

Call World Cup off: German politician

AFP, Berlin
A German Green Party politician on Tuesday said the football World Cup, which will be played here from June 9 to July 9, should be cancelled because of the outbreak of bird flu in the country.

"The virus is here, and we have a giant sports event on our hands. I would be tempted to say let us be cautious and call it off," said Baerbel Hoehn, the leader of the parliamentary committee for agriculture.

The World Cup organising committee refused to comment but Hoehn found support from World Health Organisation expert Klaus Stoehr, who said he did not think the suggestion amounted to "scare-mongering."

"We should think very carefully about what we are going to do if we have a human case of avian influenza," he said.

The 2006 World Cup is expected to bring some three million football fans to Germany, and the country has been preparing to host the event since 2000.

The dangerous H5N1 strain of bird flu reached German shores last week, and by Tuesday 103 dead birds had tested positive for the disease.

Dalmiya in hot water

PTI, New Delhi

The wranglings in the Board of Control for Cricket in India took a serious turn on Tuesday with the new regime headed by Sharad Pawar accusing former BCCI president Jagmohan Dalmiya of misappropriating funds to the tune of 20 crore rupees.

BCCI's marketing committee claimed that Dalmiya had bungled funds related to the 1996 World Cup and TV rights, a charge which was vehemently refuted by the veteran administrator.

"There has been pilferage of money. Prima facie there is a case of misappropriation of funds and fraud," BCCI vice-president and marketing committee member Lalit Modi told reporters.

"The money involved is to the tune of 20 crore rupees. PILCOM (1996 World Cup Committee) is just one account, there are other accounts as well," Modi alleged after an emergency working committee meeting of BCCI here.

"PILCOM was being operated by its erstwhile secretary Dalmiya. That has been shut down and the money transferred to CAB (Cricket Association of Bengal of which Dalmiya is the president)... So the members have asked the President to seek an explanation," he said.

"The members have authorised the President to take a decision in this regard. Dalmiya has sought seven days to reply to the charges." Dalmiya, however, termed the allegations "absolutely baseless" and said he was ready to furnish all details.

"They are making absolutely baseless allegations in the media and if they have any query they should ask me. I am ready to provide all details, but why this public accusation?" Dalmiya said.

Former BCB joint-secretary Apu no more

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh Cricket Board joint-secretary and Brothers Union official Golam Faruque Apu died of a heart attack in Florida, USA on Monday, he was 52.

Apu, a former cricketer and the board joint-secretary from 1992-96, left behind his mother, wife and two daughters.

Bangladesh Cricket Board, Brothers Union, Sammito Kria Paribar and Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh have condoned the death of Apu prayed for the salvation of the departed soul. They also expressed their heartfelt sympathy for the bereaved family.

Nat'l chess qualifiers from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The qualifying rounds of the 32nd National Chess Championship will begin today at the BCF hall-room.

Nine top players of the preliminary rounds will join automatic qualifiers GM Ziaur Rahman, GM Niaz Mursheed, IM Reefat Bin Sattar, IM Enamul Hossain Rajib and IM Abdullah Al Rakib in the finals.

Players with 2100 rating or above, selected players from Dhaka city, different districts, universities and other affiliated bodies and national junior, sub-junior and women's chess champions will participate in the qualifiers.



Chelsea captain John Terry (C) launched on a left-footed shot as his teammates look on at the club's training ground in Cobham, Surrey on Tuesday. Chelsea will host Barcelona at Stamford Bridge in a mouthwatering Champions League quarterfinal tonight.

Super Wednesday in store

AFP, Paris

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho insisted the Stamford Bridge pitch was up to scratch for their mouthwatering repeat of last year's last 16 Champions League clash against Barcelona on Wednesday by using a colourful analogy.

The Stamford Bridge pitch took a battering from heavy rain on Sunday, as Chelsea beat Colchester 3-1 in the FA Cup, but Mourinho insisted the surface was not as bad as it looked, though, Barcelona have not shared his opinion.

"Sometimes you see beautiful people with no brains. Sometimes you have ugly people who are intelligent, like scientists," said Mourinho, whose side edged Barca 5-4 on aggregate last season.

"Our pitch is a bit like that. From the top it's a disgrace but the ball rolls at normal speed."

Other last 16, first leg matches on the night include Germany's Werder Bremen against Italian giants Juventus, Ajax of the Netherlands against Inter Milan, and Scotland's Rangers against Villarreal of Spain.

Mourinho has even offered Barcelona the use of Chelsea's training pitches if they don't like the surface at Stamford Bridge. Barcelona were expected in

London on Monday.

The Catalans have been grumbling about the state of Chelsea's pitch and fear it could hinder their flowing football.

But the Blues boss invited them to give up their option of training at Stamford Bridge on the day before the game and use Chelsea's training base in Surrey instead.

Mourinho said: "If Barcelona want to train at our training centre on Tuesday to give us more time to work on the pitch, the offer is there. The training the day before a game is nothing. It's just to get used to the ball."

"If they want to train at our training centre we'd be very pleased for them to go there."

Juventus have serious problems in defence before their trip to Werder Bremen, who will be looking to improve on their woeful showing at the same stage last year when they lost 10-2 on aggregate to French champions Lyon.

Left back Gianluca Zambrotta and right back Jonathan Zebina are doubtful with Giorgio Chiellini likely to replace the former.

Juventus coach Fabio Capello was thinking of putting Frenchman Lilian Thuram on the right flank and then placing Robert Kovac in the central defensive position vacated by Thuram.

Another option would be for him to leave Thuram in the central role and field Manuel Blasi, who is comfortable in a fullback position.

Capello was also scathing of the defensive problems which cost them victory against Messina who scored a late equaliser for a 2-2 draw on Saturday.

"Juventus should not concede a goal on a freekick," Capello said. "I was really annoyed at that particularly as Bremen are very good at that aspect of the game."

Bremen have the good news international striker Miroslav Klose is available against Juventus after being out of action for three months with an injury to his right shoulder.

Werder coach Thomas Schaaf could field Klose against the Italian club after deliberately resting him in their 1-0 victory at Dortmund at the weekend.

"I want to be there at all costs," said the Germany international, who has not played since January 26.

Rangers celebrated their 2-0 Scottish Premier League win over Hibernian on Saturday with a bottle of champagne and they hope to be cracking open the bubbly again when they take on Villarreal in the Champions League.

The drinks were on Thomas Buffel, who turned 25 on Sunday, and he was keen to mark his birthday with his team-mates after the 2-0 win.

It was a much-needed victory for a team who had lost their last three games and Buffel is determined to see their luck continue

when Villarreal come calling.

Speaking of the post-match celebrations, he said: "I wanted to give everybody a glass of champagne."

"Everybody worked hard, and I think it's good to keep the boys together. We have to stick together as a team on Wednesday and work hard, because we know they will do the same."

"Not a lot of players have been to this stage, and even then we have the chance to go further and through to the quarter-finals. That would be amazing for this club."

Villarreal manager Manuel Pellegrini, meanwhile, issued a warning to Rangers that his side -- seventh in their domestic league -- would not be coming to Glasgow in the hope of taking a narrow defeat or a draw back to Spain.

"We are going to Glasgow to win. The way we play at Villarreal is we try to win games, never just to get a draw," said Pellegrini, whose team rehearsed for the game in ideal fashion by walloping Espanyol 4-0 in the league on Saturday with former Manchester United striker Diego Forlan among the goalscorers.

"It is very important to try and score a goal and we will not be going there to wait on Rangers for 90 minutes."

"We will have chances in Glasgow and we are looking to win."

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIER Japan take on India today

AFP, Yokohama

Champions Japan launch their defence of the Asian Cup on Wednesday with a qualifier against India, using the match as vital preparation for the World Cup in June.

Japan's countdown to the World Cup in Germany got off to a sluggish start with a 3-2 loss to the United States, but they are hoping to build on the momentum after beating Finland 2-0 at home on Saturday.

"We have just started preparation for the World Cup and we still have some difficulties, but we are getting better and better in each game," said coach Zico.

"We are determined to form a solid team by winning the opener of the Asian Cup qualifying round against India next Wednesday," added the Brazilian.

"I can also confirm that England's pre-World Cup games against Hungary (on May 30) and Jamaica (June 3) -- previously scheduled for Wembley -- will now be held at Old Trafford."

"This is a real competition, not a friendly game, we are vying for three points from a win to make a berth in the Asian Cup. We will do our very best to defend the Cup."

Japan have been drawn with India, Saudi Arabia and Yemen in Group A for the Asian Cup, with the top two going through to the finals co-hosted by Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam in July next year.

Zico is without his European-based players, led by Bolton midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata and Celtic midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura, but has been encouraged by the return of striker Tatsuhiko Kubo after a 17 month injury layoff.

He scored against Finland, his first goal since June 2004 and his ninth for Japan -- the second best under Zico's wing after Nakamura who has scored 10.

"He (Kubo) showed an ideal positioning to receive a pass. It gave us the victory and I'm sure he gained a lot of confidence," said Zico.

"I'm going to replace some players for the match against India, but I'm going to use Kubo as long as possible. That's the best way for him to get into his rhythm."

Japan Football Association president Saburo Kawabuchi wanted to use the Olympic team for the qualifying round, but Zico held firm, determined to use the games to prepare for the World Cup.

A goal at the Yokohama stadium Wednesday would be the 100th since Zico took charge following Japan's successful 2002 World Cup campaign.

Friendship can wait

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Bremen

Juventus midfielder Patrick Vieira will put his friendship with Johan Micoud on one side on Wednesday when the Italian league leaders face Werder Bremen in the Champions League.

Vieira, who has known Micoud since they were children and played together with him in the French national team, has been assigned to shackle the Werder playmaker in the first leg of their last 16 tie at the Weser stadium.

"We will be friendly to one another before and after the game, but we each have a job to do during the match," Vieira told Werder's official website.

"We know each other's game very well -- we both learned our trade at AS Cannes soccer school."

"It will be a special game and we'll see a lot of each other on the pitch." With his position in offensive midfield and my defensive midfield position, we'll surely have a lot to do with each other. It'll be a challenge."

While Vieira is still playing

regularly for France, Micoud is on the fringes and far from certain of going to this summer's World Cup.

Vieira insisted playing away from home first was not necessarily an advantage for the reigning Italian champions.

"At this point of the competition, whether you play at home first or second has no influence," said the former Arsenal star.

"It would be great if we can score, but we've got to be careful not to concede -- Bremen are very strong at home."

Vieira believes Werder will not allow the fear of conceding an away goal to cramp their attacking style.

"Their strengths are definitely in attack," he said.

"They play the ball to the strikers quickly and score many goals. On top of that they have Micoud. 'Joe' is a real number 10, who spreads the ball around well and creates."

Vieira said Liverpool's surprise success last season showed that every club in the competition deserves respect.

"Anything is possible in football. It's on the pitch that the decision is made as to who is the best team."

Liverpool may not have played

the most beautiful football, but they proved that as a unit great success can be achieved.

"I personally believe that the door is still open for every team still involved."

Werder striker Miroslav Klose, who has not played since injuring his right shoulder on January 26, has returned to full training but may not be ready to face Turin's 'Old Lady'.

"I want to be there at all costs," said the Germany international.

Juve's marauding left wingback Gianluca Zambrotta has failed to recover from a high strain so Giorgio Chiellini is expected to step in.

Werder's 1-0 win at Borussia Dortmund on Saturday left them in third place in the Bundesliga, nine points adrift of leaders Bayern Munich.

Juventus were held to a 2-2 draw at Messina at the weekend, but are still nine points clear at the top of Serie A.

In 10 visits to face German clubs in European competition between 1976 and 2002, Juventus have lost just once -- the 3-1 defeat to Borussia Dortmund in the 1996-97 Champions League final played in Munich.

Thai noodles eye WC boom

AFP, Bangkok

The upcoming World Cup will likely boost Thailand's instant noodles market by 10 per cent as hungry and sleepy Thai football fans watch it on live with cups of quick, hot and cheap meals in hand, a research house said Tuesday.

"The games will be broadcast live from Germany, which means Thai people will watch them from 9:00 pm to 3:00 am and instant noodles is the most convenient food for Thai football fans," Kasikorn Reserach Center said in a report.

Kasikorn said the 64-match tournament, which kicks off in Germany in early June, is expected to lift the Thai instant noodles market by 10 per cent to reach 11 billion baht (279.8 million dollars) this year.

"Also fast-food operators and 24-hour convenient stores, which sell many ready-to-cook foods, are likely to get windfalls," it said.

But the research house added Thai instant noodle makers were facing stiff competition in the domestic market and said they should seek overseas markets to boost their sales.

The World Cup begins on June 9 with the final on July 9.

FA Cup final at Cardiff

AFP, Sydney

The FA Cup final will not be held at the new Wembley Stadium, the Football Association announced Tuesday as the worst kept secret in football -- that the venue would not be ready on time -- was finally confirmed.

Instead, Cardiff's Millennium Stadium will again host English football's showcase event, as work continues to complete reconstruction of the 90,000-seater venue in north London.

"I can confirm today (Tuesday) that this season's FA Cup Final will be held at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff on May 13," FA chief executive Brian Barwick said in a statement.

"I can also confirm that England's pre-World Cup games against Hungary (on May 30) and Jamaica (June 3) -- previously scheduled for Wembley -- will now be held at Old Trafford."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP
K J U T Q Y N L Z H M Z A A F U A N
N Q U T X L F D U L Y V U L J U A
M J Z L L F T V Z T X N S M J, K Y S H X
L J Z L E U D Z P H E Y T X F T V ?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF AN OFFICER ARRESTED SOME WAYWARD LETTUCE OR ENDIVE, YOU MIGHT HAVE COLLARED GREENS.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals T
The Cryptoquip 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.



Winners of the third Hosaf President's Cup Golf Tournament are seen with Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed during the prize giving ceremony at the Savar Golf Club on Monday.