



French legend Zinedine Zidane (L) shakes hands with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (R) as they pose for a photo before their meeting at the presidential palace in Jakarta on Friday.

Zidane visiting Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

French football hero Zinedine Zidane gave a spot of coaching to Indonesia's president Friday as he began a three-day visit in the world's fourth most populous nation to promote his sport to children.

Clad in a batik shirt, jeans and runners, the star helped President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono along with some of Indonesia's young players practise a few passes as they met in the gardens of the presidential palace.

"I'm sure I'm going to have great pleasure and a lot of fun here in Indonesia as this is my first visit," the 35-year-old told reporters.

"People talked a lot about the kindness of Indonesian people and I can already see (it) in the eyes of the people since I arrived at the airport." Turning to Yudhoyono he said, "I have a present for you Mr. President," before handing him two signed shirts and several soccer balls.

The president said he hoped Zidane would "inspire" Indonesia's young football players. A motorcade for Zidane is planned through the normally traffic-snarled streets of Jakarta early Sunday morning, said Taufik Yudi, head of sports and youth at the Jakarta governor's office.

The footballer will take part in a bid to break the national record for the most number of "futsal", the official indoor soccer game of FIFA, held at one time, he told AFP.

"About 2,000 people from various youth groups and sport clubs will play futsal... There will be 200 futsal fields along the streets," he said, adding that Zidane, Governor Sutiyoso and Indonesian ex-national player Roni Patinasarani would join a match.

Zidane is also expected to hold a coaching clinic for children during his visit in his role as an ambassador for children's programmes for French company Groupe Danone. He will give a press briefing on Sunday.

The former Real Madrid and Juventus midfielder won worldwide headlines when he was involved in a head-butting incident with Italy's Marco Materazzi during the final of the 2006 World Cup.

He retired from professional football after the tournament.

Football festival begins

AFP, Bangkok



The region's top teams will battle for supremacy as they try to put a dismal World Cup in Germany behind them when the Asian Cup finals kick off on Saturday.

The three-week festival should give an indication of the advances made by the continent after last year's World Cup where Japan, South Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia all failed to get past the first round.

Confederation newcomers Australia were the only standout.

If the last Asian Cup in 2004 is any guide, there is plenty to look forward to.

In China three years ago, coaches were sacked, fans got ugly, players brawled, 17 red cards were shown and politics were dragged into the mix.

Thailand host Iraq in the opening game at the Rajamangala National Stadium here on Saturday, with organisers anticipating a full-house and an entertaining showpiece to kick off the tournament.

Security has been beefed up, with police issuing reassurances that the safety of players and fans is paramount in a country ruled by a military junta.

"We are confident it will run smoothly as the participating

countries are not rivals. We don't expect anything bad or serious to happen," said Lieutenant General Phanu Kerdlarphol, deputy head of Bangkok's metropolitan police.

Aside from security, hosting the championships in four different countries has created logistical headaches for the Asian Football Confederation, with four football associations to deal with and four media centres to be accommodated.

The governing body insist it is all systems go, although they are unlikely to repeat the multiple-host exercise any time soon.

Australia, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iran are expected to be the main challengers in the 16-team, 32-match tournament.

The Socceros have brought a star-studded squad for their first outing in Asian football since defecting from the Oceania confederation last year, and open their account against Oman here on Sunday.

Coach Graham Arnold, who is preparing the side under the potential of being dumped after the tournament in favour of a higher-profile candidate in time for 2010 World Cup qualifiers, believes his side is hungry to win.

"A pass is reaching the semifinals, but I'll put pressure on myself by saying a failure is not making the final," he said ahead of the tournament.

Defending champions Japan will be looking to Scottish Player of the Year Shunsuke Nakamura to steer them into the knockout rounds,

although coach Ivica Osim warns his side are tired and could flop.

"You may be unconditionally expecting us to come home after the final on July 29 but there is the possibility that we will come home after just three (group) matches," he said this week.

Despite his apprehensions, Japan should sail through Group B leaving United Arab Emirates, Qatar and co-hosts Vietnam to fight for second place.

China, with coach Zhu Guanghu's job hanging by a thread, have had a miserable lead-up with defeats to Thailand and two American league sides.

But with their European-based players, led by captain Zheng Zhi, all available fortunes could turn, and Zhu insists China's preparations are on track.

"We're preparing step by step to get ready for the Asian Cup. We're on track," he said.

China reached the final of the last regional showpiece in 2004 but have failed to build on their success, dropping nearly 30 places in the FIFA rankings and failing to reach last year's World Cup.

They play co-hosts Malaysia on Tuesday before facing an in-form Iran and Uzbekistan in a tough Group C.

In Group D, an injury-hit South Korea, the 2002 World Cup semi-finalists, have their work cut out against triple champions Saudi Arabia, 2004 semi-finalists Bahrain and co-host Indonesia.

Denmark sanctions relaxed

AFP, Copenhagen

UEFA on Thursday announced a slight relaxing of the punishment handed out to Denmark after their ill-fated Euro 2008 qualifier against Sweden last month.

The match had to be stopped at the end with the score at 3-3 after the referee came under attack by a spectator with UEFA awarding Sweden a 3-0 victory.

European football's governing body also ordered Denmark to play their next four home qualifiers more than 250km from the national stadium in Copenhagen with the next two behind closed doors.

But on appeal UEFA has decided to allow the games against Spain and Lichtenstein be open to the public but to be staged 140km from Copenhagen.

The other two games against Iceland and Lithuania can be held at Parken national stadium and in front of spectators.

"We're relatively satisfied with this decision by the appeal's commission," said Danish football federation secretary general Jim Sjerne Hansen.

"I'm sure that the majority of fans of the national team are frustrated that because of the work of one stupid person we weren't able to play our games at Parken," he added.

Coach Morten Olsen expressed his displeasure however, saying: "Spain had the support of 70,000 fans when we played them in Madrid. Naturally then it's very tough not to play against the same team in our biggest stadium."

Sweden lead their Euro 2008 group from Spain by three points with Denmark in fourth place, eight points adrift but with a game in hand.

Voronin in Anfield

AFP, Liverpool

Ukraine striker Andriy Voronin officially became a Liverpool player on Friday and immediately insisted he had not come to Anfield to sit on the bench.

The former Bayer Leverkusen forward has moved to England on a free transfer after coming to the end of his contract in Germany and will be competing for a place in Rafael Benitez's side with another new signing, Fernando Torres, as well as Dirk Kuyt, Peter Crouch and Craig Bellamy.

But the 27-year-old, who agreed a four-year contract with Liverpool in February, appeared unfazed by the prospect of fierce competition for starting places.

"I have not made this decision just to sit on the bench," he said. "I have come to get in the team and form a partnership with someone."

Voronin was part of Ukraine's 2006 World Cup squad and has won 44 caps. He has spent all of his senior career in Germany, playing for Cologne, Mainz and Borussia Monchengladbach before joining Leverkusen.

Benitez said he was confident that Voronin would enhance a Liverpool squad aiming to mount a serious challenge for the Premiership title next season.

"He is a player with pace and with good movement," Benitez said. "He plays between the lines, between defenders. He is a good worker also, and he scores goals."

"He's not the kind of player you can talk about strengths because he has many things he can give to us."

MU don't worry Chelsea

AFP, London



Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon said Friday that he was not worried that Manchester United have taken over the mantle of Premier League big spenders.

United have gotten a headstart in the big money summer transfers, bringing in Owen Hargreaves, Nani and Anderson, as well as attempting to tie up a deal with Carlos Tevez.

Chelsea have been more modest with Steve Sidwell, Tal Ben Haim and Claudio Pizarro already recruited, Brazil defender Alex set to join from PSV Eindhoven and negotiations continuing with Lyon for Florent Malouda.

And Kenyon underlined that they were trying to move away from relying on the billions of owner Roman Abramovich in their bid to wrest the Premiership title back from United.

"I think it surprised everybody how quick they (United) came out and what they spent," said Kenyon.

"I'm not worried about what we've spent. We always look at how

they've spent versus how we've spent and that's fine but I don't think it's all about money.

"We're happy with where we are. We've not gone for big signings and not got them, we have our list and have three out of the four on the list."

"There is money and we're going to spend money on Malouda. If there are players we feel are right there is money available to spend on those. This is very much Jose's (Mourinho) wish in terms of what he wanted."

Another signing in the backroom staff is Avram Grant, who was technical director at Portsmouth.

"It's fair to say that we would expect to make an announcement with him joining us in the next few days," said Kenyon.

Chelsea are also negotiating new contracts for Frank Lampard and John Terry, with a degree of uncertainty over their futures at the club while discussions continue.

Kenyon has not received bids for the pair and insists any approach would be rejected.

"Revenue from the sale of those players is not even factored into our thinking," he added.

"They are all professional, we're

professional and you couldn't put a value on them saying we're going to sell them. I expect them to stay."

Kenyon also distanced the club from a move for Tottenham's Pascal Chimbonda and Sevilla's Dani Alves, who are both right-backs.

"We've got Glen Johnson coming back, Paulo (Ferreira) and Ben Haim can cover right-back as can (Lassana) Diarra."

Kenyon and Abramovich were in Cobham, Surrey, to open new state-of-the-art training facilities, which is part of their plan to develop players as well recruit top internationals.

"The importance of English footballers and homegrown talent is critical to meeting UEFA requirements and what we think is the culture of Chelsea," Kenyon said.

"It's critical to not have to spend 50 million pounds every year."

"Hopefully some of those lads we're bringing in now will make it into the first team. That is a conscious plan."

"If we're looking for a payback from the training facilities, it's getting one of our young boys into the first team every year after a period of time. That is the challenge of our academy and what this is all about."

Sven takes City helm

AFP, Manchester



Sven-Goran Eriksson's appointment as the new manager of Manchester City was confirmed on Friday when the former England boss signed a three-year contract with the Premiership club.

Eriksson immediately pledged to build a squad capable of delivering results in line with City's status as one of the best-supported clubs in England.

"This is an exciting challenge and I have already started making preparations for the new season," Eriksson said.

"I want to deliver a team that our fantastic fans can be proud of."

Eriksson, 59, has been out of work since stepping down as the

national team manager following England's quarterfinal exit from the 2006 World Cup.

Although he was regarded by some as having failed to get the best out of a talented generation of England players, Eriksson has an impeccable record in club football, having won titles in his native Sweden, Portugal and Italy.

"Sven's vast experience of managing top clubs to success around Europe is one of the qualities that attracted us to him," City's chief executive, Alistair Mackintosh said. "He also knows the English Premier League inside out during his time as national team manager."

Eriksson was catapulted into pole position to succeed Stuart Pearce at the City of Manchester stadium after Claudio Ranieri, the first choice of the club's new owner

Thaksin Shinawatra, opted to join Juventus.

England under-21 boss Pearce was sacked at the end of last season, which City ended just four points above the relegation zone.

Eriksson's task of reviving the club's fortunes has since been made harder by the departure of Joey Barton, the club's top scorer and best player last season, and former captain and defensive linchpin Sylvain Distin, as well as Trevor Sinclair, Stephen Jordan, Hatem Traorisi and DeMarcus Beasley.

Eriksson has reportedly told former Thai premier Thaksin that he needs at least ten new players to make City competitive and a transfer fund in the region of 50 million pounds (100 million dollars).

Chivu move stalls

INTERNET, undated

Christian Chivu has rejected a transfer to Real Madrid as the Spanish champions did not meet his wage demands.

The 26-year-old has decided not to renew his contract with his current club Roma.

A string of top European clubs including Lyon, Internazionale and Barcelona have trailed the defender, but reports claim that only Madrid's bid was accepted by the Giallorossi.

Roma chief Rosella Sensi said: "We have accepted their offer. However, the successful completion of the operation is now dependant on the player's personal desire."

Since the Romanian international has rejected the Primera Liga club's offer, his future now hangs in the balance with his agent Victor Becali hinting that a move to Inter is still a possibility.

Becali said: "Real Madrid's wage offer was way below Inter's proposal."

"Chivu will remain with Roma unless Real make a new offer."

"The ball is in Real Madrid's court now."

Chelsea close to Malouda

AFP, London

Chelsea hope to sign France winger Florent Malouda from Lyon by next week, according to chief executive Peter Kenyon.

Lyon are willing to let Malouda leave if they receive an offer that matches their 13.5 million pounds valuation and Kenyon admitted Chelsea have started negotiations over a deal.

He believes the transfer could be completed by the time Jose Mourinho's squad fly to Los Angeles for their pre-season tour on July 10.

"We've been in dialogue with Lyon and it would be nice to conclude a deal before going to Los Angeles next week," Kenyon told BBC Radio Five Live.

Malouda's agent Philippe Flavier is convinced the move will happen and he told the BBC: "I think the two clubs will find an agreement but I don't know when. The player hopes it will be as soon as possible."

It has been suggested that Mourinho's interest in Malouda could signal the departure of Arjen Robben, who is wanted by Real Madrid.

But Kenyon is adamant the Dutch winger still has a future at Stamford Bridge.



Thai volunteers participate in an opening ceremony rehearsal at Thailand's Ratchamangla Stadium on the eve of the first match of the Asian Cup in Bangkok on Friday.

Tevez move under scrutiny

Football

AFP, London

Argentina striker Carlos Tevez insisted Friday that he is determined to complete his "dream" move to Manchester United despite fears the deal could yet be blocked by the Premier League.

The complexities surrounding the 23-year-old's ownership are holding up a potential 30-million-pound (60 million dollar) deal being struck, with the League insisting that any deal be "done directly" with the Argentinian's current club West Ham rather than his agent Kia Joorabchian.

Tevez told the Daily Mail: "For me, Manchester United will be a

sensational destination and to be a member of Sir Alex Ferguson's squad will be absolutely spectacular."

"My dream is to be an idol in English football and I can achieve this now."

The Premier League insist any transfer fee for Tevez must go to the London club as he is still contracted to them for three years and the Hammers have terminated all agreements with Joorabchian.

United were close to agreeing a two-year deal with an option to sign Tevez for a further two years, but the deal has to satisfy the Premier League that Joorabchian is not being paid a transfer fee.

A Premier League spokesman said: "As far as we are concerned any deal to take Carlos Tevez

away from West Ham has to be done directly with the club."

The League's stance means that the Tevez move to Manchester United is far from sealed even if they have agreed a deal in principle with the player's representatives.

Tevez is still under contract for three more years with West Ham but the club has been speaking to Manchester United about a transfer, and the former Boca Juniors and Corinthians player is excited at the prospect.

"I am a player who thrives on challenges. I went to England to triumph in the Premiership and with West Ham I have achieved that first stage," said Tevez. "Now I'm ready to move on to the next stage."

Iraq playing for the people

AFP, Bangkok



Striker Younis Mahmoud says Iraq's players will mask their grief at the Asian Cup and play for the people of their strife-torn homeland.

Iraq shape up to co-hosts Thailand in Saturday's Asian Cup opener here with their country beset by sectarian bloodshed.

Mahmoud goes into the tournament mourning the loss of a close relative while another teammate Noor Sabri is grieving the recent killing of a loved one.

But the Iraqis, who inspired their nation by just missing out on a football bronze medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics, beating Portugal and Australia along the way, are steeling themselves for another tournament run.

Iraq, who have yet to get past the quarterfinal stage in five attempts at the Asian Cup, have never lost to Thailand in the tournament and are confident of it staying that way on Saturday.

This all comes against the backdrop of chaos at home and minimal preparation under their coach of just two months, Brazilian Jorvan Vieira.

"You all know the current situation in Iraq and the hard

circumstances we face and this of course affects the national team," Mahmoud said at a press conference here Friday.

"The Iraqi national team has its reputation in Asian and Arab football arenas and despite it all I am confident that we will make some good performances."

"We are not here just to take part in the competition but we are here to win. This is not only my personal opinion but all the players."

Mahmoud, who was topscorer in the Qatar league last season, said he had suffered personally in the Iraq sectarian and militia violence, where bomb attacks are an almost daily occurrence.

"I was personally affected with one close relative killed this year," he said.

"This is very difficult for me, and my teammate Noor Sabri, the goalkeeper, a very close relative of his was also killed. We put this behind us and we look forward to playing football here."

"This will not affect us and we try to do our best."

"In Iraq we say that the grief is in our hearts, but we will never show this to people."

"I hope everything will be okay in Iraq very soon and we will organise a future Asian Cup."

"We got good results at the Athens Olympics with good planning and many things were available more than they are now, but with coach Vieira it is quite different, it's more difficult," he said.

"He has had a very short preparation with the players and the majority of our players are playing abroad and it was very difficult to gather the players together, but I think Vieira has done good work and he can produce a good team."

"I am confident we will make a good result in this major tournament."

Vieira, who is well versed in Arab football with stints over 20 years in Morocco, Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, Oman and Saudi Arabia, says Iraq is ready for the challenge.

"There will be thousands of spectators and more pressure and Thailand will be more comfortable because they are playing with their people behind them, they will be tough," he said.

"But I have players with a lot of experience and they are used to playing. We are ready for all situations and we know we have to be ready, we know the weight of the competition."

"If we are afraid it is better to stay at home, we have to be ready to face all the problems."



Novak Djokovic of Serbia drops to his knees in celebration following his quarterfinal victory over Marcos Baghdatis of Cyprus at Wimbledon on Friday. Djokovic won the match 7-6, 6-7, 6-7, 4-6, 7-5.