

Benzema signs for Al-Ittihad: source

Karim Benzema signs three-year contract with Saudi Arabian club Al-Ittihad, according to club source

● Benzema admits Madrid departure 'hurts' ahead of Saudi switch

AFP | Riyadh

Real Madrid's Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema has signed for Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad for three years starting next season, a source in the Jeddah-based club said yesterday.

"Benzema has signed a contract for his transfer to Al-Ittihad for a three-year period starting next season," the Saudi club source said.

Real Madrid announced on Sunday that the 35-year-old was leaving the club after 14 seasons, the day after coach Carlo Ancelotti had said there was "no doubt" Benzema's future lay in the Spanish capital.

If the move is confirmed, Benzema will join his former Real Madrid teammate Cristiano Ronaldo in the Gulf kingdom after the five-time world player of the year moved to Al Nassr from Manchester United following last year's World Cup.

Lionel Messi, who is leaving



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema (C) applauds as he talks with coach Carlo Ancelotti at the end of a match

Paris Saint-Germain after two seasons, has also been linked with a move to Saudi Arabia.

Senior officials from another Saudi Arabian club, Al Hilal, have flown to France to try and seal a deal for Messi after the 35-year-old Argentinian played his last game for PSG at the weekend, two sources with knowledge of the matter told AFP on Sunday.

The Saudi delegation plans to meet Messi's father and agent, Jorge, with the aiming of completing the signing as soon as

possible.

Benzema joined Madrid in 2009 from Ligue 1 side Lyon.

He made 648 appearances for Madrid and is second on Real's all-time goalscoring list with 354 -- only Ronaldo has more.

He has lifted five Champions Leagues, four La Liga titles and three Copas del Rey with Madrid.

But after a stellar 2021-22 season when he led Real to Champions League glory and was rewarded with the Ballon d'Or, he was troubled by injuries in

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Champions Leagues, four La Liga titles and three Copas del Rey have been won by Benzema with Real Madrid

the just-completed season and had to miss Qatar's World Cup campaign in Qatar last year with a thigh problem.

Benzema held a goodbye ceremony at Real's training ground yesterday.

"It's a bit of a sad day, because I am leaving this club, it hurts me, because I had a dream in my head - to sign for Madrid, and finish at Madrid, but sometimes life gives you other opportunities," said Benzema in a speech during his farewell at Madrid's training ground.

"I will always watch Madrid's games, and thanks to the fans too, who pushed me on to play good games."

Benzema said he was grateful to Real Madrid president Florentino Perez for signing him.

"When I saw you, I said this

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KARIM BENZEMA

is the man who brought Zizou (Zinedine Zidane) and Ronaldo, now he wants me in his team," said Benzema.

"I will never forget Real Madrid, it's the best club in the world, in history, but now is the moment to leave and to see another story."

Perez thanked Benzema for his efforts over the past 14 years. "Today it's not just another player going, today we're saying goodbye to one of the most incredible players in our history," said the president.

"Thank you for all you have given us, you arrived here as a boy and today, you leave as one of our legends."

Saudi Arabia has drawn up a



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list of more than 10 players who have won either the Champions League or the World Cup that it wants to lure to its league, a source close to the negotiations has said.

The list includes Real Madrid and Croatia midfielder Luka Modric, Tottenham goalkeeper Hugo Lloris and his France teammate N'Golo Kante. All are at the tail-end of their careers.

Guardiola warns Man City against Champions League final arrogance

AFP | London

Pep Guardiola has warned his Manchester City's stars that their confidence ahead of the Champions League final against Inter Milan cannot slip into arrogance as they aim to complete a historic treble.

Guardiola's men are one game away from becoming just the second side to win the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup in the same season.

City are huge favourites for the clash in Istanbul on Saturday, having thrashed Bayern Munich and Real Madrid on route to the final.

By contrast, Inter finished a distant third in Serie A and enjoyed a less demanding passage to the final as they beat Porto, Benfica and AC Milan.

However, the Italians boast the richer European Cup her-



Manchester City's manager Pep Guardiola reacts as he talks to his players

itage, with three triumphs to City's none, and Guardiola has urged his team not to become complacent.

"Of course we are confident, so optimistic, but at the same time I cannot deny the difficulties and qualities of the oppo-

nents," said Guardiola at City's pre-match media day yesterday.

"I have never done it and especially in the final of the Champions League."

City remain on course to match the treble achievement of Manchester United's class

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We know a final is about how you behave for 95 minutes. It's not about history, for history they are better than us

PEP GUARDIOLA

of 1998/99 by beating the Red Devils 2-1 in the FA Cup final on Saturday.

Guardiola said that was far better preparation for the Champions League final than their only previous appearance in the European showpiece two years when his side lost 1-0 against Chelsea in Porto.

But he insisted City's stunning form in the past four months will count for nothing when it comes to getting the job done at the Ataturk Stadium.

Tottenham appoint Postecoglou as new manager



Celtic FC's head coach Ange Postecoglou (L) looks on as Sydney FC celebrate their victory after a match (file photo)

AFP | London

Tottenham have appointed Ange Postecoglou as their new manager on a four-year deal, ending their long search for a new coach.

The 57-year-old Australian, who won the domestic Scottish treble with Celtic this season, will replace Antonio Conte at the Premier League club.

Conte left Spurs by "mutual agreement" in late March, with Cristian Stellini and then Ryan Mason taking temporary charge.

Postecoglou will officially join the London club, who finished a disappointing eighth in the Premier League this season, on July 1.

"Ange brings a positive mentality and a fast, attacking style of play," Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy said yesterday.

"He has a strong track record of developing players and an understanding of the importance of the link from the academy -- everything that is important to our club."

The Greek-born Postecoglou

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trophies have been won by Postecoglou during his two years with Celtic

enjoyed huge success during two years in Glasgow, winning five trophies.

But the lure of the Premier League proved too much to resist as he takes on the challenge of trying to revitalise Spurs after a disastrous 12 months.

The club were still challenging for a top-four place when Conte departed but they ended up missing out on European competition.

Former Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann and ex-Barcelona, Spain boss Luis Enrique and Feyenoord manager Arne Slot were among the big names touted for the job.

'I don't support the war, I don't support Lukashenko': Sabalenka

AFP | Paris

Belarus tennis star Aryna Sabalenka outrightly condemned her country's role in the war in Ukraine yesterday and insisted she is not a supporter of president Alexander Lukashenko.

"I'm not supporting the war. I don't support war, meaning I don't support Lukashenko," the world number two said after reaching the French Open semi-finals by defeating Elina Svitolina of Ukraine.

The 25-year-old had come under increasing pressure to distance herself from her apparent close relationship with Lukashenko, a key military ally of Moscow in the ongoing conflict.

"We played a lot of Fed Cups



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka (R) waits to shake hands with Ukraine's Elina Svitolina

in Belarus. He (Lukashenko) was in our matches taking pictures with us after the match. Nothing bad was happening that time in Belarus or in Ukraine or

in Russia," she told reporters.

Sabalenka had cancelled two previous press conferences at Roland Garros, claiming she didn't feel "safe" after facing a

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I don't want my country to be involved in any conflict. I said it many times. You have my position. You have my answer. I don't want sport to be involved in politics, because I'm just a 25-year-old tennis player. And if I would like to be political I wouldn't be here. I don't want to be involved in any politics

ARYNA SABALENKA

barrage of questions over her links to her country's strongman leader.