

Hiddink taking over ROK?

SEOUL, Nov 29: South Korea are lining up former Dutch national coach Guus Hiddink to take charge of their World Cup campaign after a string of disappointing results, reports AFP.

A Korea Football Association (KFA) spokesman told AFP on Wednesday: "We have sent out a proposal to him asking him to answer by December 10. But we have not received a reply so far."

According to the Korean media, however, Hiddink has already agreed contract details and forced the KFA to agree to let him appoint his coaching team.

Hiddink, who took Holland to the semi-finals of the 1998 World Cup, reportedly asked for a signing bonus of one million dollars and a salary of at least three million dollars over two years.

South Korea, who co-host the 2002 World Cup finals with Japan, have been seeking a big name replacement for current coach Huh Jung-Mu for several months. But the search was stepped up after they were beaten by Saudi Arabia in the semi-finals of the Asian Cup in October.

While the new coach will have to put fire into the national team, the disappointment of their results was compounded by the victory of rival Japan in the Asian Cup final.

If the Hiddink deal is confirmed his first match in charge will be against Japan in Tokyo on December 20.

Anne Jacquet, who masterminded France's triumph at the last World Cup, had been top of the list, but Jacquet repeatedly told Korean envoys he did not want to return to management, media reports said.

The Dutchman has a formidable record in Europe. He guided PSV Eindhoven to the European Cup in 1988 and Real Madrid to the same title, even though the Spanish giants sacked him shortly after.

The Dutchman was being lined up for a job at Scottish side Celtic this year after being sacked by another Spanish team Real Betis. He has also been in charge at Valencia in Spain and Turkey's Fenerbahce.

Current coach Huh is expected to stay on the staff.

Botafogo appoints Lazaroni

RIO DE JANEIRO, Nov 29: Former Brazilian national football coach Sebastiao Barroso Lazaroni has been appointed as coach of Brazilian First Division side Botafogo for the 2001 season, the club announced Tuesday, reports AFP.

The 50-year-old Lazaroni, who coached Brazil for two years leading them to the 1990 World Cup, will replace Antonio Clemente, who stepped in as interim coach following the sacking of Joel Santana.

The Rio de Janeiro-born Lazaroni has led several Brazilian and foreign teams and won the Rio de Janeiro tournament in 1986 with Flamengo, and the Saudi Arabian Cup in 1995 with Al-Helal.

He also coached Italian sides Fiorentina and Bari, along with Leon (Mexico), Fenerbahce (Turkey) and Shanghai (China).

During his time with the Brazilian squad he led them to 19 wins out of 30 games, notably the 1989 Copa America.

Sex scandal

Israeli booters face disciplinary action

JERUSALEM, Nov 29: Seven members of Israel's national under-21 football team face disciplinary action over allegations they were involved in a sex orgy with an 18-year-old woman ahead of an international tie last month, press reports said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The Israel Football Association plans to lay charges before its disciplinary court by Sunday against seven players alleged to have engaged in a bout of pre-game illicit sex last month, the Haaretz newspaper reported.

The IFA is set to charge them only with misconduct and with breaching national team regulations to avoid embarrassing testimony of the young players' sexual escapades, which would in any case be difficult to prove, it said.

Last week, IFA chairman Gavi Levy ordered the squad to be disbanded until the completion of the investigation into the scandal.

Israel's Maariv newspaper reported that several players in the squad had sex with the same girl before their Euro 2002 Group 7 qualifier against Bosnia on October 10.

According to private detectives engaged by Levy, the romp took place at a hotel near Tel Aviv, with the players taking turns with the girl - who comes from a respected family - after each one had individually asked her up to their respective rooms.

It is the latest sex scandal to rock Israeli football.

In March, several members of the national team narrowly escaped disciplinary action after claims they were involved in a sex romp on the eve of their humiliating 5-0 thrashing by Denmark in a Euro 2000 play-off in November last year.

The team's coach, Shimon Sharf, resigned after the discovery of Euro performance, although he denied any knowledge of the players' antics. He was replaced in December by former Denmark and Finland coach Richard Moller Nielsen.

Argentina revel over Boca



BUENOS AIRES, Nov 29: Euphoric crowds gathered here Tuesday in answer to the Argentine president's call for a national "fiesta" after Boca Juniors beat Real Madrid 2-1 in the Intercontinental cup in Tokyo, reports AFP.

Argentine president Fernando de la Rúa, a fanatical Boca fan, described his overwhelming joy at the victory.

"Today is a 'fiesta' for all Argentina, it doesn't matter which team you support because this was an Argentine side that won," said de la Rúa who spoke to goal-scorer Palermo via satellite link.

"They're all jealous of me because I spoke to the star of the match," he said waving a hand at the celebrating crowd in the presidential office.

Boca went two up in the first six minutes after a double-punch from man-of-the-match Martin Palermo, who was speechless after the match.

"How are you Fernando," was all the Palermo known as "Loco" (crazy) could manage.

The president, like many in Argentina was "loco" with joy as parties were due to go on all day. Half of Argentina had got up early to see the match that kicked off shortly after seven in the morning local time.

Crowds gathered, as is traditional, at the city centre Obelisk on Avenida 9 Julio, where much of the singing was dedicated to the mockery of Boca's arch rivals River Plate.

Former Boca captain and self-declared No 1 fan Diego Maradona praised coach Carlos Bianchi for both his intelligence and tactical brilliance after the victory.

"I was sure Boca would win and win with style," said Maradona, who went on to insist that the Spaniards had approached the game with equal

intent to Boca.

"It really bugged me, these people going round saying Madrid weren't interested in this cup. It's an outright lie! They were dying to win it," he said.

"Oh how I would have loved

to have been there," exclaimed the 40-year-old former great, now as well known for his cocaine addiction which the Argentine authorities decided was grounds to deny him an entry visa to watch the match.



PROUD TO BE A BOCA FAN: Boca Juniors fans partying in Buenos Aires on November 28 after their team had won the Intercontinental Cup by defeating European Champions Real Madrid 2-1 in Tokyo.

--AFP photo

All-Britain idea blasted



GLASGOW, Nov 29: Scotland coach Craig Brown has claimed that Home Secretary Jack Straw's proposals for a British football team would not get far with the Tartan Army of Scottish fans, reports AFP.

Straw had suggested that an all-Britain squad, made up of the best players from Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales, would have a better chance in international tournaments.

But Brown argued that such an idea would be dismissed by the famously patriotic fans of the Scottish national team.

"I suspect Jack Straw's proposals wouldn't meet with much favour in Scotland."

"I don't think any country wants to lose its autonomy, and certainly Scotland wouldn't," he told ITN television.

But he added: "I do hear a suggestion that Alex Ferguson would be manager and I think

he would prefer to pick quite a number of Scottish players."

Blackburn fan Straw's proposal to scrap the four British national teams was based on the principle that a manager would consequently have a far greater pool of players to select from, with for example Welsh wizard Ryan Giggs becoming available.

But his remarks are likely to be met with outrage from football authorities and fans alike as there are deep attachments to national teams and bitter rivalries between them.

Straw's call, to an organisation called Network which provides support for ethnic minority staff in the Home Office, was said to be part of a drive to create a more "inclusive" sense of being British.

According to The Times newspaper, he said: "The one area of sport where we have been consistently successful is athletics and that is the one area of sport where we do not have an English, Scottish and Welsh team but a British team."

"I personally look forward to the day when we have a British football team. I think we might start winning some games."

The Home Office confirmed Straw had called for an all-Britain team to represent the country.

But the spokesman added: "The Home Secretary made it clear he was expressing a personal view."

"He was talking in the wider context of a question of about Britishness/Englishness and how he felt Britishness was a more inclusive word to use."

A spokesman for the English Football Association told The Times: "We have always competed as individual nations and I think the majority of the public is also very much in favour of this set up."

He also pointed out an all-Britain team would mean a weakening of British influence in world football as each national association has its own vote in the ruling bodies of world football, UEFA and FIFA.

Italian Cup

Milan's superb rally

MILAN, Nov 29: AC Milan came from behind twice for a 4-2 win over Atalanta in a thrilling Italian Cup quarterfinal, first leg, yesterday, reports Reuters.

Atalanta, second in Serie A, took the lead in the 20th minute when former Milan striker Maurizio Ganz volleyed home a cross from Sebastiano Siviglia.

Brazilian Leonardo equalised in the 31st minute when he latched on to a deep cross from Paolo Maldini and looked the ball home from an awkward height and light angle.

But the young Atalanta side, playing the positive attacking football that has won them so many admirers this season, went in ahead at the break after Gianpaolo Bellini was tripped by Leonardo inside the area and veteran Marco Nappi converted the penalty.

The two players were involved again in the penalty decision which put Milan level. Bellini was judged to have pushed over Leonardo and Spaniard Jose Mari converted.

The game turned decisively on the hour when Milan coach Alberto Zaccaroni introduced Ukrainian Andriy Shevchenko for Oliver Bierhoff.

Just six minutes later Shevchenko played a killer pass to Leonardo and the Brazilian, who has been on the fringes of the Milan squad this season, finished coolly.

With two minutes remaining Shevchenko, enjoying the freedom of playing alongside Leonardo and Jose Mari, gave Milan a two-goal advantage for the second leg when he latched on to a pass from Thomas Helveg, made himself some space and then thundered a drive past Ivan Pelizzoli.

World Player nomination

FIFA's choice irks Romario

RIO DE JANEIRO, Nov 29: Why not me? Brazilian striker Romario criticised FIFA's World-Player-of-the-Year award nomination on Tuesday after three European-based players were chosen as the candidates for the title, reports Xinhua.

"I don't know what sort of criteria they use if it leaves out players like me (Juan Roman Riquelme and Ariel Ortega)," said the 34-year-old striker, who has scored seven goals in his last two internationals.

"I've broken various records this year," added Romario, who plays for Rio de Janeiro's Vasco da Gama.

FIFA announced last Friday that Rivaldo of Barcelona and Brazil, Luis Figo of Real Madrid and Portugal and Zinedine Zidane of Juventus and France had been nominated.

Romario, who won the award in 1994 after leading Brazil to World Cup victory, was top scorer in this year's cariocha championship with 19 goals and in the season-opening Rio-Sao Paulo tournament in which he scored 12 in 10 games.

He still hopes to finish the Joao Havelange Cup, which has replaced the Brazilian championship, as top scorer as well.

He has scored 15 so far and is five behind joint leaders Dill (Goias) and Magno Alves (Fluminense), whose teams have already been knocked out.

Riquelme and Ortega, who are based in their native Argentina with Boca Juniors and River Plate respectively, have both had an outstanding year.

Riquelme played an important role in Boca's 2-1 victory over Real Madrid in the World Club Cup final in Tokyo on Tuesday.

FIFA's Player of the Year award, which started in 1991 and is decided on votes by 130 national team coaches, has been awarded four times to Europeans, four times to South Americans and once to an African.

However, it has never gone to a player based with a club outside Europe.

English League Cup

Phillips shows MU the door

LONDON, Nov 29: Kevin Phillips ended his seven-game goal drought to fire Sunderland into the League Cup quarter-finals Tuesday with an extra-time penalty to edge Premier-league leaders Manchester United 2-1 at the Stadium of Light, reports AFP.

Phillips struck after 100 minutes after Argentinian Julio Arca had cancelled out Dwight Yorke's 31st minute opener.

Yorke's night ended prematurely when the Trinidadian striker was sent-off for a foul on Brazilian defender Emerson Thome eight minutes from the end of normal time.

Goals from Titus Bramble and David Johnson propelled the Premiership's surprise packages Ipswich into the last eight.

Bramble's sixth-minute opener at Portman Road was gifted by Youssef Chippo's defensive error and Johnson sealed the tie in the second half after former Norwich striker Craig Bellamy had equalised from the penalty spot.

Ipswich, third in the top-flight, will now meet either Manchester City or Wimbledon in the quarter-finals.

In the other fourth round clash Crystal Palace beat First Division rivals Tranmere 6-5 on penalties after the teams were still tied at 0-0 at the end of extra-time.



Yannick Baret of Guingamp (L) battles with Lens' Cyril Roll during their French First Division clash at Guingamp on November 28.

--AFP photo

French First Division

Lens spoil Guingamp's chance



PARIS, Nov 29: Newly-promoted Guingamp missed their chance to go top of the French league Tuesday

when they lost 0-1 to Lens, on a night when fellow Bretons Rennes came away with a 1-0 win at Paris Saint Germain, reports AFP.

Lens, who last weekend defeated Monaco 4-3, put paid to Guingamp's dream of heading the French league even briefly with a strike from former Nantes player Antoine Sibierski in the 51st minute.

While the Parisians suffered their fifth league defeat of the season as Rennes moved away from the relegation zone following the winning strike in the 30th minute from Cyril Chapuis.

The defeat would have been heavier but for excellent goal-keeping from PSG keeper Lionel Letizi.

The result led to calls for the first time among Parisian fans for the resignation of PSG coach Philippe Bergeroo, and the return of Luis Fernandez to the French capital.

Missing several of their key players PSG have now dropped one place to seventh position with 25 points after 17 games.

But Bergeroo dismissed all talk of stepping down, blaming the loss to the absence of several key players.

The first half was a tight,

Star striker Nicolas Anelka is out with muscle damage, while Nigerian playmaker Jay Jay Okocha has a sprained knee, injury and Bernard Mendy a knee problem. In addition to Peter Lucin's suspension, striker Laurent Leroy had to be replaced at the last minute after coming down with flu, leaving PSG bereft of strike force.

"It's not an excuse, but we have a lot of injuries. We have to recuperate a lot of our people," said Bergeroo.

But he added: "I have the confidence of my president."

Rennes have moved up three spots to 12th, lifting themselves away from the relegation zone, with just their third win in nine games.

It was Brittany side who look the stronger scoring the only goal of the night when striker Makhtar N'diaye passed to Cyril Chapuis, who found the net for his fourth goal of the season, with a lob.

PSG missed the finishing skills of a top striker, with only one forward Dionisio Christian, because of the absence of Leroy. They also missed several chances with Christian hitting wide in the 35th from Stephane Dalmat.

Meanwhile Guingamp, who early in the season were bottom of the league with one point from five matches, failed to pull off what would have been a minor miracle.

The first half was a tight,

busy affair where neither Guingamp's 4-4-2 nor the visitors five man midfield, leaving up front only Lamine Sakho who scored a fine goal against Monaco Sunday, were able to unlock their rival's defence.

The best chance of the first half fell to Guingamp on 36 when Bruno Rodriguez finally split Lens open.

He picked up a loose ball 30 yards out on the right and his cross, lobbed over the defence, found Florent Malouda running into the box behind the last defender but his snapshot hit the post.

As Lens coach Roland Courbis puffed away at a cigarette on the touchline his side broke the deadlock on 50. Antoine Sibierski's deflected shot from ten yards sailing over a stranded Eric Loussouarn in the Guingamp goal after a counterattack crafted by Jocelyn Blanchard.

It was a lucky goal for Lens whose coach has been complaining all season of ill-luck.

Rather than shut up shop for the remainder of the match the tight Lens midfield became more mobile, daring to venture more frequently into Guingamp territory, and subsequently leaving more space at the back.

Guingamp never came close again, hard as they tried, against a more physical and mobile Lens, who now have 27 points from 18 games, just one behind Guingamp and within striking distance of the top.

Millennium Cup

Munshi says tourney on



NEW DELHI, Nov 29: The Millennium Cup football tournament - will be held as scheduled in India early next year despite a revolt within the country's football body, it was announced on Wednesday, reports AFP.

The 16-nation event, India's biggest football extravaganza, will be played in Goa, Cochin and Calcutta from January 10-25, embattled Indian football chief Privarajan Das Munshi said.

The tournament was widely believed to be a non-starter because of organisational and sponsorship problems, but Munshi insisted alternative arrangements had been worked out.

"It is the biggest football event not only in India, but Asia as a whole," he said, "I will make sure it comes off."

Munshi faces a strong challenge to his leadership of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) after nine top clubs pulled out of the National League earlier this month and formed the rival Indian Premier Football Association (IPFA).

These clubs have refused to release their players for the Millennium Cup, but Munshi said the country's best footballers would be fielded.

South American giants Chile, Uruguay and Colombia lead the field which includes Cameroon, Iceland, Yugoslavia and Hong Kong, Munshi said.

Other teams in the fray are Indonesia, Bahrain, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Trinidad and hosts India.

Munshi said Japan was the 16th team, but if its confirmation was not received by next week, Bosnia would be drafted in.

Chile's World Cup stars Ivan Zamorano and Marcelo Salas, besides Manchester United's Trinidadian hero Dwight Yorke are expected to join their national teams for the tournament, Munshi said.

The draw for the 32-match tournament would take place before Christmas, he added.

The 16 teams will be divided into four groups with the top two from each group qualifying for the quarter-finals.

Calcutta's 100,000-seater Salt Lake stadium would hold the final on January 25, Munshi said.

Group A and B matches would be played in Cochin, Group C in Goa and Group D in Calcutta.

Munshi's rivals in the AIFF and IPFA officials, however, scoff at his plans to organise the tournament.

"The Millennium Cup should be the last thing on the mind of the AIFF," said Calcutta's football official Ranjit Gupta.

"It better get its house in order first or Indian football will suffer even more than it already has."

An IPFA official added: "The AIFF can't organise domestic tournaments, how does anyone expect it to put on an international event of this magnitude."

Munshi's first task, however, is to retain control of the faction-ridden AIFF. His leadership is being challenged by industrialist Sameer Thapar at next month's elections.

Karpin wins a battle



MADRID, Nov 29: A Russian midfielder has won a landmark ruling from a Madrid court over-turning restrictions placed on the number of non-EU players turning out for Spanish sides, his lawyer said here Wednesday, reports AFP.

The ruling means that Valery Karpin, frustrated with a lack of appearances for Celta Vigo due to the imposed quota of non-European players in Spanish football, will no longer be left on the sidelines as many non-community players find themselves, Eduardo Ipiens said.

However, it could also opens the floodgates for players who play in countries that have signed association agreements with the European Union.

Karpin had taken his club, the professional football league and the Spanish football federation to court in an attempt to overturn the law.

He won the case after it was proved that the European Union had signed accords with Russia which effectively forbids discrimination against Russians working in the EU simply because of their nationality.

The court also ruled that the current limit of non-community players imposed by the Spanish federation (three per team, per game) on the Spanish league was unjustified discrimination.

The ruling, which deemed that Karpin could "lend his services as a sports professional and have the same rights on an equal legal footing with Spanish and European footballers," was to take effect immediately.

Meanwhile the Spanish federation, which in recent years has come under pressure to

limit the number of foreigners being employed in the Spanish league, has appealed the decision.

The Madrid court's ruling comes only a month after Italian Serie A side AC Milan sent a letter to the Italian game's governing body threatening legal action unless it "promptly" amended the rules limiting the number of non-EU players a club can field to three - there is a cap of five for an entire squad.

The letter was countersigned by the club's five non-EU players - Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko, Croatian midfielder Zvonimir Boban and Brazilian trio Dida, Serginho and Roque Junior - and followed a Reggio Emilia court decision saying that any discrimination between European Union citizens and non-EU nationals, legally working in Italy was illegal.