

Iran, Qatar Football Federations Ink Agreement



President of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI), Mehdi Taj, (L) and his Qatari counterpart, Hamad Bin Khalifa Bin Ahmed Al Thani, pose for a photograph during the signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding in the Qatari capital city of Doha on December 14, 2017.

TEHRAN (Press TV) - The Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) and the Qatar Football Association (QFA) have struck an agreement on the promotion of cooperation and interaction between the governing bodies responsible for organizing national teams as well as club competitions in the two Asian countries.

On Thursday, President of the FFIRI, Mehdi Taj, and his Qatari counterpart, Hamad Bin Khalifa Bin Ahmed Al Thani, signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) during a ceremony in the Qatari capital city of Doha.

The agreement between FFIRI and QFA aims to raise the level of cooperation and to deepen relations between the two countries in men's and women's football, futsal and beach soccer.

The Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran has so far signed MoUs with several different countries, including Armenia, Belarus, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania and Russia.

Manchester City Set New Premier League Winning Streak



Pep Guardiola's Premier League leaders set a new record for the competition, with victory at Swansea City their 15th in a row.

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester City have set a new all-time Premier League record by securing their 15th consecutive top-flight victory at Swansea City.

Pep Guardiola's runaway league leaders set a new best mark for an individual season by beating Manchester United 2-1 in Sunday's derby at Old Trafford.

A run of 14 straight wins put them level with Arsenal's streak registered across campaigns, from February to August 2002.

But two goals from David Silva, a Kevin De Bruyne free-kick and a superb strike by Sergio Aguero at the Liberty Stadium sealed a 4-0 triumph over the league's bottom club.

Guardiola's men beat Brighton and Hove Albion 2-0 on the opening day of the season

before being held to a 1-1 draw at the Etihad Stadium against Everton - the only points they have dropped so far in the domestic campaign.

Raheem Sterling hit a winner deep into stoppage time to sink Bournemouth 2-1 and begin the record march on August 26.

The England winner has repeated this trick to keep City on track more recently with late interventions in wins by the same margin over Huddersfield Town and Southampton.

The uniformity of City's results of late has marked a slight downturn from their form earlier in the campaign, where Liverpool and Crystal Palace were beaten 5-0 apiece before Stoke City lost 7-2 to conclude a stunning three-match run on home soil. Watford were also thumped 6-0 at Vicarage Road during this period.

LeBron James Triple-Double Fuels Cavaliers

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Cleveland star LeBron James tied Larry Bird for sixth all time in NBA triple-doubles Thursday as the Cavaliers beat the Los Angeles Lakers 121-112.

"King" James scored 25 points with 12 rebounds and 12 assists for the 59th triple-double of his 15-season career, and spoke afterwards of Bird's legacy.

"He's one of the greatest players to ever play the game," James said of the former Boston Celtics great. "He played until he couldn't play no more."

"And for young guys that don't know him, they think of Larry Bird as a jump shooter. But he was so much more than that. He was a passer. He aver-



Lonzo Ball of the Los Angeles Lakers talks to LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers after their NBA game at Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio, on December 14, 2017.

aged double-digit rebounds. He defended. He took charges."

James's milestone had him thinking about players he ad-

mired as a youngster -- including Bird.

On the court he went up for the first time against NBA rookie Lonzo Ball -- taken second overall by the Lakers in the draft in June -- who has cited James as the player he idolized not so long ago.

Ball and a young, energetic Lakers team led by Brandon Ingram's 26 points seized an early lead before the Cavaliers found their range.

Cleveland's Kevin Love led all scorers with 28 points and Jose Calderon added 17 for the Cavs, who scored 100 points for the 22nd consecutive game and won for the 16th time in 17 contests.

Maradona Urges Madrid to 'Give Away' Injury Prone Bale

BARCELONA (Reuters) - Diego Maradona says he has a solution to Real Madrid's scarcity of goals this season - sign France teenage sensation Kylian Mbappe from Paris St Germain and give Gareth Bale away for free.

Real's record signing Bale has endured another nightmare season with injuries but fired the European champions into the Club World Cup final by striking the winner in a nervy 2-1 win over Abu Dhabi side Al Jazira.

Real will face Gremio in Sunday's decider to add some more silverware to manager Zinedine Zidane's trophy cabinet.

Their domestic form, however, has been poor and they find themselves eight points behind Barcelona in the Liga standings.

Yet Argentina's former World Cup winning captain said things might have been different had president Florentino Perez heeded his advice.

"I told Florentino to sign

Mbappe but he told me had Cristiano Ronaldo," Maradona said in an interview with AS.

Asked where signing Mbappe would leave Bale, Maradona said: "They should sell Bale, they should give him away. I expect Florentino wouldn't, but maybe he can do a deal, and let Bale go to AC Milan or Inter (Milan)."

"They have to sign Mbappe, for me he's the next big thing, he could overtake many players."

Maradona, who inspired Ar-

gentina to win the 1986 World Cup in Mexico, also said Lionel Messi could take a leaf out of his book when it comes to rallying the national team at next year's tournament in Russia.

"Messi is not capable of giving a team talk to 20 guys and motivating them like I did," Maradona said of Argentina's captain and all-time top scorer, who has never won a major international trophy despite reaching four finals.

Aljaz Bedene Switches British Alliance Back to Slovenia

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia (AP) - Aljaz Bedene is returning to play tennis for his native Slovenia after competing for Britain since 2015.

The 49th-ranked Bedene said Friday he has notified the International Tennis Federation that he will compete for Slovenia as of 2018.

Bedene's decision was prompted by his desire to compete in the Davis Cup and the 2020 Olympics, which he could not do under the British flag after losing an appeal with the ITF.

"At this stage in my career I don't want to miss the opportunity to compete in the Davis Cup and the Olympics, two events that mean so much to me," the 28-year-old Bedene said.

Bedene, who received British citizenship in 2015 and has lived in England since 2008, was the country's No. 2 behind Andy Murray.

ITF rules that entered into force in 2015 prohibited Bedene from playing in the Davis Cup for his adopted country because he already competed for Slovenia in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Bedene appealed against the ITF decision, arguing that he had applied for British citizenship before the rules were changed, but his appeal was turned down.

"I have proudly called Britain my home for the last nine years and so many people there have made me feel welcome both in the UK and abroad," Bedene said in a statement.



Britain's Aljaz Bedene returns the ball to Novak Djokovic, of Serbia, during the Italian Open tennis tournament, in Rome, Tuesday, May 16, 2017.

Bedene reached a career-high ranking of 45th in November 2015, but has never won an ATP tournament. He has twice reached a final, in Chennai in January 2015 and in Budapest in April.

Ferstl Wins Super-G to End German Drought in Speed Events



Germany's Josef Ferstl competes during an alpine ski, men's World Cup super-G, in Val Gardena, Italy, Friday, Dec. 15, 2017.

SELVA DI VAL GARDENA, Italy (AP) - Early starter Josef Ferstl put down a nearly flawless run in a fog-interrupted super-G on Friday to become the first German man to win a World Cup speed event in 13 years.

Wearing the No. 2 bib, Ferstl required slightly more than 1 1/2 minutes to negotiate the Saslong course and finished a slim 0.02 seconds ahead of Max Franz of Austria.

Olympic downhill champion Matthias Mayer of Austria came third, 0.10 behind, despite a big mistake.

"It was really a great run but

I was a little bit lucky with the weather," Ferstl said.

Ferstl's father, Sepp, won the Hahnenkamm downhill in Kitzbuehel, Austria, in 1978 and '79.

"Two wins in Kitzbuehel remains a dream for me," Ferstl said.

The previous German man to win a speed race - downhill or super-G - was Max Rauffer in a downhill on the Saslong in 2004. In super-G, the German drought had stretched all the way back to 1991, when Markus Wasmeier won in Lake Louise, Alberta.

"It's unbelievable: A victory for a German guy," Ferstl said.