

FOCUS

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Zidane's France Teaches the Brazilian Masters a Lesson in Football

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

French victory was a defeat for the anti-immigrant Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front racists, who want all non-whites deported from France. In a bitter blow to Le Pen, his countrymen chanted the Algerian immigrant Zinedine Zidane's nickname, "Zizou! Zizou! Zizou!" all night, and called national team's colours, not red-white and blue, but "Black-White and Arab."

CELEBRATION of the Bastille Day (July 14) that ushered in the French revolution, came to France two days early this year. Instead of storming the Bastille prison, the French stormed Brazil; instead of destroying the monarchy, they destroyed Brazil. By winning the World Cup on July 12, France made the world's football elite a Group of Seven. In the previous 68 years, only six other nations had managed to join the exclusive club: Uruguay (1930), Italy (1934), West Germany (1954), Brazil (1958), England (1966) and Argentina (1978). With the whole world watching (1.8 billion, the Pope too among the audience), in a stunning upset, Zinedine Zidane's France outsmarted the Brazilian masters.

England may have invented football, but this year's final was between the nation that launched the world's most popular sporting event (through Frenchman Jules Rimet, 1930) against the nation that has been most successful at it. It was South America versus Europe. Ronaldo and the world's most technically sound attack against Marcel Desailly and the world's most technically sound defense. Defense won.

The most telling statistic is that Brazil conceded 10 goals in the tournament (they had conceded only 3 in winning in 1994), against two by France. By clogging the midfield, France disrupted Brazil's play making, and took advantage of Brazil's well known weakness on defense. Strange but true, Brazil has now been shutout in two consecutive World Cup finals! By scoring the first two of the three French goals on devastating headers, midfielder Zinedine Zidane, a Muslim of Algerian heritage, who ironically plays creative football like a

Brazilian, has leapfrogged over Michel Platini to become the France's greatest footballer and a national hero. French victory was a victory for diversity: Zidane's parents are Algerian (the final showcased flawless performance by another Muslim, Said Belqola, the Moroccan referee). Thuram was born in Guadeloupe, Desailly in Ghana, others in Armenia and Poland. For three successive nights and days, millions of Black and White, Muslim and Christian, Arab and Asian people of Paris trooped down the mile-long Champs-Elysees, between Arc de Triomphe and Place de la Concorde, in moments of togetherness that the French coach Aimé Jacquet called, "National communion." This was France's biggest celebration since its liberation after World War II. For the French, who usually reserve their excitement for food and wine, 1998 has been a vintage year.

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— to Argentina at home, and to the USA; an impotency for which fans prescribed them the anti-impotency pill Viagra. The USA finished 32 out of 32 nations at the World Cup. There is so little interest in football here that their much-hyped Pele permeates all aspects of Brazilian football culture. Like the master, all Brazilians go by single names: Ronaldo, Bebeto, Denilson, Dunga, Rivaldo, even the goalie, Taffarel. "You have to understand," said a Brazilian fan, "Pele is our Shakespeare!" Holland remains the only top rated nation never to have won the World Cup. In 1974, Johan Cruyff and Neeskens introduced the concept of "total football" against Iran hardly caused a ripple.

Coach Mario Zagallo horrified Brazilians last year by saying that he would rather play ugly and win, than play attractive and lose. Brazilians demand "jogo bonito" or the beautiful game from their national team. Zagallo got calls from Pele asking him to play three forwards instead of two. In the tournament, Brazil overcame two teams that were playing at their peak — Denmark and Holland. But at the end met their Waterloo at the hands of the supremely confident "Les Bleus." In the final, the Brazilians were forced to play ugly and lose. Nevertheless, for their superb performance until the final, "Muito obrigado" (Portuguese for "Thanks, so much"), Brazil.



strated that today's footballers, the greatest collection of fakers, con men and whiners, have transformed flopping into an art form. Pulling each others shirts, they have become the world's "textile testers." Witness Croatian Slaven Bilic's Oscar-winning performance to deprive France's Laurent Blanc the chance of playing in the final. So convincingly did Bilic grab his eyes, his throat, his chest, desperately searching for his non-existent pain that Jose Manuel Garcia Arranda, the mesmerized Spanish referee promptly waived the red card at the bull, Blanc. With no film reviews, referees got suckered. In American sports, punishments are dished out after a review of the tapes. FIFA should consider that.

Sweden had seen blacks. Women would run their fingers through 17-year old Pele's hair to see how it felt! The 1962 World Cup was different. No longer an obscure star, Pele was getting unwelcome attention from the opponents. Severe injury prevented him from playing in the final. The 1966 World Cup was a nightmare for Pele. Opponents, who did not care if they were sent off, attacked him savagely. With the referees unwilling or unable to protect Pele, the 25-year old sensation declared that he would never play in the World Cup again.

Fortunately for the world, FIFA came up with the yellow and red cards for the 1970 Mexico City World Cup, and Brazil convinced Pele to change his mind. And what a show he put on! The world watched in awe what still is considered the best World Cup and Brazil's (with Pele, Tostao, Zairinho, Alberto) the best team ever. Having played for the New York Cosmos for two years in the late 1970s (along with Franz Beckenbauer) Pele is well known and admired here in the US. In American sports, punishments are dished out after a review of the tapes. FIFA should consider that.

with his back to the goal and immediately swiveled around and gently tapped the ball into the corner of the net. The goalkeeper, not expecting a shot so quickly, was caught flatfooted. Fans like to see the football busting through the net. Players such as Pele, Mueller and Ronaldo know that a lot of goals are missed that way. The superstars do it with finesse, between the goalkeeper's legs, if necessary.

Now some memories of the World Cup. The Dane Brian Laudrup's film star-like pose, lying on the ground, after equalizing against Brazil, England's Michael Owen's tremendous solo goal against Argentina, the tournament's best. And some real English violence.

In retaliation for a shove, England's David Beckham kicked an Argentine in full view of the referee, who ejected him, forcing England to play one man short for seventy-five minutes and eventually lose. Immediately, the Fleet Street wolf pack began howling for the head of Beckham, the pinup boy, who is Britain's highest paid player (14 million dollars) and engaged to Victoria Adams, better known as the Posh Spice of the Spice Girls.

"Ten Heroic Lions, One Stupid Boy," fumed the "Daily Mirror." Beckham's apology notwithstanding, readers registered the following response to "The Sun": "A 61-year caretaker from North London: Beckham should put his shirt back on and go and become the fifth Spice Girl." A 22-year old nanny from Suffolk: "How could he do this to his country? He let down the side and the nation." A Leicester resident: "If he walked into my local pub, he

would be lynched." The last is a chilling reminder of what happened to Colombian star Andres Escobar, after he accidentally let in an "own goal" against the US in 1994. Saying, "Thanks for the auto goal," a "fan" shot him dead upon his return to Medellin. David Beckham took no chances. He flew directly to New York, where he knew he would be safe!

The French players were lamenting the lack of French "supporters." Although 20.5 of the 58 million French watched their national team defeat the Croats, "Les Bleus" believed that the fans inside the stadium were not vocal enough. Said defender Frank Leboeuf: "get rid of your suits, put on a T-shirt, paint your face and start shouting. This is a game of the masses."

French President Jacques Chirac refused to wear the French jersey in the stadium. (He and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin wore French team's scarves during the final.) The French had no soccer hymn. After their victory over Croatia, they came up with a limp: "On est en la finale!" (We are in the final!) After the final, Arc de Triomphe lit up with "La Victoire est en nous" (Victory is Ours) and to Chirac's consternation, "Zidane for President!" Finally, they blared Queen's "We are the Champions." Hard to figure out the bias, French. Was it not their Nobel Prize winning writer-philosopher Albert Camus who had said, "All I know about morality and the duties we all have, I owe to football."

One could argue that overall Brazil (and Holland) were better teams. But, France was better when it mattered.

National Computer Programming Contest 1998

organised by Proshika in collaboration with The Daily Star
5th August 1998 Hotel Sheraton Dhaka Bangladesh

Our Students: Conqueror of ACM Programming Site

by Prof. Mohammad Kaykobad

In the previous article, we talked about performance of our students in their very first appearance in the ACM ICPC field February last at Atlanta. This is a kind of success in the international meet that we have possibly never enjoyed. But this success has not stopped our brilliant computer students to go forward as it often happens in case of most of our successes.

For example, consider our victory in ICC against Kenya and the way we celebrated the success. What did we do then? We lost 22 matches in a row to give an appropriate reply to all celebrations and expectations. We should have been convinced by the reality and statistics, which speak against any of our expectation. We are bereft of the merit and talent required for world standard not only in cricket but also in any other form of sports. We do not have to be disappointed with this. The whole of Asia had also to be convinced of their poor skill shown in the World Cup.

In spite of the capability Japan had to keep aloof from the development of her defense system after the Second World War. No country attacked Japan, and in return to their indifference to defense development they have turned out to be one of the topmost economic and technical might of the earth. If our indifference to sports for some time permit us to invest our scarce resources to other more productive sectors and get developed in the same way, then why not?

The University of Valladolid of Spain has been organizing a problem-solving forum for students in the same spirit as ACM does. That is why it has associated the name of ACM with it. A server has been placed with the University of Valladolid with a database containing about 500 problems divided into five volumes. These problems have been compiled from various sources. Since judge's data are not available for all of them, problems to be submitted for judgement should be selected from those for which there is a tick sign in the front. There are facilities for downloading the problems. The input and test output data using programming contents elsewhere with their judging software and problems.

Problems are of varying degrees of complexity, and follow the format of ACM contests. In fact, many of the problems are those that were set in ACM contests. Each problem is usually related to different topics of computer science. The problems are usually described in stories, and at the end are given test input and test output data using programming contents elsewhere with their judging software and problems.

done through email to the address the student provides in his registration information. In the registration, a student has to give his name, password, country and some other details. Students are given an ID consisting of 4 digits followed by two letters. The web page contains information on individual programmers in his profile, which contains, in addition to information supplied by the student, a list of problems that he has solved keeping marks of how recently the problems were solved.

It also gives the statistics as to how many submissions were accepted, accepted with presentation errors, wrong, crash, time limit exceeded etc. This also means that it is not good enough to be able to solve the problem, it is also important to use efficient algorithms for solving it.

The web page also contains various statistics on the problems. For example, for each problem how many submissions have been made and how many of them are successful. This statistics may help a new registrant to find problems that are expected to be relatively easy. The site also provides a list of so far unsolved problems. In the Online Judge status a programmer can see the status of his program just after submission whether it is running or the result.

I think the organizers of the site have been really successful in their mission. About 600 programmers from over 50 countries are submitting their programs for testing. In Bangladesh students have come to learn about it through participation of Monirul Islam Sharif in October, 1997 just before the regional contest at the North South University. This year in March Rezaul Alam Chowdhury of CSE Department, BUET, has registered. Then other students, mainly from the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, have registered, and started their massive problem-solving endeavor. By now this has made a revolution in the ranking page. For quite some time Rezaul Alam Chowdhury (Shaikat) has remained as the World Champion with the second and third positions being occupied by Andreas Bjorklund of Sweden and Suman Kumar Nath of the CSE Department, BUET.

Bangladeshi students are occupying not only these two top positions but also other 15 top positions in the first 25. The achievement of these meritorious students is unparalleled in any form of competition in the history of our country. It is hard to believe that our students have overpowered the students of the rest of the world in such convincing a manner.

Let me elaborate on the performance of our students. Our country is ranked one in quality of problem solving, which is measured by the average number of problems solved by a programmer. Our country is ranked one also in terms of total number of problems solved by any individual country. Whereas our students have solved a total of about 1979 problems, our nearest rival

Sweden, having a larger number of programmers have solved only 1/4th of ours. Will you believe that we have also surpassed Europe in ranking of quality? Europe has about 303 participants, whereas we have only 48.

Our students have altogether submitted 3697 times with 1979 problems solving successfully, whereas Europe has solved 1959 problems in 7901 submissions. Look at the quality of submission of Bangladeshi students in comparison with those of Europe — a region consisting of the most advanced nations of the world. Our student Shaikat is the World Champion, and he is the only participant, who solved 200 problems. His nearest rival has solved 177. Out of 11 centurians, including the double centurians, we have 8 from Bangladesh — a feat we never dared to imagine. The other three comes from Sweden, Canada and Ukraine. We have the most number of highly ranked programmers there in the list, in terms of number of problems solved.

Hopefully there will come a time when this skill will be used by a real leader to cash home the benefits both in economy and technology. I think the wind is favorable. Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury, Ex-adviser of the Care-Taker Government, has been constantly encouraging students. Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir rightly realized the potential. The Honorable Prime Minister has been giving due importance to this sector through tax-cut and other means. She has kindly given her consent to be present in a programming contest — an inconceivable event. Had it been a football or a cricket match or even a boat race or any other form of sports, presence of ministers would have been expected. This will be an altogether new culture for our political leaders to encourage students not in sports but in a contest where there will be no hue and cry, where win will not be celebrated by breaking or damaging cars or other public property or by punishing the opponents physically.

We sincerely pray that our leaders continue to appreciate, foster and exercise this sort of culture also in future. Let us be famous for what God has given inside our head and be not shameful for any deficiency that we have in our legs, hands and other limbs. Let our merit bring in a lot of success to this nation. Let us invest our scarce resources not where we are not world class but there, where we are world class.

In this era of information technology no other sector is as promising as this one. So in order that we can achieve our national development at an acceptable pace we must invest in education of our brilliant students, and in information technology. The Government may also give a thought to utilizing these skilled students through embarking upon challenging projects that can be completed by them under the leadership of dedicated souls.

It is very encouraging to note that Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir has realized the potential of our students quite early and has given a reception organized by BCC at an auditorium of BCBSIR. He was kind enough to announce a prize money of Tk. 1 lac each for each of the nine programmers who solved problems at that time. Of the

nine eight belongs to the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, BUET. Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir has also promised to help develop laboratories in the department for these brilliant students. It may be noted here that of the 16 programmers in the first 25, 15 comes from CSE Department, BUET — a phenomenal performance by the students of the same department.

I am also happy to see that our interest has not died down with the reception given to students earlier. A few personalities have expressed interest to encourage these young students through hosting receptions. Proshika Computer Systems, with the highly energetic and ever enthusiastic Zakaria Swapan at the forefront, has been organizing the first National Computer Programming Contest to be held at Hotel Sonargaon on the 5th of August in order to encourage and consolidate success of our computer students. This is indeed a very timely initiative to foster the skill our students are possessed with.

Hopefully there will come a time when this skill will be used by a real leader to cash home the benefits both in economy and technology. I think the wind is favorable. Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury, Ex-adviser of the Care-Taker Government, has been constantly encouraging students. Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir rightly realized the potential. The Honorable Prime Minister has been giving due importance to this sector through tax-cut and other means. She has kindly given her consent to be present in a programming contest — an inconceivable event. Had it been a football or a cricket match or even a boat race or any other form of sports, presence of ministers would have been expected. This will be an altogether new culture for our political leaders to encourage students not in sports but in a contest where there will be no hue and cry, where win will not be celebrated by breaking or damaging cars or other public property or by punishing the opponents physically.

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The writer is Head, Dept of Computer Science & Engineering, BUET. This is the second article of the series on Information Technology.

A Scent of Democracy in World's Last Shangri-La!

IANS reports from New Delhi

ONE of the world's last ruling monarchs, governing a tiny and picturesque Himalayan kingdom, has finally given a scent of democracy to his 600,000 people.

Ironically, many of his subjects in what is called the world's last Shangri-La do not appear ready for it. King Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Bhutan has proposed, for the first time in the kingdom's history, wide-ranging powers for the fledgling National Assembly, including an elected cabinet and the assembly's right to force the king to abdicate by a no-confidence vote.

The measures, which stunned Bhutan, were approved earlier this month after prolonged debate in the assembly during which many members wondered if there was any need for the Western-educated king to bring about the sweeping change.

A Bhutanese diplomat here told IANS that a special committee had been set up to frame rules for the cabinet's functioning. It would study different constitutions across the world. The diplomat did not elaborate. King Wangchuk has been in power for 26 years, ruling a country of high mountains, thick forests and fertile valleys. Bhutan, or the land of the thunder dragon, in the eastern Himalayas, is bound by communist China on the north and on all other sides by India, the world's largest democracy.

The first hereditary king of Bhutan was installed in December 1907. An Anglo-Bhutanese treaty, signed in 1910, placed Bhutan's foreign relations under the supervision of the government of British India. It was replaced in 1949 by a new treaty under which Bhutan seeks India's advice on its foreign relations, but is free to decide whether or not to accept it.

The country, which strictly controls foreign visitors to preserve its Buddhist culture, rarely figures in world news. Naturally, King Wangchuk's decision to effect radical changes in the governance stunned the kingdom.

"When we know that the existing system is perfect, why should we change it?" asked Dasho Sonam Tezin, a member

of the 140-member National Assembly, echoing widespread fears in the national newspaper 'Kuensel'. "If the people are enjoying peace and happiness, what is the reason for change? Why should a person who is not ill be hospitalized?"

Wangchuk, who became King at the age of 16 in 1972, however, had other ideas. He told the assembly that he wanted to devolve greater power to the people and the assembly to elect ministers although he would shortlist the candidates.

The time has now come to promote even greater people's participation in the decision-making process," he said, adding that in future Council of Ministers would be elected and "vested with full executive powers to provide efficient and effective governance of our country."

In a resultant secret ballot that followed, the new foreign minister Jigmi Thinley, who graduated from Delhi Univer-

sity and did his masters in Public Administration from Penn State University in the US, received the maximum of 136 votes. Thinley replaces Dawa Tsering who was the world's longest-serving foreign minister, having served his nation for 26 years. The new home minister, Thinley Gyamtsho, got the least votes — 120.

"For a country like ours it is a big event," said Kinley Dorji, editor of Bhutan's only newspaper group, 'Kuensel'. "Can you imagine 20 members not accepting a King's nominee in his presence?" Dorji said that the future elections could see closer contests.

Bhutan's new cabinet, which has been vested with executive powers, would also include six new members to a royal advisory council, also elected by the assembly, a royal nominee and two members elected by the Buddhist clergy.

The King explained that the limited democracy he had introduced was best suited to

Bhutan.

"Bhutan should have a system of government that is best suited for the needs and requirements of a small nation like ours to ensure it continued well-being and security, and safeguard its status as a sovereign, independent country," he said.

Accordingly, an inbuilt mechanism of checks and balance is very necessary for us to ensure that the procedures for the election of cabinet ministers cannot be undermined and exploited by vested interests," he said.

The fear was echoed by some of the National Assembly members. Bhutan, they said, was not prepared for such major changes.

Bhutanese diplomats in New Delhi could not explain what forced the King to act. But analysts believed the lingering campaign by pro-democracy Bhutanese groups could be one major factor.

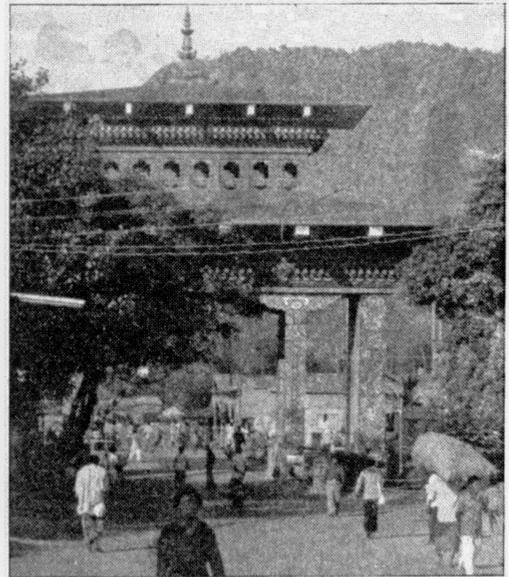
In May, the United Front for Democracy (UFD), which is in exile in Nepal and claims widespread support, said it had given up on the King introducing reforms and threatened to launch a "revolution" to bring about his downfall.

"Our hopes that King Wangchuk will change his autocratic ruling style have died," the UFD said. "Keeping in mind the fact that a revolution is the need of the day, we have already started primary works to implement our programmes for the revolution."

More than 100,000 Bhutanese, mainly Hindus of Nepalese descent, fled the kingdom in 1990 following an official clampdown on illegal immigrants and a drive to enforce traditional Drukpa Buddhist culture. All Bhutanese nationals are obliged to wear the national costume. At least seven rounds of talks between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan have failed to resolve the refugee problem.

The dissidents are unlikely to accept the changes. For them, only multi-party democracy — like in neighbouring Nepal — is the true alternative to monarchy. But that is a scenario most citizens of this Shangri-La wouldn't even want to discuss.

— India Abroad News Service



Gateway, Phuntsholing

Fresh Move to Oust Taliban Militia from Kabul

Muhammad Najeeb of IANS writes from Islamabad

THE Afghan war may flare up again as opposition forces prepare to try and oust the Taliban from Kabul.

Leaders of Afghanistan's major opposition groups are engaged in extensive consultations to chalk out a joint strategy against the fundamentalist Taliban militia who have control of most of the provinces of the war-torn country.

Ousted Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, former Afghan Defence Minister Ahmed Shah Masood, Hizb-e-Islami chief Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jumbash-e-Milli chief Rashid Dostum have held a series of meetings in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif and discussed strategy to launch joint offensive against the Taliban in different provinces, reliable sources said. Afghan sources based in Pe-

shawar told IANS that Hekmatyar, Masood, Rabbani and General Dostum have agreed to support each other's forces in different areas against the Taliban forces.

Hekmatyar's decision to throw weight behind Afghan opposition groups, especially his frequent meetings with commander Masood, is being viewed as a significant change in Afghanistan's equations.

The sources said that joint attack on Kabul might be launched in early August as the opposition leaders are again scheduled to meet on July 24 in Mazar-e-Sharif to draw up the final strategy. It is believed that the opposition forces might also launch an offensive against Taliban forces in Badghis, Kunar, Laghman and Sarobi provinces. Talking about Taliban's pre-

paredness, the sources said that they were equipped with the latest weapons but hoped that joint move by the opposition forces would force the militia to flee the capital city.

The opposition leader, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that Pakistan was not only giving monetary help to the Taliban but was also arming them with the latest weapons and missiles. At the same time, Pakistan and Iran are making hectic efforts to avoid further bloodshed in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Special Envoy Iftikhar Murshid, who returned on 10 July from Tehran, held consultations with the Iranian leadership there. "We (Pakistan and Iran) have decided to send a joint delegation to Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar (Taliban base camp), Murshid told IANS.

He said this delegations would hold extensive talks with both sides and would try to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table.

Murshid is also leading a Pakistan delegation next week to Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar to hold talks with the Taliban and the Afghan opposition known as Northern Alliance.

Resolution of the Afghan crisis requires serious cooperation among Afghanistan's neighbours," Murshid said. "Iran and Pakistan are the central figures in such efforts," he added.

Murshid said both Pakistan and Iran have vital interest in the restoration of peace in Afghanistan as no other country had suffered so much because of the Afghan conflict.