

Morocco wants WC 2000

RABAT, Mar 25: The King of Morocco is hoping it will be a case of third time lucky in its bid to secure the right to host the World Cup finals in 2006, reports Reuters.

Morocco does not want to be forced to call off its campaign to become the first African nation to stage the event and believed it has enough pull in the corridors of power to see off not only bids from England and Germany, but South Africa as well.

Five African nations — Morocco, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Egypt — are bidding for the finals, but the Confederation of African Football (CAF) has a difficult diplomatic chess game to play in order to present the best possible bid to FIFA.

The likely course of action is for CAF to ask Morocco, Ghana, Nigeria and Egypt to stand down to allow the South Africans a free run against England, Germany and Brazil — but that is not a foregone conclusion.

Morocco believes that the views of FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who has repeatedly said it would be logical for the 2006 World Cup to be held in Africa, will enormously help its bid, and the North African nation is unlikely to give up its chance for anyone else.

Morocco lost out of the United States in 1994 and to France in 1998 and is determined to be seen as even more realistic candidates this time around.

Portugal seek big win against Azerbaijan

GUIMARAES, Portugal, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): Portugal are looking for an impressive win when they play Azerbaijan in their European 2000 championship group seven qualifying match on Friday.

"Our objective is to score a big win," said coach Humberto Coelho, who believes Azerbaijan will not give Portugal much trouble after being beaten in their three previous qualifiers by Slovakia (3-0 and 4-0) and fellow minnows Liechtenstein (2-1).

Portugal meanwhile are joint second with Slovakia in group seven, one point behind Romania, who have seven points from three matches. Azerbaijan are last in the group with no points after their three successive defeats.

Despite Portugal's obvious supremacy, Coelho has warned his players not to become over-confident.

"We have to face all our games with the same responsibility," he said.

Humberto Coelho may be able to count on Inter Milan's playmaker Paulo Sousa who is back from a long injury.

But on the other hand, he has lost Sporting Lisbon striker Simao Sabrosa and Benfica midfielder Hugo Leal, who will both be in Nigeria for the World Youth Cup.

Azerbaijan coach Ahmed Aleskerov told reporters on his arrival at the northern Portuguese city of Oporto that he was aware his team's chances of victory were remote.

"A win for us would be important, but would be very difficult to achieve," said Aleskerov, who replaced Sadigov Vagif at the team.

Aleskerov said his team would play in a 5-4-1 system, which was used by his predecessor.

After Friday's match in Guimaraes, Portugal will travel to Vaduz to meet Leichtenstein on March 31.

Probable teams

Portugal: Vitor Baia; Carlos Secretario, Paulo Madeira, Fernando Couto, Dimas Teixeira, Paulo Sousa, Rui Costa, Sergio Conceicao, Luis Figo, Sa Pinto, Joao Pinto

Azerbaijan: Dmitry Kramenkov, Rasim Abushev, Tarlan Akhmedov, Aslan Kerimov, Emin Agayev, Narvik Syrkayev, Vaydi Rzayev, Vachaslav Luchkin, Rusfat Guliyev, Garhan Gurbanov, Elshan Gurbanov

Referee: Jacek Granat (Poland)

SA look for meeting with the English

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): The head of South Africa's 2006 World Cup bid said on Thursday there should be a clear-the-air meeting with their English counterparts after accusations by British sports minister Tony Banks of a dirty tricks campaign.

Irvin Khoza, chairman of the South African bid campaign, said he wanted to avoid mud-slinging and dirty tricks between the two countries in their bids to win the right to host the 2006 finals and called for a meeting between the two campaigns.

Khoza's comments follow Banks' attack on comments made by Danny Jordaan, the chief executive officer of the South African bid campaign, that English soccer is riddled with violence.

Banks has written to his South African counterpart Steve Tshwane complaining about comments made by Jordaan in a South African newspaper when he said that fans had been stabbed and killed during Manchester United's F.A. Cup fourth round tie against Liverpool on January 24.

Jordaan also claimed that all bars in Manchester were closed for the match and that cars had been set on fire.

Khoza said he did want the two countries to start a war of words.

Rain ruins Kiwi hopes



NAPIER, New Zealand, Mar 25 (AFP/Internet): The fourth one-day international between South Africa and New Zealand at McLean Park was abandoned because of rain Thursday as South Africa chased 258.

South Africa were 10 without loss after 1.3 overs when their quest to win the match and level the six-match series two-all was ended.

The start of the match had already been delayed and reduced to 48 overs each when New Zealand went in and set the demanding target.

They began their chase well with two fours in the first over, but South Africa would have been challenged to win in front of a capacity crowd of 13,500, under lights and on a wicket that was giving pace bowlers assistance.

New Zealand threatened to post a huge score when they were 196 for four after 35 overs but they lost wickets and momentum in the latter part of their innings.

Parore immediately played his shots and he and Twose smashed 65 in ten overs. Twose took 17 off one Boje over including a six and a near six that Kallis almost caught.

Shaun Pollock was brought back to stem the flow and he had Twose caught behind. Elworthy also came back strongly, having Parore taken by a good catch on the cover boundary by Gary Kirsten, and next over having Chris Harris caught behind for eight.

Kallis chimed in when he bowled Vettori and Dion Nash was caught in the deep off Pollock but Gavin Larsen and Carl Bulfin pushed the final score to 257 for eight.

Nathan Astle and Mattew Horne got New Zealand off to a flying start and it was capitalised by captain Stephen Fleming, with 21 from 26 balls, Roger Twose, 39 from 49, and Adam Parore, 44 from 43.

Hansie Cronje's decision to send New Zealand in looked justified in the first five overs, from which only nine runs were scored, when the ball seemed around on a wicket which had

pace and bounce.

But from Steve Elworthy's third over, which yielded 13, the innings took off. The batsmen took only one from Elworthy's first two overs but 37 from his next four.

Astle was particularly aggressive and the openers added 86 in 15 overs before Lance Klusener broke through, having Horne taken down the leg side by wicketkeeper Mark Boucher for 40.

Next over, Jacques Kallis had Astle (38) caught by Herschelle Gibbs in the covers.

But New Zealand maintained the momentum in the mid-part of the innings.

Returning from injury, Fleming timed the ball well until caught behind in spinner Nicky Boje's first over.

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SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the fourth one-day international between New Zealand and South Africa at McLean Park on Thursday:

NEW ZEALAND

	O	M	R	W
Horne c Boucher b Klusener	40			2
Astle c Gibbs b Kallis	38			
Fleming c Boucher b Boje	21			
Twose c Boucher b Pollock	39			
Parore c Kirsten b Elworthy	44			
Harris c Boucher b Elworthy	8			
Nash c Boje b Pollock	17			
Vettori c Klusener	2			
Larsen not out	17			
Bulfin not out	7			
Extras (0-1, lb-11, nb-2, w-10)	24			
Total: (For eight wkt in 48 overs) 257				
Fall of wickets: 1-86; 2-88; 3-130; 4-195; 5-207; 6-210; 7-213; 8-242.				

Did not bat: Geoff Allott.

Bowler O M R W

	O	M	R	W
Pollock	10	0	46	2
Elworthy	10	3	41	2
Kallis	9	0	56	1
Klusener	10	0	40	2
Boje	4	0	36	1
Cronje	5	0	36	0

SOUTH AFRICA

	O	M	R	W
Kirsten not out	5			
Gibbs not out	4			
Extras (w-1)	1			

Total: (No wicket in 1.3 overs) 10

Did not bat: Jacques Kallis, Darryl Cullinan, Hansie Cronje, Dale Benkenstein, Shaun Pollock, Mark Boucher, Lance Klusener, Nicky Boje, Steve Elworthy.

Bowler O M R W

	O	M	R	W
Allott	1	0	9	0
Nash	0.3	0	1	0

Result: Match abandoned due to rain — to be replayed on Friday.

Series: New Zealand lead 2-1.

Russians retain world title

HELSINKI, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): Russians Elena Berezhnaia and Anton Sikharulidze survived a fall and avenged a recent defeat to retain their world pairs title on Wednesday.

Despite a tumble by Berezhnaia landing a jump, they repulsed a sterling challenge from Xue Shen and Zhao Hongbo of China who upset them for the Grand Prix title when Berezhnaia made a succession of errors in St Petersburg earlier this month.

The Chinese were second here after a brave bid that, though flawless technically, failed because of the Russians' superior artistry. The winners had nine scores of 5.9 out of the maximum of 6.0 for artistry while the Chinese secured just one.

The Russians won the support of seven of the nine judges, with the Chinese winning on the two other cards.

The silver medals were the first won by pairs skaters from China in world championship history.

Poles Dorota Zagorska and Mariusz Studek held on for the bronze medals, also the first for their country in world championship pairs.

The order of the top three did not change in the free skating.

Berezhnaia's fall landing a double axel was the only flaw in a magnificent performance by the Russians, who had a disappointing season since going nine events without defeat after finishing second to team mates Oksana Kazakova and Artur Dmitriev at the 1998 Nagano Olympics.

Three Euro 2000 qualifiers postponed

GENEVA, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): Three European soccer championship qualifiers were postponed on Wednesday because of the NATO decision to launch air strikes against Yugoslavia.

The games in Belgrade between Yugoslavia and Croatia on Saturday and Yugoslavia and Macedonia next Wednesday have been rescheduled for August 18 and September 4 respectively.

The decision has been taken in view of the unstable political situation in Yugoslavia, European soccer's ruling body UEFA said in a statement on Wednesday.

UEFA later said Ireland's qualifier against Macedonia in Skopje on Saturday had also been postponed. A new date for the match has yet to be fixed.

A spokesman for the Irish football association (FAI) had said for too long been the target of unscrupulous managers and promoters," Ali wrote. "As witnessed (March 13), the three sanctioning organisations that award the title belts have joined the list of abusers.

The legislation has taken on added importance, Ali said, in light of the disputed draw.

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