JOHANNESBURG: Qualifying begins this weekend for the fourth African Nations Championship, a senior national football team competition unique to the continent. Only home-based footballers are eligible, offering space on the international stage for many who would otherwise remain in the shadows. Many African national teams, including Algeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Senegal, are composed almost exclusively of foreign-based stars. So the African Nations Championship—OR-CHAN—gives the best home talent a chance to don the national kit and display their skills.

Launched in 2008, the brainchild of Confederation of African Football (CAF) president Issa Hayatou has been won by the Democratic Republic of Congo in Abidjan, Tunisia in Khartoum and Libya in Cape Town. The shock Libyan triumph last year was remarkable as the North Africans won only one of their six matches, drawing the other five, including all three in the knock-out stages. Libya triumphed in the 16-team competition thanks to penalty-kick accuracy and nerves of steel, winning a quarter-final, a semi-final, and the final against Ghana via shootouts. They are among 42 countries vying for a place at the 2016 finals while Rwanda qualify automatically as hosts of the January 16-February 7 tournament. A region-based draw pits Libya against Morocco and Tunisia after a double-round mini-league progressing. The other five geographical areas will use a home-and-away knockout system with two or four games required to decide the winner. A downside going regional is that powerhouse can be drawn together and the pairing of Ghana and Ivory Coast later this year means one of them will miss the finals. Of the 16 teams who competed at the 2014 Nations Championship in South Africa, 13 should qualify. But the draw means Mali or Mauritania, Burundi or Ethiopia and Nigeria or Burkina Faso cannot make successive appearances.

Fourteen preliminary-round, first-leg games are scheduled for this weekend one in the north, four in the west, three in the east and six in the south. National coaches like Ephraim ‘Shakes’ Mashaba of South Africa, Mikutin ‘Mico’ Sredojevic of Uganda and Bobby Williamson of Kenya also handle CHAN assignments. But other nations like Senegal separate the coaching of the senior and CHAN squads with Aliou Cisse stepping aside and Moustapha Seck handling the home-based stars. Swaziland, who caused the biggest shock of the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers last weekend by winning away to Guineas, can field virtually the same side when they host Angola in the CHAN.

Veteran midfielder Tony Tshabalala, whose brace sank the Guineans, has drawn attention from South African clubs and many want to play him at the Nkhotakota Stadium near Lilongwe.

Top FIFA officials hire lawyers as Swiss probe bank transactions

Bank Julius Baer launches internal investigation

BERNE: FIFA’s embattled president, Sepp Blatter, and his second-in-command have hired high-powered lawyers to represent them as Swiss authorities identified suspicious bank transactions in a corruption probe engulfing soccer’s global governing body, after they retained Richard Cutter, the chairman of the law firm McGuireWoods and a former US federal prosecutor, FIFA confirmed in an email to Reuters yesterday. Jerome Valcke, FIFA secretary general, has hired prominent New York defense attorney Barry Berke to represent him, FIFA said, adding it had no further comment to make.

Prosecutors looking into the international soccer scandal identified 53 suspicious bank transactions, the country’s attorney general said on Wednesday, stressing that the investigation may take time. Attorney General Michael Lauber told journalists he would not rule out interviewing lawyers to represent them as Swiss authorities seized computers at FIFA headquarters last month. “The world of football is so international and we are faced with a complex investigation with many international implications,” Lauber said in his first public comments since his office obtained the computer data last month. “It said it was prepared to investigate more suspects of foreign-based anti-money laundering agency had identified 53 suspicious transactions flagged up from information supplied by banks.

The attorney general said Blatter and Valcke could be among those summoned for questioning: “There will be formal interviews of all relevant people. By definition, this does not exclude interview of the president of FIFA and this does not exclude interview of the secretary general of FIFA,” Lauber said.

Lauber said his team had obtained evidence on 104 bank client relationships, each of which represented sever al accounts. Switzerland’s Financial Intelligence Unit anti-money laundering agency had identified 53 suspicious transactions flagged up from information supplied by banks. Lauber held between December and February, in a related development, suspended Asian Football Confederation (AFC) General Secretary Alex Soosay, who had resigned from his post to seek a fresh start with the Palestinian FA, was suspended last month after Malaysian media reported an official at the AFC member confederation had been asked by Soosay to help him get a passport. President Mohamed Bin Hammam, with whom Soosay worked closely, Bin Hammam was once set to challenge Blatter for the FIFA presidency but was banned for his part in a cash-for-votes scandal.

SANTIAGO: Brazil captain Neymar faces a nervous wait to discover his Copa America fate after getting sent off in a post-match fracas as the five-time world champions crashed to a 1-0 defeat against Colombia on Wednesday.

Neymar was on the field when Colombia goalkeeper David Ospina smothered the ball with his hands leading to a penalty and a red card for Alves.

“Four days ago we lost to Venezuela 2-1 quarter-final exit, a match scarred by a whop ping World Cup and described suggestions he was involved in improper betting: ‘preposterous,’ Switzerland’s third-largest listed bank, said on Wednesday it had launched an internal investigation in connection with FIFA. It said it was cooperating with the authorities and did not say when its probe had begun.

The attorney general said Blatter and Valcke could be among those summoned for questioning: “There will be formal interviews of all relevant people. By definition, this does not exclude interview of the president of FIFA and this does not exclude interview of the secretary general of FIFA,” Lauber said. He said his team had obtained evidence on 104 bank client relationships, each of which represented several accounts. Switzerland’s Financial Intelligence Unit anti-money laundering agency had identified 53 suspicious transactions flagged up from information supplied by banks.

The attorney general said Blatter and Valcke could be among those summoned for questioning: “There will be formal interviews of all relevant people. By definition, this does not exclude interview of the president of FIFA and this does not exclude interview of the secretary general of FIFA,” Lauber said.

SANTIAGO: Brazil captain Neymar faces a nervous wait to discover his Copa America fate after getting sent off in a post-match fracas as the five-time world champions crashed to a 1-0 defeat against Colombia on Wednesday.

Neymar was on the field when Colombia goalkeeper David Ospina smothered the ball with his hands leading to a penalty and a red card for Alves.

“Four days ago we lost to Venezuela 2-1 quarter-final exit, a match scarred by a whopping World Cup and described suggestions he was involved in improper betting: ‘preposterous,’ Switzerland’s third-largest listed bank, said on Wednesday it had launched an internal investigation in connection with FIFA. It said it was cooperating with the authorities and did not say when its probe had begun.

The attorney general said Blatter and Valcke could be among those summoned for questioning: “There will be formal interviews of all relevant people. By definition, this does not exclude interview of the president of FIFA and this does not exclude interview of the secretary general of FIFA,” Lauber said. He said his team had obtained evidence on 104 bank client relationships, each of which represented several accounts. Switzerland’s Financial Intelligence Unit anti-money laundering agency had identified 53 suspicious transactions flagged up from information supplied by banks.