

Chithra's repeat 1500m gold marks India 17-medal finish

AFI Media

Doha, April 24: PU Chithra struck gold in the women's 1500m, there were two silver medals through Ajay Kumar Saroj (men's 1500m) and the women's 4x400m relay team as well as a women's 200m bronze for Dutee Chand as India finished with 17 medals (three gold, seven silver and seven bronze) in the 23rd Asian Athletics Championships here on Wednesday.

There was disappointment as the Indian men's 4x400m team of Kunhu Mohammed, KS Jeevan, Muhammed Anas Yahiya and Arokia Rajiv, which had finished second in 3:03.28 was disqualified under rule 163.2 (causing impediment to an athlete by jostling or obstructing). Arokia Rajiv moved up from third place at the start of the anchor leg with an explosive effort, but in vain.

The day has started with Chithra winning gold. "After losing to the Bahrainis in the Asian Games in Jakarta, I was keen to get some revenge. I am happy I made it in a slow-paced race and defended by 2017 title," Chithra said after winning in 4:14.56. Of course, her time was slower than the season's best of 4:13.58 but it was led by simple tactics of being with the Bahrain duo and sprinting past them in the final lap.

Kazakhstan's Tatyana Neroznak set the early pace, but it was Gashwaw Tigest who controlled the race after the first lap. With 300m left, she was still in the lead while Winfred Mutile Yavi, attempting a treble crown after winning the 5000m and 3000m steeplechase, was not too far behind with the Indian on her heels.

Chithra started her kick midway through the back straight on the last lap and slipped past Winfred Yavi on the bend and then set herself up to pass Gashaw Tigest on the outside on the final home straight. The Bahraini tried hard to keep the Asian Games bronze medallist at bay, but without success as the 23-year-old pushed on relentlessly to retain gold.

The photo-finish camera was needed to separate Ajay Kumar Saroj from Qatar's Musaab Ali and get him the men's 1500m silver medal behind Abraham Kipchirchir Rotich (Bahrain). The Indian was credited with a time of 3:43.18 and six-thousands of a second ahead of the Qatar runner. Ajay Saroj, who won gold in Bhubaneswar in 2017, came up with a stirring run on the home stretch.

It was the second time that the photo-finish cameras favoured India on Wednesday evening. Sprinter Dutee Chand endured a fairly long wait after sustaining her pace over 200m while several others slowed down after expending energy over the first 100m and more. She took bronze in 23.24 seconds, edging out Bahrain's Edidiong Odiong by one-thousandth of a second.

Salwa Naser (Bahrain) completed a 200-400m double with a championship record time of 22.74 seconds, showing Kazakhstan's Olga Safronova a clean pair of heels. It was the second time in three nights that she took Sri Lankan sprinter Susantika Jayasinghe's record, having claimed the 400m mark on Monday.

Gavit Murli Kumar came up with a personal best time of 13:48.99 in the men's 5000m where he finished fifth but it does not reflect the gallant effort that he made along with Abhishek Pal for a large part of the race. Bahrain's Birhanu Balew and Albert Rop were easy winners of gold and silver and Murli gave up after he was passed by Japan's Hiroki Matsueda over the last 300m.

Without Hima Das, the Indian women's 4x400m quartet finished with silver in 3:32.21 despite a terrific third leg (52.99 seconds) by Saritaben Gayakwad. Prachi, MR Poovamma and Saritaben Gayakwad could not give VR Vismaya enough lead and she could not stave off a surge by Salwa Naser (Bahrain) on the anchor leg.