

Indo-Pak ODIs in England?

LONDON, Jan 20: English cricket officials are considering a plan to stage three limited-overs internationals between India and Pakistan after the county season ends in September, reports Reuters.

A spokeswoman for the English Cricket Board (ECB) said today that Pakistan had agreed in principle but India had still to make a decision.

The ECB hope to generate the sort of interest among Asian supporters in the country that was a feature of last year's World Cup in England.

The matches would be at established one-day international venues following the end of the county programme on September 17.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) director of operations Yawar Saeed confirmed in Lahore that the board had accepted an ECB invitation for the matches.

"On our way back from Toronto (for the Sahara Cup limited-overs series against India), we have agreed to a stopover in England for a week to play three one-day internationals," Saeed said.

He said Pakistan intended to honour its commitment to play in Toronto, although India backed out of the tournament last September because of increased political tension between the countries.

Saeed also said England would make a tour of Pakistan later this year, their first visit since a controversial one in 1987-88. Three Tests and three one-day internationals are on the itinerary starting on October 18.

England's visit 13 years ago was marred by a finger-wagging on-field confrontation between touring captain Mike Gatting and umpire Shakoor Rana in the Faisalabad Test.

A full day's play was lost when Rana refused to start play until he received an apology from Gatting.

England lost the three-Test series 1-0 but swept all three one-day internationals.

PCB secy shown the door

KARACHI, Jan 20: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) secretary Shafiq Rana, who made controversial comments about the decision to suspend fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar, has been relieved of his duties, reports Reuters.

The decision was announced by PCB director of operations Yawar Saeed from Lahore today. He gave no reasons.

Rana said earlier this month a decision by the International Cricket Council (ICC) to suspend Shoaib for one month because of his illegal bowling action was "racially based".

The remarks created a furor in Australia where doubts were cast over Shoaib's action by match officials during Pakistan's test tour late last year.

Rana's comments were also slammed by PCB chairman Taugir Zia and team manager Khawaja Nasir.

M'singh cricket

MYMENSINGH, Jan 20: A brilliant 75-run knock by Moni enabled Shapla Krira Chakra to earn a 42-run victory over Gulkibari KC in the Begum Premier Division League at local Circuit House ground today, reports UNB.

Batting first, Shapla made a respectable 206 for eight in the stipulated 45 overs.

Nadir was the another notable scorer who made 29 while Afroz added 20 runs.

Ujjal, Rabin and Utpal took two wickets each for 34, 45 and 47 runs respectively.

In reply, Gulkibari were all out for 164 in 40.3 overs with Utpal making 50 and Tapu 32 runs.

Mohammad claimed three wickets for 19 while Sohel took two wickets for 20 runs.

N'singhdi soccer

NARSINGHDI, Jan 20: Baghata Eleven Star Club beat Belabo Eleven Club by a solitary goal in the Shaheed Maizuddin District football tournament here today, reports UNB.

Sappu netted the all-important goal in the 72nd minute from a penalty shot.

Friday's match: GRC Club vs Chatra Jubo Unayan Sangstha.

Office hockey

The third Metropolis Office hockey league, organised by Bangladesh Hockey Federation, will begin on February 15 at the Moula Bhasani National Hockey Stadium, reports UNB.

Interested teams have been asked to send their entries by January 26 at the federation office with a fee of Tk 300.

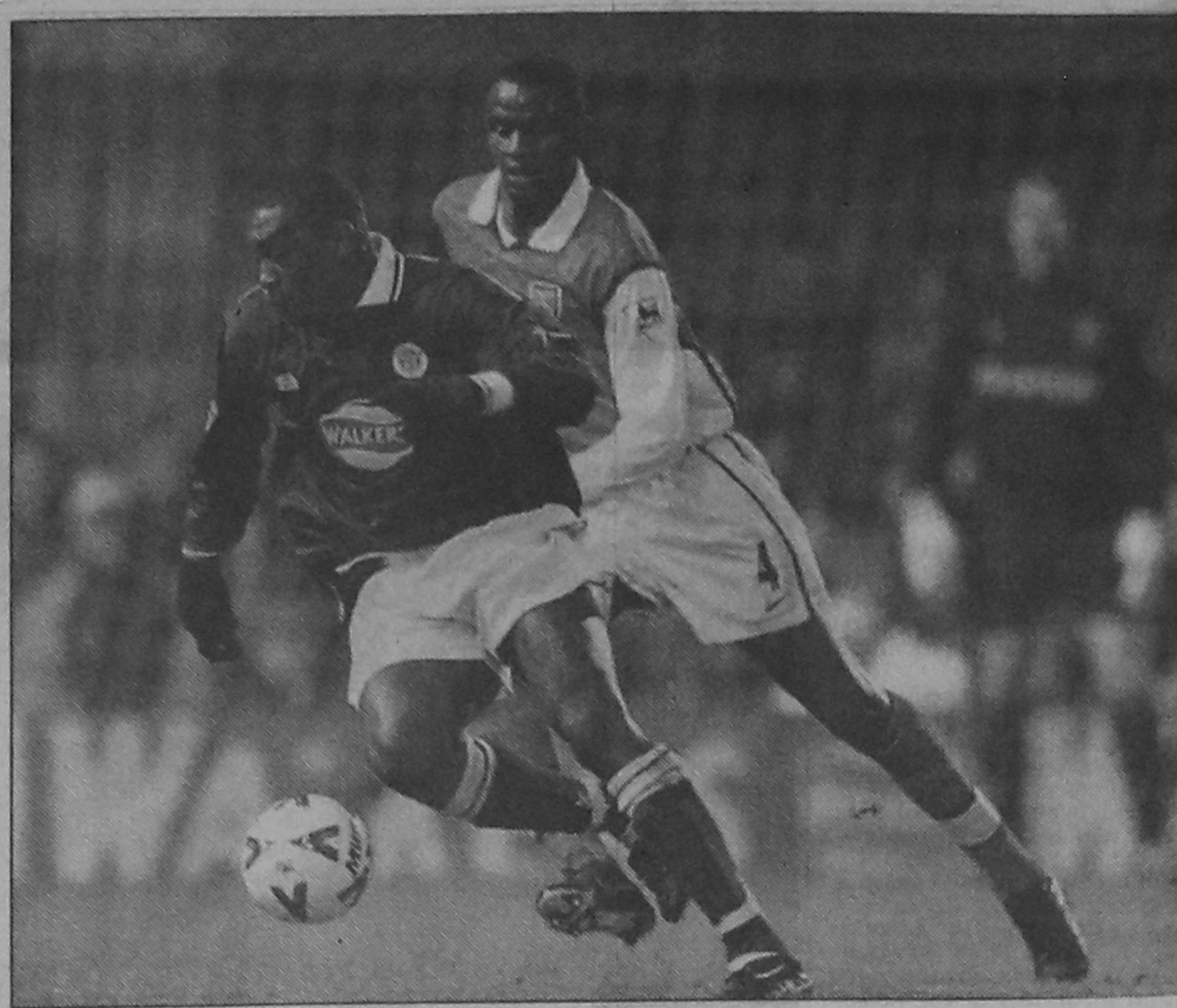
Neutral venues for Asian Cup Winners' Cup

DUBAI, Jan 20: The Asian football federation has decided to switch the Asian Cup Winners' Cup quarterfinal ties between Saudi Club Al-Ittehad and Iraq's Al-Zawra to neutral venues.

Fadi Zriqat, secretary general of Jordan's football federation, told AFP that the first leg would be played in Qatar on January 28 and the return in Amman on February 1.

The decision came after Iraq's football federation rejected a Saudi proposal that the clubs play both legs in Saudi Arabia, calling for one to be played in Baghdad.

Diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iraq have been frozen since the 1991 Gulf War, and Baghdad has been under UN sanctions since it invaded Kuwait in 1990.



Leicester's Emile Heskey (L) is under pressure from Patrick Vieira of Arsenal during their FA Cup clash at Leicester on January 19. — AFP photo

Chelsea in FA Cup last 16

Lucky Leicester oust Gunners



LONDON, Jan 20:

Leicester City won their third penalty shoot-out of the season to knock Arsenal out of the FA Cup on Wednesday after their fourth round replay ended goalless after extra-time, reports Reuters.

Leicester's reward is a trip to Chelsea who had a comfortable 2-0 home win over First Division Nottingham Forest in their delayed fourth round clash at Stamford Bridge.

Leicester, missing seven first team regulars, had two goalkeepers to thank for their place in the last 16.

Former England keeper Tim Flowers made a series of great saves before limping out of the action during extra-time. His replacement Peggy Arphaxad then saved from Lee Dixon and Gilles Grimandi to give Leicester a 6-5 win in the shoot-out.

Leicester had beaten Leeds United and Fulham on penalties en route to a place in the semifinals of the League Cup, where they play Aston Villa, while Arsenal went out of that competition on a shoot-out against Middlesbrough.

The two teams did not look like scoring in the original tie at Highbury and there were few chances in the opening hour on Wednesday. Arsenal then stepped up the

pace and after Croatian striker Davor Suker was wide with two close-range shots, Flowers made his first great save to tip over a volley by centre back Martin Keown after 71 minutes.

Ten minutes later he repeated the act to keep out a sharp shot by Suker. He then produced a great double save from Patrick Vieira and saw Robbie Savage head Suker's follow-up shot off the line.

Leicester, displaying their famed fighting spirit as they played their fourth period of extra-time in six weeks, ran for every ball and although they created very few chances they always knew that penalties would give them a chance.

"We wanted to try to win it in extra-time, not rely on penalties," said Leicester boss Martin O'Neill.

"But we were running on empty for a long period in the game. Tim Flowers made some fantastic saves but they just kept going, kept going."

"Tim Flowers hurt his groin making one of his saves and I wanted to delay the substitution as long as possible. But Peggy's never let us down."

While O'Neill can eye Wembley on two fronts, Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger must pick up his troops for next Monday's premier league match against Manchester United.

Former Chelsea keeper Dave Beasant made a great save to deny Gustavo Poyet but could do nothing when Wise was gifted a free header after nice work by Jody Morris four minutes from time.

Bilardo off to Libya

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 20: Former Argentina coach Carlos Bilardo, who led his native country to World Cup victory in 1986 and to runners-up spot in the 1990 tournament, set off for Libya Wednesday to take charge of the Libyan national team for the qualification campaign for the 2002 World Cup, reports AFP.

Bilardo will stay in the north African country until the end of March when the first phase of qualifying is finished, he told journalists at Argentina's Ezeiza airport.

Bilardo will face Mali in a two-legged tie, the first at a date to be fixed between March 7 and 9 and the second at a date between March 21 and 23.

The winners will go forward to Group C in the African qualifying pools for the 2002 tournament to be co-hosted by Japan and South Korea.

With five places up for grabs in the 2002 World Cup for Africa, the 50 national teams of that continent have been divided into five groups of five teams. The 25 teams to participate in the second phase of qualifying will be determined via two-legged play-offs with Libya paired with Mali.

If Libya is successful it is expected that Bilardo will continue in his post for the Group C campaign.

Bilardo departed at 13:40 GMT for San Pablo in Brazil. From there he will move on to the Swiss city of Zurich before finally setting off for the Libyan capital Tripoli.

Strasbourg, Le Havre climb

PARIS, Jan 20: Racing Strasbourg and Le Havre fought their way out of the French First Division relegation zone with victories on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Strasbourg ended a run of four league games without a victory by beating Troyes 2-0 at home in a match where each side had a man sent off in the last half hour.

Midfielders Pascal Camaini and Olivier Echouafni, heading home a David Zitelli cross, scored the goals in the 30th and 50th minutes.

Striker Zitelli was sent off in the 64th minute for kicking an opponent who had tackled him, his second bookable offence.

Troyes' Edouard Thomas was dismissed five minutes later after bringing down goal-bound Strasbourg forward Pascal Johansson when he was the last line of defence.

Le Havre upset fifth-placed Sedan, the surprise side of the season, 1-0 away against Yusef Miladin Becanovic's first league goal.

Both matches had been postponed from mid-December.

Zaragoza hold Real

BARCELONA, Jan 20: Real Madrid held out for a goalless draw in their third round first leg game at Real Zaragoza on Wednesday, their Spanish Cup debut, reports Reuters.

Real, who were given a bye to enable them to play in the World Club Championship in Brazil, made their tactics clear from the start as they fielded just one striker in Fernando Morientes.

Zaragoza went close on several occasions early on, Xavi Agudo missing their best chance on 13 minutes as he planted a free header wide.

Real gradually came back into the game after their slow start but rarely threatened the Zaragoza goal.

Second Division Osasuna, who knocked holders Valencia out in the previous round, beat Deportivo Coruna 1-0, although the championship leaders will be confident of turning that around in their home leg in early February.

In other games, Rayo Vallecano got the upper hand in a 3-2 thriller at second division Lleida, Atletico Madrid cruised to a 3-0 win away at third division Real Union while Espanyol edged out Celta Vigo 2-1 in an all-first division clash.

Compostela got the better of Villarreal 3-0 while Merida beat Oviedo 1-0.

Corus chess Leaders share points

WIJK AAN ZEE, Netherlands, Jan 20: Russian Gary Kasparov still shares the lead at the Corus Chess tournament with compatriot Vladimir Kramnik and Dutchman Jeroen Piket after all three played to draws Wednesday to score three points from four rounds, reports AP.

Kasparov, playing black against Englishman Michael Adams, held a draw while a pawn behind in a bishop-against-knight endgame after the day's longest struggle.

Adams abandoned the chance of a win after both players had made 60 moves in their respective three-hour time limits.

The Ecuadorean determined to make a game of it and levelled through Candelario in the 24th minute but the match turned decisively on two Colombian penalties, both converted by Candelario in the 33rd and 45th minutes.

Kaviedes had briefly made it 3-2 with Ecuador's second in the 38th minute but the second spot-kick knocked much of the stuffing out of them and Castillo caught them cold two minutes with a fourth after the break to complete the scoring.

The top two from the group advance to a round-robin stage with the top two from Group B and the top two from that stage will qualify for the Sydney Olympics.

And the other third-round leader, Dutchman Piket, played an uninspiring 11-move draw with the white pieces against compatriot Loek van Wely. Only a single pawn on either side was removed from the board.

The fourth round's only decisive games were Englishman Nigel Short's win over Judit Polgar and Hungarian Peter Leko's victory against Armenian Smbat Lputian.

African Nations' Cup

SA Group B's class act

UNDATED, Jan 20 (AFP): South Africa, Algeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon have been placed in Group B at the African Nations Cup.

for them since.

The defence of the title in Senegal proved disastrous as the North Africans collapsed against Cote d'Ivoire and could only draw with Congo to bow out in the first round.

After reaching the 1994 tournament, they were disqualified for using an illegal player and were more comprehensively beaten by South Africa in the 1996 quarter-finals than the 2-1 scoreline suggests.

But even the most pessimistic Algerian could not have imagined how low the team would go in Burkina Faso two years ago as they shared with Mozambique the humiliating experience of losing their three first-round matches.

The Warriors squeezed into the 2000 finals on goal difference from Liberia and preparations for Group B clashes consisted of two friendlies against clubs.

Algeria defeated French outfit Troyes 3-1 in November and were humiliated 7-0 in Brazil this month by a Romario-inspired Vasco da Gama team warming up for the world championships.

Nasser Sandjai is the seventh coach since the start of the qualifying rounds and one of his predecessors, former African Footballer of the Year Rabah Madjer, resigned after a row with the sports minister on a live TV show.

Contrast this with bygone days when Algeria finished first, second, third twice and fourth in six tournaments with Madjer and Lakhdar Belloumi the leading lights.

Elegant Saudi Arabia-based midfielder Moussa Saib is the one link with the cup-winning squad. He was an emerging star then, now he provides a touch of class in an ordinary side unlikely to survive the mini-league first phase.

Bafana Bafana defeated and drew with Saudi Arabia last September to win the Afro-Asian Nations Cup and finally claimed a European scalp with a 1-0 victory over Sweden in the other warm-up match.

Chaotic preparations are par for the course with the Central Africans Lions. A lengthy list of planned friendlies released last October never materialised and they had to settle for a friendly with Congo.

Motolo completes his contract after the Nations Cup and a top-four finish should earn him a role in the 2002 World Cup qualifying campaign. Anything less and the local media will renew calls for his head.

Le Havre upset fifth-placed Sedan, the surprise side of the season, 1-0 away against Yusef Miladin Becanovic's first league goal.

Both matches had been postponed from mid-December.

The only consolation for Algeria ahead of a customary appearance at the African Nations Cup is that their fortunes can hardly slip any further.

Algeria were crowned champions of Africa 10 years ago after a 1-0 victory over Nigeria in a lacklustre, negative final and little has gone right

for the South African team heading for the 2000 finals, the image of Congolese football was badly dented four years ago when they kicked Ghanaian star Abedi Pele out of the competition.

Pele was lucky to avoid decapitation after one mid-air tackle and the Black Stars blamed the absence of their midfield conductor for a heavy semi-final loss to South Africa.

It was a much more disciplined Congolese squad that wiped out a three-goal deficit with four minutes left before winning a penalty shootout to pip hosts Burkina Faso for third place.

One concern for coach Basilua Lusadus must be the form of striker Esanga Emeke, who was released by South African club Kaizer Chiefs during a six-month trial.

GABON If practice makes perfect, outsiders Gabon could take Group B rivals South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Algeria by storm.

The Azinga Nationale played 15 warm-up matches between October and January and spent several weeks at a training camp in Brazil, the home of fiery coach Antonio Dumas.

At one stage last month it looked as if Dumas might not be part of the Nations Cup due to a pay dispute, but a 50 percent rise from the sports ministry saw the South African return.

Gabon began their build-up with a surprise 1-0 victory in Cote d'Ivoire before winning a regional tournament in which goalkeeper Germain Mendome kept five consecutive blank sheets.

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