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Runaway Iranian athlete wants to compete for Germany in Tokyo

LUENEN, GERMANY (REUTERS) : Iran's only female Olympic medallist, Kimia Alizadeh, wants to compete for Germany as soon as the next Games in Tokyo, but regardless of whether she achieves that ambition, she never expects to return to her home country.

Alizadeh, who won taekwondo bronze at the 2016 Rio Olympics, announced earlier this month that she had defected to Europe because she felt she had been used as a propaganda tool by Iran.

"The Olympics is a great challenge for every athlete," the 21-year-old told reporters in Luenen, northwest Germany, speaking through a translator.

"But it is still not clear at all whether I'll be able to start in this one (Tokyo Olympics this summer). If it isn't possible, then I'll start in 2024."

Alizadeh is one of several prominent Iranians to clash with the authorities in recent months.

Iranian chess referee Shohreh Bayat, who was accused of violating her country's Islamic dress code while adjudicating a women's tournament, said this month she did not want to return home from Russia out of fear for her safety.

In December, Iran's top-rated chess champion decided not to play for his country in an apparent reaction to Tehran's informal ban on competing against Israeli players.

Musa Cicek, vice president of the German Taekwondo Union, said there was no guarantee that Alizadeh would be selected to represent Germany in Tokyo even if the paperwork could be sorted out in time.

"If there is a naturalization within the next 14 days, then it would be an option," he said. "But we also have other athletes who have been battling to go to the Olympics for the last four years, and there won't be a free ticket." Asked if she could ever imagine returning to Iran, Alizadeh replied: "No."



HAALAND HITS 2 MORE AS DORTMUND ROUT COLOGNE

LONDON: Teenager Erling Braut Haaland scored twice more off the bench on Friday as Borussia Dortmund moved up to third in the Bundesliga with a 5-1 thumping of Cologne. Having claimed a hat-trick as a replacement on his Dortmund debut last Saturday to inspire a 5-3 win away at Augsburg, Haaland, 19, again showed clinical finishing.

"For Erling, it's simply wonderful - five goals, two games, there are worse starts," said Dortmund captain Marco Reus.

"Especially here at home - that's why we signed him.

"That was a good step forward from us - also from me personally," added Reus who was criticised for missing clear chances against Augsburg.

With his team 3-1 up, Haaland came on for his first home appearance with an hour gone and 11 minutes later was on the scoresheet, slamming home the rebound of a saved Julian Brandt shot.

He then showed his speed to beat Cologne goalkeeper Timo Horn, tucking the ball into an empty net on 87 minutes.

Dortmund coach Lucien Favre explained why Haaland was again only a second-half replacement.

"He didn't train in December due to injury, therefore we have to be careful with him," said the Swiss.

"He's not ready to play from the start, we have a plan for him."

The result leaves Dortmund level on 36 points with defending champions Bayern Munich and four behind leaders RB Leipzig.

Goals by Raphael Guerreiro and Marco Reus gave Dortmund a 2-0 half-time lead.

England winger Jadon Sancho grabbed a third after the break and Cologne striker Mark Uth claimed his first goal for the visitors before Haaland's entrance.

The teenager has 33 goals in 24 games this season having netted 28 times for Salzburg

before Dortmund snapped him up for 20 million euros (\$22 million) last month.

Dortmund were ahead with less than a minute gone at Signal Iduna Park as Sancho threaded a pass through to the unmarked Guerreiro who slotted home a first-time shot.

It was Dortmund's fastest goal this season.

The hosts dominated and were awarded a penalty, which was reversed when VAR took a long look at defender Sebastian Bornauw's lunging tackle on Dortmund's Achraf Hakimi before deciding the foul was just outside the area.

Mats Hummels then clattered the woodwork with a thumping header.

However, Dortmund went into the break 2-0 up when Hummels long-range pass put Reus in behind the defence.

The Germany winger showed great timing to sweep the ball into the net on 29 minutes. Cologne's Colombia striker Jhon Cordoba

hit the post with Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Burki beaten just before Sancho grabbed the hosts' third.

Reus slid the ball into the path of the England winger, who slipped his marker and fired home four minutes after the break.

With an hour played, Uth claimed his first goal for Cologne when the ball fell to him unmarked on the left.

However, the scene was set for Haaland to claim his two goals with Cologne's defence tiring and unable to cope with the towering teenager's runs.

"He's living his dream right now, we don't want to wake him up," joked Dortmund's sports director Michael Zorc.

"He's trained well this week and is incredibly ambitious. He wants to score every goal possible in practice and gets really angry if he doesn't take a chance.

"He's got a really good mentality. That's why we signed him."

Eriksen set for Inter Milan move

LONDON: Danish international Christian Eriksen is poised to complete a move from Premier League club Tottenham to Serie A side Inter Milan, according to reports in Italy on Friday.

Eriksen will have a medical in Milan early next week before signing a contract until 2024 worth 20 million euros (\$22 million) including bonuses, Sky Sports Italia and Gazzetta Dello Sport reported.

The final details have to be ironed out with the 27-year-old midfielder expected to be available to Jose Mourinho for Tottenham's FA Cup fourth round match Saturday

at Southampton.

Eriksen joined the Premier League club in 2013 from Dutch side Ajax and has six months left on his contract.

Chinese-owned Inter Milan are pushing to return to the top of European football, having not won the league since Mourinho led them to an historic treble in 2010.

Eriksen helped Tottenham reach the Champions League final last year, scoring against Luciano Spalletti's Inter Milan in both group stage matches, as the Italians exited the tournament. The Dane becomes Antonio Conte's third signing in January after defender Ashley Young from

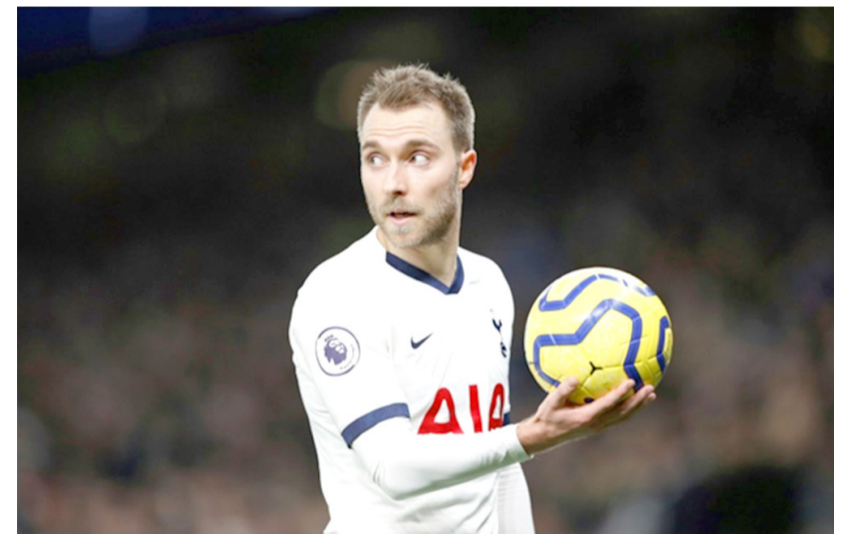
Manchester United, with midfielder Victor Moses arriving on loan from Chelsea.

Last summer Inter signed Romelu Lukaku and Alexis Sanchez, the latter on loan, from Manchester United.

Eriksen should slot into a position behind strike in-form duo Lukaku and Lautaro Martinez.

With Tottenham he has scored 69 goals in 305 games, including three this season, and 31 times in 95 matches for the Danish national team, who have qualified for Euro 2020.

Inter are second in Serie A, four points behind Juventus, and play Cagliari on Sunday.



STOKES sorry despite 'repeated abuse' - and 'Ed Sheeran reference'

LONDON: England star Ben Stokes apologised Friday for his angry exchange with a fan during the fourth and final Test against South Africa but claimed he was the victim of "repeated abuse". Stokes described his reaction at the Wanderers as "unprofessional".

English cricket chiefs, however, claimed staff and players were also subjected to "personal abuse during and after the day's play".

Stokes, the outstanding player in a series which England lead 2-1, stopped briefly as he left the field after being dismissed for just two and appeared to challenge a spectator, who evidently insulted him.

"Come say that to me out-

side the ground, you fucking four-eyed cunt," Stokes said, according to television footage captured as he left the field and started to climb the steps leading to the dressing room.

A clip of the incident was immediately distributed on social media. Witnesses told the Guardian newspaper that a middle-aged man, wearing a South Africa one-day cricket team shirt, had targeted Stokes, allegedly calling him a "ginger cunt" and likening him to pop star Ed Sheeran. "I wish to apologise for my language that was heard on the live broadcast today after my dismissal. I should not have reacted in that way," Stokes said in a statement released on his Twitter account.

"As I was leaving the playing area, I was subjected to repeated abuse from the crowd. I admit that my reaction was unprofessional, and I sincerely apologise for the language I used, especially to the many young fans watching the live telecast around the world.

"Throughout the Tests so far, the support from both sets of fans (England and South Africa) has been brilliant. One incident will not ruin such a competitive series, which we are determined to win." England all-rounder Stokes could face disciplinary action for uttering an audible obscenity, which is a level one offence according to the International Cricket Council's code of conduct.

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