Doha Film Festival 2026 Film *52 Blue* Team Reflects on Filming Inside the FIFA World Cup

- *Acclaimed Egyptian filmmaker Ali El Arabi met media alongside cast members ahead of a special screening at the Doha Film Festival 2026*
- *52 Blue is the first feature ever filmed on location at a FIFA World Cup*

Doha, Qatar; November 22 2026: Egyptian director and producer **Ali El Arabi** reflected on filming inside a FIFA World Cup prior to the Doha Film Festival (DFF) 2026 screening of his narrative feature film ***52 Blue*** (Qatar/Egypt/India/USA) in the Special Screenings programme at.

El Arabi was joined at a DFF press briefing by cast members **Yadav Shashidhar** and **Arya Appukattan** to discuss making the first feature film shot at a FIFA World Cup in Qatar. The film was co-produced with Katara Studios and shot on location in Qatar in 2022.

Set between a remote island in Kerala, India and Doha, Qatar during the World Cup, ***52 Blue*** follows Ashish, a young man from a sheltered background, under the control of his father, finding comfort in his mother's quiet support and his admiration for Lionel Messi.

When the 2022 FIFA World Cup comes to Qatar, Ashish sees an opportunity to pursue his dream. He leaves home for the first time and travels to Doha, where a backstage job at the stadiums brings him closer to his football hero and a world he has never experienced.

El Arabi shared how the idea for the film began after meeting a young Indian worker at the stadium who dreamed of meeting Messi. "*52 Blue* is about pursuing an impossible dream - it is the story of a young man determined to achieve his dream of meeting Messi," he said. "Because most of the film was shot inside actual World Cup stadiums, we could not rely on a rigid script. Everything had to be captured in a single take and was largely spontaneous."

Actor **Yadav Shashidhar**, who plays the role of Ashish, said, "This was a spontaneous, fast-moving shoot and I found it really adventurous. It was my first time working with an international director and my first debut as a lead actor," said Shashidhar, who also described meeting Messi as an unforgettable experience: "Messi felt like the simplest and kindest person I could imagine. When I met him, I wasn't sure if he would want a hug, but he opened his arms to me."

Arya Appukuttan, the female lead in the film, said, “I had a great experience, things were so spontaneous that I was just showing up, having a blast, and experiencing the World Cup from a different angle.”

Key Partners of Doha Film Festival include Katara, Media City Qatar I Film Committee and Visit Qatar. Taking place from 19–27 November 2026, Doha Film Festival brings together filmmakers, audiences and industry voices from the region and beyond to honour original storytelling and important voices in film. For more information, visit www.dohafilm.com.

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