

Wiseman won't be responsible

LONDON, Dec 25: Under fire English soccer chief Keith Wiseman hit back Thursday in the Football Association's cash for votes bribery scandal by claiming he is the victim of a plot to remove him from office, reports AP.

The FA chairman became embroiled in controversy when it revealed that he and chief executive Graham Kelly made an unsanctioned 3.2 million pound (5 million dollar) grant to the Welsh Football Association.

Kelly and Wiseman promised the money without telling the rest of the English FA's executive committee and the payment has been interpreted as a bribe to gain a Welsh vote in Wiseman's favour in an election for a FIFA post.

Kelly resigned Tuesday but Wiseman refused to tender his resignation despite a unanimous vote of no confidence against him by his committee.

Instead he called for the full 91-member FA Council meeting to decide the issue January 4.

Wiseman has continued to dispute the grant was made in return for a Welsh vote in his plan to become Britain's FIFA vice-president.

"I regard it as simply mutually beneficial arrangements," Wiseman was quoted saying Thursday.

"There are people, members of the FA council I am quite certain, who would like to take advantage of the crisis for their own ends," he said.

"There are those who feel it is a time when the whole question over who has control and power over what within football should be reviewed, and that's a mild way of putting it."

Kelly has also insisted the payment was not a bribe and was in keeping with the FA's policy of helping cash-strapped soccer federations.

"With hindsight it would have been better to come up front (with the executive committee) much more quickly than we did," he said. "That was not a deliberate act and it was something which didn't get done in the heat of the moment."

Chinese soccer crisis

SHANGHAI, Dec 25: All 26 football clubs in China's First Division falsified financial records this year to hide payments for thrown games and bribes to referees, the official Liberation Daily reported today, says AFP.

"Many figures seem to be false," an official with the finance department of the Chinese Football Association (CFA) told the newspaper.

CFA rules require proof, in the form of receipts, for all expenditure by the clubs, but every club turned in phony receipts to cover up their real figures, he said.

The report said payments to get games thrown and to buy the referee were the leading reason for the financial irregularities.

It quoted an unnamed club president as saying that the only way to eradicate match-fixing would be to have foreign companies audit clubs accounts.

Criticism of corruption in Chinese football got unprecedented attention last season, with hundreds of angry fans holding public demonstrations over allegedly corrupt decisions by referees.

In a fit of pique following a series of questionable calls the president of perennial champions Dalian Wanda, Wang Jianliang, announced in September his company would sell off the club.

The Wanda Group later reconsidered.

The CFA also censured two coaches for publicly accusing players of throwing games. Such accusations should be made first to police, who would then bring charges and make the cases public if evidence comes to light, it said.

FBI to examine Salt Lake bid

WASHINGTON, Dec 25: The FBI and US Justice Department and investigating alleged impropriety in the successful Salt Lake City bid for the 2002 Winter Olympics, an official said Thursday, reports AP.

"We opened an investigation into allegations of impropriety in connection with the Salt Lake City bid," spokesman Myron Marlin said, declining to elaborate.

The Washington Post reported that federal investigators will look into charges that the officials used scholarships and other gifts to sway International Olympic Committee (IOC) members to hold the Games in Salt Lake City.

Salt Lake Organising Committee president Frank Joklik has acknowledged the bidding committee gave out almost 400,000 dollars in scholarships to 13 people, six of whom were related to IOC members who selected each Olympic site.

SLOC officials have denied the scholarships were bribes, describing them as humanitarian gestures instead.

The Justice Department probe is the fourth into the city's bid for the Games awarded in 1995, the IOC, the US Olympic Committee and an independent ethics commission based in Salt Lake city also are investigating the case.

According to the Post, investigators would check allegations that involve federal criminal law from bribery to tax fraud to basic public corruption.

International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch has said Salt Lake would not lose the 2002 Games regardless of the outcome of the investigation.

Second Test begins today



WELLINGTON, Dec 25: India's cricket team received a boost for Saturday's second Test against New Zealand when opener Ajay Jadeja was declared fit Friday.

The Indian vice-captain sprained his ankle before the washed out first Test and after



STEPHEN FLEMING

days of hobbling was finally able to train strongly.

Jadeja is fit and batted well at the nets. He came on the tour as a first-choice opener and we have to respect that," coach Aunshuman Gaekwad said Friday.

Gaekwad emphasised on the importance of a good showing by his team in the last two Tests of the three-match series after the first Test in Dunedin was abandoned without a ball bowled.

India's last overseas series win was a 2-0 success over England in 1986. Since beating Sri

Lanka by 235 runs in Colombo in July 1993, India have failed to win a Test abroad in 17 attempts.

"We'll go in there tomorrow with a positive, aggressive attitude because we have our pride to play for," Gaekwad vowed.

"We've always been known as a team that wins Tests at home. I want to change that. In New Zealand we haven't won for a long time, and more the reason why we have to put a great deal into try and win."

India's 3-1 win here in 1967-68 remains their only series success and they are yet to win one since an eight-wicket victory in Auckland in 1976.

A third seamer will be sacrificed to make room for controversial off-spinner Harbhajan Singh after Trevor Jackson, the Basin Reserve Turf manager said the wicket would take spin after the first couple of days.

New Zealand too haven't ruled out playing off-spinner Paul Wiseman alongside left-arm orthodox spinner Daniel Vettori, although the first choice will be four seamers.

The pitch will have pace and carry. It might do something during the first half hour, but my advice is to bat first. Come third day, it will spin," Jackson said.

Harbhajan's bowling action had come under close scrutiny since the 19-year-old made his debut against Australia in March this year.

Although he has never been called for throwing, International Cricket Council's match referees Ranjan Madugalle of Sri Lanka and Peter van der Merwe of South Africa have questioned the legality of his action.

New Zealand coach Steve Rixon said any irregularity in his action was not blatant.

"He isn't the sort of guy you would watch and say to yourself, 'He is a chucker' or he has a dodgy action," Rixon said.

TEAMS

NEW ZEALAND (from): Stephen Fleming (captain), Matthew Horne, Matthew Bell, Nathan Astle, Craig McMillan, Adam Parore, Chris Cairns, Dion Nash, Daniel Vettori, Si-

AZHARUDDIN (from):

Stephen Doull, Geoff Allott and Paul Wiseman.

INDIA (from): Mohammad Azharuddin (captain), Navjot Sidhu, Ajay Jadeja, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Saurav Ganguly, Nayan Mongia, Anil Kumble, Jagavat Srinath, Venkatesh Prasad, Harbhajan Singh, Debadash Mohanty.

Umpires: Evan Watkin (New Zealand), Eddie Nicholls (West Indies). Television umpire: Steve Dunne (New Zealand).

Match referee: Barry Jarman (Australia).

Majid Khan's observation

ISLAMABAD, Dec 25: The International Cricket Council (ICC) should ban players for life for match-fixing or gambling on games, says Pakistan Cricket Board chief Majid Khan, reports AFP.

"It is the right time for the ICC to design strict laws to clean the sport from the curse," Majid said in an interview with the Associated Press of Pakistan published today.

The issue is expected to be discussed during the meeting of the ICC executive board in Christchurch on January 10.

Match-fixing and gambling allegations have plagued international cricket for years, leading to the current investigation by a judicial commission in Pakistan.

Former Pakistani captain Salim Malik was accused by Australians Shane Warne and Mark Waugh of offering them money to throw a match four years ago in Karachi. He has denied the allegation.

The situation took a new turn when the two Australian players recently confessed to taking money from an Indian bookmaker for providing information about weather and pitch conditions in Sri Lanka in 1994.

Majid said the game's ruling body must tackle the issue after a thorough inquiry and debate and take appropriate decisions to root out the "ugly practice."

"No matter which country the cricketers are from. If found guilty they should be banned for life besides facing heavy penalties," he said.

The Pakistan Cricket Board would frame new rules if the ICC passed new regulations, he said.

Majid criticised the Australian Cricket Board for hushing up for years what Warne and Waugh had done.

"It is very unfortunate the way ACCB covered up this issue and just fined the guilty cricketers and after four years it revealed the story which has shocked the world," he said.

Romantsev may coach Russia if...

MOSCOW, Dec 25 (Reuters/Internet): Oleg Romantsev, coach of Russian champions Spartak Moscow and widely seen as a leading candidate to head the national team after the sacking of Anatoly Byshovets, has said he wants the job.

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From November 26 1977 until 25 November 1978 Forest were unbeaten in 42 league matches and were also unbeaten in 40 league and cup matches from March-December 1978.

Those glory years are long gone for Forest and nowadays an unbeaten run of four games would be considered a success.

United have lost only nine of their Old Trafford meetings with Forest, and after last week's home defeat by Middlesbrough, they are in no mood to make it double figures.

They then went on to win the European Cup, beating Malmo in the final, and to prove it wasn't an aberration, repeated the feat the following year.

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