

China delays naming coach

SHANGHAI, Jan 3: China is not expected to name a new national coach before February, despite an approaching four-nation friendly tournament with Uruguay, Jamaica and New Zealand later this month, sports sources said today, reports AFP.

"Whilst they have four or five candidates they are considering ... no decision is likely before Chinese (Lunar) New Year," a source close to the Chinese Football Association said, referring to the long holiday starting February 5.

Despite furious media speculation about who is the front-runner, the source said there is no clear favourite at the moment and that officials are even looking at other coaches "who have sent their CVs in."

It appears likely an interim coach will guide the team at the Four-Nation Championship to be played in southern Guangzhou city this month.

China is scheduled to face last year's Oceania champions New Zealand on January 14. If they prevail, they will take on the winner between Jamaica and favourites Uruguay two days later.

The source said as recently as last week, China appeared close to signing a deal with colourful Serb coach Bora Milutinovic, who guided Nigeria to the 1998 World Cup finals in France.

"Now it's being held back by the Ministry of Sports," he said, adding that Milutinovic may still emerge as the eventual choice.

The ministry has demanded a less hurried process that would produce a comprehensive long-term strategy — of which filling the current vacancy should be only one part, he said.

Part of that strategy is grooming a home-grown head coach for the future.

Any foreign coach who takes on the job will have to agree to four or five Chinese coaches being tightly integrated into the new national coaching squad, the source said.

Brazil is also mulling the idea of leaving room in the budget for temporary stints by foreign "consultants" with specialist knowledge — such as in goalkeeping or preparing for a specific opponent.

He cast doubt on reports that Argentina's former star striker Mario Kempes had been offered a 750,000-dollar salary to coach China, saying: "I haven't heard that name mentioned."

China is looking for someone who has successfully taken a small football nation to the World Cup finals and dramatically improved their FIFA ranking, he said.

"Kempes doesn't have that pedigree."

The president of Bolivian runner-up club The Strongest, Jorge Stein, said last week that Kempes was vacating the club's coaching position because China had made a salary offer he could not compete against.

The source confirmed that Chinese authorities were prepared to pay top dollar for the right coach.

"They're financially stable enough to do that," he said, adding that government support behind achieving long-cherished dream World Cup qualification was strong.

China on December 10 sacked Briton Bobby Houghton — who coached the country's national and Olympic sides for 18 months — for his failure to clinch a berth in the Sydney 2000 Games.

Edmundo could be fit



UNDATED, Jan 3 (Reuters / AFP): Vasco da Gama striker Edmundo making a quicker than expected recovery from injury and may play in his team's World Club Championship opener on Thursday.

Edmundo, who pulled a thigh muscle during a Brazilian match in December, had been expected to miss the game against Australia's South Melbourne and, possibly, the whole tournament because of a pulled thigh muscle.

But team doctor Fernando Mattar said on Sunday, "He's been making a very quick recovery."

Coach Antonio Lopes said Edmundo might even play for the last few minutes of a friendly against the Algerian national side on Monday.

Edmundo sustained the injury in a match earlier in December, then aggravated it.

Club director Eurico Miranda threatened to slash Edmundo's salary after blaming the aggravation on a night out but backed down when the player apologised and vowed that he was fully committed to getting fit for the competition.

If Edmundo recovers in time for Thursday's match, he will line-up alongside former World Cup star Romario to form an attacking pair that has not played together for Vasco in a competitive match.

The pair have also had personal differences in the last year and commentators have wondered how the two flawed geniuses will fit into the same side.

Romario gave Vasco fans a scare when he limped out of a training session on Friday but Lopes guaranteed that it was nothing serious.

Vasco are taking the tournament so seriously that they

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