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Qatar prepare for must-win clash against Bosnia-Herzegovina

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar began full-fledged preparations for a decisive Group B clash against Bosnia-Herzegovina at Seattle Stadium on Wednesday, with their FIFA World Cup knockout hopes hanging in the balance.

After opening their campaign with a late 1-1 draw against group favourites Switzerland, Qatar briefly showed resilience in a tightly contested group.

However, momentum was halted in their second outing as they suffered a heavy 6-0 defeat to tournament's co-hosts Canada on Thursday, a result that pushed them to the bottom of the standings.

With the top two teams from each of the 12 groups advancing to the Round of 32, along with the eight best



Qatar players during a training session. (AFP)

third-placed sides, Qatar still remain in contention. But they will be looking to bounce back strongly to keep their chances of progressing alive.

The task, however, is demanding and Qatar will need an improved

performance in all departments after defensive lapses and disciplinary setbacks proved costly against Canada.

Head coach Julen Lopetegui has turned his attention quickly to recovery and preparation, with the

squad moving into full training mode after recovery sessions. Qatar will be without Homam Al Amin and Assim Madibo, both suspended following red cards in the previous match, adding to the challenge for the technical staff.

Bosnia-Herzegovina are in a similar situation, having one point from two matches. They drew 1-1 with Canada in their opening game before falling 4-1 to Switzerland, leaving both sides under pressure heading into a crucial clash.

Despite the setback against Canada, Lopetegui stressed the importance of regrouping quickly.

"I can put the focus on the only thing that is under my control, (which) is to recover my players, to tell them that they made a big effort, despite all the circumstances, and to be able to face in the best way possible the last group match," he said.

Qatar have now turned the page on the heavy defeat and are fully focused on Bosnia-Herzegovina, knowing only a win will realistically keep their knockout hopes alive going into the final round of group fixtures.



Deniz Undav (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring Germany's second goal.

Undav's double sends Germany through

THE PENINSULA

TORONTO: Substitute Deniz Undav struck twice as Germany booked their place in the FIFA World Cup 2026 Round of 32 with a dramatic comeback victory over Côte d'Ivoire in Toronto yesterday.

The Ivorians looked set to progress after Franck Kessie gave them the lead midway through the first half, but Undav turned the contest on its head at Toronto Stadium. The forward headed home the equaliser before netting deep into stoppage time to send the four-time champions through.

Germany threatened from the opening moments. Kai Havertz met a header straight from kick-off but lifted the loose ball narrowly over the bar. The striker then came close again when Joshua Kimmich picked him out with a precise cross, only for Côte d'Ivoire goalkeeper Yahia Fofana to keep out his low effort.

Fofana was beaten shortly after when Aleksandar Pavlovic headed home a corner from the right, only for the referee to blow after the Bayern Munich midfielder was adjudged to have led with an elbow. Les Elephants hung in though, and sucker-punched the four-time champions down

the other end. The ever-dangerous Yan Diomande burst down the left and put in a low cross which fell to the feet of Amad Diallo. While Nathaniel Brown made a block, he couldn't prevent Kessie from tucking home the rebound.

The Africans held their own at the start of the second half, forcing Julian Nagelsmann to shuffle his pack. He called upon Nadiem Amiri and Undav on the hour and just eight minutes later the former sent an inch-perfect cross for the latter to head in the leveller.

Fae turned to his bench and was almost handsomely rewarded himself. Nicholas Pepe broke down the right, and as Evann Guessand dragged away the German defence, Simon Adingra was left all alone on the left side of the box. However, a loose touch saw him crowded out.

That chance proved to be crucial as, four minutes into stoppage time, Lukas Nmecha slid a clever ball through to Undav, who turned and finished with aplomb to break Ivorian hearts. Germany will now wait for Curaçao-Ecuador to see whether they will be confirmed as section winners, but are already assured - at worst - of progressing as one of the eight best third-place teams. (FIFA)

France's Saliba says playing through pain

WALTHAM: France centre-half William Saliba said yesterday he has been "gritting his teeth" and playing through the pain at the World Cup after suffering from a back problem for the past few months. The defender was a key figure in helping his club Arsenal secure their first Premier League title in 22 years last season, but told reporters that he is not operating at "100 percent" in North America as he bids to help France win a third World Cup.

"I've had some minor niggles for several months. I've been gritting my teeth because there

was the Champions League and the Premier League. But the coaching staff are handling it very well," Saliba said at a press conference ahead of his country's upcoming Group I match against Iraq.

"The World Cup comes round only once every four years, so you've got to grit your teeth."

"I'm not at 100 percent, but there are plenty of players who aren't at 100 percent either -- you can't make excuses," he added. — AFP

Netherlands thump Sweden in Houston to get World Cup liftoff

HOUSTON: Cody Gakpo and Brian Brobbey both scored twice as the rampant Netherlands thrashed Sweden 5-1 in a World Cup warning yesterday in Houston.

The big win in front of nearly 69,000 put the delighted Dutch on the cusp of the knockout rounds and gave them liftoff after being held by Japan.

Ronald Koeman's side top Group F with four points from two games, ahead of Sweden on three, Japan (one) and Tunisia (none).

Despite the sobering loss the Swedes had plenty of chances but were denied by good goalkeeping and wasteful finishing.

They are still in with a good chance of progressing into the last 32.

Sunderland striker Brobbey got his first start of the tournament and repaid Koeman with predatory goals after five and 17 minutes.

Before that the 24-year-old had scored only once for his country since making his debut three years ago.

In a game full of top Premier League talent, Liverpool's Gakpo -- who set Brobbey up for the opener -- scored twice early in the second half.

Substitute Anthony Elanga pulled one back for Sweden just before the hour with a classy finish. Crysencio Summerville had the last word for the five-star Dutch.

Two crew members from the historic Artemis II lunar mission were among the VIP guests, a nod to Houston's place as the home of space flight.

The Dutch, twice pegged back in a lively 2-2 draw with Japan to start their title bid, made the brighter start in front of their orange-clad fans and King Willem-Alexander.

Brobbey, who came in for Summerville despite the winger scoring against Japan, started and finished the first goal.

It was made in the Premier League, with goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen, midfielder Tijjani Reijnders and Gakpo all involved.

Brobbey exchanged passes with Gakpo, before the Anfield attacker crossed in low from the left for his team-mate to stab in from close range.

Sweden, who thrashed Tunisia 5-1 in their first game, could not handle Brobbey's muscular presence.

Up front the much-vaunted attack of Liverpool's Alexander

Isak and Viktor Gyokeres of Arsenal were feeding on scraps for Sweden.

Twelve minutes after his opener Brobbey made it 2-0 when a deflected Denzel Dumfries cross from the right fell perfectly into his path and he toe-poked past Kristoffer Nordfeldt.

Sweden's English coach Graham Potter was in deep discussions with his backroom staff as the game threatened to run away from them.

At the unpopular hydration break Potter made a beeline for left-sided defender Gabriel Gudmundsson of Leeds United, who was being overrun by the flying Dumfries and Donyell Malen.

Sweden then had their best chance, Gyokeres crossing for an unmarked Yasin Ayari who completely miscontrolled the ball with his chest.

Gyokeres was next to fluff a good chance, failing to make proper contact after being played in by the largely anonymous Isak.

Gyokeres and Ayari twice both had further sights of goal, only to be denied by the increasingly overworked Verbruggen.

The Netherlands were hanging on by end of the half.

Koeman sent on Summerville for Malen at the break, and two minutes later it was mission impossible for Sweden, Gakpo prodding in from close range after yet another dangerous low cross from Dumfries.

All three goals were strikingly similar. Gakpo scored a lovely fourth on 54 minutes, turning inside his defender before firing low into the bottom corner.

Nottingham Forest winger Elanga pulled one back five minutes later when he raced clear of the Dutch defence and rattled the ball past Verbruggen.

West Ham's Summerville made it five in the dying minutes with his second goal in North America.

Sweden face Japan next while the Netherlands play Tunisia. — AFP



RESULTS

GROUP C
Scotland 0-1 Morocco
Brazil 3-0 Haiti

GROUP D
Türkiye 0-1 Paraguay

GROUP F
Netherlands 5-1 Sweden

GROUP E
Germany 2-1 Ivory Coast



Players of the Netherlands applaud fans after the team's 5-1 win over Sweden.

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Spain face Saudi test in crucial Group H clash

GODWIN ISAAC K
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: When Spain and Saudi Arabia meet in Atlanta today, the stakes will be far greater than three points. In a group where all four teams are level on points and goal difference after the opening round of matches, a victory could put either side in a strong position to reach the knockout stage.

Spain arrived in North America as one of the favourites. The European champions, technically gifted and boasting one of the most exciting young generations in world football, were expected to make a statement from the outset.

Instead, they stumbled. Their goalless draw against World Cup debutants Cape Verde exposed an uncomfortable vulnerability. Spain dominated possession, as they so often do, but for all their quick passing and territorial dominance, they failed to find the back of the net.

It was a familiar frustration for a nation still trying to rediscover its golden era. Since winning the World Cup in 2010, Spain have often failed to live up to expectations on football's biggest stage.

A second consecutive draw would leave Spain vulnerable heading into a final group encounter against Uruguay, arguably the toughest opponents in the group.

Saudi Arabia arrive with momentum and belief after their opening fixture. The Green Falcons produced a fighting comeback to earn a 1-1 draw against Uruguay. Rather than sitting back against one of South America's traditional powers, Saudi Arabia showed discipline, patience and enough attacking ambition to suggest they are capable of causing problems again.

World Cups have become a stage on which Saudi Arabia occasionally thrive when least expected. Four years ago, they produced one of the greatest upsets in modern football history by defeating eventual champions Argentina in Qatar. The question now is whether they can do it again against another football giant.



Saudi Arabia players during a warm-up session. (PICS: AFP)

Based on their first match, Saudi Arabia possess experience, talent and players who have grown together over several years. Captain Salem Al-Dawsari remains the heartbeat of the side and the man capable of producing decisive moments.

For Spain, this is a test of maturity as much as quality. La Roja, are not short of talent. It is a team built around youth, with teenage winger Lamine Yamal once again expected to be central to their attack, while Pedri and Nico Williams provide creativity and technical quality.

Their challenge is no longer about show-casing elegant football. It is about solving problems.

Saudi Arabia will not allow the spaces that European opponents often leave behind. They will defend compactly, counter with speed and wait for opportunities to frustrate one of the tournament favourites.

In many ways, this will be a fascinating clash between Spain's possession-based football and Saudi Arabia's ability to strike on the counter.

The expanded World Cup format means qualification remains possible even for third-placed teams, but nobody wants to rely on mathematics later in the tournament. A victory here would give either nation a huge advantage and perhaps one foot in the knockout rounds.

For Spain, it is about showing that the opening setback was only a minor stumble. For Saudi Arabia, it is another chance to show they can upset one of football's giants and move closer to the knockout rounds, something they have failed to reach in their last five World Cup appearances.

Will Spain take all three points, or will Saudi Arabia pull off another World Cup shock? Or will it end in a draw and set up a decisive final round in Group H?

Spain's Lamine Yamal.

Paraguay save World Cup skins with win over eliminated Turkiye

SANTA CLARA: Ten-man Paraguay beat Turkiye 1-0 at the World Cup on Friday, a result that kept their hopes alive and also guaranteed that co-hosts the USA win Group D.

Turkiye's defeat means they become the second team after Haiti to be eliminated from contention.

Matias Galarza scored the only goal in a game that featured the first sending off in World Cup history for a player covering their mouth during an on-field confrontation, for Miguel Almiron.

Galarza's low, long-range shot evaded Turkiye goalkeeper Ugurcan Cakir after just 63 seconds. Former Newcastle forward Almiron was given his marching orders in first-half stoppage time after covering his mouth while he appeared to direct a comment at Turkiye's Mert Muldur.

In a scrappy match, Deniz Gul had a golden chance to equalize in the 88th minute when Paraguay keeper Orlando Gill could only parry a shot, but he stabbed his shot wide of the goal.

Merih Demiral glanced a header wide in the dying seconds and was almost in tears afterwards as the Turkiye players slumped to the turf in bitter disappointment. — AFP

Paraguay's Almiron sent off under new FIFA 'mouth-covering' rule

SANTA CLARA: Paraguay's Miguel Almiron claimed an unwanted piece of football history on Friday after becoming the first player to be sent off for covering his mouth during an on-field confrontation under new FIFA rules.

Former Newcastle player Almiron was given his marching orders in first half stoppage time after covering his mouth while he appeared to direct a comment at Turkey's Mert Muldur during the two teams' World Cup Group D game in Santa Clara, California.

Paraguay were leading 1-0 when Almiron was dismissed following a VAR review.

FIFA announced in April that players who cover their mouths in confrontations with opponents will be given a red card.

The initiative being rolled out at the World Cup is part of a broader effort to combat racism, FIFA has said.

The new rule follows controversy earlier this year when Benfica winger Gianluca Prestianni was accused of racially abusing Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior during a Champions League game in February.

Prestianni denied racially abusing Vinicius but was later banned for six matches -- with three of those suspended -- for "homophobic conduct".

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has been a prominent supporter of the new law.

"If you do not have something to hide, you don't hide your mouth when you say something. That's it, as simple as that," Infantino said in March. — AFP

Ancelotti hails 'complete game' as Brazil sink Haiti

PHILADELPHIA: Coach Carlo Ancelotti said Brazil produced a "complete performance" in Friday's 3-0 World Cup win over Haiti and will continue to improve ahead of the knockout phase.

The five-time World Cup winners bounced back from an underwhelming 1-1 draw with Morocco, as Matheus Cunha scored twice in Philadelphia and Vinicius Junior struck for the second game running at the tournament.

Brazil's win lifted them to the top of Group C on four points, level with Morocco but ahead on goal difference, and left them all but assured of a place in the last 32 with one game remaining.

"It was a complete match, much better in the first half. In the second half we had more control, but we created plenty of chances and could have scored more goals," Ancelotti told reporters. "It was what we expected from this game: better quality, fewer mistakes, more effectiveness in attack and more control at the back."



Coach Carlo Ancelotti gestures on the touchline during the match.

"In terms of intensity it was a good match. Obviously we still have to improve, and we will improve to be ready for the knockout stage," he added.

The Italian said his team would turn their attention to Wednesday's final group match against Scotland in Miami, with top spot potentially offering a smoother path in the knockout rounds. Scotland lost 1-0 to Morocco



Matheus Cunha (centre) scores Brazil's first goal.

earlier on Friday and will attempt to prolong their World Cup adventure when they meet Brazil.

"We want to prepare well for the match. Scotland have their own characteristics and caused problems for Morocco today. We need to focus on the game, stay calm and composed," Ancelotti said. He also delivered encouraging news about Neymar, suggesting he is likely to return against Scotland.

The 34-year-old, who has not played for Brazil since October 2023, is back in training after recovering from a calf muscle injury.

"Neymar will train individually tomorrow, then rejoin the group on Monday, and he will be ready for the game against Scotland," Ancelotti said. — AFP

Saibari early strike gives Morocco win over Scotland

FOXBOROUGH: Ismael Saibari scored the fastest goal of the World Cup so far after just 71 seconds as Morocco beat Scotland 1-0 on Friday to close in on a place in the knockout rounds.

Saibari scored in Morocco's opening 1-1 draw with Brazil last weekend and his clinical finish with just over a minute gone settled a hard-fought, physical contest watched by a crowd of 64,146 at the Gillette Stadium near Boston.

The quality of his strike past goalkeeper Angus Gunn showed why he is attracting such interest, and it was telling that Scotland lacked the same quality in the opposition box - that helps explain why Morocco are ranked fifth in the world, and Scotland 40th.

With four points from two games, Morocco are now primed to advance to the last 32 as they aim to at least match

their historic run to the semi-finals in Qatar in 2022.

However, it was a sobering evening for Scotland and their army of fans who have taken over Boston during this World Cup, as their team never really tested Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou.

The laboured 1-0 win over Haiti in their opening game at the same stadium last weekend gave them a platform to build on and reason to believe they can progress beyond the group stage at a World Cup for the very first time.

Another win here would have secured progress from Group C, but their chances of going further remain up in the air going into their next match against Brazil in Miami next Wednesday.

Morocco, whose captain Achraf Hakimi started hours after it was confirmed he must stand trial in France on

rape charges, face Haiti in Atlanta next.

Moroccan coach Mohamed Ouahbi went with an unchanged starting line-up here following the Brazil clash, but opposite number Steve Clarke made three changes.

Clarke sought to reinforce his defence, meaning striker Lawrence Shankland dropped out as defender Kieran Tierney came into the side to make a back five.

But that was of little use as Morocco went ahead practically from kick-off.

The assist came from Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz and Grant Hanley played Saibari inside as the latter latched onto the ball over the top, controlled and rifled high into the net.

Morocco, who defeated Scotland 3-0 when the teams met at the 1998 World Cup, threatened to overrun their

opponents every time they got forward but were wasteful, with Bilal El Khannouss squandering a good chance on 36 minutes.

Scotland were as stodgy in attack as they have been for a long time, and it took until first-half stoppage time for them to create anything dangerous.

That was a cross whipped in from the left by skipper Andy Robertson that John McGinn was unable to make anything of, and the opening period ended without Bounou needing to make a save. Morocco hit the woodwork five minutes into the second half as Saibari met a cutback by El Khannouss and his attempt was deflected onto the bar by Jack Hendry. — AFP



Ismael Saibari (right) celebrates after scoring a goal.

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Ronaldinho coming out of retirement to join Italian 3rd division side

ROME: Former Ballon d'Or and World Cup winner Ronaldinho is set to come out of retirement aged 46 to play for Ravenna in the Italian third tier, according to reports in Italian daily Gazzetta dello Sport.

The sports daily said that Ronaldinho was scheduled to sign a deal in Miami on Tuesday and that he was already in the United States for the World Cup.

A source close to the deal confirmed the news.

"I can't wait to get back dancing with the ball again and to write a new story with Ignazio Cipriani (the Italian-American owner of Ravenna) and his entire family," Gazzetta quoted Ronaldinho as saying.

"Football has always been a source of joy for me. I want to bring the same spirit to Ravenna," added the former Paris Saint-Germain and Barcelona star.

However, Ravenna vice-president Ariedo Braida, told Italian media that Ronaldinho's signing was more a marketing ploy than a piece of squad-building and he may never actually play.

"He's a magical player, who will have his registration, that's a huge coup for us," he said.

"Will he play at 46? That depends, but he'll be registered."

Ronaldinho has not played since a two-month stint at Fluminense in 2015. — AFP

Egypt seek landmark victory against New Zealand to boost knockout hopes

MAHMOUD ELMAZATY
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Egypt will look to move within touching distance of a historic place in the FIFA World Cup 2026 knockout stage when they face New Zealand in a Group G match at BC Place tomorrow (4am, Qatar time).

The Pharaohs head into the match carrying renewed belief after an impressive opening-round performance against Belgium, where they earned a valuable point against one of the tournament favourites.

With New Zealand also beginning their campaign with a 2-2 draw against Iran, both sides enter the second round level on points and fully aware that victory could provide a major boost in the race for qualification to the Round of 32.

Egypt produced one of their most disciplined displays in recent years against Belgium under the guidance of head coach Hossam Hassan.

The Pharaohs showed tactical flexibility throughout the match, shifting smoothly between a 4-4-2 and a 4-2-3-1 formation while remaining compact defensively and dangerous on the counterattack.

One of the notable tactical adjustments saw Liverpool winger Mohamed Salah operate in a more central role behind Manchester City striker Omar Marmoush, allowing Egypt to transition quickly from defence to attack. The approach proved effective against Belgium and is expected to remain a key feature of Hassan's game plan against New Zealand.

Midfielder Emam Ashour emerged as one of Egypt's standout performers in the opening round, earning the Player of the Match award after an energetic display in midfield that combined defensive work with attacking contributions.

Local media reports quoted Hassan as telling his players that the New Zealand match could be one of the most important games in Egypt's football history.

A victory would not only secure the nation's first-ever World Cup win but also place the Pharaohs in a strong position to qualify for the knockout stage for the first time.

Despite entering the tournament as outsiders, New Zealand demonstrated their cre-

dentials with an impressive performance against Iran.

The Oceania representatives displayed resilience, physical strength and attacking intent to earn a valuable point against a side widely expected to challenge for qualification.

Much of New Zealand's attacking threat revolves around Nottingham Forest striker Chris Wood. Standing at 191 centimetres, the experienced forward provides a constant aerial presence and serves as the focal point for the team's direct style of play. With both teams chasing their first World Cup victory and a potentially decisive three points, the encounter promises to be a thrilling contest.



Egypt players during a training session yesterday. PIC: @EgyptNT

Sri Lanka's Pathirage eyes Commonwealth Games, Asian record after Doha triumph

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Sri Lankan javelin throw sensation Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage captured his maiden Doha Diamond League victory in emphatic fashion on Friday evening with a monumental 88.68m mark, and wasted no time looking ahead to claiming back-to-back global championships medals.

After becoming the eighth best in the history of his event, the 23-year-old is aiming to claim his country's first gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in 20 years, next month.

Pathirage's victory at the Suheim Bin Hamad Stadium came amidst challenges from four former and current world champions, India's Neeraj Chopra, Grenada's Anderson Peters, Kenya's Julius Yego and Keshorn Walcott of Trinidad & Tobago.

While Pathirage recovered from a slow start to deliver his winning mark in his fourth attempt, two-time world champion Peters finished second with a 86.38m mark to continue his brilliant form in the Diamond League season.

American rival Curtis Thompson (85.99m) completed the top three as India's Olympic hero Chopra, returning to action following a long injury lay-off, booked his place in the Commonwealth Games with an

impressive 85.69m throw, finishing in fourth spot.

Pathirage has been enjoying the form of his life.

Doha represented just the latest step in a blistering three-week spell in which he produced a massive 92.62m national record at the Diamond League Rome meeting - which was also the 2026 world lead and a meeting record. A week later, he captured an 86.57m triumph at the Ostrava Golden Spike meeting on the night before he took the flight to Doha.

This was his fourth competition in that span and he admitted that the fatigue made an impact to his effort.

"I knew if I threw more than 88 meters here tonight that I would secure the gold, so I'm incredibly happy," Pathirage told The Peninsula following his win.

"I always dreamed of competing in Doha and earning a place on this Diamond League meeting, it's unbelievable to be the first Sri Lankan athlete here," Pathirage, who was cheered by a sizable crowd who were waving his country flag, said.

His coach, Tony Prasanna revealed that a short spell of rest will follow back in Sri Lanka before preparations ramp up for the July 23 - August 2 Com-

monwealth Games in Glasgow.

Prasanna told *The Peninsula* that the demanding series of competitions in May and June had inevitably taken a physical toll.

Pathirage also firmly declared his intention to surpass the Asian record (92.97m), held by Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem, and also the Asian Games record of 89.15m, set by China's Zhao Qinggang in 2014.

His throw in Rome was just 35 centimeters shy of the Asian

record, and his consistent performances have shown the Asian Games record is within touching distance.

"Last year, a typical throw for me was in the 85m range, so I've made a massive leap this season," he said.

"For the Asian Games, my goal is to break the 90-meter barrier and win the gold. Now the priority is to rewrite the Asian record book," Pathirage said.

"Next month, I have the Commonwealth Games, and my absolute target there is to take home the gold medal as well."

While Pathirage and Chopra already in line for a scintillating duel in Glasgow, the prospect of seeing them competing against each other again on the grand stage will be a treat to watch.

Coach Prasanna opined that Pathirage can go for the gold both in Glasgow and Nagoya.

"He has participated in competitions alongside almost all of these athletes. I think Rumesh (Pathirage) can handle the pressure. I think he can deliver exceptional results," Prasanna said.



Sri Lanka's Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage competes in the men's javelin throw during the Doha Diamond League competition in Doha. PIC: XINHUA



Qatar gymnasts impress at Asian Championships

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar's artistic gymnastics team continued its steady rise on the continental stage as Rakan Al Harith and Mehrdad Qadimi produced encouraging results at the 2026 Asian Artistic Gymnastics Championships in Zunyi, China.

Competing in one of the strongest fields on the international calendar, the Qatari pair held their own against Olympic and world championship medallists, underlining the progress being made in the country's gymnastics programme.

Al Harith delivered the standout result for Qatar, finishing fifth in the Pommel Horse final to secure a place among Asia's leading athletes in the apparatus this year. The field featured several decorated names, making his top-five finish a notable achievement and a reflection

of his continued technical development.

Qadimi also made his presence felt, taking eighth place in the Rings final. The result came in his first appearance at Asian Championship level and against a deep field of established international competitors. His performance offered further indication of his potential on the continental stage.

Together, the two finals appearances marked an important milestone for Qatari gymnastics, with athletes reaching apparatus finals in different events and securing top-eight and top-five finishes at a major Asian competition.

The performances also highlighted the growing depth of the sport in Qatar, as the Gymnastics Federation's development pathway continues to produce athletes capable of competing at elite regional level.

Bagnaia scorches to Czech MotoGP sprint victory, Bezzecchi crashes



Team's Francesco Bagnaia (right) leads the pack during the sprint race of the MotoGP Grand Prix of Czechia in Brno, Czech Republic, yesterday.

PRAGUE: Italy's Francesco Bagnaia scorched to victory in the Czech MotoGP sprint in Brno yesterday ahead of pole sitter Ai Ogura on an Aprilia and Ducati teammate Marc Marquez.

Championship leader Marco Bezzecchi started from fourth on the grid but failed to hold on to the spot and crashed out with two laps to go.

He has however retained the overall lead

with 180 points ahead of Aprilia Racing teammate Jorge Martin with 165 and Fabio Di Giannantonio on a VR46 Ducati with 144.

The 29-year-old Bagnaia started from third on the grid and capitalised from a rocket start that saw him top the pack into turn one.

He hailed Ducati's decision to use soft rear tyres on the burning hot tarmac.

"Luckily it was the correct one," he said.

"The first two laps made everything, I started well, I tried to push, open the gap and then I tried to control a bit," he added.

Ogura settled for second and never got close enough to attack the Italian in the lead.

"I thought that I could have something more at the end of the race," said Ogura, riding on medium

tyres both front and rear.

The 25-year-old Japanese rider topped Friday's practice and then also dominated Saturday's qualifying to clinch his first-ever MotoGP pole position.

Seven-time world champion Marc Marquez in turn did not find the pace to try to overtake Ogura, but he safely held off Di Giannantonio in the fourth spot.

Marquez won the last GP in Hungary two weeks ago and also dominated both the sprint and the race in the second Czech city of Brno in 2025.

Brazil's Diogo Moreira got off to a great start from sixth on the grid, settling in the third place until turn 12 of the first lap when he crashed out. Pedro Acosta, fourth overall, also crashed out of the sprint on lap five. — AFP