

FIFA AGREES ON "GOAL PROJECT" FOR NORTH KOREA FOOTBALL TEAM

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Sepp Blatter, the president of FIFA, reportedly struck a deal with North Korea during his visit to Pyongyang from May 6-7 to provide the impoverished country with soccer gear.

Chosun Shinbo, the pro-Pyongyang newspaper based in Japan, reported Monday [May 20th] that FIFA and North Korea decided on a "goal project" for the development of North Korean soccer. Aid will reportedly proceed according to the request of the North's football association.

FIFA reportedly intends to start with a project to train personnel; coaches, trainers and referees.

Mr. Blatter, noting that FIFA has provided the North with around \$1 million for soccer development since he took over as president of the world soccer body four years ago, said such assistance would continue for the next four years as well.

He also told the Tokyo-based newspaper he invited North Korean officials to attend the opening ceremony of the World Cup to watch the match between France and Senegal. Mr. Blatter also reportedly gave high marks to the North Korean women's soccer team, and said they would get a chance to display their talents at the worldwide women's soccer tournament next year in China.

Finally, adding that ties between North Korea and FIFA would continue to develop in the right direction, he expressed gratitude for his supporters in the North for backing his efforts as president of FIFA. Mr. Blatter stands for re-election at the group's conference in Seoul on May 29. He has come under fire for alleged corruption and mishandling of FIFA's finances and is facing a strong challenge for the FIFA presidency from Issa Hayatou, head of the

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Confederation of African Football. Mr. Blatter's visit to Pyongyang - and his pledge of aid - is seen in football circles as part of an effort to win every vote possible in the election. The North's football association has voting rights at the conference.

Mr. Blatter met with Kim Yong-nam, the North's nominal head of state; Jang Ung, secretary of the DPRK Olympic Committee; Pak Myong-chol, chairman of the State Physical Culture and Sports Committee, and Trade Minister Ri Kwang-gun.

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