

Bringing co-hosts together

TOKYO, Feb 13 (AFP): For officials of Japan and South Korea, joint hosts of the 2002 football World Cup, trips between each other capitals have become routine as they try to bridge more than the stretch of water that separates them.

"We are optimistic but it's really a big challenge," said Tadao Murato of the Japan organising committee for the FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan (JAWOC), mindful of the enormous tasks to be completed by June 2002.

Some 50 people are at work full time at JAWOC's Tokyo headquarters. That will swell to 100 by April when they, along with football's world governing body FIFA, prepare the drawings for the qualifying round.

Five contact groups have been formed by JAWOC and its South Korean counterpart, KOWOC.

They will have to tread softly, Murata acknowledged, noting: "Japan and South Korea are so different and I think more dissimilar than European countries between themselves."

"Ticket pricing has to allow for the much weaker purchasing power of the Koreans as against the Japanese."

Common logos, the sharing out of match fixtures and readiness for surprise moves from North Korea during the event are other major sources of worry.

In a show of goodwill, Tokyo and Seoul decided last month to ease some visa restrictions for the finals and form twin cities of ten host cities in each country.

"Co-organising such a big event needs very close co-operation because differences can erupt over delicate situations," said Rene-Georges Querry, who officiated at France '98.

In Tokyo to share experiences from that event, Querry said the organisation of transport between venues would be a major problem.

"Crowd control is important but could be limited in view of the traditional discipline that characterises the two countries and their distance from Europe and Latin America, the two major regions from where hooligans travel," he said.

Despite recent signs of a thaw, ties between Japan and South Korea remain stuck in deep distrust, differences are still blocking a possible visit to Seoul by Emperor Akihito.

President Kim Dae-Jung said Thursday that it would not be suitable for the visit to take place after the World Cup but the Japanese public thinks the opposite, opinion polls show.

The emperor's visit has great significance as it would be the first since a 35-year Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula ended in 1945, the period left behind scars too deep to be healed by the exchange of goodwill that followed Kim's Japan trip in October.

CAF invites Nigeria

LAGOS, Feb 13: Nigeria has been invited to bid for next year's African Nations Cup in place of Zimbabwe, reports Reuters.

The new agency of Nigeria on Friday quoted sports ministry officials as saying the invitation came from the Confederation of African Football (CAF).

On Thursday, Morocco said it was prepared to step in and host the tournament which CAF took away from Zimbabwe on Monday, saying it had not made sufficient progress in building stadiums or developing an infrastructure to televise the games.

South Africa, host in 1996, said it, too, would consider stepping in.

CAF has set March 10 as a deadline for bids, it will take a decision on March 14.

Nigeria, host of the World Youth Championships in April, south Africa and Morocco are among five African nations bidding to stage the 2006 World Cup finals.



Norwegian Lasse Kjus bites the medal after winning the Men's Giant Slalom at the World Alpine Ski Championships in Vail, Colorado on February 12. Kjus also won gold medals in Giant Slalom and Super G events besides a silver in the Combined and Downhill. — AFP photo

De Boers ready for Real

MADRID, Feb 13 (Reuters/Internet): Barcelona's Frank and Ronald de Boer are used to the pressure of inter-city rivalries from their days at Ajax Amsterdam.

Games between Ajax and Rotterdam rivals Feyenoord are among the toughest in European club soccer. However even these games cannot match the frenzied atmosphere that surrounds Barcelona versus Real Madrid.

The twins will get their first taste of the biggest occasion in Spanish soccer on Sunday. "I've always had the dream of playing in this match and there is no doubt I'm starting to feel nervous," Frank de Boer admitted.

Ronald was more relaxed. "Having to get ready for Wednesday's international against Portugal helped take

my mind off things. "However I'm sure it's going to be an unforgettable experience. This match in the Nou Camp has its own unique characteristics."

"The public could be a determining factor. They are going to be behind us and not Madrid, that's for sure," Frank added.

Only 345 tickets have gone on sale to Real supporters. The Nou Camp will still be filled to its 112,000 capacity.

Both brothers said playing against a Real Madrid side coached by their compatriot Guus Hiddink would be a strange experience. They played under Hiddink when the Dutch national side finished fourth in France '98 last summer.

Their relations with Hiddink remain extremely warm since they joined Barcelona last month, each man costing \$11 million.

"I wish him all the best and hope he has much success, but

only from next Monday," Ronald joked.

Frank first encountered Real Madrid in 1992 during a pre-season tournament at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium, when Ajax won 3-1.

Three years later at the same tournament both brothers were in the Ajax line-up when Real were 1-0 winners.

However, they got their revenge later in the year during the European Cup run which took Ajax to a final against Juventus they eventually lost on penalties.

Ajax, containing the de Boers, won 1-0 in Amsterdam and then 2-0 in Madrid.

The record of success over Real has led Ronald to believe he and his brother could be talismans for Barcelona on Sunday.

"We can win our eighth consecutive league game and that would put six points between ourselves and Real," he said.

Wilkinson could stay a bit longer

LONDON, Feb 13 (Reuters/Internet): Howard Wilkinson is expected to remain as

England coach until the end of this season when Kevin Keegan could take over on a permanent basis.

British newspapers said on Saturday that Wilkinson did not want the England job on a long-term basis and wished to return to being technical director, a post which could be given more influence under a proposed reform of the Football Association.

The FA may ask Keegan, manager of second division Fulham, to support Wilkinson at this season's European championship qualifiers, starting with the game against Poland on March 27.

But their primary aim is to secure Keegan's services at the end of a season in which Fulham, currently top of their division, could win promotion.

The FA is expected to make an announcement next week, perhaps on Wednesday, on who will succeed Glenn Hoddle, who was sacked on February 2 for saying disabled people were paying for the sins of a former life.

Geoff Thompson, acting chairman of the FA, appeared equivocal about Keegan, who is the bookmaker's favourite to become England coach, in an interview in the Daily Telegraph.

He agreed that the presence

Man United's gesture

BELFAST, Feb 13: Manchester United are to donate a special trophy in memory of one of Northern Ireland's most promising young soccer players who collapsed and died during a training session in his home town of Lisburn on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Martin Bell, 14, a target for a number of top clubs, had been preparing to go to England for a trial with United last this week.

The boy was buried on Friday and United manager Alex Ferguson sent a personal message of condolence to the family.

The youngster had visited United on several occasions and Ferguson said "While I was watching the boy play or while attending a social gathering, I was very impressed by his character. He will be sadly missed by all the boys and staff at the club."

The new trophy will be presented each year to the most promising teenage player from Northern Ireland.

son said: "Yes. You may be right."

Thompson said the FA would only turn to a foreign coach if it was "not possible" to appoint an Englishman. He stressed that the integrity of the new coach would be his most important quality after the Hoddle debacle and the legal storm that swirled around Hoddle's predecessor, Terry Venables.

"He's got to be the best available coach at international level. He's got to be a good manager as well," said Thompson.

"And he's got to have integrity. We're under the microscope. You can't have the first two without the third because eventually the third over-rides them -- as we've seen in the past."

"How many parts would Keegan fit into? He'd fit into a few, wouldn't he? Kevin Keegan will be a very good candidate but there are many others who could be very good candidates."

Thompson backed up comments by French players after France's 2-0 defeat of England on Wednesday that the English players showed little heart in the second half of the Wembley game.

"I couldn't believe it. The first half they were chasing everything, really wanting to work hard. The second half... I don't know what happened. I don't know what the team talk was like," he said.

Floodlight sabotage Accused three appear in court

LONDON, Feb 12 (Reuters/Internet): Three men charged with offences related to sabotaging floodlights at a top English soccer ground appeared in court on Friday and were ordered to be held in custody for a week.

The men were arrested after damage was done to equipment at Charlton Athletic's London stadium in an incident linked by the premier league club to possible Asian betting coups.

Wai Yuen Liu, 37, from Hong Kong, and Chee Kwong Ong, 49, and Eng Hwa Lim, 25, both from Malaysia, will appear again before magistrates on February 19.

The three were charged with conspiracy to obtain a pecuniary advantage and with conspiracy to cause criminal damage by possessing articles which may endanger life. A fourth man, who was 40, had been bailed to return to police said.

One of the accused gave his profession as electrician while another said he was a professional gambler.

Police are looking into floodlight failures at other English premier league grounds amid reports of possible betting scams.

"We are currently investigating with the Football Association," a police spokesman said. The men were detained on Wednesday night at Charlton's The Valley ground.

Charlton managing director Peter Varney told BBC TV on Thursday: "We believe it is to do with a Far East betting coup, or attempted coup, on spread betting."

British media reported on Friday that bookmakers in some Asian countries paid out on matches that were stopped by a floodlight failure. The score at the time of the floodlight failure was treated as the full-time score.

Charlton play Liverpool at home in the premier league on Saturday and the arrests followed damage to the floodlights' electrical equipment.

Varney said: "We are not quite sure of the details but we know that... our floodlights would have been knocked out some time during that game and the damage would have been such that possibly the game could not then have continued."

David Davies, acting chief executive of the English Football Association (FA) said it was too early to link the arrests with a spate of floodlight failures at premier league matches.

"The arrests followed damage to electrical equipment connected to the floodlights," Davies said in a statement.

"We have provided the police with a list of previous floodlight failures but they assure us it is too early to link such incidents to this case. We are aware of connections between football and gambling."

"The premier league and the Football League will be contacting all clubs over the next 24 hours. The integrity of the game is crucial to us all."

There has been conjecture since late 1997 linking floodlight failures to a Far East betting ring.

Thais in front

BANGKOK, Feb 13: Thailand led Kazakhstan 2-0 on the first day of the Davis Cup Asia-Oceania Zone Group Two first round competition here Friday, reports AFP.

In the first match Thailand's top singles player Paradon Srichaphan beat Tavel Baranov in straight sets 6-1, 6-3, 6-2.

In the second match Thailand's rising new star Danai Udomchoke had a much tougher battle before finally overcoming Alexei Kodrukuyk 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, 5-7, 7-5, in 3 hrs 24 mins.

Today the doubles match will be between Srichaphan and Vittaya Sri of Thailand and Dias Doskaray and Yegor Shalunov.

Sponsors warn IOC

NEW YORK, Feb 13 (AP): They've paid more than a half-billion dollars to be able to use the Olympics Rings to sell everything from insurance to hamburgers.

And now, angered by the biggest scandal in Olympic history, high-level sponsors are demanding their money's worth.

"Seeking 'thorough reform' to soothe nervous chairmen and shareholders, two dozen marketing executives from the biggest sponsors of the games told the International Olympic Committee this week to clean up its house or face dire consequences, participants in the meeting told The Associated Press."

"They need to fix the problem," one official said Friday. "If they don't fix the problem to our liking, we say, 'Okay, guys,' and pick up our toys and walk away."

The dramatic meeting Thursday was the clearest sign yet the IOC was facing a revolt by the corporations that pay some \$50 million dollar each to use the five-ring Olympic logo in their ads.

The sponsor representatives, all speaking on condition of anonymity, said the companies were worried the rings would lose their "halo effect" and become devalued as advertising tools if the scandal involving bribes in Salt Lake City's winning bid for the 2002 Winter Olympics persisted.

"None of the sponsors are totally comfortable with the way things are," an officer with a

longtime IOC company said. The IOC said it had received the sponsors' support at the 3 1/2-hour session.

"Everyone was very concerned, but they have been concerned," said Michael Payne, the IOC's marketing director and one of two committee officials at the meeting.

But participating sponsors insisted the tone was far different from that of similar meetings held since the scandal broke in late November.

"They wanted Kumba Ya," but instead they got "Fire and Rain," one person in the meeting said.

Not once did representatives of the 11 companies in the Olympic Programme, or TOP, the IOC's highest-level sponsorship group, called for the resignation of committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch. But many offered support for Samaranch, either said participants from four companies.

The meeting, with Payne and IOC vice president Dick Pound, involved vice presidents, marketing chiefs and public relations directors, who said they were passing along concerns from the top floor.

"We told them chairman and bosses were now telling us that they were worried the IOC was not committed to reforms," one participant said. Another said the IOC was told that "sponsors are really lacking faith in the IOC to take the long-term actions it says it will take."

All the representatives questioned said the sponsors discussed four things:

1: Change in IOC management "at the highest level."

2: "Thorough reform" through the expulsion of any member directly linked to the scandal; so far, nine members have been expelled or resigned.

3: Permanent changes in voting for Olympic host cities, rather than one-time-only changes in the June selection of the site of the 2006 Winter Games.

4: More public accountability, including open financial records.

One participant said that unless the IOC adopts such reforms at a special assembly March 17-18, "it faces revolt March 19."

Payne said there were no signs of revolt during the meeting, the second large-scale session with the TOP sponsors since mid-January.

"It was not a contentious meeting," the IOC official said Friday by telephone from his Swiss home. "They asked some questions of us -- 'How serious is the IOC on the reform process?' We told them, 'Very serious.'"

Payne said some of the sponsors might be feeling pressure as they neared the deadline for looking in ad budgets leading to the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Sponsor officials at the New York meeting said the issue of rebates never came up, although an Olympic sponsorship can cost up to five times as much as a marketing deal with the NFL or NBA.

The TOP sponsors include Coca-Cola, IBM, John Hancock, Kodak, McDonald's, Panasonic, Samsung, Sports Illustrated, UPS, Visa and Xerox.

Sampras cruises, Chang crashes

SAN JOSE, Feb 13 (AP): He began with an ace and ended with another. Pete Sampras had a break point throughout the tournament, reached the semifinals of the Sybase Open with a 7-5, 6-3 win over Bernd Karbacher on Friday night.

Sampras, returning from a 10-week layoff, did not appear to be at all bothered by a blister that has developed on his right hand during the tournament.

"I was pleased with the way I played tonight. I'm where I want to be," Sampras said. "My tennis has gotten better throughout the week."

Through many of his points came on aces and rocket-like groundstrokes, one of Sampras' biggest points was on his softest shot of the night.

Karbacher hit a lob over Sampras' head and far to his left. Sampras, backpedaling quickly and barely managing to

maintain his balance, reached high above his head and just reached the ball -- tapping it back for a winner.

That was his first point of the sixth game of the second set. He went on to break Karbacher's serve to take a 4-2 lead, then held his own serve twice to finish off the match.

"It was an unusual point," Sampras said. "I was happy to somehow hit an overhead. My feet kind of got stuck. And I used my little athletic ability to hit that shot. My athletic ability really helped me out there."

Cecil Mamiit, two days after being handed a place in his first career quarterfinals when Andre Agassi was defaulted for cursing, played his way into the semifinals on Friday.

Mamiit outlasted Mark Woodforde 7-6 (7-5), 4-6, 6-3 in a match that went 27 minutes to reach a semifinal match against fourth-seeded Michael Chang, one of his role models.

Mamiit, who began the year ranked 132nd in the world, probably will move up to the

Top 100 with his win over Woodforde. It was his first quarterfinal match in an ATP tour event, and he got there because Agassi was defaulted while leading Mamiit by a set.

Mamiit, who lost the first set 6-0 to Agassi, was leading four points to none in the tiebreaker when Agassi had his outburst. The victory left Mamiit with an empty feeling.

"I would have liked to play that match and get that motivation, knowing I could compete against him," Mamiit said of the second-round match. "I couldn't take anything away from it."

"All I could do was justify the fact I was in the quarterfinals and take advantage of it. This certainly helps. I can't say right now I could have beaten Agassi that day, but I'm happy with my result today."

Chang was a 6-1, 7-5 winner over Christian Ruud in Friday's other afternoon quarterfinal. Third-seeded Mark Philippoussis had a quarterfinal match set for Friday night against Justin Gimelstob.



(From L-R) SECOND, FIRST & THIRD: Winners of the women's Giant Slalom at the World Alpine Ski Championships. — AFP photo

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Sunday 14th February

(All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme)

BBC

6:00 BBC World News Headlines
6:30 World News
7:00 BBC World News
7:30 World Focus: Correspondent
8:00 BBC World News
8:30 World Focus: Simpson's
9:00 BBC World News
9:30 Hard Talk
10:00 BBC World News
10:30 BBC World News
11:00 BBC World News
11:30 India Business Report
12:00 BBC World News
12:30 World Living: The Travel Show
1:00 BBC World News
1:30 Hard Talk
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