

Brazil superstar Ronaldo (R) of Corinthians celebrates scoring his second goal against Ponte Preta during their Paulista Championship encounter at the Pacaembu Stadium in Sao Paulo on Wednesday.

#### Riera fires Turkey warning

AFP, Madrid

Liverpool's Albert Riera warned his Spanish teammates that Turkey, who face the Euro 2008 champions in a World Cup qualifying game on Saturday, are a "very aggressive" team which "plays as

"Turkey is a proud team, very patriotic," he said. "They have a very aggressive game, hard... It's a team that plays as one," the midfielder said on Wednesday.

Valencia's Juan Mata, who replaces the injured Andres Iniesta in midfield, said Turkey - who reached the Euro 2008 semifinals - is Spain's toughest opponent in the group.

Spain top their 2010 World Cup qualifying group, with four wins from four games, and have only conceded one goal in their last 10 matches.

Turkey are second in the group, which also includes Belgium, Bosnia Herzegovina, Estonia and Armenia.

#### Blatter's plan shocks FIFA vice-president

AFP, Seoul

FIFA vice-president Chung Mong-Joon said Thursday he was "shocked and disappointed" at Sepp Blatter's proposal to enforce an age limit on Olympic football players.

Chung said he would launch a campaign against the FIFA president's move last week to cap the limit at 20 for players in the 2012 Olympics and do away with wildcards.

Previously, teams could field athletes aged up to 23, plus three over-age players.

Blatter's proposal, which requires approval by the FIFA general assembly in June in the Bahamas, "runs against the spirit of the Olympics, Chung told reporters.

#### Real expecting record revenues

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid announced Thursday it expected record revenues for the 2008/2009 season of 407 millions euros (552 million dollars), up from 366 million previously.

The figure is above the 400 million euros budgetary forecast, and pre-tax profits for the season, ending June 30, should rise to 58 million euros from 51 million in the 2007/08 season, the club said.

The optimistic forecast comes days before a general meeting on Sunday that could decide on the date of the next election for club president in

early June: Real said its debt by June 30 should fall to 125 million euros from 200 million last year.

Real's arch-rival Barcelona has forecast a budget of 380 million euros for the season, with a debt of 180 million euros.

The two football clubs, which currently hold the top two positions in the Primera Liga, are among the most profitable in the world.

Both have recently benefited from a sharp jump in earnings from television

# 'Germany lack top 'keepers'

Football

AFP, Berlin

Germany does not currently have a world-class goalkeeper worthy of helping the national team win next year's World Cup, insists both ex-captain Oliver Kahn and national goalkeeping coach Andreas Koepke.

"We have very good goalkeepers in the Bundesliga, but from my point of view we have no absolute world-class goalkeepers at present," Koepke told Sport Bild on Wednesday ahead of Saturday's World Cup qualifier against Liechtenstein.

And Kahn - who led Germany to the 2002 World Cup final defeat against Brazil said the national team is lacking consistency from any of the current crop of 'keep-

"This situation, which does not please me at all, is that all the current goalkeepers have all fallen into a rut more closely. and none of them have a high-level of consistency," said Kahn, who retired last

While Germany have been is the strongest mentally." able to rely on the likes of Sepp Maier, Kahn and then Jens Hansi Flick poured cold water Lehmann in recent years, the on the debate. current first-choice Rene Adler of Leverkusen is not our goalkeepers, they are all

assured of his place.

Werder Bremen's Tim Wiese or Schalke 04's Manuel Neuer,

Bundesliga clubs. Adler was in goal when Germany beat Russia and Wales last October to go top of their World Cup qualifier group.

consistently produce high-

class performances for their

But he was also between the posts when Germany were humbled in their last two friendlies at home to England and Norway, but his closest rival Enke has already conceded 52 goals in a struggling Hanover team.

For the next two World Cup qualifiers - against Liechtenstein in Leipzig on Saturday and Wales in Cardiff on April 1 - Adler and Enke will fight for the Number One shirt.

But Kahn is not surprised neither player has merited selection through lack of consistent performances. "It is a lot of pressure. When

you are in that position, your performances are criticised

"Nevertheless, it is always the same situation. "It is not only about who

has the biggest talent, but who But Loew's assistant coach

"We are convinced about high-class and I am not so sure And none of his rivals, Kahn and Lehmann were Hanover's Robert Enke, always world-class."

## Ronaldo

AGENCIES, undated

Ronaldo scored twice to lead Corinthians to 2-2 draw with Ponte Preta on Wednesday in the Sao Paulo state champion-

the first time since joining Corinthians, Ronaldo has chalked up a total of four goals from five matches with the team.

The almost 20,000 fans that packed Sao Paulo's Pacaembu stadium cheered and applauded the striker's two goals and the several scoring opportunities he created. Ponte Preta midfielder

Leandrinho opened the scor-

ing in the 32nd minute after receiving a pass from defender Edilson. Four minutes later Ronaldo made it 1-1 with a penalty shot awarded after he was knocked

to the ground by Ponte Preta defender Gum. In the 57th minute Ronaldo gained possession of the ball, beat at least two defenders and with a powerful left foot strike

sent the ball into the right hand corner of the Ponte Preta goal. Ponte Preta were reduced to 10 men when defender Edilson was sent off but the visitors gained an unexpected point

when Gum headed home an equaliser with 14 minutes left. Ronaldo has now scored four goals in five games for Corinthians since his comeback on March 5.

The draw moved Corinthians up to 34 points, six behind leaders Palmeiras and one ahead of Sao Paulo, who scored a 2-1 away win over Noroeste in Bauru.

## Darren eyes Dutch scalp

AFP, Luss



Darren Fle- around. tcher believes George FIFA Burley's side can stun

Holland in Amsterdam - if they right the wrongs from the last meeting between the coun-The Manchester United

star still winces when he recalls the 6-0 drubbing the Scots suffered at the hands of the Dutch in a play-off to qualify for Euro 2004. But, while Fletcher is full of

admiration for Saturday's opponents in a World Cup qualifier, he is convinced a lack of concentration from his own side and an overattacking approach cost them thing from the game. in the last meeting.

to be learned and, ahead of his United we are often in the return to the Amsterdam ascendancy and trying to Arena, said: "We were on the break teams down. It flips a

last time and we got beat 6-0. I Scotland think there will be more of a midfielder cautious approach this time

> "Going back to the game, perhaps the most disappointing thing for me was that we lost four goals from set-pieces. If you get outplayed, you can hold your hands up and accept it.

> "But to lose goals from setpieces was disappointing. We can't let that happen and our concentration levels have to be good. It needs everyone to get on the ball and show confidence. If we stand back and give them too much respect, we will get punished."

Boss George Burley is likely to use Kenny Miller as a lone striker but Fletcher insists they will have to do more than defend if they are to take any-

offensive from the start the little bit with Scotland, where we are resilient and hard to break down.

"But it can't just be backs to the wall and the manager has stressed there has to be a spell when we are good enough to keep possession and create chances. It's a lottery trying to sit behind the ball for 90 minutes.

"They are one of the best sides in the world. In the Euros, especially in the group stages, it was total football and they were playing some of the best football in the competition. Their players are at a peak age of 25 and 26 and they are very confident"If Burley's side lose in Holland, it makes Wednesday night's match against Iceland at Hampden even more important if they are to have any chance of finishing runners-up and

qualifying for the play-offs. Scotland have not qualified He added: "It is sometimes for a major tournament since He is desperate for lessons difficult as at Manchester the World Cup in France in 1998 and the midfielder is desperate for that run to end.

He added: "People are talking about Iceland as the mustwin game out of the two. But we can't dismiss the Holland game as we have proved before that we are capable of going away and getting results.

"We did it against France in the last campaign. If we can get anything from the Holland game it well help us massively. We are not thinking of defeat, but if we were to lose, it's important that we can pick ourselves for the Iceland game.

"I want to play in a World Cup. It doesn't get better than that. As a nation we haven't achieved it for a long time and we're desperate for the chance. We have been 'nearly men' on a couple of occasions and now we want to lose the tag and make the last step. We believe that with a bit of luck and some good performances we can achieve that."

## Asian talent Football

AFP, London

SPORT

Chelsea have launched an initiative aimed at identifying promising young players from a south Asian background in a bid to address the community's chronic under-representation in English football.

Britain is home to over three million people with family roots in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka but the country's largest ethnic minority has virtually no presence in the national sport at the professional level.

Zesh Rehman, the former Fulham defender, is one of a handful of players from a south Asian background to have made it to the Premier League, and he is backing Chelsea's move to stage a weekend of trials specifically for young Asians in early May.

Rehman, who is now at Bradford on loan from Championship side QPR, said: "I think clubs need to take a more active role and engage with their communities and I thinkit's a great project.

"Chelsea are a Premier League club with a massive profile across the world I am sure other clubs can look at that and use it as a template for future reference."

Chelsea's initiative is being backed by the Football Association, the anti-racist organisation Kick it Out, and the Asian Media Group.

The club is planning to stage open trials for 10 to 14year-olds over the Mayday holiday weekend and will offer residential trials at the club's academy to any youngsters deemed to have the potential to become the next John Terry or Frank Lampard.

The lack of Asians in English football has been attributed to cultural factors such as parental pressure for boys to concentrate on academic studies, and the fact that soccer is not as popular as cricket among many south Asian families.

But there is also a concern that promising young players from an Asian background get overlooked by club scouts because of negative stereotyping, notably a perception that they are insufficiently athletic to make the grade.

#### France call-up Remy, Luyindula

AFP, Paris

Strikers Loic Remy and Peguv Luyindula were called-up into the French squad on Wednesday for back-to-back World Cup qualifiers with Lithuania following a training ground injury suffered by Jimmy Briand.

Briand was hurt after colliding with goalkeeper Cedric Carrasso in training ahead of Saturday's trip to Lithuania and the return clash on Wednesday.

#### 'Juve will sign one star in summer'

AFP, Rome

Juventus chief executive Jean-Claude Blanc said on Wednesday that the Italian giants will sign a star player in the summer.

Inter Milan by seven points in Serie A with only nine games remaining. Following their elimination

Juve are currently trailing

from the Champions League by Chelsea earlier this month, club coach Claudio Ranieri said they needed bigger stars to compete for the top hon-

And Blanc has now prom ised him at least one.

"I'm not talking about the transfer market but what I can tell you is that we will buy a star player," Frenchman Blanc told investors at a conference in Milan.

"One who can herald a new era of success." Juve are not out of the cham-

pionship race but will need to not lose any more ground on Inter ahead of the pair's clash in Turin next month.

Were they to win that and reduce the gap between the two to no more than four points, Juve would certainly be in with a chance of claiming their first title since 2003. "We'll see what shape we're

in at the direct clash between the two teams," added Blanc. "Until it's mathematically impossible, we'll keep fighting."

## Chelsea Whelan slams Ashley want South-

AFP, London

Wigan's chairman Dave Whelan has launched an extraordinary attack on his Newcastle counterpart Mike Ashley, claiming he knew the Magpies were set to nosedive as soon as he saw Ashley wearing a replica shirt in the boardroom.

Currently mired in the relegation zone with eight games to save themselves, Newcastle are paying a high price for Ashley's fallout with Kevin Keegan, whose September departure was followed by an ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the owner to sell the club.

Ashley, launched his tirade after claiming there was "no Steve Bruce, who comes from charge of the beleaguered club, as long as Ashley is in charge.

just after Mike Ashley had bought it he turned up in the boardroom in a pair of jeans, a pair of trainers and a replica shirt," Whelan said. "Immediately he did that, the club's

"You don't do things like that in football. He's got no class whatsoever."

Earlier this week, Whelan season. accused Ashley of endangering 12,000 jobs by trying to get JJB Sports, a chain of sports-Whelan, who is a business wear shops set up by the newcompany.

as well as a football rival to Wigan chairman, placed in receivership.

Whelan sold JJB in 2007 chance" of Wigan manager but has bought back the company's gym clubs in a the Newcastle area, taking move which has secured the under-pressure retail group's short-term future. According to Whelan, Ashley wanted to "When I first went there see JJB go bust so he could pick up their outlets cheaply to add them to his own Sports Direct retail group.

Despite the sale of its gyms business, JJB remains at the mercy of its lenders, according to analysts, and the company will relinquish its naming rights to Wigan's stadium at the end of this

Instead, the ground will be known as the DW Stadium, taking the name of Whelan's

### Pele backtracks

AP, Rio de Janeiro



soccer stars Robinho and Ronaldo have been misinterpreted.

Pele says his

about sup-

posed drug

"It's unfair to talk of drugs in football just because of one or two cases, as happened with Ronaldo and Robinho, who had that problem," Pele said last week at a tourism conference.

The conference was closed to the media but Sao Paulo radio station Jovem Pan managed to record Pele's remarks.

An unidentified spokesman for Pele told the Jornal do Brasil newspaper on Wednesday that Pele was questioned about general problems soccer players had faced. While his quote seemed to connect Robinho and Ronaldo along with Diego Maradona to past drug use, the spokesman said that was not Pele's intention.

Instead, the spokesman said Pele was referring to the sexual assault allegations Robinho faces in England and an encounter Ronaldo had last year with three transvestites in On Tuesday, Robinho's

representatives said they wanted Pele to explain the comments and apologize if they were accurately reported. "A formal retraction from

Pele will be requested, if what he said was not misinterpreted by the media that published it," a statement on Robinho's personal Web site said. "And if Pele does not come forward, he will have to deal with his very unfortunate comment in "tuur

By Wednesday, that statement was taken down from Robinho's Web site and replaced with Pele's comments given to Globo.

"He is our son and thank God he came out of Santos, where he had our supervision," Pele said. "It was a misunderstanding because I didn't say anything like this. When somebody tells me something like this, I say: 'Bring me the tape."

The recording of Pele's comments were widely dispersed on the Web sites of Brazilian media outlets.

It was not clear if Robinho's threat of legal action still stood. He was in Brazil training with the national team and was not immediately available for comment.

Calls to a spokesman for Ronaldo, who has declined all comment, went unanswered.

### Make or break for Saudis

AFP, Singapore



Japan and North Korea go in search

Brazil midfielder Ronaldinho does a trick during a training session

boost their World Cup final Iran. hopes, while heavyweights Iran and Saudi Arabia meet in a must-win match in Tehran.

in Teresopolis on Wednesday.

The Japanese, who trail Australia by two points after four games in Asian qualifying Group A, want to make the most of home advantage against Bahrain to ramp up the pressure on the Socceroos, who play Uzbekistan next Wednesday.

In Saturday's other Group A game, the Uzbekis, who have just one point so far, host Qatar, who have four points.

Equally critical are the matches in Group B, where North Korea lag South Korea by a point. They play basement team United Arab Emirates in Pyongyang before travelling to Seoul to take on their southern neighbours next week.

With South Korea on eight points, the North on seven, Iran on six and the Saudis on four, the outcome of this next round of matches could have farreaching consequences, with just the top two from each group qualifying.

play off with the winner facing Beijing.

New Zealand to claim the fifth slot available for South Africa

in 2010. Saudi Arabia have made the last four World Cup finals but are in danger of missing out on a fifth with a daunting task ahead in Tehran's Azadi Stadium against Ali Daei's

They will be without 2007 Asian Player of the Year Yasser Al Qahtani after the striker was suspended for failing to turn up at their training camp on Tuesday. It is a big setback for coach

Jorge Peseiro whose team could only manage a goalless draw in Riyadh against Iraq in a friendly last weekend. "We wanted to prepare the team for the Tehran clash and

to know more about some players," said Peseiro of that match. 'We have a lot to do when

to win. It was a chance for me

we face Iran.' A trip to Pyongyang and the Kim Il-Sung Stadium is never easy, but despite having just one point from four matches the United Arab Emirates refuse to abandon their dreams of reaching the

But they know they must beat North Korea to stay alive.

"The task is difficult but not impossible," said UAE FA official Mohammad Mattar Ghorab, whose team has been The third-placed teams preparing for their trip in

"We have complete confidence and faith in our players and their capabilities to

achieve positive results." Japan are well placed behind Australia but coach Takeshi Okada, who has called up his big-name European stars led by Celtic's Shunsuke Nakamura, warned that Bahrain will be no pushovers.

"I think Bahrain are a tough match-up for any team, not just us," he said ahead of the match in Saitama. "They don't really take the game to anyone, but their style

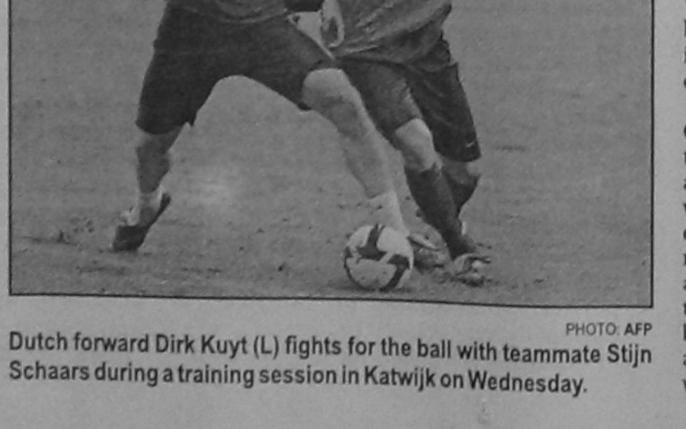
rather is to take away your strengths and make the game difficult for you." The last time the two teams met was during qualification for the 2011 Asian Cup in January. Then, for the second

time in the space of 12 months, Japan lost. Wednesday's other match sees Uzbekistan desperate to claim all three points at home to Qatar before they make the trek to Australia next week to face Pim Verbeek's men in

Sydney.

Coach Mirdjalal Kasimov has named three new caps in his provisional squad, including midfielder Stanislav Andreev, goalkeeper Michael Naumov and defender Artyom Filiposyan.

In-form striker Anvarjon Soliev as well as Islom Inomov and Ulugbek Bakaev have all been recalled.



# a brace Playing the full 90 minutes for