

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



IPL | Page 2

Punjab Kings
down Mumbai
Indians despite
De Kock ton



TENNIS | Page 3

'Decisive' Zverev
cruises into
Munich
quarter-finals

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Friday, April 17, 2026
Shawwal 29, 1447 AH

GULF TIMES

SPORT

FOOTBALL

Real Madrid season
in tatters, Arbeloa
looking shaky
after Euro exit

Page 4

Arabi beat Shamal to claim Qatar Cup title for fifth time



Al Arabi Club emerged champions of the 13th edition of the Qatar Basketball Cup after defeating Al Shamal 77-71 in the final yesterday at Al Gharafa Hall. Al Arabi raised their tally to five titles - their third consecutive triumph - setting a record for the most Qatar Cup wins and surpassing Al Gharafa's four titles. Meanwhile, Qatar SC, Al Sadd, Al Rayyan and Al Wakrah each hold one title. Al Shamal's Tyree Quannell Crump was the game's top scorer with 36 points, while Al Arabi's Elmedin Kikanovic led his team with 28 points. Following the match, Mohammed bin Saad Al-Mughaseeb, President of the Qatar Basketball Federation, Sheikh Tamim bin Fahd Al-Thani, President of Al Arabi Club, Abdullah Shamsan Al-Sada, Vice-President of Al Shamal Club, and Saadoun Sabah Al-Kuwari, Secretary-General of the Qatar Basketball Federation, presented the trophy and gold medals to the champions along with a financial prize of QR600,000. Al Shamal received silver medals and a prize of QR400,000. Al Arabi had reached the final after a marathon semi-final against Al Rayyan, decided in overtime with a 104-103 victory. Al Shamal qualified by defeating Al Wakrah 71-56 in the other semi-final.

FOOTBALL

Khalifa International Stadium to host Amir Cup final on May 9

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Football Association has announced that the Amir Cup final will take place on May 9 at Khalifa International Stadium. The country's biggest annual football cup has returned for its 54th edition, with a total of 20 clubs from first and second divisions participating in the competition. Starting May 2, fans can purchase tickets for the Amir Cup Final 2026 at www.qfa.qa in three categories: CAT 1: QAR 50; CAT 2: QAR 30; CAT 3: QAR 10; Accessibility: QAR 10. Fans arriving at the Khalifa International Stadium will be treated to a variety of entertainment and cultural activities at the fan zone. Following the Round of 16 held earlier in the year, the following eight teams have qualified to the quarter-finals and semi-finals that will take place between May 1-8: Al Gharafa, Umm Salal, Al Rayyan, Al Wakrah, Al Shamal, Al Sadd, Al Duhail and Al Arabi.



The Amir Cup final will take place at the renowned Khalifa International Stadium

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Vissel Kobe edge Sadd in thriller to enter semis

In the shootout, substitute Patric scored the winning penalty for the Japanese side

Agencies
Jeddah

Vissel Kobe booked their place in the semi-finals of the AFC Champions League Elite Finals with a 5-4 penalty shoot-out win over Qatar's Al Sadd after a thrilling 3-3 draw at the Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium in Jeddah. Substitute Jean Patric scored the winning penalty for Michael Skibbe's team after Claudinho had fired his attempt high over the bar in the third round of spot-kicks for the Qatari side. Rafa Mujica had given Roberto Mancini's outfit a sixth minute lead and the Spaniard restored his side's advantage in the 61st minute after seeing Yuya Osako level for the Japanese in the 24th minute. Roberto Firmino added a third for Al Sadd in the 65th minute but Yusuke Ideguchi's strike with 16 minutes remaining gave Kobe hope and Yoshinori Muto's header in the third minute of stoppage time took the game into an additional 30 minutes. Kobe will next face either defending champions Al Ahli Saudi from Saudi Arabia or Malaysia Super League champions Johor Darul Ta'zim, who meet at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium today. The Qataris made a strong start despite having had only three days' rest following their extra time exertions in their penalty shoot-out win over Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal in the Round of 16. Daiya Maekawa needed to be at his sharpest in the second minute, the Vissel Kobe goalkeeper throwing himself to his right to push Firmino's strike from the edge of the area to safety in a flowing opening to the game. Muto thumped an ambitious effort from more than 30 yards over the Al Sadd crossbar two minutes later but by the sixth minute, the Qatari side had punished the Japanese outfit on the counterattack.



Japan's Vissel Kobe will next face either defending champions Al Ahli Saudi from Saudi Arabia or Malaysia Super League champions Johor Darul Ta'zim, who meet at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium today.

Firmino's backheel inside his own half found Claudinho and his first-time pass was shuttled forward to Akram Afif, who fed Mujica and his clinical finish from just inside the area found the bottom corner of Maekawa's goal. By the 24th minute, Kobe had pulled level. Gotoku Sakai stormed down the right and delivered an inch-perfect cross onto the head of the unmarked Osako, who powered a header to the left of Meshaal Barsham that the Al Sadd goalkeeper could not keep out. Firmino failed to bend his attempt to restore Al Sadd's lead into the top corner of Maekawa's goal in the 34th minute while Osako headed against the crossbar seconds later as the action switched from one end of the pitch to the other.

Sixteen minutes into the second half, Mujica put Al Sadd's back in front with another fine finish. Claudinho clipped his pass into the penalty area from deep towards Firmino and the Brazilian improvised by chesting the ball into the path of Mujica, who swept his volley beyond Maekawa's dive. Four minutes later another Al Sadd counterattack caught out the former J1 League champions. Afif's long pass from inside his own half released Mujica and the former Las Palmas forward turned provider, delivering from the left into the path of Firmino and he slotted home his side-foot volley. Ideguchi pulled one back for Kobe with 16 minutes left when he was set up by substitute Jean Patric, the midfielder dragging

his right foot shot into the bottom corner to give Michael Skibbe's side hope. Afif should have snuffed that out with 10 minutes to go when he directed Firmino's centre the wrong side of the target and Al Sadd were to rue that miss when Muto raced in at the near post to nod in Rikuto Hirose's cross from the right. Maekawa denied Javairo Dilrosun with a flying save in the 102nd minute before pulling off a fine stop to keep out Afif's strike a minute into the second period of extra time. The Japanese goalkeeper saved another goal-bound Dilrosun strike with five minutes left to take the quarter-final into a penalty shoot-out where Claudinho blazed his attempt over the bar to set up Jean Patric to fire the winner into the top corner.

Iran participating in World Cup, FIFA president confirms

Washington: FIFA president Gianni Infantino said Wednesday that Iran will "for sure" participate in the 2026 World Cup despite the Middle East war. "Iran is coming for sure. We hope that by then the situation will be a peaceful situation, that would definitely help," Infantino told an economic conference. "But Iran has to come, they represent their people, they have qualified, the players want to play," he said of the team's upcoming matches scheduled in the United States in June. Infantino had made similar comments in March, when he attended an Iran-Costa Rica friendly in Antalya, Turkey, even though US President Donald Trump had previously suggested that Iranian players might not be "safe" in the United States. Iran is scheduled to play its three Group G matches in the United States - two in Los Angeles, one in Seattle - with their base for the tournament in Tucson, Arizona. Iran's participation in the global tournament being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico had been thrown into doubt by the conflict launched by the United States and Israel on February 28. Iran raised the prospect of a "boycott" of the competition before asking FIFA to move its matches from the United States to Mexico, a request the world governing body rejected. After several weeks of air strikes on Iran and Iranian reprisals against Israel and other countries in the region, a fragile truce came into effect on April 8. But Tehran has sealed off the strategic Strait of Hormuz and since Monday Washington has imposed a blockade on ships coming from or heading to Iranian ports. "Sports should be outside of politics," Infantino said on Wednesday. "If there's nobody else that believes in building bridges and keeping them intact and together, we are doing the job," he said.

HORSE RACING

Samha Alseej lands Al Bidda Cup, double for de Lepine

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Samha Alseej claimed the Al Bidda Cup, a Local Thoroughbred Graduation Plate over 1400m (Class 4) at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The bay filly, owned and trained by Jassim bin Hamad al-Atteya, the bay filly came from off the pace with a blistering turn of foot inside the final 100m to land the spoils and score by 1½ lengths. She was guided to victory by jockey Arnaud de Lepine, who completed a double on the card.

Samha Alseej was settled at the rear in the early stages as Afran set the pace ahead of Halitan, with Awayed Alseej and Ayyal Bjd following in behind. The order remained unchanged through the middle part of the race. At the top of the straight, the leading trio still held sway and looked set to decide the outcome.

However, Samha Alseej produced a decisive late surge, quickening sharply inside the final 100m to sweep past her rivals and take control, turning the race on its head in a matter of strides before stretching clear to a convincing success. The long-time leader Afran, representing Al Wasmiyah Farm and from the Ibrahim Saeed Al Malki yard, with Marco Casamento aboard, kept on to take second, two lengths clear of the nearest rival behind her.

The Umm Al Shukhut Farm-owned Halitan, trained by Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed and ridden by Alberto Sanna,

held third without threatening the first two home.

Earlier, De Lepine was in the winners' enclosure when he guided Meshaal bin Ali al-Attiyah-owned Minsk to victory in the Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-45) for three-year-old+ over 1200m.

RESULTS

68th Al Rayyan Race meeting - Al Bidda Cup
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

1 - Al Bidda Cup, Local Thoroughbred Graduation Plate

Samha Alseej, Jassim bin Hamad al-Atteya, Arnaud de Lepine

2 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate

Maraaheb, Hadi al-Ramzani, Alberto Sanna

3 - Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Plate

Safwan Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier

4 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-45)

Minsk, Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed, Arnaud de Lepine

5 - Thoroughbred Handicap (0-75)

Morello Man, Hamad al-Jehani, Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi

6 - Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80)

Make Love, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Salem Alajmi

7 - Thoroughbred Handicap (75-95)

Studio City, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Pierre Charles Boudot

8 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (70-90)

Monaafasah, Ahmed al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot

9 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (80-100)

Mohimma, Jean de Mieulle, Alberto Sanna



Jockey Arnaud de Lepine rode Samha Alseej to the Al Bidda Cup yesterday. PICTURE: Juhaim

CRICKET

Punjab Kings down Mumbai Indians despite De Kock ton

KINGS ROSE TO THE TOP OF THE IPL TABLE WITH THEIR FOURTH WIN

AFP
Mumbai

South African Quinton de Kock's record third century was to no avail as Prabhsimran Singh and skipper Shreyas Iyer hauled Punjab Kings back to the top of the IPL table with a commanding seven-wicket victory over Mumbai Indians yesterday.

De Kock marked his return to the Mumbai team for the first time since 2021 by becoming the first overseas batter to record hundreds for three different sides as the home team posted 195-6 at the Wankhede Stadium.

De Kock only got a look-in because Rohit Sharma was ruled out with a hamstring injury.

Alongside Naman Dhir, the left-handed opener put on 122 for the third wicket, Dhir making the most of being dropped by Yuzvendra Chahal on 10 to go on to post 50. De Kock, who drove his first ball from compatriot Marco Jansen over cover for six and carried his bat, remained unbeaten on 112 off 60 balls, including eight fours and seven sixes.

With Mumbai on course to top 200, Punjab fought back at the death through pacers Arshdeep Singh, who took three wickets, and Jansen, and a spectacular catch facilitated by the brilliance of Shreyas and completed by Xavier Bartlett to account for Mumbai captain Hardik Pandya.

Prabhsimran and fellow opener Priyansh Arya took 21 off the first over of the chase from Deepak Chahar before Afghanistan's Allah Ghazanfar dismissed Arya and Cooper Connolly in quick succession. But Prabhsimran, put down at short third-man by



Punjab Kings' Prabhsimran Singh plays a shot during the IPL match against Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

Jasprit Bumrah when he was on 11, thwarted those designs with a typically counter-punching second successive half-century. Prabhsimran's blistering unbeaten 39-ball 80 contained 11 fours and two sixes.

Alongside him, Shreyas continued his excellent start to the tournament with a third straight fifty.

Worryingly for Mumbai, who slumped to their fourth consecu-

tive loss, Bumrah went wicketless for the fifth match in a row, conceding 41 runs in his four overs.

With their pace spearhead rendered ineffective, Mumbai were pummeled by Prabhsimran and Shreyas, who added 139 in only 67 deliveries before the latter fell against the run of play, smartly caught by Naman running in from deep mid-wicket and diving forward.

Marcus Stoinis then came to the crease and, with his unbeaten 10 off five deliveries, helped Punjab over the line as they remain the only unbeaten side in the IPL.

BRIEF SCORES: Punjab Kings 198 for 3 in 16.3 overs (Prabhsimran 80*, Shreyas 66) **beat Mumbai Indians 195 for 6** (De Kock 112*, Dhir 50, Arshdeep 3-22) **by seven wickets.**

PAKISTAN SUPER LEAGUE

Perera and Irfan steer Hyderabad to third straight win

Agencies
Karachi

Hyderabad Kingsmen registered their third consecutive win in Pakistan Super League (PSL) with a five-wicket victory over Rawalpindiz at the National Bank Stadium yesterday, a double-header day that marked breast cancer awareness.

Kusal Perera and Muhammad Irfan Khan steered the chase home with an unbroken 54-run sixth-wicket stand as the pair finished unbeaten on 32 and 34 respectively as Hyderabad reached the target of 122 with 21 balls to spare.

The result lifted the Hyderabad to fourth in the standings, while Rawalpindiz remained at the bottom.

Earlier, Mohammad Ali (4-0-21-3) and Hunain Shah (4-0-18-3) led a disciplined bowling effort that restricted Rawalpindiz to 121 for nine, with Saim Ayub proving particularly miserly in returning four overs for 14 without reward. Glenn Maxwell removed Usman Khawaja to claim his 200th T20 wicket.

Sam Billings top-scored for the Rawalpindiz with 26 from 22 balls while Yasir Khan laboured to 24 off 30 in a stop-start innings that never gained traction.

In the chase, Hyderabad suffered an early jolt when Maaz Sadaqat fell for four in the very first over off Asif Afridi (4-1-20-2).

Skipper Marnus Labuschagne and Saim Ayub briefly counter-attacked with a 24-run stand before Asif struck again to remove Saim for 15 in the fifth over as the scoreboard read 28 for two. Mohammad Amir (3-0-22-1) then had Usman Khan caught at short midwicket for an eight-ball duck to reduce Hyderabad to 29 for three.

Labuschagne, however, continued to play his strokes and raced to 32 off 21 balls with six boundaries before being adjudged leg-before-wicket to Saad Masood in the ninth over after a successful Rawalpindiz review.

Maxwell was then cleaned up

first ball by Ben Sears for a duck and the chase suddenly looked precarious at 69 for five within 10 overs.

Perera and Irfan then took a measured approach, rotating the strike and finding the occasional boundary to keep the required rate in check.

Irfan struck the only six of the stand, pumping Mohammad Amir over long-on in the 14th over, before Perera sealed the contest with a leg glance off Mubasir Khan in the 17th over.

Earlier, having been put in to bat, Rawalpindiz lost Khawaja bowled by Maxwell for two in the third over. Captain Mohammad Rizwan made 15 from 16 balls before being bowled by Ali in the fifth over.

Humain then dismissed Daryl Mitchell for a duck and Abdullah Fazal for 11 in successive overs as Rawalpindiz slumped to 41 for four inside 10 overs.

Yasir Khan and Sam Billings attempted a rebuild with a 21-run stand for the fifth wicket before Yasir fell for 24 caught by Maaz Sadaqat off Mohammad Ali in the 14th over.

Billings continued to fight with a 22-ball 26 including a four and a six before being run out by Labuschagne in the 15th over.

The lower order offered little resistance as Humain returned to dismiss Mubasir Khan for 11 and Mohammad Ali accounted for Ben Sears to leave the Rawalpindiz tottering at 113 for nine. A late 10-ball 15 from Asif Afridi, including three boundaries, helped them limp to 121 for nine in their 20 overs.

"That's some good news post-game. I think we're just finding our balance and our blend. I think we're just finding our balance and our blend. It's nice to get three on the bounce," Labuschagne said.

BRIEF SCORES: Rawalpindiz 121-9 in 20 overs (S. Billings 26, Y. Khan 24; H. Shah 3-18, M. Ali 3-21) **lost to Hyderabad Kingsmen 123-5 in 16.3 overs** (M. Khan 34 not out, M. Labuschagne 32, K. Perera 32 not out; A. Afridi 2-20) **by five wickets.**

BOXING

Joshua gets 'unbelievable lift' training with Usyk

AFP
London

Anthony Joshua has resumed training with former heavyweight rival Oleksandr Usyk as he continues preparations for a return to the ring that could culminate in a 'Battle of Britain' bout against Tyson Fury later this year.

Joshua and Usyk have been in camp together in Valencia for several weeks.

Joshua returned to Spain after watching fellow former world heavyweight champion Fury's unanimous points victory over Arslanbek Makhmudov from ring-side at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Saturday.

Olympic gold-medallist Joshua, 36, is being lined up to face Fury in November, possibly at Wembley, but would most likely have to overcome a warm-up opponent beforehand.

Joshua's next fight will mark the first time he has been back in the ring since being involved in a car crash in Nigeria in November that killed two close friends.

He now hopes to receive medical clearance in the next fortnight to resume full training after suffering injuries in the accident.

World Boxing Council, World Boxing Association and International Boxing Federation world champion Usyk beat Joshua twice in 2021 and 2022, but they have now joined forces, with the Ukrainian insisting "if we don't

help each other, we are not people, we are animals."

"It just gives him an unbelievable lift. At the moment he's very happy," Eddie Hearn, Joshua's promoter, said yesterday.

"Right now, this is really what he needs. He's worked so hard to get himself physically ready to try and go back to full-time camp. It's really good for him. When he's there and he's focused, he's got that purpose.

"When I was there I watched a session and there were times when AJ was all out on his heart rate and Usyk was going 'come on champ - push, push, push!'"

"And I'm watching, thinking this is unbelievable what I'm seeing. You've got pound for pound number one. You've got the guy

who he beat twice, who's probably the biggest star in the sport. It's incredible and what he's getting out of this is amazing."

Joshua filmed Fury's comeback against Makhmudov on his phone and, according to Hearn, is studying the footage in great detail.

"AJ filmed the whole thing," said Hearn.

"He wasn't streaming it, it was being filmed from a different angle. He's been sending me some clips and he'll watch it over and over and over again."

"The build up to the Fury fight will be incredible but the fight will be incredible as well. I'm sure it means a lot to Fury, but I know what it means to AJ. He'll give everything in camp for that fight."

Islamabad breeze past Karachi

Islamabad United also breezed past the Karachi Kings with a comfortable eight-wicket PSL win in Karachi. With a commanding win, the Islamabad have made a big leap to the points table, leaving Karachi in a slightly tricky spot despite the latter's promising start to the season.

With Shadab Khan returning to the helm for the Islamabad United, they won an important toss and sent the Karachi Kings into bat. Nevertheless, Karachi Kings still had no David Warner in their ranks. Reeza Hendricks top-scored with 44-ball 51 but he was one of the only three batters from their side to reach double figures along with Jason Roy (39) and Azam Khan (34). With a modest 151 for the 2024 PSL champions to win, the opening stand of 93 between Devon Conway and Sameer Minhas set the perfect tone for their side. Shadab also crafted an unbeaten cameo of 31 to take their side home only in 16 overs.

"Plan was simple, to play ball by ball and go for the boundaries on the deliveries where we could attack. I have worked a lot on my fielding and fitness because if your fitness is good then your batting as well as running between the wickets gets better," Minhas said.

BRIEF SCORES: Islamabad United 153 for 2 (Minhas 58, Conway 53, Moeen Ali 1-14) **beat Karachi Kings 150 for 6** (Hendricks 51*, Gleeson 2-22, Shadab 2-28) **by 8 wickets.**

TENNIS

Zverev cruises into Munich Open quarter-finals

'I WON AND I WON DECISIVELY, THAT'S PRETTY GOOD'

AFP
Munich

German first seed Alexander Zverev is on track to defend his crown at the Munich ATP event after swatting aside Canada's Gabriel Diallo yesterday.

The world number three won 6-1, 6-2 in 73 minutes and will face Argentinian Francisco Cerundolo in the quarter-finals. "I won and I won decisively, that's pretty good," Zverev said as he kept his bid for a record fourth Munich title alive.

The Bayern Munich fan, who was in attendance at Wednesday's dramatic Champions League quarter-final win over Real Madrid, added: "It wasn't as exciting as yesterday in the Allianz Arena - that was an experience."

Zverev said the clash with fifth seed Cerundolo, who moved past Botic van de Zandschulp 6-3, 6-0 earlier in the day, "would be a more exciting match".

The 28-year-old had struggled past Serb Miomir Kecmanovic in three sets in his opener but had no such difficulties in the Munich sunshine against the world number 37 Diallo.

Diallo seemed to struggle with a back injury and needed treatment on court after the first set. The victory was Zverev's 100th clay court win this decade, with only world number two Carlos Alcaraz and Dane Casper Ruud boasting



Germany's Alexander Zverev in action during his round of 16 match against Canada's Gabriel Diallo at the Munich Open yesterday. (Reuters)

more in that time.

Zverev is the only German remaining after compatriot Daniel Altmaier was defeated 6-4, 7-6 (12/10) earlier on Thursday by Slovak qualifier Alex Molcan.

Meanwhile, Stefanos Tsitsipas walked off the court in Munich on Wednesday after another first-round defeat that highlighted how far the former world number three has drifted from the sport's elite amid injury problems and inconsistent form.

Resuming at 2-2 in the deciding set against Fabian Marozsan after

play was suspended on Tuesday due to darkness, the 27-year-old Greek crashed out 3-6 7-6(5) 6-4 in a defeat that will see his ranking slide into the 70s, his lowest in eight years.

Tsitsipas, who decided to play in Munich this year instead of his usual tour stop in Barcelona, knows that the more his ranking slides the tougher his opponents will be in the early stages of tournaments.

"I'm aware that I might need to play good players in earlier rounds at different tournaments this

year," he told Tennis TV ahead of the ATP 500 tournament.

"It's not an easy thing to get to play them early, but I also accept the challenge and I accept my current position and state, that these things need to happen in order for me to get back to where I belong."

Tsitsipas showed plenty of potential when he broke through eight years ago but since reaching the finals of the French Open in 2021 and Australian Open in 2023 he has struggled to deliver a sustained run of form.

DECISION

World Athletics deliver nationality switch hammer blow to Turkey

AFP
Monaco

World Athletics yesterday refused the applications of 11 elite athletes seeking to transfer their allegiance to Turkey in a hammer blow to the country's medal chances at the 2028 Olympics.

Four top Jamaicans, including 2024 Olympic men's discus gold medallist Roje Stona, and a quintet of Kenyans, among them former women's marathon world record-holder Brigid Kosgei, were among the 11 concerned.

The full list included Kosgei's compatriots Catherine Relin (Selin Can) Amanang'ole, Brian Kibor, Ronald Kwemai and Nelvin (Can) Jepkemoi, Stona's fellow Jamaicans Rajindra Campbell, Jaydon Hibbert and Wayne Pinnock, Nigeria's Favour Ofili and Russian Sophia Yakushina.

Turkey had been offering long-term financial support to recruit foreign track and field stars with the aim of winning a host of gold medals at the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

The move was prompted by Turkey's dire performance at the 2024 Summer Games in Paris, where it failed to win a single gold among its eight medals across all sports.

But World Athletics deemed otherwise, saying that approval of the applications "would im-

pinge upon and compromise the imperatives" underlying eligibility rules and transfer of allegiance regulations.

A World Athletics panel found that the applications "formed part of a coordinated recruitment strategy led by the Turkish government acting through a wholly-owned and financed government club".

Their aim, track and field's body said, was "to attract overseas athletes through lucrative contracts, with the aim of facilitating transfers of allegiance and enabling those athletes to represent Turkey at future international competitions, including the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games".

"Given the common features across the applications, the panel assessed them together and determined that such an approach is inconsistent with the core principles of the regulations.

"These principles are designed to safeguard the credibility of international competition, encourage member federations to invest in the development of domestic talent and maintain confidence among athletes that national teams are not primarily assembled through external recruitment."

World Athletics concluded: "As a result of the decisions, the athletes are not eligible to represent Turkey in national representative competitions or other relevant international events."

FOCUS

Rybakina, Gauff cruise into Stuttgart quarters



AFP
Stuttgart

Top seed Elena Rybakina beat Diana Shnaider in straight sets to qualify for the quarter-finals of the WTA clay-court event in Stuttgart yesterday as reigning French Open champion Coco Gauff also advanced.

The 26-year-old Rybakina, who was champion in the German tournament in 2024 but skipped last year's event, relied on her service game as she won 6-2, 6-4 against the unseeded Russian in one hour and 12 minutes. Shnaider, ranked 19th in the world, improved in the second set but was undone by double faults at crucial moments, allowing Kazakh Rybakina to capitalise.

Rybakina capped the match off with her ninth ace and will next take on either Leylah Fernandez or Zeynep Sonmez in the quarters. World number three Gauff kicked off her bid for a first Stuttgart title with a straight sets win over Liudmila Samsonova. The American sec-

ond seed won 7-5, 6-1 to book a quarter-final clash with Czech Karolina Muchova to be played today.

Earlier yesterday, Muchova came from a set down to beat Elise Mertens 1-6, 6-3, 6-0 to book a clash with Gauff.

World number nine Mirra Andreewa pushed past American Alycia Parks in straight sets in their last 16 clash to extend her winning streak to six matches.

Sixth seed Andreewa is in fine form having won the clay event in Linz last week. She eliminated defending champion Jelena Ostapenko on Wednesday and breezed past Parks 7-6 (7/3), 6-3. The Russian will take on two-time Stuttgart winner Iga Swiatek, who won her first clay court match of the season with a comprehensive victory over Laura Siegemund on Wednesday.

"Obviously she's a great player, but I'll just appreciate Muchova's compatriot Linda Noskova crushed Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-1, 6-1 to set up a quarter-final clash with Elna Svitolina, who cruised past German Eva Lys 6-1, 6-0 on Wednesday.

SPOTLIGHT

French Open prize money up by 9.5%

Reuters
Paris

Prize money at this year's French Open will jump by 9.5%, taking the total purse to 61.7mn euros (\$72.69mn), organisers said yesterday. The increase of 5.4mn euros compared to 2025 continues a steady rise in player earnings at the claycourt Grand Slam.

The organisers have in recent years focused on boosting prize money across all rounds, not only for the champions but also for players eliminated in the early stages, amid growing calls within the sport for a fairer distribution of revenues.

The Paris major, staged annually at Roland-Garros, has main-

tained equal prize money for men and women.

The prize money increase comes as pressure mounts from players for a greater share of revenues, with discussions ongoing across the sport involving governing bodies and tournament organisers. Despite the latest rise, Roland-Garros is expected to remain behind the other three Grand Slams in overall prize money.

The U.S. Open offered the largest prize fund of the Grand Slams last year with \$90mn, while Wimbledon paid out 53.5mn pounds (\$72.40mn).

The Australian Open offered a record A\$111.5mn (\$79.92mn) in prize money this year.

Organisers also said the tournament would trial allowing players to use wearable connected devices

to collect physical performance data, becoming the first Grand Slam to do so.

The use of such technology has been permitted on the ATP Tour since 2024, though Grand Slam events operate independently. The trial will also apply at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open.

Organisers will also stage a series of ceremonies to honour players appearing at the tournament for the final time or who have recently retired.

Former world number four Caroline Garcia, who announced last year she would end her career in 2025, will be celebrated on June 4 between the women's semi-finals, having opted to delay any tribute when she made her farewell appearance in 2025.

Frenchman Gael Monfils, who

has said the 2026 season will be his last, will also be honoured during the tournament and at a charity event on May 21 on Court Philippe-Chatrier titled "Gael and Friends".

"He's a showman, we've given him the keys for this charity evening," tournament director Amelie Mauresmo said. "There will obviously be tennis, with a particular mixed doubles format, and there will be entertainment. He has a very specific universe."

Proceeds from the event will go to federation-linked charities and causes chosen by Monfils.

Swiss player Stanislas Wawrinka, the 2015 champion and a three-times Grand Slam winner, will also be honoured after what is expected to be his final appearance at the tournament.

MUSETTI SEES OFF MOUTET TO REACH QUARTER-FINALS

Italian second seed Lorenzo Musetti eased into the quarter-finals of the Barcelona Open yesterday with a straight-sets victory over Frenchman Corentin Moutet. The world number nine will face either Arthur Fils or Brandon Nakashima after a 6-3, 6-4 win. He is the highest remaining seed

left in Barcelona after Carlos Alcaraz pulled out of the tournament on Wednesday with a wrist injury. Musetti impressed on clay last season, reaching at least the semi-finals in the ATP 1000 events in Monte Carlo, Madrid and Rome, as well as at the French Open. But he has struggled for form and

fitness this year and is still without an ATP title since 2022. Musetti had lost in his opening matches at both Indian Wells and the Monte Carlo Masters, after being forced to retire injured from his Australian Open quarter-final against Novak Djokovic in January. But after beating Martin Landaluce for his

first win since Melbourne on Tuesday, he was in fine fettle against Moutet and much too strong for his 31st-ranked opponent. Earlier, Russian fifth seed Andrey Rublev saw off Lorenzo Sonego 6-2, 6-3 to set up a quarter-final meeting with Tomas Machac, the beneficiary of Alcaraz's withdrawal.

FOOTBALL

Silva to leave Man City at end of the season

AFP
London

Bernardo Silva will leave Manchester City when his contract expires at the end of the season, the Premier League club announced yesterday as they hailed his "incalculable" contribution to our "greatest sustained period of success".

The 31-year-old Portuguese playmaker, who is the current club captain, joined City from Monaco for £43mn (\$58mn) in 2017 and has gone on to make over 450 appearances for manager Pep Guardiola's side, winning 15 major trophies, including six Premier League titles and one Champions League as well as this season's League Cup.

He has also scored 76 goals and provided 77 assists to date, with Silva also involved as City won the 'treble' of Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League in the 2022/23 season.

Silva recently moved into the top 10 of all-time City appearance holders, overtaking several notable former players, including David Silva, Paul Power and Willie Donachie.

"Manchester City can confirm Bernardo Silva will leave the club this summer," said a City statement.

"Bernardo will now focus on seeking to try and ensure his remaining time at City ends with even more silverware, with Pep Guardiola's side still very much in the hunt to win both the Premier

League title and the FA Cup.

"In short, he will be deservedly remembered both as one of City's finest and most popular players of all time."

Confirming his departure from the Etihad on his Instagram page, Silva wrote: "When I arrived nine years ago, I was following a dream of a little boy, wanting to succeed in life, wanting to achieve great things.

"This city and this club gave me much more than that, much more than I ever hoped for. What we won and achieved together is a legacy that will forever be cherished in my heart.

"The Centurions, the domestic quadruple, the Treble, the Four In A Row and much more... It wasn't that bad.

"In a few months, it's time to say goodbye to the city where not only we won so much as a football club, but also where I started my marriage and my family. From the bottom of my heart, Ines and Carlota, thank you!"

Silva, who thanked fans for their "unconditional support" and said he would leave the Etihad as a "Man City supporter for life", added: "To the club, Pep, the staff and all my team-mates these nine years, thank you for all the memories and for letting me be a part of this journey for so long.

"The atmosphere we created every day in the training ground made me feel at home and a part of a big family. Let's enjoy together these last weeks and fight for what this season still brings us."



Bernardo Silva to leave Manchester City after winning 15 major trophies during his nine years stay.

FEI GROUP VII FINALS

Qatar tops Children Team competition



Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish, President of the Qatar Equestrian Federation, and Sultan Mohammed al-Yahyai, President of FEI Regional Group VII, presented the trophies to winners of the CSISCH-A Children Team competition at Al Shaqab yesterday.

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Team Qatar secured first place in the CSISCH-A Children Team competition at the FEI Group VII Finals held at the Longines Arena in Al Shaqab.

In the team standings, Qatar finished ahead of the United Arab Emirates in second place, while Saudi Arabia claimed third. The awards were presented by Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish, President of the Qatar Equestrian Federation, and Sultan Mohammed al-Yahyai, President of FEI Regional Group VII.

Seventeen riders qualified for the next individual class following the conclusion of the team event. In the junior individual competition at a height of 130cm, 15 riders produced

clear rounds to qualify for the next stage. Teams representing Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates also competed in the team event for the same class. The qualifiers were honoured by Salmeen al-Suwaidi, the tournament's sports director.

Meanwhile, the under-25 class at a height of 135cm was dominated by riders from the United Arab Emirates, with 15 participants competing and 13 securing placings.

Saif Owaida Mohammed Alkirbi, riding Hui Buh 21, claimed first place with a faultless round in 64.05 seconds, followed by Mohamed Hamad Ali al-Kirbi on Lyon van de Plataan in 64.24 seconds. Omar Abdul Aziz al-Marzooqi, aboard Billy Martini, finished third in 67.55 seconds. The top five finishers were crowned by Abdullah al-Qashouti, the tournament's marketing and communications manager.

Competitions continue today at 1:30pm with a local junior class at a height of 110cm, followed by the youth team final at 120cm and the senior team final at 130cm. The programme will conclude with the under-25 Grand Prix class at a height of 145cm, scheduled for 7:45pm.

The FEI Group VII Finals for juniors, youth, and young riders, featuring athletes who qualified throughout the 2025-2026 equestrian season, are being staged at the Longines Arena in Al Shaqab. More than 100 riders from across the region are competing for a total prize purse of €318,000. Notably, this year's championship features an under-25 class for the first time, marking a significant addition to the competition structure. The initiative aims to strengthen the development pathway for emerging riders and enhance their readiness for elite international competition.

Saudi wealth fund sells football club Al Hilal

Riyadh: Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund announced the sale of its majority stake in Saudi Pro League football club Al Hilal, where French striker Karim Benzema plays.

The PIF, which also owns English Premier League side Newcastle United, sold 70 percent of Al Hilal to Kingdom Holding Company (KHC), the firm run by Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, a billionaire businessman and member of the Saudi royal family. The deal values the share capital of Al Hilal at 1.4bn Saudi riyals (\$373mn).

The sale comes amid scrutiny over the PIF's investment in LIV Golf, with reports circulated that the breakaway tour is on the verge of collapse due to the possible withdrawal of Saudi Arabian financing. "Al Hilal is a national symbol and a source of pride for the Saudi people," Bin Talal said in a statement. "This acquisition expresses our deep belief in the power of sports as a unifying force and a catalyst

for national development. By applying our global investment standards and cultivating strategic partnerships, we will unlock Al Hilal's full potential while preserving its history and identity."

The PIF, a wealthy public fund managed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, acquired a majority stake in the Riyadh-based club in 2023, along with three other teams in the Saudi league - Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr, Al Ahli and Al Ittihad - as part of the kingdom's sports investment policy.

This capital injection enabled Al Hilal to attract numerous foreign players, notably Brazilian star Neymar, before his departure in January 2025.

French striker Benzema joined Al Hilal most recently after terminating his contract with Al Ittihad. "The sale aligns with PIF's strategy to maximize returns and redeploy capital within the domestic economy," the PIF statement read.

QSL moves Qatar Cup 2026 to next season's calendar

Doha: The Qatar Stars League (QSL) has decided to reschedule Qatar Cup 2026, to be included in 2026-2027 season calendar.

In a statement QSL said it had, in co-ordination with relevant stakeholders, discussed the remaining fixtures of the current 2025-2026 season,

which has witnessed several unscheduled breaks as well as the participation of Qatari clubs in international competitions and national team's preparations for the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026, and decided to reschedule Qatar Cup 2026, to be included in 2026-2027 season calendar. (QNA)

FOOTBALL

Real Madrid season in tatters after Euro exit

Coach Arbeloa's tenure looks tenuous if Real finish season without a major trophy

AFP

Madrid

Serial Champions League winners Real Madrid bared their fangs but left Munich staring down the barrel of a second consecutive season without a major trophy and left coach Alvaro Arbeloa's tenure looking tenuous.

Nine points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona, Los Blancos seem destined to end a troubled campaign empty-handed after their dramatic European quarter-final exit against Bayern on Wednesday.

Arbeloa's side took the lead three times at the Allianz Arena and until Eduardo Camavinga's 86th minute red card had every chance of going through after digging deep and going blow-for-blow with the Bavarian giants in a thrilling clash. A late double for Bayern consigned Madrid to a 4-3 defeat on the night - one on which Arbeloa said his team gave "their souls and their lives" - and a 6-4 aggregate loss.

"An honourable exit that will not provide consolation or avoid another revolution," wrote Spanish newspaper AS after a heady night in Munich. That revolution could cost Arbeloa his job and Los Blancos are braced for pain and possible change in the weeks and months to follow.

"I've always tried to help the club in the best way I can, and that's how it will be until the last day," Arbeloa told reporters after the match. "I'm not at all worried (about my future) and I will understand perfectly any decision that the club takes."

"I'm a man of the club -- if I'm hurt to-



Real Madrid players argue with the referee after their loss to Bayern Munich in the Champions League quarter-final second leg match in Munich. (AFP)

day it's not for me, it's for Real Madrid, and because this year we will not win our 16th (Champions League title)."

Failure in the Spanish capital is rarely tolerated under president Florentino Perez without someone paying the price.

When Arbeloa was promoted to first team manager in January, Madrid did not state the length of his contract -- suggest-

ing that he had no long-term guarantees.

The coach has found it hard to motivate the squad at times in La Liga, and has only 13 victories in 21 matches at the helm.

In his first game in charge, Real's superstars were knocked out of the Copa del Rey by second-tier Albacete. Yet, his bold, attacking line-up against Bayern almost paid off. Arbeloa left Camavinga and Thiago

Pitarch on the bench and opted for an aggressive midfield trio of Jude Bellingham, Federico Valverde and Turkish playmaker Arda Guler, who struck twice.

Ultimately, it was not enough, and Real will likely fail to win any silverware for a second successive season for the first time since the 2008-09 and 2009-10 campaigns. Perhaps Madrid's biggest problem remains one which Carlo Ancelotti could not solve last season, nor Xabi Alonso in his short time at the helm - how to fit Kylian Mbappe, Vinicius Junior and Bellingham into the same side without losing balance.

Arbeloa could argue that the Bayern second leg showed it is possible, with England international Bellingham impressive, Mbappe on the scoresheet and Vinicius hitting the woodwork.

Yet the energy and effort the star trio put into this game was beyond their regular performances this season and unlikely to be replicated on lesser occasions.

Not to mention, the team still conceded four goals. Real's anger at the pivotal decision to send off Camavinga and their gutsy display could help Arbeloa, but whether it is enough to save his job, only time will tell.

There is no obvious replacement for Perez to turn to either. The final weeks of the season in La Liga may have a say in Arbeloa's prospects, including their performance in the Clasico against Barcelona on May 10, when the Catalans could capture the title. It may be a grim procession to the end of May but Arbeloa said that his team had "no other choice" but to keep on trudging and defend the club's badge for as long as he is in charge.

Messi new owner of Spanish fifth-tier club Cornella

Barcelona: Lionel Messi has bought Catalan club Cornella and become the team's new owner, the Spanish fifth-tier side announced.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner is still playing in the United States for Inter Miami and is expected to play a key role in Argentina's World Cup title defence this year.

"This move reinforces Messi's close ties to Barcelona and his commitment to the development of sport and local talent in Catalonia," the club said in a statement confirming the former Barcelona star's acquisition.

Several top players have come through the ranks at Cornella, based in the Barcelona suburbs, including Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya and Messi's former Barca teammate Jordi Alba.

Cornella have suffered back-to-back relegations in the past two seasons. "Leo Messi's arrival marks the beginning of a new chapter in the club's history, aimed at driving both sporting and institutional growth, strengthening its foundations, and continuing to invest in talent," Cornella added. "The project is guided by a long-term vision and a strategic plan that combines ambition, sustainability, and a strong connection to its local roots."

Messi came through Barcelona's academy before spending 17 seasons in the Catalan giants' first team, becoming their all-time leading scorer with 672 goals. The 38-year-old has previously said he would return to live in Catalonia after he retires from football. He is set to play in his sixth World Cup when Argentina start their title defence at the tournament in the USA, Mexico and Canada against Algeria in Kansas on June 16.

FOCUS

Draw ceremony held for 4th GCC Games Doha

By Sports Reporter

Doha

The Organising Committee of 4th GCC Games - Doha 2026 staged the official draw ceremony for the team sports competitions yesterday via advanced virtual communication technology. Held at Lusail Hall at the Qatar Olympic Committee headquarters, the event brought together heads of delegations from GCC nations. The Games is scheduled to take place in Doha from May 11 to 22.

At the beginning of the ceremony, Mohammed Issa al-Fadala, Head of the Sports Committee, emphasised that the meeting forms part of ongoing preparations and close coordination to ensure competitions are delivered to the highest technical and



The Organising Committee members of the 4th GCC Games - Doha pose after the draw ceremony.

organisational standards.

He highlighted that this step builds on continuous cooperation between the Organising Committee and GCC Olympic

Committees, strengthening readiness and contributing to an exceptional edition of the Games. The handball draw was conducted by Hamad Misfer al-Nuaimi,

Competition Manager, in accordance with international regulations, with participation from Qatar (host nation), Bahrain, the UAE, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Ara-

bia. Meanwhile, the volleyball draw was carried out by Yousef Kano, Volleyball Competition Manager, alongside former players Saeed al-Hatmi and Ali Ishaq, also following international rules, with all six GCC national teams taking part.

The fourth edition of the Games will feature the participation of elite athletes from the GCC countries, who will compete in 19 sports, including handball, table tennis, athletics, squash, padel, fencing, boxing, taekwondo, karate, swimming, billiards and snooker, basketball (5x5), basketball (3x3), shooting, archery, volleyball, equestrian, and bowling.

The competitions will be hosted across 10 venues, including Aspire Dome, Qatar Sports Club, Khalifa International Tennis, Squash and Badminton Complex, Lusail Shooting Range, Al Gharafa Sports Club, and other leading sports facilities.