

# A reputation to honour

Bahrain targets success at revived Asian Beach Games

TDT | Manama

**B**ahrain returns to the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, with a 20-athlete delegation set to compete across four disciplines. The continental event makes its comeback after a decade-long absence.

Competition officially begins tomorrow, bringing together 45 Asian delegations and featuring 14 beach and water-based sports, including beach soccer, volleyball, jiu-jitsu, sailing, dragon boat racing, and aquathlon.

Bahrain will be represented in beach handball, 3x3 basketball, open water swimming, and beach wrestling, with competition spread across the full schedule.

Action for the Kingdom's representatives starts immediately with beach handball on opening day, offering an early chance to make an impact on the medal table. The 3x3 basketball team follows on Saturday, before William Balzano and Robert Bonsall compete in open water swimming the following Sunday. The campaign concludes on April 28-29, when four athletes take part in beach wrestling.

The staggered programme allows each squad to focus on preparation and recovery while maintaining coordination across the wider delegation.

In the final build-up, Bahrain's athletes completed training camps in China, splitting time



Coach Qaidoom leads his beach handball team in training

between Sanya and Hangzhou depending on their discipline. The basketball team refined tactics and conditioning in Hangzhou, while the remaining athletes acclimatised in Sanya to coastal conditions and competition venues.

The Bahrain Olympic Committee oversaw logistics and planning throughout the prepara-

tion phase, with federation officials on site to monitor progress and support teams ahead of competition.

The 20-man squad brings experienced international competitors. The 3x3 basketball lineup features Bogdan Dragovic, Milos Supica, Nasser Al Mosawi, and Austin Ajukwa, under coach Ahmed Elias, reflecting Bah-

rain's continued investment in the format.

In open water swimming, William Balzano and Robert Bonsall represent Bahrain in the endurance event, adding strength to the delegation.

Beach wrestling again looks like the Kingdom's strongest medal hope, led by Shamil Sharipov in the 90kg category.



William Balzano steps up his preparations in the pool

A world bronze and Asian silver medallist, he is joined by Magomed Sharipov, Magomedrasul Asluev, and Alibeg Alibegov, all bringing international pedigree.

The beach handball team, coached by Hussain Al Qaidoum, faces a demanding schedule starting against hosts China on April 21 and running through April 27.

The Asian Beach Games return after a 10-year break, with the last edition held in 2016

in Da Nang, Vietnam. Bahrain has historically excelled at the event, winning 11 medals including seven golds. Its standout performance came at Phuket 2014, where it claimed five gold and two silver medals, followed by further success in Da Nang.

As competition begins, Bahrain arrives in Sanya aiming to build on that strong legacy and convert preparation into podium finishes.

## Rosenior says Chelsea owners supportive despite slump



Chelsea's head coach Liam Rosenior reacts during a match (file photo)

AFP | London

**L**iam Rosenior said yesterday that Chelsea's owners had been "magnificent" in their support despite an alarming slump that has left their Champions League qualification hopes hanging by a thread.

The Blues are seven points behind fifth-placed Liverpool after four straight Premier League defeats and their chances of finishing in the top five look bleak.

Boos greeted the full-time whistle following Saturday's 1-0 defeat to Manchester United at Stamford Bridge af-

ter some supporters staged a street protest against owners BlueCo ahead of kick-off.

Chelsea co-owner Behdad Eghbali last week said the club were still behind Rosenior and remained optimistic about long-term success under his management.

Asked yesterday if he felt that support, Blues head coach Rosenior, who replaced Enzo Maresca in January, said: "One hundred percent."

"They have been supportive of me in our daily conversations, the sporting directors involved, they have been magnificent in their support of me and the team.

## Real Madrid coach Arbeloa launches stout defence of Mbappe

AFP | Madrid

**R**eal Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa mounted a strong defence of French superstar Kylian Mbappe, who was criticised for what some perceived as ignoring his defensive responsibilities in last week's Champions League defeat by Bayern Munich.

Arbeloa, who himself is under fire with Real all but certain to finish without a trophy this term, said Mbappe had nothing to reproach himself about and that aside from scoring in both legs of the quarter-final he had "given his all in defence".

Real lost 4-3 in a thrilling second-leg tussle with Bayern Munich -- who progressed 6-4 on aggregate -- with the Spanish side reduced to 10 men after Eduardo Camavinga was sent off in the 86th minute.

Bayern scored twice after the Frenchman's dismissal, which sparked the criticism of Mbappe.

Arbeloa, though, was having none of this at his eve-of-match press conference yesterday.

"I have nothing to reproach Kylian about," said Arbeloa,



Real Madrid's French forward #10 Kylian Mbappe (R) and Bayern Munich's French defender #02 Dayot Upamecano vie for the ball

whose side host Alaves on Tuesday.

"He was at the top of his game, he scored in both legs and was a constant threat to their defence.

"He gave his all in defence, he worked really hard.

"I was thoroughly satisfied with his performance in that match," added the 43-year-old.

Mbappe, who has scored 40 goals in all competitions in his second season in Spain, will have to wait another year to realise "his dream" of winning the Champions League.

It was the reason why he joined Madrid from French giants Paris Saint-Germain, who promptly rubbed salt into his

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ALVARO ARBELOA

wounds by winning European club football's most prized trophy last term.

Whether Arbeloa, who replaced Xabi Alonso earlier this season, is the man still in charge next term is in doubt -- arch-rivals Barcelona lead Real by nine points in the race for the La Liga crown with seven matches remaining.

However, he refused to comment on his future, aside from saying it was not in his hands, but remarked that there was no need for a "huge revolution" at Real in order to turn things round next campaign.