

Welcome world

AFP, Cape Town

South African president Thabo Mbeki on Saturday opened the 2003 cricket World Cup in front of a 25,000 crowd packed inside the famous Newlands ground and an estimated worldwide television audience of 1.4 billion people.

"This eighth World Cup is the biggest ever. Together we will make it the best ever," promised Mbeki.

"I assure you Africa will live up to expectations of players and cricket enthusiasts from around the world. This tournament is about peace, it is about strengthening friendship.

"You players have come to us as messengers of peace, not war. You come as representatives of the movement of friendship. You come to us regardless of colour, race or creed.

"I have great pleasure in officially declaring the eighth World Cup open. Let the games begin."

Sports stars from the three hosting countries - South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya - had paraded around the stadium before the 14 competing nations in the six week event being held here as well and in Zimbabwe and Kenya, entered the arena.

Not surprisingly, the loudest

cheers of the night were reserved for Shaun Pollock's home side closely followed by a sympathetic roar for Zimbabwe whose status as a host has been seriously undermined by the continuing row over whether or not England will fulfil their February 13 fixture in Harare.

Amongst the sports celebrities introduced to the crowd was Basil D'Oliveira, the Cape-born cricketer who, as a coloured player, was refused entry to the country by the old apartheid government when he was chosen for England's tour here in 1968.

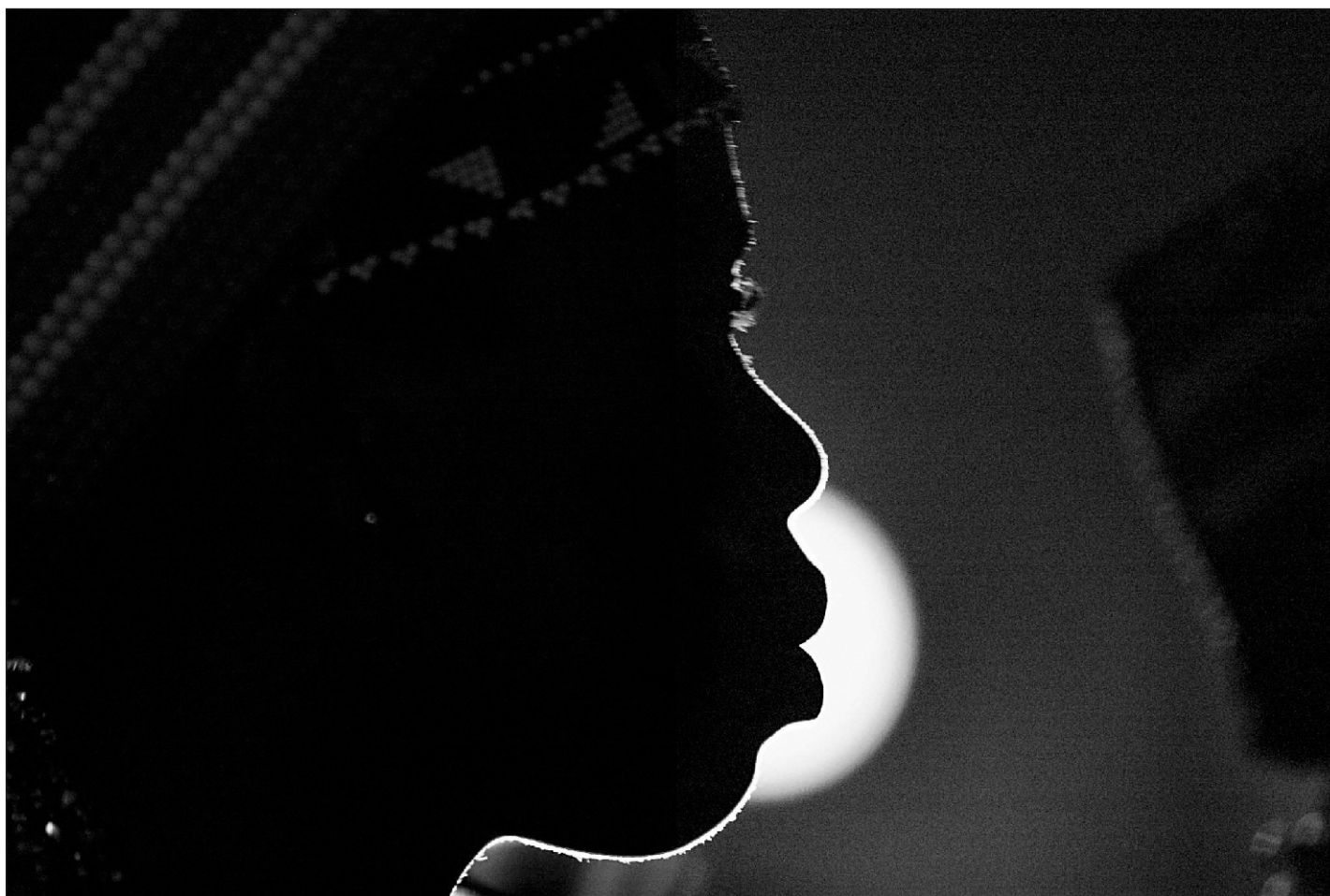
As a result, England called off their proposed trip and the old South Africa's long sporting isolation, which was to last for over 20 years, began.

Also on show were rugby's Naas Botha, cricketer Graeme Pollock, footballer Lucas Radebe, swimmer Pennie Heyns and former motor racing world champion Jody Scheckter.

From co-hosts Namibia there was athlete Frankie Fredericks and, from Kenya, fellow track star Kip Keino.

International Cricket Council (ICC) president Malcolm Gray also welcomed the tournament.

SEE PAGE 15



LUNAR ECLIPSE! A South African performer during the opening ceremony of the World Cup at Newlands in Cape Town on February 8. PHOTO: AFP

Politics banned

REUTERS, Harare

Zimbabwe police warned on Saturday that no political protests would be allowed at World Cup games in the southern African country, saying security would "be very tight" during the tournament.

Senior Assistant Commissioner Albert Mandizha told journalists at a security briefing that no political slogans and songs, placards and dress or "artefacts associated with political parties" would be allowed at match venues.

"We would not expect cricket

players to take their bats and to sing cricket songs at a political rally, likewise we don't expect people to bring their politics to the cricket games," said Mandizha.

"Security will be very tight...and we will apply the law to ensure that people enjoy their cricket in peace."

England and Australia have both expressed concerns about playing their Group A matches in strife-torn Zimbabwe, and England's players will only decide on Sunday whether to boycott their February 13 game in Harare.

SEE PAGE 15

Risk for Kiwis

REUTERS, Bloemfontein

New Zealand's hopes of improving on their semifinal appearance at the last World Cup will be instantly put to the test when they take on 1996 champions Sri Lanka on Monday.

The first-round clash is crucial to both team's chances of advancing to the second stage but especially for the Kiwis, who are considering

forfeiting their Group B match against Kenya over security concerns.

While team officials have still not made a firm decision on whether they will make the trip to Nairobi, New Zealand's players are acutely aware of the importance of their match against Sri Lanka, in which defeat would leave them facing an uphill battle to qualify for the Super Six phase.

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming, speaking after his team's win over South African province Gauteng this week, said he was confident about their chances.

"We usually start tournaments well," Fleming said. "We're going to do well because we believe in the squad we've got."

New Zealand go into the match as slight favourites after demolishing India 5-2 at home, and easily winning their two warm-up games in South Africa.

All-rounder Chris Cairns has played in the past three Cricket World Cups, making the semi-finals in 1992 and 1999, but said the

current New Zealand squad was the best he had ever been involved with.

"In the last two tournaments we had a good side and thought we would do well, but this one here, with the side we've got we're quietly confident," Cairns said.

"The preparation's been fantastic and it's the best unit I've been involved in, that's for sure."

The unpredictable Sri Lankans finished last in a triangular warm-up series with Australia and England, but showed glimpses of their best, including a one-off victory over World Cup favourites Australia, to remind everyone they remain a serious threat on their day.

They received an early boost before the match against New Zealand when off spinner Muttiah Muralitharan, the third highest wicket-taker in limited-overs international history, was cleared to play.

There was some doubt about him taking part after he tore a high muscle in Australia, but he ended doubts about his fitness when he helped Sri Lanka to a comfortable win over Free State on Thursday.

"Since it was the Cricket World Cup we were a bit cautious about how soon to play him, but he came out well on Thursday and I see no reason why he will not take the field on Monday," Sri Lanka physiotherapist Alex Kontouri told reporters.

New Zealand have been one of the big improvers in one-day cricket in recent years.

After making the Cricket World Cup semi-finals in 1999, they went on to win the ICC Champions Trophy in 2000 and knocked Australia out of their own triangular tournament a season ago, ultimately ending the one-day international career of Steve Waugh.

They have a settled batting lineup that includes Nathan Astle and captain Stephen Fleming, and an improving bowling attack led by seamers Shane Bond and Jacob Oram, and spinner Daniel Vettori.

Their trump card is Cairns, whose effectiveness has been partly blunted by a knee injury that will prevent him bowling against Sri Lanka.

SEE PAGE 15

AFRICAN TREATS

AL-AMIN from Cape Town

Bangladesh captain Khaled Mashud is a novice when it comes to knowledge about his team's first opponents Canada. He only met the Pakistan-born captain of the multi-national Canadian side at a reception hosted by official sponsors LG on Friday night.

"I haven't seen the Canadian team in action. However the Namibian captain told me that Canada have some good players. He also added that the Canadians just go out to the middle and try to hit the ball out of the park. But overall Canada is not disciplined in their approach towards the game", said Mashud.

The Bangladesh captain however said that it would have been better if he had seen some video clips of Canada's matches in the ICC trophy.

"This should have been the Bangladesh Cricket Board's job. That way we could've assessed the strengths and weaknesses of Canada", Mashud said.

IN THE GROOVE ALREADY

Cape Town is called the 'Mother city' of South Africa. Set beside a sprawling beach with the Table Mountain providing a dramatic background, Cape Town is a breathtaking getaway for the tourists.

The Victoria Waterfront on Table Bay harbour is one of South Africa's leading tourist attractions. The staging of the World Cup opening ceremony has added new colour to this Dutch establishment.

Newlands, considered as one of the most picturesque venues in the world, gave an estimated 1.5 billion television viewers around the world a

SEE PAGE 15



HEAD TO HEAD Sri Lanka v New Zealand

AFP, Bloemfontein

Head-to-head record in last 10 one-day internationals between Sri Lanka and New Zealand ahead of their World Cup Group B match here on Monday:

April 14, 2002	Sri Lanka won by 46 runs	Sharjah
April 9, 2002	New Zealand won by 11 runs	Sharjah
July 31, 2001	Sri Lanka won by 106 runs	Colombo
July 25, 2001	Sri Lanka won by 5 wickets	Colombo
July 18, 2001	Sri Lanka won by 16 runs	Colombo
April 17, 2001	New Zealand won by 79 runs	Sharjah
April 10, 2001	Sri Lanka won by 106 runs	Sharjah
Feb 11, 2001	New Zealand won by 13 runs	Christchurch
Feb 8, 2001	Sri Lanka won by 3 runs	Hamilton
Feb 6, 2001	Sri Lanka won by 9 wickets	Auckland

SEE PAGE 15



MUTTIAH MURALITHARAN



PHOTO: INTERNET

HERE COMES THE TIGERS: The Bangladesh cricket team members, led by Khaled Mashud (holding the flag), march past during the opening ceremony of the eighth World Cup in Cape Town on February 8.

Six-shooter

AFP, Bloemfontein

New Zealand batting star Nathan Astle wants to overshadow the equally dashing Sri Lankan captain Sanath Jayasuriya in the battle of the big hitters when they clash here on Monday.

"It will be exciting and although Jayasuriya has done more than me, I hope to better him this time and help my team win," Astle told the news agency.

"If he hits, so will I. I will do my best to live up to expectations."

Astle and Jayasuriya play a remarkably similar game, although the Kiwi is right-handed and the Sri Lankan a southpaw.

While Astle has Test cricket's fastest double-century against his name, Jayasuriya holds the record for the quickest half-century in the shorter version of the game.

Astle's moment of glory came in Christchurch in March last year when he took just 153 balls to record his landmark innings as he went on to make 222 against England in his team's victory chase of 550.

The Kiwis eventually lost the Test by 98 runs but Astle won hearts with his hard and clean hitting.

His second hundred came off just 39 deliveries and the entire knock contained 11 sixes and 28 fours.

Jayasuriya too is no slouch in the

big-hitting stakes. He hit three sixes and 13 fours in a 44-ball 82 that led Sri Lanka to their World Cup quarter-final win over England in Faisalabad in 1996.

Just after the tournament, he clobbered a 37-ball century against Pakistan in Singapore.



NATHAN ASTLE

"We both have a job to do at the top and that is to give our sides a flying start and take the initiative," said Astle, one of the six survivors from the previous World Cup where New Zealand reached the semi-finals.

Astle acknowledged the threat posed by both Jayasuriya and off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan in the

Goodyear Park showdown.

"What Jayasuriya is to batting, Murali is to bowling and we must control both of them," said Astle.

The 31-year-old could be the batsman to watch in the World Cup as much for his ability to pace the innings as for his deceptive slow bowling.

Astle, a middle-order batsman in Tests, has been performing the role of an opener in one-dayers remarkably well as he is the top New Zealand run-getter with 5,327 with 12 centuries in 167 matches.

His experience and calming influence is bound to stand New Zealand in good stead on the hard and bouncy tracks in South Africa especially as he is playing in his third World Cup.

Pundits say that Astle is a thinking batsman who knows when and how to switch gears and his double-century against England at Christchurch is proof.

Astle is also an effective slow bowler who can be relied on for checking the run-rate with his shrewd change of pace. His lack of speed poses a major problem for stroke-players, for the ball hardly comes on to the bat.

He is more than just a part-time bowler in the shorter version of the

SEE PAGE 15

Bookies off limits

AFP, Cape Town

World Cup cricket captains have been told to stay away from unknown people who try to be very friendly since they could be bookmakers, sources said on Sunday.

The pre-tournament briefing for all the 14 captains and team managers organised by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Saturday featured a presentation by a member of the ICC's anti-corruption unit (ACU).

The footage, apparently, has been shown to teams before in the past year, the sources added.

The ACU was formed in June 2000; following the match-fixing scandal, which led to life, bans being imposed on three Test captains, the late Hansie Cronje of South Africa, Mohammad Azharuddin of India and Salim Malik of Pakistan.

ACU members have spread around all the World Cup venues in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya to supervise security arrangements for players.

The captains' meeting was also told about the random drug tests to be conducted on players for the first time at a cricket World Cup.

Most teams conducted precautionary drug tests on their players before departing for South Africa with reports indicating that no one failed the test.

Some cricketers, meanwhile, were furious at the arrangements for Saturday's opening ceremony where they were huddled in a hall for two hours without food before the march-past at Newlands.

"We wanted to watch the cere-

mony from the stands, but we were told there was no place," a player told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"If we had to watch it on television, we could have done it from our hotel rooms."

"We were starved by the time we got back to the hotel around 11 pm.

The whole thing was a waste of time."

The first match of the World Cup will be played later on Sunday when hosts South Africa take on the West Indies under the Newlands floodlights here.



PHOTO: AFP

FATHER FIGURE: Former South African president Nelson Mandela (R), clad in a national cricket team jersey, beats a drum as captain Shaun Pollock sits next to him during a photo session at Cape Town yesterday.

Mandela lesson

AFP, Cape Town

Former president Nelson Mandela hoped history would repeat itself on Sunday as South Africa prepared to open their World Cup campaign against the West Indies here.

Mandela told Proteas skipper

Shaun Pollock that his team have the chance to imitate the rugby World Cup winning side of 1995 - and the former premier even donned a team shirt, just like he did eight years ago when he presented the rugby trophy to captain Francois Pienaar at Johannesburg's Ellis Park.

"South Africa has never won the World Cup of cricket," said Mandela as he met the players before the match.

"You are pioneers. You can open a new chapter in South African cricket. I'll remind you what Francois Pienaar said after the Springboks won the rugby World Cup," Mandela was quoted by the SAPA news agency.

"He said that they were not only playing for the 60,000 people in the stadium. They were playing for the 40 million people in the country."

Mandela stood on the winners' podium in 1995, clad in a No 6 Springbok rugby jersey, as Pienaar lifted the trophy.

"But before the first game against Australia - at the beginning of the tournament - I told our boys that if we win this game, we'll go straight through to the end. That's exactly what happened."

"If you beat the Windies, you can also go all the way."

Pollock said Mandela's informal chat had spared him the task of motivating the players before the match.

"It's a huge inspiration knowing that you are right behind us and wearing our shirt," Pollock told Mandela.

"We are going to go out and play hard for you and the country."