

Iran president not planning Germany visit

AFP, Tehran
Iran on Sunday said football-loving President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would not be attending the World Cup finals in Germany.

"There is no plan for a visit by Mr. Ahmadinejad to Germany and watching the World Cup games in the stadium," foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters.

"But what is evident is that he is a sports fan, and his presence among the athletes is a heartwarming move. We have to differentiate between these two matters," he added.

Asefi's intervention comes less than a week after the Iranian Football Federation raised the possibility of Ahmadinejad travelling to Germany to support the national team at the June 9-July 9 finals.

"It is possible because our president loves football," said federation president Mohammad Ali Dadkan.

"He often watches the national team's matches."
Iran are in Group D with Mexico, Portugal and Angola and have chosen the southern German city of Friedrichshafen as their World Cup base.



Did U Know?

Big hitting all-rounder Mohammad Rafique has hit 26 sixes in 24 matches so far in his Test career.



Diego Maradona (Argentine football legend)
'I don't know if England are going to reach the (World Cup) final but it's a team that worries me as a potential rival of Argentina.'

Nafees' motivation

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But honestly speaking I was little bit tense when I reached 99," said the batsman who was dropped at a fly-slip position by Shane Warne when he was on 66.

Nafees was not successful against Muttiah Muralidaran whenever he tried to play the sweep but he showed different character against Shane Warne to be successful.

"Actually I was wrong in choosing the ball for sweep shot against Murali but I think I learnt from my mistake which reflected in the day against Warne. My main intention was to play according to merit of the delivery," he said.

The vital cog of his and the whole innings was the short period after lunch when Nafees and skipper Bashir consolidated to be set again during the post-lunch period. Before lunch, they were rampant, going at a rate of almost six an over. But just after lunch, Ricky Ponting's applied a different strategy to contain the batsmen, to test their temperament. But thankfully, the pair were steady and controlled to score only 28 runs from 13 overs.

India doubtful

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The matter could be taken as early as Tuesday (April 11).

Sabina Park will host seven World Cup matches, including the first game and a semi-final, but work on the ground has been hit first by labour problems, and then by the cement crisis. The problem was further exacerbated when batches of cement were recalled as they were of substandard quality.

Guwahati turns

FROM PAGE 12
"We are not satisfied with the umpires' decision and we will write to the International Cricket Council about it," association spokesman Bikash Barooah said.

PREMIERSHIP

Chelsea show true colour

Football
AFP, London

Ten-man Chelsea took a giant stride towards a second straight Premiership title by overcoming the twin handicaps of going behind and having a player sent-off to beat West Ham 4-1 in dramatic style at Stamford Bridge here Sunday.

All of Chelsea's goals in an extraordinary comeback came after they'd gone 1-0 down in the 10th minute and seen Maniche, making his first Premiership start for the club, sent-off minutes later.

Victory left the Blues, who had seen their double-digit lead at the top whittled down to seven points before kick-off, 10 points clear of second-placed Manchester United before Sir Alex Ferguson's team hosted Arsenal later Sunday.

Chelsea played most of the match with 10 men after Maniche was dismissed in the 16th minute for a wild challenge on full-back Lionel Scaloni.

By then the Hammers had already rocked Chelsea when defender James Collins headed in Yossi Benayoun's corner at the near post.

But Chelsea turned the game on its head to the delight of the home crowd with two goals in just over two minutes from strike pair Didier Drogba and Hernan Crespo.

Chelsea skipper John Terry then added a third in the second-half before William Gallas made it 4-1.

But three minutes after nearly levelling for the Blues, Maniche was given a straight red card by referee Chris Foy for his lunge on Scaloni.

However the leaders responded in style with two quick goals, fully vindicating the decision of Jose Mourinho, who earlier this week said he was more worried by bird flu than United, to pair Drogba and Crespo up front.

In the 28th minute a superb

through-ball from former West Ham midfielder Frank Lampard found Drogba and although the Ivory Coast international's first shot was blocked he scored from the rebound.

And while fans were still catch-

ing their breath, Chelsea went ahead when Drogba's cross-shot was turned in by Argentina ace Crespo.



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea's Argentine striker Hernan Crespo rides on the back of Didier Drogba to celebrate his strike against West Ham during their Premiership clash at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

minute after Gallas's shot had come off the woodwork.

Gallas thought got on the score-sheet in the 69th minute when he capitalised on hesitancy in the Hammers' defence to fire home from close range.

Maradona hopes to lead Argentina

INTERNET, undated

Diego Maradona believes he has a chance of coaching Argentina if Jose Pekerman does not lead them to World Cup glory this summer in Germany.

The legendary striker told Argentinian TV: "There is a good willingness of Argentinian Football Association boss Julio Grondona to have me work as a coach of the national team."

"If Jose Pekerman wins the World Cup, I could work with the youth."

Maradona was asked about Argentina's chances.

"We need to remember the last World Cup, in that we were the main favourites and we returned to Argentina after the first group stage," he said.

"The boys know that in Korea-Japan we made history. So that error will serve as an example for us to do things in a different way."

Angry Martin 'punishes' galacticos

AFP, Martin

Real Madrid president Fernando Martin dragged his under-performing galacticos back into training two and a half days early as punishment for their insipid display against Real Sociedad.

Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane and company were back in training Sunday morning despite playing at the Bernabeu on Saturday night, a match they threw away after Iker Casillas' mistake gifted the visitors a 1-1 draw in a match which also saw Guti sent off and the players booed off.

Martin ordered coach Juan Ramon Lopez Caro to cancel the players' proposed rest and focus on trying to secure second place in Primera Liga, a position they lost to Valencia which won 1-0 at Celta Vigo.

The president met with players and coaching staff and asked them to increase their efforts to secure the second automatic Champions League qualifying spot.

Puyol admits Milan affection

INTERNET, undated

Carles Puyol has confessed that he would like to join Milan if he ever leaves Barcelona.

The outstanding Catalan captain is eyeing a major prize in the shape of the UEFA Champions League trophy this term but the Rossoneri stand between Barca and a place in the final in Paris.

Puyol is unlikely to ever contemplate quitting Nou Camp but, if he was to move on, Milan would be his ideal destination.

"Considering that I'd like to finish my career here in Barcelona, and that I'll never play for another Spanish club, if I would have to leave Spain one day, I'd like to go to Milan," he told Gazzetta dello Sport.

"Paolo Maldini, Alessandro Nesta, Alessandro Costacurta and Jaap Stam are great defenders."

"With them, there is always something to learn."

Barcelona tackle Milan over two legs with Villarreal or Arsenal awaiting the victors in the final.

Premier Div v'ball

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Rifles and Titas Club won their respective matches of the United Commercial Premier Division Volleyball League at the Volleyball Court adjacent to Bangabandhu National Stadium Sunday.

Bangladesh Rifles beat Dilkusha SC by 25-13, 25-17 and 25-21 points while Titas Club outplayed Wari Club by 25-18, 25-23 and 25-23 points.

Fleming shines

FROM PAGE 12

New Zealand's opening batsmen were dismissed in successive overs early in the touring team's reply. Michael Papps was caught at third slip off Monde Zondeki in the sixth over and Jamie How was trapped leg before by Garnett Kruger seven balls later.

Coming together at 26 for two, Fleming and Peter Fulton added an unbeaten 133 for the third wicket before bad light stopped play half an hour after tea.

The left-handed Fleming was the dominant partner, making his 96 off 96 balls with 15 fours and four sixes, two of them pulled in one over from Kruger, who was earlier named in the South African squad for the Test series.

Fulton was unbeaten on 36 off 84 balls with seven fours.

BRIEF SCORES
REST OF SOUTH AFRICA: 395 all out (McKenzie 147, Duminy 127, Franklin 4/80)

NEW ZEALAND: 159 for 2 (Fleming 96 not out, Fulton 36 not out, Zondeki 1/33)

Rooney racks up gambling debts

Football
INTERNET, undated

England boss Sven-Goran Eriksson will talk to star striker Wayne Rooney over allegations that he has racked up 700,000 British pounds (1.22 million dollars) of gambling debts.

Rooney, who earns an estimated 50,000 pounds (87,290 dollars) a week on the pitch and millions more a year from sponsorship deals, is one of a number of England players said to be involved in betting on sports other than their own, according to the Sunday Mirror newspaper.

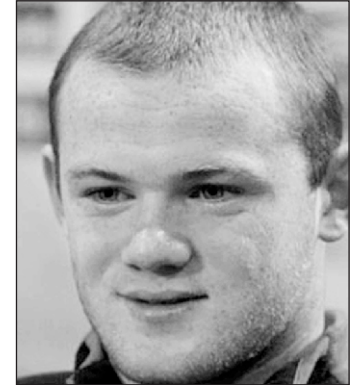
It is not the first time England players have been linked to the pursuit of gambling.

Manchester United coach Sir Alex Ferguson - who owns his own racehorse - and former England boss Kevin Keegan have reputations for enjoying betting.

Michael Owen, who owns four racehorses, is well known for his love of gambling and in 2003 he admitted to being an "occasional" gambler who had run up 30,000-40,000 pounds (52,000-70,000 dollars) in losses from his bets.

A spokesman for Rooney, 20, refused to discuss the newspaper's claims, saying: "We have got absolutely no comment to make at all."

The Football Association said although Eriksson would not launch an inquiry into the claims, he would speak to the players allegedly involved to establish exactly what the situation is.



WAYNE ROONEY

The players are due to take up their World Cup bid in Germany in less than two months' time.

SERIE A

Sinisa revives Inter

Football
REUTERS, Rome

Inter Milan put their Champions League elimination by Villarreal behind them with a 2-1 win at Ascoli that moved them up to second in Serie A on Saturday.

The result gave Inter 71 points from 33 matches, eight points behind leaders Juventus and one ahead of AC Milan who host Fiorentina and Chievo Verona respectively on Sunday.

It also helps Inter's bid to claim the second automatic place in next season's Champions League group stage.

However, the win was not easy as Inter had to come from behind after Ascoli striker Fabio Quagliarella fell in the area to earn a 21st minute penalty that Marco Ferrante converted.

Inter struggled to create scoring chances before the break, but came out strongly at the start of the second half.

The pressure paid off after 51

minutes when Obafemi Martins raced onto a defence-splitting pass by Santiago Solari only to be upended by keeper Ferdinando Coppola as Inter won a penalty of their own, which Julio Cruz fired into the roof of the net.

The visitors took the lead five minutes later, a foul on Cruz earning a 25-metre free-kick that Sinisa Mihajlovic curled round the wall and in at Coppola's near post.

Having seized control Inter rarely looked like letting go, though they played the final few minutes of the match with 10 men after Cruz was sent off for a second bookable offence.

Earlier, Udinese continued their climb away from the relegation zone with a 2-0 win at Livorno.

A goal either side of halftime by Italy striker Vincenzo Iaquinta and defender Cesare Natali gave last season's fourth-placed finishers their second win in a row and took them seven points clear of Messina in the last relegation berth.

Hiddink out of England frame

Football
AFP, London

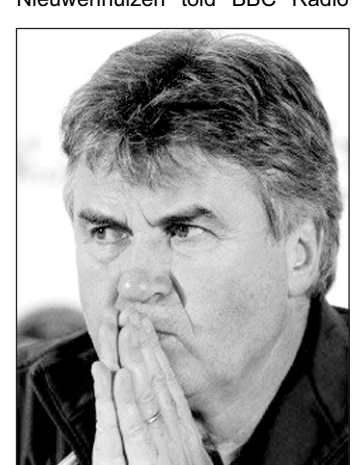
Guus Hiddink's agent on Sunday ruled the PSV Eindhoven and Australia coach out of becoming the next England manager and took a swipe at the Football Association over their handling of the affair.

Hiddink, who guided Holland and South Korea to World Cup semifinals, was the erstwhile favourite to succeed Sven-Goran Eriksson after the 2006 World Cup finals.

But in recent weeks he has slipped out of contention, instead being linked to Real Madrid or taking over as manager of Russia.

The 59-year-old Dutchman's agent Cees van Nieuwenhuizen insisted it was "sort of an insult" for Hiddink to be asked to go on a shortlist for the England job.

"I guess that the homework has not been done very well," Van Nieuwenhuizen told BBC Radio



GUUS HIDDINK

Five Live.
"We didn't take it too seriously because you would expect, when

Inter players assaulted

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan president Giacinto Facchetti has condemned the group of fans who attacked several of the club's players at Milan's Malpensa airport in the early hours of Sunday morning.

Around 100 Inter supporters, still angry about their team's exit from the Champions League on Tuesday, were waiting for the squad as they got off their flight from Ascoli, where they had won 2-1 on Saturday evening.

Several Inter players were set upon and midfielder Cristiano Zanetti was struck on the back of the head.

"We cannot accept it when disappoinment degenerates into violence," Facchetti said.

"What happened at Malpensa airport on Saturday night when the team returned from Ascoli is unacceptable."

"Violence is unacceptable for those who declare themselves as Inter fans."

The Italian Cup is Inter's only realistic hope of landing a trophy this season.

AR Knitwear champions

SPORTS REPORTER

AR Knitwears beat Car Haat by 4 runs in the final to lift the fourth Dhanmondi Cricket Academy Twenty20 Cricket Cup at the Academy ground on Saturday.

Batting first, AR Knitwears scored 92 for the loss of 5 wickets in 20 overs. In reply, Car Haat were stipulated to 88 runs in the final over of the match.

Rohan was adjudged man-of-the-match, while Shoikot of Car Haat was chosen as the man-of-the-series.

Gaibandha cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Mohammedan Sporting Club defeated Ghagot Kirra Chakra by 98 runs in the Super League phase of the Naheed Cotton First Division Cricket league here at the local stadium yesterday.

Ghagot were bowled out for 106 runs, chasing a total of 203 runs.

Tough task

FROM PAGE 12
not only Bangladesh," said Nazarov, who is on his second visit to Bangladesh.

"Yes, my team beat them twice three years earlier but we have only 30 per cent players from that side. It will depend on which team is better on the day. Every team want to win, and so do we."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across, Down, and Cryptic words.

Cryptic crossword puzzle grid with clues for letters and words.

CRYPTOQUIP

H V U J A M R L V J M X M Q V
X I M Q X Z X J M U P M M X A V M
J V C Z V J M R S C X I L U B I U V Z
" X E E M X M Q V H I R B V P I "
Yesterday's Cryptiquip: IF THEY COULD ENGINEER A PERFECT COPY OF A PARK KEEPER, I'D NAME HIM THE CLONE RANGER.
Today's Cryptiquip Clue: M equals T
The Cryptiquip 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.

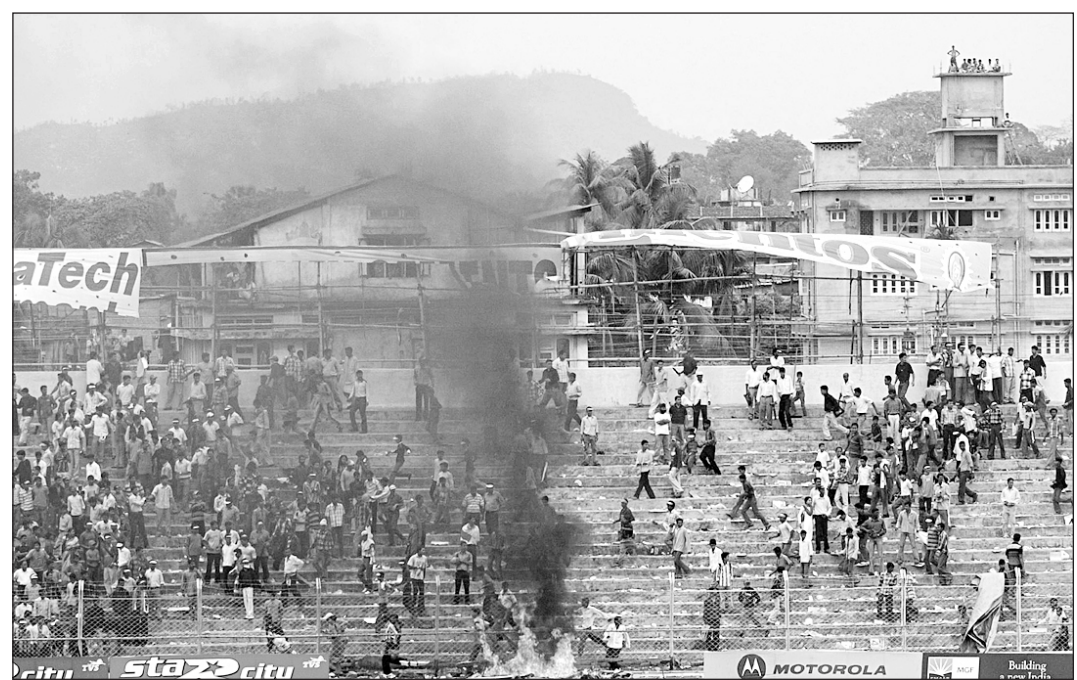


PHOTO: AFP

Indian cricket fans set fire to various materials in the stands of the Nehru Stadium in Guwahati after the fifth ODI between India and England was called off.