

Battle against Blatter on

Football

AFP, Zurich

Five FIFA vice-presidents began legal action against beleaguered FIFA president Sepp Blatter in Zurich on Friday.

The five, led by European soccer chief Lennart Johansson, president of UEFA, said in an official communique they had reason to believe Blatter had been involved in 'various criminal offences'.

They also accused him of using FIFA money to buy votes in a bid to remain in power.

Blatter is standing for another four years when the presidential election is held on May 29 in Seoul. He is being opposed by FIFA vice-president and head of the African Football Confederation (CAF) Issa Hayatou.

The law action was sparked by a confidential report delivered by FIFA secretary general Michel Zen-Ruffinen last week in Zurich.

In the most explosive document ever delivered to a FIFA ruling executive committee, Zen-Ruffinen outlined allegations of a trail of deception, mismanagement, illegal payments and cronyism against the 66-year-old Blatter.

"We take no pleasure in proceeding this way but as members of the controlling body of FIFA we have a legal responsibility to the FIFA member associations and a possible personal liability which requires us to act," said the statement, signed by Johansson, David Will, Chung Mong-Joon, Hayatou and Antonio Matarrese.

"The report (by Zen Ruffinen) has shown numerous irregularities which exist within FIFA and various non-constitutional decisions taken by the FIFA president, some of which may constitute criminal acts under the Swiss penal code.

"We are also led to believe that some of the money spent by the FIFA president was used to secure the vote of some national associations and it is therefore likely that the president illegally tried to influence the result of the present presidential campaign," said the official communique.

"The refusal of the FIFA president to resign his post, despite the evidence before the executive committee, left us no choice but to

retain the services of a Swiss law firm.

"We have now been advised that the facts brought forward by the FIFA general secretary most likely do constitute various criminal offences and that we are obliged to refer these to the appropriate authorities," added the five.

In Zen Ruffinen's report, stamped 'strictly confidential' but obtained by AFP, the secretary general revealed a secret presidential group within football's governing world body that is answerable only to Blatter, in contravention to the FIFA statutes.

The most damning indictment against Blatter came at the end of the file where Zen-Ruffinen delivered two accusations, one which he said constituted a criminal act under

purpose of the president," said Zen-Ruffinen in his report.

The secretary general also produced a damning indictment of FIFA vice-president Jack Warner of Trinidad, a staunch Blatter supporter.

"The president has constantly taken decisions which are favourable to the economical interests of Jack Warner and some of his family members, and thus are contrary to the financial interests of FIFA," said Zen-Ruffinen.

Zen-Ruffinen claimed FIFA overpaid one of Warner's sons over one million US dollars for an internet project.

But more damagingly, he said Warner paid only a symbolic one dollar for the World Cup television rights in the Caribbean for 1990/94 and 1998.

Blatter has strenuously denied the allegations laid against him by 44-year-old Zen-Ruffinen.

"I have a leadership style that does not suit everyone," Blatter told a Swiss newspaper. "I had to acquire it because I always had a majority of 13 to 11 votes against me in the executive committee."

"I made mistakes now and then, but there were no criminal wheelings and dealings of which the young man speaks," he added.

Later on Friday, Blatter claimed he was the target of a smear campaign.

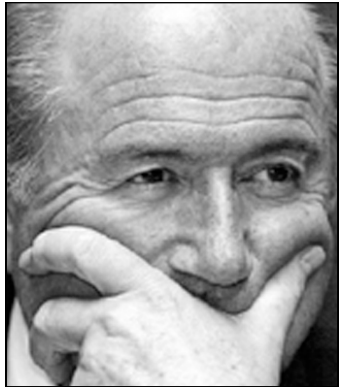
"It is extremely unusual that a candidate should use his political allies to wage the election campaign through the courts," Blatter said in a statement.

"I am sure that my opponents within the Executive Committee constitute a minority who are taking action outside the remit of the Statutes and who cannot therefore claim to be acting on behalf of FIFA."

"It astounds me that....their intentions were made known by means of a UEFA press release thereby giving the impression that they were acting on behalf of the 51 national associations."

"The fact that I did not have the chance to respond to a document presented by the General Secretary is a measure of the style of this smear campaign."

"I remain unperturbed by the prospect of a possible investigation. I am preparing my written response which will clarify both the matter at hand and my good name."



SEPP BLATTER

the Swiss Penal Code and the second which 'may' constitute a criminal offence.

The first allegation claimed that Blatter paid executive committee member Adrian Wickham of the Solomon Islands, who was elected in 2000, two years backdated remuneration to 1998 of 100,000 US dollars.

The second charge was over a payment to former Niger referee Lucien Bouchardeau for giving evidence against CAF vice-president Farah Addo, who in March accused Blatter supporters of bribing FIFA members to vote for him in the 1998 presidential election in Paris.

"The president handed out to him in front of two FIFA employees a cheque of USD 25,000 mentioning that Bouchardeau would receive additional USD 25,000 if the information he provided would suit the

No Juventus double

Football

AFP, Parma

Parma beat Juventus 1-0 here Friday evening to win the Italian Cup and deny their opponents a Cup and League double just five days after the Turin outfit lifted their 26th Italian Serie A title.

The only goal of the game was scored after four minutes when Brazilian Junior bagged a freakish goal for the hosts to level the aggregate score at 2-2 -- they successfully defended their lead and won the Cup on the away goals rule.

Juve looked a shadow of the side that won the title last Sunday and it appeared five days of celebration may have taken their toll.

"We conceded a botched goal and that affected us," said coach Marcello Lippi.

"But I thought we played well after that. It's a pity, it would have been a nice end to the season."

His Parma counterpart Gedeone Carmignani, who is set to be replaced by Cesare Prandelli in the summer after filling in on a stop-gap basis under director of football Arrigo Sacchi, said he should not take the plaudits for ending a difficult

season with a trophy.

"It's not the coach that deserves the credit -- I want to thank the players for all their efforts."

Parma had been given a lifeline in the first leg when their Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata scored in injury-time, ensuring the Turin side were defending a 2-1 lead rather than a 2-0 scoreline in the second leg.

And they started at the Stadio Ennio Tardini as they finished at the Stadio Delle Alpi, taking the lead after four minutes on the night to level the aggregate score.

It was a bizarre goal when it came.

Nakata's corner fell at the feet of Junior who slipped as he shot, striking the ball with his left foot against his own right ankle but the ball bobbed into the Juve net with neither defender nor attacker getting a touch.

Minutes later Parma nearly made it 2-0 when their veteran Argentinian defender NestorSENSINI headed the ball goalwards.

It was saved by Juve goalkeeper Fabian Carini and bounced off Juve defender Ciro Ferrara back into the arms of the Uruguayan goalkeeper.

Nicola Amoroso forced a save from Parma's Brazilian goalkeeper Claudio Taffarel but most of the

action was coming at the other end.

First Marco Di Vaio, one of four players put on World Cup stand-by by Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni should any of his players be injured, had a shot tipped behind by Carini and then Di Vaio blasted over after being well set up by Junior.

Juve coach Marcello Lippi had started the match with only three members of his side that won the title last weekend by winning 2-0 at Udinese.

But he reacted to Parma's goal by making big changes in the second half, bringing on top strikers Alessandro Del Piero and David Trezeguet who bagged 40 goals between them during the Serie A campaign but have taken a back seat for most of the Cup campaign.

Then Lippi made his third change, introducing Chilean Marcelo Salas who was playing his first match since injuring ligaments seven months ago.

Regardless of Friday's result Parma would have qualified for the UEFA Cup as Juventus will be in next season's Champions League and it ensures a happy ending to a disappointing season where they only ensured first division survival two weeks before the end of the campaign.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Juventus' Christian Zenoni (L) and Junior of Parma fight for possession during the Italian Cup second-leg final at Parma on May 10.

Ronaldo thanks Virgin Mary

AFP, Rome

Brazilian footballer Ronaldo has made a pilgrimage to a shrine of the Virgin Mary in Brazil to give thanks for his recovery from injury and his call-up into Brazil's World Cup squad, the Italian sports press reported Saturday.

The Brazilian, who plays his club football for Inter Milan of Italy, journeyed by helicopter from his home city of Rio de Janeiro to the Sanctuary of Our Lady some 167km north of Sao Paulo.

The player and his mother Sonia both prayed to the Madonna during his 18-month lay-off with knee ligament damage.

"I thanked the Virgin for the cure and the call-up," explained the 25-year-old two-times FIFA World Player of the Year to journalists.

Beckham, Butt Dubai-bound

AFP, London

Skipper David Beckham and his fellow injured clubmate Nicky Butt will join the rest of the England squad at their pre-World Cup training base in Dubai.

Coach Sven-Goran Eriksson achieved his desired outcome following talks with Manchester United even though the Premiership club were understood to have initially been reluctant to release Beckham from his treatment programme at a critical stage of his comeback from a broken bone in his left foot.

However, Eriksson has now gained their agreement for both Beckham and Butt, who has a knee ligament injury, to travel out to Dubai on Monday afternoon with the rest of the players.

Football Association chief executive Adam Crozier was involved in talks over the issue with his opposite number at Old Trafford, Peter Kenyon, for the past couple of days.

The outcome will no doubt be portrayed as Eriksson having won a club versus country battle of wills with United manager Alex Ferguson, although the FA insist there was no such dispute.

FA spokesman Paul Newman said: "There has never been a dispute between Manchester United and the FA over the travel arrangements to Dubai for both David Beckham and Nicky Butt."

"England medical staff will be implementing a fitness programme devised by Manchester United's medical staff, aimed at ensuring the speedy return to fitness of both players."

Beckham is due to start light training this weekend amid his recovery process from the broken metatarsal bone in his foot.

Eriksson, who met the Queen on Friday at a reception at Bisham Abbey, had earlier said: "We have a very good medical staff, who can treat any players who need it, but that is one thing we are discussing with Manchester United."

So far, Beckham's recovery seems to be progressing smoothly, putting him on course to play against Sweden in the opening World Cup group game on June 2.

S Africa quit ANC race

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa have withdrawn from the race to stage the 2006 African Nations Cup (ANC), the national association confirmed Saturday.

The South African Football Association said it had informed the Cairo-based African Football Confederation (CAF), but gave no reason for the surprise move.

Media reports here suggested South Africa did not want to antagonise rivals, especially Egypt, ahead of what is expected to be a fierce fight to host the 2010 World Cup, which has been earmarked for Africa.

Algeria, Egypt, Ivory Coast and Libya are the remaining candidates with Egypt, who hosted the showpiece of African football three times, considered favourites.

Gabon and Namibia were other late withdrawals, citing financial constraints.

CAF executive committee members will decide during September who follows Tunisia, hosts of the 2004 edition of the oldest continental football championship.



AFP, Washington

With the United States starting a three-game final tune-up for the World Cup here Sunday against Uruguay, coach Bruce Arena has fired a warning shot at star forward Clint Mathis -- get fit or sit.

Arena has worried about Mathis' training habits with his club team,

Deportivo book Europe ticket

Football

AFP, Madrid

Deportivo La Coruna claimed second place in the Spanish League, and secured seeding through to next season's Champions League group stage, with an outstanding 3-0 win over an under-strength Real Madrid on Friday.

Real went behind to a stunning 30-metre lob from Deportivo's Roy Makaay two minutes into injury time at the end of the first half, the Dutch international striker's 12th goal of the season.

The visitors' misery was completed by late goals from Fran and Walter Pandiani.

League champions Valencia, are unassailable with 72 points and play their last game of the season against Real Betis on Saturday.

Deportivo move up to second with 68 points while Real are secure in third with 66 points.

"Second was our objective for today. It was a clean game, a good advert for football. But we played more football than them and showed more character," commented Deportivo coach Javier Irureta, who might have had his last game at the helm of the club he lead to the league title two years ago.

Irureta has yet to renew his contract with Deportivo and been linked with a move to rivals Barcelona.

Fourth-placed Barcelona can draw level on points with Real, if they win at relegated bottom club Real Zaragoza, but an inferior head-to-head record this season means that the Catalans cannot overtake them.

The defeat in Galicia was hardly the send-off to the domestic season

Real wanted ahead of Wednesday's Champions League final against Bayer Leverkusen in Glasgow.

It also meant that Real have only notched up four points from their last five games this season, which was one of the key factors in them failing to defend the Spanish championship they won for the 28th time last season.

They will need no additional motivation to try and beat Bayer but

defeat against the Germans will also mean an early return from their holidays for the Real squad, with the likelihood of having to play Champions League qualification matches in the summer.

Real coach Vicente Del Bosque admitted that he and his players' minds were more on Wednesday's match than the task in hand.

"Our priority was just getting through this game and that's why I



PHOTO: INTERNET

Deportivo La Coruna's Mauro Silva (R) wins the aerial battle to head the ball against Fernando Morientes of Real Madrid during their Primera Liga clash at La Coruna on May 10.

Ono the encouragement



AFP, Tokyo

Dutch club Feyenoord's UEFA Cup victory, helped by Japanese midfielder Shinji Ono, has salvaged Japan's morale ahead of their World Cup battle on home turf.

"All of us were proud when they won the championship," Japan coach Philippe Troussier said after Feyenoord beat Germany's Borussia Dortmund 3-2 in the UEFA Cup final in Rotterdam, according to Japanese press reports Friday.

"We felt happy when Ono held up the winners' cup with both hands," said the Frenchman who watched the match on television with his players in the Spanish capital Madrid Wednesday, the day after bowing 1-0 to a makeshift Real Madrid side in a World Cup warm-up game there.

Ono, 22, who moved from the J-League Urawa Reds last July for his first overseas contract, set up Feyenoord's matchwinning third goal by feeding a neat ball for Danish international Jon Dahl Tomasson to fire home.

"It may have made each Japanese player feel ambitious and dream of playing on the same field in the future," Troussier said.

"Having witnessed his success, I realise again that overseas experience is essential for success," added the coach, who signed with Japan in 1998 after they made a winless debut in the World Cup finals in France the same year.

In the UEFA Cup final, Ono was substituted five minutes from time but became the first Japanese player to pick up a major European winners medal.

Wearing a headband bearing the



SHINJI ONO

red sun and the Japanese word "ichiban (number one)," he shared the honour of holding up Europe's second most prestigious football trophy.

"I wanted to be on the pitch at the final whistle, but we won so who cares? It's a fantastic feeling, the

best," Ono told Japanese reporters in Rotterdam. "I'm going to have a bit of a rest so I can go (to Oslo this weekend) feeling refreshed."

Japan's defeat at the hands of Real Madrid was the first in their eight-match World-Cup build-up series after three wins and two draws in international-A matches.

Ono and Parma midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata, Japan's most famous soccer export, did not play in Madrid because of their club commitments.

But they are due to join the Troussier squad over the weekend for a friendly against Norway in Oslo on Tuesday.

The Japanese side also features two England-based players, Portsmouth keeper Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi and Arsenal midfielder Junichi Inamoto, who saw his club seal the domestic double as a reserve.

Nakata, who is beginning to shine after 10 difficult months at Italian Serie A side Parma, was expected to make the first team against Italian champions Juventus in the Italian Cup final later on Friday.

If Parma win the Italian Cup, "it would make each of our players feel confident that Japanese football and its talent can match Europe's top level," Troussier said.

Radebe's time to prove



AFP, Durban

Former captain Lucas Radebe will be playing for a World Cup place when South Africa host Madagascar Sunday in a World Cup warm-up match.

After being sidelined for more than one year with recurring ankle and knee injuries, Radebe is making a belated attempt to secure a berth in the 23-man squad due to be announced Thursday.

Capped 63 times by Bafana Bafana (The Boys), the central defender has played several recent matches for the reserve team of English Premiership outfit Leeds United.

He also came successfully through a testimonial match for teammate and Republic of Ireland defender Gary Kelly this week, prompting South Africa coach Jomo Sono to choose him.

Sono will work with a full-strength squad for the first time after experimenting with inexperienced players in four international friendly matches during March and April.

Radebe, who captained the team at the World Cup finals in France four years ago, was not included in a preliminary squad of 30 players named by Sono last week.

"Lucas will play so I can assess his form and fitness," former national star Sono told reporters Saturday in the Indian Ocean city where the squad have been training for one week.

Given the lack of experience and resilience in the South African defence, a good showing by Radebe could seal a ticket to South Korea, where Bafana Bafana are in Group B with Paraguay, Slovenia and Spain.

After adopting a strange selection policy in previous World Cup warm-ups against Saudi Arabia (0-1), Georgia (1-4), Botswana (0-0) and Ecuador (0-0), Sono seems ready to test his best.

He used his Europe-based

players, who form the core of the team, only against Georgia in Tbilisi, and with embarrassing results as the quicker, slicker East Europeans created scoring chances with alarming ease.

A notable absentee against Madagascar will be leading scorer and captain Shaun Bartlett, who has been ruled out of the quadrennial showcase of football by an Achilles tendon injury.

Even if Radebe is included in the squad, goalkeeper Hans Vonk from Dutch club Heerenveen is considered more likely to wear the armband having won praise from Sono in Georgia.

South Africa are expected to prove too strong for modest Madagascar at Absa Stadium (1330GMT) and, after the squad is announced, they head for the Far East.

Bafana Bafana play Scotland (May 20) and fellow finalists Turkey (May 23) in Hong Kong and an unnamed Japanese club in Ueno City before opening their World Cup campaign on June 2 against Paraguay.

While he stood out for the US

decided to reserve some important players," said Del Bosque.

"We were not throwing in the towel but I'm sure that everyone has their own opinion whether it was right to save players or not," added the Real Madrid coach.

Real were missing Ivan Helguera through suspension, Claude Makelele and Raul with minor injuries, and also World Player of the Year Luis Figo, who was rested to protect a tender knee.

The four key absentees meant Deportivo decided to attack from the outset in a bid to unsettle Real.

Sergio Gonzalez twice went close in the first half before Makaay's stunning strike, from a pass by Juan Carlos Valeron.

The World Cup-bound Spanish international also provided the service for Fran to find the net after 73 minutes, with the Real defence in disarray. The Deportivo captain side-footed the ball home after a neat one-two with Valeron had split the Real rear guard.

Pandiani, who came on as a substitute for Makaay with 15 minutes to go, provided the finishing touch for Deportivo by getting their third a minute into injury time, with Real clearly having given up on the game.

"Mission accomplished, a good way to end the season," said Deportivo's Brazilian midfielder Mauro Silva triumphantly.

The 1994 World Cup winner had another excellent game and, at 34, is playing some of the best football of his long career.

Deportivo have been Madrid's nemesis this season, including beating them in the Spanish Cup final in March at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium, Real's only home defeat all season in any competition.

Baggio ponders retirement

AFP, Brescia

Brescia striker Roberto Baggio admits he is contemplating retiring from football after being excluded from his country's squad of 23 for the 2002 World Cup, Corriere dello Sport reported Saturday.

Baggio, at 35, was as expected omitted from Giovanni Trapattoni's line-up for the finals after defying doctors to recover from knee ligament damage in time for the World Cup but he now admits he may quit altogether.

"I am considering everything including retiring," said Baggio.

Djorkaeff makes up his mind?

AFP, Paris

French midfielder Youri Djorkaeff said Saturday that he would be retiring from international football after the World Cup in Japan and South Korea this summer.

"After the World Cup I'm going to take my bow," the 34-year-old told the daily Le Parisien.

"Lets say for me and Les Bleus that will be it. I won't have any regrets. It's also a question of age and motivation. What we've achieved is beautiful," said world and European champion Djorkaeff.

A key part of the 1998 World Cup-winning team, Djorkaeff saw his career nosedive after leaving Inter Milan to join Bundesliga side Kaiserslautern in 2000.

But he returned to the French side for the 5-0 thrashing of Scotland two months ago after coach Roger Lemerre was impressed at his form since joining modest English Premiership side Bolton early this year.

Djorkaeff said that while he would never play in France again he had not ruled out remaining in England.

"I know that I still want to play. Bolton have asked me to prolong. We will discuss it, but it will be difficult. I haven't ruled out staying in England. Whatever the case I won't return to France," he added.

Djorkaeff turned professional in 1984 and during his long career played for French sides Strasbourg, Monaco, and Paris Saint Germain, followed by Inter Milan, Kaiserslautern and Bolton.

He received his first call-up for the French squad in 1993 and capped 78 times is the Bleus top scorer still in action with 28 goals.

Final American warm-up



AFP, Washington

Major League Soccer's New York-New Jersey MetroStars, and the shape he arrived in for the team's training camp before the World Cup in Japan and South Korea.

"He is probably our best goal scorer," Arena said. "But if we don't think that his fitness is at a level where he can be a factor for 90 minutes, he will have to play less."

That could mean Mathis could be pulled early or come on as a sub.

Since returning from a knee injury, Mathis has scored five goals in eight games for the US team, so expecta-

tions are high for the striker in Asia next month.

"I think it's a combination of his environment with his club team and the fact that Clint is not always fully accountable for himself," Arena said. "That's something he has to do a little bit more of. Whenever we have him in camp he works hard. But we don't have control of him 24 hours a day, year-round."

Some of the world's top teams would like him that way. Craig Sherron, Mathis' agent, visited Perugia of the Italian league last

week. Mathis, 25, made a stop at Bayern Munich before reporting to camp.

Both clubs might sign Mathis before the Cup begins, with MLS reaping a transfer fee of five to six million dollars for a player whose salary in the US league is reportedly a paltry 250,000 dollars.

MLS is a single-entity league, meaning all contracts are signed with the league and players are allocated to clubs, as Mathis is to the MetroStars.

While he stood out for the US

team in World Cup warm-ups, Mathis was less than stellar and a disappointment for the MetroStars with two goals in five games.

On several occasions, Mathis was content to give a teammate a square pass instead of taking on a defender as he did the past two seasons.

Perhaps he still is cautious about re-injuring his left knee again. The first US match at the World Cup, June 5 against Portugal, comes a year to the day from the date on which Mathis tore knee ligaments.