



Sheikh Joaan attends Saudi Arabia National Day celebrations

Olympic Council of Asia and Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani yesterday attended a celebration held by the Saudi delegation in Nagoya, Japan, to mark the National Day of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the sidelines of the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026. Also in attendance were QOC First Vice President Mohammed bin Yousef Al Mana, QOC Secretary General Jassim bin Rashid Al Buenain, and several heads of delegations participating in the Asian Games.



Qatar shooters celebrate men's team skeet gold

FROM LEFT: Qatari shooters Rashid Saleh Al Athba, Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah and Ali Ahmed Al Ishaq celebrate on the podium after winning the men's team skeet gold medal at the Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026. Qatar dominated the event, leading from the opening round to the last, finishing with 353 hits ahead of Kuwait and India.



Qatar's Rashid Saleh Al-Athba competes in the men's skeet final. (AFP)

Al Athba sets Asian record as Qatar clinch two gold medals in shooting

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Rashid Saleh Al Athba led Qatar's golden day at the Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 yesterday, helping the team win men's team skeet gold before adding the individual title with a new Asian record.

Al Athba teamed up with Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah and Ali Ahmed Al Ishaq as Qatar dominated the team event, leading from the opening round to the last and finishing with 353 hits. Kuwait took silver with 348, while India claimed bronze with 346.

Al Athba then produced another standout performance in the individual competition, hitting 34 targets to set a new Asian record. Kazakhstan's Eduard Yechshenko had held the previous mark of 33, set in January this year.

China's Lyu Jianlin took silver with 33 hits, while Chinese Taipei's Lee Meng-Yuan claimed bronze with 29. Al Attiyah finished fifth.

The two gold medals lifted Qatar's medal tally to four - two gold, one silver and one bronze - after the national karate team had opened the country's account with Abdulrahman Abdulhamid's silver and Abdullah Rashad Mohi El Din Babiker's bronze.

Olympic Council of Asia President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani presented Qatar's shooting team with the team gold medal, adding to a memorable day for the country's shooters.

Al Athba, who won both team and individual gold,



Individual skeet gold medalist Rashid Saleh Al-Athba (centre) of Qatar, silver medalist L Jianlin (left) of China and bronze winner L Meng-Yuan of Chinese Taipei celebrate on the podium. (XINHUA)

“It is a major achievement that I am extremely proud of. The level of competition was extremely high. The Asian Games are considered one of the toughest competitions, particularly as the conditions surrounding the event were not easy.”

Rashid Saleh Al Athba



MEDAL TALLY					
RK	COUNTRY	G	S	B	T
1	China	48	20	10	78
2	Japan	15	25	27	67
3	Republic of Korea	8	8	25	41
4	Kazakhstan	7	4	8	19
5	Thailand	5	3	4	12
6	Hong Kong, China	3	6	7	16
7	Iran	3	3	2	8
8	Malaysia	3	1	5	9
9	North Korea	2	1	3	6
10	Kuwait	2	1	2	5
11	Qatar	2	1	1	4
11	Tajikistan	2	1	1	4
13	India	1	5	6	12
20	Vietnam	1	0	8	9



Abdulla Al Tamimi made a winning start, beating Mongolia's Yesun Otgonchimeg 3-0 to reach the Round of 16.

Nasser Al Attiyah and Ali Al Ishaq, and I was also able to win the individual gold,” he said. “It is a major achievement that I am extremely proud of.”

The shooter said the competition had been particularly demanding.

“The level of competition was extremely high. The Asian Games are considered one of the toughest competitions, particularly as the conditions surrounding the event were not easy,” said Al Athba, who also claimed gold at the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cup in Hangzhou in July.

“We knew how strong the competition would be, so we gave everything we had and maintained a high level of concentration.”

Al Attiyah, competing after a period away from the sport, was equally pleased with the team success.

“Praise be to Allah for winning the team gold medal. I congratulate my teammate Rashid Al Athba on winning gold in the individual competition,” he said.

The Dakar Rally champion, who is 55, said he had returned to competition after trials two months ago and felt he had more to give.

“I have not yet reached 100 percent of my level, and I am working to prepare myself better for the next challenge, particularly the World Shooting Championships in Doha, which will serve as a qualifier for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games,” Al Attiyah said.

It was Al Attiyah's third Asian Games gold, following his victories in 2002 and 2010, and his sixth medal at the Games overall.

He also won skeet bronze at the 2012 London Olympics.



Action during the match between Qatar and Bahrain in men's 3x3 basketball event. Qatar won 21-15.



Qatar's Mousa Al Khair and Ehab Mohammed claimed another victory in beach volleyball.



Swimming action continues at Asian Games.

range, Qatar's 3x3 basketball team continued its impressive campaign by beating Bahrain 21-15 to reach the quarter-finals with a third successive victory.

After opening with wins over Indonesia and Chinese Taipei, Qatar completed a clean sweep in the group against Bahrain and will face the winners of Mongolia and Singapore today.

“It was a difficult match against Bahrain, but thankfully we managed to secure the victory and qualify for the quarter-finals,” said team manager Yassin Ismail.

“We know the next stage will be more difficult, but we will give everything we have.”

Meanwhile, Qatar's second beach volleyball team also maintained its winning run, with Mousa Al Khair and Ehab Mohammed defeating Sri Lanka 2-1 in Group D. The Qatari pair, who had earlier beaten Republic of Korea, won 21-10, 16-21, 15-10 to claim their second straight victory.

Al Tamimi enters last-16

In squash, Abdulla Al Tamimi made a winning start, beating Mongolia's Yesun Otgonchimeg 3-0 (11-3, 11-2, 11-2) in 15 minutes to reach the Round of 16. He faces Japan's Ryunosuke Tsukue today.

Salem Al Malki, meanwhile, exited after a 3-0 loss to Republic of Korea's Na Joo-young.

Swimming also saw Ali Tamer reach the 200m free-style final after clocking 1:48.66 in the heats. He finished sixth in the final in 1:48.00.

Qatar's esports campaign ended with Rashid Al Oulan finishing seventh in Gran Turismo 7 after reaching the semi-finals.

The eFootball team also ended its group-stage campaign after defeats to Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Qatar reach 3x3 basketball quarters
Away from the shooting

China prodigy wins third Asian Games gold as North Korea weightlifters roar

NAGOYA: China's 13-year-old swimming prodigy Yu Zidi sealed a hat-trick of Asian Games titles yesterday, as North Korea won their first two golds thanks to their powerhouse women weightlifters.

Towards the end of the fourth full day of action in Aichi-Nagoya, China were easily top of the medals table with 47 golds.

Second were the hosts Japan on 15, with Republic of Korea third with eight.

The schoolgirl Yu will be remembered as one of the faces of the Games after her eye-popping exploits in the pool.

If she maintains her current trajectory the teenager will be a major medal threat at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

Yu, who turns 14 next month, powered to a dominant victory in the women's 400m individual medley in a Games-record 4min 28.56sec.

It gave her a clean sweep from her three individual events, following victories in the 200m butterfly and 200m individual medley, also in Games-record times.

It was a reflection of China's dominance in the pool this week, winning 21 of the 28 golds so far.

But for all her success, Yu says there is still room for improvement.

"I gained a lot from these Asian Games but there were also some regrets," she said after the race.

The teenager stood in wide-eyed amazement when a reporter suggested she had made it look easy.

"Definitely not," she replied.

North Korean weightlifter Ri Song Gum gave her country their first gold of the Games, and in style, setting three world records in the women's 49kg class.

Kang Hyon Gyong made it a golden double for North Korea's women weightlifters by winning the 53kg class in equally dominant fashion.

Ri, who stands a mere 140cm (4ft 7ins) tall, joined an elite club of four weightlifters who have won three Asian Games golds.

The 28-year-old was emotional as her country's anthem was played at the medal ceremony.

Ri's exceptional achievement was



China's Yu Zidi celebrates on the podium.

cheered to the rafters in a lively atmosphere, made all the more raucous by a large number of Japanese North Korean fans waving flags.

Ri hauled 94kg above her head in the opening snatch discipline, one kilogram more than

the previous world standard of 93kg.

She then smashed the clean and jerk world mark of 115kg twice by hoisting 116kg and then 121kg. Her total of 215kg also obliterated the world mark by 7kg.

"The reason I got this gold is for the feelings of my home country, the people had huge expectations for me," Ri told reporters.

"I wanted to lift my country up on these two small shoulders."

Athletics began with the men's and women's half-marathon race walks.

China's Shi Shengji won the men's and compatriot Yang Liuqing triumphed in the women's.

"My name means 'power', so here I walked with power," said Yang.

Asked about her country winning both the men's and women's disciplines, she replied: "I think it's normal for us to sweep the (gold) medals." In badminton, world number one An Se-young won her match but South Korea lost 3-1 to Japan in the women's team event semi-finals.

An, the reigning world and Olympic champion, was not best pleased by her father in the crowd.

"Parents usually cannot bear to watch their own children compete, but my dad seems to watch perfectly happily, which is a bit much," she said.

"I am out there running myself into the ground and he is just cheering away in comfort." China won the men's team event in gymnastics, ahead of Japan.

"Second place. The most honest feeling is that it is very frustrating," said Japan's Daiki Hashimoto. — **AFP**



Spain Cristina Bucsa (right) and Sara Sorribes Tormo celebrate.

Spain survive doubles scare to reach BJK Cup semis

SHENZHEN: Cristina Bucsa overcame fatigue and rebounded from a disappointing singles loss to help Spain punch their ticket to the Billie Jean King Cup semi-finals for the first time since 2008 in Shenzhen yesterday.

Bucsa and her teammate Sara Sorribes Tormo secured the deciding doubles point by triumphing 6-2, 7-5 over Anna Danilina and Zhibek Kulambayeva to clinch the quarter-final tie for Spain over Kazakhstan. The Spanish pair saved a whopping 18 out of 20 break points throughout the gruelling two-hour seven-minute doubles affair.

Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro claimed the opening point of the tie with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Sonja Zhiyenbayeva, before world number 79 Yulia Putintseva kept Kazakhstan alive in the contest by defeating Bucsa 6-2, 3-6, 6-1.

Putintseva's victory, her 28th in the competition, saw her equal the record held by Galina Voskoboeva for most BJK Cup matches won by a Kazakh player.

Bucsa had arrived late in Shenzhen after reaching the singles semi-finals and winning the doubles title at the WTA tournament in Guadalajara last weekend.

The long trek from Mexico to China may have accounted for her slow start against Putintseva, who played a near-flawless opening set to take the lead in just 33 minutes.

Bucsa dug deep in the second, countering Putintseva's drop shots with her own mix of big-hitting and soft touches to level the match.

But the 35th-ranked Spaniard ran out of gas in the third, as Putintseva swung the momentum back in her favour to clinch the win and take the quarter-final tie into a deciding doubles showdown.

The day was not over for Bucsa, who was back on court some 30 minutes later to partner up with Sorribes Tormo in doubles.

As the highest-ranked Spanish player in both singles and doubles, the Moldovaborn Bucsa knew her team were relying on her to pull off double duty in Shenzhen and the 28-year-old did not disappoint, as she sealed the deal alongside Sorribes Tormo to send Spain through to a semi-final meeting with the Czech Republic. — **AFP**

Pakistan coach Hesson eyes India clash

KARACHI: Pakistan head coach Mike Hesson admitted yesterday that his team has some catching up to do if they are to challenge arch-rivals India at the Asian Games.

India's men have won back-to-back World Cups and are also defending champions at the Asian Games.

Since Hesson took over in May last year Pakistan lost to India three times in the Asia Cup 2025 and once in this year's Twenty20 World Cup.

"India are the benchmark in terms of white ball cricket at the moment and our challenge is to catch up to that," said Hesson in Karachi ahead of the team's departure.

The men's cricket at the Asian Games in Japan starts today.

Pakistan and India have never met at the Games but are likely to face off in the semi-finals on October 1 in Nagoya.

"We are certainly preparing as best we can and if we get an opportunity to play (India) we will certainly put them under pressure like we did in the final of the Asia Cup," Hesson said of last year's final in Dubai.

Pakistan will first meet the winners of Pool B, comprising Hong Kong, Oman and Malaysia, in the quarter-final on September 28.

Hesson said Pakistan need to start well.

"There is a lot of cricket to be played between now and being able to play in the semi-final for both sides (Pakistan and India), so we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves," Hesson said.

Pakistan have never won a medal in the Asian Games cricket, losing the bronze medal match in 2010 and 2023 while they did not compete in 2014.

While India has sent a full-strength team for the Asian Games, Pakistan's side is a combination of youth and experience, captained by opener Sahibzada Farhan. — **AFP**

Badminton No.1 An tells dad to keep it down at Asian Games

NAGOYA: Badminton world number one An Se-young (pictured) had stern words for her watching father as her frustrations threatened to boil over in victory at the Asian Games in Japan yesterday.

The reigning world and Olympic champion from Republic of Korea defeated home player Akane Yamaguchi in three tough games in the semi-finals of the women's team event in Nagoya.

But the 24-year-old was not always at her brilliant best against the world number three, winning 21-9, 18-21, 21-11.

"I think I expressed it too forcefully, to make myself notice that I was making mistakes," she said of her

visible frustrations. "I should not have done that. From now on I need to hold it in more."

An said the fact that she could hear everything in the crowd, including the commentators, was proof of her poor concentration.

Most of all, she said, she was aware of parents watching in the arena.

"Parents usually cannot bear to watch their own children compete, but my dad seems to watch perfectly happily, which is a bit much."

"I am out there running myself into the ground and he is just cheering away in comfort."

Japan recovered to win the semi-final 3-1. — **AFP**



Milne returns to New Zealand squad for India T20 series

WELLINGTON: New Zealand speedster Adam Milne (pictured) will return to the Black Cap's T20 squad for next month's home series against India after more than a year out of international cricket, coach Rob Walter said yesterday.

India's tour of New Zealand will include five T20s, five ODIs and two Test matches, with the opening T20 set for Christchurch on October 22. Thirteen of the 16-strong squad were part of the New Zealand side that finished runners-up to India at the T20 World Cup in March.

"We've got a near full-strength squad that covers all bases and I'm excited to see



how we compete against the current T20 world champions," Black Caps coach Walter said.

Milne, 34, last played for New Zealand more than a year ago and has amassed 56 international caps.

He missed the World Cup due to injury, as did off-spin all-rounder Michael Bracewell who also returns to the squad.

Walter confirmed Rachin Ravindra will miss the series due to an injury suffered during a promotional shoot last week, but it is hoped he might return for the ODI series.

T20 specialists Tim Seifert and Finn Allen were named in the squad, as Walter said he sought to pick the strongest team possible.

"Our priority is winning games and putting the best team on the park, but we also have to keep in mind the volume of cricket in the coming months," he said.

"We're very fortunate with the depth that we've got to call upon, so we'll look to use all 16 squad members throughout the series as we manage workloads."

NEW ZEALAND: Mitchell Santner (capt), Finn Allen, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Zak Foulkes, Matt Henry, Bevon Jacobs, Kyle Jamieson, Adam Milne, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Tim Seifert, Nathan Smith. — **AFP**

'Never a friendly game' for Brazil, says Ancelotti ahead of India match

NEW DELHI: Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti said the five-time world champions take their friendly against India next week very seriously, insisting there is "never a friendly game" for them, according to media reports yesterday.

Brazil, ranked fifth in the world and boasting stars including Vinicius Junior, will face India in Kolkata on October 3 -- their first senior men's international in the country where football enjoys a passionate following despite cricket's overwhelming popularity.

The visit will offer a rare opportunity for local fans to see one of football's most celebrated teams in action.

"Brazil has supporters in every corner of the world," Ancelotti was quoted as saying by daily *The Times* of India.

"It's a pleasure for us to play in

India, not just for the Brazilian supporters, but also those in India." Although the match is officially a friendly, the veteran Italian manager said Brazil would approach it with full seriousness.

"It's a preparatory game, a friendly, but for us, there is never a friendly game," Ancelotti, 67, said.

India, ranked 138th by FIFA, have never qualified for a World Cup but football remains hugely popular, especially in Kolkata and the southern city of Kochi.

Ancelotti said the fixture would also offer Brazil a chance to experience a new football culture.

"We have to see other nations, other cultures. We are used to playing friendlies with different styles," said the coach who took charge last year.

"India will be exciting. It's true that India does not have a good

experience (of playing world-class opponents), but it's important for us to know how they play. I've never been to India. I am very excited to come to Kolkata." Next week's match will be the first appearance by a full-strength Brazilian men's national team in India.

Brazilian legend Pele visited India in 1977 and 2015.

The Brazilians will arrive in India after playing two friendlies in Australia.

One of the most decorated managers in the game's history, Ancelotti has won a record five Champions League titles as a coach.

Brazil are seeking to end a lengthy World Cup drought, having last lifted football's biggest prize in 2002.

Their most recent World Cup campaign saw them bow out in the round-of-16. — **AFP**



Brazil's Vitor Reis (left) and Endrick (centre) attend a training session at Ballymore Stadium in Brisbane.

Qatar begin ‘new story’ against Gulf Cup holders Bahrain

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: “The World Cup is in the past. We are starting a new story.”

That was coach Julen Lopetegui’s message yesterday as Qatar prepare to begin their first competitive assignment since the World Cup, facing defending champions Bahrain in their opening Group B match in the 27th Arabian Gulf Cup at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium in Jeddah tonight.

Kick-off is at 9pm, with the UAE taking on Yemen in the other Group B match at 6:55pm.

For Lopetegui, the Gulf Cup is the first chapter of that new story. The Spanish coach, who retained his position after Qatar’s World Cup campaign, has kept the core of the squad that featured in Qatar’s first appearance at the tournament through traditional qualifying route.

Of the 26 players selected for Khaleeji 27, only three changes have been made to the World Cup group. Al Sadd defender Tarek Salman returns, while Hashim Ali and Naif Al Hadrami have been brought back after two years away from the national team. Al Hashemi Al Hussein, Lucas Mendes and Mohammed Muntari are the omissions.

Hassan Al Haydos remains available after reversing his



Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui (left) and Qatar goalkeeper Mahmoud Abunada speak during a press conference ahead of their Gulf Cup opener against defending champions Bahrain in Jeddah yesterday. RIGHT: Qatar’s Hassan Al Haydos (right) and Yusuf Abdurisag attend a training session.



competition. Now we have to produce an even better level because defending the championship requires double the effort from everyone,” he said.

Talajic also knows what awaits his side.

“This tournament is the World Cup for the Gulf countries. We are playing against our brothers, and it is a very difficult tournament,” he said.

Qatar’s immediate focus is the Gulf Cup, with Lopetegui making it clear that the Asian Cup can wait. Qatar will travel to Saudi Arabia again for the AFC Asian Cup from January 7 to February 5 next year, where they will bid for a third successive continental title.

The Gulf Cup, one of the region’s oldest football competitions, has been dominated by Kuwait with 10 titles. Iraq have won it four times, while Qatar and Saudi Arabia have three titles each. Oman, the UAE and Bahrain have two apiece, with Yemen yet to lift the trophy.

Saudi Arabia edge Kuwait

In Group A yesterday, hosts Saudi Arabia edged Kuwait 1-0 in their opening match.

An own goal by Yousef Al Haqan in the 73rd minute was enough to give the home side all three points.

Iraq and Oman opened the Gulf Cup with a 1-1 draw, with Mohammed Qasim putting Iraq ahead before Nasser Al-Rawahi equalised for Oman.



The Gulf Cup is an important tournament with a special significance for the people of the region. We have prepared well and are ready to compete.

Julen Lopetegui
Qatar coach

international retirement, while Akram Afif and Almoez Ali continue to lead the attack.

Qatar’s World Cup ended with defeats to Canada and Bosnia and Herzegovina and a 1-1 draw against Switzerland, which gave them their first point at the finals.

But Lopetegui is not looking back.

“The Gulf Cup is an important tournament with a special significance for the people of the region. We have prepared well and are ready to compete,” he said.

Qatar face the defending champions in a fixture that has been closely contested in recent years. Bahrain have won two of

the teams’ last four meetings, Qatar one, while the other ended in a draw.

“History stays in history. We are in the present and want to change these numbers,” Lopetegui said.

Bahrain, who lifted the title in Kuwait in the previous edition, will provide an immediate test. Lopetegui acknowledged the quality of Dragan Talajic’s side, saying: “They have good quality and a lot of strength. We know that, and that is why we are here to do our best.”

Qatar goalkeeper Mahmoud

Abunada expects another fiercely contested Gulf Cup.

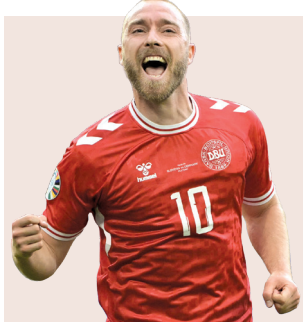
“This edition is expected to witness strong competition,” Abunada said.

“We want to go as far as possible in the tournament, but we will take the matches step by step and focus on ourselves.”

Bahrain, meanwhile, are determined to make a strong start to their title defence.

Sayed Dhiya Saeed said defending champions Bahrain must raise their level.

“In the last edition, we won the title after strong



Eriksen to return to Denmark after parting ways with Wolfsburg

BERLIN: Former Tottenham, Inter Milan and Manchester United midfielder Christian Eriksen (pictured) will return to his native Denmark after leaving Bundesliga 2 side Wolfsburg yesterday.

Wolfsburg, who were relegated from the top flight at the end of last season, announced Eriksen was ending his contract, due to run out next year, early “by mutual consent”.

The 34-year-old has been recovering from suffering an on-pitch collapse in June during a friendly between Denmark and Ukraine which forced the match to be abandoned.

He was able to leave the pitch of his own accord after treatment.

Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest and needed to be resuscitated on the pitch during a Euro 2020 match against Finland.

He was out for six months after that collapse five years ago and has played the remainder of his career with a pacemaker fitted. — AFP

MADRID: Spain coach Luis de la Fuente will not allow the World Cup winners to rest on their laurels as they get back into action this week for the first time since their triumph.

La Roja may have conquered Europe in 2024 and then the world this summer, but when they face England in the Nations League on Saturday, they will be seeking to improve.

De la Fuente said in the aftermath of the World Cup final victory over Argentina in New Jersey in July, he was already looking to the future.

The 65-year-old signed a contract extension, keeping him with the team until 2032, earlier this week.

“In the heat of the moment, two or three minutes later, a player came up to me and said, ‘What do we still have to win?’ Well, the match against England on September 26th,” said De la Fuente.

“This team never stops. The World Cup isn’t enough -- we have to be better. What we’ve achieved isn’t enough to win the next match.”

Spain’s next major target will be the 2028 European championships, where they have a chance to emulate the La Roja side that won Euro 2008, World Cup 2010 and Euro 2012. De la Fuente admitted that repeating that feat would be tricky.

“In life it’s very hard to win, and many



more (teams) lose than win,” he said.

“Repeating past successes in terms of titles... we’re going to try to be in a position to compete to win.

“Now we’re the team to beat. That’s an added motivation.”

New faces

Thomas Tuchel’s England, who lost to Spain in the Euro 2024 final, offer an immediate reminder of the level Spain

will be expected to maintain as world champions.

De la Fuente picked a similar squad to his World Cup team for the upcoming Nations League games against England, Croatia twice, and the Czech Republic.

Teenage star Lamine Yamal, having returned to form with Barcelona, and captain Rodri remain the key figures, and are both in the running to win the Ballon

Alonso slams ‘assassination’ of classic F1 circuits

BAKU: Two-time champion Fernando Alonso (pictured) yesterday said some of Formula One’s most classic circuits had been “assassinated” in the modern era of hybrid cars and called for change.

The Aston Martin driver’s remarks came after his home Spanish Grand Prix at the Madring circuit was criticised for a lack of

overtaking opportunities and described by reigning world champion Lando Norris as “not a great race track”.

Alonso said his disappointment with the experience of racing in F1 this year extended to many other circuits and cited the British Grand Prix at Silverstone, the Belgian race at Spa-Francorchamps and the

Japanese event at Suzuka as among those diminished.

“Maybe from the cockpit, behind the wheel, especially if you drive other categories or have experienced other F1 cars, there’s a bit of frustration,” Alonso said.

“Silverstone, which is an incredible track, is no longer fun,” he said.

“At Spa, it was almost embarrassing going through Eau Rouge and, at Suzuka, the 130R,” he said referencing once-daunting corners.

“There are circuits that have been assassinated this year.”

Alonso is 19th in the world championship standings with just three points. Kimi Antonelli leads the way on 292. — AFP



Runaway leader Antonelli eyeing third straight win

BAKU: Kimi Antonelli (pictured) has another opportunity to extend his runaway lead in this year’s Formula One title race as he heads into this weekend’s Azerbaijan Grand Prix, the first in a potentially decisive triple-header, bidding for a third straight win.

Buoyed by eight victories this year and a lead of 81 points ahead of Mercedes team-mate George Russell, the 20-year-old Italian has been irrepressible as he seeks to become Italy’s first champion since Alberto Ascari in 1953.

But he and Mercedes know they have to temper his enthusiasm on a fast street track with a reputation for creating chaos.

“Recent results have been encouraging, but they don’t guarantee anything,” said Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff.

“Baku will expose any weakness very quickly. We have to approach the weekend with humility, do the

F1: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS DRIVERS (TOP 10)

1. Kimi Antonelli (ITA) 292 pts, 2. George Russell (GBR) 211, 3. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 191, 4. Lando Norris (GBR) 186, 5. Charles Leclerc (MON) 167, 6. Max Verstappen (NED) 145, 7. Oscar Piastri (AUS) 120, 8. Isack Hadjar (FRA) 71, 9. Liam Lawson (NZL) 59, 10. Pierre Gasly (FRA) 41

CONSTRUCTORS

1. Mercedes 503 pts, 2. Ferrari 358, 3. McLaren 306, 4. Red Bull 230, 5. Racing Bulls 77, 6. Alpine 68, 7. Haas 21, 8. Audi 17, 9. Williams 11, 10. Aston Martin 3, 11. Cadillac 0

basics well and earn every point.” Having won in Italy and Spain, Antonelli will be seeking a hat-trick which could tighten his grip on the title.

But he admitted after winning in Madrid that he was lucky with a virtual safety car which denied McLaren’s Lando Norris victory.

“The last two races brought us good results,” said Wolff.



The high-speed Baku street track can deliver unexpected incidents and results while the following events in Malaysia and Singapore will be physically draining for everyone, with three grands prix in as many weeks.

The Baku race this year takes place on Saturday because Azerbaijan is marking its Remembrance Day on Sunday.

The race is the 10th in Baku, which joined the calendar in 2016 initially as the European Grand Prix, but was

cancelled in 2020 due to the Covid pandemic. While Mercedes hope to set the pace again, McLaren, Ferrari and Red Bull will all have reason to be confident.

Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc has a brilliant qualifying record in Azerbaijan, only having his run of four consecutive pole positions in the race ended last year when he crashed in final qualifying and failed to set a time.

The Monegasque has never won the race, though.

His team-mate, seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, has ruled himself out of the title race, sitting third in the drivers’ standings but 101 points adrift.

However, the former Baku winner may be a threat if he and Ferrari rediscover their form.

Max Verstappen will be hunting his third Baku triumph for Red Bull, who have enjoyed five wins on the circuit, and Oscar Piastri of McLaren his second. — AFP

Hadjar extends Red Bull contract for 2027 F1 season

PARIS: Frenchman Isack Hadjar will continue to partner Max Verstappen at Red Bull for the 2027 Formula One season, the team announced yesterday.

The 21-year-old has impressed in his debut year at the team after being promoted following a strong rookie campaign with its junior outfit Racing Bulls in 2025.

Hadjar has missed the last three races with a wrist injury, but still sits eighth in the drivers’ standings with 71 points.

He posted a run of seven consecutive top-six finishes, including a podium in Monaco, before being sidelined.

Hadjar will return to action this weekend at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix. — AFP