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English pledge support to Asia in return for bid backing

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ENGLAND are determined to garner full support from all over the world, including Asia, in their bid to host the 2006 World Cup.

Yesterday, they pledged to give all the help to Asia to ensure they catch up with the Europeans in terms of skills and style.

Sir Bobby Charlton, president of England's 2006 World Cup bid committee, signed a Memorandum of Understanding for technical co-operation with the Asian Football Confederation in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The MoU offers a wide range of help, including coaching, referee training and administrative support as well as training camps and tournaments for young players.

Charlton said this is a long-term agreement, starting with a five-year deal.

The agreement, said Charlton, is part of English soccer's commitment to the future of world soccer - a commitment reflected in England's 2006 World Cup bid.

Besides England, Germany, South Africa, Morocco and Brazil are also bidding to host the event.

"If we become host, we intend to share it with the world," said the legendary soccer star who won the 1996 World Cup with England and the 1968 European Cup with Manchester United.

Charlton said England have also set aside scholarship funds for talented Asian soccer players to train in England's top soccer academies and free coaching courses for all via the internet.

"Our bid contains a deal where we will invite 12 youngsters from the 204 Fifa members to attend the World Cup in 2006," said Charlton.

* ASIAN football will fulfil a dream tonight when a new landmark of the association, the AFC headquarters building, officially opens its doors at Bukit Jalil.

All 44 AFC members will be at the opening ceremony, which will be attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed, Fifa president Sepp Blatter and members of the 2006 World Cup bid committees from Germany, South Africa, Brazil, England and Morocco.

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