

Sports

Saudi 'racing against time' to complete Formula One track

The floodlit circuit will run over 6.175km

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia is working overtime to prepare for its Formula One debut, an official said, with the track still under construction ahead of the race in early December. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said organizers were "racing against time" and working "round the clock" in the Red Sea city of Jeddah. A visit to the track this week showed there was still much work to be done, with buildings under construction and cranes and diggers on site.

The floodlit circuit will run over 6.175km (3.8 miles), the second longest on the calendar, and will feature 27 corners. The race weekend is from December 3-5. Prince Khalid bin Sultan Al-Faisal, president of the Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation, said there was a "huge demand" for tickets, even at a time when travel remains difficult because of the pandemic.

Tickets are also not cheap, ranging between 2,000 Saudi riyals (\$533) and 35,000 Saudi

riyals (\$9,333). "We're expecting a huge turnout, especially from Europe and the United States," he told reporters. "The Formula One project has cost a lot, and it is standard that cost is compensated by the sale of tickets as well as other sources, including advertisements and local sponsors."

The conservative kingdom has frequently been accused of 'sportswashing' after it began hosting a series of high-profile competitions. Saudi Arabia already hosts the Dakar Rally, the all-electric Formula E series, in addition to top boxing, golf and tennis events. Formula One has come under close scrutiny over the staging of a race in Bahrain, and the addition of Saudi Arabia is sure to escalate criticism from human rights watchers. The Saudi Arabian Grand Prix will be the penultimate event of the 22-race calendar for 2021 which concludes in Abu Dhabi, in Gulf neighbor the United Arab Emirates. —AFP



JEDDAH: Photo shows a view of the Jeddah Street Circuit in the Red Sea Port city, ahead of the penultimate Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. —AFP

News in brief

Ballon d'Or in Nov

PARIS: Football's prestigious Ballon d'Or will be awarded on November 29 in Paris, event organizer France Football magazine announced yesterday. The nominees for the awards, which include men's and women's player of the year, best young player and best goalkeeper, will be announced on October 8. Six-time winner Lionel Messi and Megan Rapinoe won the awards the last time they were held in 2019. Last year's event was cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic. While upstaged recently by FIFA's own awards, the Ballon d'Or, whose first recipient was Stanley Matthews in 1956, remains one of the most coveted individual awards in football. —AFP

Spain lifts stadium ban

MADRID: Spanish football clubs will be allowed to open their stadiums up to 100 percent capacity from this weekend after national restrictions brought in to combat the COVID-19 pandemic were lifted yesterday. Local restrictions, however, remain in place which is likely to prevent cash-strapped Barcelona from throwing their doors fully open just yet. The measures will run until the end of October when they will be re-assessed. However, other measures, such as the obligation to wear a mask and to respect a distance of 1.5 meters (five feet) between each person, have been kept in place which logically compromises the notion of matches taking place in full stadiums. —AFP

Arsenal's Xhaka out

LONDON: Arsenal said yesterday midfielder Granit Xhaka has been ruled out for up to three months after suffering a knee injury during the weekend's north London derby win against Tottenham. Xhaka was injured in a collision with Lucas Moura after the Tottenham forward had been challenged by Thomas Partey. The Swiss international limped off and could now miss the rest of 2021 after a specialist examined the injury. Sunday was Xhaka's first game back following a three-match ban for a red card in the 5-0 thrashing at Manchester City before the international break. As well as being suspended, Xhaka has only recently recovered after testing positive for the coronavirus. —AFP

Cardinals book wild card spot

LOS ANGELES: The St Louis Cardinals beat the Milwaukee Brewers 6-2 on Tuesday in front of a crowd of 35,700 at Busch Stadium in downtown St Louis, to clinch a spot in the National League wild card game and extend their team-record winning streak to 17 games. Pitcher Adam Wainwright recorded his 17th win of the season for St Louis, whose streak is the longest in Major League Baseball since Cleveland won 22 consecutive games in 2017. The Cardinals will play in the wild-card game against either the Los Angeles Dodgers or the San Francisco Giants. —AFP

Pakistan's cricket chief quits weeks after tour chaos

KARACHI: The chief executive of the Pakistan Cricket Board resigned yesterday, two weeks after New Zealand and England abandoned tours of the South Asian nation over security concerns. Wasim Khan - who has been credited for reviving Pakistan's international cricket after a 2009 terror attack on the Sri Lankan team

sent the country into isolation for years - gave no reason for quitting.

"When I arrived in 2019, there was a real need to build relationships and restore and enhance the global image and reputation of the PCB and Pakistan cricket," he said at an emergency meeting according to a statement released by the PCB yesterday. "With decisive and strategic decision-making, we succeeded in earning the goodwill and respect of the global cricketing family, which I am hopeful will lead to increased international cricket being hosted in Pakistan in future."

Khan added it was "hugely satisfying" to see the resumption of Test cricket, which has includ-

Holdings Palmeiras into Copa Libertadores final

BELO HORIZONTE, Brazil: Defending champions Palmeiras booked their place in the final of the Copa Libertadores on Tuesday, securing a battling 1-1 against Brazilian rivals Atletico Mineiro to advance on away goals. A second-half equaliser from winger Dudu cancelled out Atletico Mineiro's opener from Chilean international Eduardo Silva to send Palmeiras through to the November 27 final of South American club football's showpiece tournament.

After the first leg in Sao Paulo ended 0-0 last week, Atletico Mineiro appeared poised to make home advantage count in Tuesday's return leg at Belo Horizonte's Mineirao Stadium. But it was Palmeiras who came closest to scoring in a dour first half, the striker springing the offside trap in the second minute to test Atletico goalkeeper Everson with a fierce strike. Atletico's best chance came on 25 minutes when Joaquin Piquerez latched on to a long ball forward and sent a shot whistling past the post.

The encounter exploded into life in the second half however with Atletico's former Brazil international striker Hulk forcing a fine save from Weverton. At the other end, a swift Palmeiras counter-attack saw Everson rescue Atletico once again from Rony's well-struck effort. The opening goal came on 52 minutes, when Jair found space down the right flank and crossed into the six-yard area for Vargas to head home for 1-0.

The goal heralded a period of dominance for Atletico, and Vargas missed a golden opportunity



BELO HORIZONTE: Palmeiras' goalkeeper stops a ball during the all-Brazilian Copa Libertadores semifinal second leg football match against Atletico Mineiro, at the Mineirao stadium in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, on September 28, 2021. —AFP

to make it 2-0 on 56 minutes, playing a deft 1-2 to split the Palmeiras defense only to shoot wide. Three minutes later Palmeiras almost grabbed an equalizer, with Rony capitalizing on a defensive lapse by Nathan Da Silva only to drag his shot past the upright. That was Rony's final contribution of the game, with the striker departing for 19-year-old Gabriel Veron.

The teenaged substitute made an instant impact, using his pace and athleticism to reach

the byline and squaring for Dudu to make it 1-1 on 68 minutes. That goal proved decisive and Atletico were unable to find the winner against a resolute Palmeiras. Palmeiras - bidding to become the first back-to-back winners of the Copa Libertadores since Boca Juniors in 2000-2001 - will play either Brazilian club Flamengo or Ecuador's Barcelona SC in the final. Flamengo lead that semi-final tie 3-1 heading into Wednesday's second leg. —AFP

Spurs bid to bounce back as free-scoring Roma head to Ukraine

LONDON: Tottenham host Slovenians Mura in the Europa Conference League today looking for a confidence boost after a worrying slump in form, while their former manager Jose Mourinho takes his free-scoring Roma side to Zorya Luhansk. Spurs kicked off the Premier League season under Nuno Espirito Santo with three straight 1-0 wins, but have since suffered three successive defeats, shipping nine goals in the process. Their tame defeats by London rivals Crystal Palace, Chelsea and Arsenal have raised questions about new manager Nuno.

Harry Kane is yet to score in five league games since failing to force through a close-season move to Manchester City. "The performance was not good. The game plan was not good. The decisions were not good," former Wolves boss Nuno admitted after the chastening 3-1 derby loss to Arsenal on Sunday. Spurs are also in need of points in the inaugural Conference League after opening the group stage with a 2-2 draw at Rennes.

Anything other than victory against Mura, who sit fifth in the Slovenian top flight, would see Nuno and his side come under more scrutiny before this weekend's game against Aston Villa. Spurs, without a trophy since 2008, parted ways with Mourinho shortly before last season's League Cup final loss to Manchester City. But the Portuguese has enjoyed a strong start to life with Roma, despite suffering a 3-2 loss to Lazio in last week's derby clash.

Often criticized by Spurs fans for his perceived negative style of play, Mourinho has seen his Roma team score 24 goals in only nine matches this term. He will be looking for a reaction from his side against Luhansk, though, after



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Portuguese head coach Nuno Espirito Santo gestures on the touchline during the English Premier League football match in London. —AFP

railing against refereeing decisions in the Lazio loss. "The referee and VAR weren't up to the standards of a match of this level," he said. Mourinho, a two-time Champions League-winning coach, now finds himself managing in the far less glamorous third-tier Conference League. But Roma sent out a statement of intent last time out in Europe as a strong side thumped CSKA Sofia 5-1.

Celtic seek consistency
Scottish giants Celtic have endured a difficult campaign so far despite some sparkling home displays under Ange Postecoglou. They welcome Bayern Leverkusen to Parkhead after slipping to a 4-3 loss to Real Betis in their Europa League group-stage opener. A strong start to the

season at home has provided respite, but Celtic were held by Dundee United at the weekend in Glasgow to fall six points behind reigning Scottish Premiership champions Rangers.

A win over Bundesliga side Leverkusen would lift some of the gloom over the Hoops, after they were booed off by their own fans on Sunday. Steven Gerrard's Rangers need a positive result at Sparta Prague to boost their hopes of reaching the knockout stage for the third consecutive season after losing to Lyon. Lyon play Brondby at the Groupama Stadium in the other Group A encounter. Elsewhere, in-form West Ham host Rapid Vienna and Leicester visit Legia Warsaw. —AFP

ed recent tours by South Africa, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. But Pakistan is again facing cricketing isolation after New Zealand called off their first tour of the country in 18 years earlier this month over security concerns.

Their decision was swiftly followed by England's cancellation of a planned tour in October. "(The) Pakistan Cricket Board today confirmed Wasim Khan has tendered his resignation as chief executive," the PCB said in the statement. The PCB's board of governors later met by videoconference during which they unanimously accepted the resignation. Khan, who is British with Pakistani heritage, was hired on a three-year contract in 2019 and had organized Pakistan's

tours of England and then New Zealand amid severe COVID-19 restrictions last year.

The first British Muslim to play county cricket in England, he had reported run-ins with former PCB chairman Ehsan Mani, who he accused of stopping him from working freely. Pakistan was forced to play its home matches at neutral venues in the United Arab Emirates after the terrorist attacks on the Sri Lankan team bus in 2009. Security in the country has improved dramatically over the past few years, but militant groups still operate along the border with Afghanistan. Pakistan has only hosted South Africa, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe since the 2009 attacks. —AFP