

FIFA plan hit by senior advisor resigning, AFC opposition

World football governing body vows to continue consultation process despite mounting criticism | P12

Hamas agrees to disarm

# THE DAILY tribune

Maresca aims to bring 'new concepts' to first Man City match

Property sales top BD795m in seven months

Coast Guard rescues three after boat breaks down at sea

TDT | Manama

Three Bahraini nationals were rescued after their boat broke down at sea, the Ministry of Interior said.

The Coast Guard launched a rescue operation in coordination with the Police Aviation Unit and the Main Operations Room after receiving a distress call from the vessel.

Rescue teams quickly reached the boat, checked on the occupants, provided assistance and safely towed the disabled vessel back to shore. No injuries were reported.



Vehicle catches fire after Diyar Muharraq crash

TDT | Manama

A vehicle caught fire after a collision involving two cars in Diyar Muharraq, authorities said.

Emergency teams responded to the incident and brought the blaze under control. No injuries were reported. The cause of the accident was not immediately known.

Google launches new satellite image AI tool

Washington, United States

Google announced a new feature allowing Google Earth users to generate AI visualizations on top of the service's satellite imagery, sparking concerns from researchers and open-source intelligence experts about the potential for disinformation.

The "create image" tool, rolled out Thursday, integrates Google's Nano Banana 2 image-generation technology to let users zoom into locations and build images in seconds based on Google Earth satellite, aerial and 3D-mapping data.

# Blueprint for peace in Gaza

Trump-backed roadmap charts Gaza's future



U.S. President Trump Ratifies Board of Peace in Historic Ceremony, Opening Path to Hope and Dignity for Gazans in January 22, 2026

## KEY POINTS



1 Israel, Hamas and other factions to halt military operations.



2 Implementation plan to be finalised within 14 days.



3 NCAG to assume administration of Gaza.



4 Each phase depends on verified completion of the previous one.



5 International Verification Committee (IVC) to monitor compliance.



6 Gaza to follow the principle: "One Authority, One Law, One Weapon".



7 New police officers to be vetted and integrated into the force.



8 Those failing vetting to be offered civilian roles.



9 NCAG to oversee all police weapons.



10 Hamas's heavy weapons, tunnels and military sites to be decommissioned.



11 Israeli withdrawal linked to phased disarmament.



12 No weapons to be handed to Israel or non-Palestinian parties.



13 Only NCAG to control weapons at the end of the process.



14 Social Peace Agreement to end internal violence and reprisals.



15 International Stabilisation Force (ISF) to deploy in Gaza.



16 ISF to monitor ceasefire, train police and support aid delivery.



17 ISF will not carry out policing duties.

UN chief hails Hamas disarmament deal as rare good news

United Nations, United States

A deal meant to see the disarmament of Hamas is a rare piece of good news for the Middle East, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said yesterday.

Referring to nearly six months of US war against Iran -- and growing regional spillover -- Guterres said the Hamas deal announced late Thursday was an outlier.

"The only good news in recent days is the announcement by the US president of an agreement for Hamas to relinquish their weapons and for Israel to withdraw its forces from Gaza," he said.

"Let me be clear: the fighting must stop on all fronts in the region," he said. "We are now six months into the military escalation in the Gulf. What began as a regional conflict is increasingly becoming a driver of global instability."

Bahrain adopts global rules to curb ship emissions

TDT | Manama



Bahrain has joined MARPOL Annex VI, adopting international rules to reduce air pollution from ships and strengthen environmental protection in the maritime sector.

The move aligns the Kingdom with International Maritime Organization (IMO) standards on limiting emissions, including sulfur in ship fuel, nitrogen oxides from marine engines and other harmful pollutants. The annex also requires ships to carry an International Air Pollution Prevention (IAPP) Certificate and meet energy efficiency measures to reduce carbon emissions.

Undersecretary for Ports and Maritime Affairs Bader Hood Al-Mahmoud said the accession reflects Bahrain's commitment to protecting the marine environment and supporting global efforts to cut shipping emissions. He said Bahrain would strengthen inspections and monitoring to ensure vessels visiting its ports and those flying the national flag comply with the new requirements, reinforcing the Kingdom's position as a sustainable regional maritime hub.

## Trump hails 'historic' Gaza breakthrough

TDT | Manama

US President Donald Trump yesterday described the Board of Peace agreement as a "historic" breakthrough, saying it paves the way for the complete disarmament of Hamas and all other armed groups in Gaza.

Calling it "a monumental step towards lasting peace and security," Trump said the phased agreement would see Israeli forces withdraw as disarmament progresses, while a new Palestinian government takes charge of Gaza with support from an International Stabilisation Force.

"This agreement is a critical step towards Gaza finally being governed by a new Palestinian government that will work closely with the Board of Peace to help the Palestinian people," Trump said. He thanked mediators Egypt, Qatar and Türkiye for helping secure what he called

a "historic breakthrough", adding: "The threat that emerged from Gaza on October 7 will not be allowed to rebuild."

Trump concluded by saying the agreement would place Gaza "in the hands of a new Palestinian government that serves its people."



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## Parliament leaders hail King’s Gulf security vision

TDT | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa’s address during the joint Bahrain Shield military exercise reaffirmed Bahrain’s commitment to Gulf security, collective defence and regional stability, parliamentary leaders said.

Shura Council Chairman Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh said the King’s speech reflected a strategic vision centred on stronger GCC military cooperation, regional unity and good neighbourly relations. He said the address also underscored the importance of respecting state sovereignty, international law



Shura Council Chairman Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh



Speaker Ahmed bin Salman Al Musallam

and non-interference, while tackling shared challenges. Speaker of the Council of

Representatives Ahmed bin Salman Al Musallam said the King’s participation in the exercise sent a clear message that Gulf security is indivisible and that GCC nations stand united. He said the speech highlighted the importance of joint deterrence and reassured Bahrainis of the Kingdom’s strong security framework backed by Gulf partners and international allies.

Both leaders praised the Bahrain Shield exercise, saying it showcased the professionalism, readiness and defence integration of Gulf armed forces while reinforcing regional security cooperation.

## Women’s growing influence in economy hailed



TDT | Manama

The expanding role of Bahraini women in the national economy reflects the success of Bahrain’s development vision, Finance and National Economy Minister Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa said as he received author and banker Noura Mohammed Al Faihani.

Al Faihani presented the minister with a copy of her book, Bahraini Women and the National Economy: From Empowerment to Influence in the Era of His Majesty the King. The minister said women’s

progress has been driven by the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the support of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, and the initiatives of Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, President of the Supreme Council for Women.

He praised the book for documenting Bahraini women’s contributions to the national economy, while Al Faihani highlighted the importance of preserving these achievements for future generations.

# Khalas dates lead the summer fruit rush

Mohammed Darwish

TDT | Manama

The prized khalas date has reached Bahrain’s markets at BD2.5 a kilogramme, marking the next stage of the Kingdom’s date season as traders expect prices to ease with the arrival of larger harvests through August.

The first batches are being sold alongside khunaizi dates at BD2 a kilogramme and ghurra at BD1. Khalas dates typically appear after the first week of July and peak the following month, with each variety ripening in succession rather than all at once.

Fruit stalls are also well stocked with watermelon, peaches, apricots, cherries, melons and mangoes as demand rises for refreshing summer produce.

Watermelon continues to dominate sales.

Sayed Jaffar Salman, owner of Al Sada fruit and vegetable stall, said Jordanian watermelons remained the top choice among Bahraini shoppers, while Omani and, at times, Yemeni fruit was also available.

Standard watermelons sell at about BD1 for five kilogrammes, while premium fruit is priced at three kilogrammes for BD1.

Mr Salman said flat peaches, white peaches, Syrian cherries and melons were also selling well. Yellow watermelon, once popular, has largely disappeared from shop fronts as shoppers returned to the sweeter red variety.



Peaches, apricots and cherries start at BD1 a kilogramme, bananas cost about BD2.5, while Egyptian mangoes are widely available. Seller Habib Al Baqali said shops were also stocking apricots, peaches, cherries, nectar-

ines and mangoes from India, Pakistan, Egypt and Bahrain.

Traders expect date prices to soften as supplies increase over the coming weeks, while watermelon continues to hold its place as Bahrain’s favourite summer fruit.

BETTER YOU KNOW

Khalas dates are prized for their naturally rich, caramel-like flavour and melt-in-the-mouth texture, making them one of the Gulf’s most popular date varieties.

Khalas dates are often described as the “king of fresh dates” because they can be enjoyed both fresh (rutab stage) and fully dried without losing their rich flavour.

## Bahrain, UK review security ties and regional challenges

Ministers discuss Strait of Hormuz, Iran, strategic cooperation and UN coordination

TDT | Manama

Bahrain and the United Kingdom have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening security and strategic cooperation during talks in London that focused on regional tensions, the Strait of Hormuz and collaboration at the United Nations Security Council.

Foreign Minister Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani met UK Foreign Secretary for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs Ed Miliband at the Foreign Office on Thursday.

The ministers reviewed progress under the Comprehensive Security Integration and

Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA), discussed the outcomes of the Bahrain-UK Strategic Dialogue and explored ways to expand cooperation through existing agreements and memoranda of understanding.

Regional developments featured prominently in the discussions, including the impact of recent Iranian attacks on Bahrain and other countries in the region, as well as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and its implications for maritime navigation, international trade and the global economy.

Miliband reiterated the UK’s solidarity with Bahrain over the Iranian attacks and expressed support for the Kingdom’s efforts to safeguard its security and stability.

The ministers also exchanged views on strengthening Bahrain-UK coordination during Bahrain’s membership of the United Nations Security Council on issues before the Council.

## Isa Town intersection to fully open before new school term

Mohammed Darwish

TDT | Manama

With the new school term approaching, the Isa Town Northern Intersection will be fully open by the end of August, nearly doubling its daily traffic capacity from 12,000 to 22,500 vehicles.

Southern Municipal Council member Abdullah Darraj said the contractor had confirmed the deadline for the remaining works. He said completing the



project before schools reopen would ease congestion and reduce pressure on surrounding roads as students, teachers and school staff return for the new term.

The main flyover, which opened last week, carries three lanes in each direction over the junction of Shaikh Salman Avenue with Amman Avenue and Salmabad Avenue, allowing uninterrupted traffic flow along Shaikh Salman Avenue. Traffic lights at ground level will con-

tinue to manage vehicles travelling between Salmabad Avenue and Amman Avenue.

The project strengthens links between Isa Town and neighbouring areas including Riffa, A’ali, Sanad and Salmabad. Shaikh Salman Avenue also serves as a key route connecting the Capital and Northern governorates with the Southern Governorate.

Darraj said the partial opening had already eased congestion at nearby junctions and

roads. Bringing the entire project into operation before the school year begins, he added, would give motorists time to familiarise themselves with the new road layout before traffic volumes increase.

The remaining works include drainage, paving, pavements, landscaping and road safety improvements. The project is being carried out by a consortium of Alghanim International and Almoayyed Contracting.



# DANAT introduces youth to careers in pearls and gemstones

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain Institute for Pearls and Gemstones (DANAT) is offering young Bahrainis a glimpse into careers in the pearl and jewellery industry through a specialist training course at Youth City 2030.

Developed with Al Kooheji Jewellery, the course introduces participants to Bahrain's pearl heritage, gemstone identification and career opportunities in pearl and gemstone related fields.

Participants receive practical training in the identifica-

tion and assessment of pearls, diamonds, rubies, emeralds and sapphires, using the tools and techniques employed by industry professionals.

DANAT Chief Executive Officer Noora Jamsheer said the programme aims to inspire more Bahrainis to pursue careers in a sector closely linked to the Kingdom's history and economy. She said it equips participants with foundational knowledge while encouraging them to explore specialised professions that support Bahrain's position as a global centre for natural pearls and gemstones.



# Career World debuts at Youth City 2030



TDT | Manama

A career guidance platform that helps young Bahrainis make informed education and employment choices is making its debut at Youth City 2030, Youth Affairs Minister Rawan bint Najeeb Tawfeeqi said.

The minister said the Career World platform, part of Skills Bahrain and an initiative of the Labour Fund (Tamkeen), is a valuable addition to the annual event, offering insights into career pathways and in-demand skills based on labour market data.

She said the platform enables



young people to better understand career opportunities and align their interests and abilities with the needs of different economic sectors. Its interactive activities and guidance sessions for students and parents also provide practical advice on educational and career options.

Tawfeeqi said the initiative supports Youth City 2030's goal of preparing Bahraini youth for the labour market through career guidance and practical learning, while reflecting Tamkeen's continued investment in developing national talent and strengthening future workforce readiness.

# Isa Town market to get 500 new parking spaces

● Upgrade package aims to ease congestion, attract shoppers and boost business

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Isa Town Market will gain 500 new parking spaces under a major upgrade aimed at easing congestion, improving access and attracting more shoppers, MP Dr Maryam Al Dhaen said.

The parking expansion forms part of a wider development programme for the Southern Governorate's second constituency. Other projects include the expansion of Ramez Shopping



Centre, upgraded lighting and electrical infrastructure, new investment opportunities with-

in the market and a treated-water network for landscaping.

Dr Al Dhaen said the addi-

tional parking would improve access for shoppers while helping businesses attract more customers. She added that the joint expansion of Ramez Shopping Centre by the Southern Municipality and Ramez Group reflects successful public-private cooperation to enhance retail services and increase footfall.

The programme also includes replacing ageing electrical cables, upgrading lighting, carrying out safety inspections and creating greener public spaces using treated water. Dr Al Dhaen said the projects would strengthen Isa Town's position as one of Bahrain's leading commercial centres while meeting the needs of residents, traders and investors.



# Innovation guide aims to turn ideas into successful projects

TDT | Manama

A new guide designed to help innovators and entrepreneurs transform ideas into successful projects has been presented to Economic Advisor to His Majesty the King, Dr Hassan bin Abdullah Fakhro.

Dr Yousef Mohammed Al-

Amin presented Dr Fakhro with a copy of his book, A Guide to Smart Ideas for Projects and Innovation Competitions, which outlines practical methods for developing creative ideas, turning them into innovative projects and preparing competitive entries for innovation contests.

Dr Fakhro praised the book's

scientific and practical value, saying it would strengthen the skills of innovators, entrepreneurs and project owners while supporting knowledge-based initiatives that enhance national capabilities and encourage innovation.

He described the guide as a valuable reference for students,

innovators and entrepreneurs seeking to develop ideas and compete in innovation challenges. Dr Al-Amin said the book aims to provide a practical framework for turning ideas into impactful projects, supporting Bahrain's transition towards a knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy.

# The quiet strength of *lasting friendships*



Ammar Ahmed Tareef



Hussain Marhoon



Sawsan Darwish

## Community voices mark the International Day of Friendship

Rehab Mohammad  
TDT | Manama

A loyal friend can make life's toughest moments easier, offering support, honesty and a sense of belonging that no online connection can fully replace.

As the world marks the International Day of Friendship,

community members in Bahrain reflected on the value of genuine relationships built on trust, respect and understanding. The United Nations observes the day to highlight friendship's role in promoting peace and cooperation, while Islam also encourages bonds rooted in mutual respect and communication.

Hussain Marhoon said true friendship is founded on trust, honesty and loyalty, helping people face life's challenges with confidence. While social media has expanded social circles, he said meaningful friendships are still built through sincerity.

Ammar Ahmed Tareef described friendship as a lifelong



Zainab Al Oraibi with her son Akbar commitment that is tested in difficult times rather than words alone.

For mother-of-three Zainab Al Oraibi, shared values and upbringing play an important role

BETTER  
**YOU**  
KNOW

In 1998, the United Nations named Winnie the Pooh the world's Ambassador of Friendship to promote the value of friendship.

in nurturing lasting friendships among children.

Sawsan Darwish said the occasion is a reminder to appreciate friends whose kindness, loyalty and support remain constant despite time and distance.

# Property sales top BD795m in seven months

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's property market has crossed BD795 million in sales so far this year after another strong month in July, when transactions exceeded BD134 million.

Figures from the Survey and Land Registration Bureau show 988 property sales were completed in July, up from 857 in June and 770 in May, signalling continued momentum despite the summer season.

Since January, more than 5,900 property sales have been recorded. The bureau has also processed over 17,000 transactions, including more than 11,000 general registrations.

April remained the busiest month, with 1,129 sales, while January and February each recorded more than 900 transactions.

The market follows a robust 2025, when property sales surged 51.6% to BD1.6 billion and transactions rose 19.8 per cent to 29,777.

The bureau's latest daily update showed a further BD3.2 million in property sales.



## OpenAI says has more than 1 billion active users

AFP | Washington, United States

OpenAI announced yesterday that it had surpassed the symbolic milestone of 1 billion active users, less than four years after the launch of its popular chatbot ChatGPT.

"Our models now reach more than one billion active users and more than two million businesses. As people gain confidence in the technology, they use it more deeply," the company said in a blog post.

According to several US media outlets, the San Francisco-based startup had initially expected to reach the milestone earlier this year, after hitting 900 million weekly active users in late February, but faced increased competition from its rivals.

OpenAI was founded in 2015, but did not launch its first consumer product, ChatGPT, until November 2022.

By comparison, it took Facebook six years after launching its social network to reach one billion users.

The figure cited by OpenAI on Friday covers all of its artificial intelligence (AI) interfaces, primarily ChatGPT but also Codex, its model dedicated to AI-assisted programming, as well as ChatGPT Work, a platform that allows users to access other external appli-

cations.

Its business customer segment, which generates higher revenue and margins per user, became a priority for the company in late 2025. Since then, it has closed some of the gap with its major rival Anthropic, which focuses on this class of clients.

The emergence of AI agents -- which perform tasks on demand, evaluate their results, and make improvements autonomously -- has sent demand for computing power skyrocketing and caused costs to soar for businesses and developers.

Eager to keep those costs down, many are now turning to models that are less sophisticated than the cutting-edge AI systems from OpenAI and Anthropic, including open-source models, particularly those from China.

In early July, OpenAI released three versions of its new model, GPT-5.6, including a "low-cost" version, Luna, which costs one-fifth as much as the highest-performing model, Sol.

But the market is evolving so rapidly that the company went even further on Thursday by cutting Luna's price by 80 per cent, placing it among the least expensive advanced models, including those developed in China.

## India approves \$8.81 bn offshore oil and gas exploration plan

AFP | New Delhi, India

India said yesterday it will provide \$8.8 billion in financial support for offshore oil and gas exploration as part of its efforts to reduce its heavy reliance on energy imports.

India, the world's third-largest importer of oil and the second-largest buyer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), has faced major disruptions due to restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz driven by conflict between the United States and Iran.

To cushion the impact, New Delhi has expanded its pool of

crude suppliers from 27 to 41 countries, including Venezuela, while increasing purchases from Russia and several African nations.

The cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved what officials described as a "very ambitious" push to explore vast offshore areas on Friday under India's jurisdiction for untapped oil and gas reserves.

"If exploration is carried out properly, India can achieve substantial production," Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters in New Delhi.

## Tech-fuelled rally fizzles as oil prices rise

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Asian stock markets rallied yesterday, led by a record surge of almost 18 percent for Seoul as technology firms performed a blistering recovery from an extended sell-off.

But a rise in oil prices and some profit taking saw the rally fizzle as trading shifted to Europe and North America.

"End of month profit taking might be a bit of a cliché, but with a weekend of potential strikes on Iran and the last day of July trading upon us investors have looked to book in some gains," said Chris Beauchamp, chief market analyst at online trading and investing platform IG.

### Brent crude

Benchmark international oil contract Brent crude was up 1.8% and the main US contract, WTI, climbed 2.6%.

Asian were led higher by a tech rebound following four weeks of blood-letting fuelled by worries over the vast sums being invested in artificial intelligence.

Seoul's Kospi had been at the forefront of the sell-off after hitting a record high a month ago, with chipmakers SK hynix and Samsung the poster children of the rout, losing around half their value in the panic.

However, the voracious buying sentiment that had charac-

| Key figures around 1530 GMT |                                             |  |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--|
| New York - DOW:             | ▲ less than 0.1% at 52,233.32 points        |  |
| New York - S&P 500:         | ▼ 0.2% at 7,424.54                          |  |
| Nasdaq Composite:           | ▼ 0.2% at 25,073.11                         |  |
| London - FTSE 100:          | ▼ 0.3% at 10,868.05 (close)                 |  |
| Paris - CAC 40:             | ▲ 0.3% at 8,509.64 (close)                  |  |
| Frankfurt - DAX:            | ▲ less than 0.1% at 25,629.24 (close)       |  |
| Seoul - Kospi:              | ▲ 17.9% at 6,595.45 (close)                 |  |
| Tokyo - Nikkei 225:         | ▲ 4.0% at 64,362.02 (close)                 |  |
| Hang Seng Index:            | ▲ 0.1% at 25,884.43 (close)                 |  |
| Shanghai - Composite:       | ▲ 0.7% at 3,832.26 (close)                  |  |
| Dollar/yen:                 | ▼ at 159.40 yen from 162.61 yen on Thursday |  |
| Euro/dollar:                | ▼ at \$1.1506 from \$1.1529                 |  |
| Pound/dollar:               | ▼ at \$1.3461 from \$1.3468                 |  |
| Euro/pound:                 | ▼ at 85.48 pence at 85.60 pence             |  |
| Brent North Sea Crude:      | ▲ 2.0% at \$88.60 per barrel                |  |
| West Texas Intermediate:    | ▲ 2.4% at \$85.59 per barrel                |  |

terised markets for much of the past two years was reignited Friday.

US giant Microsoft unveiled healthy earnings this week that saw their shares storm higher on Wall Street.

"The rebound in tech powered by Microsoft's extremely well-received numbers has helped lift the broader market mood, helping investors to put concerns about the Iran conflict and its continuing impact on ice for now," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

Analysts have noted that heavy selling in recent weeks

was focused on concerns about when the huge sums invested in artificial intelligence would see returns, rather than fundamental problems in the sector.

Seoul's eye-watering rally was helped by news that South Korea's government planned to pump almost \$14 billion into its sovereign wealth fund for AI investments and data centres.

### SK hynix

South Korean chipmaker SK hynix surged 30% -- wiping out its losses from the previous two days.

Meanwhile in the United

States, shares in Amazon surged over 13% higher after it beat analysts' expectations when it reported growth in overall revenue and sales, particularly in its cloud, artificial intelligence and chips divisions.

The company said that two of its AI-related divisions grew by "triple-digit percentages" -- its AI cloud and chips businesses each "exceeded" \$25 billion annual revenue run rates, a measure of recurring sales.

But shares in Apple fell 9.3 percent despite beating market expectations with sales rising 16 percent to \$109.4 billion in the April-through-June period, while profit climbed 27% to \$29.8 billion.

Souring the picture for investors, Apple forecast revenue growth of between nine and 11 percent in the current quarter, which was below estimates. It cited supply constraints.

Elsewhere Friday, the yen held gains against the dollar, a day after rallying amid speculation that Japanese authorities intervened to prop up the currency, which had been sitting around 40-year lows.

London's benchmark FTSE 100 index, whose major constituents do not feature technology companies, hit another record high as it came close to reaching 11,000 points for the first time.

However it later pulled back and ended the day lower.

## Bodies of four climbers found near Pakistan avalanche site: police

AFP | Islamabad

Search teams in Pakistan found four bodies after an avalanche on one of the world's highest mountains, with six people still missing from an expedition led by renowned British-Nepali climber Nirmal Purja, police said yesterday.

A spokesperson for police in the mountainous Gilgit-Baltistan region said search-and-rescue teams had reached the location the avalanche had struck on Thursday, cutting off contact with the international expedition that had been in the area.

Four bodies have been recovered, the police spokesperson said in a statement on Facebook, later adding that the two of them, of a Nepali climber and an Omani, were being transported to Skardu city on board a military helicopter.

The statement did not name the two climbers.

It added that the search operation ended for the day and will resume on Saturday.

The Alpine Club of Pakistan said the expedition comprised 10 people -- including five Nepalese, a Pakistani, an Omani, an American, and a climber from China. Police did not mention an American citizen and said two British nationals -- a man and a woman -- were in the missing team.

## Wildfire rages on Crete as strong winds hamper firefighting

AFP | Athens

Greek firefighters continued yesterday to battle a wildfire ravaging parts of the tourist island of Crete, although conditions had improved, authorities said. "The situation around Rethymno is better," a fire department spokesperson told AFP.

But the blaze "has not yet been contained, there are still many hotspots," he added.

About 4,500 hectares (11,120 acres) had been scorched on Wednesday and Thursday south of the tourist town of Rethymno, according to meteo.gr, the weather service of the National Observatory of Athens, citing an analysis of satellite imagery from the European Union's Copernicus programme.

Strong winds and rugged terrain continued to hamper firefighting efforts, authorities said.

# Hamas agrees to disarm

Trump announces disarmament as part of ceasefire implementation roadmap

● Hamas accepts proposed roadmap

● Weapons to go to governing committee

● Israeli forces set for gradual withdrawal

AFP | Gaza City

Hamas said yesterday it had agreed to a deal announced by US President Donald Trump to end the war with Israel, that includes it handing over its weapons to a Palestinian governing committee and the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

Israel did not immediately comment on the announcement, but shortly beforehand an Israeli political source had said the proposed agreement did not "satisfactorily" address Israeli demands for the full demilitarisation of the Gaza Strip.

The source also said that "the issue of Gaza did not come up at all" in this week's meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Trump in Washington.

The Palestinian Islamist group's weapons have been one of the key sticking points in implementing a ceasefire deal in place since October, but Trump announced late Thursday an agreement for Hamas's "complete disarmament", calling it a critical step toward a new Palestinian government in Gaza.

Hamas officials said that a committee established by Trump's Board of Peace to govern Gaza would oversee the process of storing the Islamist movement's weapons.

The group said it expected mediators and the Board of Peace to ensure Israel complied with the deal's terms, which include Israel's withdrawal from Gaza.

Ghazi Hamad, a member of the group's negotiating team, said the movement was making "concessions for the sake of our people in the Gaza Strip, to save them from killing and displacement".



A Palestinian boy walks his bicycle through the rubble of a destroyed building after it was targeted by Israeli strikes

"Israel will not intervene in the issue of disarmament. The National Committee is the body that will undertake this task," he said, referring to the National Committee for Administration of Gaza (NCAG).

Despite the October ceasefire, violence has continued in Gaza, with Israeli strikes killing at least four people, including two children, on Thursday, according to health officials.

### Focus now on implementation

The Board of Peace confirmed in a post on X that Hamas had "agreed to a detailed Roadmap for implementing the next phases of the Gaza ceasefire".

"Our focus now turns to implementation," the organisation wrote, adding the NCAG will "soon begin a phased transition toward full authority".

Trump, in an earlier social media post, said that once Hamas is disarmed "Israeli forces will withdraw, and the International Stabilization Force will work with a new Palestinian police force to take responsibility for Gaza being safe for its residents and its neighbours".

Nickolay Mladenov, the Board of Peace's high representative for Gaza, said yesterday the deal "took months of very difficult



**Hamas official Ghazi Hamad stated the movement made major concessions regarding its arsenal specifically to protect the population of the Gaza Strip from further displacement and casualties**

negotiations".

"What happens next matters even more. Implementation and verification have to be real," Mladenov wrote on X.

"Withdrawal must move in lockstep with decommissioning," he added.

### 'No exceptions'

Egypt's state-linked Al-Qahera News said yesterday that Cairo will soon host a meeting soon of the truce mediators, which also include the United States, Qatar and Turkey, fo-

cused on the second phase of the ceasefire plan.

Earlier, a diplomatic source said: "We continue to advance the implementation roadmap that offers a balanced and pragmatic path forward, with all weapons decommissioned and a phased transition of responsibilities taking place to hand over full authority to the technocratic government."

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak publicly on the matter, said there would be "no exceptions for certain weapons or certain people. One authority, one law, one weapon".

The roadmap, the source said, would create "a process for the elimination of all tunnels, depots of weapons and any weapons production facilities".

The source said a verification mechanism would ensure compliance by each side.

A Hamas source familiar with the talks said earlier that the movement was "awaiting the Israeli response to the amendments we recently submitted to the mediators".

The source said the amendments concerned two articles in the roadmap presented by the Board of Peace.

## Sri Lanka sentences two ex-security officials to death over 2019 bombings



Sri Lankan soldiers inspect the scene following the blast (file photo)

AFP | Colombo

A Sri Lanka court sentenced two ex-security officials to death for failing to prevent the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, which killed 279 people including 45 foreigners.

In a majority decision, a three-judge bench ruled that the former police chief Pujith Jayasundara and former defence ministry secretary Hemasiri Fernando failed in their duties to stop the deadly attacks, blamed on a home-grown Islamist extremist group.

Jayasundara, 66, and Fernando, 76, can appeal against the sentence in the Supreme Court but have been remanded to judicial custody until granted bail.

Sri Lanka has not carried out the death sentence since 1976, maintaining an unofficial moratorium on capital punishment.

There are at least 800 people on death row, according to government figures shared with Parliament in February, with sentences usually commuted to life imprisonment.

The July 31 judgment at the special fast-track court came after the state appealed against a 2022 decision that acquitted the duo.

The court was told during the proceedings that an Indian intelligence agency had alerted Sri Lanka on April 4, 2019 to a possible suicide attack by Islamist extremists, but the authorities failed to take action.

The attacks on April 21 that year targeted three churches and three hotels.

More than 500 people were wounded.

## Israel carries out huge detonations near Lebanon's Beaufort castle

AFP | Beirut

Israeli forces carried out a series of detonations overnight near the Unesco-listed Beaufort Castle in southern Lebanon, Lebanese state media reported yesterday, with Israel saying it had destroyed tunnels used by the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group.

"Israeli forces triggered very powerful explosions around midnight," specifically "in the area of the Beaufort fortress," the official National News Agency (NNA) said.

The Crusader-era castle, located in the southern area occupied by Israel, was added last week to Unesco's List of World



Smoke rises following Israeli bombardment in southern Lebanon close to the Beaufort Castle

Heritage in Danger.

A correspondent in a nearby

village reported hearing large explosions.

In a joint statement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and defence minister Israel Katz announced that the army had destroyed "terror tunnels in the Beaufort area" using approximately 700 tonnes of explosives.

They said the explosions came after a "blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement" by Hezbollah on Wednesday.

The Israeli army accused Hezbollah of violating their fragile ceasefire by launching an explosive drone at an Israeli military vehicle in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah has not claimed

any attack on Israel since June 20.

While violence has declined since the US-Iran agreement signed last month and a Lebanon-Israel framework deal, Lebanon continues to report Israeli strikes and artillery shelling on the south, as well as detonations of buildings in southern villages.

The Iran-backed movement drew Lebanon into the wider Middle East war on March 2 with attacks on Israel.

Israel retaliated with a massive bombing campaign and a ground offensive, and its army continues to occupy areas of southern Lebanon extending about ten kilometres (six miles) into its territory.

Justinian I becomes the sole ruler of the Byzantine Empire after the death of his uncle Justin I

English chemist Joseph Priestley discovers oxygen by isolating it in its gaseous state



Slavery Abolition Act 1833 comes into effect, abolishing slavery across the British Empire

Nuclear-powered submarine USS Nautilus begins the first transit of the North Pole in Operation Sunshine

# EU scrambles as massive migrant surge overwhelms Spain's Ceuta

Madrid blames trafficking networks while Morocco strengthens border enforcement

Spain deploys reinforcements

Thousands return voluntarily

34 people die attempting the crossing

AFP | Ceuta

The European Union yesterday scrambled to contain one of the largest migrant crises faced by the block in recent years, after tens of thousands of people poured into Spain's enclave in north Africa in just days.

Some 60,000 migrants have crossed into the territory from Morocco, the local regional president Juan Jesus Vivas told reporters. Many swam around a small border barrier that juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, with 34 people dying in the attempt.

The sudden massive influx has sparked an international crisis for Spain's government, drawing criticism from Germany, Italy and Finland and prompting France to tighten checks on its border with Spain.

Madrid has sent troops, more police, including divers, drones and boats, to boost security in Ceuta. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and his interior minister rushed to the enclave yesterday.

Yesterday, Spain's interior



People gather at Bab Sebta, on the Morocco-Spain border near Spain's enclave of Ceuta and the Moroccan town of Fnideq

minister said that 25,000 people who had crossed had voluntarily returned to Morocco.

AFP reporters have seen hundreds of people -- men, women and children -- entering Ceuta, discarding flotation rings and clothes used in the risky passage.

Yesterday, hundreds of migrants, mostly young men, were hanging around on the Morocco side of the border while others were seen turning back, saying "there are too many people here".

"It's catastrophic," said Mo-

hammered, a local taxi driver and Ceuta resident. "Sure, we sympathise with them -- they're having a terrible time in their own country, and all that -- but this isn't the way to enter a place, nor is it a way to live."

It was not immediately clear what prompted this surge of migrants from Morocco. Some previous surges have occurred during tensions between Spain and Morocco.

Sanchez visited Algiers on July 20 -- the first such visit by

a Spanish head of government in four years -- marking a thaw in relations with Morocco's rival Algeria, but it was not clear if this visit was related to the influx.

Sanchez, in Ceuta, blamed the sudden inflow on people-traffickers spreading rumours about a Spanish Supreme Court ruling this month that irregular migrants arriving by sea cannot be immediately returned.

"What has emerged from our talks with Moroccan authorities is that trafficking mafias took a

## 60,000

migrants have crossed into Spain's Ceuta enclave from Morocco in recent days

self-serving interpretation of a Supreme Court ruling," he said. That interpretation "spread like wildfire in recent hours."

### Diplomatic fallout

Scenes of the crowds of people surging into a member of the European Union, which normally does not enforce border controls between members, sparked diplomatic fallout.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on social media, called the scenes at Ceuta "unacceptable", adding: "We cannot allow anyone to come to our (European) Union without abiding by our rules."

Italy on Thursday called for Spain to be suspended from Europe's open-borders Schengen zone, prompting Spain to summon Italy's ambassador and accuse Rome of using the crisis for political gain.

Finland and Denmark yesterday backed Italy's call, while German Chancellor Friedrich Merz demanded that Morocco "take back illegal migrants immediately".

## Explosion at coal mine kills 34 in southern Pakistan

AFP | Quetta

A blast at a coal mine killed at least 34 workers in southern Pakistan, the provincial disaster agency said yesterday, as rescuers searched for more missing miners.

The explosion, suspected to be caused by methane gas, tore through the mine near the capital of the resource-rich province of Balochistan on Thursday, sparking a rescue operation that ran through the night.

"According to information received from the deployed teams, 34... bodies have been recovered," southern Balochistan's provincial disaster management authority said in a statement in the early hours of yesterday.

"The joint rescue operation is still underway to locate and recover the remaining trapped miners," it added, without specifying how many were in the mine when the explosion took place.

Witnesses said that after hearing the blast, an unknown number of miners in the area rushed to try to reach workers



Coal miners and relatives gather at the entrance of a coal mine after it collapsed in the Surange area, some 50 kilometres east of Quetta

inside.

"Other miners descended into the mine after the explosion for a rescue operation, but they also died," Ahmed Zada, a mine worker at the site, said.

### Safety concerns

Relatives, rescuers, and miners gathered at the mine entrance in Sorange, around 50 kilometres (31 miles) from the

provincial capital Quetta, as the rescue operations were carried out.

Rescuers and workers, some wearing hard hats but most in everyday attire, helped carry bodies out of the concrete tunnel, some covered in black soot.

They ferried them on stretchers to waiting vehicles and ambulances near the entrance to the mine.

## Palestinian shot during settler march through West Bank towns



Israeli settlers take part in a march between the villages of Sarra and Tell, southwest of Nablus

AFP | Jerusalem

One Palestinian was shot and wounded during an Israeli settler march through several West Bank Palestinian towns yesterday that sparked clashes with locals, first responders, the army and an AFP journalist said.

"Our crews in Nablus are treating a young man who was shot with live ammunition in the abdomen during an Israeli army and settler raid on the al-Junaid area," the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

Israeli settlers organised a march yesterday morning in the northern West Bank in memory of two Israelis killed

last week during clashes in the Palestinian town of Tell, near Nablus, during which four Palestinians were also killed.

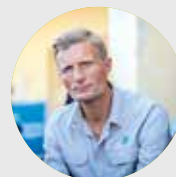
A journalist at the scene said that between 100 and 150 settlers including women and children came near Tell from the west, the direction of Havat Gilad, the home settlement of one of the killed Israelis.

The settlers, roughly ten of whom were armed, marched through fields near Tell, through the nearby town of Sarra and the Nablus neighbourhood of al-Junaid, while army troops stationed along the route periodically dispersed settlers and Palestinians when clashes occurred.



TOP  
4  
TWEETS

01



The Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC is worsening food insecurity in communities already facing one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. In Bunia, I spoke with @AP about the need for more support to contain the outbreak and prevent further crisis.

@WFPchief

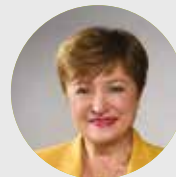
02



Thank God @POTUS was elected and our country's border no longer looks like this. These images out of Spain are an unfortunate reminder of the consequences of mass migration and the radical left-wing globalist policies that have enabled the Invasion of the West.

@JD Vance

03



A few large economies drove a widening of global current account imbalances in 2025, according to our latest External Sector Report. As trade patterns evolve, the path to stronger growth & stability is in sound policies at home & cross-border cooperation.

@KGeorgieva

04



Settler violence reached record levels in the West Bank. Nearly 700 Palestinians were displaced in only 4 months this year & lives were lost. Palestinian communities are being isolated & cut off from vital services. Protecting civilians is an obligation under international law.

@hadjalahbib

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)



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## region

### Kuwait Condemns Continued Iranian Drone Attacks

Foreign Ministry says aggression threatens sovereignty and regional stability



Kuwait has strongly condemned what it described as continued Iranian aggression after hostile drones targeted several vital and military facilities in the country on Friday.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the attacks represent a violation of Kuwait's sovereignty, a direct threat to its security and stability, and a breach of international law, the United Nations Charter, and UN Security Council Resolution 2817.

The ministry warned that the continuation of such attacks marks a dangerous escalation and reflects a systematic hostile approach that cannot be justified or accepted.

Kuwait reaffirmed its right to take all necessary measures to protect its sovereignty, ensure national security, and safeguard the safety of citizens and residents across the country.

### Saudi Arabia advances plans for a multinational maritime defense alliance



Saudi Arabia has taken a key step toward establishing a multinational maritime defense alliance after hosting a meeting with chiefs of staff, military representatives from friendly countries, and the European Union delegation.

The Ministry of Defense said representatives from 43 countries and the EU participated in the meeting, discussing growing threats to maritime security, including attacks on commercial vessels, energy tankers, and critical infrastructure. Participants stressed the need for stronger international cooperation to protect global shipping routes and safeguard the world economy.

The meeting reviewed the proposed alliance's draft charter, command structure, governance framework, and operational plans. The initiative aims to enhance security in the Bab al-Mandab Strait, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden.

Saudi Arabia proposed serving as the founding and leading nation while hosting the alliance's headquarters. Fourteen countries signed a joint declaration supporting the initiative, while other participating nations are expected to join after completing their national approval procedures before the alliance is formally launched.

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# Bahrain beat Kenya in thrilling T20 opener



● **Fiaz Ahmed's blazing 88 and Rizwan Butt's four-wicket haul secure 15-run victory**

Manama

Bahrain secured a thrilling 15-run victory over Kenya in the opening match of the two-game T20 International series at the Gymkhana Club Ground in Nairobi.

The win gave Bahrain, ranked 30th in the ICC T20I rankings, a 1-0 lead over 33rd-ranked Kenya in the series.

Bahrain's victory was built on a brilliant batting display from Fiaz Ahmed and a match-winning bowling spell

from fast bowler Rizwan Butt, who dismantled Kenya's top order with a four-wicket haul.

**Fiaz Ahmed Powers Bahrain to 159**

After winning the toss and choosing to bat first, Bahrain overcame an early setback following the dismissal of captain Asif Ali without scoring.

Fiaz Ahmed then took control of the innings, smashing an explosive 88 runs from 49 balls, including eight fours and five sixes. He combined with wicketkeeper Prashant Kurup, who scored a steady 33 runs, to build a crucial 75-run partnership that steadied Bahrain's innings.

A late six from Imran Anwar off the only delivery he faced helped Bahrain finish

with a competitive total of 159 for four in 20 overs.

Kenya's bowlers had some success, with left-arm spinner Sachin Gill taking two wickets for 20 runs, while Peter Langat claimed one wicket. However, seven wides added pressure to Kenya's bowling effort.

**Rizwan Butt's Four-Wicket Burst Sinks Kenya**

Chasing 160, Kenya started positively but suffered a major setback as Bahrain's Rizwan Butt produced a devastating spell.

The right-arm pacer claimed the first four Kenyan wickets to fall, including key dismissals of Rushab Patel and Sachin Bhudia, who were both dismissed without scoring, leaving Kenya

struggling at 42 for three.

Kenya captain Dhiren Gondaria fought back with a determined 73 runs from 49 balls, but a lack of support from the other end prevented the hosts from completing the chase.

Kenya eventually finished on 144 for eight, falling 15 runs short of Bahrain's target.

**Bahrain Take Series Lead**

Rizwan Butt finished as Bahrain's standout performer with figures of 4 wickets for 17 runs, while Asif Shaikh contributed with two wickets to maintain pressure on Kenya's middle order.

Bahrain now lead the two-match series 1-0. The teams will meet again at the same venue for the final T20I, with Kenya aiming to level the series.

## Bahrain fighters face world test in Abu Dhabi



**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's jiu-jitsu fighters will test themselves against the world's best in Abu Dhabi next week as the national team enters nine days of hard combat at Mubadala Arena.

The World Jiu-Jitsu Championship runs from August 1 to 9, with Bahrain fielding fighters in the masters, senior and youth ranks.

The squad has arrived in the UAE capital under head coach Robert Henik and assistant coach Dr Ahmed Al Aradi, who have led the final work before the first bouts.

Bahrain Jiu-Jitsu Federation president Redha Monfaradi said the event would show how the country's fighters measure up against top rivals and give younger team mem-

bers much-needed time on the mat.

He said Bahrain knew the size of the task but would seek strong displays, greater fight experience and a clear view of each athlete's level.

'We are counting on the players' discipline and hard work to give their best and represent Bahraini jiu-jitsu with pride,' he said.

Dr Al Aradi will fight in the masters over-94kg class, while Bader Al Doseri enters the under-77kg division.

In the senior ranks, Khalid Faraj will compete at under 94kg, Abdulla Al Shaikh at under 56kg and Hassan Osama at under 69kg.

Hamad Mohseni will take part in the under-21, under-56kg class, while Rashid Al Asfoor will fight in the under-18, under-52kg event.

# BRAVE CF 107 ready for action as full fight card gets the green light



Manama

BRAVE Combat Federation™ (BRAVE CF), the world's fastest-growing and most global mixed martial arts organization, has officially released the weigh-in results for BRAVE CF 107.

The final step before the cage door closes has been completed, with the official weigh-ins concluding and every scheduled matchup remaining on course

for Saturday, August 1. Fans at the magnificent Burgas Arena are now one step closer to experiencing another memorable spectacle as the promotion joins forces once again with Bulgarian Fight Agency (BFA).

This latest visit underscores a thriving partnership that has entered its third consecutive year. Together, the two organizations have steadily elevated the profile of the sport across Eastern Europe, creating valuable opportunities for regional

| FULL WEIGH-IN RESULTS                                         |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>96-KG Catchweight Bout - 96 KG / 211.2 LBS**</b>           |  |
| Kaloyan Kolev (95.6 KG) vs. Salim El Ouassaidi (97.2 KG)      |  |
| <b>Flyweight Bout - 56.7 KG / 125 LBS*</b>                    |  |
| Bidzina Gavashelishvili (57.2 KG) vs. Luthando Biko (56.9 KG) |  |
| <b>Lightweight Bout - 70.3 KG / 155 LBS*</b>                  |  |
| Pavel Vladev (70.6 KG) vs. Muhammed Kir Ahmet (70.8 KG)       |  |
| <b>Super Welterweight Bout - 79.4 KG / 175 LBS*</b>           |  |
| Deyan Galinov (79.7 KG) vs. Alexander Mikael (79.5 KG)        |  |
| <b>68-KG Catchweight Bout - 68 KG / 150 LBS</b>               |  |
| Delyan Georgiev (67.9 KG) vs. Owais Yaqoob (68 KG)            |  |
| <b>Bantamweight Bout - 61.2 KG / 135 LBS***</b>               |  |
| Muhammad Idrisov (61.6 KG) vs. Alinson Ochoa (66.5 KG)        |  |
| <b>Lightweight Bout - 70.3 KG / 155 LBS*</b>                  |  |
| Anton Yanchev (70.5 KG) vs. Bachuki Tchikaidze (70.7 KG)      |  |
| <b>81-KG Catchweight Bout - 81 KG / 178.2 LBS</b>             |  |
| Bozhidar Ivanov (80.6 KG) vs. Ricards Ozols (81 KG)           |  |
| <b>59-KG Catchweight Bout - 59 KG / 130 LBS</b>               |  |
| Mohamed Alsameea (58.5 KG) vs. Miran Ramani (58.9 KG)         |  |

athletes while attracting internationally recognized talent to one of the continent's most dynamic markets.

Leading the bill is a compelling clash between hometown favorite Kaloyan Kolev and France's Salim "Bizon" El Ouassaidi. The featured contest offers Kolev the opportunity to deliver a statement performance before a passionate home audience against a dangerous foe with ambitions of spoiling the celebration.

Sharing the marquee is an intriguing flyweight encounter between Georgia's Bidzina Gavashelishvili and South Africa's Luthando "Shorty" Biko. With both athletes eager to

build momentum, the matchup is expected to produce an explosive battle from the opening bell.

The remainder of the lineup offers no shortage of intrigue, with accomplished names and emerging contenders prepared to leave a lasting impression inside the cage. Among those set for action are Muhammad Idrisov, Delyan Georgiev, Owais Yaqoob, and Mohamed Alsameea, adding further depth to an already stacked card.

As anticipation reaches its peak, all eyes now turn to Saturday, when elite athletes from across the globe will converge for an evening filled with high-stakes encounters.

## Chelsea fined £10mn, handed suspended transfer ban for breaching agent rules



A Chelsea flag is seen ahead of a match

AFP | London

Chelsea were fined £10 million (\$13.4 million) and given a suspended two-window transfer ban yesterday after an appeal hearing into sanctions imposed for multiple breaches of Football Association rules.

The Premier League club were initially given a suspended six-point deduction along with a fine, but the points penalty has now been replaced by the suspended registration ban.

The club had admitted to 74 breaches of FA regulations covering agents, working with intermediaries and third-party investment in players.

Owners Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital self-reported the breaches to football authorities in 2022, when they were in the process of buying the club from Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich.

The six-point deduction, which was to have been suspended until the end of June

2027, was imposed by the independent commission that initially heard the case but the club appealed against that sanction.

An appeal board instead replaced the points penalty with the suspended two-window registration ban, which is suspended over the same period.

Chelsea have previously entered sanction settlements in regard to the matter with the Premier League and European football's governing body UEFA.

The £10 million fine imposed by the regulatory commission was not subject to appeal and the full amount will be invested into grassroots football.

The FA said it was continuing to investigate individual misconduct arising out of the case.

Chelsea issued a statement welcoming a "final decision" on the matter.

"In 2022, the club self-reported potential historical rule breaches to all applicable regulators," it said.

# Maresca aims to bring ‘new concepts’ to first Man City match

New manager says he will not copy Pep Guardiola as Manchester City begin a new era

- Maresca prepares for first City match today
- Faces Inter Milan in Hong Kong
- Warns against quick judgements
- Dismisses Rodri transfer speculation

AFP | Hong Kong

Manchester City manager Enzo Maresca said yesterday people may be quick to judge his side, as he prepared for his first game in charge since succeeding Pep Guardiola.

The Italian formally took over last month following the departure of the legendary Catalan, who steered the club to 20 trophies during a supremely successful decade at the Etihad Stadium.



Enzo Maresca reacts during a match (file photo)

Maresca will lead City out for the first time in a pre-season friendly against Inter Milan in Hong Kong on Saturday.

“We’re going to be judged, always -- not just tomorrow,” the former Chelsea and Leicester boss said at a news conference.

“We started 10 days ago, all together, we are introducing some new concepts, so it’s also impor-

tant tomorrow to see something.

“I don’t believe in copy and paste. I think every manager (is) different... so it’s my target, my duty, to try to introduce some new ideas.”

Several of City’s World Cup stars have not travelled with the squad to Hong Kong, the first stop on an Asia tour that will also include two games in Seoul.

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Several of City’s World Cup stars, including Erling Haaland and Rodri, have not travelled with the squad for the Asia tour

Among them are striker Erling Haaland -- last season’s Premier League top scorer -- and Rodri, who captained Spain to World Cup victory this month.

The midfielder is recovering from minor back surgery and has been rumoured to be a transfer target for Real Madrid.

Maresca dismissed the links as “speculation” and said he and the club hierarchy had not had “any conversations just focused on Rodri”.

## Real Madrid pounce to sign Levante striker Espi



Levante  
AFP | Madrid

Real Madrid swooped to sign striker Carlos Espi from Levante for a reported €25 million fee.

The 21-year-old had been linked with several Premier League sides but record 15-time European champions Madrid pounced, with Gonzalo Garcia likely to leave for Fulham.

“(Espi) will join our club for the next five seasons, until June 30, 2031,” said Madrid in a statement.

Espi scored 11 goals in LaLiga last season in 25 top-flight appearances.

The striker is the fifth signing Madrid have made this summer, following Marc Cucurella, Bernardo Silva, Ibrahima Konate and Denzel Dumfries.

Madrid have agreed terms with RB Leipzig’s Ivorian winger Yan Diomande according to media reports, while Manchester City midfielder Rodri is also a rumoured target.

## Chelsea’s Palmer says World Cup snub has motivated him

AFP | Sydney

Chelsea playmaker Cole Palmer said yesterday he has a point to prove this season after missing out on England’s World Cup squad, while hailing new manager Xabi Alonso as a “breath of fresh air”.

Palmer was a high-profile omission from Thomas Tuchel’s World Cup line-up, despite playing a major role in England’s run to the final of Euro 2024.

He ultimately paid the price



Cole Palmer  
for a poor season at Chelsea and said being overlooked hurt.

“It’s like anything, if someone

tells you’re essentially not good enough to get in the squad, then you’re going to think, ‘all right’ and try and go extra harder,” he said in Sydney on Chelsea’s pre-season tour.

Painful as it was to miss out on England’s run to a third-place finish, Palmer enjoyed a rare seven-week summer break, which has him “fresh” and itching to get going again.

After a disappointing 10th-place finish last season, Chelsea has a new manager in Spanish

great Alonso who Palmer is excited about.

“Him and his staff have been good. You know, a breath of fresh air for us players with his ideas and stuff. So yeah, we’re enjoying it,” he said.

Palmer is also ecstatic about Chelsea signing attacking midfielder Morgan Rogers from Aston Villa for a British record 117 million pounds (\$157 million).

The two are close friends and Alonso said this week he expected the pair to “link really well”.

## Casemiro keen to team with Messi at Miami



Inter Miami co-owner Jorge Mas introduces new Brazilian acquisition Casemiro

AFP | Miami

Casemiro said he was looking forward to playing alongside, rather than against, Messi, after their many battles in the Spanish league classics between Real Madrid and Barcelona.

“I know he’s impossible to stop. I never managed it,” Casemiro said. “I always needed help from my teammates. And in the two training sessions I’ve already had with him, it’s already clear he’s impossible to stop.”

Miami co-owner Jorge Mas beamed as he handed over Casemiro’s pink jersey and denied there had been any impropriety in signing him despite MLS’s investigation into possible “tampering”.

The probe focuses on MLS’s system of “discovery rights,” which must be acquired by a club before they can start negotiating with some high-profile players.

Casemiro was on LA Galaxy’s list, and Mas said he had contacted the club before starting talks with the Brazilian.

“Of course if I’m here it’s because of him and to help him and Inter Miami,” the former Real Madrid midfielder said of the Argentine star who now captains Miami.

“I want to enjoy being with him, help him win, make him even greater. He’s one of the gods, if not the god of football,” Casemiro said as he was officially introduced by his new Major League Soccer club.

Casemiro, who arrived in MLS after a four-year stint at Manchester United, has already played his first minutes for the Herons in a 1-0 win over Montreal on Saturday.

Argentine star Messi sat that one out less than two weeks after his country’s World Cup final defeat to Spain.

## De Minaur beats teen Hewitt in all-Aussie Washington clash

AFP | Washington

Defending champion Alex de Minaur powered into the Washington Open quarter-finals with a clinical 6-2, 6-3 victory over fellow Australian Cruz Hewitt.

Men’s second seed Ben Shelton also advanced, as did women’s top seed Jessica Pegula and No. 2 Elina Svitolina.

Top-seeded De Minaur was always likely to prove too much for 17-year-old qualifier Hewitt -- son of Aussie great Lleyton Hewitt -- who had only captured his first ATP victory in Tuesday’s first round.

The first set threatened to become a demolition as De Minaur raced to a 5-0 lead.

But Hewitt found his feet, breaking back in the sixth game and holding serve before succumbing 6-2.

Cheered on by a crowd that included his famous father, Hewitt started the second set brightly.

But he was broken again on his second service game and could not reel in De Minaur, who warmly embraced the



Alex de Minaur embraces fellow Australian Cruz Hewitt following their match

youngster at the net after taking the match.

It was the first head-to-head ATP Tour match between the two, who have known each other for years.

“It was definitely weird,” said De Minaur. “I knew I was going to play him on the tour someday, but I didn’t actually expect it to be this week.”

“It was an amazing feeling. Even all the lead up, seeing all the incredible pictures that we have together and how we’ve both grown up.”

“I’m glad I managed to get

through, but I’m sure we’re going to have many battles in the years to come.”

De Minaur next faces American Brandon Nakashima, who upset Czech seventh seed Jakub Mensik 7-6 (7/5), 3-6, 6-4.

US home hope Shelton advanced with a gritty 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 6-4, victory over France’s Ugo Humbert. After handing Humbert the first set with a double fault on set point, Shelton dominated the second.

But the third set was a tense affair and after seizing a break

”

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ALEX DE MINAUR

for a 5-4 lead Shelton had to fend off a break point before polishing off the match with a sharply angled serve that Humbert smacked into the net.

“For me, it was all about heart tonight,” Shelton said after lining up a meeting with Chile’s Alejandro Tabile, a 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) winner over France’s Terence Atmane.

Pegula also had to rally from a set down, saying she started her match against Poland’s Frech “just a little off” after a first-round bye.

# FIFA plan **hit** by senior advisor resigning, AFC opposition

World football governing body vows to continue consultation process despite mounting criticism

● **AFC joins UEFA and CONCACAF in opposing FIFA**

● **Senior advisor Carlos Cordeiro resigns in protest**

AFP | Paris

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) joined UEFA and CONCACAF in condemning world football's governing body FIFA's proposed private investment plan, saying yesterday they were alarmed it had reached the point a "World Cup boycott has entered public discourse".

A damaging blow to FIFA president Gianni Infantino came with the later resignation of a senior advisor Carlos Cordeiro, who issued an excoriating statement.

"As a senior advisor to the FIFA president, a former banker, and a lifelong football fan, I cannot stand by while FIFA considers selling a stake in the World Cup," wrote Cordeiro, a former head of the US Soccer Federation.

"Let me be clear: I had no involvement in this proposal, and I oppose it unequivocally."

"It is a bad deal for FIFA's member associations, a bad deal for football, and a bad deal for the long-term future of the game."

His resignation and the AFC statement came hours after FIFA vowed to press ahead with an "open and democratic" consultation on the plan.



The FIFA logo is seen ahead of the 2026 World Cup match (file photo)

The statement followed a pledge by Europe's governing body UEFA to boycott the World Cup if FIFA went ahead with its plan which set alarm bells ringing within the AFC.

"The AFC stands in solidarity with UEFA and CONCACAF in expressing serious concerns over FIFA's proposal," the Kuala Lumpur-based body said in a statement.

"The fact that the situation has reached the point where the real possibility of a FIFA World Cup boycott has entered public discourse should concern everyone who cares about the future of our game," said the AFC, which represents 47 member nations, including Australia, China, Ja-

pan and Saudi Arabia.

FIFA said in a statement all of its member associations should have a chance to consider the plan.

"Nobody is selling football," it said.

"This is not something FIFA would ever entertain."

It also said it had heard feedback from UEFA and CONCACAF, the governing body for football in North and Central America, which said all 41 of its member associations had rejected FIFA's proposal to sell a stake in the business operations of the World Cup.

The world body also said its planned consultation process had been "disrupted by incorrect

media reports".

"We respect the feedback and concern aired in public and reaffirm our commitment to an open and democratic consultation," FIFA's statement said.

"We will proceed with this consultation process to ensure that each (member association) has the ability to express its vote based on facts," it said.

FIFA has said the plan it announced on Tuesday could raise up to \$4.2 billion based on a valuation of \$20 billion for the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), the commercial subsidiary it proposed to run events such as the World Cup and Club World Cup.

If approved, the project could



**Carlos Cordeiro, a former US Soccer Federation head and senior advisor to Infantino, said he had no involvement in the proposal and opposed it unequivocally**

provide each of FIFA's 211 member associations with a one-off payment of \$20 million in early 2027 and increase their funding allocation for the 2027-2030 cycle from \$8.0 million to \$20 million.

Private investors would be allowed under the proposal to acquire stakes in the company but would remain minority shareholders.

UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham said that Infantino "is the wrong man to lead" FIFA, calling the plan an "outrageous suggestion".

**'Time for a hydration break'**

UEFA said in an earlier statement none of its national teams would participate in any FIFA competition "for so long as these proposals remain alive".

"The World Cup cannot be treated as an investment product... No part of it should ever be surrendered to private investors. The World Cup is not for sale," it said.

Infantino had described the initiative on Wednesday as a "golden opportunity to turbocharge the development of the game globally".

However, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin, who boycotted the World Cup final to show unhappiness with FIFA, said there was no place in world football for such a model.

"Football's future cannot be dictated by the expectations of those whose first duty is to maximise financial return," he said.

"Nor can the interests of national associations, leagues, clubs, players and supporters become subordinate to investor returns. Football cannot mortgage its future for financial gain."

The European Union praised UEFA on Thursday for "defending the integrity of the game".

UEFA also received approval from Chelsea's Spanish coach Xabi Alonso, who was a member of the 2010 World Cup-winning side.

"We have seen a great World Cup, and some things they (should) stay the same way. So it's good to defend the interests from other people," he said in Sydney, where the London club are on a pre-season tour.

CONCACAF members, including the three co-hosts of the recent World Cup, unanimously rejected the proposal on Thursday.

On a lighter note a beer brand that is a major UEFA sponsor posted an advert with the line 'Time for a hydration break, Gianni? Probably,' referring to the pauses in each half for the players at the World Cup.

## AC Milan 'in tears' at death of Italian football legend Baresi

AFP | Milan

Italian defender Franco Baresi, the captain of AC Milan in the 1980s and 1990s when they won three European Cups and six Italian league titles, has died at the age of 66, the club announced yesterday.

"Milan is in tears following the passing of Franco Baresi. His example and integrity will be forever etched into the Club's DNA, just as his iconic number 6 shirt is," AC Milan, of which Baresi became honorary vice-president in 2020, wrote on X.

"We must be strong and gather every bit of energy, even at this saddest of times."

"We lost Franco only a few months after his last public appearance in a packed San Siro, at the Milan Winter Olympics opening ceremony, an event on the world stage he helped make unforgettable."



Franco Baresi

"In memory of Franco, we stand united, knowing he'll guide and push us throughout our Rossoneri journey. Forever. Because Baresi is forever."

A World Cup winner with Italy in 1982 and a finalist at the 1994 World Cup, Baresi is regarded as one of the greatest sweepers in football history. AC Milan did not specify the cause of Baresi's death.

He had undergone surgery in August 2025 to remove a lung nodule.

## Alonso says new Chelsea signing Lacroix has 'winner's mentality'

AFP | Sydney

Chelsea manager Xabi Alonso yesterday said new signing Maxence Lacroix has a winner's mentality and will boost their defensive line, hailing his "strong personality".

The French international was unveiled on Thursday, moving to Stamford Bridge from Crystal Palace in a deal worth a reported £52 million (\$70 million).

Lacroix agreed a six-year contract and will link up with the new club for their pre-season preparations.

"I know Maxence from my time in the Bundesliga," said former Liverpool star Alonso, who rose to prominence as one of Europe's brightest coaches at Bayer Leverkusen.

"But I think that his progression and his adaptation in the Premier League has been fantastic. Not just on the pitch but in terms of personality, leadership."

"He has these attributes and



Maxence Lacroix reacts during a match (file photo)

is a very reliable player that will give us power in the defensive line and will have a big direct impact in the team, I'm sure."

"So it's a great signing for now and for the future."

Lacroix made 98 appearances for Palace after arriving from Wolfsburg in 2024.

He won the FA Cup, the UEFA Conference League and the

Community Shield during his time at Selhurst Park.

"He has strong personality, he's mature," added Alonso, in Sydney on Chelsea's pre-tour as he works to revitalise a side that finished a disappointing 10th in the Premier League last season.

"He wants to win. He has a winner's mentality, and he loves to defend, and that's something



**I know Maxence from my time in the Bundesliga. But I think that his progression and his adaptation in the Premier League has been fantastic. Not just on the pitch but in terms of personality, leadership**

XABI ALONSO

I like as well."

The 26-year-old, who has won seven caps for France and played for his country at the recent World Cup, said he was proud to be a part of "this beautiful club".

"When I spoke with the manager, I saw that we have the same direction and desire for this club," he said. "We want to win."