Qatar end 3x3 Nations League Series in style

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA



US Ambassador to Qatar H E Timmy Davis (fourth left) and QBF President Mohammed bin Saad Al Mughaiseeb with the victorious Qatar team.

DOHA: The Qatar U23 men's basketball team signed off on a victorious note at the FIBA 3x3 Nations League - Asia-Pacific Zone, delivering a standout performance to secure the title in the sixth and final stage at the Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) Hall at Al Gharafa yesterday.

The Qatari side finished their campaign with a hard-fought 17-14 win over New Zealand in the final, handing the Kiwis their second defeat in the tournament. Earlier in the group stage, the hosts defeated Chinese Taipei (21-9) and Indonesia (21-14) to book their place in the title clash for a sixth consecutive time.

The tournament, which featured 12 elite men's and women's youth teams, showcased world-class 3x3 cager talent. Qatar men's triumph in yesterday's final raised their overall points tally to 520, bolstered by victories in the third and sixth stages, placed them in strong contention for a spot at the 3x3 FIBA World Cup which is to be held in Xiong'an, China in September.

On the other hand, New Zealand advanced to the final after defeating Philippines (18-16) and Singapore (21-19) in the Pool Stage.

The Kiwis topped the overall rankings with 560 points, claiming first place in four stages and runners-up spots in the remaining two. The Philippines secured third place in the standings with 420 points, followed by Singapore (325), Chinese Taipei (305), and Indonesia (300) in sixth spot after six rounds of intense action.

Team Qatar had the services of Nazar Mahmoud, Hamad Yassin Mousa, Zineeddine Bedri, and Mubarak Juma.

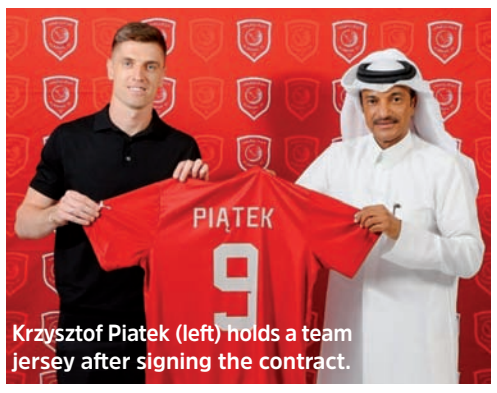
New Zealand captured the top honors in the women's division after edging Chinese Taipei 21-19 in the final. Despite not making to the final in the last round, the Philippines finished the series at the top with 530 points, followed by New Zealand and Chinese Taipei followed with 480 points each. Singapore (360), Indonesia (310), and Qatar (270) rounded out the table.

US Ambassador to Qatar H E Timmy Davis and QBF President Mohammed bin Saad Al Mughaiseeb, presented the trophies to the winners.

Following the highly successful tournament, the QBF President expressed his pride in the home team's performance, linking it to the Federation's focused efforts on youth development.

"We take great pride in the exceptional performance of our national youth team, which exemplifies the ongoing efforts and strategy implemented by the Association to enhance the 3x3 game at the youth level," Al Mughaiseeb said.

In recognition of his continued support for sport events in Qatar, Al Mughaiseeb presented a special token of appreciation to Ambassador H E Timmy Davis, also symbolizing the strong sporting and diplomatic ties between the two nations.



Krzysztof Piatek (left) holds a team jersey after signing the contract.

Al Duhail sign Polish striker Krzysztof Piatek

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Duhail SC announced the signing of Krzysztof Piatek on Monday, with the Polish striker to add firepower to the Qatar Stars League club.

Piatek, 29, joins Al Duhail from Basaksehir, having netted 21 goals in the 2024-25 season for the Turkish club.

Piatek will be a welcome addition for Al Duhail, who parted ways with all-time topscorer Michael Olunga on Saturday, with the Kenyan striker having netted 130 goals in his time with the club.

Piatek has extensive experience in European leagues, having previously played for Italian clubs AC Milan, Genoa and Fiorentina, and Hertha BSC in Germany. He has been capped 35 times by Poland, scoring 12 goals.

Al Duhail, who finished second in the Qatar Stars League 2024-25, will make a return to the AFC Champions League Elite 2025-26 after missing out on the last edition.

Coach Lopetegui believes 'Qatar can qualify'

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Julen Lopetegui is the new man in charge of Qatar, right as a crucial stage in Asian qualifying for the FIFA World Cup 26 is just around the corner.

With the third round drawing to a close, the former Spain and Real Madrid coach has taken the reins of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 hosts with Qatar sitting fourth in Group A and unable to secure a direct berth in the current phase.

Should they finish either third or fourth though that would send them through to the next round where half a dozen nations will scrap for a further two direct spots. An additional place at the global finals is then potentially available via the FIFA Play-Off Tournament so there's certainly plenty on the line for the Maroons.

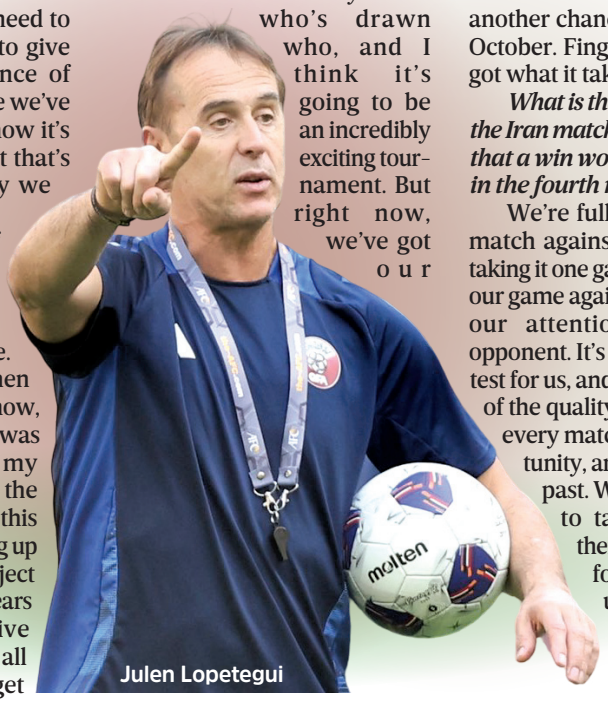
Ahead of Qatar's qualifiers against Iran and Uzbekistan, Lopetegui spoke to FIFA about his new coaching challenge.

FIFA: How do you feel about this new project with Qatar and how did it come about?

Julen Lopetegui: There's a moment when the people offering you the job and your own excitement and enthusiasm to take on the project come together perfectly. We know that we're taking over at a difficult time, and we know we're going to have to pull off something spectacular to qualify for the World Cup. And to compound matters, we're up against the two sides that currently sit first and second in the group.

We'll do everything in our power to give ourselves another shot at qualification in October, which is when the fourth round takes place in Asia. We need to give it our absolute all to give ourselves another chance of qualifying. Let's just hope we've got what it takes. We know it's not going to be easy, but that's one of the reasons why we decided to come here.

We've been aware of Qatar's football project for a long time. Several years ago in my career, I was in talks to come here. It didn't come off back then for various reasons, but now, as I mentioned before, it was the right moment in my career for me to take on the responsibility of leading this national team and heading up the country's football project for at least the next two years to come. It's a massive responsibility, and we're all chomping at the bit to get started. We're fully committed to the task, and have been working tirelessly for the past three weeks.



Julen Lopetegui

What will be your approach to the challenges ahead?

We're fully aware of the challenges that lie in wait. In December, we've got the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025, which is another hugely important tournament that's taking place on home soil. We already know who's drawn who, and I think it's going to be an incredibly exciting tournament. But right now, we've got our sights fully set on qualifying for the World Cup.

Qatar has never qualified for a World Cup through the qualifiers before, and it's a dream we're determined to fight for. It's within touching distance. We've got two games left to play, both of which will be incredibly difficult, and in quick succession. However, despite all the difficulties, we're determined to give it our best shot to earn ourselves another chance of qualifying in October. Fingers crossed we've got what it takes.

What is the feeling going into the Iran match at home knowing that a win would secure a place in the fourth round?

We're fully focused on our match against Iran. We're just taking it one game at a time. After our game against Iran, we'll turn our attention to our next opponent. It's going to be a stern test for us, and we're fully aware of the quality they possess. But every match is a new opportunity, and the past is in the past. We'll do our utmost to take the game to them and put in a performance that gives us a chance of beating them. Knowing how much is riding on this fixture, we'll be giving it everything we've got. We're not thinking about other team's fixtures. We're fully aware that Kyrgyz Republic's two games are very different prospects from ours, but we want to focus on ourselves without worrying about what other teams are doing.

How would it feel to qualify this team for the World Cup?

The prospect of playing at the World Cup is what really spurs us on. And also the wider vision for the national team's future development. We're hoping for the best, but we know it'll be a tough ask. But at the same time, it's the project itself that's really got the juices flowing amongst everyone - in terms of how the game in Qatar has developed over the past few years. There's no doubt in anyone's mind that this generation has achieved some very impressive things in the Asian Cup. However, generations come to an end, and now we need to turn our attention to starting the process again, which will be no mean feat. And while we do that, we'll be doing our best to compete, which is the most important thing in the short term. Right now, our short-term focus is on Iran. We need to make sure all the players stay focused and motivated. **(FIFA)**

Al Khor announce departure of Moroccan defender Rhaili

DOHA: Al Khor SC announced yesterday that they have parted ways with Moroccan defender Adil Rhaili following the end of his contract for the 2024-2025 season.

In an official statement, the club expressed gratitude to the player for his tenure with the team, during which he played a pivotal role in securing Al Khor's promotion to the First Division before the club was relegated once again at the end of the past season to the Second Division.

The 34-year-old Rhaili joined the club in the early 2023-2024 season.

After concluding his two-season stint with Umm Salal SC, he went on to make 22 appearances for Al Khor SC in the Ooredoo Stars League.

Al Khor SC concluded last season's Ooredoo Stars League campaign in 12th and final place, with a total of 13 points, resulting in their return to the Qatari Second Division. — ***QNA***

Former finalist Kyrgios out of Wimbledon with injury

SYDNEY: The 2022 Wimbledon finalist Nick Kyrgios said yesterday that he will miss this year's tournament and the grass-court season after "a small setback" on his latest injury return.

The 30-year-old Australian has played very little tennis over the last two years because of various injuries, notably a wrist problem that required surgery.

In March at the Miami Open he won his first singles match since 2022 but he pulled out of the ongoing French Open, where he had been down to play men's doubles, with a knee injury.

"I've hit a small setback in my recovery and unfortunately won't make it back for grass season this year," he wrote on Instagram.

Kyrgios, whose undoubted talent has often been overshadowed by his fragile temperament, added: "This is just a bump in the road though and I'm already working hard to get back stronger than ever."

Kyrgios reached the final at Wimbledon three years ago before going down in four sets to Novak Djokovic. The third Grand Slam of the year starts on June 30. — ***AFP***

'Amazing' Alcaraz cruises into French Open last four

PARIS: Reigning champion Carlos Alcaraz glided into the semi-finals of Roland Garros yesterday, blowing away American 12th seed Tommy Paul for the loss of just five games in the night session on Court Philippe Chatrier.

The Spaniard needed just one hour 34 minutes to dismantle former world number nine Paul 6-0, 6-1, 6-4 and set up a last-four meeting with Italy's Lorenzo Musetti.

Musetti, seeded eighth, earlier beat Paul's compatriot and 15th seed Frances Tiafoe in four sets.

It will be the third time Alcaraz and Musetti meet this clay-court season.

Alcaraz has dominated that series, beating the Italian in the final in Monte Carlo before also stopping him in the last four on his way to the Rome title. And the 22-year-old's blistering performance under the lights on centre court in Paris will have many backing him to make it three from three against Musetti as he seeks to defend his title.

"It was, I could close my eyes and everything went in, my feeling today was amazing. Today was one of those matches where everything went in, I'm just pleased with everything," said Alcaraz.


Spain's Carlos Alcaraz plays a backhand return to US Tommy Paul.

Alcaraz fired 40 winners on his way to victory over Paul for just 22 unforced errors as he emphatically put inconsistent displays in the previous rounds behind him.

"This kind of match is never easy," he said. "I've played Tommy many times and he's beat me twice."

Despite previous success against Alcaraz, it took the 28-year-old American eight games to get on the scoreboard as his opponent raced out of the blocks, mixing powerful groundstrokes with perfectly-weighted drop-shots and lobs.

Paul put up determined resistance in the third set but couldn't deny Alcaraz, who broke in the ninth game before holding to love for victory.

"I know you wanted to watch more tennis," an apologetic Alcaraz told the crowd on centre court. "I have to say sorry for that. But I had to do my work."

Paul has now lost his last four meetings with Alcaraz, including at the same venue last year in the last eight of the Olympic Games.

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN: QUARTER-FINALS
Lorenzo Musetti (ITA x8) bt Frances Tiafoe (USA x15) 6-2, 4-6, 7-5, 6-2
Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x2) bt Tommy Paul (USA x12) 6-0, 6-1, 6-4
WOMEN: QUARTER-FINALS
Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x1) bt Zheng Qinwen (CHN x8) 7-6 (7/3), 6-3
Iga Swiatek (POL x5) bt Elina Svitolina (UKR x13) 6-1, 7-5

Earlier, three-time defending champion Iga Swiatek set up a blockbuster semi-final clash with world number one Aryna Sabalenka, as Lorenzo Musetti advanced to a potential last-four meeting with men's holder Carlos Alcaraz.

Swiatek, the fifth seed, got past Ukrainian Elina Svitolina 6-1, 7-5, after top women's seed Sabalenka won a tense quarter-final against Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen, 7-6 (7/3), 6-3.

Eighth-seed Musetti won 6-2, 4-6, 7-5, 6-2 against 15th seed Frances Tiafoe after over two hours and 45 minutes of battle on Court Philippe Chatrier.

The 23-year-old achieved his second Grand Slam semi-final after Wimbledon last year. — ***AFP***

Coach Inzaghi to leave Inter after Champions League thumping

ROME: Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi **(pictured)** is leaving after four years by "mutual agreement", the club announced yesterday, as Italian media reported he was moving to Saudi Arabia.

"The club and Simone Inzaghi are parting ways. This is the decision taken by mutual agreement," Inter said in a statement.

Both Inter and Inzaghi said the decision had been made at a meeting involving the coach and club President Giuseppe Marotta yesterday.



The parting came just days after Saturday's 5-0 thumping by Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final.

Talk had already been swirling about his exit, and last month Inzaghi played down rumours about a two-year deal with Saudi Pro League club Al-Hilal worth €50m. Italian media said yesterday this reported had been confirmed.

Inzaghi took over Inter in 2021 and had a contract until 2026.

The 49-year-old guided the club to one Serie A title - Inter's 20th - and two Italian Cups. He led the team to two Champions League finals in the past three seasons but lost both.

On track to repeat the treble heroics of 2010 just a few weeks ago, Inter ended the season trophyless after falling away in each competition.

In its statement, the club said Inzaghi's management was "characterised by great passion, accompanied by professionalism and dedication".

His trophies had "brought the club back to the top of Italian and European football", it said.

Marotta thanked him "for the work done, for the passion shown and also for the sincerity in today's discussion, which led to the common decision to separate our paths". "Only when we have fought together to achieve success day by day, can we have a frank dialogue like the one that happened today," he said.

In a separate statement, Inzaghi thanked the players, managers and staff, but most of all the fans, adding: "I will never forget you." — ***AFP***

Kohli fulfils IPL dream as RCB clinch maiden title

AHMEDABAD: Batting legend Virat Kohli top-scored for Royal Challengers Bengaluru as they beat Punjab Kings by six runs yesterday to win their first Indian Premier League T20 title.

Kohli's 43 from 35 balls at the top of the order set up Bengaluru for an imposing total of 190-9 which was one big blow too many for a Punjab side that battled until the end, finishing on 184-7.

More than 91,000 fans packed into the 132,000-capacity stadium in Ahmedabad, a sea of Bengaluru's red and Kohli's jersey number 18 dominating the stands as chants of "Kohli, Kohli" rang out.

They celebrated noisily when Kohli and RCB clinched victory for the first time in the 18 years of the IPL, their three previous finals having all ended in defeat.

The 36-year-old Kohli, one of India's all-time greats in all formats of the game, collapsed on the ground after the win and then got up to be hugged by his teammates as the crowd celebrated their hero.

Punjab faltered in their chase after left-arm spinner Krunal Pandya took 2-17 from his four overs.

Shashank Singh hit a valiant 61 not out and finished with three sixes and a four off Australian fast bowler Josh Hazlewood who defended 29 runs in the final over.

Hazlewood, who took 3-21 against Punjab in last week's qualifier win after recovering from a shoulder injury, struck first to send back left-handed Priyansh Arya for 24 with Phil Salt taking a stunning catch at the ropes. Impact substitute Prabhsimran Singh was the next to go off Pandya but the Bengaluru crowd went wild when Romario Shepherd had skipper Shreyas Iyer caught behind for one.



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Indian Premier League title.

Pandya stuck again to cut short Australian wicketkeeper-batter Josh Inglis' stay on 39 and Bengaluru seized momentum and Shashank's late blitz was not enough.

Bengaluru had the perfect start as 'King Kohli' dug in. Far from his fluent best, he only struck three fours during his innings but in the end it turned out to be key.

He lost opening partner Salt for 16 when New Zealand quick Kyle Jamieson struck in his first over to have the England batter caught in the deep off Iyer. Kohli anchored the innings, sharing important partnerships with Mayank Agarwal, who made 24, and then skipper Rajat Patidar, who hit 26.

But Punjab kept chipping away with wickets as leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal got Agarwal and Jamieson trapped the captain lbw.

Kohli's vigil ended when he mistimed a rising delivery from Afghanistan pace bowler Azmatullah Omarzai for a caught and bowled, the disappointment etched across his face mirrored by his fans.

Jamieson took his third wicket to cut short Liam Livingstone's rampant 25 off 15 balls.

Wickets kept tumbling as wicketkeeper-batsman Jitesh Sharma fell for a 10-ball 24 and Romario Shepherd for 17 off nine balls.

Left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh took three wickets including Shepherd in the 20th over and gave away just three runs.

Bengaluru had defeated Punjab in the first playoff to book their fourth final. The 18th edition of the world's richest cricket league ended nine days late due to a pause because of the military conflict between India and Pakistan.

BRIEF SCORES

Royal Challengers Bengaluru 190 for 9 *(Kohli 43, Arshdeep 3-40, Jamieson 3-48)* ***beat Punjab Kings 184 for 7*** *(Shashank 61*, Inglis 39, Krunal 2-17, Bhuvneshwar 2-38)* ***by six runs*** — ***AFP***

Fernandes confirms he rejected Saudi move to stay at Man United

MUNICH: Bruno Fernandes confirmed yesterday he rejected a huge offer from Saudi Arabia to stay at Manchester United, saying he wanted to "continue to play at the highest level".

Speaking to media in a Portugal camp ahead of Wednesday's Nations League semi-final against Germany in Munich, Fernandes confirmed he received an "exciting offer" from Al Hilal but wanted to be part of Ruben Amorim's rebuild at Old Trafford.

Reports said Al Hilal were willing to pay United up to £100m ($135m) for the 30-year-old Portugal international.

"The president of Al Hilal called me and asked me if I wanted to move there," Fernandes confirmed, saying the club "waited for me to think about my future".

"I talked to the gaffer and he asked me not to go," Fernandes revealed, adding: "Man United said they didn't want to sell me.

"They said if I wanted to go I could but they didn't need the money." The player said a transfer would have been "easy" with several Portuguese players already in Saudi Arabia, including Cristiano Ronaldo, Joao Cancelo and Ruben Neves, but added: "I want to play at the highest possible level.

"I want to play major competitions. I know I still can and I want to be happy doing the thing I love the most.

"For better or worse, this is how I see football and I'm passionate about football and this is the decision I've made."

United endured their worst finish of the Premier League era, finishing 15th. They also lost the Europa League final to Tottenham.

United captain Fernandes was one of the few players to emerge with credit from a disastrous season, scoring 19 goals and making 19 assists across all competitions.

Former United captain Gary Neville, now a Sky Sports pundit, said the development was "significant".

"I think that there was an element of this situation that meant United getting that level of money, for someone of Bruno's age, obviously, you couldn't say that it would have been a bad deal," he said.

The club have already signed Brazil forward Matheus Cunha from Wolves and are being heavily linked with Brentford forward Bryan Mbeumo.

Departures could include Jadon Sancho, Marcus Rashford, Antony and Alejandro Garnacho.



Fernandes has made 290 appearances and scored 98 goals for United since his £47m move from Sporting Lisbon in January 2020. — ***AFP***

Pakistan to play in Sri Lanka at India-hosted Women's World Cup

NEW DELHI: Pakistan will play their matches at this year's Women's Cricket World Cup in Sri Lanka under an International Cricket Council deal that allows them to avoid playing in host nation India.

The refusal of India to travel to Pakistan for the men's Champions Trophy earlier this year resulted in the ICC introducing neutral venues to tournaments hosted by either of the neighbouring countries. India and Pakistan were last month involved in a four-day military conflict, their worst since 1999, before a ceasefire was agreed.

Sri Lanka's Colombo will join Indian host cities Bengaluru, Guwahati, Indore and Visakhapatnam in staging matches from September 30 until the final of the 50-over tournament on November 2, the ICC announced late on Monday.

Colombo will be Pakistan's home for seven group games. The first semi-final will take place in either Guwahati or Colombo, if Pakistan progress that far, on October 29 with the second semi-final a day later in Bengaluru.

The final will be in either Bengaluru or Colombo on Sunday, November 2.

"The venues for the knockouts are dependent on Pakistan qualifying", the ICC said in a statement.

"Two alternative venues have been identified for one semi-final and the final." Eight teams will contest the World Cup -- Australia, Bangladesh, England, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa and Sri Lanka. Australia beat England by 71 runs in the final of the last Women's World Cup, hosted by New Zealand in 2022. — ***AFP***

England beat West Indies to seal 3-0 ODI series sweep



England's Jamie Smith celebrates after hitting a half century.

LONDON: England thrashed the West Indies by seven wickets on the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern Method in the third one-day international at the Oval on Tuesday as they completed a 3-0 series clean sweep.

England, set a revised target of 246 in 40 overs in a rain-affected match, finished on 246-3 with more than 10 overs remaining.

Jamie Smith launched the run-chase with a dynamic 64, his maiden ODI fifty coming on the opener's Surrey home ground.

Victory meant Harry Brook led England to a clean sweep in his first series as permanent white-ball captain after they had lost their seven previous ODIs, culminating in a woeful exit from this year's Champions Trophy in Pakistan.

Brook was there at the finish with 26 not out.

But it was Jos Buttler, Brook's predecessor as captain, who ended the match in emphatic fashion with a six off fast bowler Jayden Seals that capped his unbeaten 41 off 20 balls.

Earlier, West Indies posted 251-9 off their 40 overs, with recalled all-rounder Sherfane Rutherford top-scoring with 70 and Gudakesh Motie making 63.

Leg-spinner Adil Rashid was the pick of England's bowlers with 3-40 in eight overs.

Brief scores:

West Indies: 251-9, 40 overs *(S Rutherford 70, G Motie 63; A Rashid 3-40)* ***England: 246-3, 29.4 overs*** *(J Smith 64, B Duckett 58)* — ***AFP***

Leverkusen sign goalie Flekken

MUNICH: Bayer Leverkusen have signed Netherlands goalkeeper Mark Flekken from Premier League side Brentford, the Bundesliga club announced yesterday.

German media reported Leverkusen paid €10m ($11.5m) to secure the 31-year-old's services.

Flekken, who signed a deal running to 2028, will likely take over from current Leverkusen goalie Lukas Hradecky, who captained the side to their historic unbeaten league and cup double in 2023-24.

In a statement, Flekken said he was taking "another special step in my career", adding that Leverkusen are "a top German club with high national and European goals".

Leverkusen are expected to undergo a rebuild this off-season, with former Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag having already replaced the Real Madrid-bound Xabi Alonso as coach.

Centre-back Jonathan Tah signed on a free transfer with German champions Bayern Munich, while midfielder Florian Wirtz is in talks to join wing-back Jeremie Frimpong in moving to Premier League winners Liverpool.

The Dutch 'keeper has Bundesliga experience, having spent five years at Freiburg before making the switch to Brentford in 2023. — ***AFP***

Arshad stars as Black Hawks clinch QCA Cup

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: A breezy half century from Adnan Irshad and a four-wicket haul by Awais Riaz propelled Black Hawks to a convincing 56-run victory over Arabian Knights in the final to lift the QCA Cup on Saturday.

The winners were honoured by Abdullah Al Abdullah, Director of Domestic Cricket, Qatar Cricket Association (QCA).

Adnan, who made 37-ball 51 (2x4s, 3x6s) shared an opening stand of 45 runs with Jamshaid Anwar (33) and a 70-run second-wicket association with Syed Kazim (35).

Imdad Hussain (17) and Zaigham Abbas (26) later added to Black Hawks' total of 181 for 5 in 20 overs.

Chasing the target, Arabian Knights were bowled out for 125 runs in 18.3 overs.

Riaz, who opened the bowling with Zabih Ullah, was the most successful returning figures of 3.3-1-13-4.

Kazim claimed two wickets while Ullah, Abdullah Shahzad and Saad Abbasi claimed a wicket each.

Wasim Muhammad made the highest score of 23 runs for Arabian Knights.

Adnan Irshad was named Man of the Match.



QCA Domestic Cricket Director Abdullah Al Abdullah poses for a photo with the victorious Black Hawks players and officials.