

Chelsea striker Andriy Shevchenko is about to score from the penalty spot during their Premiership match against Aston Villa at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

Milan sanction Ronaldo talks

INTERNET, undated

Brazilian giants Flamengo claim they have started negotiations with Milan to sign striker Ronaldo.

After agreeing a six-month loan deal for Internazionale striker Adriano last week, Flamengo have now set their sights on another big-name signing.

Flamengo president Kleber Leite told www.globoesporte.com that talks have begun over acquiring the 31-year-old Brazilian striker from the European and recently-crowned FIFA Club World Cup champions.

"Flamengo have been authorised by Milan to talk to Ronaldo," said Leite. "We've had a preliminary conversation and noticed he wants to change the direction of his life."

The 1994 and 2002 World Cup winner has recently undergone fitness tests with Brazil team doctor Jose Luiz Runcio after suffering some pains in his left shin.

"I have a good opinion of Ronaldo. He needs to play, whether it is in Brazil or anywhere else," Runcio said.

Leite used Runcio's words to tantalise fans over the possible signing, adding: "Both we and Ronaldo are interested and Runcio has already given a positive medical report."

Referee pulls out gun!

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

A Malaysian referee took out his gun and fired warning shots in the air after a local soccer match turned unruly following the suspension of a player, a newspaper said on Tuesday.

The referee, who was also a policeman, ran to his patrol car to get his gun after players mobbed him for showing the red-card to one of them, the New Straits Times said.

"We are investigating as to whether the policeman was justified in taking out his firearm and discharging it, and also why he had it with him during the match," it quoted Hussin Ismail, police chief in the southern Johor state, as saying.

The policeman was taken into custody for suspected misuse of firearms.

Five players, aged between 23 and 40, were also being held for questioning and could be charged for rioting, the paper said.

Old boys not keen on return

INTERNET, undated

Argentine club River Plate are keen to repatriate Zaragoza players Roberto Ayala, Pablo Aimar and Andres D'Alessandro, the AS sports daily said on its website on Wednesday. AS said that new River Plate coach Diego Simeone is keen to sign the Zaragoza trio - all of whom started their careers at River, in the 1990s - in order to bring some experience into his young squad.

Canary Wharf's strategic advisor Howard Dawner said that the organisation has been considering prospects of building a football academy in Bangladesh.

"Nothing has been finalised about the academy yet. But we will talk with Emirates and Clifton Group about it," he said.

It was learned that the Canary Wharf officials will visit the United Arab Emirates on their way back to England to talk with their Emirates counterparts.

Clifton group is a British-based group owned by Bangladeshi expatriates.

Chief coach of the camp Golam Sarwar Tipu, meanwhile, was optimistic about the future of his Spanish club.

Fernandez has had several training-ground arguments with the explosive D'Alessandro, who was suspended by the club for four days in November because of his indiscipline.

The IFF confirmed that Santini and Portuguese coach Artur Jorge are possible options to lead Iran in the upcoming 2010 World Cup qualifiers.

The duo have come to an overall agreement with the transitory committee members, but both are still undecided over the financial terms of the proposal.

Santini, who had a spell in charge at Spurs in 2004, has asked for £1.5 million (£1.1 million) to sign a one-year deal.

However, IFF officials have not yet confirmed who will be chosen to take charge of Team Melli.

Wenger all for video trials

Football

THE INDEPENDENT

Arsene Wenger has upped the ante in the growing debate over the verbal abuse of players and managers by supporters by saying errant fans should be filmed and their families forced to view the results.

It would be a novel if not wholly practical solution to the problem but such is Wenger's undoubted frustration over the subject, born of having suffered himself over the years, that the Arsenal manager feels action of some sort should be taken.

"Most of it is abusive but why do people get away with it?" Wenger said. "Because they are in the mass of people. Sometimes the best thing to do is to film them and show the DVD to their family at home. That is the way to deal with it."

Wenger is not saying that either players or managers should be immune from criticism, but he believes a line should be drawn on what is acceptable.

"They are entitled to an opinion," he said of supporters. "They can say to the manager, 'You are useless', but you cannot say, 'You

are a fucking bastard'."

It is highly unusual to hear Wenger swear but to do so demonstrates his anger. "I personally, I think I have a long and heavy experience of it," he said, in reference to the abuse he has suffered since his arrival in English football 11 years ago. There have been nasty terrace chants and taunts from the totally unfounded personal allegations which continue to this day.

The Manchester United manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, complained over abuse he suffered at the Emirates Stadium earlier this season, prompting Wenger to say that he could detail a long history of such behaviour at Old Trafford. More recently, Portsmouth's Harry Redknapp reacted angrily at Villa Park and Sol Campbell called the BBC last week to ask to be interviewed about the issue after again suffering the attentions of supporters of his former club, Tottenham Hotspur.

"Sol has a big point," Wenger said of the man he signed from Spurs. "Why should we not be respected just because we are on the pitch? I agree completely with him."

The pair will meet later today when Wenger takes Arsenal to Fratton Park as they try to maintain

their slender lead at the top of the Premier League. In fact, by the time they kick off this evening they could be trailing Manchester United, who face Sunderland, and Roy Keane, earlier in the day. Keane also weighed into the debate over the abuse of players last week.

Wenger's resources are wearing a little thin and his team were fortunate to gain three points against Spurs on Saturday. But, with the African Nations Cup looming, which will deprive him of Kolo Toure and Emmanuel Eboue, Wenger said he did not expect to sign another central defender in the January transfer window. He could also lose Alex Song if the Cameroonian is called up, so Johan Djurou has been recalled from Birmingham City.

"We could be left short," Wenger said. "Even with Johan we would then be left with just three specialists centre-backs. If I signed another one we'd have too many after the African Cup of Nations. Sometimes you just have to suffer during the tournament and let your players play."

Wenger, who must resist attempts by Lassana Diarra to leave when Wenger takes Arsenal to Fratton Park as they try to maintain

WI ride on Gayle

Cricket

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Captain Chris Gayle smashed an explosive half-century as the West Indies made a good start on the first day of the first Test against South Africa at St George's Park Wednesday.

The West Indies were 190 for three at tea after being sent in to bat on what proved to be an easy-paced pitch.

Gayle hammered 66 off 48 balls in his first innings since injuring his right hamstring against Zimbabwe 26 days ago.

Mainly through Gayle, who was a doubtful starter until declaring himself fit shortly before the start, the West Indies raced to 130 for two at lunch but the scoring rate slowed after the break as the South Africans opted for a more defensive bowling line.

Only 60 runs were added in 28 overs between lunch and tea but importantly for the West Indies, who have been criticised for a lack of batting discipline, they only lost one wicket.

Gayle and Daren Ganga put on 98 for the first wicket in just 16 overs but both were out within the space of three balls.

Ganga edged a drive at a wide ball from Andre Nel and was caught behind by Mark Boucher after making 33 off 57 deliveries with four fours.

In the next over Gayle cracked left-arm spinner Paul Harris' first ball of the match through extra cover for four but was then caught at slip by Jacques Kallis when he attempted to drive the next ball. He hit 13 boundaries.

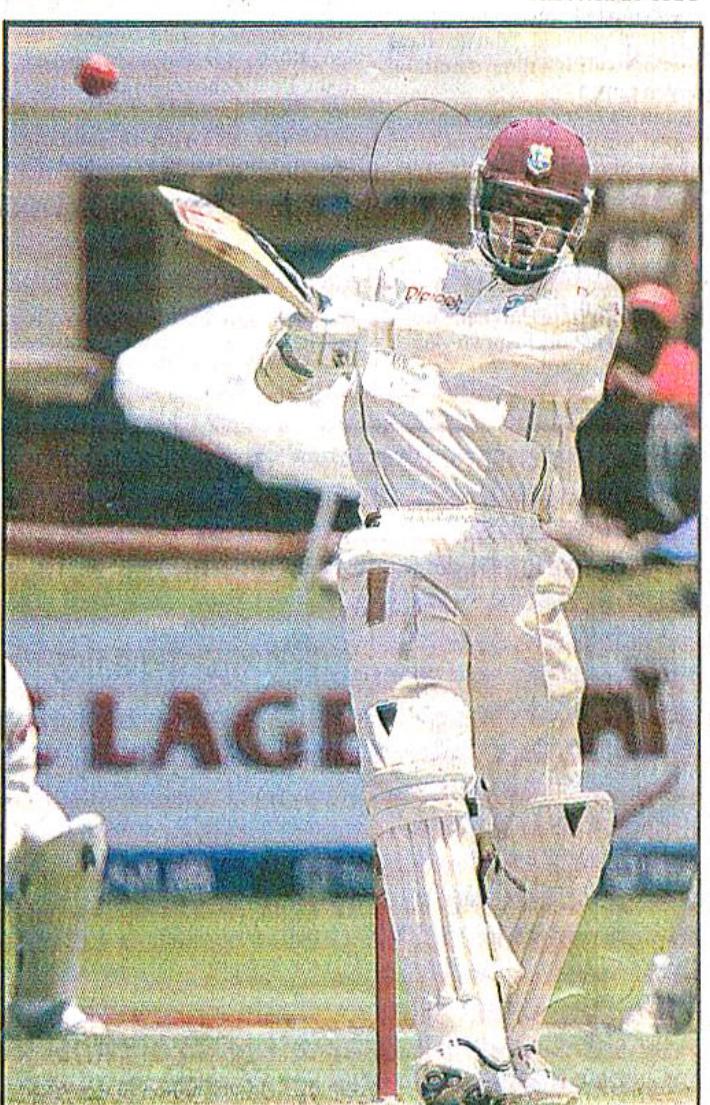
Runako Morton and Marlon Samuels put on 64 for the third wicket but it became slow going before Morton was caught at backward point off Makhaya Ntini for 33 off a ball that bounced higher than expected and looped off a thick edge.

Samuels was 44 not out at tea. He was twice "caught" at first slip off Dale Steyn, on 14 and 20, but was firstly saved by a call of no-ball, which initially he did not hear, and on the second occasion because

the ball looped off his right glove after he had taken it off his bat.

Gayle barely managed a jog in his pre-match fitness trial but after a discussion with coach John Dyson he took his place as West Indian captain for the first time in a Test match.

He put the injury to the test when he scored his first run with a sharp single off Steyn, having to dive to make the crease, but then



BANGLADSHI West Indies captain Chris Gayle pulls the ball over mid-wicket during his scintillating 66 against South Africa on the opening day of the first Test at St George's Park in Port Elizabeth on Wednesday.

Almunia eyeing England switch

Football

AFP, London

Spanish goalkeeper Manuel Almunia has refused to rule out switching his national colours to England.

The 30-year-old Arsenal keeper was born in Pamplona but is yet to receive a call from Spain's national team boss Luis Aragones, and in a year he will qualify for England.

One of the first tasks for new England coach Fabio Capello will be to solve his own goalkeeping conundrum with Paul Robinson and Scott Carson having committed expensive errors during the doomed Euro 2008 qualifying campaign.

Almunia is currently the informal goalkeeper in the Premier League after his penalty save in the

2-1 win over Tottenham at the weekend, but Capello will have to wait another year to pick him.

"I will study my situation," said Almunia.

"Spain have never called me. And, if other people want me, I have to study my situation and take a decision because it is good for me; I will not close myself to anything."

"I would be very pleased to take a decision that would make me happy and my family happy."

"I always say I have to wait until that moment to see what is happening at that moment, or which goalkeeper England has, or which goalkeeper Spain has - look at the situation and take a decision."

Almunia admitted it would be a tough decision to turn his back on his country.

"But that's football," he said. "It

would be a big decision but I wouldn't care if I had two days to take it."

Arsenal are top of the Premier League but Almunia feels there is plenty to come from Arsene Wenger's side.

"We are not playing too well now, but we have taken three points against Spurs at the weekend," he said.

"I think we have to improve away from home because now we have two consecutive games which are very difficult, Portsmouth (Wednesday) and Everton (Saturday)."

"After those two games, we will show how strong is Arsenal or what Arsenal can win this year."

"The season is long, but at the moment, we have played 18 games and we are at the top and that means something."

England beckons young booters

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

but so far, we have ensured at least 15 players will go," said Zakir Khan, community affairs manager of Canary Wharf yesterday.

He was talking to reporters at the BKSP, where British aviation minister Jim Fitzpatrick, MP, went to visit the 18-month-old youth camp.

Fitzpatrick, on a personal visit to Bangladesh, enjoyed a superb day out and also scored the lone goal -- a spectacular headed effort by the 55-year-old -- for the Canary Wharf trainees in an exhibition match against veteran footballers featuring the likes of Aslam, Sabir and Kaiser Hamid.

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British Aviation Minister Jim Fitzpatrick (second from right) hands over a jersey to a young footballer of the Canary Wharf coaching camp at the BKSP yesterday.