

# Togo team attacked

## Two players shot

Football

AFP, Luanda

Togo's football team would decide Saturday whether to pull out of the African Nations Cup after hooded gunmen ambushed their vehicle killing the driver and injuring nine, the squad's captain said.

African football officials were also due in Angola's restive Cabinda enclave to review security and probe the circumstances surrounding the deadly attack.

Players and others on board, fearing for their lives, covered under seats for 20 minutes to escape the hail of bullets during Friday's assault. Squad member Thomas Dossevi said it was as if they had been "fired on like dogs."

Togo team captain and Manchester City striker Emmanuel Adebayor said he would convene a meeting for the squad would discuss whether to stay in the tournament.

"I think a lot of players want to leave," he told BBC Radio Five Live in Britain early Saturday.

"They have seen one of their team-mates have a bullet in his body, who is crying, who is losing consciousness and everything," said Adebayor, who was shown on Angolan television looking dazed and in tears shortly after the attack.

"If the security is not sure then we will be leaving tomorrow... I don't think they will be ready to give their life."

Two players were among the injured when gunmen fired at the team's vehicles, killing a driver, after they crossed into Angola's restive Cabinda province from Congo-Brazzaville on Friday.

Organisers, who have pledged that the tournament will go ahead, said a delegation would be in Cabinda on Saturday morning while Angola's Prime Minister Paulo Kassoma was set to meet the Confederation of African Football (CAF) president Issa Hayatou.

The meeting would "take decisions to guarantee the smooth running of the competition,"

the body said Friday.

Dossevi -- one of the strongest in African football -- said the assailants "were hooded and armed to the teeth."

"We stayed under the seats for 20 minutes. It was horrible," he told AFP.

Two English Premiership players -- Adebayor and Aston Villa midfielder Moustapha Salifou -- emerged unharmed from the attack, their clubs said.

Angola's government denounced the attack by the separatist Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC), and in a statement vowed to "reinforce and strengthen all security mechanisms" for the games.

FLEC, embroiled in a decades-long separatist struggle, confirmed the one fatality and said: "This operation is only the start of a series of targeted actions that will continue in all the territory of Cabinda."

FLEC signed a peace deal with Angola's government in 2006, but has recently claimed a spate of attacks in the province, which is physically separated from the rest of the country by a strip of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

CAF spokesman Souleymane Habuba questioned why Togo had elected to travel by road.

"CAF's regulations are clear: teams are required to fly rather than travel by bus," he said.

He added: "Our great concern is for the players, but the championship goes ahead."

Togo, one of Africa's top sides and who appeared in the last World Cup in Germany, were scheduled to play Ghana on Monday in Cabinda.

In Togo's capital Lome news of the shooting shocked locals.

"I'm just all shook up. I can't understand what happened," said fan Armel Adjoun.

"In the normal order of things, Togo shouldn't play" the tournament, he added.

Despite long-running security concerns, oil-rich Cabinda is to host seven Nations Cup matches this month in Angola's biggest sporting event since the end of a 27-year civil war in 2002.



A photo grab from Televisao Publico de Angola shows Togo captain Emmanuel Adebayor (R) being comforted by an unidentified teammate in Cabinda on Friday. Adebayor said that many of his teammates wanted to leave the African Nations Cup after gunmen opened fire on the bus carrying the team to the tournament in Angola.

PHOTO: AFP

# Togo withdraws

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Togo have withdrawn from the Africa Cup of Nations following the gun attack on the team bus that killed the driver and two staff members yesterday as it crossed the border from the Democratic Republic of Congo into the Angolan enclave of Cabinda.

The Togo goalkeeper, Kossi Agassa, who plays for the French club Istres told France-Info radio today that a Togo assistant coach and a spokesperson had died as well as the driver.

Agassa also confirmed that a second team goalkeeper was badly injured and had been transported urgently to South Africa for treatment. Local officials had said on Friday that eight other people had also suffered injuries.

Togo's midfielder Alaixys Romao confirmed the players were at the airport waiting to return home, and were also encouraging other teams to pull out of the competition. "We're waiting for the plane to return to Lome," the Grenoble player told L'Equipe.

"We're also talking to the other teams in our group to try to convince them to boycott the competition too." Togo were due to kick off their campaign against Ghana on Monday.

The Manchester City striker Emmanuel Adebayor admitted in the aftermath of the attack that many of the squad's players wanted to go home. "I think a lot of players want to leave. I don't think they want to be at this tournament any more because they have seen their death already," he said.

"Most of the players want to go back to their family. No one can sleep after what they have seen. They have seen one of their team-mates have a bullet in his body, who is crying, who is losing consciousness and everything."

Togo's coach Hubert Velud claimed the authorities should seriously consider whether to call off the whole tournament, although the Angolan authorities insist their country is committed to hosting a secure competition and said they would step up security.

"We can at least pose ourselves that question," Velud said. "It's an act of barbarism while we are here to celebrate African football. We left the hospital a short time ago to come to the centre for the teams in the competition. We stayed in the hospital a long time so that we could be very united."

"In these situations you become a bit paranoid, you doubt everything. We don't feel that the authorities are taking this very seriously. I don't mean that they want to hush up the matter, but almost."

## More injury woes for Robben, Ribery

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich's France midfielder Franck Ribery will definitely miss the restart of the Bundesliga next week while Arjen Robben broke off training in pain in Dubai on Friday.

Dutch coach Louis van Gaal ruled out Ribery for the visit of Hoffenheim next Friday and faces fresh worries over winger Robben who appeared to twist his ankle in a tackle during training at the team's winter camp.

"The aim was to bring Robben and Ribery back into the squad but we weren't able to do that," van Gaal said Friday before the new scare over Dutch international Robben.

Ribery has been unable to take part in any training sessions at as a result of a toe inflammation.

"It's disappointing that he hasn't been able to train with the team," van Gaal said.

"This week was very important for our teamwork, but now we'll have to reintroduce him during a competitive period. That's hard for him, for me, and for the other players."

"I think he'll be able to train with us next week. He will not be in the squad for the Hoffenheim game."

Ribery has struggled with his fitness so far this season, playing for the full 90 minutes in just two matches and making an appearance in only nine of Bayern's 26 competitive games.

Robben had only just returned to full fitness after missing more than two months following knee surgery.

After collapsing in pain in training Friday afternoon, his right ankle was packed in ice and a compression. It was not initially known how serious the injury was.

## Mancini wants Richards stay

SOCCERNET

Roberto Mancini insists Manchester City defender Micah Richards is staying at Eastlands, claiming the youngster is an important part of his plans.

Reports have suggested Harry Redknapp is preparing a bid to bring Richards to Tottenham. However, ESPN SoccerNet understands there has been no contact between the clubs and Mancini has revealed he will brush aside any attempts to lure the right-back away from the club.

"How could I afford to lose Micah? We have only four fit defenders at the moment," he told the club website. "Anyway, I rate him very highly. He has played for England and has great potential for the future. It is important that he stays."

Mancini is also eager to keep Roque Santa Cruz who has been strongly linked with a move to Espanyol.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

# EPL clubs concerned

Football

AFP, London

Premier League clubs have expressed concern for the safety of their African footballers after gunmen killed a driver and injured nine when opening fire on the Togo team bus as it travelled to the African Cup of Nations in Angola.

Manchester City's Emmanuel Adebayor and Moustapha Salifou of Aston Villa were among the players left scurrying for safety as their team bus came under attack on Friday.

It was later confirmed a driver of a team convoy bus was killed, and nine of the delegation were injured.

As the African Football Confederation warned off calls for the tournament to be scrapped, City and Villa, among others in the English Premier League, expressed concern for the safety of their players.

Togo captain Adebayor was unharmed in the attack however City have discussed the incident with officials from the Football Association.

A statement on the club's website read: "Manchester City can confirm that striker Emmanuel Adebayor is uninjured after this afternoon's attack on the Togo team bus in Angola."

"Club officials have spoken with Adebayor and, though shaken by the terrible events, he is unharmed."

"The club would like to send its condolences to the family of the driver and sends best

wishes for a speedy recovery to the injured.

"We are currently in talks with the Football Association over what may happen next."

Aston Villa manager Martin O'Neill told the club's official website, www.avfc.co.uk: "I am really shocked to hear about this."

"Obviously I am pleased and relieved to hear that Moustapha is okay and that he is not among the injured people."

"The club have been in contact with him and he has reassured us that he is okay but he is extremely shocked and upset, which he would be in these circumstances."

Portsmouth, who have several stars at the event, have also contacted the FA asking them to demand assurances from FIFA that the players' safety will be guaranteed, and calling for them to be sent home if it cannot.

A spokesman for Portsmouth said: "We will be asking the FA to talk to FIFA to ensure the players' safety. That is paramount, and if the players' safety can't be ensured, then the players should be sent home."

Two players, goalkeeper Kodjovi Obilale and defender Serge Akakpo were among the wounded, squad member Thomas Dossevi, who plays for French second division side Nantes, told AFP.

Dossevi said they had been "fired on like dogs."

"One of them (Akakpo) took a bullet in the back and the other (Obilale) was hit in the kidneys," Dossevi said. "The assailants were hooded and armed to the teeth. We stayed under the seats for 20 minutes. It was horrible."

# Carlo's no to Pazzini

Football

SOCCERNET

Carlo Ancelotti has firmly denied having any interest in Sampdoria star Giampaolo Pazzini, while another Italian striker, Vincenzo Iaquinta, has stated he will not be moving to Stamford Bridge.

Despite Ancelotti's pledge that he will strip naked if he reinforces his squad in January, Chelsea continue to be linked with a wide range of players with Pazzini and Iaquinta the latest in a list that includes Atletico Madrid star Sergio Aguero.

Sampdoria even claimed on Thursday that the Premier League club have shown an interest in Pazzini, who has scored 10 goals in 19 domestic

appearances this season to underline an impressive reputation in his home country.

But with Ancelotti placing his faith in Nicolas Anelka and Daniel Sturridge while Didier Drogba is at the African Nations Cup, the Chelsea manager is not interested in pursuing a deal for Pazzini in January and has dismissed suggestions that sporting director Frank Arnesen has been scouting the player.

"We don't have any news," said Ancelotti. "We stay with the same squad. I have said that a lot of times. We have a good squad and have a very good striker in Daniel Sturridge. We don't need to have another new player."

"Frank was in London on Wednesday, it is not true. Pazzini is not a player who is

of interest to us."

Chelsea have also been linked with Iaquinta but the Juventus striker, who has recently recovered from a serious knee injury, is fully focused on returning to top form with the Bianconeri.

"I'm flattered by market rumours, but I'm interested only in Juventus," Iaquinta told the club's official website. "I feel good here and I don't want to leave. I've been sorry to have not been able to help the team in this period of difficulty, but now I'm ready to give my help."

"I believe in this group, in this club and its people. We are convinced that we still have possibilities to do well and for this reason market rumours should not distract us from our sporting objectives."

# Reds in for Maxi

Football

SOCCERNET

Ryan Babel's future at Liverpool remains unclear, with Anfield boss Rafael Benitez maintaining that the winger has said he does not want to leave the club.

Liverpool have rejected a £9 million bid from Birmingham for the Holland international. Babel has frequently complained about his lack of senior games this season and is known to be concerned about his position in Holland's World Cup squad.

But Benitez said: "I have not said that Ryan has to leave

the club. We received an offer for the player and he said that he did not want to leave the club. Therefore we rejected the offer. He is a good player and he works hard. I want him in the squad."

Benitez is aware that any big money raised from transfers during the current transfer window is likely to be stockpiled for use in the summer rather than mid-season, so there is no real desire from the manager to sell Babel.

Two players are on their way out of Anfield. Full-back Andrea Dossena has completed a £4.5 million move to Napoli while striker Andriy

Voronin is closing in on a £2 million move to Dynamo Moscow. Benitez said: "That deal is also nearing completion. They are both different players. They are both different and wanted to play regularly elsewhere."

The move to bring winger Maxi Rodriguez from Atletico Madrid is not yet concluded. The player is believed to have agreed an 18-month contract, subject to a medical.

Benitez says: "We have talked with Madrid and the players' advisors. But Rodriguez still has some issues to sort out with Madrid first."

## Gentner to return to Stuttgart

INTERNET, undated

Germany midfielder Christian Gentner is to return to VfB Stuttgart from champions Wolfsburg at the end of the season, both clubs said Friday. Gentner, 24, moves on a free transfer with a contract until 2013.

"I have had a great time in Wolfsburg but in the end it was my personal wish to return to Stuttgart," he said.

Gentner has been in recent Germany squads and hopes to win a place in Joachim Loew's final selection for the World Cup this year.

He had been at Stuttgart between 1999 and 2007 but failed to claim a regular first-team place.

Initially on loan at Wolfsburg, he became a permanent signing for 3.5 million euros (5 million dollars) and last season made his debut for Germany and won the league title with Wolfsburg.

According to Kicker magazine, Gentner, who has won four caps, turned down lucrative offers from England and Spain to return to his old club.

## IN BRIEF

### Fired over a hug

INTERNET, undated

Pakistan's parliament has fined a national hockey player and two team officials for hugging a female liaison officer and drinking beer in Argentina last month. Rehan Butt, the member of hockey team, was fined 1,176 US dollars while manager Asif Bajwa and coach Shahid Ali Khan, were fined 588 US dollars each.

The fine was imposed by the National Assembly's standing committee on sports that held a hearing after Pakistani television aired the pictures showing Butt hugging the Argentinian female liaison officer. Another picture showed him drinking beer.

"Pakistan is an Islamic country and hugging a female or drinking alcohol is not acceptable in our society," committee chairman Jamshid Dasti told German Press Agency dpa.

"We as a nation expect our national players to follow our moral code when they represent the country."

"It's a warning for all our national players that they should avoid indulging in any immoral activity during their foreign trips," Dasti added.

The pictures were taken during a dinner at the end of Champions Challenge tournament in Argentina and were posted by the female liaison officer on her Facebook page.

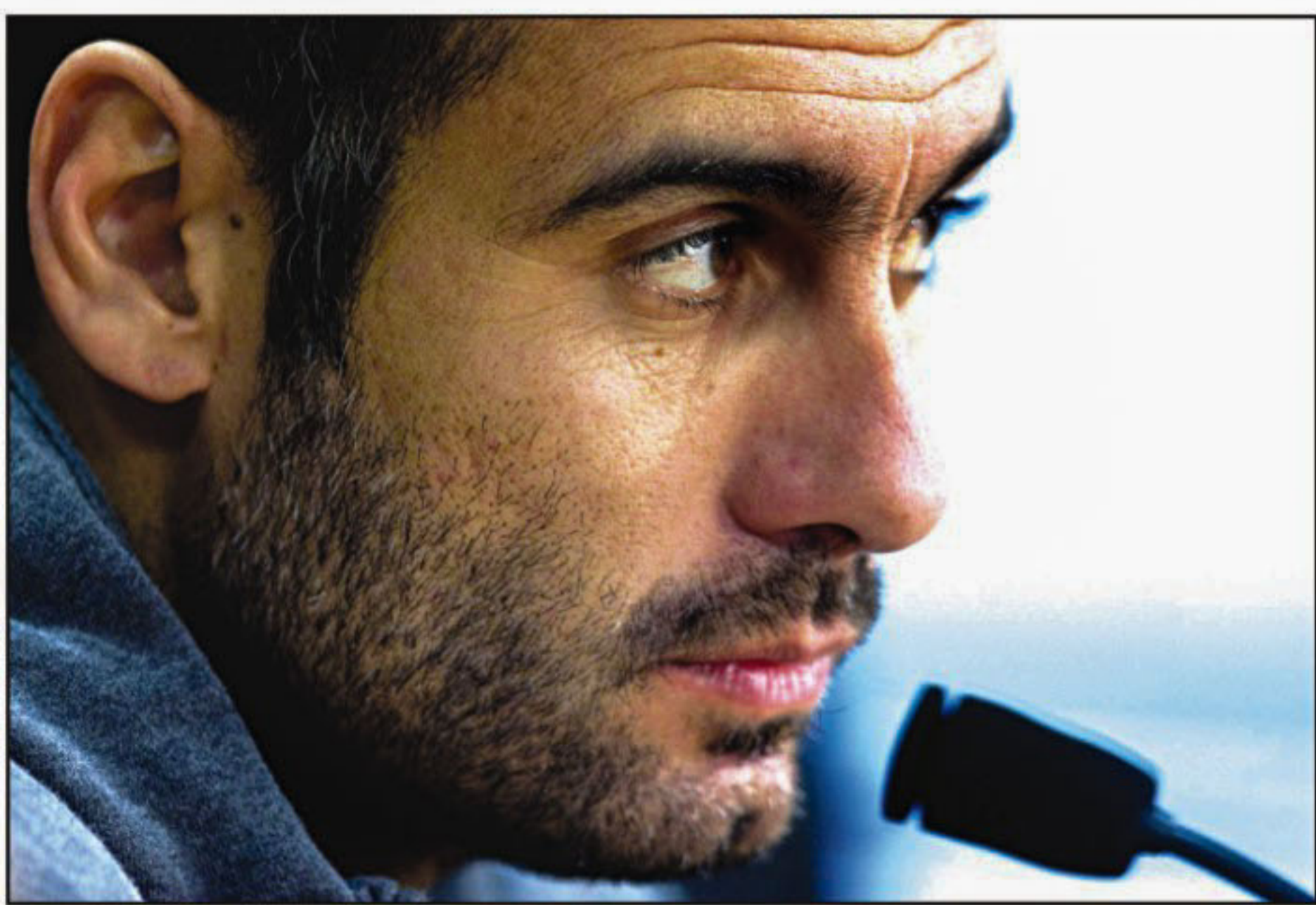


PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona's coach Pep Guardiola listens to questions during a press conference after a training session in Barcelona yesterday. Guardiola was recently voted by the International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS) as the best club coach of 2009.