

Bayern shrug off political fallout from Tehran visit

AFP, Tehran

Bayern Munich shrugged off the political fallout from their controversial visit here on Friday to beat Iranian side Persepolis 2-1 in a friendly match.

Germany, as well as France and Britain, has condemned Iran for resuming its sensitive nuclear fuel research and is calling for action against Tehran's rulers.

In addition to the current nuclear standoff, the match came amid calls by some German politicians for FIFA to expel Iran from the World Cup after hardline Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad described the Holocaust as "a myth".

"We consider politics and sports to be separate from one another," said Bayern coach Felix Magath who was pressed on why he chose to come to Iran in the current tense political climate.

"As soon as we received the invitation letter from Persepolis we replied with pleasure, since we have a lot of friends in Iran and in a few months time we will host the Iran national team in Germany at the World Cup finals."

Ali Ansarian scored the first goal from a penalty in the 26th minute.

But the Germans came back strong and in the 35th minute Michael Ballack levelled before Jose Paolo Guerrero scored the winner just before the break.

More than 40,000 spectators filled the 100,000-capacity Azadi Stadium in subzero temperatures.

Persepolis coach, Ali Parvin, said: "Such games are good for the Iranian people and players, since it will boost their morale."



Iranian fans wave flags of Germany and Bayern Munich during the friendly match between Bayern and Persepolis Club of Iran at Azadi Stadium in Tehran on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Eng mull over spin options

Cricket

AFP, London

England have yet to finalise their spin options for their forthcoming Test series in India despite naming a 15-man squad for the three-match series here Friday.

Quality slow bowling has long been regarded as a key component of success on the sub-continent.

But during their 2-0 Test series defeat in Pakistan, in the first-half

of their northern winter programme, England saw left-arm mainstay Ashley Giles return home early with a hip injury while off-spinner Shaun Udal, making his debut in the five-day game, managed just three wickets in the three Tests.

By contrast Pakistan leg-spinner Danish Kaneria took 11 wickets and, just as importantly, by bowling more than 133 overs, was able to ensure his team's fast bowlers got a decent amount of respite between spells -- something England's slow men were unable to

provide for their hard-pressed pacemen.

Giles, who has since had surgery, and 36-year-old Hampshire hero Udal were both included in the Test squad for India.

However, England left open the option of adding a third spinner with Northamptonshire left-arter Monty Panesar, much praised by England chairman of selectors David Graveney during a recent radio interview, Alex Loudon of Warwickshire and Somerset's Ian Blackwell the leading candidates.

"Ashley has been part of our attack for a long period and there is no doubt he would go if he has recovered from his operation," Graveney said Friday.

"Shaun Udal found the wickets pretty flat in Pakistan but we expect them to be more conducive to spin in India. We were sure he should be given another chance.

"For the third spinner people may be surprised we have left an opening. Loudon went on the last trip (to Pakistan), he is a young guy starting his career and did very well. Monty did very well for Northants, he has been in Adelaide working on the areas he needed to improve, and Ian Blackwell is part of the one-day party.

"We want to work with these guys and we have a fantastic facility at Loughborough (home to England's National Academy)," Graveney, a former county spin bowler, also told Sky Sports. "We didn't want to make a hasty decision."

Giles, 32, who missed the third Test in Pakistan before having surgery in England, said: "I'm feeling pretty good. The operation went well and the rehab is going well. I'm working hard in the gym and hoping to bowl next week.

"I'm looking forward to the challenge but the important thing is to get fit and get on the trip."

Meanwhile relieved Udal said: "I was a little worried in case the vote didn't go my way, but thanks to the selectors for keeping faith and I hope to repay them with wickets in India.

"I will just try to do my best. Criticism comes and you have got to learn to take that.

"Some of it was pretty harsh but that has gone now and it is up to me to try to prove them wrong," added Udal, captained at Hampshire by Australia leg-spin great Shane Warne.

"The pressure is on myself and Ashley to produce the goods and if I go to India and fail I have had a fair crack of the whip."

England's Test squad leaves for Mumbai on February 12 and the first of three Tests is due to start, in Nagpur, on March 1.

Clean cops for World Cup

AFP, Berlin

German police have been ordered to spruce up their appearance by the time of the World Cup finals, according to a decree from the Interior Ministry.

Policemen will not be allowed to wear earrings, body studs, pony tails, dreadlocks, three-day old beards or visible tattoos. Women will be able to wear earrings provided they are not more than five millimetres.

An Interior Ministry spokesman told Der Spiegel magazine: "We want German police to have a united front in terms of appearance."

The decree, which will be published next month, will stay in force till after the June 9 to July 9 World Cup finals.

Party consolation for gala call-off?

AFP, Berlin

The mayor of Berlin, disappointed at the cancellation of the World Cup gala by FIFA, has suggested instead a party take place at the Brandenburg Gate.

World football's governing body FIFA said that studies showed they would be taking a big risk in hoping that the Olympic Stadium pitch would recover from the damage it would incur at the June 7 jamboree.

Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit told Germany's Tagesspiegel newspaper on Saturday: "I am going to write to FIFA president Sepp Blatter and suggest Berlin and FIFA organise a party for supporters at the Brandenburg Gate."

Wowereit said he was very disappointed by FIFA's surprise decision on Friday. "I cannot believe that the threat of damage to the pitch at the Olympic stadium is the real reason for the cancellation," he said, adding that the turf was going to be changed anyway and that FIFA knew all this right from the start.

Ronaldo reveals Messi admiration

INTERNET, undated

Brazil striker Ronaldo admits he wishes Argentinian starlet Lionel Messi was lining up alongside him at this summer's World Cup finals.

The Real Madrid striker has nothing but admiration for the teenage Barcelona frontman who has set La Liga alight this season as his side look to retain their league title.

"I would have loved that Messi was Brazilian. He's incredible," Ronaldo told Rio de Janeiro newspaper O Globo.

"From the new generation of players, he is the player of the moment."

Defending champions Brazil face Croatia, Australia and Japan in Group F at the World Cup, while Argentina have been paired with Ivory Coast, Serbia & Montenegro and Holland.

Former Nou Camp star Ronaldo has set his sights on facing arch-rivals Argentina in the World Cup final, in a contest which he believes is "the biggest derby in the world."

"It would be great, even more if we (Brazil) win that final. But they (Argentina) deserve respect and consideration. Argentina have an excellent national team," he added.

More injury

FROM PAGE 12

SOUTH AFRICA: Graeme Smith (captain), Boeta Dippenaar, Herschelle Gibbs, Jacques Kallis, Jacques Rudolph, Ashwell Prince, Justin Kemp, Mark Boucher, Shaun Pollock, Andrew Hall, Garnett Kruger, Monde Zondeki (super sub to be named).

Henry wants Arsenal to be competitive

Football

INTERNET, undated

Thierry Henry has urged Arsenal to match his sporting ambitions as he gears up for talks regarding a new contract.

The Gunners skipper revealed last week that he is ready to pledge his long-term future to the club.

Henry has 18 months remaining on his contract and there had been fears he could move on at the end of the season, when Arsenal vacate their current Highbury home.

But while the France international has assuaged those concerns by declaring his willingness to sign a new deal, there is a caveat to his pledge.

The quick-silver striker admits the issue about concuring on fresh terms in North London has nothing to do with money.

Instead, Henry wants Arsenal to demonstrate they can be competitive at the highest level before he signs with the club for the rest of his career.

"This is not about the money," Henry told The Sun. "Cash has never been my priority."

"It is more a matter of football and now the club must show me they can match my sporting ambitions."

"I am willing to commit to Arsenal for the rest of my career, but the team has to be competitive."

"We need to build and the ball is in the club's court. I need to know the club's ambition."

Mahanama due today

FROM PAGE 12

Sri Lanka in March at Mirpur, Babu however ruled out the possibility of any international matches at cricket's new home before April.

"Mahanama will also visit Mirpur Stadium but I'm afraid it won't be ready for international matches before April with massive renovation work still pending," he said.

Babu was also worried with the slow progress of renovation work in Mirpur.

"An advance team from Cricket Australia is expected to visit the venue in the last week of this month. So, we will have to speed up the work if we stand any realistic chance to

hold any matches at Mirpur during Australia's first visit in April-May, said the BCB joint-secretary.

United suffer

FROM PAGE 12

Yet, apart from a Rooney shot that passed well wide from the edge of the area a few minutes later, City had little to worry about for the remainder of the game.

Indeed, in the fourth minute of injury-time, Fowler eased any lingering worries, slotting home a pass from Vassell as City converted a four-against-two break in the United area.

Martyn hopeful

FROM PAGE 12

Martyn's knock yesterday included two of the lucky breaks that might have saved his Test career.

The right-hander was caught off a no-ball and then dropped next over. His luck in England was not so good, when he was twice judged lbw after getting inside edges at Old Trafford and Trent Bridge.

But Martyn, whose Ashes series yielded only 178 runs at 19.78, said he could not blame those dismissals for his Test sacking.

"That's disappointing that you lose your spot, but I don't look back on it and dwell on those decisions costing me my spot," he said.

"I had other chances in other innings and didn't make enough runs."

Sixes assault

FROM PAGE 12

"The wicket is very good for batting."

"Maybe our fast bowlers will find some reverse swing but India have a very strong batting line-up and are good against spinners so let's see."

"It was fun out there," said Afridi. "At one stage, Anil Kumble asked me where he should bowl to me so that I am not able to hit the ball."

Becks to lead Eng in WC

Football

INTERNET, undated

England Coach Sven Goran Eriksson has confirmed that David Beckham will be captain of the England football team in the World Cup finals starting, "Beckham will be England's captain in Germany, and I will not even discuss anyone else!"

Eriksson's faith in Beckham has been constant since the Swede first gave Beckham the captain's armband, and doesn't have any plans of changing his mind. In an interview on the League Managers Association website the England coach heaped praise on the Real Madrid midfielder.

"David is an extremely good player and his right foot is the best in the world. For crosses, long passes, short passes, free kicks and corners, he is number one. But he is an all-round player, too. He can defend, he

has two big lungs for running up and down for 90 minutes, he is a good man, and a good captain."

England has a plethora of commanding players in the squad, including Liverpool's Steven Gerrard, Chelsea's John Terry, Manchester United's Rio Ferdinand and Arsenal's Sol Campbell, who all have a huge presence on the field, and are all either captains of, or who have captained their respective teams.

But nonetheless the England boss is adamant that Beckham is the right choice for the job of captain.

"Beckham will be England's captain in Germany, and I will not even discuss anyone else. He's calm in the dressing room and when he talks, people listen. That's good. But you must also remember that we have many captains in our team."

"John Terry is a good leader who is captain of Chelsea, Steven Gerrard is captain of Liverpool...and so on."

Federer Hewitt's favourite too

Tennis

BBC ONLINE, undated

World number four Lleyton Hewitt has acknowledged that Roger Federer is the overwhelming favourite to lift the Australian Open title.

Hewitt reached the final in 2005, but the prospect of meeting the world number one in this year's semifinals has left the Australian downbeat.

"He's beaten me in our last nine matches, so you work it out," he said.

"I think Roger's got to go down as one of the biggest favourites of all time this year."

Federer's hopes of winning the crown for a second time increased with the withdrawals of defending champion Marat Safin, world number two Rafael Nadal and US Open finalist Andre Agassi.

But the Swiss star is not concerned about shouldering the burden of expectation.

"I'm used to it - it really doesn't matter," said the 24-year-old.

Federer has admitted he knows nothing about his first-round

opponent Denis Istomin.

The 19-year-old Uzbek is ranked 195 in the world and won a wildcard after winning the 2005 Asian Championships.

"I cannot tell you one thing about him," said Federer.

"That could be good, it could be bad - we'll find out soon. I tried to ask around a bit about him, and no one knew him at all.

"I have no clue about him, how old he is, how he looks, if he's left or right-handed. I'd better find out because I don't want to be facing someone very unknown."



LLEYTON HEWITT

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Tie up the phone
4 Support system?
7 Ovine remark
12 Pussy-cat's partner
13 Boat-house item
14 Busybody
15 E.T.'s craft
16 Ploy
18 Pair
19 Put on a show
20 Charitable donation
22 Caustic solution
23 Pumps up the volume
27 West of Hollywood
29 Canoe type
31 Lucy's pal
34 Oversentimental
35 Affluence
37 Feedbag morsel
38 Bridge position
39 Early hrs.

DOWN

1 Edam
5 Litter
11 Cohort of members
15 Alternative
20 Litter
25 Litter
44 Nervous
45 Cohort of Meredith and Joy
46 Advantage
48 Turf
49 Word indexers ignore
50 Snitch
51 Beati-tudes verb

Solution time: 25 mins.

HEM SLEW DAIS
AGO AIRY INCH
MONALISA STOA
TWO ETCHING
PARLOR TAP
ALE SUM TAMER
LEAP BOB NOME
ECLAIR OAR NIP
YAM DEPOSITS
GOURMET CUR
ARGO MONETARY
DELLI ODES TOU
SIGHT SOWS LOP

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56						57			58	

CRYPTOQUIP

U B Z R Z G X B T X G T J F N T D N
D W L G G S W L P Z D S W B T X G
P B W R A X J X B Z S T J A P W M V
G R X V V G : " V Z F Z J U W U W B ."
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A MAN POSSESSED REAL SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH, DO YOU SUPPOSE HE MIGHT TRY SHOP LIFTING?
Today's Cryptquip Clue: U equals D
The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.