

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



IPL | Page 2

Rashid the hero as Gujarat beat Delhi in last-ball thriller



TENNIS | Page 3

Medvedev thrashed 6-0, 6-0 by Berrettini; Zverev through

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Thursday, April 9, 2026
Shawwal 21, 1447 AH

GULF TIMES

SPORT

ATHLETICS

Doha Diamond League meet postponed until June 19

Page 4

Sheikh Joaan reviews progress of Athletes' Village Project of Doha 2030 Asian Games

Doha: HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) and Chairman of the Organising Committee of the 21st Asian Games - Doha 2030, conducted a field visit yesterday to review the latest developments of the Athletes' Village Project in Lusail City.

Sheikh Joaan was accompanied by HE Eng. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Meer, President of the Public Works Authority (Ashghal) and a member of the Organising Committee; Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, QOC Secretary General and member of the Organising Committee; and Dr. Ahmad Abdullah al-Buainain, Chief Executive Officer of the Organising Committee.

During the visit, Sheikh Joaan was briefed on the ongoing development of the project, which is being delivered in line with the highest international standards to accommodate approximately 18,000 athletes during the Games.

The Athletes' Village will feature integrated infrastructure, modern facilities, and a comprehensive range of services tailored to meet athletes' needs. The project also reflects a strong commitment to sustainability across both design and operations, while embracing the smart city concept through the adoption of advanced technologies aimed at enhancing quality of life and ensuring efficient management of facilities and services.



CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Dominant PSG beat Liverpool to seize advantage

Goals from Doue and Kvaratskhelia spurred holders to 2-0 win



Paris St Germain's Desire Doue celebrates with Khvicha Kvaratskhelia after scoring against Liverpool at Parc des Princes in Paris. (Reuters)

AFP
Paris

Desire Doue and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored the goals to give a dominant Paris Saint-Germain a 2-0 win over Liverpool in their Champions League quarter-final first leg last night, as the holders seized a clear advantage to take to Anfield for next week's return.

Doue's shot in the 11th minute looped over goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili and in thanks to a big touch off Ryan Gravenberch, and Kvaratskhelia then rounded his compatriot to double PSG's lead 65 minutes into a game they bossed from start to finish.

It only remains to be seen whether the reigning European champions - who had a second-half penalty in their favour overturned after a VAR review - might regret not scoring more goals against a Liverpool side who lined up with three centre-backs, an extreme rarity for them under Arne Slot, and were run ragged.

The game plan could not stop the Reds slumping to a second emphatic loss in five days, even if the scoreline was not as bad as the 4-0 mauling inflicted by Manchester City in the FA Cup quarter-finals last weekend. It is just one win in six games in all competitions now for Liverpool, and this was a 16th reverse in total in a difficult campaign.

Slot's team must now try to repeat what they did in the last 16, when they overturned a 1-0 first-leg loss away to Galatasaray by winning 4-0 in the return. This will be a far tougher

task than that, however, as the sides clash again next Tuesday on Merseyside, where PSG won 1-0 in the second leg of their last-16 tie last season before advancing on penalties.

That was a big step on their way to winning the Champions League for the first time, and came after they somehow lost 1-0 at the Parc des Princes despite completely dominating. A string of Alisson Becker saves helped Liverpool smash and grab their way to victory a year ago, but the Brazilian was absent here meaning Mamardashvili started in goal for the visitors.

Mohamed Salah was also left out of the lineup by Slot, instead taking a place on the bench alongside Alexander Isak with the Swede back involved again after suffering a leg fracture in December. Hugo Ekitike started up front for Liverpool against the club where he spent 18 months earlier in his career and failed to escape the shadows of Kylian Mbappe, Lionel Messi and Neymar.

Joe Gomez slotted in alongside Ibrahim Konate and Virgil van Dijk as a third central defender, as Liverpool set out to press high but ultimately spent the night chasing after the ball. PSG were already well in control before they scored, as Doue collected the ball just outside the box following an Ousmane Dembele dribble, advanced into the area and tried a shot which struck Gravenberch's boot and took a looping trajectory which left the goalkeeper flummoxed.

Mamardashvili did later save from Kvaratskhelia and Doue meaning there was just one goal in a one-sided first half in which PSG had 70 percent possession and Liverpool's only at-

tempt came from Jeremie Frimpong when he was offside.

The pattern of the contest did not really change after the break, with Dembele blazing over from a great position before the second goal arrived almost midway through the second half.

A superb threaded Joao Neves pass released Kvaratskhelia through the inside-left channel, and the Georgian held off Gravenberch before going around the goalkeeper to tuck in.

Liverpool were then rescued by the Spanish referee's decision to change his mind after initially awarding a penalty when Konate brought down Warren Zaire-Emery, while also taking the ball.

Small mercies for Slot, who sent on Isak in a quadruple substitution on 78 minutes, but left Salah on the bench. Dembele hit the post late on for PSG, although they are firmly in control after a ninth win in a game against Premier League opposition since the start of last year.

ATLETICO BEAT 10-MAN BARCA

Julian Alvarez and Alexander Sorloth both scored to give Atletico Madrid a 2-0 lead to defend against Barcelona in the return fixture of their Champions League quarter-final tie.

The turning point in the first leg came just before half-time as Pau Cubarsi was sent off for the hosts for a last-man foul and Alvarez sensationally bent in the resulting free-kick. Despite Barcelona's dominance, Sorloth doubled Atletico's lead on the night as they take a two-goal advantage back to the Metropolitan stadium for next Tuesday's second leg.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Al Sadd inch closer to title as Al Shamal suffer setback

By Sports Reporter
Doha

League leaders Al Sadd moved within touching distance of retaining the Qatar Stars League title after securing a vital 3-1 victory over Al Saliya, while Al Shamal's hopes of a historic maiden crown suffered a significant blow following their 0-2 defeat to Al Shahania yesterday.

Al Sadd now have five-point advantage over Al Shamal, who will first take on Qatar SC on Monday in their rescheduled fixture before facing Al Sadd in the final round on April 28, a clash that could ultimately decide the destination of the title. Despite having the extra match to play, the defeat to Al Shahania has tilted the momentum in favour of the leaders.

Akram Afif starred for Al Sadd with a brace in their win over Al Saliya at Al Bayt Stadium, scoring in the 10th and 48th minutes, while Roberto Firmino added a third goal in the 70th minute to strengthen The Wolves' grip at the summit. Al Saliya, battling to avoid relegation, managed a late consolation through Anwar El Ghazi but remained rooted at the bottom.

Earlier, Al Shahania delivered a disciplined performance to upset Al Shamal at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. Goals from Francesco Antonucci in the 14th minute and Pelle van Amersfoort in the 76th

minute secured three valuable points for Al Shahania, lifting them to 20 points and boosting their survival chances.

Al Ahli boosted their survival prospects with a crucial 2-1 win over Al Duhail, courtesy of goals from Michel Vlap and Julian Draxler, while Qatar SC and Al Arabi settled for a 1-1 draw in a closely contested encounter.

The fight to avoid relegation remains wide open heading into the final stretch of the season. Al Saliya stay at the bottom with 19 points but still have two matches remaining, keeping their survival hopes alive.

Just above them, Umm Salal and Al Shahania are level on 20 points, while Al Ahli have moved slightly clear on 23 points. With only a few points separating the bottom four teams, the relegation picture is likely to be decided in the final round.

Elsewhere, Al Rayyan strengthened their push for a top-three finish with a convincing 3-0 victory over Umm Salal. Roger Guedes struck twice to take his league tally to 20 goals this season, while Rodrigo Moreno also found the net as Al Rayyan stay in third place.

Al Wakrah staged a dramatic late comeback to draw 3-3 with Al Gharafa in one of the most entertaining matches of the round. Trailing 3-1 late in the game, Al Wakrah fought back through Luis Alberto and a stoppage-time equaliser from Almahdi Ali to salvage a point.



Akram Afif starred for Al Sadd with a brace in their win over Al Saliya at Al Bayt Stadium. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

SPOTLIGHT

Sooryavanshi aces Bumrah test in IPL

Reuters
Lucknow

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's fast-rising reputation as Indian cricket's next big thing faced its sternest test in Tuesday's Indian Premier League (IPL) clash against Mumbai Indians, and the 15-year-old Rajasthan Royals opener came through with flying colours, bossing Jasprit Bumrah - arguably the finest all-format bowler of his generation - with nonchalant aggression.

Sooryavanshi announced his arrival last year with a 35-ball hundred in his debut season and the washbuckling left-hander was adjudged Player of the Series when India won the Under-19 World Cup earlier this year.

Sooryavanshi's strike rate of 248.97 in this year's IPL is second only to Royal Challengers Bengaluru batter Rajat Patidar's 254.83, and his 11 sixes so far have been matched only by Delhi Capitals batter Sameer Rizvi.

His duel with the 32-year-old Bumrah was an enthralling subplot of the rain-hit game in Guwahati, reduced to 11 overs a side.

From the non-striker's end, Sooryavanshi watched opening partner Yashasvi Jaiswal plunder 22 off Deepak Chahar's first over, setting the tone.

Anticipation spiked as Bumrah, India's pace talisman, took the ball for the second over and Sooryavanshi flicked the first delivery over wide long-on for a towering six, drawing a wry smile from Bumrah as he walked back to his mark.

Three balls later, the teenager pulled him beyond backward square for another six.

Trent Boult fared worse in the next over as Sooryavanshi launched three sixes in the New Zealander's first four balls. Shardul Thakur was next to suffer a couple of blows before Sooryavanshi holed out, departing for a 14-ball 39.

Jaiswal's unbeaten 77 powered Rajasthan to 150-3 and they restricted Mumbai to 123-9 to cement

top spot with a third straight win.

"It's amazing to bat with Vaibhav," Player of the Match Jaiswal told reporters.

"He hit the first ball for a six and I was like - keep playing your shots. Bumrah is one of the leg-ends, and if he's scoring off him like this, it's amazing.

"The way he has been playing is tremendous. I also get motivated (looking at him). We have these discussions on how can we go and I keep giving him positive messages - to play freely. He is amazing and understands the game well and is capable of doing stuff himself," he added.

After that, it felt like we could take down the other bowlers. It took pressure off me and I could work on my plans to target someone else."

Hardik Pandya, MI captain, said after the match: "Quite fascinating to see a 17- or 16-year-old boy (15-year-old) play that way. Amazing to see the way he bats, the fearlessness he has. Wish him good luck for the future."



Rajasthan Royals' Vaibhav Sooryavanshi in action against Mumbai Indians in the IPL match in Guwahati on Tuesday. (Reuters)

IPL

Rashid the hero as Gujarat beat Delhi by one run

A thriller in New Delhi as the home team fails to close tight chase

AFP
New Delhi

England's Jos Buttler struck form with a fluent 52 to help Gujarat Titans to their first win of the 2026 IPL as they beat Delhi Capitals in a last-ball thriller yesterday with David Miller falling just short of guiding his new side home.

The South African looked set to take Delhi over the line but elected to turn down a single on the second last ball with his side needing two to win.

Bowler Prasidh Krishna then outfoxed Miller with a slow delivery with the last ball of the match which the batter missed with a big swing as wicketkeeper Buttler hit the stumps to run out Kuldeep Yadav, who was desperately scrambling for the single that would have forced a super over.

Earlier, Buttler raised his first T20 half-century after a dismal run, which included a disappointing T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

His knock laid the foundations for Gujarat's 210-4 and in reply Delhi finished on 209-8 in 20 overs despite an explosive 41 not out by Miller and KL Rahul's 92.

Gujarat won by one run to bounce back from two defeats. Delhi suffered their first loss after two wins.

Buttler found his groove with a fourth-ball six off Mukesh Kumar and there was no looking back as



Gujarat Titans' Rashid Khan celebrates after taking the wicket of Delhi Capitals' captain India's Axar Patel during the IPL match in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

he smacked four more hits over the fence in his 27-ball knock.

Buttler, 35, told AFP at the start of the T20 tournament that "he still has the hunger for runs" and still has the energy and motivation to play at the highest level.

But his knock for Gujarat seemed to have inspired the team's batting as skipper Shubman Gill also struck form with a 70 after

he missed the previous game. Gill was involved in a 60-run stand with Buttler and then put on 104 runs with Washington Sundar, who scored 55 for his first IPL fifty.

Delhi started their reply strongly courtesy of Pathum Nissanka, who made 41, and Rahul as the pair put on 76 runs for the opening wicket but the chase wobbled as wickets fell. Nissanka missed out

on a fifty and leg-spinner Rashid Khan struck twice on successive balls in the 10th over.

BRIEF SCORES

Gujarat Titans 210 for 4 (Gill 70, Washington 55, Buttler 52, Mukesh 2-55) **beat Delhi Capitals 209 for 8** (Rahul 92, Miller 41*, Nissanka 41, Rashid 3-17) **by one run**

MATCH REPORT

Iftikhar guides Zalmi to gritty win over Kingsmen

Agencies
Karachi

Peshawar Zalmi secured a hard-fought four-wicket victory over the Hyderabad Kingsmen on Wednesday night at the National Stadium, leaving the PSL newcomers still searching for their first win of the 2026 season.

In a match defined by disciplined bowling and a tense chase, Iftikhar Ahmed emerged as the undisputed hero, dismantling the Kingsmen's middle order before contributing crucial runs to seal the result.

After winning the toss and electing to bowl, Zalmi's decision paid immediate dividends. Despite a fighting 58 from Kusal Perera, the Hyderabad Kingsmen struggled to find any rhythm on a Karachi surface that offered unexpected assistance to the slower bowlers.

The Kingsmen were looking steady at one stage, but the introduction of Iftikhar turned the tide completely. Iftikhar produced a masterclass in T20 spin bowling, finishing with remarkable figures of 4 for 21.

He was well-supported by young leg-spin-



Iftikhar Ahmed (right) of Peshawar Zalmi celebrates with teammate Babar Azam during their PSL match against Hyderabad Kingsmen in Karachi yesterday.

ner Sufiyan Muqeem, who also claimed four wickets, as the Kingsmen collapsed from a promising position to be bowled out for 145 in 18.2 overs.

The chase was far from a foregone conclusion. Zalmi's pursuit of 146 got off to a rocky start, but captain Babar Azam provided the necessary composure. Babar played a quintessential anchor role, scoring a controlled 43 off

37 balls to keep the required rate within reach.

However, the Kingsmen's bowlers, led by a spirited spell from Saim Ayub (2/19), kept the pressure on by taking regular wickets. The match swung back and forth until the final overs, when Iftikhar returned to the middle, this time with the bat, to steer Zalmi home with six wickets down and only a few balls to spare.

The defeat marks the fourth consecutive loss for Marnus Labuschagne's Hyderabad Kingsmen. While their bowling showed more teeth tonight than in previous outings, their batting fragility remains a major concern as the tournament moves deeper into the Karachi leg.

Zalmi, meanwhile, moves up the table with five points, keeping them firmly in contention for the playoffs. Iftikhar was rightly named Player of the Match for his game-changing four-wicket haul and clinical finishing.

BRIEF SCORES

Peshawar Zalmi 146 for 6 (Babar 43, Mendis 27, Ayub 2-19) **beat Hyderabad Kingsmen 145 all out** (Perera 58, Iftikhar 4-21, Muqeem 4-32) **by four wickets**

COMMENT

Tamim promises to repair Bangladesh's cricket reputation

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh's interim cricket chief Tamim Iqbal has vowed to repair the country's damaged reputation in the game, following the board's dismissal over alleged "gross irregularities".

Cricket and politics are intertwined in Bangladesh with the sport affected by the turmoil following the uprising in 2024 that ousted long-time ruler Sheikh Hasina.

A new government was elected in February and on Tuesday the National Sports Council said it had dissolved the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) after finding "gross irregularities" in its 2025 election.

An interim board was appointed, led by the 37-year-old former captain Tamim, who retired from international cricket in 2023.

"Our first and foremost duty is to restore the lost glory of Bangladesh cricket," said Tamim.

"Our biggest priority is to amend the loss to our reputation in the last 18 months?"

Under the previous board, Bangladesh refused to play in India at this year's T20 World Cup, citing security concerns after fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman was dumped by IPL team Kolkata Knight Riders.

The International Cricket Council refused a Bangladesh request to play their matches in Sri Lanka and kicked them out of the tournament.

Tamim pledged to hold fair elections to replace his caretaker administration as soon as possible.

But sacked BCB president Aminul Islam yesterday insisted he was still in charge, calling the dissolution a "constitutional coup" and "government interference".

"Such actions risk eroding investor confidence, threatening hosting rights and damaging Bangladesh's standing within the international cricketing community," said Aminul told reporters yesterday.

Tamim scored more than 15,000 runs for Bangladesh in a career spanning 15 years and remains the only Bangladeshi to make centuries in all three formats of international cricket.



Former captain Tamim Iqbal heads the second board meeting of the newly formed ad-hoc Committee of the Bangladesh Cricket Board in Dhaka yesterday. (@BCBTigers)

FOCUS

NSW to support Warner after drink-driving case

AFP
Sydney

Cricket New South Wales said yesterday it would support David Warner after he was charged with drink-driving, adding that the former Australian opener aware of the "seriousness" of the incident.

The 39-year-old Sydney Thunder captain is due to appear in court on May 7 after allegedly blowing more than twice the legal limit in a random breath test in Sydney over the weekend.

Cricket NSW, which has a long-term partnership with government agency Transport for NSW, said it was committed to educating Warner "on the importance of safe driving". "Cricket NSW is a strong advocate of safe driving, including avoiding drink-driving, and takes incidents of this nature very seriously," chief executive Lee Germon told cricket.com.au.

"David is aware of the serious-



ness of these allegations. We will support him through the upcoming process." The Sydney Daily Telegraph said Warner allegedly told police he had three glasses of wine at a friend's house before attempting to drive back to his home.

Warner, who retired from international cricket in 2024, is reportedly on his way back to Pakistan to complete his Pakistan Super League campaign with Karachi Kings, who he captains. They are scheduled to play today.

GOLF

DeChambeau learns Masters patience and placement lessons

AFP
Augusta, United States

Bryson DeChambeau, known for his long tee shots and YouTube videos, declared in 2020 that Augusta National played as a "par-67" to him because of his driving distance.

Six years later, the two-time US Open champion boasts he has learned patience and accepts he must take what the famed course will allow as he prepares for the 90th Masters. "There's a sense of obedience you have to have out here," he said Tuesday. "But it truly is patience because it gives you the opportunity to go for it."

"More patience, not as aggressive all the time. Knowing where to be aggressive and when not to be aggressive. Those are the things. Making better decisions."

DeChambeau, who was 34th in 2020 and never shot better than 69 at the par-72 layout, was fifth last year and sixth in 2024.

The LIV Golf star has traded ball bashing and distance for location and strategy when it comes to Augusta National. "Focusing on hitting the bigger parts of the greens, making sure I'm missing it in the right places to certain flags, is really what has adjusted my mindset in a positive way," he said.

"In times past, I'd just be going right for the flag, and it quite honestly would get me in a lot of trouble."

I have my golf swing a little bit more under control than I have in years past."

The 32-year-old American won LIV titles last month in Singapore and South Africa and has five triumphs in the Saudi-backed series over the past three years.

"I'm playing well and I feel like my game is in the best place of its career," DeChambeau said. "I'm excited to get the week going and see where I can put myself."

DeChambeau, ranked 24th in the world, put himself into the final group on Sunday last year but lost to Rory McIlroy, whom he edged at Pinehurst for the 2024 US Open crown. "It was a great learning lesson. That last group final round gave me a lot of per-

spective," he said. "The more I put myself in those positions, the better opportunities I'm going to have to win. DeChambeau is working on creating his own personal clubs and likes tinkering with strategy."

"It's a continual learning process. From a nerding-out perspective, it's really about the wind this year for me," said DeChambeau.

"Preparation the past couple days has really been focused on wind and how I'm hitting my second shots into the greens... just making sure the numbers are correct and hitting my distances and missing in the right places when I need to."

"There's numerous things I'm working on always and next year it will probably be different as well."



Bryson DeChambeau of the United States acknowledges a gallery of patrons while playing the third hole during a practice round prior to the Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club. (AFP)

TENNIS

Medvedev thrashed 6-0, 6-0 by Berrettini as Zverev advances

'I THINK IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST PERFORMANCES OF MY LIFE'

AFP
Monte Carlo

Daniil Medvedev slipped to an embarrassing 6-0, 6-0 thrashing by Matteo Berrettini in the Monte Carlo Masters second round on Wednesday, as Alexander Zverev dug deep to beat Cristian Garin.

Medvedev completely unravelled against Berrettini after missing two break points in the opening game, making 30 unforced errors and serving five double faults.

Medvedev did not win more than two points in any of the last 11 games and his frustrations boiled over in the second set, smashing his racket into the court four times. Berrettini wrapped up the double-bagel victory, the first such defeat of former world number one Medvedev's career, in just 49 minutes.

"I think it was one of the best performances of my life," Berrettini said.

"I think I missed three shots in the entire match and it is not easy against a tricky player like Daniil. I think the game plan was perfect and my weapons were working."

The former Wimbledon runner-up, now ranked 90th, will face Joao Fonseca in the last 16 after the Brazilian teenager beat Arthur Rinderknech 7-5, 4-6, 6-3.

World number three Zverev, who is hoping to complete the set of all three clay-court Masters 1000 titles this week, staged a



Russia's Daniil Medvedev smashes his racket on the clay during his Monte Carlo Masters match against Italy's Matteo Berrettini. (AFP)

late comeback to edge out Chilean qualifier Garin 4-6, 6-4, 7-5.

Zverev has reached the semi-finals at each of the Australian Open, Indian Wells and the Miami Open this year but was in danger of a shock exit after losing the first set and then trailing 4-0 in the third. Garin also served for the match when 5-3 ahead in the deciding set, but Zverev broke and then sealed victory by reeling off

five consecutive games. He had to stave off three break points in a nervy 12th game to avoid a tie-break, but eventually got the job done on his third match point.

"My level was not there at all to be honest," Zverev said after taking two hours and 50 minutes to get over the line.

"But it was my first clay-court match in 11 months. I didn't have much time to prepare as I played

well in Miami. "I am happy to get the win. It was a tough match and he is someone playing well, especially here."

The 28-year-old will face unseeded Belgian Zizou Bergs, who dethroned 2023 champion Andrey Rublev 6-4, 6-1, in round three.

Zverev has not won an ATP title since Munich 12 months ago, while the last of his seven Masters triumphs came in Paris in 2024.

PREVIEW

McIlroy chases Masters repeat at quick Augusta

AFP
Augusta

Rory McIlroy seeks a historic repeat victory starting today at the 90th Masters, while world number one Scottie Scheffler and Bryson DeChambeau lead a host of challengers in firm and fast conditions.

Second-ranked McIlroy completed a career Grand Slam by capturing the green jacket at Augusta National last year, but only Jack Nicklaus, Nick Faldo and Tiger Woods have won back-to-back green jackets, Woods the most recent in 2001-2002.

"Maybe not the largest field in golf but it's the strongest," McIlroy said. "I know that I can do it now, so that should make it a little easier for me to go out and play the golf I want to play."

McIlroy suffered an injury scare last month when back pain prompted his withdrawal at Bay Hill. But he competed the following week and has rested since. "I've taken the last three weeks to make sure I'm 100 percent coming in here, which I am," McIlroy said.

"I feel comfortable on the golf course, feel comfortable with my game. It has been a good three weeks at home getting ready physically and mentally and just trying to prepare for everything this week is going to throw at me."

Scheffler, last year's British Open and PGA Championship winner, has failed in two Masters repeat bids.

"Defending can always be difficult, but I think that's mostly just the odds of winning a tournament in back-to-back years," Scheffler said. "That's just extremely challenging, especially when you look at these major championships."

Scheffler, the 2022 and 2024 Masters winner, has been off for three weeks as wife Meredith gave birth to son Remy on March 27.

"Game feels like it's in a good



Rory McIlroy during a practice round at Augusta National Golf Club on Tuesday. (AFP)

spot," Scheffler said. "I feel rested and ready to go this week."

DeChambeau, who edged McIlroy for the 2024 US Open title, was in the final Sunday group last year at the Masters when the Northern Ireland star made history. "It's great if we can continue to have a rivalry," DeChambeau said. "It kind of helps create more buzz around the game of golf."

"It's one of those things like I got him at Pinehurst, he got me here, and I hope there's more of those to come because it's great for the game."

DeChambeau, ranked 24th, won LIV Golf titles in Singapore and South Africa last month and likes speed at Augusta.

"If it's firm and fast, the greens are going to be even more difficult to hit than they already are," DeChambeau said. "I feel really good. It's just about going out and executing."

Precision will be at a premium with no rain in the forecast to soften the course.

"You have to be more precise when it's firm," American Kurt Kitayama said. "Whenever it's firm and fast makes any course difficult, and especially with how sloped the greens are, it's going to be even more penalizing missing your spots."

Dustin Johnson, the 2020 Masters champion who holds the 72-hole Masters record score of 20-under par 268, is already seeing strong bounces on the course.

Laurance 'becomes someone else' to nab Tour of the Basque Country stage win

BASAURI, SPAIN: Frenchman Axel Laurance said he "became someone else" to clinch the third stage of the Tour of the Basque Country yesterday after a late two-man battle with Spaniard Igor Arrieta. Ineos Grenadiers' Laurance finished two seconds ahead of local boy Arrieta with Eritrean Natnael Tesfatsion 14sec behind in third place, after a 152.8km loop starting and ending in Basauri. "I was really optimistic for today, my legs felt good," the 24-year-old said. "At the end, when he launched, I had cramp. It was just mentally, when I saw the finish line I became someone else."

"I knew it was only a few seconds of suffering for a big moment of joy," he added. Overall leader Paul Seixas of France retained his advantage of 1min 59sec in the yellow jersey, having dominated the opening two stages. Former Giro d'Italia and Vuelta a Espana winner Primož Roglic is second in the general classification and German Florian Lipowitz is third at 2min 08sec.

Riders departed from Basauri in unusually warm temperatures of more than 28 degrees Celsius (82.4 degrees Fahrenheit). Isaac del Toro, one of Seixas' major rivals for the yellow jersey, withdrew from the race after being involved in a crash with 74km to go. Mexican Del Toro, a team-mate of Tadej Pogacar and Arrieta at UAE Team Emirates, seemed to have hurt his hand and leg. With 90km to go, a 14-man breakaway group was formed. They grew their lead to 1min 20sec over the next 50km as the peloton moved towards the daunting climb up Bikotx-Gane. Laurance and Arrieta made their move on that category two ascent and were neck-and-neck until the final seconds in the Bilbao suburbs. Laurance then pipped 23-year-old Arrieta by powering away with less than 200m to the finish line.



Team Ineos' Axel Laurance celebrates winning the third stage of the Tour of Basque in Basauri yesterday. (AFP)

HORSE RACING

Shagraan claims Msheireb Cup in style

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Shagraan bounced back to winning ways in style, landing the Msheireb Cup for owner-trainer Saeed Mohammed Shafi al-Shafi at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Positioned comfortably in mid-field for most of the race, he unleashed a powerful turn of foot in the home straight, surging past his rivals to secure an emphatic two-and-a-half-length victory in the day feature - the 1400m Purebred Arabian Handicap.

The six-year-old bay gelding was expertly partnered by Saleh Salem al-Marri, who went on to complete a notable double on the card. Settled in mid-field through the early and middle stages, Shagraan travelled comfortably as Waseel set the pace from the outset, tracked by Posuelo Py before the latter was gradually eased back, with Al Zwaier and the eventual winner also positioned off the tempo.

Approaching the home straight, Nah'ash Al Shahania moved up to challenge and briefly took the lead, but the race quickly turned as the closers began to emerge. Inside the final 200m, Shagraan unleashed a decisive turn of foot, sweeping past his rivals and asserting with authority to put the result beyond



Jockey Saleh Salem al-Marri guided Shagraan to the Msheireb Cup victory yesterday. PICTURE: Juhaim

doubt. Al Zwaier, representing Al Shaqab Racing and prepared by Jean de Mieuille, finished second with Pierre Charles Boudot aboard, a quarter of a length ahead of Posuelo Py, who stayed on for Ibrahim Mohammed al-Fadala, from the Hamad al-Jehani yard and with Szczepan Mazur in the saddle to take third.

Shagraan last win was in the Purebred Arabian Handicap 80-100 (Class 2) race under jockey Tomas Lukasek on February 5, 2026 at the Al Uqda Racecourse.

RESULTS
63st Al Rayyan Race Meeting

-Msheireb Cup WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
1. Msheireb Cup, Purebred Arabian Handicap (85-105), 4yo+, 1400m Shagraan, Saeed Mohammed Shafi al-Shafi, Saleh Salem al-Marri
2. Thoroughbred Handicap (0-90), 3yo, 1400m Jungle Monarch, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento
3. Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85), 4yo+, 2000m Byblos, Bader al-Balushi, Soufiane Saadi
4. Purebred Arabian Novice Plate, 3yo, 1400m Al Wazeer, Alban de Mieuille,

Soufiane Saadi
5. Thoroughbred Handicap (55-75), 3yo+, 2000m Lucentio, Ahmed Kobeissi, Jefferson Smith
6. Local Thoroughbred Novice Plate, 3yo, 1400m Afran, Ibrahim Saeed Ibrahim al-Malki, Marco Casamento
7. Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Plate, 4-7yo, 2000m Al Murqab, Ibrahim Saeed Ibrahim al-Malki, Jefferson Smith
8. Thoroughbred Maiden Plate, 4-7yo, 2000m Atlantic Convoy, Ibrahim Saeed Ibrahim al-Malki, Saleh Salem al-Marri

ATHLETICS

Doha Diamond League meet postponed until June 19

AFP
Paris

The Diamond League athletics meeting in Doha has been postponed for six weeks and will now take place on June 19 due to the war in the Middle East, organisers announced.

The United States and Iran agreed on Tuesday a two-week ceasefire to the war that has killed thousands and hammered the global economy. The Diamond League organisers had previously said the opening leg of this year's series would go ahead as planned on May 8, but have now decided to delay the event.

"In recent weeks, the Diamond League has been monitoring the situation in Doha,

working in close coordination with meeting organisers, Qatari authorities and other stakeholders. In the interests of athlete and spectator safety, a decision has now been taken to postpone the meeting. Should conditions allow, it will now be held on June 19," they said in a statement.

The competition will also be moved from the Qatar Sports Club to the Khalifa International Stadium in case of higher temperatures. The Khalifa stadium, which is temperature controlled, hosted the world athletics championships in 2019 and matches of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

The Diamond League is the elite one-day meeting series in track and field, a season that features 15 meets in 13 different countries across four different continents. The first Diamond League meeting will instead be in Shanghai on May 16.

Several major sporting events in the Middle East have been postponed or cancelled because of the war the United States and Israel launched on Iran, including the Formula One grands prix in Bahrain and Jeddah, in Saudi Arabia.

Both were scheduled for mid-April and have been cancelled. In football, the Finalissima, which was to pit European champions Spain against Copa America winners Argentina on March 27 in Qatar, was called off. The Qatar MotoGP, initially scheduled for the weekend of April 12, has been postponed to November 8, while a gymnastics World Cup event scheduled to take place in Doha in April was also cancelled.

However, a horse racing meeting in Dubai, carrying prize money of \$30.5m and featuring the Dubai World Cup, did go ahead on March 28.



The Doha Diamond League will also be moved from the Qatar Sports Club to the Khalifa International Stadium in case of higher temperatures.

FOOTBALL

Bayern's Kompany praises 'special' Neuer

Veteran goalkeeper made a string of impressive saves to keep Real Madrid at bay

AFP
Madrid

Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany hailed goalkeeper Manuel Neuer after his team secured a 2-1 Champions League quarter-final first leg win at Real Madrid on Tuesday.

Luis Diaz and Harry Kane's goals gave the Bundesliga leaders a strong lead on a dominant display but Kylian Mbappe pulled one back for Madrid, with Neuer making a string of impressive saves to keep the record 15-time winners at bay.

The veteran stopper thwarted the competition's top goalscorer Mbappe on several occasions and was named man of the match. "If he was the best player, then I'm also happy with that, it's not a problem," Kompany told reporters. "I think you need special performances always at this level in these type of games. I think today we had also some chances to score more goals, so let's hope we continue this form next week, and let's hope that our strikers are the best players next week."

Kompany praised two-time Champions League and 12-time Bundesliga winner Neuer's longevity. "Manu is one of the very few - he's not just able to do it for a very long time, but for a very, very long time," said the Belgian coach. "To still perform like he does now, I think that is something that not many goalkeepers, even the top ones, are able to do."

Kompany said that despite Mbappe's goal in the 74th minute, he was happy with his team's win ahead of the second leg next Wednesday. "We're happy with the result. It's a win, and any win in the Bernabeu in Madrid is an important result," added Kompany. "It's something that we can build on. And then we play at home the next game, so I think, of course, we have respect for the quality of Real Madrid... It's normal that



Bayern Munich's goalkeeper Manuel Neuer thwarted Real Madrid's forward Kylian Mbappe on several occasions and was named man of the match of the Champions League quarter first-leg at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid. (AFP)

they create some moments as well, they were incredibly dangerous at times. But most importantly, we stayed really dangerous as well, so the idea is when we go and play the next game at home, to try and go and win the game."

Bayern's match-winner Kane scored his 49th goal of a superb season and was pleased with the win, but warned his team to stay on their toes in the second leg. "I thought we played some really good stuff today," Kane said.

"We're in a good position but as always, it's a one-goal lead and that can change quickly.

We'll try to perform as we did today."

Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa backed his team to mount a comeback in Munich. "I think it's a defeat that maybe, with a bit more luck in the second half, we could have avoided," said the Spaniard. "We scored a goal that gave us hope - the pity is we weren't able to put away any more of the chances we had. It's not going to be easy, but if any team can win in Munich, it's Real Madrid."

Jude Bellingham impressed as a second half substitute for Madrid, as he continues to find fitness after a hamstring injury, and Arbeloa highlighted the England interna-

tional's contribution. "We've talked a lot about how his return to the team should be, about getting back to his best level, and I think doing it progressively is just logical to me," said the coach.

"It's true he gave us a huge amount, because we need a player like him, who can evade that very aggressive press Bayern put on, carry the ball, get past opponents. And I'm very happy with the energy he showed us, with what we always talk about - his character and personality. I see him looking much better, and I'm sure in Munich he's going to help us a lot."

Leicester close to third tier after points deduction appeal dismissed

London: Leicester's appeal against a six-point deduction for breaching financial rules was rejected, plunging the Foxes ever closer to relegation to English football's third tier.

Just a decade on from their stunning Premier League title triumph, Leicester sit third from bottom of the Championship, one point adrift of safety with just five games to go.

"With the matter now at an end and five games of the season remaining, everyone at the club is fully focused on the matches in front of us and on shaping the outcome of our season through our results on the pitch," Leicester said in a statement. "The responsibility now is to ensure these remaining games are approached with the focus and intent our current situation demands."

Relegated from the Premier League last season, Leicester are now at serious risk of dropping into League One after a run of just one win in 12 games in all competitions.

An independent commission found in February that the club had breached profit and sustainability rules for the three-year period up to the 2023/24 season, when they won promotion from the Championship, by nearly £21m. In the three seasons from 2021/22 to 2023/24, the club posted losses of over £200m.

"An independent commission's decision to recommend a six-point deduction on Leicester City Football Club this season has been upheld by an independent appeal board," the Premier League said in a statement.

In the 2015/16 season, Leicester shocked the football world to win the Premier League despite starting the campaign as 5,000-1 outsiders. They also won the FA Cup for the first time in 2021 but were relegated in 2023. They bounced straight back to the top flight under Enzo Maresca but were relegated again last season with just six wins in 38 games.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Arsenal's Raya hailed as 'world's best keeper'

AFP
Lisbon

David Raya was hailed as the world's best goalkeeper by Arsenal's Kai Havertz after the pair inspired Tuesday's 1-0 win at Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League quarter-final first leg.

Raya made a trio of vital saves to keep spluttering Arsenal in the game at the Jose Alvalade Stadium. The Spaniard tipped Maxi Araujo's drive onto the crossbar and kept out Geny Catamo's low effort before making another fine stop to parry Catamo's header late in the second half.

Below their best for long spells, Arsenal capitalised on Raya's man-of-the-match display to end their two-game losing run. Havertz calmly converted a pass from fellow substitute Gabriel Martinelli in stoppage-time, making Arsenal firm favourites to advance to the semi-finals when they host Sporting in the second leg on April 15.

Raya's return to the team was vital after he was rested for Arsenal's League Cup final loss to Manchester City and their embarrassing FA Cup quarter-final defeat against second-tier Southampton. Raya's deputy Kepa Arrizabalaga made a costly mistake that led to City's opener at Wembley -- a stark contrast to the former Brentford star's heroics in Lisbon.

"Unbelievable. I think still underestimated in the world of football but for me, the last two seasons, the best keeper in the world," Havertz said. "He's outstanding, he's saved us so many times and we're very glad to have him."

Gunners boss Mikel Arteta echoed Havertz's verdict after Raya's seventh Champions League clean-sheet this season. "At the moment he's phenomenal and extraordinary since he joined us. We are very lucky to have him," he said. "He had two moments where he made two big saves.



And that's the Champions League, the Champions League is always decided in the boxes and because there's so much quality here."

Raya felt his first save from Araujo was the decisive moment in the game as it kept Arsenal afloat in a difficult period. "I think that's a turning moment. It was a quick transition from them, great strike but I managed to get a fingertip to it to hit the bar. It's one of those moments that can change games," he said.

"It's something that I'm there for. I'm trying to help the team as much as possible in any single action, not just defending but commanding and on the ball. You have to be focused no matter what you're doing, whether you're touching the ball or not. So delighted with myself and, of course, the win."

Arsenal's mentality has been questioned during their recent wobble. But the Premier League leaders remain on course for a first English title in 22 years, and are still in the hunt for their first ever Champions League crown. "We believe 100 percent that we can win the Champions League. We go game by game and show what we can do," Raya said.

"We just have to focus on the present, that's the most important thing, but of course we have full belief. We've come from two losses, learn from those moments, that pain when you lose a game. Use that pain in the belly to go out there and express yourself, be yourself and try to be better every single day. That's the main message we have to send out there."

SPOTLIGHT

CAF president Motsepe visits Dakar following AFCON trophy reversal

AFP
Dakar

The president of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) was in Dakar yesterday, nearly a month after the body's shock decision to strip Senegal of its AFCON title and award it to Morocco. Patrice Motsepe announced the trip at the end of March, stating that he would travel to Senegal and Morocco to emphasize the importance of "working together to grow African football", as his organisation faces considerable criticism. President Bassirou Diomaye Faye was received Motsepe at the presidential palace later in the day, with a press conference to follow.

His visit comes at a particularly tense time for CAF following its surprise decision to overturn Senegal's 1-0 win over hosts Morocco in the Cup of Nations final on January 18.

CAF cited regulations about leaving the field as it recorded a 3-0 victory in Morocco's favour on March 17. During the match Senegalese players, head coach Pape Thiaw and his staff walked off the pitch in Rabat after Mo-

rocco were awarded an added-time penalty, which forward Brahima Diallo ultimately missed.

The Senegalese Football Federation has appealed CAF's decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). The decision has sparked a strong response by Senegal, whose government has called for an international investigation into suspected corruption within the institution. Weighing in on the matter late last month, Motsepe said he would "respect and implement the CAS decision. My personal opinion regarding the matter is irrelevant".

CISSE RESIGNS AS LIBYA COACH

Former Senegal coach Aliou Cisse has stepped down from his role in charge of the Libyan national team after just 10 matches at the helm. His final two matches as coach both ended as draws last month, in friendlies against Niger and Liberia.

Cisse was head coach of his native Senegal for almost 10 years from 2015 until 2024, leading them to their first ever Africa Cup of Nations title in 2021, after losing the 2019 final. Libya missed out on a maiden World Cup appearance this year.