

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



GOLF | Page 3

Schauffele
determined to
win Claret
Jug back



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Croatia legend
Modric eyes
World Cup after
Milan move

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Wednesday, July 16, 2025
Muharram 21, 1447 AH

GULF

TIMES

SPORT

CRICKET
West Indies seek
advice from Lloyd,
Richards and Lara
after historic collapse
Page 2

CLUB WORLD CUP

Chelsea’s win a ‘statement’, but what might be the cost?

Chelsea’s off-season is drastically reduced, with their next match against Crystal Palace on August 17

AFP
New York

For Chelsea, victory in Sunday’s Club World Cup decider completed a fine first season under Enzo Maresca, and also finally brought the curtain down on a marathon campaign that they must hope does not catch up with them down the line.

The Cole Palmer-inspired 3-0 victory over Paris Saint-Germain at the MetLife Stadium outside New York was Chelsea’s 64th game of a season which lasted 11 months. By any measure it was one of Chelsea’s best ever campaigns, with their Club World Cup triumph – placed on a par by Maresca to winning the Champions League – following victory in the UEFA Conference League and a fourth-placed finish in the Premier League.

Maresca, an ex-assistant to Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, could not have asked for much more after arriving off the back of leading Leicester City to promotion. “It has been a fantastic season but I am especially happy for the players,” said the Italian, who has succeeded in putting together a coherent team out of the endless line of new signings being brought in by the club’s owners. “We have said many times that talent alone is not enough. You need to find a way for them to all fit together.”

It all represents considerable progress from just two years ago, when the Stamford Bridge side finished in the bottom half of the Premier League. Maresca incorporated more new faces during the Club World Cup, with Joao Pedro making a remarkable impact – the Brazilian forward cut short a holiday to complete a £60mn transfer from Brighton and Hove Albion, and went on to score twice in the semi-final against Fluminense and once in the final.

Liam Delap, Dario Essugo, Mamadou Sarr and Andrey Santos all joined up ahead of the month in the United States, while Jamie Gittens has since arrived from Borussia Dortmund and fellow winger Estevao Willian now joins from Palmeiras in Brazil. Chelsea will hope those signings, added to a squad led by the likes of Palmer, Enzo Fernandez and Moises Caicedo, can make a real push for the Premier League title off the back of their impressive triumph at FIFA’s new tournament.

“It’s a big statement,” captain Reece James told English media shortly after lifting the trophy alongside US President Donald Trump. “I’m happy with how much the club has progressed and how next season you know we’ll be competing in the Premier League, to win the title and compete, and to go far in the Champions League as well.”



The Cole Palmer-inspired 3-0 victory over Paris Saint-Germain at the MetLife Stadium outside New York was Chelsea’s 64th game of a season which lasted 11 months. (AFP)

Chelsea have also pocketed a stunning \$115mn in prize money from the Club World Cup, but what if there comes a point in 2025/26 when their exploits of this season catch up with them?

While Chelsea have been competing at the Club World Cup in draining weather conditions, Premier League champions Liverpool and runners-up Arsenal have enjoyed extended off-season breaks. Manchester City were also at the Club World Cup but they went out over a week earlier. Global players’ union FIFPro has been the leading voices expressing concerns about the demands on the game’s biggest stars in an ever-expanding calendar.

One of the safeguards it proposed in a study published before the tournament was a mandatory four-week off-season break, along with four-week retraining periods before returning to competition. Chelsea’s off-season is drastically reduced, with their first match of the next

Premier League campaign against Crystal Palace slated for August 17, exactly five weeks after the Club World Cup final. They have a friendly against Bayer Leverkusen on August 8.

“Tomorrow I have three weeks of holiday which is all I want right now because I have not stopped in 15 months,” said Maresca on Sunday. It remains to be seen if Maresca and his players come back sufficiently refreshed before attacking a season in which they hope to go far in the Champions League, and which will end with the World Cup in North America.

PSG face an even tighter squeeze after a historic campaign for Luis Enrique’s team, capped by their triumph in the Champions League final. Their first competitive match of next season will be the UEFA Super Cup against Tottenham Hotspur in Italy on August 13, exactly one month after their defeat in New York – a chance to win more silverware, but at what cost?



Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca lifts the trophy as he celebrates with his players.

FOOTBALL

World Cup 2026 ticketing programme to be launched in September



FIFA World Cup kicks off on June 11, 2026 in Mexico City, with the final taking place on July 19, 2026, at the MetLife Stadium outside New York.

FIFA yesterday announced that the application period for the first ticket draw for the FIFA World Cup 2026 will open on Wednesday, September 10, 2025. Fans are encouraged to visit FIFA.com/tickets to register their interest and create a FIFA ID.

“Following the incredible success of the FIFA Club World Cup in the United States, excitement is reaching new heights for the FIFA World Cup 2026,” said FIFA President Gianni Infantino. “We’re looking forward to welcoming the world back to North America, as Canada, Mexico and the United States host what will be the biggest and greatest sporting event ever. We encourage fans everywhere to get ready to secure their place – these will be the most coveted seats in world sport.”

The 2026 game-changing tournament kicks off on June 11, 2026 in Mexico City, with the final taking place on July 19, 2026, in New York, New Jersey – which successfully hosted the FIFA Club World Cup final last Sunday. FIFA’s new flagship club competition united 32 of the world’s best club sides and attracted close to 2.5mn fans to 11

cities across the United States, setting the stage for what’s to come in 2026.

With 6.5mn fans expected to attend, the 2026 edition of the FIFA World Cup will be the biggest FIFA World Cup yet, consisting of 48 teams and 104 matches across the three host countries. Fans should start planning now in order to be there when it happens – to witness greatness and be part of this historic tournament and its enthralling in-stadium experience.

Due to anticipated high demand, FIFA World Cup tickets are released in phases. Fans should visit FIFA.com/tickets to register their interest, if they have not done so already. When registering, fans who do not have a FIFA ID will need to create one. This registration of interest ensures they are made aware of ticketing dates, next steps and processes. On September 10, fans will then be able to use their FIFA ID to apply for their first chance to buy tickets.

There will be several distinct ticket sales phases from the start of sales on September 10, 2025, through to the final match on July 19, 2026. Each phase may differ in purchasing processes, payment methods

and ticket products, and full details on each phase will be released in the coming months. The Final Draw for the FIFA World Cup is set to take place in December, with teams assigned to specific match schedule fixtures, including venues and kick-off times, shortly thereafter.

Fans can already purchase hospitality packages, inclusive of match tickets, at FIFA.com/hospitality. For fans interested in a specific team, the Follow My Team hospitality packages allow fans to see their team in action at group stage and round of 32 matches, should their team qualify.

FIFA is encouraging fans to purchase tickets only through FIFA.com/tickets, the official and preferred source of tickets for the FIFA World Cup. Hospitality packages and tickets sourced from unofficial sales channels may not be valid.

A match ticket does not guarantee admission to a host country, and fans should visit each host country’s government websites today for entry requirements. Visa, a world leader in digital payments, is the preferred way to pay for tickets and hospitality packages.

EMERGENCY MEETING

West Indies seek advice from Lloyd, Richards and Lara

ALARM BELLS RING FOR THE WEST INDIES CRICKET BOARD

Reuters
Sabina Park, Jamaica

Cricket West Indies will call upon batting royalty Clive Lloyd, Vivian Richards and Brian Lara to help dissect their humiliating 3-0 series whitewash by Australia, which culminated in one of the most spectacular collapses in cricket history.

Chasing 204 for victory in the final Test, West Indies were bowled out for just 27 runs on Monday, recording the second-lowest total in Test history after New Zealand's 26 against England in 1955.

The carnage prompted CWI president Kishore Shallow to summon an emergency meeting of the Cricket Strategy and Officiating Committee, enlisting three of the Caribbean's greatest batters to give their thoughts on the humiliating defeat in Kingston.

"To strengthen the discussions, I have extended invitations to three of our greatest batsmen ever: Sir Clive Lloyd, Sir Vivian Richards, and Brian Lara," Shallow said in a statement yesterday.

The trio, who plundered a combined 27,967 Test runs in their careers, will join former players Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Desmond Haynes and Ian Bradshaw who already serve on the committee.

"This engagement is not ceremonial. These are men who helped define our golden eras," Shallow added.

"Their perspectives will be invaluable as we shape the next phase of our cricket development. We intend for this gathering to result in tangible, actionable recommendations."

Shallow acknowledged that the series result and especially the final match would lead to many "sleepless nights ahead" for fans and players, but urged patience as they continue to rebuild the team.



Kevlon Anderson of West Indies bowled by Mitchell Starc of Australia during the 1st day of the 3rd Test between West Indies and Australia at Sabina Park, Kingston, Jamaica, on Saturday. (AFP)

"While disappointment is natural, we must not allow this moment to define our journey," he said. "We are in a rebuilding phase, steadily investing in the next generation, and reigniting the spirit that has long made West Indies cricket a force in the world."

"The road ahead will test us, but I have faith in the talent and commitment of our players when they apply themselves."

'Heads should roll' after WI horror show, says Hooper

Cricket West Indies must take responsibility for the team's woeful results after they were bundled out for the second-lowest total in test history in the third match against Australia on Monday, former all-rounder Carl Hooper said.

Chasing 204 for victory in the day-night test at Sabina Park, West Indies lasted only 14.3 overs before being dismissed for 27.

Seven West Indies batters registered ducks in the innings, a record for the Test format.

"Cricket West Indies, I really think a few heads should roll for this because they've made some decisions and this is the result of those decisions," a dismayed Hooper told *ABC Sport*.

"They've made some wholesale changes, massive changes, that I think wasn't needed."

"To make wholesale changes and then get results like this, Cricket West Indies have got to hold up their hands and be held accountable," said Hooper, who played 102 Tests between 1987-2002.

Former Twenty20 captain Carlos Brathwaite was shocked by their failure to put up any resistance with the bat.

"Abysmal comes to mind," said Brathwaite, who hit four sixes in a row in the 2016 World Cup final against England to power West Indies to the title.

West Indies were the leading lights of Test cricket in the 1970s and 1980s but have gone through a period of decline and currently rank eighth of 12 teams in the world rankings. They have struggled to field a consistent test team in recent years with several front-line players often prioritising lucrative franchise cricket over the longest format.

West Indies will next face a trial by spin when they tour India for two tests in October.

SPOTLIGHT

India's players consoled by King Charles after defeat at Lord's



King Charles III meets members of the India men's Test team Jasprit Bumrah, Rishabh Pant and captain Shubman Gill during an audience in the gardens of Clarence House, London, Britain, yesterday. India's women's team was also present on the occasion. (AFP)

AFF
London

Britain's King Charles III commiserated with India's crestfallen cricket stars yesterday in the aftermath of their painful defeat against England at Lord's.

Charles consoled members of the Indian team when he hosted them at his Clarence House home less than 24 hours after the third Test ended in an agonising loss for the tourists.

India, chasing 193 to win, were beaten by 22 runs in the final session of the last day.

India's Mohammed Siraj was the last man out when he attempted to block a delivery from Shoaib Bashir, only to see the ball spin back onto the stumps and dislodge a

bail. The King told India captain Shubman Gill he had watched the crucial last wicket fall on television on Monday.

He said in sympathy about the dramatic spin on the ball that dismissed Siraj; "really annoying just to touch the balls".

India trail 2-1 in the five-match series, with the fourth Test scheduled for Old Trafford next week before the finale at The Oval in London.

Gill added: "He did tell us that the way our last batsman got out was quite unfortunate - the ball rolling on the stumps, and he was just asking us how did we feel after that."

"And we told him it was an unfortunate match for us, but it could have gone either way and hopefully we'll have better luck in both the next games."

India captain Gill says Pant should be fit to play in fourth Test

London: India captain Shubman Gill said the finger injury suffered by Rishabh Pant in the third Test against England is not overly serious and the wicketkeeper-batsman should be able to play in the next match in Manchester. Pant injured the index finger of his left hand when trying to collect a delivery from Bumrah during England's first innings at Lord's. Pant completed the over but did not keep wickets afterwards, though he batted in both innings.

Dhruv Jurel replaced him behind the stumps for the remainder of the Test, which England won by 22 runs to go 2-1 up in the five-match series. "Rishabh went for scans and there is no major injury there," Gill told reporters. "I think he should be fine for the next Test match." Pant is the second-highest scorer in the series with his tally of 425 from six innings, which includes two hundreds, second only to Gill's 607. The fourth Test at Old Trafford begins on July 23.

REVIEW

Future uncertain for Australia's Konstas after West Indies wipeout

Reuters
Sabina Park, Jamaica

Amid the back slaps and banter in a victorious Australian dressing room, teen opener **Sam Konstas**'s celebrations may feel bittersweet at the end of his forgettable Test series in the West Indies.

Australia completed a 3-0 whitewash of the West Indies on Monday with a 176-run rout in the pink-ball test in Kingston. But Konstas can claim little credit.

A five-ball duck in the second innings at Sabina Park saw the 19-year-old, who has been touted as the "future of Australian batting", finish with 50 runs from his six innings at an average of 8.33.

Only Jayden Seales, the West Indies fast bowler and tailender, had fewer runs among players who competed in all three matches.

With England's Jofra Archer and the first Ashes Test looming in four months, alarm bells are ringing in Australia.

"The prospect of Konstas facing Jofra Archer with the first ball of the Ashes on November 21 - potentially delivered at 155km/h - doesn't feel like a fair fight," the *Sydney Morning Herald* said.

Konstas also grassed two slips catches off Mitchell Starc's bowling on the final day at Sabina Park as Australia bowled out the hosts for 27, the second-lowest Test innings score after New Zealand's 26 against England in 1955.

Last December, Konstas took the cricket world by storm when he scored 60 on debut at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Boxing Day, repeatedly ramping India's



pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah. He has not passed 25 runs in an innings since, holding an average of 16.30 from five Tests.

Australia have discarded plenty of players for lesser batting crimes but selectors are desperate for Konstas to make the grade and fill the void at opener which has lingered since David Warner's retirement.

The West Indies pitches were surprisingly tough and Konstas was not alone in his struggles. His opening partner Usman Khawaja also had a poor series, averaging 19.50, while Travis Head was the top performer with a modest average of 37.33.

Australia captain Pat Cummins was loath to criticise his batting teammates in the conditions.

"It's really hard to judge, I think," he told reporters.

"There'll be a few of the guys who of course wish they could have done better and if they had another crack at it maybe did a few things differently."

"No doubt it was tough."

Konstas will look forward to returning to home pitches where last year he racked up centuries for fun in the Sheffield Shield.

THIRD TEST

Starc record as Australia bowl out Windies for 27

Reuters
Sabina Park, Jamaica

Mitchell Starc delivered the fastest five-wicket haul in Test history on Monday as Australia crushed the West Indies by 176 runs in the third Test in Kingston, Jamaica to complete a 3-0 series sweep.

In his 100th Test, Starc took 15 balls to wreck the West Indies top order and leave the home side's run chase in tatters, before returning for his sixth wicket after Scott Boland became Australia's 10th bowler to take a Test hat-trick.

West Indies were bowled out for 27, the second-lowest total in Test history after New Zealand's 26 against England in 1955.

Starc shattered the previous record for a "five-for" by four balls, surpassing Ernie Toshack (1947), Stuart Broad (2015) and Boland (2021), who needed 19 deliveries to achieve the feat. "You talk about 100 Tests and skill and fitness ... but I think today showed the real Mitchell Starc - what he can bring to a team. Which is, out of nowhere, tear an opposition apart and win a game for you," said Australia captain Pat Cummins.

The drama began on the first delivery of West Indies' second innings, when Starc enticed John Campbell to nick an outswinger to wicketkeeper Josh Inglis.

Debutant Kevlon Anderson shouldered arms to a ball that jagged back and struck his pad four balls later, before Brandon King edged on to his stumps as



Mitchell Starc (left) and Pat Cummins (second left) and teammates of Australia pose with the trophy after winning on the third day of the third Test against the West Indies at Sabina Park in Kingston, Jamaica, on Monday. Australia won the series 3-0. (AFP)

the hosts found themselves three wickets down with no runs on the board.

Starc, named player-of-the-match and series, then trapped Mikyle Louis lbw to become the fourth Australian to reach 400 Test wickets alongside Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath and Nathan Lyon.

Two balls later, he trapped Shai Hope lbw and finished with figures of 6-9.

At tea, the West Indies stood at a precarious 22-6, needing 182 runs for victory and staring down the barrel of cricket's ultimate embarrassment, with five runs needed to avoid the lowest-ever total.

And the drama was far from over.

Boland dismissed Justin Greaves, Shamar Joseph and Jomel Warrican to claim a hat-trick that left West Indies at 26-9, level with New Zealand's record.

"He is amazing, isn't he?" Starc said of 36-year-old Boland, who has 62 wickets from 14 Tests at an average of 16.53.

"He would have played so many more Tests in another team."

In the end, it was a narrow escape for West Indies as they added another run before Starc returned to bowl Jayden Seales.

Earlier, Australia were dismissed for 121, their lowest score against West Indies in 30 years, with Alzarri Joseph completing career-best figures of 5-27 and Shamar Joseph 4-34.

That was little consolation

for West Indies captain Roston Chase, who said being bowled out for less than 30 was "quite embarrassing."

"Obviously we've been putting ourselves in positions to win games and then we (are) just laying down and not putting up a fight in the last batting innings," he said. "It's quite heartbreaking, because I think we did it in all three tests, and we're not really learning from our mistakes."

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 225 (Smith 48, Green 46, Shamar 4-33, Greaves 3-56) **and 121** (Green 42, Alzarri 5-27, Shamar 4-34) **beat West Indies 143** (Campbell 36, Boland 3-34) **and 27** (Starc 6-9, Boland 3-2) **by 176 runs**

CYCLING / TOUR DE FRANCE

Five things Pogacar expects in week two



UAE Team Emirates XRG's Tadej Pogacar reacts crossing the finish line in ninth place in Stage 10 with 10th-placed Team Visma Lease a Bike's Jonas Vingegaard during the Tour de France on Monday. (Reuters)

AFP
Toulouse, France

The second week of the Tour de France may be short, but it will be crucial, defending champion Tadej Pogacar said and during the rest day yesterday he went to the barber, had a burger and enjoyed a French cafe. But he was raring to get back on the bike.

Here AFP breaks down the Slovenian's views on the challenges of the week ahead.

Five-day week: Pogacar has been unusually serious during the opening week of the Tour which he described yesterday as "explosive, nervous, stressful and super-hard".

He has also complained about the heat, tiredness and how annoyed he can get by the stonewall tactics from Jonas Vingegaard's

Visma team. "Week two will be really fast," he predicted.

But he was not talking about the speed of the wheels, rather that it will be over more quickly due to being a day shorter after the 10-day slog before the first rest day.

Hopes Healy feels tired: Pogacar said it was refreshing to see some new faces like current leader Ben Healy and emerging French star Kevin Vauquelin, and suggested their arrival had muddied the waters.

"The field is packed, it's going to be a huge fight even for the podium and especially for the yellow jersey," the 26-year-old said.

"It's not just the big teams, everyone has proved they can stay up front," he added, explaining the race is harder to control than it usually is.

He also forecast the overall lead would change hands.

"Not tomorrow on the flat, but

at the Hautacam," he said of the Pyrenean giant mountain today.

"We'll see if Ben (Healy) can hold on.

"I hope he feels tired. I want the yellow jersey back."

Pinpoints danger: While Pogacar paraded to triumph against a weakened Vingegaard in 2024, his thoughts yesterday seemed to drift back to 2023 when he was routed on a time-trial followed by a mountain slog.

"I'm really looking forward to this week, especially the uphill time-trial to Peyragudes."

Stage 13 is just 11km long, and he lit up when he spoke of it.

"I'm looking forward to the Hautacam but especially to the time-trial at Peyragudes," said the man who is eyeing a fourth Tour triumph with a wistful look.

Good for me: Pogacar said the second week was usually a medium mountain affair with lots of break-

always as the Tour built towards a finale in week three, but not this year.

"We are going to see some big gaps in the upcoming days and I think it's going to be good for me. It's almost as hard as the final week."

Up to rivals to attack: When Pogacar, Tour winner in 2020, 2021 and last year, was asked about his rivals he named no names. Instead he cast his net wider.

"In the coming days I'm under no pressure to attack, it's up to them if they want to get ahead of me," he said.

Pogacar stands second after stage 10, 29sec adrift of Healy.

Remco Evenepoel, who says "everyone knows that this is where the Tour starts", is third, a minute behind the Slovenian.

Two-time champion Vingegaard is 1min 17sec behind the Slovenian in fourth.

GOLF

Schauffele ready to take another shot at Claret Jug

NO GOLFER HAS WON BACK-TO-BACK OPENS SINCE PADRAIG HARRINGTON (2007-08) AND TIGER WOODS (2005-06)

Reuters
County Antrim, Northern Ireland

Four birdies in his final eight holes swept Xander Schauffele to a two-shot victory in The Open Championship last year at Royal Troon in Scotland.

The World No. 3 hopes to catch a similar wave as he attempts to defend the Claret Jug this week at Royal Portrush Golf Club in Northern Ireland.

"There's typically a good wave and a bad wave in an Open Championship," Schauffele said yesterday. "You just keep your fingers crossed that you're in the good wave and try and play well. If you're not, fight for your life and make the cut and then try and do something on the weekend."

No golfer has won back-to-back Opens since Ireland's Padraig Harrington (2007-08) did it right after Tiger Woods (2005-06).

Schauffele, 31, dealt with a rib injury earlier this year and has yet to win a tournament this season after collecting his first two major victories last year at the PGA Championship at Valhalla and the Open. He matched his best finish of the season last week with a T8 at the Genesis Scottish Open.

Although he's had success with links-style golf, he admits he still has a lot to learn.

"I think even from last week to this week, we actually have divots flying this week. Last week was ball mark-less and divot-less,"



Xander Schauffele of the US during a press conference at the 153rd Open Championship at Royal Portrush Golf Club, Portrush, Northern Ireland, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

Schauffele said. "Just learning how the ball reacts on certain grass, if it's going to jump or not, when you're sitting in like a fescue bush or weed, how that's going to come out, how much it's going to grab your club. There's so many things you still learn on the way.

"More of it's just the mentality. I think, when you say links golf, it comes with weather, and when you play in bad weather, you have to have a good attitude."

Schauffele played well at the first three majors this year, tying for eighth at the Masters, for 28th at the PGA and for 12th place at the US Open.

He tied for 41st the last time the Open was played at Royal Portrush in 2019.

"Coming here, I feel like I'm trying to relearn this golf course, get comfortable with certain sight lines, some blind tee shots," he said.

"I think, if I can get myself in

the mix is when I think I would have an advantage.

"That's where my biggest edge would be.

"I can lean on experience at other points in time, but I think the most fun and the biggest advantage I would have is coming down the stretch if I can get close to that lead.

Schauffele is paired with Spain's Jon Rahm and reigning US Open champion JJ Spaun for the first two rounds.

COMMENT

Reuters
County Antrim, Northern Ireland

Edgy Rahm eager to end Spanish drought

Jon Rahm knows it has been 37 years since a Spaniard won The Open Championship, when Seve Ballesteros lifted his third Claret Jug in 1988.

Rahm has had several close calls, with ties for second in 2023, third in 2021 and seventh last year. He also finished T11 the last time it was played at Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland in 2019.

"I can't really give you an answer why (it has been so long)," Rahm said yesterday as he prepares for the start of the 153rd Open tomorrow.

"The way Seve played, it's a bit of a different way to play on links courses. I think one of the reasons he was so loved in Great Britain and Ireland, because I don't think anybody conceived that that was the way to play links golf - just hit driver everywhere and somehow find a way to put it on the green and chip and putt. It was not normal, which is a testament to how good of a golfer he was."

Countrymen Jose Maria Olazabal and Sergio Garcia made strong runs at The Open Championship.

Olazabal twice finished third and Garcia twice finished second.

"I think Sergio and I are obviously more known for being ball strikers," Rahm said. "Ollie, besides the driver, everything else was outstanding, one of the best iron players ever. Incredible golf game, both Ollie and Sergio; it's just never easy to win an Open."

Rahm, 30, returns to Royal Portrush in top form, having finished in the top 15 at all three majors so far and coming off a runner-up showing last week at the LIV Golf Andalucia event in his home country.

Rahm played through blustery conditions at Real Club Valderrama and carded a 6-under 65 on Sunday to finish one stroke behind winner Talor Gooch.

"We had quite a bit of wind, and that's always going to be a very hopeful week to get ready for (the Open)," Rahm said. "The other thing Valderrama does, it's challenging. Every golf shot you hit there, it's very little margin of error, so it does prep you mentally to get ready for a challenge that a major can be. Not to the fullest, but it's challenging enough to where you have to think about it quite a bit. With the wind obviously there's differences, but in those two aspects it helps."

Rahm has enjoyed success in Ireland, including his first title on the European Tour at the Irish Open in 2017, which he won again two years later.

"From what I've played in Ireland, I think maybe the designs - or I really don't know how to explain it best, but it just seems they use the contours in different ways," the two-time major winner said. "All the courses seem to be in a way where there's a few more dunes."

Rahm is paired with defending champion Xander Schauffele and reigning US Open champion JJ Spaun for the first two rounds.



Spain's Jon Rahm in action during a practice round ahead of the 153rd Open Championship at Royal Portrush Golf Club, Portrush, Northern Ireland, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

Badosa faces another spell on sidelines after fresh back injury

London: Paula Badosa said she will be out of action for a few weeks due to another back injury, leaving the world number 10 in a race to be fit for next month's US Open.

The Spanish former world number two has worked her way back into the top 10 this year after a string of injuries, including a chronic lower back issue, had left her contemplating retirement. Badosa lost 6-2 3-6 6-4 to Katie Boulter in the first round of Wimbledon earlier this month, and in a statement on Monday said she had suffered a tear in her psoas, the muscle which connects the lower back to the top of the leg. "These are really challenging times for me but I'm staying hopeful that things will turn around soon and the light at the end of the tunnel will start to shine through," Badosa said, adding that the injury had occurred before Wimbledon.

This has become an unfortunate



trend for the former world No. 2, whose chronic back injury forced her to pull out of Madrid and Miami mid-tournament earlier this year. She was also forced to withdraw from Indian Wells. Badosa is scheduled to play alongside Stefanos Tsitsipas in the US Open's revamped mixed doubles event, which will take place a week before the August 24 to September 7 singles main draw.

FOCUS

Italy showcase medals for 2026 Winter Games

Reuters
Venice, Italy

Organisers of the Milano-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics unveiled yesterday the medals that will be awarded to athletes during the Games next year.

The medals have the traditional Olympic five-ring symbol on one side, with an inscription on the reverse that details the event and commemorates the venue.

The same format has been used for the Paralympics, which has its own distinct symbol.

They were presented at a ceremony in Venice that featured two celebrated retired Italian athletes, swimmer Federica Pellegrini, and Francesca Porcellato, who has won gold medals at both Winter and Summer Paralympics.

"Each medal, whether Olympic or Paralympic, is a story etched into metal: it speaks of effort, determination, sacrifice, and the hopes of those who have lived to reach the podium," said Giovanni Malago, president of the Milano-Cortina 2026 Foundation.

The medals have been produced by the IPZS, the state mint, which is owned by the



This photograph shows the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games medals during the unveiling ceremony at Palazzo Balbi in Venice yesterday. (AFP)

economy ministry. A total of 245 gold, 245 silver, and 245 bronze medals will be presented during the Winter Games. In the Paralympics, 137 medals will be awarded in each of the three rankings.

Milan and the town of Cortina d'Ampezzo, one of Italy's most famous ski resorts, are the main hosts of the Games, which run from February 6 to 22 next year. The Paralympics will follow the following month.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar basketball team to train in South Korea ahead of FIBA Asia Cup

QNA
Doha

The Qatar Basketball Association (QBA) announced that the national team will hold a training camp in South Korea as part of the third phase of preparations for the 31st FIBA Asia Cup, to be held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, from August 5 to 17 with 16 teams participating.

The delegation, led by QBA President Mohammed bin Saad al-Mughaiseeb, departs for South Korea today. It also includes Secretary-General Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari, National Teams Director Jassim Ashkanani, Turkish head coach Hakan Demir, and 16 players. The team will play two friendly matches on July 19 and 20 before returning to Doha for a home tournament at Lusail Multipurpose Hall from July 28 to August 1, featuring Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Japan.

Qatar will open its Asia Cup campaign against Lebanon on August 6 in Group A, which also includes Australia and South Korea. Group winners will advance directly to the quarter-finals, while the second- and third-placed teams will compete in playoff matches.

Meanwhile, the Qatari reserve team continues competing in the 44th William Jones Cup in Taiwan. After falling to the Philippine Strong Group (54-81) in the fourth round, they face Chinese Taipei (B) today. The team, led by Mishaal Abdullah al-Malki, will also play Bahrain (July 17), Chinese Taipei (A) (July 19), and Malaysia (July 20), as part of preparations for the 26th Arab Basketball Championship in Bahrain from July 25 to August 2.

These engagements form part of a broader strategy to boost the technical development and competitive readiness of Qatar's national basketball teams ahead of major regional and continental tournaments.



FOOTBALL

Modric eyes World Cup after Milan move

Modric, who will turn 40 this September, is keen on play at next year's World Cup



Croatia captain Luka Modric, who left Real Madrid after 13 years at the La Liga club, has signed a one-year deal at AC Milan with an option to extend until June 2027.

Agencies
Milan

“Like when I used to watch you with my dad when I was a kid” is one of AC Milan's most famous chants and can often be heard reverberating around the San Siro. A verse that even Luka Modric, one of the greatest footballers of all time with an endless list of silverware to his name, can truly relate to after securing his dream move to the club.

The silky Croatian playmaker, having called time on an illustrious spell at Real Madrid following his side's semi-final exit at the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain, is now chomping at the bit to add another jewel to his crown with Milan. Milan, the club he has dreamed of playing for since he was a little boy, as shown by pictures of him wearing the Rossoneri colours, will be his last rodeo in football, at least at club level. He is still dreaming of representing his country again at the FIFA World Cup 26.

The deal that sees the best player at the FIFA World Cup Russia 2018 make the switch to Serie A is a shrewd move and a win-win for all parties involved, despite his advancing age. Modric will turn 40 this September, but in the Italian league and at a club like Milan, who are crying out for a fresh start and someone to grab the team by the scruff of the neck both on and off the pitch, his vast experience with Real Madrid and Croatia means he still has a lot to offer, even if he is no spring chicken.

Out of all European competitions, Massimiliano Allegri's side can offer the two-time FIFA World Cup All-Star Team member, who featured at Russia 2018 and the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, a starring role, be it as a regular starter or as the proverbial 12th man.

They can guarantee him plenty of minutes in the highly tactical Serie A, which will give him the perfect opportunity to once again showcase his ability to be one step ahead of his opponents, combining his

quality and vision to make a difference on the pitch. Even though he will not be able to contribute as much as he has done in the past, Modric can still play a pivotal role in Serie A, deployed either as a deep-lying playmaker or an attacking midfielder. He will be crucial in helping his younger teammates develop their game both on the pitch and in terms of their character off it.

The midfielder's arrival was confirmed by newly-appointed Milan coach Allegri earlier this month. “Very happy to be here to start a new chapter in my career,” said Modric in an Instagram video shared by Milan. Milan said Modric will wear the number 14 shirt, which he previously wore during his four years at English side Tottenham Hotspur to honour Dutch great Johan Cruyff. “It's an immense honour for them to compare me to (Cruyff)... I wore the no. 14 at Tottenham in honour of him, and because the no. 10 wasn't available,” Modric had said after winning the Ballon d'Or award in 2018.

Modric's arrival at the club will do wonders for the league's reputation, while also offering him the perfect setting to get himself ready for one final dance on the world's biggest stage. Getting regular minutes at Milan will help keep him fresh, fit and ready for the FIFA World Cup 26. “Boban was my hero, and when I was a little boy, my father bought me a Milan tracksuit,” Modric revealed in a 2020 interview. “I used to picture myself playing for Milan, but things didn't quite pan out that way.”

Until now. The most-decorated player in Real Madrid's history is eager to embark on one final challenge: to help fire the Rossoneri back to the top of Serie A and represent his country one last time before hanging up his boots.

He played his last game for Real on Wednesday, coming on as a second-half substitute during a 4-0 loss to Paris St Germain in the Club World Cup semi-finals.

“It's a bitter end... he's a legend of world football and of Real Madrid. He'll be remembered for many more good things than for the 25 minutes he played today,” Real Madrid manager Xabi Alonso said.

Oman appoint Queiroz as new coach

Muscat: Oman named former Real Madrid and Portugal manager Carlos Queiroz as their new head coach as they bid to reach the 2026 World Cup. Oman reached the fourth round of Asia's World Cup qualifiers after finishing fourth in Group B in the previous round, ending with a 1-1 draw with Palestine to secure their spot in the next phase.

“Queiroz has extensive coaching experience, having led the national teams of Portugal, Iran, Colombia, Egypt, and Qatar. He also served as an assistant coach at Manchester United under Sir Alex Ferguson,” the Oman FA said on social media platform X. “The Federation extends its thanks and appreciation to the previous technical staff, led by national coach Rashid Jaber, for their efforts during the past period, wishing them success in their future,” the federation added.

Oman will be joined by Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates in the fourth round draw, which takes place on July 17.

LEICESTER NAME CIFUENTES AS MANAGER

Leicester City have appointed former Queens Park Rangers head coach Marti Cifuentes as their manager on a three-year contract, the Championship side said. Leicester parted ways with former manager Ruud van Nistelrooy last month following the club's relegation to the English second tier after finishing 18th in the Premier League. The Spaniard, 43, previously coached Hammarby, whom he led to a Swedish Cup final and UEFA Conference League qualification. He took over at QPR in October 2023.

QPR put Cifuentes on gardening leave in April, ahead of their final game of the Championship season, as they finished 15th, seven points clear of the relegation zone.

Leicester begin their 2025-26 Championship campaign at home against Sheffield Wednesday on August 10.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Midfielder Henderson joins Brentford

AFP
London

England midfielder Jordan Henderson insists he can still thrive in the Premier League after joining Brentford on a free transfer yesterday following his exit from Dutch side Ajax.

Henderson agreed a two-year contract with the Bees as he returned to the Premier League after leaving Liverpool in 2023.

“After a couple of years away I still have that fire to come back and play in the Premier League again,” the 35-year-old said. “Obviously it's the best league in the world, with the best players. So it's a big challenge but one I'm keen on doing. When I was given the opportunity by Brentford and after speaking with the club it became an easy decision.”

Henderson will face his boyhood club Sunderland in August before an emotional return to Liverpool in October. “Both clubs mean a lot to me. I owe a lot to Sunderland and then Liverpool was a huge part of my life,” he said. “But when I'm playing against them there's no friends, we know that in football.”

Brentford's new manager Keith Andrews moved for Henderson after losing Denmark midfielder Christian Norgaard to Arsenal. “When we became aware of Jordan's availability, it was a pretty simple decision,” Andrews said. “We did our due diligence around his recent games to see where he is. He's still phenomenally fit and he's still phenomenally motivated to achieve things in the game, having already achieved a lot. With the void of experienced players leaving the building – Christian Norgaard, Mark Flekken and Ben Mee – it was important to replace that. What Jordan will bring is that he has been one of the most influential leaders in modern Premier League years. He's been at the forefront of driving for titles and Champions Leagues at a fantastic football club.”

Henderson has 84 England caps and was recently recalled by Three Lions boss Thomas Tuchel. He spent 12 years with Liverpool, winning the Champions League in 2019 and the Premier League in 2020 among numerous other trophies, before a lucrative move to Saudi Arabian club Al Ettifaq two years ago. His contract with Al Ettifaq was cancelled just six months later. Henderson subse-



quently joined Ajax, earning the captaincy and making 57 appearances for the Dutch club.

However, Ajax's late collapse

cost them the Eredivisie title last season and his contract was terminated last week with a year still left to run.

FOCUS

Man City sign kit deal worth reported £1bn

AFP
London

Manchester City have signed a blockbuster new kit deal with Puma worth a reported £1bn (\$1.34bn) over the next 10 years. City's extension of their contract with Puma ranks as the largest kit manufacturing partnership in Premier League history.

Having agreed a £65mn per year deal with the German company in 2019, City's new arrangement is believed to be worth a £100mn per year until 2035, according to British media reports. That figure shatters the £90mn per year deal signed by Manchester United with Adidas in 2023. Spanish giants Real Madrid and Barcelona are both reported to have kit deals worth in excess of £100mn per year.

“We joined forces with Puma with the ambition to challenge ourselves and go beyond the expectations. We have achieved this and more over the last six seasons,” City Football Group chief executive Ferran Soriano said. “Puma have seamlessly integrated into



our organisation, and we have enjoyed many historic moments together, engaging fans globally.”

Puma chief executive Arthur Hoeld added: “Puma's partnership with Manchester City has been a great success both on and off the pitch. Trophies, a perfect stage for our performance products and commercial success were exceptional.”

City's massive deal comes after the club's first season without major silverware since 2016-17. Pep Guardiola's men finished third in the Premier League after winning the title for the previous four seasons. They also suffered a shock FA Cup final defeat against Crystal Palace and crashed out of the recent Club World Cup in the last 16 against Saudi side Al Hilal.