

CONGRESS 2002



Sepp Blatter (L), the FIFA president, presents a plaque to AFC's General Secretary Peter Velappan (C) for his contribution to the World Cup 2002, during the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Congress Meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Mohammed bin Hamam of Qatar, AFC's president in waiting, looks on.

Blatter cautious about Asia

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

FIFA chief Sepp Blatter on Wednesday said Asia would have to fight hard for the right to a fifth automatic berth in the 2006 World Cup.

"It is an absolutely legitimate demand and request from the AFC," he told a news conference after the Asian Football Confederation annual congress, but made it clear that Asia would face stiff competition.

Blatter noted that there would be one slot available because the winner of the 2002 games Brazil would not automatically qualify for the next finals in Munich.

"But this free slot, in my opinion and those in FIFA, should go to the confederation that has never had a direct entry in FIFA's World Cup, which is Oceania," he said.

A trade-off for the AFC would be another "half" position which Oceania currently has, leaving the Asian countries with a play-off to obtain another World Cup slot.

The AFC would have to "work hard" to reach its objective of five seats, he said, adding that the continent's performance in the 2002 Cup co-hosted by Japan and South Korea was a "good step forward."

"I can only express my sympathy to this approach. The decision will be made on December 17 or 18 in Madrid at the FIFA executive committee meeting."

The AFC's new president, Mohamed bin Hammam, earlier told the congress that the region would support Oceania's automatic entry into the 2006 Cup but urged FIFA to give Asia "more opportunities to show our talents".

"It is my priority to see five Asian teams in 2006 in Germany. Regardless of whether we deserve it technically or not, I think it is our right," he told AFP.

"We have shown to the world at the recent World Cup in Asia that we can compete at the top level."

Hammam, who took over the AFC presidency at its congress here, said the launch of the AFC Champions League on Tuesday strengthened Asia's bid for five berths, adding that he saw a "50-50 chance" for the region's long-running quest.

Opponents of giving Asia extra berths have long argued that the allocation for the world's most populous continent should only be increased on merit.

Asia had four teams at the 2002 finals, including co-hosts South Korea and Japan. The success of South Korea in reaching the semi-finals, the best performance of an Asian side in World Cup history, as well as Japan's qualification for the last 16 have boosted arguments for another place.

Hammam said his two main missions were to unite the Asian football family and to develop the sport to narrow the gap for AFC's more backward members.

Under a new development plan, the Qataris said the continent would be divided into four zones with an official appointed to guide the growth of the sport in each zone.

"If we leave the countries without guidance, they are going to lose money, they are going to lose (out) in their efforts. We want these countries to concentrate on youth development so that maybe they can do something in 2010."

Hammam said the AFC and FIFA would also work out programs to boost development in India and China.

"There is a lot of potential in these two countries. We have to explore the possibility of increasing the development capability of these two countries, maybe to edge them to work towards professionalism."

Earlier at the AFC congress, Japan's Junji Ogura and Thailand's Worawi Makudi were elected to represent Asia on the FIFA executive committee.

East Timor was admitted as an associate member and will undergo a two-year probation before it can become a full AFC member.

The AFC congress also welcomed Afghanistan, which was one of 12 founding members in 1954, back into the fold after its participation was affected by years of war.

FIFA world rankings France sink further

REUTERS, Zurich

Former World champions France have slipped to fourth in the latest edition of FIFA's world ranking, while the United States have broken into the top 10 for the first time.

The rankings are the second set since the World Cup and though few European or South American teams have been in action, there has been widespread activity in the rest of the world with nearly 50 matches taking place.

Placings have also been affected by the loss of historical ranking points. France slipped from first spot to joint-second after their first round World Cup exit and are now fourth.

Brazil remain top, ahead of Argentina and Spain, up one place from fourth.

Germany are fifth, followed by Mexico, with England and Portugal - who meet in a friendly next month - joint-seventh.

Italy and the United States are joint-ninth, the first time that the U.S. have made the top 10.

Colombia, who failed to qualify for the World Cup, have slipped from ninth to 16th.

The biggest movers were New Zealand, who leapt 41 places to 47th on the back of their victory over Australia in the recent Oceania Nations Cup.

TEAM	POINTS
1. Brazil	859
2. Argentina	781
3. Spain	775
4. France	772
5. Germany	764
6. Mexico	733
7. Portugal	728
8. England	728
9= Italy	714
9= USA	714
11. Turkey	707
12. Denmark	703
13. Republic of Ireland	699
14. Holland	693
15= Colombia	688
15= Yugoslavia	688
17. Cameroon	682
18. Belgium	677
19. Paraguay	674
20. Sweden	673

Two Koreas to meet on Sept. 7

AFP, Seoul

The two Koreas will play a football international against each for the first time in more than a decade in Seoul next month, organisers said Tuesday.

The match will be held on September 7 at the new Seoul stadium built for this year's World Cup.

Their last matches were in 1990 in Seoul and Pyongyang when the rival states had embarked on an earlier attempt to improve relations through sport.

"The North Korean football team will visit here from September 6 to 8 and will have a friendly match at the Sang-Am World Cup stadium on September 7," the Europe-Korea Foundation said in a statement.

The foundation has organised the match and a four-member delegation will go to the North for more talks on the match.

North Korea boycotted the World Cup staged in South Korea and Japan in June and would not answer an offer to stage matches.

It first agreed to send a team to Seoul when a leading South Korean lawmaker, Park Keun-Hye, visited Pyongyang in May.

Park is the daughter of former South Korean president, Park Chung-Hee, whose 18 years of authoritarian rule were marked by spectacular industrial growth.

North Korea has also agreed to send athletes to the Asian Games to be held in South Korea from September 29.

Amid lingering Cold War antagonism, the communist state has never taken part in an international sporting event in the capitalist South.

Choe Song-ik, a North Korean delegate to high-level talks being held in Seoul, said on Monday that the North would send more than 600 people to Asia biggest sporting event including athletes, officials and supporters.

He also said the North would notify the Busan Asian Games Organizing Committee how many events it would take part in when they have talks in North Korea from Sunday.

"We will send a large number of a delegation... more than 600," he told Ahn Sang-Young, mayor of the host city Busan.

Trezeguet to miss opener

REUTERS, Milan

Juventus striker David Trezeguet will miss the start of the Serie A season with a knee injury.

More oil for the rumour mill

Football

INTERNET, Milan

There is a new page to the Ronaldo saga. In fact his personal spokesman, Rodrigo Paiva, from Brazil denied that the Brazilian phenomenon made an interview with Italian daily "Il Gazzettino" which was quoted by all the media.

Paiva stated that Ronie wants to underline that he never spoke to any journalist in the last few days. "Ronaldo only heard the reports about the content of that interview after the training and immediately called me to deny that fact."

Are there balanced declarations? It's ok, but the fact is that Ronie never gave them. Just think about a telephone interview, when the whole world is asking him for one. Ronie wants it to be clear that he'll only speak when he considers it the right moment", concluded Paiva.

But while Paiva absolutely denies any type of interview, the "Il Gazzettino" journalist also came with an official announcement, stating that yesterday evening he spoke with Ronaldo to clear the situation, and to understand the reasons for this denial made by Paiva, who is in Brazil.

Ronaldo allegedly told Venice's paper, "Il Gazzettino" on Monday, "I understand Mr (Massimo)Moratti and the supporter's bitterness, but then again a player also has to evaluate other things."

"My problem isn't really Moratti: if it were for him, who I still consider as a second father to me, I'd surely stay with Inter for life. But at the moment there are other reasons and motivations to choose, which are really more technical and professional. It isn't a money problem... I'm waiting to meet the president, because having a face-to-face is different than a telephone call of a few minutes."

"On that occasion we'll evaluate what to do together, and we'll discuss the current problems. I haven't decided anything: this week will be important. I don't know if I'll leave Milan... probably soon, I could be more precise. But let's wait for the meeting with Moratti: meanwhile I'm continuing to have my own training at Inter's headquarter in Appiano Gentile."

Ronaldo allegedly said that if Moratti tells him that he must respect his contract he'll "try to score and to do everything for the good of Inter. My problem is that I want clearness. I'd also like a face-

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with the phenomenon Moratti told Gazzetta: "I had a telephone call with him 4 days ago, and I don't have problems understanding him as he doesn't have problems understanding me. We'll meet..."

But Inter's official website aired a different sounding Moratti who brushed aside any prospect of a showdown with Ronaldo. At the end of Tuesday night's training session of Inter's Champions League squad, Moratti joined them in the Portuguese capital Lisbon and was concise in replying to questions from journalists about the Ronaldo

case. "There hasn't been and there won't be a meeting, also because the footballer will return to Brazil for national team duties. However, there is absolutely no incompatibility between us," said Moratti.

A question for coach Cuper about Ronaldo, who was not included in the 20-man roster for the match against Sporting Lisbon next week was inevitable during yesterday's press conference.

Cuper said: "I haven't broken off any relationship with Ronaldo. I don't have any problems, perhaps it's him who's not in accordance with me. During our meeting we spoke about training sessions and preparations only."

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