

FIFA against Ailton's Arab exodus

Football

AFP, Hamburg

FIFA are in favour of stopping Brazilian striker Ailton from playing for oil-rich Qatar and of taking measures to prevent such incidents happening again, an executive committee member of soccer's world governing body said.

Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder, also the president of the German football federation, said the matter was utter nonsense.

"We are of the opinion that it is ridiculous that people can acquire the nationality of a country with which they have absolutely no connection. It attacks the fundamental fabric of national teams.

"FIFA has acknowledged this abusive use of trying to change nationality (in the Ailton affair) and want to oppose it," Mayer-

Vorfelder said in an interview with German news agency DPA.

The Werder Bremen striker, who leads the Bundesliga scoring charts with 20 goals this season, has accepted a money-spinning offer to help fire Qatar to the World Cup finals after being continually overlooked by Brazil.

"It's almost certain that Ailton will play with the Qatar national team in the next 2006 World Cup qualifier against Jordan on March 31," Qatar Federation deputy secretary general Majed Al-Khalifi told AFP earlier this week. He added that Ailton was expected in Doha next week.

Ailton said he was not concerned what FIFA might do. "I don't really care," he said on Friday. "I will be flying to Qatar on Monday and I will sign a contract."

Fatal smoke

AP, San Salvador

One man was killed and at least 27 people were injured by an explosion at a soccer stadium Sunday.

The dead man apparently mishandled chemicals typically used to create smoke, authorities said.

The blast in the upper deck at Jorge Gonzalez Stadium before an El Salvador league match killed a Salvadoran man in his 20s who was handling a volatile powder, according to emergency crews and police.

The others were injured by flames and in the rush to evacuate the area.

"We're discarding totally that it

could have been a device that was launched," said police commissioner Roberto Villalobos. "There were leftover chemicals that when combined usually ... only make a white smoke."

Referees called off the game between Alianza and San Salvador before it started. The explosion took place within a group of Alianza fans in a section of the stadium with the cheapest seats.

Four of the injured were treated for second-degree burns and a German tourist arrived with a damaged eardrum.

The injuries included facial burns, but none was life-threatening, a hospital surgeon said.



Fans scurry for safety at the Magico Gonzalez stadium in San Salvador, El Salvador on March 7 after an explosion that killed a fan.



Barcelona's Spanish international Luis Enrique Martinez (R) tries to break clear of Mallorca's Ivan at the Nou Camp in Barcelona on March 7.

Primera Liga 7-up Barcelona

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Resurgent Barcelona survived a late bout of nerves to beat Real Mallorca 3-2 at the Nou Camp on Sunday and stretch their winning league run to seven matches.

Two eye-catching goals from Luis Garcia, either side of a tap-in from Luis Enrique, set Barcelona on their way and the home side held on despite a 90th-minute chip from Samuel Eto'o and an Andrija Delibasic strike deep in injury time.

Victory for Barcelona took them to within a point of third-placed Deportivo Coruna and kept second-placed Valencia in their sights. With 11 games remaining, Real Madrid lead the standings with 60 points, following their 1-1 draw away to Racing Santander on Saturday, with Valencia now six points behind them after their 3-0 win at home to Deportivo Coruna.

Deportivo remain third on 50 points with Barcelona breathing down their necks.

Barcelona have an eight-point cushion in the fourth and final

Champions League qualification slot after Athletic Bilbao were beaten 4-1 at home to Valladolid and Atletico Madrid had to strike late to claim a 1-1 draw at home to Murcia.

Both Bilbao and Atletico have 41 points from 27 games, in fifth and sixth respectively.

Barcelona were in command against Mallorca for all but the final three minutes and managed to hold on for a well deserved win. "It happens quite often, a side thinking all the work's done and then conceding goals," said Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard.

"There was a little bit of tension but we can be happy with another victory, with the only shame being that we didn't score more goals."

Rijkaard's side opened the scoring in the third minute, when Garcia lashed in from outside the box after Michael Reiziger's cross had been blocked.

Luis Enrique, playing as a makeshift striker in the absence of Patrick Kluijvert and Javier Saviola, celebrated his return to the side by making it 2-0 in the 16th minute.

Mallorca keeper Miki spilled the ball after a mix-up with his defender Ivan Ramis and allowed

Ronaldinho to set up a simple chance for the Spanish midfielder.

Barca hit the frame of the goal twice in the remainder of a one-sided first half, with a Giovanni van Bronckhorst free kick and a header from Mallorca's Edu Moya that came close to supplying an own goal.

Xavi hit the bar with a 40-metre lob early in the second half but Barcelona did not have to wait too long for a third, Garcia blasting in his second outstanding goal after Philip Cocu's header had been punched away by Miki.

Garcia missed three clear chances to complete his hat-trick before Mallorca's mini-revival gave Barca fans just a slight scare at the end.

TOP SIX							
Spanish league standings after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Real	27	18	6	3	55	30	60
Valencia	27	16	6	5	50	20	54
Deportivo	27	15	5	7	43	23	50
Barcelona	27	14	7	6	45	32	49
Bilbao	27	11	8	8	34	33	41
Madrid	27	11	8	8	33	32	41

Serie A Impressive Milan, Roma

Football

REUTERS, Milan

European champions AC Milan maintained their lead at the top of Serie A with an impressive 3-1 win over Sampdoria on Sunday but AS Roma kept on their tail after a 4-1 crushing of Inter Milan.

Milan lead on 61 points with Roma on 56, while champions Juventus, who won 3-2 at Brescia on Saturday, are a further point behind in third place.

Andrea Pirlo put Milan ahead in the 17th minute but Cristiano Doni brought the enterprising visitors level 10 minutes later.

A header from Filippo Inzaghi before the break and then a well-taken goal from Brazilian Kaka in the second half ensured Carlo Ancelotti's side's 10th win from

their last 11 league games.

Roma's victory was not as emphatic as the result suggests, with two of the goals coming in the final three minutes after Inter's Ivan Cordoba had been sent off.

But another outstanding performance from striker Antonio Cassano ensured Inter's fourth straight league defeat despite one of their better displays in recent weeks.

Lazio's game at Bologna was postponed due to snow but Roberto Mancini's side remain in fourth place.

After some sparkling moves in the opening minutes, Milan went ahead through Pirlo's 25-metre drive which flew in off the inside of the post.

While Milan were producing some lively attacking football, Sampdoria, the surprise package of the season so far, were always

dangerous going forward and, in contrast to many visitors to the San Siro, were keen to play positively.

Milan keeper Dida needed to be quick off his line to foil Aimo Diana in the 24th minute and then three minutes later the visitors drew level when Doni slammed home the loose ball after Gennaro Gattuso cleared a Diano effort off the line.

Ten minutes before the break Milan restored their lead when Inzaghi rose superbly to meet a Giuseppe Pancaro cross with a perfectly angled glancing header at the near post.

Inzaghi, who has only recently returned from injury, looked sharp and moments later he almost added his second with a low diagonal shot that flashed across the face of the goal.

Three minutes after the restart, Kaka latched on to a through ball from Pirlo and made himself

enough

space for a low shot past former Milan keeper Antonioli to make it 3-1.

"It was a very open and entertaining game. Sampdoria are not easy to play against but we were at our best today," said Ancelotti. "The teams behind us are not giving up and that is what worries us."

Proof of that came with Roma's latest goal spree -- following their recent hammerings of Siena and Parma they have now hit 14 in three games.

Fabio Capello's side had three 'goals' disallowed before Cassano put them ahead on the stroke of halftime with a composed finish after a sublime through ball from his strike partner Francesco Totti.

Brazilian Mancini doubled Roma's lead in the 63rd minute with a superb solo goal, latching on to a Cassano pass and bursting into the area before firing home.

Inter got themselves back into the game 10 minutes later when Obafemi Martins' shot took a deflection and looped to Christian Vieri at the back post who volleyed past Ivan Pellizzoli to make it 2-1.

Alberto Zaccheroni's side pushed forward in search of an equaliser but were caught at the back again when Cassano broke free of Cordoba and the Colombian defender barged him over inside the area conceding a penalty and receiving a red card.

Totti smashed home the spot-kick to ensure the three points but there was still time for more Cassano magic when he turned Thomas Helveg and slipped the ball across the goal to Mancini, who tapped in from close range.

TOP SIX							
Italian football league table ahead of Sunday's late match (played, won, drawn, lost, for, against, points):							
Milan	24	19	4	1	47	14	61
Roma	24	17	5	2	55	11	56
Juventus	24	17	4	3	50	27	55
Lazio	23	12	4	7	33	23	40
Parma	24	11	7	6	35	32	40
Udinese	24	10	7	7	29	26	37



STRIPPER? AS Roma forward Antonio Cassano (C) has taken off his shirt in celebration after scoring against Inter Milan while Inter's Christian Zanetti (L) and Daniele Adani look on at Rome's Olympic stadium on March 7.

Porto's time to party?

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Paris

Alex Ferguson's Manchester United host FC Porto in the European Champions League on Tuesday in what is looking more and more like a defining moment of truth.

At 2-1 down from the first leg of their first knockout round clash, United, nine points behind Arsenal in the Premiership and without Roy Keane who was sent off in the first leg, badly need a Champions League triumph to boost confidence among the ranks.

The talents of Ferguson's newly-appointed assistant Walter Smith will help a side in the shadow of Arsenal who are thriving in both domestic and European competition.

FC Porto, under the guidance of 2003 UEFA coach of the year Jose Mourinho, are, like Arsenal, unbeaten in their league this season but have lost all previous six trips to England including a 4-0 defeat at Old Trafford in 1997.

United's attempt at their eighth consecutive Champions League quarter-final is hampered by defensive question marks. Ferguson did not buy during the winter transfer window to replace the suspended Rio Ferdinand which could be seen as a mistake which might prove his undoing.

"We've been hit hard in defence through losing Ferdinand, coupled with other injuries and suspensions," he said. "You don't want to be changing your back four all the time, but that's what we've had to do."

"It hasn't stopped us attacking. We are still capable of scoring and I'm sure we will score goals on Tuesday. We scored first in Portugal, and we had chances for a second. That might have killed them off. Instead, they created three chances and scored from two of them."

"That shows Porto are a good team, but I don't think they are great travellers. They will have a hard night if there's a real electric atmosphere at Old Trafford."

"The important thing now is for the fans to make it a real European night on Tuesday and for us to make sure we get a lot of threats on goal."

Chelsea are in a better position

than United in their match with a 1-0 lead over VfB Stuttgart from the first leg.

Stuttgart coach Felix Magath may have described Fernando Meira's own goal as one of those things and is optimistic about the Stamford Bridge tie, but his opposite number at Chelsea, Claudio Ranieri, believes his team can progress.

Ranieri, buoyed by second place in the Premiership above Manchester United, is believed to need at least one trophy this season to ensure his job after buying heavily with club owner Roman Abramovich's money.

But a 2-0 win over Borussia Dortmund on Saturday has installed new confidence in



ALEX FERGUSON

Stuttgart, last season's German league runners-up.

"If we play like we did against Dortmund we could embarrass the English," insisted Magath.

"It was vital for our confidence that we scored away from home again and we can travel to London on the back of these two goals."

Goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand acknowledged the Germans were the underdogs but refused to rule out an upset.

"The win has given us confidence. Why can't we get past Chelsea?" asked Hildebrand.

Croatian defender Zvonimir Soldo, 36, hobbled out of the Dortmund triumph at half-time with a knee injury but Magath allayed fears his inspirational captain would miss the encounter.

"I think it's almost 100 percent that Soldo will play," commented Magath.

Lyon have a 1-0 lead going into their return leg having beaten Real Sociedad in Spain for the Basque side's first home loss in the competition for 28 years to boost Paul Le Guen's side.

Lyon midfielder Eric Carriere however is a doubt for the match with a knee injury.

Deportivo La Coruna go to Juventus on a high having won their last seven Champions League matches and having beaten the Turin side 1-0 in the first leg.

But the Spanish side suffered a demoralising 3-0 league defeat against Valencia on Saturday and will be without left-back Romero for the tie although they could welcome back veteran Mauro Silva.

Juventus, runners-up in the competition last year, are without the injured David Trezeguet and Enzo Maresca.

FIXTURES

Champions League first knockout round, second leg fixtures on Tuesday and Wednesday (all kick-off times 19:45 GMT unless stated):

TUESDAY
 At Stamford Bridge, London
 Chelsea (ENG) v VfB Stuttgart (GER)
 1st leg result: 1-0
 At Old Trafford, Manchester
 Manchester United (ENG) v FC Porto (POR)
 1st leg result: 1-2
 At Garland Stadium, Lyon
 Lyon (FRA) v Real Sociedad (SPA)
 1st result: 1-0
 At Stadio delle Alpi,
 Juventus (ITA) v Deportivo La Coruna (SPA)
 1st leg result: 0-1

WEDNESDAY
 At Highbury, London
 Arsenal (ENG) v Celta Vigo (SPA)
 1st leg result: 3-2
 At the Bernabeu, Madrid
 Real Madrid (SPA) v Bayern Munich (GER)
 1st leg result: 1-1
 At the San Siro, Milan
 AC Milan (ITA) v Sparta Prague (CZE)
 1st leg result: 0-0
 At Prince Albert Stadium, Monaco
 Monaco (FRA) v Lokomotiv Moscow (RUS)
 1st leg result: 0-2