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Wednesday, September 23, 2026
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SPORT

Sheikh Joaan meets officials, visits Bayt Qatar

Nagoya, Japan: HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), held separate meetings with senior Olympic officials on the sidelines of the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026. Sheikh Joaan met Ser Miang Ng, Member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Keith Joseph, President of the Association of Caribbean National Olympic Committees (CANOC), and Mustafa Berraf, President of the Association of African National Olympic Committees (ANOCA). The meetings discussed ways to strengthen cooperation between the OCA and international and continental Olympic organisations, enhance the exchange of expertise and knowledge, and develop joint initiatives and programmes to support the Olympic Movement, athletes and National Olympic Committees. The officials also exchanged views on issues of common interest and stressed the importance of strengthening the role of sport in promoting communication and understanding among peoples across continents. Sheikh Joaan also toured Bayt Qatar in Nagoya, where he viewed displays highlighting Qatar's sporting achievements and activities being held for visitors during the Asian Games. During the visit, he met members of the Qatari delegation, including beach volleyball stars Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan.



SPOTLIGHT

Qatar building 2036 Olympic bid on strong foundations: Al-Kuwari

By Sports Reporter
Nagoya, Japan

Fatima Sultan al-Kuwari, CEO of Qatar's bid to host the 2036 Olympic and Paralympic Games, has expressed confidence in Doha's bid and its ability to deliver an exceptional edition of the Summer Games. Speaking during a dialogue session yesterday on the sidelines of the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 at Bayt Qatar, al-Kuwari said Doha had begun its bid journey with confidence and national ambition, building on Qatar's growing position on the global sporting map.

She said the bid was supported by Qatar's experience in hosting major international events, modern infrastructure, world-class sporting venues and a pool of national expertise developed over years of staging major championships.

Al-Kuwari stressed that the bid was not simply an attempt to add another major event to Qatar's hosting record, but was based on a wider vision to deliver an Olympic and Paralympic experience that would leave a sustainable legacy for Qatar, the region and the Olympic Movement.

Qatar's hosting record includes a wide range of continental and international championships, with the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 representing a major milestone.



"The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 demonstrated our ability to deliver one of the world's largest and most complex sporting events while welcoming millions of fans, athletes, media representatives and official delegations and providing them with an integrated experience both inside and outside the stadiums," she said.

Al-Kuwari said Qatar's bid reflects the country's belief in the power of sport to bring people together and build communities. She said Doha sees the Olympic and Paralympic Games as more than a sporting competition, highlighting their cultural, social and economic dimensions.

Hosting the Games, she added, would give Qatar and the wider Arab region an opportunity to present their culture, identity and values to international audiences. "We believe in Qatar's ability to deliver an exceptional experience. Our goal is to represent our country with pride and present a bid

that reflects the position Qatar's sport has reached and the significant development the country has achieved across different fields," she said.

Al-Kuwari acknowledged that the bid journey would be lengthy and require extensive planning, coordination and teamwork, but said Qatar was approaching the process with complete seriousness and confidence in its capabilities.

Al-Kuwari described the success of the 2022 World Cup as one of the foundations of Doha's Olympics bid. She said the tournament demonstrated Qatar's ability to meet demanding organisational, security, operational and service requirements while also providing visitors with a cultural experience.

The World Cup legacy, she added, can still be seen in Qatar's sporting venues and infrastructure, as well as in the human and organisational expertise developed through the tournament. "Qatar continues to develop its sporting ecosystem and use every event it hosts as an opportunity to gain further expertise and enhance its readiness for the future," she said.

Al-Kuwari said Qatar's ambition went beyond securing the right to host the Games, with Doha seeking to contribute to the development of the Olympic Movement. She noted that the Middle East has never hosted the Olympic Games despite its rich history, diverse cultures and strong passion for sport.

FOCUS

Rashad secures bronze to give Qatar second karate medal

Qatar remained at the top of the men's skeet team standings after the second day of competition



Qatar's Abdullah Rashad Mohi El Din Babiker celebrates with bronze medal.

By Sports Reporter
Nagoya, Japan

Qatar's Abdullah Rashad Mohi El Din Babiker won the bronze medal in the men's under-84kg karate kumite at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan. Rashad secured the medal with an emphatic 8-0 victory over Palestine's Abdallah al-Khatib, producing a dominant performance from the start.

It was Qatar's second karate medal at the Games after Abdulrahman Mustafa won silver in the men's under-60kg event. The two medals underline Qatar's strong showing in karate, with the athletes overcoming tough competition to reach the podium. Rashad said he was delighted to win the bronze and proud to see the Qatari flag raised at the Asian Games.

He described the competition as extremely challenging but said he was pleased with his performance and reach-



Qatar's Abdullah Rashad Mohi El Din Babiker in action with Palestine's Abdallah Alkhatib during the karate Kumite 84kg bronze medal bout in Toyohashi, Japan.

ing the podium. He added that the medal would motivate him to achieve more for Qatar in future competitions.

Eid al-Marikhi, President of the Qatar Taekwondo, Judo and Karate Federation, praised Rashad's bronze medal, describing it as the result of sustained work and tremendous effort. "We are delighted with this achievement and dedicate it to our wise leadership and everyone who has supported the national team. I also congratulate the athlete, the technical and administrative staff and the entire Qatari karate family," al-Marikhi said. "These achievements did not happen by chance. They are the result of sustained work and tremendous effort over the past period, during which we were committed to preparing the athletes well for the Games."

He also praised the Algerian coach, who took charge of the national team about three months ago. "He has worked extremely hard with the athletes and, in a short period of time, succeeded in preparing the team well. His contribution to this achievement has been clear," al-Marikhi said.

QATAR SHOOTERS RETAIN TOP SPOT IN MEN'S SKEET

Qatar remained at the top of the men's skeet team standings after the second day of competition at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games. Qatar lead the standings with 283 shots, followed by Kazakhstan on 280, while Chinese Taipei and Kuwait share third place on 278. With one more round of 25 targets remaining today, Qatar



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah is tied for fifth place with four others in skeet. The final qualification round of 25 shots will be held today, following which the top eight shooters will advance to the medal round.

are well placed to clinch gold. Among the leading contenders for the individual gold medal is Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah, the ace rally driver and London 2012 Olympic bronze medallist. He is on 95 shots and tied for fifth place with four other shooters. Rashed Saleh al-Athba is also on 95 shots and is ninth, while Ali Ahmed al-Ishaq is 14th on 93.

The final qualification round of 25 shots will be held today, following which the top eight shooters will advance to the medal round.

In the women's team event, Qatar are sixth out of seven teams with 249 shots and with medal out of contention. China lead with 287, followed by Kazakhstan on 274 and India on 266.

Reem al-Sharshani is Qatar's leading individual performer in the women's event, lying 10th on 89 shots. Hajar Mohammed is 21st on 81, while Sarah Ghulam Mohammed is 23rd on 79.

QATAR 3X3 TEAMS FACE SAUDI, KAZAKHSTAN

Qatar's men's 3x3 basketball team face Bahrain today after opening their Asiad campaign with victories over Indonesia and Chinese Taipei.

The women's team will take on Kazakhstan after losing their opening matches to Sri Lanka and Chinese Taipei. Qatar lost 19-16 to Sri Lanka before suffering a 21-3 defeat against Chinese Taipei.

AL-TAMIMI, AL-MALKI BEGIN SQUASH CAMPAIGN

Qatar's squash team begin their Asian Games campaign today, with Abdullah al-Tamimi facing Mongolia's Yesun Otgonchimeg and Saleem al-Malki taking on South Korea's Na Joo-young.

Al-Tamimi will draw on his previous Asian Games experience, having won bronze in the men's singles at Hangzhou 2022.

SPOTLIGHT

Loss of contract changes nothing: Miller



Reuters
Cape Town

David Miller is looking forward to a reunion with Australia in the three-match one-day international series starting in Durban on Thursday, and while he is disappointed to have lost his national contract, remains committed to playing for South Africa. The swashbuckling left-handed middle-order batter has an excellent record against the Australians in the format with three centuries and an average of 57.38 from

28 matches. His highest score in ODIs of 139 came against Australia in Hobart in 2018.

"I do enjoy playing against Australia," Miller told reporters yesterday.

"They have always been a really competitive team with incredibly skilled individual players.

"For me personally, you always want to be playing against the best. Playing against teams and players like that raises your standards and tests you, which is always nice," Miller added.

The 37-year-old admits he was disappointed to lose his national contract ahead of the 2027 World

Cup that South Africa will host with Namibia and Zimbabwe.

"Although I play in a lot of (Twenty20) leagues, I've always wanted to play for South Africa and I love playing for my country," Miller said.

"Nothing has changed in that regard," Miller explained.

"I've just lost my contract, but I still make myself available. If I'm selected, I'll play. It's about making sure everything is communicated properly.

"There is obviously healthy competition at the moment, with a lot of youngsters coming through. I'm well aware of that and it's great

to have that competition because it encourages growth."

South Africa have had much World Cup disappointment in the past but Miller is hopeful that next year they can end a series of failures that has defined the side.

"We've played really good cricket over the last couple of years and we've done really well in World Cups. We haven't won one, obviously, but we've certainly been knocking on the door," Miller said.

"Sometimes, when you strive too hard for something, mistakes can creep in. You can become a little frantic and stop thinking clearly."

MATCH REPORT

All-rounder Jacks guides England to win over Sri Lanka

JACKS SCORED A BRILLIANT 46 AND THEN GRABBED 5/22

AFP
Chester-le-Street, United Kingdom

All-rounder Will Jacks starred with both bat and ball as England overwhelmed Sri Lanka by 89 runs in the first one-day international at Chester-le-Street yesterday.

His quickfire 46 not out helped take the hosts to a competitive 265 all out after they lost momentum following the exit of captain Harry Brook for 67.

Off-spinner Jacks then took a fine 5-22 in seven overs, including three dismissals in the final over for his maiden five-wicket haul in ODIs.

Sri Lanka were dismissed for 176 with 13 overs to spare as England went 1-0 up in this three-match series. The tourists made a positive start to their pursuit of a target of 266. But after Josh Tongue had Pathum Nissanka caught behind for 27 to leave Sri Lanka 48-2, the innings stalled, with Pavan Rathnayake taking 23 balls for a 13 that ended when he caught low down at cover by Tom Banton off Jamie Overton.

And 84-3 then became 85-4 when Jacks had Charith Asalanka lbw missing a sweep.

Sri Lanka captain Kusal Mendis fell in similar fashion when he too was lbw attempting to sweep Jacks for 42 off 60 balls, with his side faltering at 105-6.

Jacks' treble strike then ended the match.

Dunith Wellalage tried to revive the innings with 45 until he skyed Jacks to mid-on.

Two balls later, Jacks dismissed



Will Jacks (centre) walks off with the ball after taking five wickets after England won the game by 89 runs in the first One Day international against Sri Lanka at the Riverside Ground in Chester-le-Street yesterday. (AFP)

Asitha Fernando for nought before producing his best delivery of the over to clean bowl last man Dilshan Madushanka for a golden duck with a classic off-break.

Earlier, leg-spinner Sachindu Colombage took an impressive 3-44 on his Sri Lanka debut, including the prize wickets of Joe Root and Jos Buttler.

England, despite a tricky pitch on which the ball was not coming onto the bat, were on course for a large total at 182-3 in the 32nd

over after Brook won the toss.

Sri Lanka, however, then took three quick wickets to reduce them to 199-6.

But Jacks' 47-ball innings, featuring four consecutive fours off Dushmantha Chameera, bolstered England's total, albeit they failed to bat out their full 50 overs.

Test skipper Root and Brook had previously shared a third-wicket partnership of 68.

Root, however, was eventually dismissed for the first time

in five ODI innings - a sequence spanning 404 runs - when he was bowled playing back for 44 to Colombage.

But Brook continued his fine form from the T20 series with a 49-ball fifty including six fours.

BRIEF SCORES

England 265 all out (Brook 67, Jacks 46*, Colombage 3-44, Asitha 3-53) **beat Sri Lanka 176** (Wellalage 45, Mendis 42, Jacks 5-22) **by 89 runs**

WORLD CHAMPS INDIA NARROWLY SURVIVE SCARE AGAINST JAPAN

TOKYO: World champions India narrowly survived being on the end of a huge upset as they edged a spirited Japan by two runs in a rain-shortened first-ever T20 international between the teams yesterday. The historic match celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations took place at Japan's modest Sano International Cricket Ground outside Tokyo. It was Japan's first T20 game against a full-member nation. India, who retained their T20 World Cup crown at home earlier this year, opted to bat first after rain and wet outfield delayed the start and forced a five-overs-a-side shootout. India, captained by Shreyas Iyer, struggled to score on a sluggish pitch as they made 32-4. Japan - ranked 41st by the International Cricket Council (ICC) - pushed their more illustrious opponents all the way as they threatened a massive shock. They were in the game until the last ball but finished on 30-3, falling agonisingly just short. "Yeah, extremely proud, as I think I've been saying to a few other guys, that when it gets that close,



India's Ishant Kishan (center) shakes hands with a member of the Japanese cricket team after the T20 match at Sano International Cricket Ground in Sano, Tochigi Prefecture, yesterday. (AFP)

it's actually a little bit tougher to take, and the emotions are running pretty high in our group," Japan skipper Kendel Kadowaki-Fleming said. "But the fact that we were able to run the best team in the world, in my opinion, to the last ball of a game is pretty special,"

Kadowaki-Fleming added. Japan's 17-year-old spinner Charlie Hara-Hinze stood out with figures of 2-17 in his two overs after he opened the attack and sent back opener Abhishek Sharma for a golden duck. Kadowaki-Fleming attempted to pull off the chase in his run-a-

ball 12, but India's experienced spinners dealt the heavyweights from embarrassment. "It doesn't matter how good a team you are, because the oppositions are also competitive, and the attitude and approach the Japanese team showed today was impeccable, and kudos to them," India skipper Iyer said. "The approach was outstanding. So I'm sure that they are on the right track right now."

The build-up to what should have been a mismatch was affected by Typhoon Dujuan, with heavy rain in Sano forcing training to be cancelled on Monday. The venue, which is also used for baseball and has a capacity of around 2,000 spectators, was dominated by India fans who had been expecting a rout. Japan will play the opening match of men's T20 cricket at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games against Afghanistan on Thursday at a converted baseball field.

BRIEF SCORES

Five overs a side India 32 for 4 (Iyer 16, Hara-Hinze 2-17) **beat Japan 30 for 3** (Kadowaki-Fleming 12, Washington 2-13) **by 2 runs**

ANNOUNCEMENT

England paceman Wood retires from international cricket



AFP
London

England fast bowler **Mark Wood** announced his retirement from international cricket yesterday, saying he had "lost the battle" after a career repeatedly disrupted by injuries.

The 36-year-old, one of the quickest bowlers to play for England, took 253 wickets in 146 international matches across all formats, including 119 wickets at 30.79 in his 38 Tests.

Wood, who made his England debut in 2015, played a key role in the team's 50-over World Cup triumph in 2019.

He was also in the England squad that won the T20 World Cup in 2022, although injury ruled him out of the semi-final and the final.

Wood last played for England in an eight-wicket defeat by Australia in the first Test of the 2025/26 Ashes series - his first Test for 15 months - but his comeback lasted just 11 overs.

Swelling in his knee forced him

out of the second Test, and he was subsequently ruled out of the rest of the series.

"Although this may not come as a surprise given the past year, it just feels like a natural time at the end of my contract," Wood said in a statement on social media.

"I've always tried to be resilient and come back from injury to prove people wrong and show everyone what I can do. Unfortunately, this time I lost the battle.

"On medical advice, Test cricket and 50-over cricket are not possible, so the England dream has slowly been ground out of me over the last year.

"Playing for England has been the greatest honour I could have ever wished for and a dream come true."

England managing director Rob Key said: "It's been a privilege to watch the latter part of a great career."

"To have been a point of difference in Ashes series wins, a World Cup, and to have thrilled crowds every time he got the ball in his hand is something very few players achieve."

FOCUS

Ganna and Borghini lead Italy to mixed relay gold at cycling Worlds



FROM LEFT: Second-place finishers France, winners Italy, and third-place finishers Switzerland celebrate on the podium after the mixed relay team time trial during the 2026 UCI Road World Championships in Montreal, Quebec, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Montreal, Canada

Elisa Longo Borghini and Filippo Ganna dug deep to lead the Italian mixed relay team to a long-awaited gold at the cycling world championships time-trial yesterday, ahead of France and Switzerland.

The mixed relay has proved to be highly popular with the competitors since it was added to the roster in 2019 and is the only road cycling event where men and women compete together on the same team.

"We've been chasing this title for so long. I love this event. I'm absolutely over the moon right now," said Longo Borghini who was on the team that took bronze two years ago, as well as silver in the 2022 edition.

Longo Borghini, Vittoria Guazzini, Monica Trinca Colonet, Ganna, Mattia Cattaneo and Matteo Sobrero were all on the team with the men going first and the women embarking last.

"We've had to dig really deep. We've been chasing this title for a long time. It's a moment that will stay with us for the rest of our careers," said Ganna.

PREVIEW

Verstappen looks to keep winning streak in Baku

‘We’ve made some good steps with the car over the last few races’

Reuters
Baku

Red Bull’s four-time champion Max Verstappen, fresh from a last-to-first karting triumph, will be looking to keep that winning feeling going by chalking up a first Formula One victory of the year at this weekend’s Azerbaijan Grand Prix.

The Dutchman took just 14 laps and 35 minutes to scythe through a field of 100 competitors at Red Bull’s “Max vs. 100” karting challenge at Britain’s Silverstone last week.

That may have been nothing more than a fun exhibition event for the 71-times grand prix winner, who jokingly pointed out that it was his first win of the season. But after six podium appearances, four in the last five races, and a second-place finish in Madrid Azerbaijan’s Baku street circuit could set the stage for Verstappen to break his victory duck for the year and become the venue’s first triple winner.

“Madrid was a good result for us and the team has been working hard on taking this positive momentum to make sure we maximise the performance of the car in Baku,” said the 28-year-old.

“We’ve made some good steps with the car over the last few races and we have some good memories here,” he added.

The Baku street track, a 6-km-long mix of flat-out blasts and tight corners, has a reputation for unpredictable races.

Seven different drivers have won the nine races at the venue, with Verstappen and former Mexican team mate Sergio Perez the only two to have won there more than once.

With safety cars a regular feature of the race, Verstappen’s victory hopes may well rest on Red Bull’s ability to take on the might of Mercedes. The team’s runaway championship leader Kimi Antonelli heads into the weekend gunning for a third straight win and ninth of the season.

The 20-year-old Italian, who won his home race at Monza from the back of the grid and followed that up with victory in the Spanish Grand Prix at the Madring, is 81 points clear of Briton George Russell, his team mate and closest title rival, after 14 rounds.

Russell and third-placed Ferrari rival Lewis Hamilton have both ruled themselves out of realistic title contention.

ANTONELLI CLOSING ON TITLE

A win in Baku would only tighten Antonelli’s grip on the championship and move his prospect of becoming the first Italian to win a For-



Max Verstappen took just 14 laps and 35 minutes to scythe through a field of 100 competitors at Red Bull’s “Max vs. 100” karting challenge at Britain’s Silverstone last week.

mula One title since Alberto Ascari in 1953 further into the realm of when rather than if.

McLaren’s reigning champion Lando Norris, meanwhile, will be fired up to make up for the win that got away from him. The Briton had been leading comfortably from pole in Madrid and seemed on course for his third win from four races when an ill-timed virtual safety car went against him.

He eventually had to settle for third. French racer Isack Hadjar will return to action alongside Verstappen after recovering from a wrist injury that sidelined him for the last three

races. Yuki Tsunoda is set to step back into his reserve role. The Azerbaijan Grand Prix, the first of a “triple header” of races on consecutive weekends, is being run on Saturday this year with the country marking its Remembrance Day on Sunday.

Organisers are also celebrating a “Decade of Racin” in Baku, with the race joining the Formula One calendar in 2016 as the European Grand Prix. This year’s race will be the 10th around the Baku street track, with the event left off the calendar during the COVID pandemic in 2020.

TENNIS

South Korea face holders Italy in Davis Cup finals

AFP
Paris

South Korea’s reward for reaching the Davis Cup finals for the first time ever is a quarter-final tie against hosts and holders Italy, following the draw in Bologna yesterday.

The Italians have been kept on the opposite side of the draw from Spain, the team they beat in last year’s final. South Korea reached the finals courtesy of a 3-1 win over India at the weekend when Kwon Soon-woo brushed Sumit Nagal aside 6-1, 6-2 to clinch the decisive point.

The Italians are three-time defending champions but may be without world number one Jannik Sinner who missed the recent US Open because of a knee injury. Sinner featured in the 2024 win over the Netherlands but was absent for the victories in 2023 and 2025. The winner of that match-up will then meet either the Czech Republic or Canada in the semi-finals. On the other side of the draw, last year’s runners-up Spain will open with a quarter-final against Austria, before a possible semi-final against Britain or Germany.

World number three Carlos Alcaraz also did not play in last year’s finals but Germany’s Alexander Zverev, the winner of the US Open, played for Germany at the weekend and is expected to lead his country’s bid for a first Davis Cup title since 1993. The captains will announce their teams on October 27, with the competition taking place in Bologna from November 24 to 29.

Fonseca to take break

Brazilian Joao Fonseca announced on Monday that he would “skip the Asian swing” in

order to recover physically and mentally after a season of injury lows and on-court highs.

The 20-year-old, one of the most promising young talents on the ATP tour, wrote on Instagram: “2026 has been a very challenging year for me.

On top of everything the profession demands, a series of injuries ended up taking me out of important tournaments and keeping me from playing the way I would like to.

“I talked a lot with my team, and we came to the conclusion that the best decision right now is to listen to my body, give my mind and body a break, and skip the Asian swing.”

After missing the US Open due to abdominal pain, Fonseca made his comeback last weekend during Brazil’s 3-1 victory over Switzerland in the Davis Cup. He beat Dominic Stricker 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 to get his country off to a winning start in Rio de Janeiro. “I made a huge effort to return and represent Brazil in the Davis Cup, but I still need more time,” the world number 28 added.

“I know that’s just part of an athlete’s life, but even so, it’s still frustrating.”

Fonseca will miss the ATP 500 event in Tokyo, which will run from September 30-October 6, and the Shanghai Masters over the following fortnight. Earlier this year, the South American suffered recurring back problems which led to his elimination in the first round of the Australian Open.

Despite these issues, Fonseca has had some standout moments this season, such as his victory over Novak Djokovic in the third round of the French Open on his way to a debut quarter-final appearance at a Grand Slam. He also reached the third round at Wimbledon.

F1 races to be shortened next season

The governing body of motorsports (FIA) announced Formula One rules changes which included shortening Grand Prix races and putting the brakes on some proposed tinkering with gearboxes. The FIA’s Formula One Commission met in London to confirm reforms for next season. They decided to cut races from a total of 305 kilometres to 290kms - a reduction they calculated of two or three laps per race. The FIA and Formula One said in separate statements that the cut was an inevitable consequence of an earlier decision to reduce fuel flow in engines. They also decided to cancel plans for gearbox ‘homologation’ - or conformity across all cars - to “preserve supplier development freedom”. The commission also changed the rules on the fixed three-hour limitation of races impacted by rain interruptions, “to ensure that the spectators have the best possible chance to enjoy a full race if disruptions occur”.

FOCUS

Infantino proposes consulting federations to reform FIFA

AFP
Paris

FIFA president Gianni Infantino on Monday suggested a “consultation” with the member federations to reform the world football governing body’s decision-making processes, in a letter addressed to the 211 member associations, and seen by AFP.

“I will propose that the Council establish a direct, structured and time-limited consultation with confederations, Member Associations and relevant stakeholders on how FIFA’s decision-making can be further strengthened,” Infantino wrote.

The 56-year-old Swiss has come under fire since his now-abandoned plan to bring private investment into the men’s and women’s World Cups.

“The consultation would invite specific proposals on earlier institutional involvement, the respective roles of the President, the Bureau, the Council and the Congress, and practical ways to strengthen transparency, participation and accountability in major strategic initiatives,” the letter continued.

Infantino asked for the initial proposals to be considered at the council meeting scheduled for October 15.

Infantino replaced Sepp Blatter as president of FIFA in 2016. He has come under severe pressure since the announcement in late July of proposals to create a commercial subsidiary to run its biggest events, such as the World Cup and Club World Cup.

The plan would have allowed



private investors to acquire stakes in a company created under the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) initiative. The backlash that followed led to the proposals being quickly shelved.

European football’s governing body UEFA threatened to boycott FIFA competitions. It later suspended that threat, but has urged Infantino to resign and has been preparing possible legal action against him for alleged “criminal mismanagement”.

Infantino addressed FFE in his letter on Monday and wrote that “FIFA’s democratic processes, independence and sporting authority were never for sale”.

The plan also “did not involve relinquishing FIFA’s control or authority over sporting decisions”, he insisted.

He further lamented the fact that the scheme “entered the public domain before FIFA’s planned institutional process had been completed and before it could be presented in full to the Council and the Member Associations”.

“I recognise that, without the full context, this caused concern and created the impression

that decisions had already been taken. They had not,” Infantino added. “Major ideas must be developed, tested and communicated through clear and trusted institutions. That is a responsibility I take seriously.”

UEFA, alongside North American body CONCACAF and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), issued a no-holds-barred joint letter against Infantino in August. “Leadership in football is not a possession. It is not about holding - or demanding - power to be held,” they wrote.

However, Infantino is not without friends - 2034 World Cup hosts Saudi Arabia came out in support last month, with African football’s governing body CAF and South America’s CONMEBOL also supportive.

FIFA confirmed earlier in September that Infantino will stand for re-election as president next March. At this stage, he is the only candidate. However, CONCACAF president Victor Montagliani is widely seen as a likely challenger.

Candidate nominations for next year’s election must be submitted by November 18.

BJK CUP

Wimbledon champion Noskova sends Czechs into semi-finals



Czech Republic’s Linda Noskova in action during her BJK Cup quarter-finals against Britain’s Katie Boulter in Shenzhen. (Reuters)

AFP
Shenzhen

Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova helped the Czech Republic into the semi-finals of the Billie Jean King Cup with a 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) victory over Great Britain’s Katie Boulter in Shenzhen yesterday.

Noskova’s win secured a 2-0 win for the Czechs, who will next face either Kazakhstan or Spain as they seek their 12th title in the competition.

“The first match is never easy, no matter what. So, I was surprised by the way that I played in the first set, especially,” said the sixth-ranked Noskova, who fired 15 aces and faced no break points. “Obviously, second set was a lot tougher. Katie served really well and didn’t give me many chances, so I had to kind of use anything that I have in the tie-break, and that worked.”

Noskova breezed through the opening set and came up with clutch serves at crucial moments in the second to wrap up the match. Earlier, Czech captain Barbora Strycova selected Marie Bouzkova as her No.2 singles player instead of the eighth-ranked Karolina Muchova - and was rewarded for her choice.

Bouzkova used her all-court prowess and clever net play to put the Czechs in front, surviving a three-hour

tug of war with Sonay Kartal to record a 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 6-4 victory.

World number 127 Kartal was playing her first competitive match in six months after recovering from a spinal stress fracture, and she did well to challenge the 26th-ranked Bouzkova but ultimately faded in the deciding set. “I think she played incredible. I think not playing for half a year and coming out the way she did, yeah, huge respect for her,” said Bouzkova of her 24-year-old opponent.

Quarter-final action resumes on Wednesday at the Shenzhen Bay Sports Center with the clash between Spain and Kazakhstan. Ukraine face Belgium on Thursday morning, before defending champions Italy take on China in the evening.

The Italians are seeking a third successive crown but their top singles player Jasmine Paolini is taking nothing for granted as the team prepare for a tough affair against the hosts, led by Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen. “Qinwen, she played amazing in the US Open,” Paolini told reporters yesterday.

“We expect really high level of tennis from her. I think also the support from the Chinese fans will be great for them. She’s a great player. Very powerful. She can play really well on every surface. It’s going to be a tough match. Hopefully I can play a great match and can be a great battle.”

FOCUS

Magnificent Mandhana's 79 helps India to cricket gold



Gold medallists India cricket team players pose on the podium during the 2026 Asian Games at Korogi Athletic Park in Nisshin, Aichi prefecture, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Nagoya

Smriti Mandhana's whirlwind 79 helped India crush Sri Lanka by 147 runs and win a second consecutive women's cricket gold at the Asian Games yesterday.

India smashed 216-3 off their 20 overs, the highest women's total in Asian Games history, with 18 fours and 13 sixes.

Richa Ghosh and Bharti Fulmali plundered 25 off the final over from the hapless Mithali Ayodhya, who did not help her cause by conceding eight wides. Sri Lanka were never in the hunt and captain Chamari Athapaththu's 29 was their only innings of note as they were skittled for 69 in 15.4 overs and had to settle for silver.

It was her country's first gold medal of these Asian Games and opening batter Mandhana hit seven sixes and five fours in a 45-ball knock that sent the ball to all parts of the Korogi Athletic Park ground in Nagoya.

"It's a good thing to win the first gold medal for India," Mandhana told AFP. "It feels amazing. We've seen other athletes win gold on TV. But it's nice to be on the po-

dium." After India captain Harmanpreet Kaur won the toss and opted to bat, Shafali Verma, who made an unbeaten century in the semi-final, and Mandhana put on a blistering opening partnership.

The pair had raced to 99 in the 10th over when Verma had a rush of blood, playing a needless reverse sweep which she top-edged to Kawya Kavindi at point to fall for 48 off 29 balls.

Mandhana, the greatest run scorer in women's T20 cricket history, had reached her fifty earlier in the over and sailed on in style, clubbing anything loose to the boundary. Harmanpreet joined her and the pair took the score to 141 before the captain holed out to long-off for 19. Mandhana, looking to accelerate further in the latter overs, skied an attempted six and was out in the 17th over with the score on 163. Ghosh clattered 49 off 22 balls with three sixes and six fours to take India past 200 in the final over.

"It was good to see again Smriti and Shafali gave us a big start, and in between all the partnerships, they were very crucial," said Harmanpreet. "They worked really well, and I think at the end of the day we were able to achieve what we wanted as a batting unit."

Earlier, some lusty late-order hitting by Pakistan captain Fatima Sana set up a 31-run win over Bangladesh in the bronze medal match. Sana came in with her side rocking at 67-5 in the 12th over but plundered 45 off 30 balls including three fours and three sixes and was out off the last ball of the 20 overs after seeing Pakistan to 145-8.

Her 67-run partnership with Aliya Riaz (25) for the sixth wicket proved the turning point and Bangladesh could only muster 114-7 in reply. The Pakistan and Sri Lanka players joined India on the podium for a group photograph after receiving their medals.

"We are not used to (playing in a multi-sport event like the Asian Games)," said the India captain Harmanpreet. "It means a lot to us, and we're really happy that we have opened the gate and, hopefully, we'll see many more golds (for India). But that's why we came to Japan. We have been waiting for this day."

BRIEF SCORES
India 216 for 3 (Mandhana 79, Ghosh 49*, Shafali 48, Praboda 1-34) **beat Sri Lanka 69** (Athapaththu 29, Deepti 3-6, Shafali 2-3, Patil 2-9, Charani 2-13) **by 147 runs**

ASIAN GAMES

More teen magic in pool as Kojima thrills hosts Japan

KOJIMA SETS GAMES RECORD IN MEN'S 400M INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

Reuters
Nagoya, Japan

At an Asian Games pool entranced by China's 13-year-old Yu Zidi, hosts Japan hailed their own teen prodigy yesterday as Yumeki Kojima powered to medley gold in a swim that made French great Leon Marchand sit up and take notice.

The 17-year-old Kojima's triumph in the men's 400 metres individual medley set a Games record of four minutes 7.02 seconds at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre, topping the 12-year-old mark of Kosuke Hagino, one of Japan's favourite swimming sons.

World record holder Marchand was at the pool giving a swimming clinic for local children but Kojima hopes one day to school the four-times Olympic champion.

"Marchand is the athlete I'm aiming for the most. I want to close the gap on him little by little and, one day, be able to beat him," said Kojima, who also rewrote his world junior record.

Highlighted by schoolgirl Yu's two individual golds, China have dominated the pool at the Aichi-Nagoya Games, and they continued in that vein on day three of full competition.

Peng Xuwei grabbed another title for the swimming superpower in the women's 200m backstroke in an Asian record 2:05.77 to smash the previous mark (2:06.46) of compatriot Zhao Jing.

SHOOTING WORLD RECORD

China may struggle to match their record of 201 golds from their home Games in Hangzhou three years ago but record-breaking shooters Sheng Lihao and Wang Zifei won't be to blame.

Olympic champion Sheng claimed his third gold at Nagoya alongside Wang in the 10m air rifle mixed team event as they combined for a world-record score of 507.1.

Sheng, a double gold medallist at Hangzhou, had already swept the individual and men's team titles in the 10m air rifle earlier in the competition.

Afghanistan celebrated a maiden cycling medal won by a woman who once disguised herself as a man when training in the nation and ultimately fled the Taliban when they returned to power.

Fariba Hashimi said her silver behind China's Guo Li in the road event showed the resilience of



Japan's Yumeki Kojima competes in the men's 400m individual medley swimming event during the 2026 Asian Games at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)



Gold medallist China's Li Guo celebrates on the podium, silver medallist Afghanistan's Fariba Hashimi and bronze medallist Hong Kong's Wing Yee Leung celebrates on the road cycling podium in Shinshiro. (AFP)

Afghan women. "I hope that the next generation will come here and represent their country without any fear," said the Italy-based cyclist.

"They took away our freedom, they took away everything from us."

India's wait for a first gold medal ended on Tuesday as their women's team crushed Sri Lanka by 147 runs to claim the T20 ti-

tle, led by 79 from veteran opener Smriti Mandhana. Pakistan beat Bangladesh for bronze.

India will be backed for the men's gold as well but the team nearly fell to a stunning defeat in a rain-hit T20 against Japan on the Games' sidelines.

With the match reduced to five overs per side, Japan fell two runs short of an historic upset.

"Honestly speaking, it was a

very difficult wicket to bat on," said India captain Shreyas Iyer, India's only batter to reach double figures (16).

LOGISTICS PROBLEMS

Outside the competition venues, organisers were on the defensive over accommodation and logistics problems that blighted the event's buildup.

South Korea's team chef de mission said athletes had paid the price for cost-cutting measures in a rebuke of the Games' management.

An Aichi-Nagoya organising committee official apologised.

A South Korean media report said two members of North Korea's 180-strong Asian Games delegation in Japan were looking to seek asylum, citing a source from Japan's Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office.

Reuters was unable to confirm the report and Asian Games organisers did not provide immediate comment.

China's teenage phenomenon Yu is set to return to the pool on day four on Wednesday in pursuit of a third individual title in the 400m medley, while hosts Japan face a gymnastics showdown with China for the men's and women's team golds.

SPOTLIGHT

Officials named for FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026

The FIFA Referees Committee has announced the match officials who will take charge of fixtures at this year's FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026, which will be contested from November 19 to December 13.

A total of 81 match officials, comprising 27 referees and 54 assistant referees from 36 FIFA Member Associations, have been selected to oversee matches during the competition.

The appointments include two all-female refereeing trios, comprising six officials in total, underlining FIFA's continued commitment to providing leading female match officials with opportunities to perform at the highest level of international football.

The tournament will bring together 48 teams and feature 104 matches, with all games to be played in the Aspire Zone, and the final at Khalifa International Stadium – a FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadium. It will be the second edition of the FIFA U-17 World Cup to be staged annually in Qatar as part of the country's five-year hosting cycle.

"Last year's tournament presented a refereeing operation of significant scale and complexity, and the quality and consistency demonstrated by the match officials were extremely high. For this year's edition, we have again brought together some of the

most promising officials from every confederation. They have been selected not only for their performances, but also for their ability to work as part of an international team and meet the demands of a major FIFA tournament," said FIFA Chief Refereeing Officer and Chairman of the FIFA Referees Committee Pierluigi Collina.

"The 2025 edition of this tournament demonstrated the value of giving talented match officials the opportunity to develop in a demanding international environment. We saw them grow in confidence and experience throughout the competition, and several have since taken important steps in their careers. This year's officials have been selected with the same long-term objective; to prepare the next generation to perform at the highest level of the game," commented FIFA Director of Refereeing Massimo Busacca.

During the tournament, the match officials will be supported by a professional FIFA team of refereeing instructors, medical and physiotherapy expertise, fitness coaches and additional refereeing specialists in video technology and organisation.

Football Video Support (FVS) will again be used at the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026, following its implementation at the 2025 edition of the tournament.

27th Gulf Cup kicks off today with hosts Saudi Arabia taking on Kuwait

Hosts Saudi Arabia will meet Kuwait in the opening clash of the 27th Gulf Cup kicks off at the Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium in Jeddah today. Eight of the region's leading sides will battle for supremacy with Hosts Saudi Arabia seeking a fourth title, while defending champions Bahrain, record 10-time winners Kuwait and four-time champions Iraq are among the teams hoping to emerge victorious. Saudi Arabia will look to make home advantage count as they target their first Gulf Cup title since 2003. They face Kuwait in their opening match, with Feras Al Brikan, Mohammed Kanno and Mohammed Al Owais among the key figures expected to lead their challenge. Saudi Arabia's Greek coach Georgios Donis, while speaking ahead of the match, addressed the pressures that typically fall on the host nation. He said the Saudi national team has a blend of youth and experience. He also noted that three teams in the Gulf Cup have participated in the 2026 World Cup which reflects the strength of the competition.

Kuwait's Portuguese coach Helio Sousa also expressed his confidence in his players' ability to go far in the tournament.

Group A comprises Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and Oman while Group B includes Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Iraq and Oman will get Group A underway before Saudi Arabia meet Kuwait later today. Bahrain enter the tournament as defending champions after defeating Oman 2-1 in the 2024 final to claim their second title. Their title defence begins against Qatar, with the three-time champions boasting plenty of experience through the likes of Akram Afif, Almozez Ali and Hassan al-Haydos.

Iraq will also have high expectations after lifting their fourth title in 2023, while Oman will be aiming to recover from the disappointment of finishing runners-up in each of the previous two editions. Kuwait, meanwhile, remain the competition's most successful nation and will be eager to add to their record haul of 10 titles. The UAE, winners in 2007 and 2013, will also be hoping to mount a strong challenge, while Yemen will look to spring a surprise against their more decorated rivals. The UAE face Yemen in tomorrow's opening Group B fixture before Bahrain take on Qatar. With the top two teams from each group to advance to the semi-finals, there will be little margin for error as the battle for supremacy begins in Jeddah.