

MU eyeing Asian market

LONDON, July 21: (Reuters) Manchester United, the world's wealthiest soccer club, is looking to extend its brand and merchandising activities into Asia. The Financial Times reported today.

Quoting the English club's managing director Michael Farnan, it said: "Old Trafford megastores, which stock United merchandise, were being planned for cities across Asia."

The newspaper said the first was to open in Singapore later this year, followed by Hong Kong and Jakarta.

Talks were under way with three potential Chinese partners for stores in the People's Republic, it said.

The United team is currently in China for a friendly against Shanghai Shenhua which the club hopes will cement its appeal in the Far East.

Once the club had opened stores in Beijing and possibly Shanghai, it would begin manufacturing its merchandise in China, the newspaper said.

Zidane hopes to be there

BUENOS AIRES, July 21: FIFA world player-of-the-year Zinedine Zidane is poised to top the bill at a match to mark the retirement of Uruguayan forward Enzo Francescoli, it was announced Tuesday, reports AFP.

The match, which will pit Francescoli's last club River Plate, based in the Argentinian capital, against the player's favourite club Penarol of Montevideo.

Zidane, born in Marseille, has frequently said he hero worshipped the Uruguayan when he played for the French first division club. And France's World Cup winning playmaker even named his son Enzo.

Organisers said Zidane's club side Juventus had said he could attend the gala match.

Francescoli played in Argentina, France and Italy as well as his homeland and was a member of Uruguay's World Cup squads in 1986 and 1990.

Fed Cup

Dokic's partner yet to be named

SYDNEY, July 21: Australian captain Lesley Bowrey said Wednesday she had yet to decide who would partner Wimbledon quarterfinalist Jelena Dokic in the doubles of this year's Fed Cup qualifier in Amsterdam, reports AFP.

Bowrey, who is making her Fed Cup debut, said she had not yet decided whether Nicole Pratt or Alicia Molik would partner the Yugoslav-born Dokic, who burst into the spotlight at Wimbledon after ousting top seed Martina Hingis in the first round.

But Bowrey said she was confident of securing a berth for Australia -- ranked No.2 behind Belarus in the Amsterdam qualifier -- in next year's Fed Cup.

It's going to be a tough week for all the teams, possibly playing four days in a row," Bowrey said in a statement released by Tennis Australia.

But the girls have been hitting well in practice so I think we've got a great shot at getting into the World Group next year."

Just 16, Dokic is Australia's top-ranked player at 39 and carrying Australia's Fed Cup hopes.

Bowrey said she and the rest of the Australian team were up to the task set to begin later Wednesday against Argentina.

It's almost one year ago to the day that we beat Argentina 5-0 in Canberra without dropping a set," Bowrey said.

Jelena and Nicole made fantastic debuts in the singles and they've got more Fed Cup experience under their belts now, as has Alicia, so they're more than ready."

The first 12 qualifying spots for the Fed Cup have been filled by Austria, Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and the United States.

This year's winner will automatically progress to the semi-finals in 2000 with the remaining 12 nations vying for the other three positions.

President makes Perec available

PARIS, July 21: France's triple Olympic champion Marie-José Perec is virtually certain to return to the track here at the IAAF Golden League meeting on Wednesday following a telephone call from French President Jacques Chirac, reports AFP.

The 31-year-old, who has been suffering from Epstein-Barr virus, a type of glandular fever, last competed on August 6, 1997, in the quarterfinals of the 200m at the World Championships in Athens.

"I think there is an 80 per cent chance of Marie-José Perec running," meet organiser Raymond Lorre said.

"I think I have convinced her to run in the B race and as far as I am aware her coach John Smith is not against the idea," he added.

Perec had missed a meeting with Lorre on Monday night but explained that it was because Chirac had phoned her -- although she didn't divulge what the conversation was about.

Perec, a two-time Olympic champion at 400m and also winner of 200m gold in Atlanta, had originally planned to run in Salamanca last week but said after discussing her return with coach Smith last Saturday that it had been decided to run over the shorter distance.



Veteran German captain Lothar Matthaeus (L) and teammates warming up during a training session in Guadalajara, Mexico on July 20 ahead of their Confederations Cup opener against Brazil on July 24.

— AFP photo

Milan sets eyes on Europe



CARNAGO, Italy, July 21: AC Milan staked their claim to the European Cup held by Manchester United here on Tuesday, as the Italian champions began preparing for their centenary season, reports AFP.

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni and club officials, congratulated by hundreds of fans who converged on their training base here, are convinced they have an even better team than last season, and are setting themselves no limits.

Vice-president Adriano Galliani said: "It's a fantastic season for us because it's our centenary, you'll recall that the club was founded on December 16, 1899, and because the dream we had last year of playing this season with the 'scudetto' (league) badge sewn onto the shirts, came true." Paying tribute to Zaccheroni, who won the league title in his first season after Milan had been through two years of torture, he added: "We went from 10th place to first. And we are very proud of him."

Zaccheroni was more interested in the future, saying: "Our aim is to finish in the top four in the Serie A -- to ensure ourselves a place in the Champions League again next season -- and in the Champions League this season, we want to go as far as we possibly can."

Skipper Paolo Maldini, who has already won three European Cups with the club, most recently in 1994, said: "It's great to be back in Europe. And to be coming back through the front door."

Milan will make that return wearing replica shirts of the first ones ever to be worn by the club, which was founded by an

winning the league last season has given us extra confidence.

"I'm personally pleased to have been kept on," he said with a grin, "the players have stayed with us and the season ticket sales shows that the fans are with us too."

"We've got a balanced team, self-belief and we've got the certainty that we have added a number of good players. They will enable us to take a step up in terms of quality," he insisted.

The club have made nine new signings, seven of them Italian: as part of the club's recent policy of looking for local talent, plus Brazilian midfielder Serginho and Ukrainian striker Shevchenko, bought from Dynamo Kiev.

There are seven teams who have a chance of winning the championship, and all of them have been strengthening their squads, and all have made a particular effort in their forward line," Zaccheroni said.

"It's something we have to get used to. There are more clubs now who are capable of finding the financial resources needed to put together a highly competitive team."

Skipper Paolo Maldini, who has already won three European Cups with the club, most recently in 1994, said: "It's great to be back in Europe. And to be coming back through the front door."

Milan will make that return wearing replica shirts of the first ones ever to be worn by the club, which was founded by an

Englishman Alfred Edwards, as "Milan Cricket and Football Club."

The shirts, with narrow red and black stripes, plus a full button-up collar and the City of Milan insignia on the chest, will only be used for the European Cup.

The centenary celebrations, christened "100Milan" and featuring a museum exhibition plus cultural and charity events, will be kicked off at San Siro stadium on Wednesday night, when the whole squad will be presented to the fans.

Zaccheroni, who has taken Milan supporters to a different planet since becoming coach, is due to drive onto the pitch aboard a replica moon-buggy.

Milan's pre-season matches start next week, and as Galliani pointed out: "We are going to be particularly busy in August when we are playing against some of the best teams in Europe."

"It's something we have to get used to. There are more clubs now who are capable of finding the financial resources needed to put together a highly competitive team."

After two years without official European football, Milan will play an exhibition tournament in Paris with Paris St Germain and Bayern Munich (Aug 2), a friendly in Leverkusen against Bayer (Aug 6), and another in Trieste against Benfica (Aug 13) before meeting old foes Juventus for the Berlusconi Trophy (Aug 17).

Their first official match will be the Italian Super Cup against Parma (21 Aug), the weekend before the Serie A starts.

It's something we have to get used to. There are more clubs now who are capable of finding the financial resources needed to put together a highly competitive team."

Skipper Paolo Maldini, who has already won three European Cups with the club, most recently in 1994, said: "It's great to be back in Europe. And to be coming back through the front door."

Milan will make that return wearing replica shirts of the first ones ever to be worn by the club, which was founded by an

Locals come first for champs



CARNAGO, Italy, July 21: Foreign players look set to become a rare species at champions AC Milan after the Serie A giants' decision to buck the trend and buy, Italian, reports AFP.

Much of the blame for the club's troubles in previous seasons has been laid at the door of foreigners who haven't fitted in, who've been flooded by the language barrier, the style of football and a new way of life.

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni was keen to stress that he too wanted an essentially Italian team.

"I set three criteria for our moves on the transfer market," he said. "Firstly, the players

must be good, secondly they must be young and thirdly, if possible, Italian."

"I know that foreigners might have more appeal, but you can also find good players in the Italian championship."

The issue of foreign players is an increasingly sensitive one in Italy, ever since the "Bosman" ruling in 1995 by the European Court which allowed clubs to sign unlimited numbers of European Union (EU) players.

Italian soccer and government officials have supported moves to persuade the EU to re-establish limits on foreigners, arguing for an exception to legislation on the free movement of workers.

"We are faced with a global market and we don't want to isolate ourselves. So the attitude is a majority of Italians, but an eye on talented players wherever they are born."

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni was keen to stress that he too wanted an essentially Italian team.

"I set three criteria for our moves on the transfer market," he said. "Firstly, the players

must be good, secondly they must be young and thirdly, if possible, Italian."

"I know that foreigners might have more appeal, but you can also find good players in the Italian championship."

The issue of foreign players is an increasingly sensitive one in Italy, ever since the "Bosman" ruling in 1995 by the European Court which allowed clubs to sign unlimited numbers of European Union (EU) players.

Italian soccer and government officials have supported moves to persuade the EU to re-establish limits on foreigners, arguing for an exception to legislation on the free movement of workers.

"We are faced with a global market and we don't want to isolate ourselves. So the attitude is a majority of Italians, but an eye on talented players wherever they are born."

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni was keen to stress that he too wanted an essentially Italian team.

"I set three criteria for our moves on the transfer market," he said. "Firstly, the players

must be good, secondly they must be young and thirdly, if possible, Italian."

"I know that foreigners might have more appeal, but you can also find good players in the Italian championship."

The issue of foreign players is an increasingly sensitive one in Italy, ever since the "Bosman" ruling in 1995 by the European Court which allowed clubs to sign unlimited numbers of European Union (EU) players.

Italian soccer and government officials have supported moves to persuade the EU to re-establish limits on foreigners, arguing for an exception to legislation on the free movement of workers.

"We are faced with a global market and we don't want to isolate ourselves. So the attitude is a majority of Italians, but an eye on talented players wherever they are born."

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni was keen to stress that he too wanted an essentially Italian team.

"I set three criteria for our moves on the transfer market," he said. "Firstly, the players

must be good, secondly they must be young and thirdly, if possible, Italian."

"I know that foreigners might have more appeal, but you can also find good players in the Italian championship."

The issue of foreign players is an increasingly sensitive one in Italy, ever since the "Bosman" ruling in 1995 by the European Court which allowed clubs to sign unlimited numbers of European Union (EU) players.

Italian soccer and government officials have supported moves to persuade the EU to re-establish limits on foreigners, arguing for an exception to legislation on the free movement of workers.

"We are faced with a global market and we don't want to isolate ourselves. So the attitude is a majority of Italians, but an eye on talented players wherever they are born."

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni was keen to stress that he too wanted an essentially Italian team.

"I set three criteria for our moves on the transfer market," he said. "Firstly, the players

must be good, secondly they must be young and thirdly, if possible, Italian."

"I know that foreigners might have more appeal, but you can also find good players in the Italian championship."

The issue of foreign players is an increasingly sensitive one in Italy, ever since the "Bosman" ruling in 1995 by the European Court which allowed clubs to sign unlimited numbers of European Union (EU) players.

Italian soccer and government officials have supported moves to persuade the EU to re-establish limits on foreigners, arguing for an exception to legislation on the free movement of workers.

"We are faced with a global market and we don't want to isolate ourselves. So the attitude is a majority of Italians, but an eye on talented players wherever they are born."

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni was keen to stress that he too wanted an essentially Italian team.

"I set three criteria for our moves on the transfer market," he said. "Firstly, the players

must be good, secondly they must be young and thirdly, if possible, Italian."

"I know that foreigners might have more appeal, but you can also find good players in the Italian championship."

The issue of foreign players is an increasingly sensitive one in Italy, ever since the "Bosman" ruling in 1995 by the European Court which allowed clubs to sign unlimited numbers of European Union (EU) players.

Italian soccer and government officials have supported moves to persuade the EU to re-establish limits on foreigners, arguing for an exception to legislation on the free movement of workers.

"We are faced with a global market and we don't want to isolate ourselves. So the attitude is a majority of Italians, but an eye on talented players wherever they are born."

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni was keen to stress that he too wanted an essentially Italian team.

"I set three criteria for our moves on the transfer market," he said. "Firstly, the players

must be good, secondly they must be young and thirdly, if possible, Italian."

"I know that foreigners might have more appeal, but you can also find good players in the Italian championship."

The issue of foreign players is an increasingly sensitive one in Italy, ever since the "Bosman" ruling in 1995 by the European Court which allowed clubs to sign unlimited numbers of European Union (EU) players.

Italian soccer and government officials have supported moves to persuade the EU to re-establish limits on foreigners, arguing for an exception to legislation on the free movement of workers.

"We are faced with a global market and we don't want to isolate ourselves. So the attitude is a majority of Italians, but an eye on talented players wherever they are born."

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni was keen to stress that he too wanted an essentially Italian team.

"I set three criteria for our moves on the transfer market," he said. "Firstly, the players

must be good, secondly they must be young and thirdly, if possible, Italian."