's FIFA Arab Cup final.

"I'm very happy to be back here. I have good memories of the World Cup with the Spain national team," he said.

Flamengo target 'perfect game' against PSG

Flamengo head coach Filipe Luis will have his full squad available, including striker Pedro, who returned from injury in the final moments against Pyramids FC.

"Pedro is available, the whole group is available for me to make the decisions. We are all prepared for this great

moment, which is the last of the season," Luis said.

The Flamengo coach expressed confidence in his side against the European giants.

"We're going to face the current Champions League winner, the best team in the world with the best coach in the world. We're going to try to make a perfect game; that's our only way to have a chance to win this game."

Luis added that his team will be ready to stop PSG's attackers.

"We have a way of

Coach Luis Enrique has arrived in Doha with a full-strength squad, aiming for a six-trophy haul after already securing Ligue 1, the Trophée des Champions, the Coupe de France, the Champions League and the UEFA Super Cup with PSG this year.

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defending; we don't defend the individual player, we defend the team, the ball, and we hope to take as much time as possible away from key players, especially in midfield. I have no doubt that we will have the weapons to neutralise PSG's attack," he said.

Tonight's final marks the first time the two teams will face each other in a competitive match.



Paris Saint-Germain's players attend a training session on the eve of their 2025 FIFA Intercontinental Cup final against CR Flamengo. AFP

Dembele scoops Best FIFA Men's Player award in Doha

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Paris Saint-Germain and France superstar Ousmane Dembele won the Best FIFA Men's Player 2025 at a special event at Fairmont Katara Hall in Doha yesterday.

The dynamic attacker has been rewarded following an incredible season for PSG. He was a talismanic figure during the club's run to a maiden UEFA Champions League title, scoring eight times and providing six assists during their triumphant European campaign.

Dembele – who was named as the 2024/25 season's MVP in both the continental competition and Ligue 1 – was integral as PSG won a domestic treble.

The 28-year-old also helped the team reach the final of the inaugural FIFA Club World Cup. He won the Ballon d'Or in September

The winner of The Best FIFA Men's Player Award was determined from a shortlist selected by experts based on performances and achievements between 11 August 2024 and 2 August 2025.

Votes were cast by men's national team coaches, team captains, football

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journalists, and fans on FIFA's official website, with each voter ranking their first, second, and third choices.

Points were awarded accordingly (five for first, three for second, one for third), and nominated captains could not vote for themselves.

Each voting group contributed 25% of the total score, regardless of the number of voters. The player with the highest total points won the award, with ties broken by the number of first-choice votes from their own voter group.

PSG coach Luis Enrique was named Best Coach of a Men's Team, beating Barcelona's Hansi Flick and Liverpool's Premier League-winning manager Arne Slot.

At 27, Alexia Bonmati was crowned Women's Player of the Year for the third consecutive time, following her



The Best FIFA Men's Player winner, Ousmane Dembele (second left) on stage with FIFA President Gianni Infantino (third left) and former footballer Alessandro Del Piero (left).

third straight Ballon d'Or in the autumn. The personal accolade caps a year

of highs and lows for Bonmati, who won the Spanish league but lost both

the Champions League and European Championship finals last season.

She was named Player of the Tournament at the Euros despite not starting Spain's first two matches while recovering from viral meningitis. Bonmati is currently sidelined after fracturing her leg in training on the eve of Spain's victorious Nations League final second-leg win over Germany.

England manager Sarina Wiegman won the women's coaching award after guiding her team to a third consecutive Euros title in the summer.

In the goalkeeping categories, Italy's Gianluigi Donnarumma, who joined Manchester City after winning the Champions League with PSG, took the men's award, while Chelsea's Euro 2025 winner Hannah Hampton won the women's trophy.

The Puskas Award for the best goal of the year went to Santiago Montiel for his overhead kick from outside the penalty area for Independiente against Independiente Rivadavia in Argentina's top flight.

The Marta Award went to Lizbeth Ovalle for her scorpion kick for Tigres against Guadalajara in the Mexican league. *With inputs from AFP*



Fans cheer during the FIFA Arab Cup semi-final between Jordan and Saudi Arabia at Al Bayt Stadium on Monday.

FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 continues to break records

DOHA: The semi-finals of the 11th edition of the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 lived up to its promise of high-quality matches and enthusiastic crowds, resulting in the well-deserved qualification of the Jordanian and Moroccan national teams for the final, scheduled for Thursday at Lusail Stadium.

The Moroccan national team secured their place in the final after a convincing 3-0 victory over the UAE in the first semi-final, held Monday at Khalifa International Stadium.

Jordan joined them after a hard-fought 1-0 win against Saudi Arabia in the second semi-final, played at Al Bayt Stadium on the same day.

While the two finalists will meet at Lusail Stadium tomorrow to compete for the title, Saudi Arabia and the UAE will face each other in the third-place match, also scheduled for Thursday at Khalifa International Stadium.

The tournament continued to break attendance records, with fans maintaining their momentum in the semi-finals, building on the momentum of the previous rounds.

The total attendance reached 1,119,315 by the end of the semi-finals, highlighting the significant engagement the competition has garnered from fans both within Qatar and those who traveled to the country from across the Arab world.

The tournament surpassed the one million mark by the end of the quarter-finals, with a total attendance of 1,022,592 fans across all matches.

The two semi-final matches drew a combined 96,723 spectators, with 62,825

attending the Jordan-Saudi Arabia match and 33,898 the Morocco-UAE match.

The group stage had already set a record with 812,318 fans attending the 24 matches played, significantly exceeding the previous record of 571,605 set in the 2021 Doha edition.

This record was broken early, specifically after the 18th match of the current tournament, when the total attendance reached 598,290. These figures continued to climb, eventually surpassing the one million mark.

The quarter-finals saw an attendance of 210,274 fans, while the group stage drew 812,318, and the semi-finals attracted 96,723, bringing the total to 1,119,315.

However, including the seven preliminary matches played before the official start of the finals, which drew 44,625 fans, the overall attendance reached 1,163,940.

As for the highest attendance for a single match, the Morocco-Saudi Arabia game in the final round of the group stage broke the record with 78,131 fans, surpassing the previous record set in the 2021 edition during the Qatar-UAE quarter-final match, which drew 63,439 fans.

In terms of overall tournament statistics from the start of the finals until the semi-finals, the teams played 30 matches, recording 22 wins and 8 draws (3 goalless and 5 with goals). A total of 72 goals were scored, averaging a healthy 2.4 goals per match. Twelve penalties were awarded, with nine converted and three missed. 77 yellow cards and 11 red cards were issued. — *QNA*

FIFA honours Qatar Football Association

FIFA President Gianni Infantino thanked the Qatar Football Association (QFA) in appreciation of its efforts in hosting the FIFA Standing Committees, in the presence of representatives from international football federations. Infantino honoured QFA President Jassim bin Rashid Al Buainain on the sidelines of the FIFA Standing Committees meeting held in Doha yesterday. The FIFA's Standing Committees meetings featured a distinguished Qatari presence alongside officials from international football federations during one of FIFA's most important annual gatherings.



Ayed: We're capable of winning title

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Full concentration for 90 minutes has been the hallmark of Jordan's campaign at the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025, helping them register five straight wins, collect maximum points, score 10 goals and concede only two.

Jordan's impressive form prompted Issam Smeeri, one of the standouts from their semi-final win over Saudi Arabia, to sum it all up in his post-match comments to FIFA.

"You have to play with full concentration until the final whistle," he admitted. "We did exactly as the coach asked, applying his instructions to the letter, while also working on our mental strength to maintain our level throughout. Knockout games are decided by fine margins, but we stayed focused, achieved our goal, and we thank the Jordanian fans for helping us along the way."

Smeeri shouldered a major responsibility, tasked with containing Salem Al Dawsari, a two-time AFC Player of the Year and one of the tournament's stars, and he did so with considerable success.

"I thank God for granting me success in this match, and I thank coach Jamal Sellami for the confidence he showed in me at this stage of the tournament," he continued. "I'm happy that I had the opportunity to play, and this was my moment to deliver. There's no doubt that Salem Al Dawsari is an outstanding player and part of a top national team, but with God's help I was able to limit his threat and deliver a positive performance. I'm hoping to play even better going forward."

Mahmoud Al Mardi also delivered an excellent defensive performance alongside Smeeri, and made his mark going forward by setting up Nizar Al Rashdan for the decisive goal.

"The coach asked me to help close down the spaces, but Smeeri delivered a great performance and proved himself on the pitch," he stated. "We made a change in the second half by bringing on Shararh (Mohammad Abu Zrayq) with instructions to push forward."

"[For the goal] the ball looked like it was going out, and the opponent assumed I'd let it run, but I kept it alive and we went on to score, thanks to God."



Rajaei Ayed

The players' remarks underline the significant impact of coach Jamal, who handled the tie expertly. One of his key decisions was introducing Mohammad Abu Hasheesh in the 72nd minute, having identified Abdulrahman Al Oboud's growing threat on the right side following his half-time introduction in place of Saleh Abu Al Shamah.

"We're all on the same page. Our aim is to maintain this run of clean sheets in the next game to secure a win," Abu Hasheesh said. "The coach read the match perfectly and prepared for it in an excellent way, and that's why we achieved the result we wanted."

Rajaei Ayed was another key part of the Jordanian machine, with coach Jamal deploying him to take control of the midfield battle.

"I thank the coach for giving me the opportunity, but whether it's me or another player, the performance will be the same," the 32-year-old stated. "We've seen that he has relied on all 23 players, and every one of them has delivered a strong performance in the tournament. I thank God for today's performance, as we all did our part and secured a place in the final."

Saleem Obaid, who began the tournament as a starter against the United Arab Emirates before sustaining an injury against Egypt, watched the match from the sidelines but couldn't have been prouder of his side's efforts.

"Our defence is strong because we defend as one unit. I hope we can continue in the same way," he said. "The

coaching staff analysed Saudi Arabia's strengths and weaknesses before the match, and we worked to neutralise their attacking threat while successfully exploiting their vulnerabilities."

For his part, Ayed expressed strong confidence in the Nashama's ability to win the FIFA Arab Cup, which would mark the first official title in the nation's history.

"We're capable of winning the title. We now have the experience, having played a final at the same stadium (at the 2023 AFC Asian Cup), and this time we're ready to go one step further."

Saleem Obaid echoed that sentiment, saying: "We're ready for our second final in Qatar. Luck wasn't on our side last time, but we hope it will be with us this time so our fans can celebrate the title. We have what it takes to get the job done."

Abu Hasheesh stressed that Jordan should focus on their own strengths without fearing any opponent. He also sent a message of support to his teammate Yazan Al Naimat, who suffered a serious ACL injury in the opening minutes of the match against Iraq, saying:

"I hope this title will be ours. We're on the right path. Thank you to our fans and to the Jordanian people. We need to focus on ourselves and aim to deliver the performance expected of us. If we manage to do that, we'll be close to achieving what we want. As players, we want to dedicate the title at the end of the tournament to Yazan Al Naimat."

Jordan are set to face Morocco in the final tomorrow at the iconic Lusail Stadium, with the match kicking off at 19:00 local time. FIFA



Paris Saint-Germain players with a fan at one of the events.

QNB hosts exclusive events during PSG's tour in Doha

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: QNB hosted two special events in Doha as part of its Premium Partnership with the French football club, Paris Saint-Germain, during the team's annual winter tour in Qatar.

The tour presents an exciting opportunity for fans and customers to engage with the celebrated Paris Saint-Germain team, who are still riding the wave of their historic 2024-2025 Treble.

As a prominent component of its sponsorship activities, QNB organized activities in the ICI C'EST PARIS Park Doha, an immersive fan event held at Hotel Park. QNB's football activation within the park, named "Speed Park," challenged guests to achieve the fastest ball-shooting speed.

Furthermore, QNB hosted a

private Paris Saint-Germain Meet and Greet Workshop at the Swissôtel Corniche Park Towers Doha exclusively for a limited number of clients. This private session offered unique opportunities for the bank's customers to meet some of the players, take photographs, and receive signatures.

The bank's continued engagement in high-profile sports events highlights its strategy regarding community and wellness. Sports is one of QNB's most recognized sponsorship activities, as it helps promote a healthy lifestyle and highlights the importance of physical well-being.

This support also aligns with QNB's commitment to Qatar's National Vision 2030 to work towards a dynamic society.

It is difficult to choose between PSG and Flamengo: Ronaldinho

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: When you think about the names to have worn the colours of Flamengo and Paris Saint-Germain over the years, not many will stand out more than that of Ronaldinho (pictured).

The Brazilian legend – a football icon all around the globe – spoke to FIFA about his time at the two clubs, who are set to come face to face to decide the FIFA Intercontinental Cup 2025 today, and he made it clear that he will not be choosing one side to support in this final.

"When you have a history with both sides, it's difficult to choose just one of them. The most important thing is to appreciate what this final represents," said Ronaldinho. "Flamengo are in great form at the moment and it's great for us to see a Brazilian club in another big final like this. PSG are also enjoying a good spell; they're a confident and competitive side."

Having begun his career at Gremio back in Brazil, Ronaldinho made the move to Paris in 2001, where he began a successful career in European football. With his dazzling footwork and outstanding natural ability, he had no trouble quickly winning over the PSG fans. His impressive displays for the Parisians resulted in a place in the Brazil squad for the FIFA World Cup Korea/ Japan 2002, where he became a world

champion with the Seleção shortly before signing for Barcelona.

"My time at PSG was a special period of growth and transformation at the club," he reminisced. "It was around the time when PSG began to cement their place on the world stage, and being a part of that, helping them to forge an identity and leave their mark, is something I'm still very proud of today."

After spells at Barcelona and AC Milan, Ronaldinho decided to return to his native Brazil in January 2011 when he signed for Flamengo. He played 74 times, scored 28 goals and won the Rio state championship title during his time at the Rio giants.



The most important thing is to appreciate what this final represents.
Ronaldinho

Contrary to their current situation, the Rubro-negro did not have the financial muscle to put out a star-studded team back then. Despite only being at the club for barely more than a season, he gave the fans some unforgettable memories that they still look back on fondly.

"They were two very important points of my career. What stood out most to me at Flamengo was the size of the club and the support from the fans. Wearing that shirt comes with enormous responsibility, and experiencing the day-to-day of Brazilian football, with that passion and demand, was a very intense experience," he said.

When Flamengo and PSG come face to face to decide who takes home this latest global competition, Ronaldinho's loyalty will be very much divided. What he hopes for, though, is for the fans to be as happy as those who were lucky enough to see him play for their club up close.

"I expect it to be a great, high-intensity game, full of technical quality and emotion. Let's hope that it's a great spectacle for football." FIFA



Saudi Arabia claim AGCFF U-23 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025 title

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Saudi Arabia have been crowned champions of the AGCFF U-23 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025, after claiming a 2-0 win over Iraq in the final match held at Stadium 974 yesterday.

The tournament took place in Qatar from December 4-16, bringing together rising U-23 football stars from across the region to compete for the prestigious title.

This was the first time that the competition was held under the auspices of the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF).

"The U-23 Gulf Cup is part of a thrilling football season in the country, with Qatar making history by hosting numerous tournaments consecutively."

"The successful delivery of this tournament once again showcased Qatar's commitment towards supporting emerging football talents from the region, while uniting fans to celebrate



Saudi Arabia players and officials celebrate after winning the AGCFF U-23 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025 title yesterday.

our shared passion for football. Congratulations to all the players who took part, and to Saudi Arabia for clinching the trophy," said Jassim Sultan Al Rumaihi, AGCFF Secretary General.

The AGCFF U-23 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025 featured a total of 14 matches played on state-of-the-art pitches at Aspire Zone, that most recently served as a venue for a historic edition of the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025.

Prior to the tournament, Qatar also hosted the AGCFF U-17 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025 that saw Saudi Arabia lift the trophy.

The AGCFF U-23 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025 is part of an exhilarating football calendar in Qatar, which also includes the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 taking place from December 1-18, as well as the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2025 on December 10, 13, and 17, reflecting Qatar's ongoing capability to host world-class sporting events.

Team Qatar GT impresses at Asian Le Mans Series in Kuala Lumpur

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Team Qatar GT kicked off its participation in the GT category of the Asian Le Mans Series with an encouraging performance in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with the team consisting of drivers Abdullah Al Khelaifi and Ghanem Al Maadeed. The team delivered a strong statement early in the weekend by securing a P2 in qualifying, highlighting its competitiveness against a highly competitive field.

Race 1 proved challenging, with the team ultimately finishing in P19, but valuable experience and data were gained throughout the race.

The weekend concluded on a positive note, as Team Qatar GT bounced back in Race 2 with a solid P10 finish, demonstrating resilience and steady progress.

With momentum building after the Kuala Lumpur round, Team Qatar GT now looks ahead with confidence to the upcoming races in the Le Mans Series.



Team Qatar GT's drivers Lucas Auer, Ghanem Al Maadeed and Abdullah Al Khelaifi at the Sepang Circuit.



LIC achieves FIA three-star environmental accreditation

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Lusail International Circuit (LIC) received Three-Star Environmental Accreditation from the FIA – its highest level of recognition for environmental performance.

LIC stands out as the world's only venue to hold FIA Three-Star Environmental Accreditation that hosts Formula 1, MotoGP, and the FIA World Endurance Championship.

Leading up to this achievement, the fourth edition of the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix prominently featured sustainability, accessibility, and community engagement.

The circuit showcased its dedication to environmental stewardship, fan welfare, and local economic growth through impactful and measurable initiatives. These efforts are consistent with both Qatar's National Vision 2030 and F1's overarching global sustainability commitments. This dedication was further acknowledged with a certificate from Earthna, recognizing LIC's support and partnership in the 10th edition of Qatar Sustainability Week 2025.

Preparations began months before with the #QatarGP Educational Tour, introducing more than 1000 students from schools and universities across Qatar to motorsport operations. LIC staff also planted mangroves at Al Thakhira to boost coastal biodiversity, while partnerships with institutions such as the University of Doha for Science and Technology provided additional internship opportunities in key areas. Beyond students, LIC engaged motorsport and health enthusiasts throughout the year with on-track activities, including free training sessions.

Carrying forward with the same theme, LIC integrated eco-friendly landscape and design, featuring 2,500 native trees, 30,000 drought resistant plants and shrubs, 20,000 square meters of ground coverage and 10,000 sqM of roof top coverage. The circuit continued the expansion of green spaces and the total green coverage at the facility is expected to double by 2027.

Renewable Energy systems remained

The 2025 Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix prominently featured sustainability, accessibility and community engagement.



central with a 1.23 megawatt rooftop solar array producing 3 million kilowatt hours annually, solar powered lights for paths and parking, and hybrid generators for powering the event. The circuit's fleet followed suit by predominantly using electric vehicles, including buggies, fan shuttles, operational vehicles, waste trucks, and forklifts, supported by four EV charging stations. Additionally, 100% of the shuttles operating between the Metro station and the circuit were electric.

In the FanZone, a dedicated sensory room provided a calm space for visitors with diverse learning needs, while for the first time in F1, a commentary booth was adapted to offer families with specific needs comfortable seating and prime track views. A customized pit walk further extended this inclusivity, engaging about 25 students with additional learning needs in a guided exploration of the garages.

Community involvement also reached new heights during the Grand Prix, as 665 volunteers from 107 nationalities, 66% male and 34% female, played key roles in operations. The Sustainability Volunteers Team engaged fans in interactive activities to promote eco-responsibility.

Initiatives included guiding waste disposal, "Guess the Right Bin" games, and demonstrations on recyclables versus

organics. The "Be clean. Keep your environment clean. Go Green with Lusail" message resonated through fun interactions.

Transportation stayed eco friendly and inclusive, with complimentary electric shuttles and metro access available to ticket holders, staff, volunteers, and interns.

The circuit implemented advanced waste management measures to reduce the environmental impact of waste generation at source and throughout handling processes. This was achieved by digitalising ninety percent of tickets, avoiding 2.5 metric tons of CO2. Event banners were recycled into tote bags, food waste was turned into compost via BioBins, and a 100% recycled paper option was offered for printing. LIC banned single use plastics entirely while crafting Fan Zone seating from repurposed pallets, timber, and materials from previous events.

These efforts contributed to an impressive 86.6% recycling segregation rate for the event, in line with the Qatar national vision targets. A 95% reduction in surplus food wastage compared to last year was achieved through improved planning and more effective surplus food management at events.

F1: Portuguese GP returning in 2027

PARIS: The Portuguese Grand Prix in Portimao will return to the Formula One schedule on a two-year agreement for 2027 and 2028, organisers announced yesterday.

The race was previously held at the Algarve circuit in 2020 and 2021 during the Covid pandemic, with both editions won by Lewis Hamilton.

Portugal hosted a GP between 1984 and 1996 in Estoril, after previous iterations elsewhere from 1958-1960.

The race is expected to replace the Dutch Grand Prix which is slated to be dropped from the calendar after 2026, when it will be held in late August.

"The circuit delivers on-track excitement from the first corner to the chequered flag, and its energy lifts fans out of their seats," said F1 president Stefano Domenicali.

Next year's world championship begins in Melbourne on March 8, with Lando Norris defending the drivers' title he won earlier this month in Abu Dhabi. — **AFP**

Cummins and Lyon back for 3rd Ashes Test as Khawaja left out

ADELAIDE: Fit-again opener Usman Khawaja was left out of the third Ashes Test in Adelaide starting today as skipper Pat Cummins (pictured) and veteran Nathan Lyon were named in an Australia side looking to seal the series.

Khawaja, who turns 39 this month, had back spasms and failed to open in the first Test victory against England in Perth then was ruled out injured for the second in Brisbane.

He has since recovered but selectors opted to stick with Travis Head and Jake Weatherald at the top of the order, leaving the 85-Test veteran's international future in grave doubt.

Asked if there was a way back for Khawaja, who has been on a lean run of form, Cummins replied: "Yeah, potentially."

"I think the selectors have been quite adamant we're picking a side each week that doesn't necessarily mean it's got to be exactly the same team as the previous week."

"We do that with the bowlers, this week obviously Nathan Lyon's coming back in, he missed last week."

"One of Uzzie's (Khawaja) great strengths is he has scored runs at the top, he scored runs in the middle," he added.

"If we didn't think he'd be good enough to come straight in, then he wouldn't be here in the squad. So absolutely, I can see a path back at some point if needed." As expected, Cummins returns after missing the first two Tests with a back injury and will lead the attack alongside the outstanding Mitchell Starc and Scott Boland.

Veteran spin king Lyon is also back after being axed in preference for an all-pace attack at the Gabba, with Brendan Doggett and Michael Neser making way.

AUSTRALIA: Jake Weatherald, Travis Head, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Cameron Green, Josh Inglis, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins (capt), Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Scott Boland — **AFP**

