

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 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



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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."