

## Qatar opens fifth World Cup stadium

Doha hopes to attract 1.2 million World Cup visitors



DOHA: This fisheye image shows fireworks illuminating the venue during the opening ceremony of the Al-Thumama Stadium in the capital on Friday, ahead of the Amir Cup final football match between Al-Sadd and Al-Rayyan. — AFP

DOHA: Qatar inaugurated the fifth stadium that will host World Cup games in 2022 with a domestic cup tie on Friday watched by thousands who either recently recovered from coronavirus or received vaccinations. Al-Thumama stadium, 12 km south of central Doha, and inspired by the lace-like Islamic gahfiya cap, will seat 40,000 fans in the Gulf nation, the most controversial hosts in a generation.

"Since we won the World Cup (rights) we have received a lot of criticism. There is constructive criticism that we tried to take on board," said Fatma Al-Nuaimi, head of communications at the Supreme Committee that is organizing the 2022 tournament. "We also try not to let this criticism stop us."

The inaugural fixture, the Amir Cup, is in honor of the nation's all-powerful ruler Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani who attended Friday's fixture along with FIFA president Gianni Infantino. It saw Al-Sadd, under former Spain legend Xavi Hernandez, take on Al-Rayyan, coached by former France boss Laurent Blanc, with Al-Sadd winning 5-4 after a penalty shootout. "It's my first time inside a stadium. It's amazing," said Julie Rule, 25, a beauti-

cian from the Philippines.

Around the stadium, which is located between suburban Doha and the blue-collar Industrial Area, migrants who outnumber Qataris seven to one gathered on dusty parcels of land to play impromptu games of pre-match cricket and football. The area around Thumama, designed by Qatari architect Ibrahim Jaidah, is best known to expatriates in Qatar for the sole off-license permitted to sell alcohol and pork, as well as the country's only authorized Christian churches.

Energy-rich Qatar has so far inaugurated five of the eight stadiums that will be the home of the first World Cup in the Middle East. In addition to Al-Thumama, Qatar has so far inaugurated new-build Ahmad Bin Ali, Al-Janoub and Education City stadiums alongside the refurbished Khalifa ground. Ras Abu Aboud, Al-Bayt, and Lusail, which will host the final in 14 months, are yet to be opened.

Following the World Cup, Al-Thumama's capacity will be reduced to 20,000, with a sports clinic and a boutique hotel set to open on site as tiny Qatar seeks to avoid the burden of superfluous sta-

dia. Fans were able to apply for tickets to Friday's event if they either tested positive for virus antibodies, or have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Qatar, which says it vaccinated more than three quarters of its population, will review infection data ahead of the Arab Cup regional test tournament due to kick off in November.

Meanwhile, Nuaimi said organizers hope to attract 1.2 million tourists to the country, hosting them in traditional hotels and "innovative" accommodation. "We hope that during the World Cup, more than 1.2 million visitors from around the world will attend," she said. "They will not (all) be in the country at the same time, as the event extends over a period of 28 days."

Qatar, with a population of approximately 2.75 million, will be the first ever Middle East World Cup host nation between Nov 21 and Dec 18 next year. In addition to the hotels already available, Nuaimi said there were other "innovative and temporary" solutions to hosting visitors. Those include accommodation on cruise liners, hotel apartments, fan villages with an Arabian desert vibe, as well as stays in

private homes.

Officials have said 16 floating hotels will also be built, providing around 1,600 rooms in total. Nuaimi said the "Host a Fan" initiative will give visitors an opportunity to learn about Qatari culture. "We are a hospitable people, and this will be applied to the World Cup as well," she told AFP. Qatar had earlier said it expected as many as 1.5 million people to descend on the tiny Gulf nation for the World Cup, and in the months before and after the big event.

Some fans and commentators have expressed concerns that the conservative Gulf country may not offer visitors the same experience as past tournaments. Nuaimi said while alcohol was not part of Qatari culture, "alcoholic beverages will be available in designated areas".

Qatari authorities have repeatedly insisted that they have done more than any country in the region to improve worker welfare and say they have "always been transparent about the health and safety of workers". Nuaimi stressed that "98 percent of the construction was ready, and preparations will be completed by the end of the year". — Agencies

### England thrash Windies; Aussies beat Proteas

DUBAI: Adil Rashid returned figures of 4-2 to set up a six-wicket victory for England after they dismissed defending champions West Indies for a paltry 55 at the Twenty20 World Cup yesterday. West Indies rattled England's top order before Jos Buttler (24) and skipper Eoin Morgan (7) took the team home in 8.2 overs in Dubai.

Left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein took two wickets and Moeen Ali was run out, but the target proved too meagre to challenge England. Moeen opened the bowling for England with his off-spin and made an instant impact, first with a sharp running catch to remove Evin Lewis. He then got the wicket of Lendl Simmons.

Pace bowler Tymal Mills claimed two wickets including Chris Gayle, the only batsman to make double figures with his 13, as West Indies crumbled in a poor batting performance from the two-time champions. Rashid entered the attack with West Indies on 44-6 and bowled the big-hitting Andre Russell for nought. He took two more wickets in successive balls in

his next over and then wrapped up the innings. He returned outstanding figures of 4-2 from his 2.2 overs of leg-spin.

West Indies avoided their worst T20 total of 45 against the same opposition in 2019. The two sides met five years after their clash in the 2016 final in Kolkata when Carlos Brathwaite hit Ben Stokes for four straight sixes in the last over. But with yesterday's crushing performance, England have fired a warning to their rivals in the seventh edition of T20's showpiece event.

Earlier yesterday, Marcus Stoinis and Matthew Wade stood unbeaten to help Australia prevail in a tense finish against South Africa and win by five wickets in the Twenty20 World Cup. Chasing a modest 119 for victory, Australia were in trouble at 81-5 after Steve Smith, who scored 35, and Glenn Maxwell, who made 18, departed. Stoinis, who made 24, stood firm and put on an unbeaten stand of 40 with the left-handed Wade, who made 15. Stoinis hit the winning boundary to take Australia over the line with two balls to spare. — AFP

### Rampant Chelsea hit Norwich for seven, Newcastle still winless

LONDON: Chelsea opened up a four-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a 7-0 demolition of Norwich yesterday as Newcastle's wait for a Premier League win went on after a 1-1 draw at Crystal Palace. Mason Mount scored a hat-trick for the Blues at Stamford Bridge as the European champions coped easily without first-choice strikers Romelu Lukaku and Timo Werner.

Only Norwich are keeping Newcastle off the foot of the table and already look destined for a swift return to the Championship with only two points and minus-21 goal difference from their opening nine games. Mount started the rout after just eight minutes and finished it with two more in the closing stages after Ben Gibson had been sent-off for the visitors.

Callum Hudson-Odoi, Reece James and Ben Chilwell were also on target for Thomas Tuchel's men, while Max Aarons' own goal summed up a sorry day for the Canaries. Mount had not scored since May and Tuchel welcomed his return to scoring form with Lukaku and Werner expected to be out for some time. "No matter how satisfied the coach is, the offensive guys need goals to be fully happy," said Tuchel. "He waited too long, so it was good that he got some goals. I agree he looked fresh again today."

Newcastle's new Saudi owners were given another reminder of the investment it will take to make the Magpies a force to be reckoned with at Selhurst Park. Interim manager

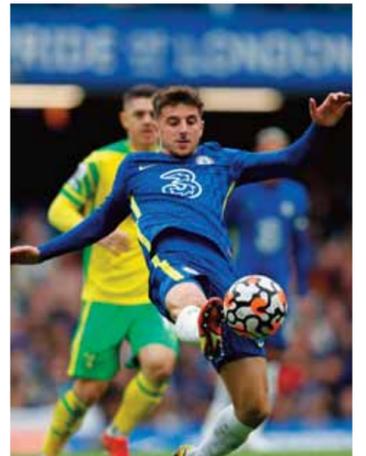
Graeme Jones took charge for the first time since Steve Bruce was sacked and needed a moment of brilliance from Callum Wilson just to salvage a point. Christian Benteke headed the Patrick Vieira's men in front.

Wilson showed the value of a proven goalscorer with a stunning overhead kick into the top corner 25 minutes from time. Benteke also hit the woodwork twice and thought he had earned a deserved three points for the Eagles five minutes from time, but his second goal was ruled out after a VAR review for a foul by Marc Guehi. Newcastle stay second bottom, but are just three points adrift of safety.

Claudio Ranieri got his first win as Watford manager as the Hornets twice came from behind to stun Everton 5-2 at Goodison Park. Josh King failed to score as an Everton player last season, but hit a hat-trick to help move Watford six points clear of the relegation zone. Juraj Kucka and Emmanuel Dennis were also on target for the visitors, who scored four times in the final 12 minutes.

Leeds needed a stoppage-time penalty to earn a 1-1 draw at home to Wolves. South Korean international Hwang Heechan opened the scoring at Elland Road. Wolves were set to move up to fifth until Joe Gelhardt was fouled inside the area in the 94th minute and Rodrigo slotted home the penalty.

Burnley remain in the bottom three, but



LONDON: Chelsea's English midfielder Mason Mount controls the ball during an English Premier League match between Chelsea and Norwich City at Stamford Bridge yesterday. — AFP

Maxwel Cornet is proving himself a shrewd signing for Sean Dyche's men as the Ivorian scored twice in a 2-2 draw at Southampton. Saints turned the game around after Cornet opened the scoring to take the lead with goals from Tino Livramento and Armando Broja. The former Lyon winger then salvaged a point for the Claretts with a thumping finish on the volley from outside the area. — AFP