



AFC President Mohamed bin Hammam (C) waves to the crowd alongside FIFA supreme Sepp Blatter (L) after being re-elected for a second four-year term as President of AFC in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.

## Row over MU's tour

### Football

APP, London

Manchester United officials are confident the club's planned summer tour of Asia will go ahead, despite being told they will not be welcome in Malaysia during July because of fears their visit will distract attention from the finals of the Asian Cup.

The newly-crowned English champions, who have a massive fan-base across Asia, are due to play matches in the Chinese territory of Macau, Japan and South Korea, and had been scheduled to end their tour by facing a Malaysian XI in Kuala Lumpur on July 27.

The final leg now looks as if it will have rescheduled or cancelled after local football chiefs caved in to pressure from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and said they would not sanction the match taking place in July.

"We are currently attempting to clarify with our tour organisers what the situation is in regards to Malaysia but we are confident that the rest of the tour will go ahead," United spokesman Phil Townsend told AFP.

FIFA President Sepp Blatter revealed earlier on Tuesday that he was liaising with England's Football Association to try and get United to change their tour plans out of respect to the Asian Cup finals, which are being held in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam from July 7-29.

"You are welcome but please come at a time that is acceptable to the whole football family," Blatter said at the AFC Congress in the Malaysian capital.

"As FIFA president I appeal for your solidarity."

"If a big club is touring we appeal for a minimum of respect when they plan to travel to the region when the Asian Cup is being played."

The vice-president of the

Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) Tengku Abdullah Ibni Sultan Ahmad Shah joined AFC president Mohammed bin Hammam in calling for United's entire pre-season tour to be called off.

"If they want to come (to Malaysia) during that time they can't," Tengku Abdullah told reporters. "The sanction has not been given by the AFC and we have to follow it. Manchester United cannot come to Malaysia during the Asian Cup. They will have to rearrange their schedule."

Bin Hammam had described United as "disrespectful" for scheduling a tour during Asian football's showpiece event and warned that, if the Kuala Lumpur match went ahead, the FAM would be in breach of a contractual commitment not to organise other games during the tournament.

United's match had been planned as part of the celebrations to mark 50 years of Malaysian independence.

"It is bad news for the fans but it is the feeling of the family of Asia," said Tengku Abdullah. "By the look of it the Asian Cup will have to take precedence."

"We all have to support Mr. Bin Hammam's call for Manchester United not to come to Asia at all during the Asian Cup. The feeling is that they have to reschedule."

It was clearly a decision taken reluctantly with FAM General Secretary Ibrahim Saad separately spelling out what he thought.

"As a Malaysian I'm surprised. It is out of tune for people to dictate to us how we celebrate our 50 years of independence," he said.

Manchester United plan to kick off their tour against J-League champions Urawa Red Diamonds on July 17 in Saitama in Japan before travelling to the South Korean capital for a show-down with FC Seoul on July 20.

Alex Ferguson's team are then due to head to Macau for a match against Chinese club Shenzhen on July 23.

### AFC chief re-elected

APP, Kuala Lumpur

Mohamed Bin Hammam was Tuesday sworn in unopposed to a second four-year term as Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president.

The Qatari was the only candidate in the fray with his new term rubber-stamped at the AFC Congress here.

The 58-year-old was also unopposed when voted into office for his first term.

"I am immensely grateful for this vote of confidence," he said.

"My re-election demonstrates the solidarity in Asia and the confidence among AFC's Member Associations that AFC is heading in the right direction as far as football development in our continent is concerned."

The AFC Congress also approved an increase in the number of vice presidents to five from four and ruled that for the first time one of them must be a woman from 2009.

### Ajax fans arrested

APP, The Hague

Dutch police arrested around 50 people in Amsterdam late on Monday after Ajax football supporters began smashing shop windows and looting following a ceremony honouring the team's Dutch Cup victory, the ANP news agency reported.

Following the ceremony celebrating the team's Sunday victory over AZ Alkmaar several groups of Ajax supporters headed into the city centre, where they began to throw bricks into shop windows and looting.

Police arrested around 50 people for destruction of property, violence, and refusing to disperse, the Dutch news agency reported.

A ceremony marking Ajax's Dutch Cup victory last year was also followed by violence.

### Berbatov is happy

INTERNET, undated

Dimitar Berbatov has told Martin Jol he's happy to stay at Tottenham, despite speculation linking him with a summer move to Manchester United.

The Bulgarian striker has enjoyed an excellent first season in English football and his partnership with Robbie Keane has helped fire the club to the brink of European football once again.

Berbatov scored his 22nd goal of the campaign in Monday night's 2-0 victory over Charlton and after the game Spurs boss Jol was confident he wouldn't be losing him.

Berbatov is very happy at our club," Jol told SkySports1.

"I had a word with him yesterday and he said he is so happy here."

"The crowd and the supporters are always positive and he said what more do I want?"

"I said 'yeah' because I'm always happy when my players are happy."

Berbatov was a £10.9million signing from Bayer Leverkusen last summer and has quickly made an impact in the Premiership.

And Jol also thinks he is probably the best signing of the season.

He added: "Could be, could be. For us, he's excellent quality."

### WC in SA safe

APP, Kuala Lumpur

FIFA President Sepp Blatter insisted Tuesday that South Africa will definitely host the 2010 World Cup barring a natural disaster.

South Africa will be the first African nation to host football's showpiece event, but reports of delays in stadium construction have raised questions as to whether the tournament would go ahead.

Blatter stirred the pot last month by pointing out that there were fallback options in the United States, Mexico or Japan in the event of an emergency.

But he said on the sidelines of the Asian Football Confederation congress here that there was no way any country other than South Africa would host the event.

"I can tell you that unless there is a natural catastrophe, then the World Cup 2010 will definitely be in South Africa," he said. "It is my last statement on this."

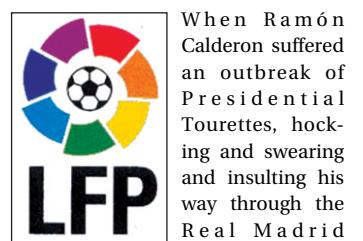
"I will repeat it in the FIFA Congress (later this month). There will be seven South African ministers there and I will have a special meeting with them."

"They have been alarmed because we said we had contingency plans, but we always have contingency plans or it wouldn't be good governance."

"But the World Cup 2010 will not be taken away from South Africa."

## The magic of Guti

SID LOWE



When Ramón Calderón suffered an outbreak of Presidential Tourettes, hocking and swearing and insulting his way through the Real Madrid squad, everyone jumped up and down in righteous indignation. The president of Real Madrid, they insisted, simply can't go round saying such things, no matter how much he claims that a conference with 150 students he doesn't know constitutes a private conversation scurrilously recorded by an unscrupulous journalist. Calderón, they said, had done it this time. He was out of order - and, frankly, a bit of a pill.

What they forgot to say was that he was right. Many of Madrid's players are uneducated and spoilt, never putting their hands in their pockets for anything other than a discreet scratch of the goolies - the former midfielder who avoided Do María because he hated looking like a free-loader was a rare exception - Iker Casillas does earn 45 times the salary of Diego Lopez, and David Beckham is half an actor bound for Hollywood. Above all, 30-year-old Jose María Gutierrez Hernandez is Madrid's "eternal promise" - a still unfulfilled hope for the future.

Born in Torrejón but brought up a Barca fan, Guti made his Madrid debut 12 years ago and has played over 400 games, becoming the club's vice-captain. When Ronaldinho arrived he claimed that Guti was their most talented player, and he's one of only four footballers the Ultra Sur regularly sing about, alongside Raul, Beckham and the long-deceased Juanito. And yet while the Ultras sing the rest of the stadium just as often whistles. And boos. And tuts. And rolls its eyes.

Guti has never truly convinced. It doesn't help that, despite his intelligence and a rarely witnessed vein of solidarity, he's seen as an uninterested pouting pretty-boy, a poor

man's Beckham stepping out in pink bomber jackets. It doesn't help that his wife, whose own obsession with Beckham arrived as tragic as it was comic, is a player in the celebrity C-list, and it certainly doesn't help that Guti famously dated a woman who turned out to be a man. But most of all, it doesn't help that Guti's achievements have never matched his talent. Only once in 11 years has he been rated amongst the country's top 100 players. In fact, only twice in 11 years has he even been a regular starter. This season promised to be different, Fabio Capello vowing to "invent something so that Guti can play" while opponents singled him out as the man to stop, complimenting him as they booted him miles in the air. But despite those intentions, Capello has found what others found - including the former coach who bitterly whinged, "How can I trust an arsehole like that?" The answer is you can't. Nor, maybe, should you: that's not the point of Guti. This columnist has insisted before that if he was manager of Madrid - and why, not everyone else has had a go - Guti wouldn't play again and others have reached the same conclusion, because his talent is unrivalled, so is his temperament.

When Guti feels unloved and he has a point to prove, he can be unbelievably brilliant; when he has a run in the team, he can be unbelievably irrelevant, hence Capello's remark last night: "When Guti comes on as a sub, he always make the difference".

The fact that when he starts, he does not wait without saying but Guti has not delivered the results his ability demands. Madrid have won four from six when Guti has been missing this season and for every fabulous game, there are three (or four, or five) anonymous ones, where he ambles about doing nothing, gets stroppy and gets pointlessly booked or sent off. He's had more than 10 yellow cards for each of the last three seasons and this year he already has nine, plus two reds, the latest an utterly ridiculous one in Vigo. And that is why Capello decided he couldn't trust Guti either,

relegating him to the bench, the "eternal promise" once more.

But what promise! Because while Guti may infuriate, he also has the talent to delight, as he proved with a truly awesome performance against Barcelona and again in the biggest match of Madrid's season last night.

Real Madrid versus Sevilla, third versus second, the league or bust, a match so big the Bernabeu blared out operatic music, from the Star Wars soundtrack to the theme from the Old Spice adverts. A match that had it all: five goals, four of them superb, the miss of the season from Dani Alves - a miss that means Madrid, not Sevilla, will push Barca for the league - and a surreal refereeing display complete with four red cards, one for a sub, one for a doctor, one for being held and one for being happy. It also had some tactical mastery from Capello, fight, togetherness and attacking spirit from Madrid and the best Bernabeu atmosphere anyone could remember for years, the place bouncing and rocking into the night, convinced that Madrid will be champions as the whistle went on a 3-2 win.

Above all, though, it had Guti. Just before the hour, with Sevilla winning 1-0 through Vicente Maresca's fantastic volley, Capello finally did what countless Madrid coaches should have done years ago: he took off Raul. In his place he sent on Guti. Within four minutes, Guti had produced a wonderful pass for Ruud van Nistelrooy to score the equaliser. Within 20 minutes he had produced an even better pass, through Aitor Ocio's legs, for Robinho to make it 2-1 then get himself sent off for whipping his shirt off. And within half an hour he had produced another excellent pass to start the move that led to Madrid's third - vital, as it turned out, because of Chevanton's last-minute free kick.

With five games left, Madrid and Barca are head to head. Ludicrous though it seems, Calderon was right. Not just about the "eternal promise", but also about Madrid finishing this season celebrating down at Cibeles.

## Terry to lead tribute

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea captain John Terry is ready to give Manchester United a guard of honour as champions even though he knows it will be hard to stomach.

The Blues were shown similar respect when they won the title and Terry knows it was a difficult thing to do for some of United's players.

After Chelsea's failure to beat Arsenal on Sunday, United will arrive at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday night as champions and Terry is ready to return the compliment.

He declared: "The manager has said already they will get the guard of honour which they did to us at Old Trafford.

"Looking at some faces, it could not have been nice. We have to go through that and we fully respect them as players and individuals. We will do that holding our heads up high."

Chelsea, who were last top of the Barclays Premiership in October last year, ran out of steam as they chased success on four fronts.

Having won the Carling Cup in February, Chelsea were hoping to land an unprecedented quadruple

but a defeat in the Champions League semi-final against Liverpool last week put paid to that dream.

Their hopes of winning a third successive title were then wrecked by Arsenal even though Chelsea's heroic efforts deserved more.

Terry added: "It is obviously very disappointing, when you look at the



JOHN TERRY

season as a whole.

"We were played really well at Arsenal, especially with 10 men and were unlucky not to have been able to push Manchester United right to the wire in the end. But it was not to be."

"They are champions, and congratulations to them for that. They have been very good this year."

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### CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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