

Local

Qatar Asian Cup victory to 'deepen' Gulf tensions

'Omanis and Kuwaitis rejoiced in Qatari success'

DOHA: Qatar's remarkable Asian Cup victory may have been a sporting triumph which sparked wild celebrations in Doha but it is almost certain to come at a political price, analysts say. The win - in the hostile capital of the United Arab Emirates, one of its opponents in a bitter regional dispute - is expected to lead to further animosity between Qatar and the Saudi-led bloc of rival nations. And even just days after Qatar beat Japan 3-1 in the final, it may have already deepened the Gulf diplomatic impasse.

"Any sense of embitterment in Abu Dhabi at the way the tournament they hosted turned out may translate into an escalation of rhetoric against Qatar," said Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, a research fellow at Rice University. He added: "The response to Qatar's run in the Asian Cup has, if anything, deepened the split within the Gulf. "Omanis and Kuwaitis have rejoiced in Qatari success and have done so in extremely public fashion, visibly emphasizing their rejection of the blockading states' attempt to isolate Qatar in the region."

Football and geopolitics

Qatar's first ever Asian Cup win is an astonishing story on numerous levels - a modern-day sporting parable, soaked in geopolitics and symbolism. It is a powerful Qatari riposte to critics who long ridiculed the 2022 World Cup host for its lack of footballing prowess. The team beat three sides who appeared in the Russia World Cup, scored 19 goals, conceded just one and provided the tournament's best goalkeeper, player and highest goalscorer. It is a vindication of the wealthy Gulf state's huge spending to develop talent at its Aspire Academy - 13 of the 23-man squad were graduates, including top scorer Ali Almoez.

But it is far more than just sport. Since June 2017, Saudi-led countries have cut ties with Doha, claiming it supports terrorism and wants a better relationship with Riyadh's arch-rival, Tehran. Qatar denies the charges, says it is being punished for pursuing an independent foreign policy and its enemies want regime change in Doha. As a result, few, if any, Qataris travelled to the UAE to watch matches, claiming they were fearful about what would happen to them. Practically their only supporters were a group of Omanis, subsequently leading Qataris to celebrate with Omani flags in Doha.

Notably, Qatar beat Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the latter victory seeing their players pelted with shoes and bottles by a partisan crowd. The 4-0 victory over the UAE was, according to some, better than the cup win. Many Qataris celebrated by holding up four fingers - one for each of the neighboring boycotting countries, said Ulrichsen. That gesture also matched the one used by Qatar-backed Muslim Brotherhood supporters following the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi in Egypt in 2013.

Qatar's victorious team were greeted by Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani when they arrived back home. He then made his first trip abroad since the victory, notably to regional peace-broker Kuwait, where he presented HH the Amir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with a maroon Qatar football shirt.

And there is yet more symbolism, argues James M Dorsey, author and a senior fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies. "The victory emphasizes to Qatar that it can stand on its own, whatever the obstacles," he said. Salford University professor Simon Chadwick said Qatar's win also helped polish its tarnished international standing. "Qatar's image and



DOHA: Qatari national football team players and staff celebrate on the corniche on Feb 2, 2019 after they returned from the United Arab Emirates with the trophy after winning the 2019 AFC Asian Cup. — AFP

reputation has gained advantage over its rivals, especially given the apparent calmness on Qatar's team when faced with sometimes rancorous rivals," said Chadwick.

'Very naive'

The "escalation" Ulrichsen spoke about is likely to focus on the 2022 World Cup, said Dorsey. "I think what you are going to see is Qatar's victory is going to escalate opposition by primarily the UAE and Saudi Arabia to Qatar hosting the World Cup," he added. Next month,

FIFA will rule on whether the 2022 World Cup will include 32 or 48 teams, and whether Qatar should share games, potentially with neighboring rivals.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino's insistence that an expanded World Cup could help ease regional tensions is "very naive", Dorsey insisted. He pointed to a previous Asian Cup victory - Iraq in 2007 - where people celebrated during a period of sectarian violence, but trouble soon flared again. "Sports and politics are inextricably enshrined," he added. — AFP

Municipal leader hails Sheikh Jaber Causeway project

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Municipal Council Osama Al-Otaibi said Wednesday that Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway Project (SJSC) is one of the world's longest and most gigantic high-speed bridges. "The project is almost complete," he told reporters during an inspection tour of the construction works of the project. He was accompanied by Acting Director-General of the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation Soha Ashkenani and Head of the Capital Affairs Dept of the Municipal Council Hassan Kamal.

"The causeway spans 37.5 km across Kuwait Bay from Kuwait City to Subbiya. It includes a seven-km-long bridge and the Doha Link, which spans across Sulaibikhat Bay from Shuwaik Port in Kuwait City to Doha Peninsula, with a total length of 12.4 km," Otaibi pointed out. "The mega transport project is one of the landmarks in His Highness the Amir's 2035 New Kuwait vision - it will cut short the distance between the capital and Subbiya and remarkably ease traffic between the northern and southern parts of the country over the coming three decades," he added.

Ashkenani said the project starts from the intersection of Jamal Abdul Nasser St and Ghazali Highway to the New Subbiya area



KUWAIT: Chairman of the Municipal Council Osama Al-Otaibi, Acting Director-General of the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation Soha Ashkenani and Head of the Capital Affairs Dept of the Municipal Council Hassan Kamal tour the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway Project on Wednesday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

on the northern side of Kuwait Bay, with a view to easing traffic jams in this vital part of the country. "The causeway will shorten the distance between Kuwait City and Subbiya area from 104 km to 37.5 km and cut short the average time spent by motorists from 90 minutes to only 30," she noted.

"The causeway, the world's fourth longest bridge, follows the latest standards of construction," Ashkenani affirmed, adding that the project envisages launching two industrial islands, one near Kuwait City and another near Subbiya with total areas of 300,000 sq m each. — KUNA

Naked body found in car

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Police found a body of a man inside a car on King Fahd Expressway near Adan Hospital, and there were signs of beating on it. The body — which was naked - was found in the back seat. The deceased was disabled, as one leg was missing and a prosthetic leg was lying next to the body.

Escapee arrested

The interior ministry's public relations department commented on social media reports about a prisoner escaping from the Palace of Justice, saying the inmate was arrested immediately and was taken back to jail.

Farwaniya afternoon hours

The interior ministry's PR department said Farwaniya residency affairs department will operate in the afternoon from 2:30 pm until 7:00 pm to process companies' transactions.