

Confeds Cup FFF's fresh concern

PARIS, Dec 12: The chances of France participating in next year's Confederations' Cup nosedived here on Friday, reports AFP.

A final decision on the World champions' presence in the competition will be taken when Joseph Blatter, president of FIFA, football's governing body, meets French Football Federation (FFF) president Claude Simonet in Rome next week.

The French are concerned about the timing of the event, which has been switched to the summer on their request from its original date in January.

But the announcement by UEFA, the organisation overseeing European football, of seven additional summer ties for the new European competitions, has sparked fresh concern.

Blatter, speaking from Zurich, said: "There is a flexibility of two to three days, not more because the Copa America finishes on July 18 and you have to have a little time between competitions."

But Simonet described the additional leeway granted by FIFA as insufficient.

3 Atletico fans detained

MADRID, Dec 12: Three Atletico Madrid fans were being held for questioning Friday in the fatal stabbing of Real Sociedad fan Aitor Zabaleta, reports AP.

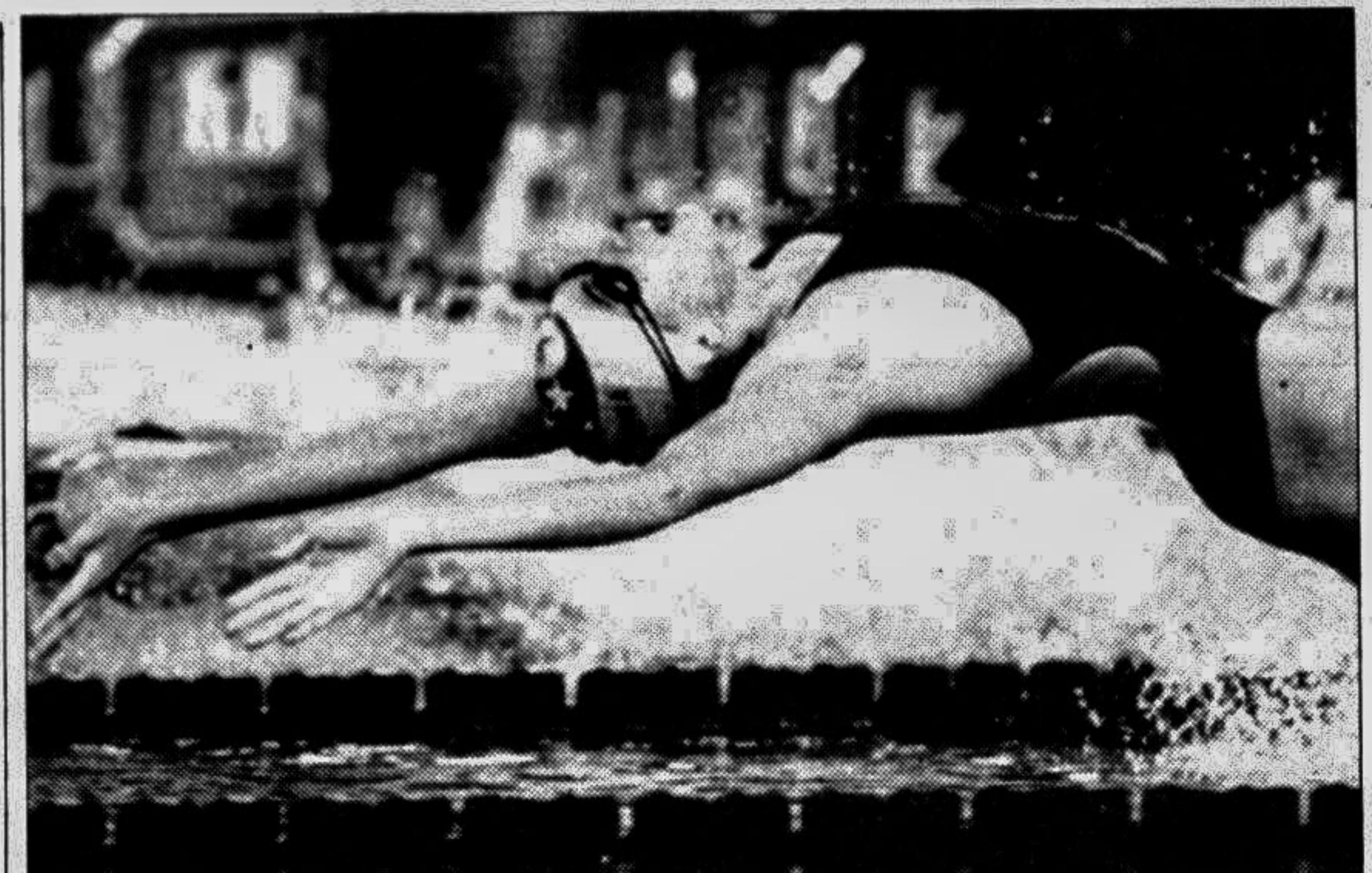
Zabaleta, 28, died from wounds received outside Atletico's Vicente Calderon Stadium a few hours before Atletico and Real Sociedad faced each other in a UEFA Cup game on Tuesday. Atletico won the match 4-1.

Police chief Juan Cotino said on National Spanish Radio that the three suspects, detained late Thursday, had been linked to "the criminal world" and had a record of soccer-related violence," Cotino said.

Police refused to identify the detained trio or confirm reports that they belonged to a particularly radical group of Atletico fans known as "The Bastion."

Madrid-based daily *El Mundo* reported Friday that the search was still on for a blond man identified by Zabaleta's girlfriend as being involved in the attack.

Zabaleta, his girlfriend and several more Real Sociedad supporters were drinking in a bar near the stadium when they were warned to leave, *El Mundo* said, quoting one of the group identified as Juan Barragan.



China's Wu Yanyan starts her heat in the women's 200 metres backstroke at the Asian Games yesterday. —AP/UNB photo

Asian Games roundup

BANGKOK, Dec 12: Chinese women sharpshooters swept four Asian Games gold medals Saturday, giving their nation 18 of the 30 on offer at the Games, reports AP.

Kazakhstan won three of the day's silver medals.

Cai Yeqing's gold in the sport pistol individual competition was her third here. She beat Kazakhstan's Yuliya Bondareva 685.3 to 683.8, with China's Cao Ying taking the bronze with 681.2.

Cai, Cai and Li Duihong shot a combined 1,743 in the team event for another Chinese gold. Bondareva and her Kazakhstan teammates took silver with 1,729, and Mongolia won the bronze with 1,726.

In the sport rifle event, China's Shan Hong won with 672.8, followed by Olga Dovgun of Kazakhstan with 670.8 and Kong Hyun-ah of South Korea with 670.2.

Shan helped her team take another gold with 1,715 to 1,702 for Thailand and 1,700 for Uzbekistan.

The squad won 12 gold medals at this year's world championships.

Chinese head shooting coach Zheng Heng said the team had aimed for 18 here.

Thailand racked up another gold Saturday with a convincing victory over Myanmar in the women's team competition of sepak takraw, sparking frenzied celebrations by the home crowd.

One delighted member of the Thai team grabbed her young son from the stands for a victory lap of the arena. The crowd, which had been growing noisier with each point, erupted with screaming and cheering as the team clinched gold by win-

ning the second set 15-5, 15-9 for an unassailable 2-0 lead in the best-of-three set final.

Thailand won the first set 15-6, 15-13 and was ahead early in the third set too.

It was Thailand's eighth gold.

Zarak clinches squash gold

BANGKOK, Dec 12: Zarak Jahan Khan made a spectacular comeback in an all-Pakistani squash final against Amjad Khan to win the Asian Games singles title here today, reports AFP.

Zarak fought back from a 2-1 deficit to take the last two games in a marathon battle against his fancied opponent.

Zarak won 1-9, 9-0, 6-9, 9-7, 9-3 to hand Pakistan their second gold of the Games after Shawkat Ali's victory in the snooker singles final on Tues-

day.

Malaysia's Nicol-Ann David underlined her status as Asia's leading player by winning the women's title.

David, the Asian and SEA Games champion, thrashed Hong Kong's Rebecca Chu 9-3, 9-1, 9-6.

The bronze was shared by the two losing semifinals, Abdul Fahim Khan of Hong Kong and Low Ewe-Long of Malaysia.

V-Day carrom

The Victory Day carrom competition will begin today organised by the Bangladesh Carrom Association, reports BSS.

Twenty teams from different parts of the country will take part in the competition.

China and Vietnam, the semifinal losers, got bronze. Sepak takraw is akin to volleyball, with players using their feet to kick a rattan ball back and forth across a net.

Cheering, flag-waving and kazoo-playing erupted from the crowd every time Thailand scored, and spectators joined in the wave.

The Thai team and spectators fed off each other, which players gesturing to the crowd to make more noise.

The men's team from Myanmar, which was on the sidelines watching and had overall at these games.

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