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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Sarabia strike seals Arabi win as Sailiya salvage draw

Al Arabi move up to fifth place with 31 points, while Al Shahania remain on 17 points in last place

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Arabi completed a season double over Al Shahania with a 2-0 win in the Qatar Stars League at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday. A superb on-the-run strike from Pablo Sarabia in the 75th minute broke the deadlock in a match that had been tightly contested by both sides until then. Sarabia was set up by a cross from the right by Abdullah Marafee. Al Shahania's Yousuf al-Raeesi attempted to cut off the aerial delivery but in vain.

The lead was doubled in the dying seconds of stoppage time (90+10 minute) when Karl Toko-Ekambi deflected in a cross from Jordan Veretout, who weaved his way through the defence.

Al Shahania pushed hard throughout the match but failed to convert several promising chances. With the three valuable points, Al Arabi moved up to fifth place with 31 points, while Al Shahania remained on 17 points in 12th and last place in the standings.

Meanwhile, Al Sailiya rallied to snatch a thrilling 2-2 draw against Al Ahli at the Al Thumama Stadium. Driss Fettouhi (9th minute) and Michel Vlap (13th minute) delivered the early blows for Al Ahli, but Al Sailiya hit back in the second half through Diago Amaro (54th minute) and Cristian Del Bello (80th minute) to force a stalemate.

With this result, Al Sailiya raised their tally to 19 points in 11th place, while Al Ahli moved to 20 points and advanced to ninth place, ahead of Umm Salal.

Fettouhi drilled home the opening strike from outside the box after an assist from Julian Draxler, and soon after Michel Vlap capitalised on a backheel pass from Oumar Sekou to beat the goalkeeper. Amaro pulled one back with a superb leaping header from a corner kick before Cristian Del Bello drove down the right, weaving



Al Arabi's Pablo Sarabia celebrates after scoring against Al Shahania in the Qatar Stars League at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday.

past defenders to level the score at 2-2.

In another match, Al Wakrah defeated Qatar SC 4-1 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, delivering a commanding performance with four different scorers securing an emphatic victory that lifted the visitors to eighth in the standings. Yusuf Abduris-ag opened the scoring early with a fifth-minute header, before Aissa Laidouni doubled the lead with a powerful long-range

strike in the 29th minute.

Redouane Berkane added a third just before halftime after capitalising on a defensive lapse, giving Al Wakrah a comfortable advantage at the break. Amin Zahzou extended the lead in the 60th minute to seal the result. Qatar SC missed a penalty shortly before that and managed only a late consolation through Ahmed al-Rawi five minutes from time.



Al Sailiya rallied to snatch a thrilling 2-2 draw against Al Ahli at the Al Thumama Stadium.

MANCINI EYES BIG WIN AS AL SADD FACE AL RAYYAN TODAY

Roberto Mancini has stressed the importance of strong preparation as Al Sadd gear up for a crucial 'Qatar Clasico' clash against Al Rayyan today at Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium.

With the title race entering a decisive phase, defending champions Al Sadd are determined to bounce back after consecutive defeats and maintain their push at the top of the standings. The leaders are on 38 points, closely followed by Al Shamal and Al Gharafa on 34 points each, while Al Rayyan remain firmly in contention with 31 points, setting the stage for a high-stakes encounter between the rivals. "It is clear that the match against Al Rayyan will be very evenly matched, but we are working hard to get the three points and try to move up the standings," Mancini said.

The Italian coach underlined the ur-

gency of securing maximum points as the season approaches its closing stages. "We realise that in the current situation there is no room for losing any more points. The players are highly motivated and are working in the best way possible. They know how important this match is for everyone at the club, especially for the fans. We want to put on a great performance for them and continue working in this manner," he added.

The Qatar Clasico carries added significance this season, with Al Sadd having won 12 matches, drawn two and lost five, including defeats in their last two outings. With only three games remaining, the record 18-time champions cannot afford another slip if they are to retain the title.

Meanwhile, Al Shamal are eyeing a historic maiden league triumph and will look to capitalise on any dropped points by the leaders. They face Umm Salal today.

QATAR EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION CUP

Al-Ajami triumphs, double win for al-Hadi

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Faleh Suwead al-Ajami delivered a strong performance to win the feature CSI5* class of the Qatar Equestrian Federation Cup, part of the Doha Equestrian Tour 2026, held at the Longines Arena in Al Shaqab.

Al-Ajami, riding Wathnan Qapella, secured victory in the CSI5* Jump Off class at a height of 155cm, clocking 44.10 seconds with four faults to finish ahead of Brazil's Sergio Neupmann Junior on Corina Blue, who registered the same faults in a slower time of 45.12 seconds. Brazil's Santiago Lambre on Zeus completed the podium with eight faults in 48.49 seconds.

Al-Ajami said: "Things came together well for me. I managed to produce a clear round in the first round, and in the jump-off I tried to put pressure on the riders who came after me. In the end, it worked out well and I was able to take first place."

In the CSI3* Faults and Time class at 140cm, Kuwait's Annaz al-Annaz riding Be Bop de Lyons produced a clear round in 65.74 seconds to take top honours. Austria's Gerfried Puck on Idiaal Special H.J. finished second in 69.77 seconds, while Kuwait's Fawaz Rashed on Gaia des Forets placed third in 72.97 seconds.

Saudi Arabia's Khalid al-Hadi enjoyed a successful outing, winning the CSI3* Special Two Phases class at 135cm aboard Capoen with a double-clear round in 33.33 seconds. Qatar's Saad Ahmed al-Saad on Craquante de Mazin took second place in 34.69 seconds, followed closely by Sheikh Fahad Jassim al-Thani on Christians Carado in 34.85 seconds.

Al-Hadi also claimed victory in the CSI1* Faults and Time class at 130cm, riding Carlton de Sauvageonn to a clear round in 55.68 seconds. Qatar's Yaqoub Nasser al-Mass on Ozenne secured second place in 59.59 seconds,



Qatar's Faleh Suwead al-Ajami in action with Wathnan Qapella during the Qatar Equestrian Federation Cup at Al Shaqab yesterday.

while Abdulaziz Khalid al-Bukhari on Ganges Loca finished third in 61.82 seconds.

In another CSI3* Faults and Time class at 130cm, Saudi Arabia's Bader Alfard on Murdock topped the standings with a faultless effort in 71.40 seconds. Qatar's Mohammed Khalifa al-Baker riding Emiro Delle Sementarece finished second in 74.13 seconds, while France's Cyrine Cherif on Easy Casarola placed third in 80.78 seconds.

Saudi Arabia's Halah al-Rasheed won the CSI1* Immediate Jump Off class at 115cm on Cruising On The Ridge with a double-clear round in 32.66 seconds. Qatar's Ibrahim Khalid al-Kuwari on Carte Blanche took second place in 34.72 seconds, while Mohammad al-Ghazali

on Palmer - V finished third in 35.54 seconds.

In the junior category, Saudi Arabia's Noura al-Rasheed secured victory in the CSIJ-B Special Two Phases class at 115cm riding Flash NH with a time of 30.37 seconds, ahead of Qatar's Hadi Nasser al-Hajri on Monopoly in 31.26 seconds. Al-Rasheed also claimed third place on Sarina Del Valle in 31.53 seconds.

Meanwhile, Qatar's Alya Ahmad al-Khater riding Vahine de Curaine topped the children's CSICH-B Special Two Phases class at 105cm with a double-clear effort in 30.48 seconds. Layan Sultan al-Thani on Dino Bb Z finished second in 32.19 seconds, while Saudi Arabia's Alanoud al-Rasheed on Love You Smh placed third in 32.81 seconds.

QATAR OPEN GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP

Hrinda leads heading into final round

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Slovakia's Jakub Hrinda took the lead after the second round of the 40th Qatar Open Golf Championship at Doha Golf Club yesterday. Hrinda carded four over par, followed by South Africa's Franco Rabbi in second place with six over par. Australia's Andrew Extremis and England's Andrew Sanders are tied for third place with eight over par each.

Qatari player Saleh al-Kaabi is in fifth place overall with a total of 153 strokes, nine over par,

followed by England's Callum Fitzgerald with 11 over par and Britain's Dean Morris with 12 over par.

Qatar's Daniel Sokolov, his team-mate Waqas al-Balushi and Australia's Cam Craner are in eighth, ninth and tenth place respectively, each with a score of 159 strokes, 15 over par. Thirty-seven players made the cut for the final round, which will be held today. Among them are nine Qatari players - al-Kaabi, Sokolov, al-Balushi, Abdulaziz al-Buainain, Abdulaziz al-Shahrani, Abdulaziz al-Mohannadi, Fahad Mir, Jassim al-Kuwari and Kamil Bourqia.



CRICKET

Bashir retains England 'ambition' despite Ashes snub

AFP
London

Shoab Bashir retains a "massive ambition" to become England's go-to spinner despite being overlooked by selectors during a troubled tour of Australia.

Bashir was named as England's only frontline spinner for the tour Down Under but was not selected for any of the five Test matches as the tourists lost 4-1.

Instead all-rounder Will Jacks acted as the spin option for Ben Stokes' side in four of the five

matches after an all-seam attack was selected for the opening Test.

"I've got a massive ambition to play for England," said Bashir, who has switched counties from Somerset to Derbyshire to secure more playing time.

"It's the most special thing and the most honourable thing that you can do, so I'll do anything in my powers to try and improve."

Derbyshire head coach Mickey Arthur, who has overseen Australia, South Africa, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, hailed the 22-year-old as one of the best spinners he has seen at that age.

"I've been very fortunate to see a lot of spinners, some in the sub-continent, I haven't seen a spinner that is as consistent as what Shoab is at the same age," Arthur said.

"The growth is going to be massive and what we do is give them the roots to grow and the wings to fly. From what I've seen with Shoab, the world is going to be his oyster."

Bashir was plucked from obscurity by England two years ago and claimed 68 wickets in 19 Tests.

He continued to be backed by the England set up despite inconsistent displays and Jack Leach

being preferred to him at Somerset.

"Obviously it was very situational and the team was selected on a game-to-game basis and spin didn't play a massive part in the Ashes," Bashir said.

"I'm in communication with the England management a lot and I definitely feel that they're keeping an eye on me and seeing how I'm improving and tracking the things that I'm learning," he said.

England host New Zealand in a three-Test series in June before facing Pakistan for three more Tests in August and September.



INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Iyer guides Punjab past Chennai to go top of the table

Punjab made a chase of 210 look easy as Chennai lose again at Chepauk



Punjab Kings' Shreyas Iyer in action during the Indian Premier League match against Chennai Super Kings at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
New Delhi

A beautifully crafted half-century by skipper Shreyas Iyer took Punjab Kings to a second successive victory, by five wickets against Chennai Super Kings, and to the top of the Indian Premier League table yesterday.

Put in, Chennai overcame the second-over dismissal of Sanju Samson, caught behind off Xavier Bartlett, to post a competitive 209-5 on a good batting strip at the MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Punjab responded with 210-5, a record-extending ninth time they had successfully chased a target in excess of 200 in the IPL.

Ayush Mhatre, India's under-19

World Cup-winning captain, provided the early momentum for Chennai with a blazing 73 off 43 deliveries, Sarfaraz Khan bossed the middle overs with a 12-ball 32 and the final kick came from Shivam Dube, 14 from 14 at one stage before finishing unbeaten on 45 off 27.

Mhatre took five deliveries to get off the mark but once he found his bearings, he peppered the ground with a bouquet of delectable fours and powerful sixes.

Fortunate to be dropped on 59 and 67, both times off seasoned leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal who surprisingly bowled only three overs, he otherwise hardly put a foot wrong while dominating a second-wicket stand of 96 with his captain, Ruturaj Gaikwad.

Punjab fought back with the wickets of Gaikwad, Mhatre and

Kartik Sharma in quick succession but Sarfaraz uncorked a cheeky cameo and Dube cut loose towards the end, largely responsible for 64 runs flowing off the last five overs.

Fresh off a three-wicket win against Gujarat Titans, Punjab attacked the target furiously through Priyansh Arya, the left-handed opener who unleashed a flurry of fours and sixes. Prabhsimran Singh too played his part in an opening stand worth 61, though it was Arya who bossed the early exchanges while smashing three fours and four sixes in an 11-ball 39.

Punjab continued to string together useful partnerships. Prabhsimran and Cooper Connolly put on 34 for the second wicket, after which Connolly helped Shreyas add 32, but when the Australian

was caught off an Anshul Kamboj full toss, Punjab still needed 83 off 49 deliveries.

That was the cue for Shreyas to announce himself. The captain picked off leg-spinner Rahul Chahar for two sixes in the 13th over and followed it up with a four and six off New Zealand pacer Matt Henry in the 15th to bring up his fifty in just 26 deliveries. Marcus Stoinis and Shashank Singh steered Punjab home with eight balls to spare, consigning Chennai to a second successive defeat.

BRIEF SCORES: Punjab Kings 210 for 5 (Shreyas 50, Prabhsimran 43, Arya 39, Kamboj 2-43, Henry 2-54) **beat Chennai Super Kings 209 for 5** (Mhatre 73, Dube 45, Vyshak 2-38) **by five wickets.**

PAKISTAN SUPER LEAGUE

Qalandars beat Sultans by 20 runs in rain-hit tie

Agencies
Lahore

Lahore Qalandars clinched a 20-run victory over Multan Sultans with Mohammad Naeem's fifty and disciplined bowling in a rain-curtailed match of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) in Lahore yesterday. Set to chase a daunting 186-run target in 13 overs, the 2021 champions could accumulate 165 for 5 despite a blistering cameo by Shan Masood and an unbeaten half-century by captain Ashton Turner.

The Sultans got off to a shaky start to the pursuit as they lost Steve Smith (nine) and Josh Philippe (one) inside the batting powerplay, comprising 3.5 overs, with just 18 runs on the board.

Following the early setbacks, Masood and in-form Sahibzada Farhan (24) put together a cautious 32-run partnership for the third wicket, which culminated with the latter's dismissal off Mustafizur Rahman in the sixth over. Masood, on the other hand, continued his counter-attack until he too fell victim to Rahman on the third delivery of the 10th over and walked back after scoring an 18-ball 44, comprising seven fours and a six.

Following his dismissal, captain Turner and emerging all-rounder Arafat Minhas (25) knitted a valiant 57-run partnership for the fifth wicket until the latter was dismissed by Sikandar Raza on the fourth delivery of the final over. Turner, on the other hand, batted until the end and top-scored with an unbeaten 52 off 22 deliveries with the help of five sixes and two fours,

but his efforts were insufficient to pull off a miraculous victory for the Sultans, who suffered their first defeat of the season.

Rahman was the standout bowler for the Qalandars, taking two wickets for 37 runs in his three overs, while Ubaid Shah, Sikandar Raza and captain Shaheen Shah Afridi chipped in with one scalp apiece. Naeem was named Player of the Match for his 60 off 28. In a match that was reduced to 13 overs per side due to a two-hour-long rain hindrance, Sultans captain Ashton Turner won the toss and elected to field first, but the decision backfired as the holders accumulated a humongous total of 185/5, courtesy of top order.

The home side got off to a flying start to their innings, with their new opening pair of Naeem and Parvez Hossain Emon putting together 86 runs in just five overs. Debutant pacer Muhammad Ismail, who got off to an unwanted start to his spell as he conceded 26 runs in his first over, gave the Sultans a much-needed breakthrough on the first delivery of the sixth over by cleaning up Emon.

The Bangladesh international walked back after scoring a quickfire 45 off just 19 deliveries, laced with five sixes and two fours. His dismissal, however, did not dent Qalandars' dominance as Abdullah Shafique and Naeem raised a 58-run partnership at a brisk pace before both perished in successive overs.

BRIEF SCORES: Lahore Qalandars 185 for 5 (Naeem 60, Emon 45, Ismail 2-47) **beat Multan Sultans 165 for 5** (Turner 52, Masood 44, Mustafizur 2-37) **by 20 runs (DLS method)**

Thain becomes first injury substitute in English county cricket

Essex all-rounder Noah Thain became the first ever injury substitute in county cricket in England yesterday when he replaced captain Tom Westley, who broke a finger while batting against Hampshire in Southampton. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) debuted a season-long trial earlier this week, allowing fully participating, like-for-like replacements in the case of injuries, illness or significant life events like the birth of a child or the serious illness of a family member. Injured players could be replaced by a substitute fielder under existing rules, but the ECB allowed them to participate fully after the International Cricket Council (ICC) asked member boards to experiment with injury substitutes in domestic cricket. Similar rules have been tried out in the domestic first-class competitions of Australia, India and South Africa. The substitutions must be approved by the match referee and once replaced, a player cannot return to the game. As a like-for-like replacement for Westley, who is primarily a batter, Thain will be allowed to bat but cannot bowl in this match.

CYCLING

Pogacar welcomes Evenepoel challenge in Flanders

AFP
Waregem, Belgium

World champion Tadej Pogacar is happy that Olympic gold medalist Remco Evenepoel is making his Tour of Flanders debut this weekend.

Reigning champion Pogacar has started his year in sensational form, storming to victory in Strade Bianche and then pipping Briton Tom Pidcock to the line at Milan-San Remo, the first Monument of the season.

His victory there, meant that Pogacar is missing only Paris-Roubaix from his bid to complete the Monument Grand Slam, having won Flanders twice, Liege-Bastogne-Liege three times and the Giro di Lombardia five times.

The 27-year-old Slovenian will start Sunday's race as the hot favourite, but Evenepoel's surprise

participation has ramped up expectations for year's second of five Monuments. "From my side, it's good to have a rider like Remco always wanting to go from far... and always on the attack," Pogacar said yesterday. "We saw the last few races, he always goes for the win no matter what."

"He can do a really great race on Sunday. He's in good shape and definitely a rider to look (out) for, for his long-range attacks, and just not (to) let him out of sight."

Double Olympic champion Evenepoel is a similar rider to Pogacar, with both known for launching daring long-range solo attacks that just a few years ago would have been derided as suicide missions.

Evenepoel won the world championships in 2022 with a 25km solo breakaway having earlier in the year attacked solo 30km from the finish to win Liege-Bastogne-Liege, his first Monument success,



Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar speaks to journalists during a press conference ahead of the 110th edition of Tour of Flanders in Waregem yesterday. (AFP)

and 44km out to win the Clasic San Sebastian. Those, though, were dwarfed by the 80km-long solo attack Pogacar produced to

win Strade Bianche in 2024. "With Remco, you never know where he can go and he can attack in (the) most random places and you need

to be careful," added Pogacar. "You can never let him go in the front with a couple of seconds because it's almost impossible to catch him back because he's so fast."

Long-range attacks have been a theme of the cobbled classics season, although they have rarely been successful. Former world champion Mathieu van der Poel, who will be aiming for a record fourth Flanders victory on Sunday, just managed to hold on to win E3 Saxo Classic last week by a handful of seconds after breaking clear 42km from the finish.

But he and arch-rival Wout van Aert were caught a kilometre from the line two days later at In Flanders Fields after breaking clear of the field with 36km left.

And on Wednesday, Van Aert was just 100-metres away from glory when he was passed by a late-charging Filippo Ganna at Dwars door Vlaanderen after another daring break from 40km

out. "The teams maybe finally realised that if somebody attacks (with) 60km to go that there's still time to reorganise themselves in the back and if you work together and (are) not just attacking each other over the climbs, there's more chance to catch the guy in the lead," said Pogacar.

"That's what happened in Ghent (In Flanders Fields) or Dwars as well. There was a bigger group in the back that could cooperate and it was interesting to watch."

But the four-time Tour de France winner, widely regarded as one of the sport's all-time greats, is not convinced that such chases would be so successful at Flanders, which at 278km is significantly longer than those other cobbled classics. "Flanders is a very different race. It's way longer and more demanding," he said, although he added: "I'm not saying that I want to attack every race (with) 50km or 60km to go. We'll see."

FOOTBALL

Liverpool's Alisson to miss Man City, PSG matches: Slot

'Towards the end of the season we expect him to be fit again'

AFP
London

Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker will miss their FA Cup quarter-final against Manchester City and both legs of the Champions League tie with Paris Saint-Germain, manager Arne Slot said.

The Brazilian suffered an injury during Liverpool's win over Galatasaray in the Champions League last-16 second leg last month. The Reds visit Man City today before taking on reigning European champions PSG at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday, with the quarter-final return leg six days later.

"He will not be part of the Paris Saint-Germain games as well," Slot told reporters. "He will be out for a bit longer. Towards the end of the season we expect him to be fit again."

Alexander Isak may be fit to play a part against City, though, having returned to training after breaking his leg in December. "It will take a bit of time to give him a lot of minutes," Slot said of Isak. "We will make sure we do the right thing in terms of building him up in minutes, but it's a very good thing to have him on the training ground again. It would be even better to have him available for games, that's for sure."

Mohamed Salah is ready to play after hobbling off against Galatasaray and then missing Liverpool's loss at Brighton before the international break.

The Egyptian announced last week he will leave Anfield at the end of the season.

Slot hailed the impact Salah has had on Liverpool during his nine



Liverpool players train on the eve of their FA Cup quarter-final against Manchester City.

years at the club, and is hoping the Egyptian forward will win two more trophies with them before leaving. Salah has scored 255 goals for Liverpool and helped them win two Premier League titles, one FA Cup, two League Cups and one Champions League trophy.

Slot said: "He trained with us yesterday and today, and he's available for the game tomorrow. It's been unbelievable what he did for this club, for so many years, every three days, scoring the goals he did, having the assists, having the impact that he had on this club, winning the trophies... I can only hope that he can add two extra trophies to it towards the end of the season."

Liverpool have endured a tough campaign in the Premier League

after winning the title last season and sit in fifth place, battling for a spot in next season's Champions League. But they remain in the hunt for a seventh European crown, facing a rematch against PSG after a last-16 penalty shoot-out defeat by the French champions last year.

Alisson starred in that tie with a spectacular display in Liverpool's 1-0 first-leg victory in Paris. Georgia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili is set to deputise for Alisson at the Etihad against City on Saturday, as Liverpool bid to reach the FA Cup semi-finals for the first time since lifting the trophy in 2022.

Man City, still in with a chance of repeating the domestic treble they won in 2018/19, are bid-

ding to reach a record-extending eighth successive FA Cup semi-final. Pep Guardiola is encouraging his players to focus on the future, after they beat Premier League title rivals Arsenal in last month's League Cup final.

"It was a long time ago already," said the City manager of the 2-0 win over the Gunners at Wembley.

"It's better and nice to win another title. It's not the most prestigious one but the fact is it's another chance to play against the best team in Europe so far in the Premier League and the Champions League. It was a good test against a good team. We finished one and think of the next one. Tomorrow we have chance to make another incredible milestone - eight semi-finals in a row."

TENNIS

Top seed Pegula reaches semis with latest three-setter

AFP
Washington

Top seed Jessica Pegula once again fought back from a set down to reach the WTA Charleston Open semi-finals with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 win against Russia's Diana Shnaider yesterday.

Defending champion Pegula has lost the first set in all three matches so far, but again dug deep to maintain her hopes of retaining the title.

The world number five from the United States took two hours and 10 minutes to defeat 19th-ranked Shnaider, relying on a formidable service game that included eight aces.

Shnaider battled well in the first two sets, and broke early for a 2-0 lead in the final set, before losing six straight games.

Pegula, chasing her second tournament victory of the year after winning the title in Dubai in February, will face the winner of the quarter-final between fourth-seeded fellow American Iva Jovic and Russian Anna Kalinskaya.



Jessica Pegula of the United States returns a shot to Diana Shnaider during Charleston Open quarter-final. (AFP)

Swiss third seed Belinda Bencic and fifth-seeded American Madison Keys are among the possible final opponents lurking on the other side of the draw.

Despite a first-round bye, Pegula has clocked up nine sets and more than seven hours on court so far.

She has won nine of 10 matches this year that have gone to a deciding third set.

French court rules to extradite Russian who owned Portsmouth football club

A French court has ruled to extradite Russian banker Vladimir Antonov, a former owner of English football club Portsmouth, to Lithuania, his lawyer said yesterday.

Antonov was detained in western France last December on suspicion of fraud, following a European arrest warrant from Lithuania. He is accused of having stripped assets and funds from a leading Lithuanian bank, Snoras, where he was a majority shareholder, between 2008 and 2011, when the lender was nationalised.

A second arrest warrant issued in December 2025 added charges of corruption, money laundering and bankruptcy, with total losses amounting to at least 478m euros (\$551m).

Antonov's lawyer said that his client would challenge the ruling. The court "clearly did not take into account the real risk to Mr. Antonov's life in Eastern Europe", Henry Ermeneux told AFP.

In 2024, a Lithuanian court sentenced Antonov in absentia to 10.5 years in prison for embezzlement.

In 2011, Antonov was arrested in Britain on the strength of a Lithuanian arrest warrant issued over the collapse of the Snoras Bank, but later released. He purchased Portsmouth, then in the second-tier Championship, in June 2011. He stepped down the following November when his company, Convers Sports Initiatives, went into administration following his arrest over the fraud allegations. In 2015, a lawyer said Antonov had fled Britain because he feared for his life.

GOLF

Hubbard emerges from the pack with Valero Texas Open lead

Reuters
Los Angeles

Mark Hubbard birdied the 18th hole to complete a 6-under-par 30 on the back nine and grab a one-shot lead at the Valero Texas Open when play was suspended Thursday at TPC San Antonio.

Hubbard emerged from a six-way tie for the lead and signed for a 7-under 65 late in the day. The 36-year-old has never won on the PGA Tour.

After the start of the tournament was delayed by 90 minutes due to inclement weather, 24 players were unable to finish their rounds before darkness fell Thursday evening.

The highlight of Hubbard's round was a four-birdie stretch from Nos. 11-14, featuring a 24-foot birdie putt at No. 12. Then he stuck his tee shot at the par-3 16th to about 6 feet of the cup to set up another birdie, and he cleaned up a 3-footer for birdie at the par-5 14th.

"I always thought the back nine's a little gettable out here," Hubbard said. "That front nine there's a couple tough par 4s, you're just hanging on, but the back you can get it going, especially with the wind direction. ... I just hit it really well with my irons, and if you're in the fairways, just kind of frees me up."

World No. 11 Robert MacIntyre of Scotland and Tony Finau stand out from the group tied at 6-under 66, also featuring Davis Thompson, Andrew Putnam and Steven Fisk.

MacIntyre posted a bogey-free round with five of his six birdies occurring on the back nine, including back-to-back at Nos. 17 and 18. MacIntyre said the conditions were "a lot trickier" in the afternoon.

"The wind got up pretty much as we were going to tee off, I knew it was going to be tough, but you have to take your chances," he



Mark Hubbard of the United States plays his shot from the second tee during the first round of the Valero Texas Open at TPC San Antonio in San Antonio, Texas. (AFP)

said. "Almost on the back nine, a finishing stretch, some big opportunities and thankfully today I'd done that."

Finau started his round on the back nine and followed a 9-foot birdie putt at the par-3 13th with an eagle at the par-5 14th. He rolled in a downhill, right-to-left putt from 41 1/2 feet.

The six-time PGA Tour winner has fallen out of the top 100 in the world rankings and is currently not on the list for the Masters next week. The only way for him to qualify now is by winning in Texas.

"I feel like I'm really close to putting together a string of good golf tournaments," Finau said. "I've had some good days during tournaments, whether that's in the first round, the final round, but I haven't been able to put together I feel like really strong finishes and four days of good golf."

"So I'm off to a good start this week. I'll just be looking to capitalize on three more days of good golf."

Will Zalatoris, Englishman Tommy Fleetwood and Sweden's Ludvig Aberg are part of an eight-way knot at 5-under 67.

Like Finau, Zalatoris has not secured his place at Augusta Na-

tional yet. That's because his world ranking has also fallen off in recent years as a chronic back injury cost him time. This week is just his fourth start of the season.

If he wins this week to make the Masters field, there's reason to believe he can do damage. He has three top-10 finishes in four starts, most notably placing second in his debut in 2021. "After everything that I've kind of gone through, I'm just glad that I'm able to do this," said Zalatoris, who holed a 31-foot putt for birdie at No. 18 Thursday.

"I think there were probably a few moments that I thought I was done just considering the pain that I was in day to day, but the fact that I'm able to come out and do this again and stripe it the way I did and still have 178 (mph) ball speed, you know, after everything I've been through, it's still really encouraging. If anything, it's kind of been a blessing too having this time off and not be able to hit balls because I think everybody knows I needed to work on my putting, and that's all I've done for basically the last two years and how to learn to use the broomstick and it's paid off."

Defending champion Brian Harman opened with an even-par 72.

FOCUS

Yamashita in three-way tie for lead at LPGA Aramco Championship

AFP
Los Angeles

Reigning Women's British Open champion Miyu Yamashita bounced back from an early bogey to join a three-way tie for the lead on Thursday in the LPGA Aramco Championship.

The 24-year-old from Japan had an eagle and four birdies on the way to a five-under par 67 at Shadow Creek Golf Club in Las Vegas, Nevada, and shared the first-round lead with compatriot Nasa Hataoka and American Lauren Coughlin.

"The course is tough, but it's fun to figure it out," said Yamashita, the world number six who captured her first major title at Royal Porthcawl last year and added a title in Malaysia on the way to earning Rookie of the Year honors.

She teed off on 10 and bogeyed the 15th, but bounced back with an eagle at the par-five 18th and added four birdies coming in.

Hataoka, a seven-time LPGA winner, also recovered from an early bogey, dropping a shot at the first but bouncing back im-



Miyu Yamashita of Japan plays a shot on the 14th hole during the Aramco Championship in Las Vegas. (AFP)

mediately to birdie the second. She added five more birdies and after picking up a stroke at all four of the par-fives said that was crucial on a course that offered relatively few birdie chances.

"Last week, almost every hole you can try to make a birdie, so (this is) a totally different type of golf course this week," she said.

"So that's why par-fives are very important. I played good

today," Coughlin, chasing a third career title, got off to a hot start with birdies at the 10th and 11th. She added two more at 16 and 18, then birdied three and seven before her lone bogey at her final hole, the ninth.

The leading trio had a one-shot lead over world number two Nelly Korda, third-ranked Kim Hyo-joo of South Korea and American Jing Yan.

America's Korda, who finished runner-up to Kim in each of the past two weeks, birdied four of the first seven holes, stumbled with a pair of late bogeys then eagled the par-five 18th for her 68.

Kim, who won the Founders Cup before defending her title at the Ford Championship last week, shook off an early bogey to card five birdies while Yan posted eight birdies to counter two bogeys and a double-bogey.

The field includes all of the top 20 players in the world. The event is co-sanctioned by the Ladies European Tour as part of the PIF Global Series and features a \$4m total purse with a \$600,000 winner's prize.

World number one Jeeno Thitikul of Thailand was five shots off the pace after an even par 72.

Mickelson out of Masters due to family health matter

Phil Mickelson announced Thursday that he will not compete in the upcoming Masters. "Unfortunately I will not play in the Masters Tournament next week and will be out for an extended period of time as my family continues to navigate a personal health matter," Mickelson wrote on Instagram.

"I have great respect for Augusta National Golf Club and it is definitely the most special week of the year. I wish everyone the best of luck and will be watching."

Mickelson, 55, joins Tiger Woods as high-profile golfers who will miss this year's tournament at Augusta National. Woods announced Tuesday that he would be "stepping away" while he seeks treatment following a rollover crash last week in Florida

that resulted in a DUI charge. A three-time Masters champion (2004, 2006, 2010), Mickelson made his first appearance in the event back in 1991. This will mark just the fourth time that the six-time major champion will not be in attendance for the event at Augusta National.

Mickelson missed the first four events of the LIV Golf season in 2026 while tending to a family health matter. He returned for LIV South Africa, finishing 7-under-par to end up T48 in a 54-man field. Ten LIV golfers will compete in the Masters on April 9-12: Bryson DeChambeau, Sergio Garcia, Tyrrell Hatton, Dustin Johnson, Tom McKibbin, Carlos Ortiz, Jon Rahm, Charl Schwartzel, Cameron Smith and Bubba Watson.

SPOTLIGHT

Gattuso resigns as Italy coach after World Cup flop

Gattuso was considered a strange choice to replace Spalletti

AFP
Rome

Gennaro Gattuso quit as Italy coach yesterday, as the Azzurri's failure to reach a third straight World Cup continued to send shockwaves through Italian football.

A World Cup winner in 2006, Gattuso leaves after less than a year in charge of Italy, a team which has fallen far behind historic rivals like France and Spain in the last two decades.

Defeat on penalties to Bosnia and Herzegovina in Tuesday's qualification play-off final ended up costing Gattuso his job, as the man who hired him also stepped down as president of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC).

"With a heavy heart, and having fallen short of the goal we set ourselves, I feel my time as head coach of the national team has come to an end," Gattuso said in a statement. "The Azzurri shirt is the most precious thing in football, and for that reason it's only right to make way immediately for the federation's future decisions. It has been an honour to lead the national team, especially with a group of players who have shown such commitment and dedication."

Gabriele Gravina had asked Gattuso to stay on immediately after elimination in Zenica but his departure, and that of national team general manager Gianluigi Buffon, paved the way for the 48-year-old's exit after his contract was terminated by mutual consent.

Gattuso took charge of Italy in June last year following the sacking of Luciano Spalletti, himself a victim of a dismal title defence at Euro 2024 and a 3-0 hammering at the hands of Erling Haaland's Norway in their first World Cup qualifier.

His record is impressive on paper, with six wins, one defeat and one draw in eight matches with 22 goals scored and 10 conceded. But that draw was the 1-1 with Bosnia which preceded a penalty shoot-out in which Italy missed twice, while the loss was another humiliating one to Norway, this time 4-1 at the San Siro.

Gattuso was considered by many a strange choice to replace Spalletti due to his spotty club coaching record, and he was heavily criticised after Tuesday's elimination. Italy were second best nearly the whole game, and completely conceded the initiative when Alessandro Bastoni was sent off not long before half-time.

Bosnia could easily have won the game in normal time but once Italy managed to get to the shoot-out Gattuso selected inexperienced



A World Cup winner in 2006, Gennaro Gattuso leaves after less than a year in charge of Italy, a team which has fallen far behind historic rivals like France and Spain in the last two decades.

Pio Esposito to take the first penalty, which the 20-year-old smashed over the bar.

The upheaval caused by failing to qualify for this summer's finals in the United States, Canada and Mexico, means the national team will have an interim coach for a friendly with Greece on June 7.

Two former national team coaches in Roberto Mancini, who led Italy to victory at Euro 2020, and Antonio Conte are the names most frequently cited as Gattuso's replacement. But no new coach will be announced until after the FIGC's board vote on a new president on June 22, Gravina falling on his sword a day after sports minister Andrea Abodi called on him to go.

Italy's failure to reach the first ever 48-team World Cup - which will feature the likes of Cape Verde and Curacao - led Abodi to re-

lease a statement saying: "It's clear that Italian football needs to be rebuilt from the ground up and that starts with changes at the top of the FIGC."

That came a day after Gravina had hit out at politicians "who have only pushed for resignations", while also admitting Italian football "is in a profound crisis".

Italy's footballing woes do not just relate to diminishing performances by the national team. No Serie A club has won the Champions League since 2010. The country is due to co-host Euro 2032 with Turkey but on Thursday, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin hit out at the state of Italy's stadiums, warning the country could be stripped of hosting rights.

"I just hope that the infrastructure (in Italy) will be ready. If that's not the case, the tournament will not be held in Italy," Ceferin said.

FOCUS

Chelsea's Fernandez dropped for two games

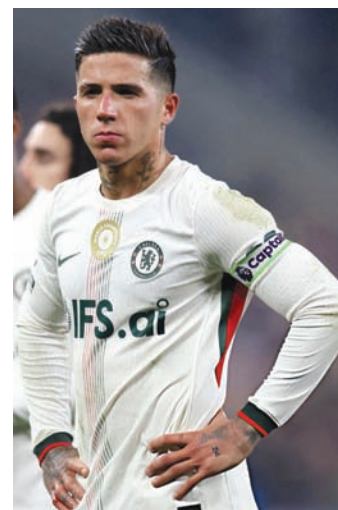
AFP
London

Argentina midfielder Enzo Fernandez will miss Chelsea's next two matches after he "crossed a line" with comments that cast doubt on his future at Stamford Bridge.

The 25-year-old, linked with Real Madrid, fuelled speculation by telling a podcast he would like to live in the Spanish capital. Defender Marc Cucurella also spoke openly about "instability" at the club and questioned its recruitment strategy.

Fernandez's remarks, however, were viewed as the most damaging and the strongest indication yet that he may be considering a move. After Chelsea's Champions League exit at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain last month, he said he did not know whether he would still be at the club next season.

Head coach Liam Rosenior confirmed Fernandez would not be part of the squad for today's FA Cup quarter-final against Port Vale and next weekend's Premier League game against Manchester City. "I spoke with Enzo about an hour ago," Rosenior said. "As a football club, with me as part of the decision, he won't be available for tomorrow's game or Manchester City next Sunday. "It's disappointing for Enzo to speak that way. I have got no bad words to say about him, but a line was crossed



in terms of our culture and what we want to build."

Fernandez joined Chelsea for a then-British record £107 million in 2023 and was named vice-captain the following year. After a challenging start, he has become one of the club's most influential figures both on and off the pitch. "Enzo, firstly, as a character, a person and a player, I have the utmost respect," said Rosenior.

"He's frustrated because he wants us to be successful. In terms of the decision, it's not all about me, or the sporting directors, the ownership, the players, we are aligned in our decision. The door is not closed on Enzo. It's a sanction. You have to protect the culture and, in terms of that, a line was crossed."

Colombia's Rodriguez hospitalised with 'severe dehydration'

Bogota: Colombian football captain James Rodriguez was hospitalised for three days with severe dehydration following a friendly match against France, Colombia's football federation said Thursday.

The 34-year-old former Real Madrid and Everton attacker featured in Sunday's World Cup warm-up match in Landover, Maryland, which Colombia lost 3-1. Rodriguez was substituted off after 63 minutes, having appeared sluggish and disconnected from the game.

He "presented symptoms of severe dehydration that required his hospitalization over the past 72 hours," said the federation. Rodriguez was taken to hospital in Minnesota, where he plays for Major League Soccer side Minnesota United, "for preventive clinical monitoring and recovery."

Minnesota United confirmed Rodriguez is recovering, telling that his status for this weekend's clash with LA Galaxy will be updated.

Rodriguez joined the MLS side in February but has played just 39 minutes so far due to injury. The federation statement said his hospitalization was not related to those injuries. His physical fitness remains uncertain ahead of Colombia's World Cup campaign this summer, when they will face Uzbekistan, DR Congo and Portugal in Group K.

Rodriguez was the top scorer in the 2014 World Cup, joining Real Madrid soon after. He continues to play a pivotal role in the Colombia side. Head coach Nestor Lorenzo has fielded criticism for starting Rodriguez against France and a previous friendly versus Croatia despite his lack of match fitness.

FA CUP

Arteta hopes League Cup loss will 'fuel' Arsenal season run-in

AFP
London

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has been urging his players to use their League Cup final defeat as "fuel" for the remainder of the season as they chase down a domestic Premier League and FA Cup double as well as the Champions League.

Arsenal top the Premier League table with a nine-point advantage over Manchester City, the team who beat them 2-0 at Wembley. They travel to Championship side Southampton in the quarter-finals of the FA Cup today and face a last-eight tie in the Champions League next week against Sporting Lisbon. "When you didn't manage to win that final, what you have to take on board is: 'Okay, how is this going to make us stronger for the final push of the season?'" said Arteta. "That has been the mindset and the only work that we have done in the last few days, to use that as fuel, as tools, to be able to get the final push that we want and achieve what we want. And immediately, I could sense that."

Arsenal's defeat at Wembley raised questions about the club's big-game mentality and left supporters wondering if there would be an end to their six-year wait for a trophy. "We analysed what we did, not just on that game, but the last 120 days, the amount of matches we have played," said Arteta. "It will make us better and now we have to use it for the most important and beautiful part of the season."

Arteta also rejected criticism that had come his way follow-



ing the withdrawal of 10 injured players from their respective international teams during this break, including three from England in Declan Rice, Bukayo Saka and Noni Madueke.

"It makes us proud that we have that many players in the national teams and the players are desperate to play. We are fully supportive of that," said the Spaniard. "We have a very good relationship and communication with most of the national teams and, as I have said, with (England boss) Thomas (Tuchel). We're always very honest and, at the end,

it's a medical decision and the conclusion was clear."

Eberechi Eze and Piero Hincapie will miss the Southampton game as will Madueke who left Wembley with his left knee in a brace after being forced off during England's 1-1 draw with Uruguay last Friday, but Martin Odegaard and Jurrien Timber may return from injury.

Madueke is likely to be back in action soon. Arteta concurred with the view of Tuchel, after the match, that the former Chelsea man could be back again within days. "I think so," said Arteta.

ROUND-UP

Rashford has 'big chance' with Raphinha out: Barca coach Flick

AFP
Barcelona

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said winger Marcus Rashford has a "big chance" to impress with Raphinha out injured ahead of today's visit to face Atletico Madrid in La Liga. Brazil international Raphinha is sidelined until May with a hamstring injury, opening the door for Rashford. The England forward, on loan from Manchester United, impressed in the first half of the season but has not played as much in recent weeks.

"I said it before, I'm happy with Marcus. He's performed well. In the last weeks he had some problems, he was injured and we have to take care of that," Flick said.

The German coach said Rashford would still be battling with other players for the chance to play in Raphinha's stead. "It's a big chance for him to show (his quality) again, but also we have other options," he continued. "Fermin (Lopez) can play there, Gavi can also play there, I'm really happy that Gavi is back on the level he's showing in training."

Barcelona have an option to buy Rashford for 30mn from Man United but have not yet decided if they will activate it. Flick said he gave Raphinha a few days off to spend in Brazil with his family to cheer him up after his injury, sustained in a friendly against France last week. Raphinha will miss several league games and the upcoming Champions League quarter-final tie against Atletico Madrid, with the first leg on Wednesday. "It's not the best moment for this injury, for us, for him, and he was



sad about this," said Flick. "I faced him, he was very disappointed, he was down... I gave him some days in Brazil with his family to clear his mind."

Flick said defenders Jules Kounde, Alejandro Balde and Eric Garcia were fit to face Atletico at the Metropolitan stadium and confirmed midfielder Frenkie de Jong was still sidelined.

Barca face Atletico three times in the space of 11 days and also lost the Copa del Rey semi-finals against Diego Simeone's Rojiblanco earlier this season.

KANE RULED OUT OF BAYERN MATCH WITH INJURY, SAYS KOMPANY

Harry Kane will miss Bayern Munich's Bundesliga match at Freiburg this weekend but should be fit for their Champions League clash with Real Madrid next week, coach Vincent Kompany said.

Kane missed England's friendly defeat by Japan this week with an ankle problem and has not recovered in time to face Freiburg today. Bayern take on Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu in their Champions League quarter-final first leg on Tuesday.

"Harry trained well until Sunday, then he felt something in his ankle while with the national team," Kompany said. "That will have an impact on tomorrow's game - he won't be available. Nevertheless, I'm positive about Tuesday. It's not great, I'd like him to play against Freiburg, but as things stand today that won't be possible."

Bayern lead second-placed Borussia Dortmund by nine points in the Bundesliga and can take another step towards a second straight title this week. But they will be without Kane and his suspended understudy Nicolas Jackson.

Bayern sporting director Christoph Freund also confirmed that Raphael Guerreiro will leave the club at the end of the season, with Juventus reportedly interested in signing the Portugal full-back. "Rapha will be leaving us. It wasn't easy because he's a great lad, has played a lot of good games, is very versatile - a great strength of his," said Freund. "But we've always said that when we make a decision, we tell the lads, so that's what we've done now." Guerreiro has scored 12 goals in 89 appearances for Bayern since signing from Dortmund three years ago.