

FIFA rankings

Brazil's position intact

PARIS, Jan 17 (AFP): With most of the early year activity taking place in Africa, there has been little movement atop the FIFA world rankings with Brazil still edging World and European Champions France for the number one slot.

- PARAGUAY ARE DOWN ONE TO 10TH AND SOUTH AFRICA ARE UP ONE TO 19TH. THE NEXT RANKINGS WILL BE PUBLISHED ON FEBRUARY 14.

- FIFA top 30: 1. Brazil, 2. France, 3. Argentina, 4. Italy and Czech Republic, 5. Portugal, 6. Spain, 7. Netherlands, 8. Yugoslavia, 9. Paraguay, 10. Germany, 11. Mexico, 12. Romania, 13. Norway, 14. Colombia, 15. United States, 16. England, 17. Croatia, 18. South Africa, 19. Russia, 20. Chile, 21. Slovakia, 22. Denmark, 23. Sweden, 24. Scotland, 25. Tunisia, 26. Belgium, 27. Morocco, 28. Trinidad and Tobago, 29. Egypt

Bergkamp extends Arsenal contract

LONDON, Jan 17: Arsenal's Dutch international striker Dennis Bergkamp said Tuesday that he is to stay at Highbury for the next two years, reports AFP.

Bergkamp signed an extension to his contract that will keep him at the club until 2003. There had been widespread speculation he would move on this summer but the Dutch World Cup star will now remain in the Premiership with the Gunners.

Joke on Eriksson!

LONDON, Jan 17: England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson on Tuesday fell victim to a radio hoaxer pretending to be former boss Kevin Keegan, reports AFP.

The impressionist fooled Eriksson into believing he was chatting to his predecessor and revealed that David Beckham was likely to be his first captain.

The Swede, who watched West Ham play Sunderland at the weekend, was asked what he thought of Joe Cole and Kevin Phillips and said he was impressed by both players. Mike Maguire, who co-hosts a north-west radio station breakfast show, called Eriksson at his Italian home to wish him all the best in his new job.

All for keeping Beckham

LONDON, Jan 17: Manchester United are confident they can satisfy David Beckham's wage demands and agree a new contract with the midfielder star, reports AFP. United have ridiculed reports that Beckham wants a staggering 160,000 pounds-a-week (235,000 dollars) to stay at Old Trafford, insisting talks have not started.



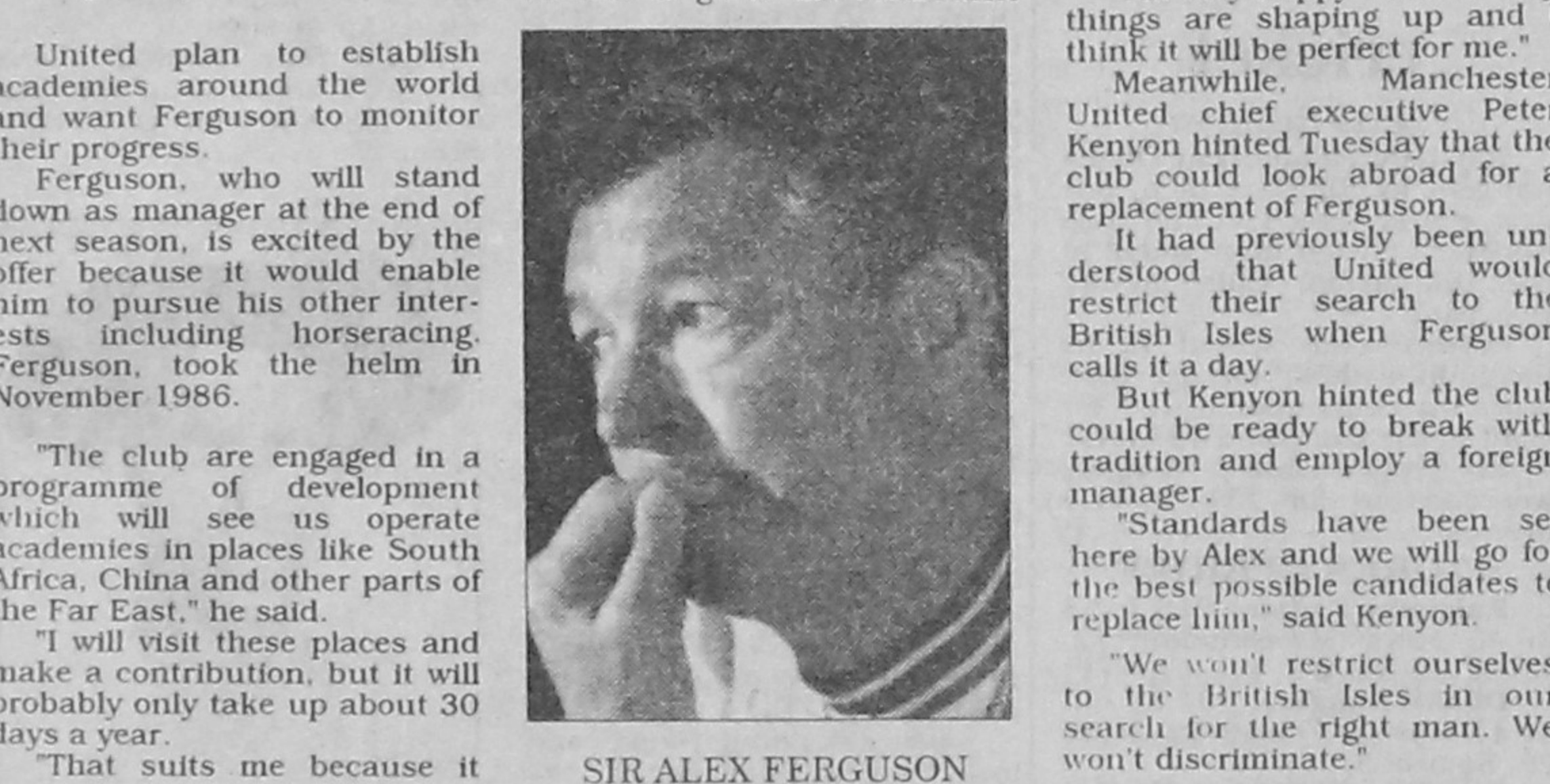
Chief executive of Manchester United Peter Kenyon (L) and managing director of Courts Singapore Terry O'Gonorr having some fun with soccer balls during a press conference in Singapore yesterday.

Chief executive's transfer concern MU due in Asia in July

SINGAPORE, Jan 17 (AFP) - Manchester United chief executive Peter Kenyon Wednesday stepped into the row over FIFA's plans to reform the transfer system warning that both clubs and fans would be hurt. The proposal from football's world governing body to allow players to quit contracts with three months' notice would harm small clubs in particular, he said in Singapore during a promotion for Manchester United's July Asian tour.

A foreigner may replace Fergie

LONDON, Jan 17: Sir Alex Ferguson revealed Tuesday that Manchester United want him to oversee the club's overseas development programme when he retires as manager, reports AFP.



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

Ancelotti dismisses it

TURIN, Italy, Jan 17: Juventus coach Carlo Ancelotti Tuesday angrily dismissed the commonly-aided theory in Italy that referees help out his club in times of crisis, reports AFP.

Bari, Perugia presidents to be questioned

ROME, Jan 16 (AFP) - The presidents of Italian first division clubs Bari and Perugia were Tuesday referred by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) to the League Disciplinary Committee for questioning the standard of refereeing after matches played at the weekend, reports AFP.

Mondragon denies using false passport

PARIS, Jan 17: Colombian goalkeeper Farid Mondragon of French First Division side Metz on Tuesday held an impromptu news conference to deny reports that he had admitted knowingly using a false Greek passport.

Mondragon, who was held Monday night by police investigating the false passports affair in French football, will appear in a Paris court to answer charges on March 14 after his revelation to police on Monday night, according to a judicial source.

But amid reports he had admitted to knowingly playing with false papers Mondragon emerged to tell reporters: "I never admitted to those dealing with the enquiry during my detention that I had a false passport."

The 29-year-old Colombian keeper, who arrived at the eastern French side from Argentine club Independiente last season, became the latest suspect to be questioned by police in an affair which has put the spotlight on some of the league's top players.

Ronaldo improving well

MILAN, Jan 17: Inter Milan's Brazilian striker Ronaldo is making good progress on the injured knee that has ruled him out of action since last April, Inter's website reported Tuesday, reports AFP.

However, doctors are still unable to say when he will be able to play again, reports AFP. Inter doctor Franco Combi, who has flown to Rio de Janeiro to meet the player, said: "He (Ronaldo) is working well and making constant progress and the recuperation programme agreed with Doctor (Gerard) Saillant is going without problems."

"We are very happy because the knee is in excellent condition and Ronaldo is working with serenity and desire. "But it is still premature to say when he will be able to play again."

Ronaldo, 24, is due to have his next consultation with Paris surgeon Saillant at the Pite Salpetriere Hospital in the French capital on January 25.



Farid Mondragon, Metz's Colombian international goalkeeper, listening to queries during a press conference at the club's headquarters on January 16.

St Etienne duo suspended

PARIS, Jan 17: St Etienne's Brazilian striker Alex Levisky and Ukrainian goalkeeper Maxim Levisky were handed a four-month ban on Tuesday, with two suspended, for their role in the false passports affair sweeping the French league, reports AFP.

The French League's (LNF) judicial commission also docked the struggling first division outfit seven points and handed their deputy president Gerard Soler a fixed year ban from the game.

Alex, detained in police custody for questioning on Monday before being released, stood accused of having a false Portuguese passport and was hauled before the commission in Paris having missed an original hearing date last week as he was in Brazil.

Levisky, who is set for a move to Spartak Moscow, had been playing under a false Greek passport.

Alain Bompard, the St Etienne president said he would appeal but told reporters: "I will make no further declaration before meeting with my lawyers on Wednesday. Whatever, we will not leave things as they are."

The loss of seven points leaves St Etienne joint third bottom of the table five points below fifth-bottom Marseille and they thus stare relegation in the face.

The club's other Brazilian, Jose Aloisio, remains under investigation.

Earlier, Colombian keeper Farid Mondragon of first division Metz denied reports that he had admitted to using a false Greek passport.

Mondragon is to appear in a Paris court to answer charges on March 14, French judicial sources said.

The 29-year-old Colombian keeper, who arrived at the eastern French side from Argentine club Independiente last season, became the latest suspect to be questioned by police in an affair which has put the spotlight on some of the league's top players.

Former Strasbourg player, Argentine Diego Garay, who has been loaned back to Cordoba after it emerged he had been accused of using a false Italian passport, is meanwhile set to meet French officials to "prove he has double Italian and Argentine nationality," according to Strasbourg's website Tuesday evening.

The club say Garay, whose French league contract was suspended earlier this month, has evidence which proves he is innocent of any wrongdoing.

Nancy, who were relegated last year, have threatened to call on the league to relegate Strasbourg and reinstate them in the top flight if Garay and Strasbourg are found to have acted improperly.

Henry tiring fast

LONDON, Jan 17: French international Thierry Henry confirmed coach Arsene Wenger's worst fears Tuesday by revealing the Premiership season is starting to take its toll, reports AFP.

The Arsenal boss has already aired his worries about how long Arsenal's top scorer can last as a regular starter this season and now Henry has voiced his own concerns over burn-out.

"After Euro 2000 I did have a long break, but I was tired and when I came back I did not have a proper pre-season, said Henry.

"It has meant I have got tired the more I have played. I have only missed the matches against Everton, and when you add the matches that I will play with the national team that is a lot of games in the season."

"I want to play, it is what I like, but it is not always easy."

"In the last three or four months of the season - because we want to carry on in the Champions League - I will, hopefully, play every three days. But that is difficult for me."

Frenchman is confident. "We're far from Bayern Munich in our group, but it is not finished yet," he said.

Gunners get Edu at last

LONDON, Jan 17: Arsenal have completed the signing of Brazilian midfielder Edu for an undisclosed fee, the English premier club said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The 22-year-old, whose full name is Eduard Daude Gaspar, also qualifies for a Portuguese passport through his father and has been cleared to work in Britain by the European Union. Arsenal thought they had signed him in July for 6 million pounds (\$8.8 million) but he was refused entry at Heathrow Airport because he was carrying a false passport.

"We are naturally pleased to have eventually signed Edu," manager Arsene Wenger told the club's official website.

"He is a huge talent with great potential who will add strength to our squad."

But although the Highbury outfit are propping up their Champions League group, the



THIERRY HENRY

Paraguay and Strasbourg goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert, a club official said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Chilavert offered to come and play for Boca, but that will not happen," said the official.

Chilavert also told Radio Mitre that if he went to Radio he would only play for another Buenos Aires side with whom he had previously played, Velez Sarsfield. As for the Boca rumours, Chilavert said no-one had asked him.

The 35-year-old Chilavert is currently out of favour with his French first division side after he refused a call to be substitute for a league match against Bastia on Saturday.

Chilavert, who was voted the top keeper at France '98, said



JOSE LUIS CHILAVERT

move to Aston Villa, with an offer of 6.5 million euros (six million dollars) already on the table from the English Premiership side.

Chilavert's agent Omar Da Fonseca reportedly arrived in Buenos Aires Tuesday morning, according to an informed source, to discuss a possible return for Chilavert who has had a nightmare spell at Strasbourg, conceding nine goals in six games.

Meanwhile, Strasbourg president Patrick Proisy refused to comment on the wayward keeper's increasingly-fragile situation in Alsace.

Chilavert did turn up for training at Strasbourg Tuesday after being threatened with sanctions but he had harsh words for Proisy saying he was not always at the club looking after its affairs. "That the root of all that is wrong at Strasbourg," he said



Portugal and Real Madrid superstar Luis Figo shows off the trophy for the Best Footballer during the World Sports Awards function at the Royal Albert Hall in London on January 16.