

### CAF SECRETARY-GENERAL HICHAM EL AMRANI QUILTS



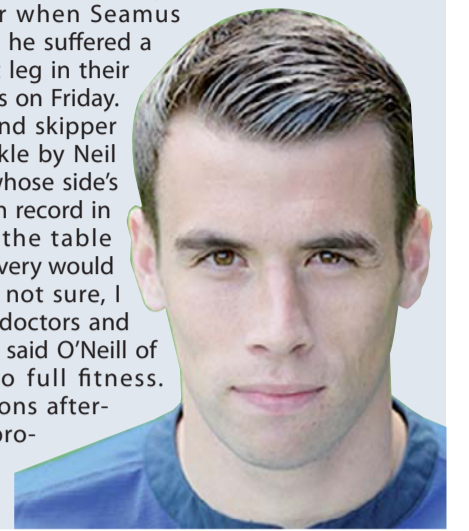
**JOHANNESBURG:** African Football Confederation (CAF) secretary-general Hicham El Amrani resigned yesterday without giving an explanation. The 37-year-old Moroccan revealed his decision in a letter to African national football associations. His move is probably linked to the defeat of long-serving Cameroonian Issa Hayatou by Malagasy outsider Ahmad Ahmad in the CAF presidential election this month. El Amrani was a Hayatou loyalist, constantly defending his boss, who ruled African football for 29 years, against public and media criticism. He became secretary-general, initially on an interim basis, in 2010 when Egyptian Mustapha Fakhry moved to global football body FIFA. Ahmad, who will serve a four-year term, is scheduled to meet CAF staff today at the Cairo headquarters of the 60-year-old organisation.—AFP

### MESUT OZIL FIT TO FACE AZERBAIJAN FOR GERMANY

**BAKU:** Arsenal's attacking midfielder Mesut Ozil is fit to face Azerbaijan for record-breaking Germany in World Cup qualifier in Baku, the German Football Association (DFB) has confirmed. Gunners' star Ozil had been an injury doubt for the away qualifier after the 28-year-old missed Friday's training session after complaining of back trouble. But Germany's assistant coach Marcus Sorg confirmed Ozil, along with the rest of the squad, is fit for Russia 2018 qualifier, which kicks off at 2000 local time (1600 GMT). "At the final training session in Baku, all 21 players were there, ready to play and Mesut Ozil could train without discomfort," Sorg told dfb.de Germany are five points clear of Azerbaijan at the top of Group C. In Wednesday's 1-0 friendly victory over England in Dortmund, Germany set a new national record by conceding no goals in winning all of their last seven matches. Azerbaijan, who are third in the group, were crushed 4-0 by Northern Ireland in their last qualifier, but Sorg says the world champions can expect a tough away match.—AFP

### O'NEILL UNSURE OF COLEMAN RECOVERY

**LONDON:** Ireland football coach Martin O'Neill says doctors cannot give a fixed time for when Seamus Coleman will return to action after he suffered a horrific double fracture of his right leg in their 2018 World Cup qualifier with Wales on Friday. The 28-year-old fullback and Ireland skipper suffered the injury in a horror tackle by Neil Taylor, who was sent off. O'Neill, whose side's 0-0 draw maintained their unbeaten record in the qualifiers sitting second in the table behind Serbia, told the BBC his recovery would depend on several factors. "I'm not sure, I would only be guessing. Even the doctors and surgeons wouldn't be terribly sure," said O'Neill of the timeline for his recovery to full fitness. "Sometimes there are complications afterwards and injuries can be more prolonged, other times it can be clean and clear sailing.—AFP



EQUESTRIAN

## NOURA AL-QUOUD WINS AMIR'S HORSE JUMPING CUP

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's horse rider Noura Al-Quoud won the grand prize of HH the Amir Horse Jumping tournament at its conclusion Saturday, which was held at the Hunting and Equestrian Club. The tournament included 14 rounds of various heights and age groups.

Al-Quoud was able to win the round of the 140 cm height in the deeding stage which had eight top finishers in the qualifying stages. Abdelrahman Al-Fuzai was second and Rakan Al-Hasawi third.

Capital governor Thabet Al-Muhanna said those involved with the tournament are very proud with HH the Amir's patronage of the tournament which returned after 20 years of absence, which is an achievement for the HEC board of directors.

Al-Muhanna said HH the Amir's patronage of the Equestrian sport is the most important reason for its development and prosperity, as evident by the levels shown by the winning riders.

Teams competition at the height of 115 cm saw Ahmad Al-Enaz, Abdelrahman Al-

Fuzai and Abdallah Al-Awadhi won first place, followed by Latifa Al-Hajiri, Ghaneema Al-Marzouq and Luloua Al-Essa in second place, while Enaz Al-Enaz, Dafny Helaitus and Jameela Al-Mutawaa won third place.

Ali Al-Kharafi won the minor prize of the 130 cm height, while Bavel Kronko from Belarus won second place and Rakan Al-Hasawi was third.

Ahmad al-Enaz ended in first place of the middle round of the 115 cm height, Ali Al-Kharafi was second and Latifa Al-Hajiri third.

Shamlan Al-Shamlan took first place of the 105 cm height, Fahad Al-Masoud second and Dawood al-Obaidan third.

Zaina Al-Nafeesi won the under 14 category, Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi second, and third place went to Suhaib Al-Mutawa.

The closing ceremony was attended by Minister of Commerce and Industry, Acting State Minister for Youth Affairs Khalid Al-Roudhan, Deputy Director General of Public Authority for Sports Dr Humoud Fulaiteh, and Chairman of HEC Masoud Hayat.



CYCLING

## VALVERDE SEALS CATALUNYA WIN

**BARCELONA:** Alejandro Valverde completed his second Tour of Catalonia win yesterday with his third stage win of the seven-day race to top an all Spanish podium from Alberto Contador and Movistar teammate Albert Soler.

Valverde, 36, added to his victories on stage three and five on the 138.7km stage around Barcelona with an eight-lap circuit to finish in 3hr 08min 50sec. Colombian Jarlinson Pantano was second ahead of Frenchman Arthur Vichot in third.

Valverde extended his winning margin



**BARCELONA:** Movistar's Spanish rider Alejandro Valverde celebrates on the podium after winning the 97th Volta Catalunya 2017 a 138.7km from Barcelona to Barcelona, in Barcelona yesterday.—AFP

over Contador to 1min 03sec with Soler 1min 16sec back. The scale of Valverde's win is even more impressive given every Movistar rider was handed a one minute penalty for infringements by Jose Joaquin Rojas in Tuesday's team time trial.

Movistar had won the time trial until they were penalised for Rojas giving his teammates a push.

"Inside the team we knew it was an injustice," said Valverde. "They deprived us of our great time trial. I wanted to win (before) but I wanted to win even more after what happened." Victory continues a stellar start to the season for Valverde after also beating Contador by a second to the Tour of Andalusia and winning the one day Tour of Murcia for a fifth time in February.

"I started well, but every day that went by I felt better," he said. "Even today in a demanding short stage with a very tough finale I felt even better than in the previous days." It is the third time Contador has finished second in four races this season as the two-time Tour de France winner was also runner-up in Paris-Nice earlier this month. "We weren't able to win, Alejandro was very strong on all terrains and we have to congratulate him," said Contador, who is in his first season with Trek-Segafredo.

"But I am happy with my performances at the start of the season." Three-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome ended down in 30th overall, over 28 minutes behind Valverde.

The vast majority of the damage to the Briton competing in his first European race of the season was done on Saturday when he was left behind as the peloton split early on and lost over 26 minutes.

Froome attempted to make amends with an unexpected attack on the final lap around the Catalan capital. But he was quickly reeled in by the leaders with five kilometres to go and ended up losing another 1min 04secs on the stage in finishing 48th.—AFP

## NISSAN POWERS ABU DHABI DESERT CHALLENGE FOR 14TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR

**DUBAI:** Nissan Middle East is once again shifting into high gear as the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, powered by Nissan, fast approaches. This is the 14th consecutive year in which Nissan will be the principal sponsor of this iconic event, formerly known as the UAE Desert Challenge, which this year runs from April 1 to 6 and will form the third round of this year's FIA World Cup for Cross Country Rallies.

Taking place under the patronage of HH Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Ruler's Representative in Al Dafrah Region, the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge is also the opening round of the FIM Cross Country Rallies World Championship for bikes and quads.

Samir Cherfan, Nissan Middle East managing director said: "Over the years Nissan has become synonymous with the Desert Challenge and our relationship with the Automobile and Touring Club of the UAE (ATCUAE) the event organizer, has allowed a deep and mutual level of trust, respect and understanding to develop between us. This in turn has helped grow the reputation of the event to the extent that it's now recognized around the world as one of the toughest and yet most enjoyable challenges on the Cross Country Rallying calendar."

"Nissan has become an invaluable partner in our work to promote and develop the Desert Challenge, and I'm pleased to extend this relationship so that we can increase the event's exposure in the future," said Mohammed Ben Sulayem, President of the ATCUAE, the rally organizers, and President of Emirates Motor Sports Federation.

"Nissan Middle East shares our enthusiasm for the Desert Challenge, as well as our commitment to its long-term success, and I'm confident this partnership will guarantee that the event continues to set the standard in the FIA World Cup for Cross Country Rallies."

Nissan's whole-hearted commitment to motorsport in the region also extends to its backing of individual Middle East-based competitors through factory-level sponsorship. It was this support which helped Qatari driver Adel Abdulla to become the current world champion in the FIA T2 off-road category at the wheel of a Nissan Patrol.

This year, both Adel and fellow competitor

in T2 category, the UAE-based Lebanese driver Emil Khneisser, are receiving a full support package from Nissan, naturally based around the "hero of all terrains" Nissan Patrol.

While Adel is the current FIA T2 world champion, Emil is the reigning Emirates Desert Championship T2 champion.

Samir Cherfan said: "Both of these drivers are exceptionally talented but also tenacious and filled with that unshakeable determination to succeed which is a defining characteristic of competitors from our region. We feel that, as well as being able to do justice to the immense off-road capabilities of the Nissan Patrol through their driving skills, they are fitting ambassadors for both Nissan Middle East and the region's motorsports scene in general. We look forward to their continued success."

Nissan's sponsorship of the Desert Challenge means getting involved well before the event itself gets underway. A fleet of Nissan Patrols is supplied to the ATCUAE in order for officials to map out the course of the special stages in the months leading up to the race. The fleet will be also utilized during the event itself when the Patrols are indispensable for ferrying race officials, marshals, dignitaries and media representatives to control and vantage points on the special stages.

In addition to providing the fleet of Patrols and naming the event "Powered by Nissan" the



carmaker's sponsorship extends to naming a Special Stage. The most challenging single element of the race will be the Nissan Special Stage 2, taking place on April 3. At 289.39kms it is the longest of the five individual Special Stages and will take place among massive dunes in the beautiful desert of the UAE's western region of Al Dafrah.

Coming off the back of Nissan's headline sponsorship of the Dubai International Baja held earlier this month, the carmaker's support for the Desert Challenge reflects its unwavering commitment to motorsport in the region and one that is unrivalled in the Middle East off-road scene.

