

America clear frontrunner to host 2026 WC

Trump policies cloud potential US World Cup bid

WASHINGTON, Feb 1, (RTRS): President Donald Trump's controversial immigration policies could hurt an expected US bid to host the 2026 World Cup although plenty of time remains for concerns to ease before the decision by world soccer's governing body FIFA.

The United States hosted the World Cup in 1994 and is viewed as the favourite to host the 2026 tournament since the 2018 and 2022 finals were awarded to Russia and Qatar, respectively.

FIFA has said that neither Europe nor Asia will be able to bid for 2026,

leaving the CONCACAF region, which covers North and Central America and the Caribbean, as the clear frontrunner.

Officials from the region have yet to settle on a firm bid and there have been informal discussions about a possible joint bid involving the United States, Mexico and Canada.

With the 2026 tournament expanding to 48 teams from 32 such a set-up might appeal to decision-makers with a vote due in 2020 and all 211 FIFA member associations FIFA getting a ballot.

But Trump's recent policies on immigration issues raise the issue of

whether those federations may be turned off the idea of taking the sports' biggest event to the United States.

By executive order on Friday, Trump banned immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries — Iran,

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Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen — and temporarily halted the entry of refugees.

Perhaps more relevant to a possible World Cup bid, Trump wants to build a

US-Mexican border wall to keep out illegal immigrants and says Mexico will pay for it. Mexico has flatly refused, making the issue a point of national pride.

"A US bid for the 2026 World Cup could meet a lot of criteria that would make a 48-team tournament credible — existing stadia, welcoming crowds, possible partnerships in co-hosting portraying a united alliance of the North and Central Americas," said Alan Tomlinson, a professor at the University of Brighton and author of two books on FIFA.

"And FIFA's cash cow may need a

reputational revival after the events in Russia and Qatar.

"But all this will almost certainly be undone by Trump's determination to put in place a new US isolationism that most FIFA members across the world can only find distasteful and demeaning as FIFA seeks to involve its full membership in the decision as to who will host this expanded event."

Regional soccer officials have been tight-lipped about Trump's moves and their possible impact on a World Cup bid.

"How this plays out in terms of international events, I think that's frankly

a secondary issue right now. The issue involving the executive order and its implications are far broader than that," US Soccer Federation (USSF) president and FIFA Council member Sunil Gulati told reporters on Sunday.

Gulati declined to comment when asked if the USSF had a public stance on Trump's policy and US Soccer did not respond to requests for comment on Tuesday.

CONCACAF president Victor Montagliani, also the head of Canada's federation, likewise did not immediately respond to questions about the impact of Trump's policies.

Lebanese duo aim to upset Gulf applectart

Qatari, Kuwaiti drivers lead challenge for honors

LOSAIL, Qatar, Feb 1: Qatar's Rashed Al-Naimi kick-starts his challenge for the FIA MERC 2 title at this weekend's QMMF Qatar International Rally, but the JRM-built Subaru Impreza WRX STi driver faces a strong challenge from a host of Qatari and Kuwaiti drivers entered in the increasingly popular Group N category of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

Cars such as the Subaru Impreza and various derivatives of the Mitsubishi



Henry Kahy and Rony Maroun

X at his disposal and will be co-driven by his brother Fares Al-Thafiri.

Several other Qatari drivers will be hoping to stop Al-Naimi winning on his home sand. Khalifa Saleh Al-Attiah enjoyed mixed fortunes in a switch to cross-country rallying in 2016 and the brother of 13-time Qatar Rally winner Nasser Saleh has called upon the services of Cypriot Savvas Laos to try and help him achieve the win in MERC 2 in the second of the JRM-built NR4 cars run by Autotek.

Irish co-driver Killian Duffy achieved considerable success at world level with Qatar's Abdulaziz Al-Kuwari (a former winner of the Qatar International Rally) and Duffy takes a break from working on the sport professionally in the Republic of Ireland to team up with Nasser Sadoon Al-Kuwari in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX on this occasion.

Saif Al-Naimi is an unknown quantity in an Evolution X with Slovenian co-driver Vili Oslaj on hand to read his notes. Other entrants in Group N include the veteran German female campaigner Edith Weiss.

The Lebanese duo of Henry Kahy and Rony Maroun will be hoping to upset the regular Gulf establishment with their first entry in Qatar with a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VIII. Maroun has been a regular in Lebanese rallies for several seasons with the likes of Nasser Nassib and Joseph Hindy and tackled the recent Sharjah Rally with rookie Mohamad Chehab, the son of former senior Dubai International Rally organiser Faez Chehab.

the likes of Bernardo Sousa in a Ford Fiesta RRC.

"This is my first event of 2017 and I am so looking forward to taking part in Qatar," said Al-Naimi who recently arranged a competition to offer a ride to the winner in his Autotek-run rally car. "The goal is the victory in Group N and, perhaps, an outright podium finish."

Standing in his way are several experienced drivers: Meshari Al-Thafiri, 34, has been a regular on the MERC scene for several seasons and once finished as the runner-up in the esteemed Pirelli Star Driver competition. The Kuwaiti has a new Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution

BMC beat Sky to team trial in Valencia tour opener

Germany's Kittel wins again in Dubai

RAS AL-KHAIMAH, UAE, Feb 1, (AFP): Defending Tour of Dubai champion Marcel Kittel outsprinted the field to clinch a second stage win after a 188 km ride from Dubai to Ras al-Khaimah on Wednesday.

Having won Tuesday's opening of five stages, the German — who has won nine Tour de France stages — edged fellow sprint specialists Dylan Groenew-



Germany's Marcel Kittel celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the second stage of the Dubai Tour 2017 cycling race, from Dubai International Marine Club to Ras Al Khaimah, in Dubai, on Feb 1. (AP)

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gen and Jakub Mareczko after the peloton comfortably closed down a plucky escape 11km from the line.

Thursday's third stage is also a flat run over 200 km to Fujairah.

BMC Racing Team beat out Team Sky to claim victory in a 37.9 km team time trial on the opening stage of the Tour of Valencia with Italian Manuel Senni taking the leader's jersey.

The American team set the pace with a time of 43 min 14 sec with Sky second 24 seconds back and Quick-Step Flores a further 28 seconds behind in third.

Vuelta a Espana winner Nairo Quintana leads the Movistar team as he prepares to tackle the Giro d'Italia-Tour de France double later in the year, but the Spanish team are better known for their climbing and finished 1min 05sec back on BMC in fourth.

Tour de France champion Chris Froome is not going head-to-head with old foe Quintana as he is instead defending his title as part of Sky's team at the Herald Sun Tour in Australia this week.

Shiffrin boosts lead

STOCKHOLM, Feb 1, (AP): In absence of her main rival, Mikaela Shiffrin strengthened her position in the race for the overall World Cup title Tuesday by winning a parallel slalom city event, while Linus Strasser became the surprise winner of the men's competition.

Shiffrin's 28th win in her 99th World Cup start stretched the American's lead over defending champion Lara Gut to 180 points. The Swiss skier skipped the event to rest a sore right arm and thigh after hooking a gate in a super-G in Italy on Sunday.

"I came here for a reason. I am happy to get that crossed off the list," said Shiffrin after her maiden win in a city event, which also counts toward the slalom standings.

"It was a great show tonight. I think everybody enjoyed it. We could hear everybody screaming. This is really fun," added Shiffrin, who can become the first American overall champion since Lindsey Vonn won her fourth title in 2012.

Vonn returned just weeks ago from an 11-month injury layoff and did not qualify for the event, where racers compete head-to-head in a knock-out format, with the winner over two runs advancing to the next round.

Only the slalom top 12 and the four best ranked skiers from the overall standings were allowed to start.

In the final between the two top-ranked slalom skiers, Shiffrin won both runs against Veronika Velez Zuzulova of Slovakia.

The result also boosted Shiffrin's chances to win the discipline title for a fourth time. The Olympic champion leads Velez Zuzulova by 145 points with two races remaining.

If Shiffrin finishes third or better in the March 11 slalom in Squaw Valley, California, she wraps up the title even a week before the World Cup finals in Aspen, Colorado.

Best of the Rest

Top-seeded Halep beats Konjuh:

Top-seeded Simona Halep won her first match since an opening-round exit at the Australian Open, beating Ana Konjuh 6-4, 7-6 (2) Wednesday at the St Petersburg Ladies Trophy.

The fourth-ranked Romanian, who was broken three times, will next face Natalia Vikhlyantseva in the quarter-finals. The Russian wild-card entry defeated eighth-seeded Daria Kasatkina 7-6 (4), 6-2.

Playing in her home city for the first time, third-seeded veteran Svetlana Kuznetsova swept aside Moscow-born Australian Daria

Gavrilova, winning 6-1, 6-3.

That sets up a quarter-final against Yulia Putintseva, who earlier beat Annika Beck 6-4, 6-0. Also, fifth-seeded Elena Vesnina of Russia beat Olympic doubles partner Ekaterina Makarova 6-3, 6-1. Vesnina and Makarova won the women's doubles gold medal in Rio de Janeiro. (AP)

Woods returns to iconic landmark:

Tiger Woods' return to competitive golf continues in Dubai at the Omega Dubai Desert Classic (Feb 2-5, 2017). Ahead of

the event he visited the Burj Al Arab, the iconic Dubai landmark where he famously hit balls from the helipad in 2004.

Woods, making his eighth appearance in the tournament that he won in 2006 and 2008, took time out to practise his swing on the terrace and was on the helipad again to take a helicopter tour of the city that in 2019 will become home to a course he is designing. Woods was interviewed by Peter Dawson, former Chief Executive of The R&A and former Secretary of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews.

Jail terms for Karabatic brothers:

Three days after leading France to a sixth world handball championship team captain Nikola Karabatic and brother Luka were given two-month suspended sentences for their key role in a betting scandal.

The brothers were feted as national heroes on Sunday after France beat Norway for the world title in Paris, but on Wednesday the pair were handed the stiffer penalties on appeal in Montpellier, where they played in 2012, having previously only been fined. (AFP)

Bets totalling 100,000 euros were placed

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Mr. Edmond John Fernandes son of Mr. Edward Christopher Fernandes, resident of Janakalyan Nagar, Jaynagar Complex, D BLDG 3rd floor, Flat No 83 84, Marve Road Malad West Mumbai 400059 and Ms. Linda Liza Dalmeida daughter of Mr. Patrick Alexander Dalmeida, resident of 82 Tower 3 Godrej Garden Enclave, Pirojshah Nagar Vikhroli East Mumbai 400079 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed Marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act /Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (sscons@indembkwt.org, welfaresection@indembkwt.org) / letters / telephonic calls (00965-22533315, 00965-22533125).

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