

# FIFA TRIBUNAL TO DECIDE BLATTER'S FATE

**ZURICH:** Scandal-tainted FIFA's ethics watchdog was locked in talks yesterday to decide the fate of world football president Sepp Blatter as attacks on the veteran sports baron mounted.

The ethics committee tribunal was also to decide whether to take action against UEFA leader Michael Platini and former FIFA vice president Chung Mong-Joon, both candidates to take over from Blatter. Chung hit out at Blatter on Wednesday, calling him "a hypocrite and a liar" and threatening a legal case for embezzlement of FIFA funds.

The 79-year-old Swiss official Blatter, who has ruled FIFA for 17 years, insisted in a German magazine interview however that he would not be forced out of office before an election to be held in February.

FIFA has kept the activities of its independent ethics committee cloaked in secrecy in recent months as accusations of corruption have mounted.

But a Senegalese member of the committee's adjudicatory chamber, FIFA's highest court, said it started a five-day meeting on Monday with Blatter and the other two officials on the agenda.

Abdoulaye Makhtar Diop, a former Senegal sports minister, said in a state-



**MOROCCO:** In this Dec. 19, 2014 file photo FIFA President Sepp Blatter gestures as he attends a press conference in Marrakech. —AP

ment: "the members will focus on the topics of the Swiss Sepp Blatter, FIFA president, the Frenchman Michel Platini, president of UEFA, and the South Korean Chung Mong-Joon." FIFA

officials refused to comment on the disclosure.

But the world body, fighting off multiple corruption accusations, has been forced to consider suspending its presi-

dent since Swiss authorities opened an investigation for "criminal mismanagement" against Blatter.

Platini has also been implicated in the investigation because of a two million dollar (1.78 million euros) payment made to the French football legend in 2011. FIFA's secretary general Jerome Valcke was suspended last month following press allegations that linked him to the sale of World Cup tickets at inflated prices.

Blatter won a fifth term of office on May 29, despite a major storm over a US inquiry into the football business. But four days later he announced he would stand down when a new election is held on February 26. Despite the new allegations, Blatter said he will carry on until the election. "I will fight until February 26. For me. And for FIFA," he told Bunte, a German magazine.

"I am convinced that evil will come into the light and good will triumph." Platini had been favourite to win the election until the Swiss investigation named him. His entourage said that he did not appear before the FIFA commission this week and that he feels he has done nothing wrong.

"The president feels that he has given satisfactory explanations to the authorities that are dealing with this

case," Platini's spokesman, Pedro Pinto, told reporters in London. Platini, Chung and Prince Ali bin al-Hussein, a former FIFA vice president from Jordan, are the main candidates for the election so far.

Chung is under investigation because of his lobbying for South Korea's bid for the 2022 World Cup, which Qatar controversially won.

The South Korean tycoon says FIFA has cleared him of the charges once in 2012 and that the new charges are part of a Blatter campaign to block his bid for the presidency.

Chung returned to the attack on Wednesday at the Leaders Sport Business convention in London, saying Swiss lawyers could launch a \$100 million "embezzlement" case against Blatter. Chung, a FIFA vice president for 17 years until 2011, condemned what he called Blatter's "secretive" ways in not declaring his salary and taking payments without permission.

He said Blatter had "repeatedly meddled" in the elections of major football confederations and FIFA votes. "FIFA has become a badge of shame," he said. "In short Mr Blatter is a hypocrite and a liar."

Chung said the FIFA ethics committee has sought a 15 year ban against him. He called it a "smear campaign" by Blatter. — AFP

## DOWNPOUR SPOILS SOUTH SUDAN WORLD CUP DEBUT

**JOHANNESBURG:** Torrential rain spoilt the World Cup debut of South Sudan in Juba yesterday with play abandoned early in the first half after they levelled at 1-1 against Mauritania.

Officials hope to resume play Thursday morning at the national stadium in the capital city of the youngest African nation, which gained independence from Sudan four years ago.

South Sudanese supporters last month celebrated a first victory for the national football team — 1-0 at home to Equatorial Guinea in a 2017 Africa Cup of Nations qualifier.

That success raised hopes that their World Cup debut, in the first leg of a first-round eliminator

against rivals 55 places higher on the world rankings, could bring more success.

But a capacity crowd packed into the rudimentary Juba stadium on a grey East African afternoon were silenced after just three minutes when Boubacar Bagili scored for the Mauritians.

The gloom lasted only two minutes, though, before Dominic Abui Pretino equalised, sparking wild celebrations as the weather worsened. The match officials abandoned play soon after with no sign of the downpour ending.

Tanzania beat Malawi 2-0 in Dar es Salaam, Burundi edged the Seychelles 1-0 in Roche Caiman and Comoros and Lesotho drew 0-0 in Moroni in other first legs.

Mbwana Samata and Thomas Ulimwengu transferred to Tanzania their good form with CAF Champions League finalists TP Mazembe from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Samata put the Taifa Stars ahead after 19 minutes off a pass from Ulimwengu, who scored the second goal four minutes later at the Benjamin Mkapa National Stadium.

The slow-starting Malawians came closest to scoring before Samata darted on to a pass across the box and pushed the ball past onrushing goalkeeper Simplex Nthala.

A surprise returnee to the national team after a lengthy ban, Nthala gifted the second goal to Tanzania by spilling a low cross.

He was spared the embarrassment of an own-goal, however, when Ulimwengu raced in to poke the ball over the line. Ulimwengu and Samata, who scored three of the four goals that took Mazembe past Al Merrikh of Sudan in a Champions League semi-final this month, had second-half chances to increase the lead. The woodwork foiled a far-post Ulimwengu header and Samata shot weakly from close range in stoppage time with only Nthala to beat.

Fiston Abdul Razak from South African club Mamelodi Sundowns scored after 15 minutes to bring Burundi success in the Seychelles.

Lesotho survived the late red-carding of goalkeeper Mohau Kuenane, leaving Comoros still seeking a first World Cup win after four consecutive losses in two previous attempts.

Sao Tome e Principe host Ethiopia and Liberia have home advantage over Guinea-Bissau Thursday when the qualifiers continue.

Kenya led by three goals in Mauritius, then conceded twice before finishing strongly for a 5-2 win that all but assured qualification for the second knockout round during November.

Johanna Omolo bagged a brace for the Harambee Stars, who scored five goals in a World Cup qualifier for the first time at the 65th attempt. — AFP



**BUENOS AIRES:** Ecuador players attend a soccer training session in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Ecuador will face Argentina for a 2018 World Cup Russia qualifier soccer match. — AP

## MESSI, NEYMAR OUT AS S AMERICA 2018 WORLD CUP JOURNEY BEGINS

**MONTEVIDEO:** Lionel Messi and Neymar will be absent as Brazil and Argentina set out on the road to Russia and redemption when South American qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup kick off today.

Injured Messi and suspended Neymar are just two of a galaxy of stars who will be missing as the long journey to Russia 2018 begins. Uruguay will be without Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani while Colombia's James Rodriguez is also injured.

Brazil and Argentina, the two superpowers of South American football, launch their respective qualifying campaigns still smarting from disappointing performances in the Copa America, which saw Chile lift the title on home soil.

Brazil's Copa America ended in defeat to Paraguay in the quarter-finals, a loss that deepened the sense of gloom surrounding the Selecao, still bearing the scars of their humiliating World Cup exit to Germany in 2014. Argentina's campaign meanwhile ended in a penalty shoot-out against Chile in the final, shattering Messi and the Albiceleste's hopes of winning a first major tournament since 1993.

Those twin setbacks provide the sobering backdrop to Thursday's opening round of fixtures, where Brazil face a daunting trip to Santiago to face Chile while Argentina meet Ecuador in Buenos Aires.

But while Copa America form suggests Chile are

favourites, Brazil head into their game with history squarely in their corner.

Brazil have suffered one solitary defeat to Chile during World Cup qualifiers, a 3-0 loss during the campaign to reach the 2002 tournament.

In 14 meetings since that defeat, Brazil have won 12, drawn two, lost none. "Every game has its own history, and times change, but the fact that we do well against Chile whenever we play them has its advantages," said Brazilian veteran Kaka, drafted into manager Dunga's squad to replace the injured Liverpool star Philippe Coutinho.

Brazil's most recent win over the Chileans came in March, a 1-0 friendly victory in London which followed last year's World Cup second round win.

"Any match against Chile is difficult, but we are determined to win," Brazil defender David Luiz said shortly after arriving in Chile.

One critical factor for Brazil could be the absence of suspended captain Neymar, who was banned after being sent off in a stormy Copa America battle with Colombia in June.

Yet Brazil have showed no sign of tension during the build-up, holding relaxed open training sessions before large crowds of journalists and fans.

Chile by contrast have drawn a veil over their preparations, with coach Jorge Sampaoli restricting press access to training to just 15 minutes each

day at the team's Juan Pinto Duran complex.

"Now we start a new chapter; together we can do it," Chile captain Claudio Bravo wrote on Twitter in a message to fans this week.

Argentina meanwhile will get a taste of life without their superstar captain Messi when they take on Ecuador in Buenos Aires. Messi, who was scapegoated in some quarters for another Argentinian tournament failure in the Copa America, is sidelined for the game after suffering a serious knee injury while playing for Barcelona last month.

Javier Mascherano, who will captain Argentina in Messi's absence, called on the squad not to use his Barcelona team-mate's injury as an excuse.

"It's always better to have Messi," Mascherano said. "But we are not going to have him and we have to try and turn that into a positive and not use it as an excuse."

In other matches today, Uruguay will have to grapple with the absence of Suarez and Cavani as they face a daunting trip to the thin air of La Paz to face Bolivia.

Colombia, meanwhile, who face Uruguay in their second match next week, meet Peru in the port city of Barranquilla without Real Madrid star James Rodriguez, meaning the attacking burden is likely to fall on out-of-form Chelsea striker Radamel Falcao. — AFP

## KLOPP DUE TO LAND IN ANFIELD TODAY

**GERMANY:** Former Borussia Dortmund manager Juergen Klopp is expected at Anfield today as the German edges closer to becoming Brendan Rodgers' successor at Liverpool, while Carlo Ancelotti has ruled himself out of contention, British media reported.

Klopp is reportedly in advanced talks with Fenway Sports Group President Mike Gordon and Liverpool Chief Executive Ian Ayre and is planning to fly to England to complete negotiations ahead of his highly anticipated move, the reports said.

Former Real Madrid and Chelsea manager Ancelotti, who was also linked with the job, has told reporters he would return to management, but only next season.

"I enjoy my time now but, of course, I want to come back to manage-to-work-because it is my passion," the 56-year-old Italian said at a press event in London. "I want to take my time to rest, but next season I am ready."

The fiery Klopp, twice a Bundesliga champion with Dortmund, who he also steered to the Champions League final in 2013, has made no secret of

his desire to work in England.

The charismatic German forged his reputation by turning 1997 Champions League winners

Dortmund, who were relegation candidates under predecessor Thomas Doll, into one of the most exciting brands in world football.



**GERMANY:** In this April 21, 2012 file photo Dortmund head coach Juergen Klopp celebrates after his team scored during the German First Division. —AP

He left the Ruhr valley club in 2015 after seven years to take a break from football after finishing seventh in the Bundesliga.

Known for his wit and exuberance as much as for his high pressing, quick counter-attacking and never-say-die brand of football, Klopp is reportedly willing to curtail his sabbatical to revive Liverpool's fortunes and is on the verge of committing to a three-year contract.

He has also asked to bring former assistants Zeljko Brucic, called the 'brains' behind Dortmund's success, and Peter Kraewitz in as part of his coaching staff.

Germany's World Cup winning captain and manager Franz Beckenbauer called Klopp one of the "best coaches in the world" and urged Liverpool to seal the deal quickly. "He is fantastic. He's one of the best coaches I know in the whole world..." Beckenbauer said. "Liverpool is also one of the biggest clubs in the world, so Liverpool and Juergen Klopp is definitely a good combination." "If Liverpool has the chance to sign Juergen Klopp, then they should do it," he added. —Reuters

**Live Matches on TV**  
(Local Timings)

### EURO QUALIFIERS 2016

Georgia v Gibraltar	19:00
Abu Dhabi SPORTS	
Portugal v Denmark	21:45
Abu Dhabi SPORTS	
Hungary v Faroe Islands	21:45
Abu Dhabi SPORTS	
Albania v Serbia	21:45
Abu Dhabi SPORTS	
Northern Ireland v Greece	21:45
Abu Dhabi SPORTS	
Ireland v Germany	21:45
Abu Dhabi SPORTS	
Romania v Finland	21:45
Abu Dhabi SPORTS	
Scotland v Poland	21:45
Abu Dhabi SPORTS	

### ASIA WORLD CUP QUALIFYING

Indonesia v Thailand	3:00
beIN SPORT	
North Korea v Philippines	10:00
beIN SPORT	
East Timor v Palestine	10:00
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	
Myanmar v Lebanon	15:00
beIN SPORT	
Bhutan v Maldives	15:00
beIN SPORTS 3 HD	
Singapore v Afghanistan	15:00
beIN SPORTS 10 HD	
Viet Nam v Iraq	15:00
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	
Turkmenistan v India	16:00
beIN SPORT	
Syria v Japan	16:00
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	
Kyrgyzstan v Tajikistan	17:00
beIN SPORT	
Jordan v Australia	17:00
beIN SPORT	
Oman v Iran	17:30
beIN SPORT	
Kuwait v South Korea	17:55
beIN SPORT	
Bahrain v Uzbekistan	18:00
beIN SPORTS 3 HD	
Qatar v China	18:30
beIN SPORT	
Saudi Arabia v UAE	20:00
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	