

Shahab Zahedi Joins Avispa Fukuoka on Permanent Deal



TEHRAN – Iranian forward Shahab Zahedi has joined the Japanese football club Avispa Fukuoka on a permanent deal.

Zahedi has signed a one-year deal with Avispa.

The 29-year-old striker joined the Japanese team on loan from Ukraine's Zorya Luhansk last season.

Zahedi scored 11 goals in 34 matches for Avispa.

Avispa Fukuoka, based in Hakata, Fukuoka, is a prominent Japanese professional football club competing in the top-tier J1 League.

Ethiopian Runners Sweep China's Marathon Titles With New Course Records



Runners participate in the 2025 Xiamen Marathon on Jan 5, 2025.

XIAMEN (Xinhua) - Ethiopia's Dawit Wolde and Ruti Aga claimed the respective men's and women's titles, both with new course records, at the 2025 Xiamen Marathon on Sunday.

Wolde clocked a winning time of two hours, six minutes and six seconds, shattering the previous record of 2:06:19 set by Kenya's Moses Cheruiyot Mosop in 2015. Tebello Ramakongoana of Lesotho took silver, 12 seconds back, while another Ethiopian runner Asefa Boki Kebebe secured bronze in 2:06:32.

"The course is amazing and nice. We are lucky to have com-

peted in the Xiamen Marathon this season and the weather is nice. I like this race because the atmosphere is good and it is well organized. I will come back," said Wolde.

Aga captured the women's title with 2:18:46, breaking the former course record of 2:19:52 set by her compatriot Mare Dibaba Hurrsa in 2015. Gutemi Shone and Fikrte Wereta, also from Ethiopia, finished second and third respectively.

The Xiamen Marathon gained the World Athletics Elite Platinum Label in 2021. This year's event has attracted 35,000 contestants from 46 countries and regions.

Arsenal, Chelsea Both Drop Points, Newcastle's Surge Continues

LONDON (Reuters) - Arsenal squandered the chance to exert some pressure on Premier League leaders Liverpool when they drew 1-1 away at Brighton & Hove Albion, while Chelsea's challenge continued to falter as they also dropped points at Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Liverpool kick off their new year on Sunday at home to Manchester United when they have the chance to move eight points clear of their pursuers with a game in hand.

Reigning champions Manchester City began their year with a second successive victory as something like normal service resumed for Pep Guardiola's side and Newcastle United closed on the top four with a narrow victory at Tottenham Hotspur.

After an autumnal slump, Arsenal have re-emerged



Brighton's Joao Pedro (center) is tackled by Arsenal's Leandro Trossard.

as the most likely side to push Liverpool in the second half of the season and victory at Brighton would have cut the gap to three points.

They looked on course for a fourth successive league win when teenager Ethan Nwaneri gave them a first-half lead but Arsenal were pegged back when Joao Pedro converted a penalty just past the hour mark on the south coast.

Arsenal have 40 points from 20 games, with Liverpool on 45. Chelsea's 1-1 draw at Crystal Palace left them in fourth place with 36 points from 20 games, one point behind third-placed Nottingham Forest who face Wolverhampton Wanderers on Monday.

The 17-year-old Nwaneri has earned rave reviews with some cameo displays for Arsenal and has been given

a chance to shine in the absence of the injured Bukayo Saka.

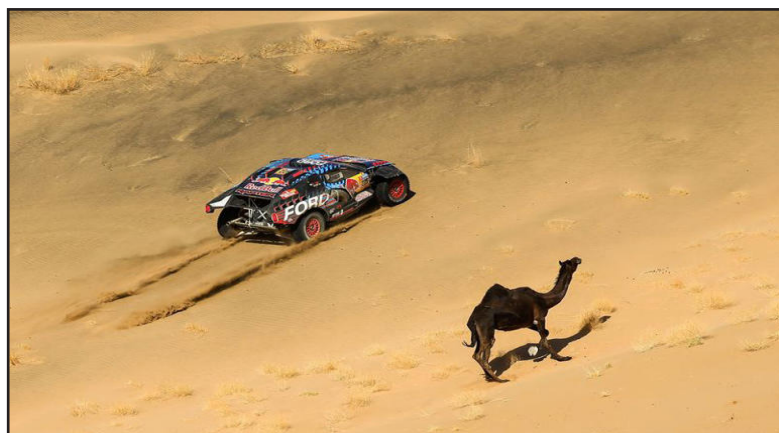
He opened the scoring 16 minutes into his second Premier League start, cutting in and shooting confidently past Bart Verbruggen to reward Arsenal for a strong start.

But Brighton battled back and were awarded a penalty on the hour when Pedro went down after a clash of heads with William Saliba in the area. The Brazilian then calmly dispatched his spot kick beyond David Raya.

Brighton, who are 10th, had chances to take all three points but drew for the sixth time in their last eight league games.

Chelsea's pre-Christmas surge has run out of steam and they have now taken only two points from their last four games.

Defending Dakar Champion Sainz Flips His Ford



Ford M-Sport's Carlos Sainz and Lucas Cruz in action

RIYADH (Reuters) - Spain's defending Dakar Rally cham-

pion Carlos Sainz flipped his Ford Raptor car in the Saudi

desert dunes during the 48-hour Chrono stage on Sunday, spending more than 20 minutes at a standstill.

The four-times Dakar winner, now 62 and hoping to triumph with a fifth different manufacturer, got going again after the setback at the 327km mark of the 947km stage that started and finishes in the south-west town of Bisha.

The Spaniard, father of the Formula One driver of the same name, had started the

day eighth overall and was 15th at the last checkpoint before the roll.

It was unclear how damaged the car was.

At the 413km fuel stop, Sainz's Ford teammate and compatriot Nani Roma was the virtual leader ahead of local hope Yazeed Al Rajhi and Dacia's Qatari five-times champion Nasser Al Attiyah.

The two-week rally, staged entirely in Saudi Arabia, ends on Jan. 17 at Shubaytah in the eastern Empty Quarter.



Fiorentina's Lucas Beltran heads the ball during the Serie A soccer match between Fiorentina and Napoli at the Artemio Franchi Stadium in Florence, Italy, Jan 4, 2025.

FLORENCE (Reuters) - Napoli went top of the Serie A standings thanks to a comfortable 3-0 win at Fiorentina on Saturday, the visitors facing few problems as they registered a fourth successive league victory.

With Napoli's main Scudetto rivals not in league action this weekend -- Atalanta and Inter Milan are both in Saudi Arabia for the Italian Super Cup -- Antonio Conte's side took full advantage.

Napoli are on 44 points, three ahead of Atalanta who have a game in hand, and Inter are a further point back, but with two fewer matches played. Fiorentina dropped to sixth on 32 points.

Mathias Olivera had the ball in the net for Napoli early on but the goal was ruled out for offside, while Leonardo Spinazzola drew a save from Fiorentina keeper David de Gea. The visitors took the lead in

the 29th minute when David Neres went on a mazy dribbling run into the area, going past three players before blasting a powerful shot into the roof of the net.

Fiorentina striker Moise Kean finally got his chance to shine, and found the net, but his goal was chalked off for a handball while controlling the ball and Napoli took their lead into the break.

Fiorentina manager Raffaele Palladino had given defender Matias Moreno his Serie A debut and the Argentine showed his inexperience when hauling down Andre Anguissa in the area.

Romelu Lukaku, who had a penalty saved in Napoli's last game, sent De Gea the wrong way with his low strike straight down the middle to give the visitors a two-goal cushion nine minutes after the interval.

Unstoppable Sabalenka Rallies Past Kudermetova for Brisbane Title

BRISBANE (Reuters) - Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka geared up for her title defense at the year's opening Grand Slam with a battling 4-6 6-3 6-2 win over Russian qualifier Polina Kudermetova in the final of the Brisbane International on Sunday.

The world number one from Belarus, outclassed in last year's final by Elena Rybakina before going on to win a second straight Melbourne Park crown, appeared off the pace against Kudermetova and lost the first set by dropping her serve for a second time.

Kudermetova came under pressure on serve in the opening game

of the next set but the aggressive world number 107 rode out the storm and began to dictate play with more heavy hitting from the baseline to trouble Sabalenka.

A delicate drop shot handed Sabalenka the break, and the 26-year-old appeared much more like her usual dominant self in the rest of the set as she forced a decider, much to the delight of fans at a packed Pat Rafter Arena.

Sabalenka offered another reminder of her calibre by breaking in the third set with a sharp crosscourt forehand winner and staved off a late comeback attempt from Kudermetova to claim her first title of



the season. American Reilly Opelka will meet

Czech Jiri Lehecka in the Brisbane men's final later on Sunday.