Alcaraz overcomes Rinderknech test to reach last 16 in Doha



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return against France's Arthur Rinderknech during their men's singles match in Doha yesterday. AFP

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Carlos Alcaraz made a victorious start to his Qatar ExxonMobil Open campaign at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha yesterday, withstanding a challenge from Arthur Rinderknech to advance with a 6-4, 7-6(5) win.

Playing his first match since lifting the Australian Open title and becoming the youngest player to complete a career Grand Slam, the world No.1 was tested throughout yesterday's Round of 32 clash by World No. 30 Rinderknech.

Alcaraz saved two set points on serve in a tense second set before prevailing in the tie-break to secure his 150th tour-level hard-court win.

"Well, I think it was a great level," Alcaraz said of his opponent after the match.

"It's always, I'm going to say, a nightmare, playing the first round against Rinderknech, to be honest. But I think we put up great points. I'm just happy with the way that I performed today. It's a positive first round, and hopefully, keep it going in the next round," the 22-year-old said.

"All our matches are always really tight," Alcaraz explained after extending his head-to-head record to 5-0 against the Frenchman.

QATAR EXXONMOBIL OPEN RESULTS

Andrey Rublev (RUS x5) bt Jesper De Jong (NED) 6-4, 6-3
Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x1) bt Arthur Rinderknech (FRA) 6-4, 7-6(5)
Karen Khachanov (RUS x7) bt Shintaro Mochizuki (JPN) 6-1, 3-6, 6-4
Jiri Lehecka (CZE x8) bt Jenson Brooksby (USA) 6-3, 6-3
Zizou Bergs (BEL) bt Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard (FRA) 6-3, 6-7, 6-4
Marton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Hady Habib (LBN WC) 6-3, 6-3
Quentin Halys (FRA LL) bt Pablo Carreno Busta (ESP Q) 4-6, 7-5, 6-3
Fabian Marozsan (HUN) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 6-3, 6-1
Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) bt Moez Echargui (TUN WC) 6-4, 6-4
Zhizhen Zhang (CHN PR) bt Roberto Carballes Baena (ESP Q) 6-4, 6-4

"He has an annoying game. With the serve, trying to go all the time to the net, he's really big, and at the net, he covers a lot of the court. It's really difficult making the passing shots," Alcaraz said.

Alcaraz praised the atmosphere at the state-of-the-art venue, noting he enjoyed the support.

"It was great. It wasn't full, but the people were great. I'm grateful and happy with the support. I know it's Ramadan right now, so probably it's more difficult for people to come to the matches. But I'm happy to see a lot of people coming to the event."

Alcaraz, who extended his flawless start to the 2026 season to 8-0 with yesterday's win, stressed that his ambitions remain high.

"There are a lot of Masters 1000s, there are three Grand Slams, the Masters, the Davis Cup," he said.

"I'll try not to have too many losses this year. I'll try to participate in as many tournaments as possible. I'm really ambitious. I don't want to lose."

At the Doha Round of 16, Alcaraz will take on another French opponent, world No.60 Valentin Royer, who overcame Pierre Hugues Herbert in the first round.

Former Doha champion Karen Khachanov of Russia also advanced.

Seventh seed Khachanov was pushed to three sets before overcoming Japanese lucky loser Shintaro Mochizuki 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 to book his place in the next round.

Meanwhile, Jiri Lehecka, who knocked out Alcaraz a year ago in Doha, continued his solid form with a straight-sets win over American Jenson Brooksby, 6-3, 6-3.

Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas also advanced comfortably, defeating Tunisian wild card Moez Echargui 6-4, 6-4 to set up a meeting with 2023 champion Daniil Medvedev in what promises to be one of the key clashes of the round.

CHI Al Shaqab gallops into action with world's best

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: World-class equestrian sport continues in Doha as the star-studded Concours Hippique International (CHI) Al Shaqab Presented by Longines gets underway today. The prestigious event brings together the world's best horse-and-rider combinations, promising four thrilling days of competition at Al Shaqab.

CHI Al Shaqab marks the sixth round of the ongoing Doha Equestrian Tour, following four rounds of the inaugural H H The Father Amir's Prix in January and last weekend's H H The Amir's Sword.

Staged in only five destinations worldwide, CHI events – featuring an integrated format combining show jumping, dressage, and para dressage in a single world-class showcase – rank among the most prestigious fixtures on the international equestrian calendar. Al Shaqab, hosting its 13th edition this year, remains the only venue in the Middle East and Asia to stage this competition.

This year's edition carries a total prize purse of €1,373,000, with over 300 riders from 40 countries taking part in the showjumping events across CSIY-B, CSICh-B, CSI1*, CSI3* and CSI5* competitions. The dressage programme includes CDI5* competition featuring 14 riders and 14 horses, as well as CDI1* with 12 riders and 12 horses, complemented by CPEDI3* para dressage, which will see 12 riders partnered with 12 horses.



Assistant Deputy Director of the Doha Equestrian Tour Sheikh Talal bin Khalid Al-Thani, Director of Communications and Public Relations at Visit Qatar Jassim Al Mahmoud, American para dressage rider Fiona Howard and Director of Marketing and Communications Abdullah Al Qashouti pose for a group photo after the press conference.

"CHI Al Shaqab Presented by Longines reflects our continued commitment to delivering world-class equestrian sport that reinforces Doha's position on the international calendar," Assistant Deputy Director of the Doha Equestrian Tour Sheikh Talal bin Khalid Al-Thani told a pre-event press conference yesterday.

"With a total prize fund of €1,373,000 and a strong international field across all three disciplines, the programme builds towards a Grand Prix weekend, headlined by Saturday's CSI5* Grand Prix presented by Longines."

Director of Communications and Public Relations at Visit Qatar Jassim Al Mahmoud, said: "CHI Al Shaqab Presented by Longines reflects Visit Qatar's continued commitment to supporting world-class international events that reinforce Qatar's position as a global destination for sport and excellence. Equestrian holds a special place in Qatar's cultural heritage and national identity, and this championship provides a valuable platform to showcase that legacy to international audiences."

American para dressage rider Fiona Howard hailed Al Shaqab as one of the world's premier equestrian venues.

"CHI Al Shaqab is always my favourite competition of the year. This is my third time attending, and the weather is incredible, and the people here are so welcoming. I love bringing my horses here. I brought a young horse this time, and I'm very excited to be back in Doha. I want to give my horse a very special experience," said Howard, who won the Para Grand Prix A (Grade II) at CHI Al Shaqab 2023.

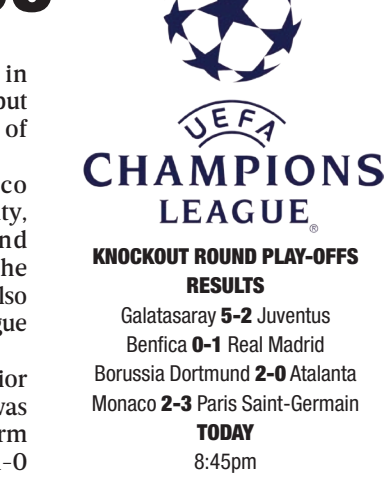
As the Doha Equestrian Tour continues, Britain's Scott Brash (GBR) leads the CSI4*/5* standings on 199 points, followed by compatriot Harry Charles on 144, and France's Megane Moissonnier on 113. Qatari riders lead the CSI1* standings, with Saad Ahmed S A Al Saad on 66 points, ahead of Hussain Said A M Haidan on 43, and Ali Omar A H Al Ansari on 32.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS: WHAT NOT TO MISS

Across four days, CHI Al Shaqab Presented by Longines builds toward Grand Prix weekend across disciplines, from para dressage to five-star show jumping.

Thursday brings a major para dressage milestone as the programme features the CPEDI3* Para Grand Prix A, setting the tone for the para dressage storyline of the week.

Friday continues the para and dressage build-up with the CPEDI3* Para Grand Prix B and the CDI5* Grand Prix, while the show jumping programme adds a crowd favorite: the CSI3* 1.30m Jump & Drive.
A signature spectator-friendly format, Jump & Drive delivers fast-paced entertainment.
The rider first completes the jumping phase on horseback, then switches immediately into a car and races through a driving course with obstacles. Jump & Drive is a format that blends athletic precision, speed, and split-second decision-making across two disciplines in one class.



Saturday is the peak day, with multiple headline finals across disciplines: the CDI5* Grand Prix Special, the CPEDI3* Para Grand Prix Freestyle*, and the CDI5* CHI AL SHAQAB Grand Prix Freestyle presented by Longines. In show jumping, the day culminates in three Grand Prix showdowns: CSI1* Grand Prix 1.30m (Jump-Off), CSI3* Grand Prix 1.50m (Jump-Off), and the feature class CSI5* CHI Al Shaqab Grand Prix presented by Longines 1.60m (Jump-Off).

Doue inspires PSG to comeback win in Monaco

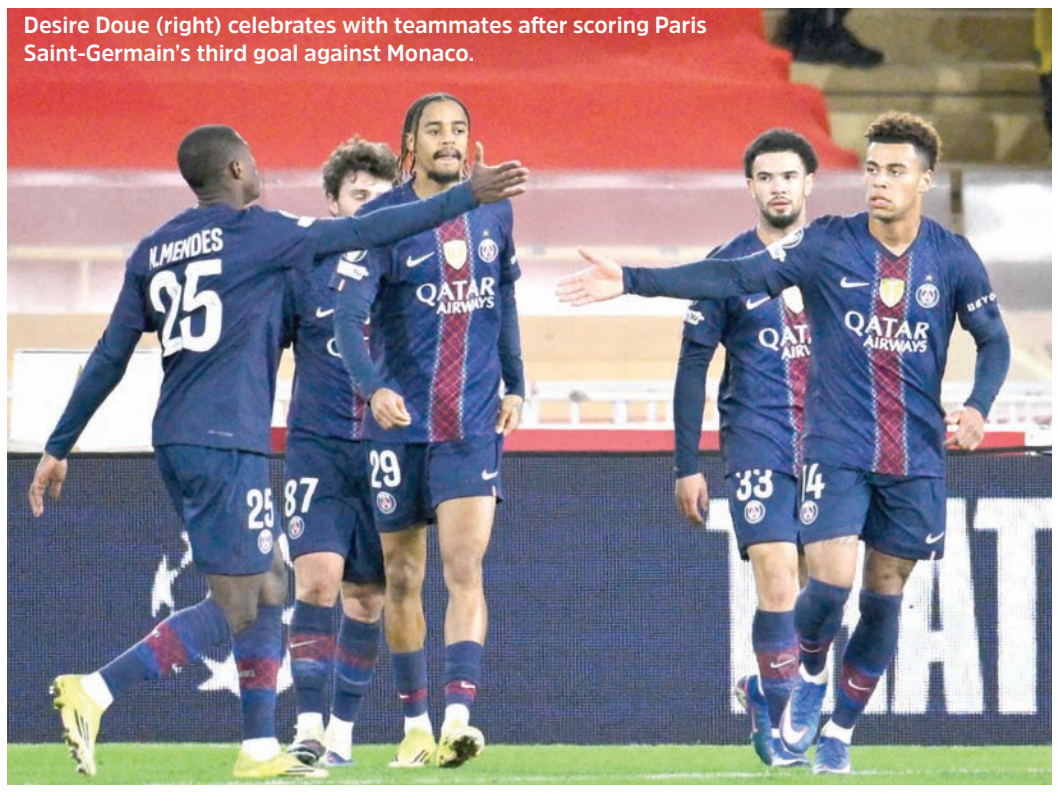
MONACO: Paris Saint-Germain recovered from a shambolic start as Desire Doue inspired a comeback from two goals down to beat Monaco 3-2 in the principality in the first leg of their Champions League knockout phase play-off tie yesterday.

United States star Folarin Balogun opened the scoring after just 55 seconds and found the net again on 18 minutes to put Monaco in control against their French Ligue 1 rivals at the Stade Louis II.

Vitinha then missed a chance for the reigning European champions to reduce the deficit when he had a penalty saved and last year's Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele came off injured before the half-hour mark, but his replacement Doue sparked the comeback.

He pulled one back and then helped set up Achraf Hakimi for the equaliser just before the break, and Monaco then had Aleksandr Golovin sent off right at the start of the second half. Doue then scored the winner on 67 minutes.

It was a remarkable game and the result keeps the tie alive going into the return leg in Paris next Wednesday, but Luis Enrique's PSG side are now strong favourites to seal a place in the last 16 in front of their own fans.



Desire Doue (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring Paris Saint-Germain's third goal against Monaco.

PSG came into this game having been knocked off top spot in the French league last weekend following a defeat at Rennes, with Lens replacing them at the summit.

However, they are a huge 20 points clear of Monaco, who find themselves languishing in eighth due to an inability to put together a consistent run of form.

Nevertheless, Monaco notably held Manchester City, Tottenham Hotspur and Juventus at home during the league phase in Europe and also won 1-0 at home to PSG in Ligue 1 in November.

Meanwhile, Vinicius Junior scored the winning goal and was at the centre of a racism storm as Real Madrid beat Benfica 1-0 in the play-off first leg in Lisbon.

The match was halted for more than 10 minutes early in the second period after Brazilian Vinicius seemed to accuse Benfica's Argentine midfielder Gianluca Prestianni of calling him "mono" -- the Spanish word for monkey -- leading to French referee Francois Letexier applying the racism protocol.

Earlier in Istanbul, Dutch midfielder Noa Lang scored a brace as Galatasaray thumped Juventus 5-2 in a pulsating contest in the first leg of playoff.

In a nerve-shredding atmosphere, Luciano Spalletti's Juventus actually led 2-1 at half-time after Teun Koopmeiners replied to Brazilian midfielder Gabriel Sara's opener with a brace of his own. But Colombian full-back Juan Cabal was dismissed for two bookings in a calamitous second half as Lang's brace and goals from Davinson Sanchez and Sacha Boey sunk the Old Lady, who faced a miserable return to Turin. — *AFP*

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

KNOCKOUT ROUND PLAY-OFFS RESULTS
Galatasaray **5-2** Juventus
Benfica **0-1** Real Madrid
Borussia Dortmund **2-0** Atalanta
Monaco **2-3** Paris Saint-Germain

TODAY
8:45pm
Qarabag vs Newcastle United
11:00pm
Bodo / Glimt vs Inter Milan
Club Brugge vs Atletico Madrid
Olympiakos vs Bayer Leverkusen



Qatar Olympic Academy celebrates Sports Law Master's graduates

Under the patronage of Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) and Qatar Olympic Academy President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani, and in the presence of QOC First Vice President Mohamed bin Yousef Al Mana, Second Vice President Dr. Thani bin Abdulrahman Al Kuwari and QOC Secretary General and Vice President of the Qatar Olympic Academy Jassim bin Rashid Al Buenain, the Academy celebrated the graduation of students at the QOC headquarters. The ceremony witnessed the graduation of a new cohort from the Master's Program in Sports Law. The program is delivered in cooperation with the University of Lleida in Spain and is accredited by the International Olympic Committee, the Olympic Council of Asia, the International Olympic Academy, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), and the QOC. The degree is also officially recognised by the Qatar Education and Higher Education Ministry.

ACL Two: Al Ahli aim to secure last-8 berth against Sepahan

THE PENINSULA



DOHA: Al Ahli SC will aim to capitalise on home advantage today in the second leg of the AFC Champions League (ACL) Two Round of 16 against Iran's Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan SC at Al Thumama Stadium.

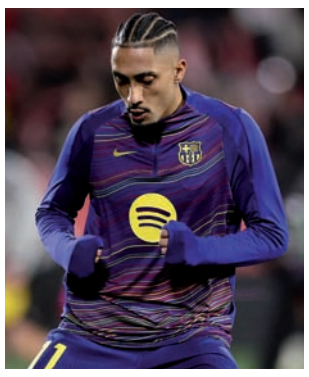
The Qatari side heads into the match on level terms after a dramatic 2-2 draw in the first leg, thanks to Erik Exposito's stoppage-time goal.

Speaking ahead of the crucial fixture, Al Ahli coach Younes Ali **(pictured)** said: "We will play a very important and more complicated match than the first leg, and we must enter it with full focus."

"Sepahan is physically strong and technically well-organised, so it will be a difficult challenge. Our players are prepared and will give their best to secure qualification."

Defender William Ekong added: "We realise the difficulty of the match because the opposing team is strong and organised, and winning against them requires a high degree of concentration."

In the first leg, Al Ahli fell behind early but fought back, with Exposito's late strike rescuing a point. Sepahan, meanwhile, will be eager to make up for letting a first-leg advantage slip in the dying moments.



Barca's Raphinha blasts refereeing double standards

BARCELONA: Barcelona winger Raphinha **(pictured)** lashed out at perceived refereeing double standards in La Liga yesterday after his side fell to a 2-1 defeat at Girona.

The Catalan giants were left upset at a decision to allow Girona's late derby winner on Monday to stand after what they considered to be a foul on Barca defender Jules Kounde in the build-up.

Barcelona issued a statement on Saturday complaining about inconsistencies in arbitration, following a controversially disallowed goal in their 4-0 Copa del Rey defeat by Atletico Madrid last week.

"We have a lot to improve, but not just us," wrote Raphinha on Instagram.

"It's very difficult when the rules are different if they are for you or against you, but if we have to play against everyone to win, then fine, we will do it."

Defeat by Girona left champions Barcelona second, two points behind Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. — ***AFP***

Al Sadd join Al Duhail in Round of 16, Al Gharafa exit

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Sadd SC secured a place in the AFC Champions League Elite Round of 16 despite a 4-1 defeat to Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad Club at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

The big victory for Al Ittihad still allowed Al Sadd to claim the final Round of 16 spot from the West Zone, edging out fellow Qatari side Al Gharafa SC, who were eliminated after a 2-0 loss to Tractor FC.

Qatar's other representative, Al Duhail SC, also advanced to the last 16 following yesterday's outcomes. Al Duhail finished seventh in the West Zone with eight points, edging Al Sadd on goal difference.

Al Sadd entered the match needing a win to advance, while Al Ittihad had already secured qualification.

The Saudi side dominated early, testing goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham before breaking the deadlock in the 10th minute. Houssem Aouar pounced on a rebound to slot home, putting Al Sadd on the back foot. Eight minutes later, Youssef En-Nesyri doubled the lead, evading defenders and firing through Barsham's legs.


Action during match between Al Sadd and Al Ittihad.

Pedro Miguel inadvertently added to Al Sadd's woes with an own goal in the 33rd minute. Rafa Mujica pulled one back for Al Sadd before halftime, but Stephane Keller sealed Al Ittihad's 4-1 victory in the 63rd minute.

Despite the defeat, Al Sadd's previous results and goal difference were sufficient to secure Round of 16 qualification, ensuring Qatar had two representatives advancing to the knockout stage.

"We are happy to qualify. Two months ago, the team was almost out of the tournament, and now we have made it. We will reassess and prepare for what comes next. Saudi clubs are currently the strongest in the AFC Champions League, which is natural," Al Sadd coach Roberto Mancini said after his team qualified for the Round of 16.

He added on yesterday's 4-1 defeat to Al Ittihad: "We were not happy with the result, but the team overcame the early difficulties and secured qualification despite a tough match against a strong opponent."

Al Gharafa SC's campaign, however, ended in disappointment in 10th place with six points. Facing Tractor FC at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, the Cheetahs needed a win to keep their hopes alive but were controlled by the Iranian side for much of the match.

Tractor broke the deadlock in the 61st minute after Al Gharafa failed to clear a rebound, with Mahdi Hashemnezhad finishing clinically.

The visitors then doubled their advantage in the 81st minute through Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh, leaving Al Gharafa unable to respond and confirming their exit from the competition.

GCCL: Al Rayyan top Group B with win over Al Nahda

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Rayyan yesterday claimed the top spot in Group B at the AGCFF Gulf Club Champions League (GCCL) after a 3-1 victory over Oman's Al Nahda in a match held at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan, concluding the group stage fixtures.

The win lifted Al Rayyan's tally to 12 points, confirming their position at the summit of Group B and setting up a semi-final clash against the runner-up from Group A.

Meanwhile, Al Nahda ended their campaign on seven points and exited the tournament after Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia defeated Al Tadhamon Hadramout of Yemen 13-0 to claim second place in the group.

The match opened at a brisk pace, with Al Rayyan asserting control early.

Ahmed Alaaeldin broke the deadlock in the 21st minute with a composed finish inside the box, giving the hosts the lead. Al Rayyan continued to dominate possession and created several chances.

Roger Guedes doubled the advantage in the 55th minute with a well-placed strike that left the Al Nahda goalkeeper helpless.

Al Nahda fought back, and Messouke Oloumou capitalised on a defensive lapse in the 63rd minute to pull one back, injecting hope into the visitors.

However, Al Rayyan responded quickly through substitute Aleksandar Mitrovic, who sealed the 3-1 victory in the 71st minute with a precise finish after a swift counterattack, effectively ending the contest.

Zakho club of Iraq and UAE's Al Ain advanced to the semi-finals of the competition from Group A.


Al Rayyan players celebrate during the match.

Australia and Ireland out of T20 World Cup as Zimbabwe qualify after washout

KANDY: The 2021 champions Australia were knocked out of the T20 World Cup yesterday, with Zimbabwe qualifying for the Super Eights after their match against Ireland was washed out without a ball being bowled in Kandy.

Zimbabwe joined Sri Lanka as qualifiers from Group B and will move on to face the West Indies, India and South Africa in the next phase. Ireland were also eliminated.

Persistent drizzle all day at the Pallekelle stadium kept the covers on and the umpires finally called it off at 5:30 pm local time (1200 GMT) with no prospect of beginning the minimum five-over match before the 6:10 pm cut-off time.

Australia, who had been beaten by Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, needed an Ireland victory to keep their hopes alive.

Zimbabwe are now on an unassailable five points with a game to still to come, while Ireland are third on three points.

Australia, on two points, have one game remaining against Oman on Friday, but cannot overtake Zimbabwe.

Australia had a shambolic build-up to the tournament They lost leading pace bowlers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood to injury, while captain Mitchell Marsh missed the first two games after being hit in the groin in training and suffering testicular bleeding Test great

Steve Smith was left out despite being in terrific form top of the order in the Big Bash League and his expertise in playing against spin bowling.

He flew in as cover last week and was formally added to the Australia squad at the weekend.

But then he was left out for the must-win game against Sri Lanka on Monday which saw an Australia middle-order collapse as they lost by eight wickets.

Zimbabwe captain Sikander Raza hailed his side's achievement in reaching the last eight, but warned there were tougher battles to come.


New Zealand's Glenn Phillips (left) plays a shot during match against Canada.

"We have come this far. We will celebrate but we have a game against Sri Lanka to come," said Raza.

"This is only a tick in the box and this is not the only thing that we set out for. Everyone loves an underdog story."

Ireland skipper Lorcan Tucker was downcast after his side did not get to play.

"Obviously very disappointed to go out in this fashion, but completely uncontrollable," said Tucker.

"Our batting failed. There were big moments in the tournament particularly against Sri Lanka when we dropped so many catches.

"Hopefully, we will handle these tough situations differently moving forward."

New Zealand cruise into Super Eights

Meanwhile, in Chennai, India, New Zealand sealed their qualification to the next phase of the T20 World Cup with an eight-wicket thumping of Canada yesterday.

Chasing 174 to win, New Zealand were never in trouble and reached 176-2 with almost five overs to spare.

Glenn Phillips was on 76 not out at the end with Rachin Ravindra unbeaten on 59.

Nepal sign off with win over Scotland

In Mumbai, Dipendra Singh Airee hit an unbeaten 50 as Nepal saved their best for last to end their T20 World Cup campaign with a seven-wicket win over Scotland.

Chasing 171 for victory, Nepal looked in trouble at 98-3 in the 14th over before Airee took the initiative in his 23-ball knock as his team achieved the target with four balls to spare in Mumbai.

Airee put on 73 runs with Gulsan Jha, who made 24 not out, as Nepal earned their first win after three losses in Group C. — ***AFP***

Russians, Belarusians allowed to compete under own flags at Paralympics: IPC

BERLIN: Six Russian and four Belarusian athletes will be allowed to compete under their own national flags at the 2026 Paralympics in Milan-Cortina, the Games' governing body confirmed yesterday.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) told *AFP* the athletes would be "treated like (those from) any other country".

Athletes from Russia and Belarus had been banned from competing under their own flags since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The IPC unexpectedly lifted its suspension on Russian and Belarusian athletes at the organisation's general assembly in September.

The partial suspension, which allowed athletes only to compete as neutrals, was put in place in 2023 in place of a complete ban enacted after Russia's invasion in 2022.

Athletes from both nations have been permitted to accumulate ranking points since Russia and Belarus won an appeal against the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS) at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in December.

The Russian Paralympic Committee (RPC) has been awarded six wildcards for the upcoming games, receiving places in alpine skiing, cross-country skiing and snowboarding. The participants have already been determined, with the RPC announcing three-time alpine skiing gold medallist Alexey Bugaev among the athletes taking part. — ***AFP***