

QATAR COACHES VERBALLY ABUSED MY MOTHER: QUEIROZ

DOHA: An angry Carlos Queiroz accused Qatar's coaching staff of verbally abusing his mother following an explosive end to Iran's 1-0 World Cup qualifier win in Doha on Thursday. The Portuguese coach said members of the Qatar bench made rude remarks in Spanish about his mother and accused his opponents of "a lack of ethics" throughout the match. "Two staff insulted me in Spanish, I can't understand it," he said.

Asked to clarify, he said they had made offensive remarks about his mother. "People don't have the right to spend the game insulting and offending other people," said Queiroz. "I have never seen this in my life

before," said the former Real Madrid coach. He added: "One thing I am sure, the coaching staff is not at the level of the Qatar national team. "The Qatar national team deserves much better."

He said Qatar's antics were "embarrassing". Queiroz also accused the opposite bench of trying to influence the referee throughout the game, which saw Iran take a giant step towards qualification for the World Cup in Russia next year while Qatar's hopes virtually vanished. The two benches clashed at the end of the match, confronting each other and Queiroz was booed from the pitch by home fans. That bad-tempered

ending came after tensions had simmered between the coaching staff prior to the crucial qualifier.

Before the match, Qatar's coach Jorge Fossati said he was upset by remarks attributed to Queiroz about the number of foreign-born players in the squad.

The remarks were allegedly made when the teams met in Tehran last September when Iran secured a 2-0 victory with goals in the 94th and 96th minutes.

That match too ended with angry clashes after the final whistle between players and officials. Queiroz however denied making the remarks. In response to the accusations

of abuse, Fossati said he did not believe Queiroz and accused the Portuguese coach of being a "Hollywood artist".

Talking about the remarks over naturalised players, he said Queiroz had accused the media of being "liars".

"If he doesn't take responsibility for what he said (about naturalised players), how can we believe what he says?"

"Mr Queiroz is a good artist," Fossati told reporters. He added that Queiroz had not raised the issue when the pair had met immediately after the final whistle. "He is not the kind of man that I like," added Fossati. — AFP

RODRIGUEZ AT THE DOUBLE AS BOLIVIA PAY PENALTY

BARRANQUILLA: Real Madrid star James Rodriguez bundled in the rebound from a late penalty as Colombia defeated Bolivia 1-0 on Thursday to boost their 2018 World Cup qualification campaign. Rodriguez rammed home his finish at the second attempt after Bolivia goalkeeper Carlos Lampe had saved the playmaker's spotkick on 83 minutes.

The goal gave Colombia a precious three points and moved them up into fourth spot in the South American standings ahead of other matches being played Thursday, with 21 points from 13 games. Until Rodriguez's late winner, it looked as if Bolivia had done enough to earn a point, defending in depth and frustrating the hosts at every turn.

The Colombians almost opened the scoring after eight minutes when Pablo Armero's cross into the area was met by Sampdoria striker Luis Muriel, who clipped his left-foot shot against the bar.

Mateus Uribe rattled Bolivian nerves next after 17 minutes, shooting low after a deft layoff from MacNelly Torres only to see his effort parried and gathered by Lampe.

Colombia were forced into a reshuffle just after the half-hour mark when Muriel limped off with what looked like an injury to his right hamstring.

Rodriguez threatened to open the scoring on 34 minutes but Cristian Coimbra did just enough with his covering tackle to throw the Real Madrid star off balance and his shot went wide. Rodriguez almost created an opening for Juan Cuadrado on the stroke of half-time but his chip into the box was directed just wide by the Juventus winger.

Colombia cranked up the pressure in the second half and carved out a series of good chances in quick succession which began when Carlos Bacca's header was turned around the post by Lampe in the 63rd minute.

Centre-back Yerry Mina crashed a thumping header off the underside of the bar from the ensuing corner and Torres then sent a low shot from just outside the area skidding wide of the post. Bolivia continued to ride their luck and Coimbra was fortunate not to concede a penalty for handball as the minutes wound down. But Bolivia's luck ran out when Coimbra brought down Cuadrado, allowing Rodriguez to score from the spot at the second attempt. —AFP



BARRANQUILLA: Bolivia's defenders Ronald Raldes (2nd-R), Mario Cuellar (2nd-L) and Cristian Coimbra (L) vie for the ball with Colombia's midfielder James Rodriguez (R) during their 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifier football match in Barranquilla, on Thursday. — AFP



GENEVA: Swiss head coach Vladimir Petkovic, speaks to his players during a training session of Switzerland's squad at the stade de Geneve stadium, in Geneva, Switzerland, yesterday. Switzerland will play Latvia today, for a 2018 World Cup group B qualification soccer match. —AP

SOCCER

AS WORLD CUP 2018 HOPE FADES, EURO TURN TO NATIONS LEAGUE

GENEVA: For European teams fading out of the 2018 World Cup picture, a new opportunity opens if they lose their qualifying match this weekend.

Meet the Nations League. The complex format created by UEFA to replace most unloved national team friendlies kicks off in 18 months' time.

By tomorrow night, for teams with slim-to-none World Cup hopes, their next meaningful match with qualification at stake might be their Nations League debut.

It offers a second-chance path to major tournaments - the 2020 European Championship for sure and, UEFA intends, the 2022 World Cup - for teams which have not been in a generation, or ever. For teams failing to finish in the top two of a traditional Euro 2020 qualifying group, a subsequent playoff round is based on Nations League standings. It will send at least one of UEFA's lowest-ranked teams to the 24-team tournament. For fans of Norway and Scotland, Armenia and Kazakhstan, it's almost time to learn to love the Nations League:

WHY CREATE THE NATIONS LEAGUE?

"The friendlies really don't interest anybody, neither the audience at large, neither the journalists nor the players," UEFA's then-president Michel Platini

said in launching the competition in March 2014. Top-ranked teams wanted games against each other, middle-ranked teams wanted winnable competitive games, low-ranked teams wanted hope of playing at tournaments.

Norway helped draft the Nations League plan. Its most recent tournaments were Euro 2020 and the 1998 World Cup, where it played Scotland, also enduring a two-decade tournament drought. Tomorrow, Norway and Scotland are fifth-place teams in World Cup qualifying groups facing another early exit if they lose against second-place opponents, Northern Ireland and Slovenia, respectively. "The whole landscape of football has changed since (1998)," said Scotland federation president Alan McRae, who was at the 1-1 draw with Norway in Bordeaux 19 years ago. "(The Nations League) is very important for the smaller nations."

WHAT IS THE NATIONS LEAGUE?

A new competition for all 55 UEFA members with three parts. A group stage from September

November 2018; Final Four mini-tournament in June 2019 for high-ranked teams; playoffs in March 2020 to fill the last four Euro 2020 qualifying places. The group stage is the compli-

cated bit. League A has the 12 top-ranked teams playing in three-team groups. Group winners advance to the Final Four at a venue to be decided. That will crown the Nations League champion. League B is another 12-team tier for teams ranked Nos. 13-24. Group winners are promoted to League A in the next Nations League groups two years later. Last-place teams are relegated to League C. League C is for 15 teams ranked Nos. 25-39, also with promotion and relegation. League D is for the 16 lowest-ranked teams, and group winners are promoted.

WHAT HAPPENS TO EURO 2020 QUALIFYING?

It starts late in March 2019 and group-stage games are completed that year.

The draw - with five groups of five teams and five six-team groups - is influenced by Nations League results. Teams set to play in the Final Four are placed in a five-team Euro 2020 qualifying group. With fewer matches, their schedule is clear for the June 2019 mini-tournament.

The top two teams in each group will fill 20 places at Euro 2020, being played in 13 different countries with no automatic entries for hosts.—AP