

Handballers stay hot at Asiad

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Bahrain maintained their perfect start to the men's handball tournament at the 20th Asian Games yesterday, beating Iran 34-20 for their second successive Group B victory. A day after opening with a 43-20 win over Kazakhstan, the Warriors followed up with another convincing display at Toyoda Gosei Memorial Gymnasium. After an even start, Bahrain began to pull clear and opened up a 9-4 advantage. Iran responded with two goals to cut the gap to 9-6, but the Bahrainis struck six unanswered to take a 15-6 lead into the break. The Iranians made their strongest push after the restart, reducing the deficit to 17-10, but Robert Hedin's men quickly regained control. A 10-2 run stretched the lead to 27-12 before they comfortably saw out the victory.

Salman Alshowaikh led the scoring with seven goals from as many attempts, while Ahmed Fadhul and Mohamed Mohamed added five apiece. Hesham Isa and Mohamed Ali combined for 12 saves, with Isa stopping seven of the 13 shots he faced. Attention now turns to tomorrow's meeting with fellow unbeaten side South Korea at 11.30am, Bahrain time. The Koreans defeated Kuwait 26-23 yesterday to remain level with Bahrain on maximum points in Group B. The nationals round off their preliminary-round campaign against the Kuwaitis on Friday at 7.30am, before the quarter-finals on Saturday. The semi-fi-

nals follow on Monday, with the medal matches next Tuesday. Bahrain are seeking a maiden Asian Games handball title after reaching the podium at each of the previous three editions. The kingdom took bronze at Incheon 2014 before claiming successive silver medals behind Qatar at Jakarta-Palembang 2018 and Hangzhou 2022. Their latest bid comes amid an impressive run of success under Swedish coach Hedin, beginning with Islamic Solidarity Games gold

in Riyadh last November. Bahrain then captured their maiden Asian Men's Handball Championship crown in Kuwait before triumphing at the GCC Games in Doha.



Bahrain's handball squad with officials following their back-to-back victories

MMA duo storm into finals



Mukhammad Nabiev, left, is declared the winner of his semi-final

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Bahrain's Diana Pogolian and Mukhammad Nabiev will fight for Asian Games gold today after both won their MMA semi-finals at the Nagoya City Inae Sports Centre yesterday. Pogolian secured her place in the women's modern MMA under-54kg final after defeating South Korea's Bomi Lee by doctor stoppage just one minute and 20 seconds into the opening round. The 24-year-old will now face Thailand's Kanjutha Phattaraboonsorn in the gold-medal bout at 8.17am, Bahrain time. Nabiev followed his compatriot into a title fight with a unanimous-decision victory over Kyrgyzstan's Syimyk Zhanybek Uulu in the men's traditional MMA

under-77kg semi-finals. The 31-year-old will meet Kazakhstan's Yerkingali Burkutalin for gold at 8.34am. Pogolian and Nabiev had already guaranteed Bahrain at least two bronze medals by reaching the semi-finals, but yesterday's victories ensured both will leave the Games with no worse than silver. Pogolian began her campaign with a unanimous-decision quarter-final victory over Japan's Tomoe Katayama, while Nabiev defeated Vietnam's Van Minh Quang by unanimous decision before advancing from the quarter-finals without fighting after India's Varun Aryamaan San- yal was ruled out. Their final fight of today's con- cluding MMA pro- gramme at the Nago- ya City Inae Sports Centre.

Diana Pogolian (L) squares up to her opponent

Abdalla lands first Asiad blow

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Bahrain boxer Ali Abdalla made a winning start to his Asian Games campaign yesterday, defeating Turkmenistan's Bayramdurdy Nurmuhamedov in the men's 70kg preliminaries at Nishio Gymnasium. With Irish head coach John Conlan in his corner, the GCC Games champion earned a 4-1 victory on points after three rounds to book his place in the last 16 at the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan. Abdalla built his advantage over the opening two rounds, with four of the five judges scoring in his favour. Nurmuhamedov responded in the third, but the Bahraini had done enough to secure his passage to the next stage. Abdalla will return to the ring for his last-16 bout on Thursday, with a place in the September 28 quarter-finals at stake. The 70kg semi-finals are scheduled for September 30, with the final to be held on October 3. He is one of five Bahrain fighters competing at the Games as the kingdom pursues a first-ever Asian Games boxing medal. Two more members of the squad enter the ring tomorrow: Omar Budhahei faces Iraq's Mohammed Sattar Salih Shijlawi in the men's 60kg preliminaries and Hamsa Vogel takes on India's Ankush in the



Bahrain boxing coach John Conlan watches the bout from ringside

men's 80kg preliminaries. Maryam Khamis, Bahrain's lone woman boxer, is entered in the women's 54kg category, with her opening bout scheduled for Friday. Jorge Luis Lobaina completes the kingdom's line-up and will begin his campaign against Kyrgyzstan's Bakyt Toktosun Uulu in the men's 90kg preliminaries on Saturday. Bahrain are competing in Asian Games boxing for only the second time, having made their debut at Hangzhou 2022.



Ali Abdalla, left, sizes up his Turkmen opponent

Paddlers march into knockouts

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Bahrain booked their place in the knockout stage of the men's team table tennis competition at the 20th Asian Games after sweeping Nepal 3-0 at Sky Hall Toyota in Japan yesterday. The kingdom bounced back from their opening defeat to Chinese Taipei to finish second in Group C. Rashed Sanad set Bahrain on their way with an 11-6, 11-5, 11-4 victory over Sanyog Kapali, before Mohamed Saleh beat Rubin Maharjan 11-3, 11-8, 9-11, 11-9. Mohammed Alaali then completed the sweep, overcoming Gananjaya Dahal 13-11, 11-2, 11-9 to seal Bahrain's progression.



Alaali serves during Bahrain's victory over Nepal

The result saw Bahrain finish behind Chinese Taipei in Group C, while Nepal were eliminated after losing both of their matches. Bahrain now turn their attention to the knockout stage, with the men's team quarter-finals scheduled for 1:20pm today. The semi-finals follow tomorrow, with the gold-medal match taking place on Thursday.

Shooters continue campaign

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Bahrain's skeet shooters return to action at the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya today as the individual qualification competition continues at the Aichi Prefectural General Shooting Gallery. Tammam Alwatt leads the kingdom's challenge in the men's event after finishing the opening day of qualification in 23rd place yesterday with a total of 46 targets from the first two rounds. Alwatt made a strong start by hitting 24 of his 25 targets in the opening round before adding 22 in the second. The Bahraini trails overnight leader Mohammed Ahmed of the UAE, who produced a perfect start with scores of 25 in both rounds for a total of 50. Chinese Taipei's Lee Meng-Yuan and Qatar's Rashid Al-Athba follow on 49. In the women's competi-

tion, Maryam Hassani was Bahrain's leading performer after the opening two rounds, recording scores of 21 and 20 for a total of 41 to sit 21st in the 26-shooter field. Compatriot Maryam Alasam finished the day in 26th position on 35 after shooting 17 in the first round and 18 in the second. China's Che Yufei leads the women's standings on 49 following rounds of 24 and 25, one target ahead of compatriot Jiang Yiting. Thailand's Isarapa Imprasertsuk and Kazakhstan's Assem Orynbay are next on 47. The Bahraini trio resume qualification from 4am today, Bahrain time, with the competition continuing into a third day tomorrow. The final day will determine the individual medal contenders, with the women's final scheduled for 8.30am tomorrow and the men's final set for 10am.

Goncharov just misses backstroke medal

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Bahrain's Stepan Goncharov came agonisingly close to a medal at the 20th Asian Games yesterday, finishing fourth in the men's 50m backstroke final at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre. The 23-year-old produced his fastest swim of the day in the final, touching the wall in 24.92 seconds to finish just 0.38sec outside the podium places. China's Xu Jiayu stormed to gold in a Games-record 24.04, with compatriot Wang Zicheng taking silver in 24.49 and South Korea's Yoon Jihwan claiming bronze in 24.54. Goncharov had earlier impressed in the heats, winning his race in 25.18 to qualify seventh overall for the 10-swimmer final. Bahrain's other entrant Ahmed Helal finished 23rd overall in 27.81. Goncharov was also in action in the men's 50m freestyle, clocking 23.06 to finish 22nd overall, while compatriot Abdulla Jamal was 34th in 24.30. South Korea's Kim Youngbeom went on to take gold, ahead of Hong Kong's Ian

Ho and compatriot Ji Yuchan. Jamal later contested the men's 100m breaststroke, where he finished 29th overall with a time of one minute 5.77 seconds. China's Dong Zhihao and Japan's Shin Ohashi shared gold, with China's Qin Haiyang taking bronze. In the women's events, Amani Al Obaidli led the kingdom's challenge in the 50m backstroke, finishing 20th in 30.10, while Noor Taha was 26th after touching home in 31.57. China's Wan Letian won gold, compatriot Wang Xueer took silver and South Korea's Kim Seungwon claimed bronze. Sana Le Falher was Bahrain's highest finisher in the women's 200m freestyle heats, taking 15th overall in 2:10.88. Asma Le Falher followed in 17th with a time of 2:12.21. Hong Kong's Siobhan Haughey claimed the 200m freestyle title, with China's Li Jiaping taking silver and compatriot Liu Yaxin completing the podium.



Stepan Goncharov launches into the pool at the start of his race