

Word Cup Asian qualifiers:

Sweet revenge as ruthless Iran puts Qatar to the sword

Iranica Desk

A revenge for the Asian Cup last-four heartbreak couldn't have come in a more emphatic fashion as Sardar Azmoun and Mohammad Mohebbi bagged a brace apiece to help Iran rout Qatar 4-1 in the World Cup Asian qualifiers.

A third victory in four outings saw Amir Qalenoee's men overtake Uzbekistan on top of the Group A table on goal difference. Uzbekistan had an Otabek Shukurov's late strike to thank for a 1-0 home win against the 10-man United Arab Emirates earlier on Tuesday.

Hosting the Qataris in the neutral venue of Rashid Stadium in Dubai due to the AFC's security concerns amid the political tensions in the region, Iran got off to lively start but the Asian champion thought it was on its way to a second triumph over Team Melli in just over eight months when Almoez Ali found the net against the run of play in the 17th minute.

Lucas Mendes' long ball released Ali behind the Iranian backline and the striker smashed a devastating first-time strike into the roof of Alireza Beiranvand's net. Azmoun restored parity with three minutes left in the first half, rising unmarked in the box to head home an Omid Nourafkan's cross into top corner.

The Iranian striker scored his 55th international goal three minutes after the break, when Mahdi Qayedi's cross was headed into the air by Mendes but, as Qatari keeper Barsham came to collect, he tripped over his teammate and Azmoun smashed into the empty net.



Sardar Azmoun (20) heads home Iran's equalizer during a 4-1 victory over Qatar in the World Cup Asian qualifiers in Dubai, UAE, on October 15, 2024.
● MOHSEN DAVOUDI/FFIRI

The prolific forward then rounded off his outstanding performance with an assist in the 65th minute, bursting through the Qatar defense before unselfish-

ly rolling the ball across goal for Mohebbi to tap the ball into the net with Barsham well beaten. Mohebbi completed the rout in the eighth minute of added time as his glancing header on Nourafkan's corner kick found the bottom corner to put the seal on a commanding victory. "I think it was one of our good days," Qalenoee said after the game, adding: "We scored four goals and had several other

opportunities." "Overall, it was a very good game. Congratulations to Qatar for the way they played today. It was one of the best games of the group that Asia enjoyed. "This win will help us further. We can rejoice for a day or two and then we have to think about the next games. I hope we can make Iranian people happy with more good results," added the Iranian coach.

Tuesday's results meant Iran and Uzbekistan now have a six-point lead over third-place UAE in the six-team table and with the top two in each group progressing to the World Cup finals, Qalenoee's side will be looking to take a significant stride towards the 2026 showpiece in away game against North Korea and the Kyrgyz Republic in November's international break. "It's a bit too soon to talk about

securing World Cup qualification but this win definitely paved the way for us," Iranian winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh, who was introduced as a late substitute said.

"We have utmost respect for all of the teams in the group. Uzbekistan is equal [on 10 points] with us, and Qatar, the UAE, Kyrgyzstan and even North Korea have had some decent performances so far. I think today's victory was a testament to what our team is capable of."

Jahanbakhsh was part of the Iranian team that fell to a 3-2 loss to Qatar in the Asian flagship international event in Doha.

"All of us still regret that defeat. We were unlucky to miss out on the Asian title but we just can't turn back the clock. Today's result showcased the gap between Qatar and us."

Elsewhere in the group, Khristiyan Brauzman's 11th-minute strike led the Kyrgyz Republic to a 1-0 win against North Korea in Bishkek.

In Group B, Jordan eased past Oman by four goals in Amman, with Palestine and Kuwait sharing the spoils in a 2-2 draw in Doha. South Korea defeated Iraq 3-2 at home to stay atop the group with 10 points – three points clear of Jordan and Iraq.

Japan kept a five-point lead over Australia on top of Group C standings, despite playing to a 1-1 draw with the Soccerroos in Saitama.

Saudi Arabia was held to a goalless stalemate by Bahrain in Jeddah, with the two teams equal on five points with Australia.

Branko Ivankovic's China was given a lifeline in its qualification campaign, edging out Indonesia 2-1 at home.

Tuchel 'very proud' to be named England manager

BBC – Thomas Tuchel has been appointed England manager from 1 January 2025.

The 51-year-old German, who has signed an 18-month contract, becomes the third non-British permanent manager of the men's team after Sven-Goran Eriksson and Fabio Capello. Gareth Southgate resigned in July after England's defeat by Spain in the Euro 2024 final.

Lee Carsley, who was overseen four games since being appointed interim manager in August, will remain in charge for the Nations League matches against Greece and the Republic of Ireland next month.

Former Chelsea boss Tuchel, who left Bayern Munich at the end of last season, said: "I am very proud to have been given the honour of leading the England team.

"I have long felt a personal connection to the game in this country, and it has given me some incredible moments already.

"To have the chance to represent England is a huge privilege, and the opportunity to work with this special and talented group of players is very exciting."

Chief executive Mark Bullingham said the Football Association had appointed "one of the best coaches in the world". He said: "Thomas and the team have a single-minded focus on giving us the best possible chance to win the World Cup in 2026."

England have not won a major trophy since the 1966 World Cup.

They will start their qualification process for the 2026 tournament in Canada, Mexico and the United States next year.

The FA approached Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola in the summer to see if had an interest in the role, while Newcastle United boss Eddie Howe and ex-Brighton and Chelsea manager Graham Potter were also linked with the position.

FA said, external Tuchel was the "preferred candidate" from "several" managers interviewed.

It said the FA board approved the decision last week and Tuchel signed a contract on 8 October. Under Carsley, England lost to Greece on 10 October and beat Finland on 13 October.

Tuchel won the German Cup with Borussia Dortmund and two Ligue 1 titles at Paris St-Germain, including a domestic treble in 2019-20.

He became Chelsea manager in January 2021, winning the Champions League, Club World Cup and UEFA Super Cup before being sacked in September 2022.

After Bayern failed to win the Bundesliga title last season for the first time since 2011-12, Tuchel left despite still having a year to run on his contract.

Messi never ceases to amaze, Argentina boss Scaloni says



● MATIAS BAGLIETTO/REUTERS

REUTERS – Lionel Scaloni has been witness to many of Lionel Messi's magical moments over the course of his career but the Argentina manager said on Tuesday that even at the age of 37 his captain continues to amaze him.

Messi, who was making just his second international appearance since recovering from an injury sustained at the Copa America in July, scored his 10th international hat-trick as Argentina beat Bolivia 6-0 in a World Cup qualifier.

The record eight-times Ballon d'Or winner said after the game he would keep playing as long as he can perform the way he wants and Scaloni hoped he would be on the pitch for years to come. "It never ceases to amaze," Scaloni told reporters. "At one point I sit down with

(assistant coach) Pablo Aimar and tell him that this is wonderful.

"To be able to be on the bench and see the things he does? The team is with him and what I ask him to do is to play as long as he can."

Despite missing a few players through injury and suspension, Scaloni said he could not be more proud of his squad. Goalkeeper Emiliano "Dibu" Martinez was suspended for two matches by FIFA for offensive behaviour in September and missed qualifiers against Venezuela and Bolivia.

"The big players know that if they give the chance to play to a kid who comes from behind they could lose their place," Scaloni said. "That breath of fresh air generates a lot for us. The boys are behaving in an exemplary manner."



● JUAN MEDINA/REUTERS