

JAPAN

World Cup Countdown: All set for a grand start

MONZURUL HUQ *writes from Tokyo*

THE long awaited 2002 FIFA World Cup is to take-off at Seoul's newly built World Cup Stadium exactly a week from now. Japan, being the co-host of the prestigious tournament and having the privilege of staging the final, will have to wait less than twenty-four hours for the excitement and euphoria to reach its shore on 1st June. The World Cup in Japanese soil is to kick-off on that day at the Sea of Japan coastal town of Niigata at 15:30 local time when two group E rivals, Ireland and Cameroon, will play their match at the recently completed beautiful stadium rightfully named as the 'Big Swan'. The stadium, with its location at the waterfront and an outward look from above as if a swan is having its carefree swim in tranquil water, has a 40,000-seat capacity to welcome spectators and players from around the world. A few hours later on the same day, northern city of Sapporo will host the match between Germany and Saudi Arabia at the all covered 'Sapporo Dome'. From then on till 14th June, three to four matches of the preliminary round will be played each day at different locations of two host countries before the competition moves on to next knock-out stage.

Meanwhile, French coach of the Japanese national team, Philippe Troussier, has picked up 23 players who will represent Japan at the World Cup. Troussier had called up over 100 players since taking over the charge of the national team in September 1998, but was conspicuously absent from the official press conference held in Tokyo last Friday to announce the names of those whom he has selected for the final squad. The coach was in Paris to watch a match between title-holder France and Belgium, Japan's first group opponent at the World Cup. He faxed the list of his final selection from there to the Japan Football Association (JFA) managing director Kozo Kinomoto, who read off the 23 names at the press conference. This outraged the Japanese media and some of them even started speculating that

Troussier, who already made his intention clear in more than one occasion that he intends to leave Japan after the World Cup, wanted to be in Europe to do job hunting.

Philippe Troussier's list of final 23 includes eight World Cup veterans who were on duty for Japan four years ago in France. Out of the eight two are considered to be last minutes inclusion, as they were dropped out of most warm-up games that the national team was

Japan is to play her first match against Belgium in Saitama on 4th June, which will be followed by two more group level games against Russia and Tunisia. Soccer experts around the country have already started calculating different variations of outcomes of those matches to predict the possibility of the

playing recently. A pressing need to install some form of pride and passion into the national squad that was increasingly proving vulnerable recently might have prompted the coach to include veteran defender Yutaka Akita and striker Masashi Nakayama into the final list. In last two warm up games Japanese side conceded six goals. Losing 0-3 to Norway was particularly shocking as it exposed how shaky Japan remained in defense. Norwegians, who have not qualified for the World Cup finals, tormented the physically inferior Japanese back line and scored three goals in last eighteen minutes. The overall performance of the team in Norway probably played a crucial role for

Troussier to decide that more experience and leadership qualities were needed in his squad.

But the inclusion of veterans also meant there was no place for the most popular J-League player in recent days, Shunsuke Nakamura, whose strong claims for a midfield position eventually came to nothing. The 23-member squad includes three goalkeepers, six defenders, ten midfielders and four strikers. The national team, despite having six players from Kashima Antlers, reflects a more or less balanced representation of other leading local clubs. It also includes four Japanese star players who are playing in foreign leagues. The four are: goalkeeper Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi of the English first division team Portsmouth, and midfielders Hidetoshi Nakata of Italian team A.C.Parma, Junichi Inamoto of English Premier League champion Arsenal, and Shinji Ono of Netherlands's UEFA Cup title holder Feyenoord. The team also includes a Brazilian national, Alessandro Santos, who has recently obtained his Japanese citizenship.

Japan is to play her first match against Belgium in Saitama on 4th June, which will be followed by two more group level games against Russia and Tunisia. Soccer experts around the country have already started calculating different variations of outcomes of those matches to predict the possibility of the national squad moving to the second round of the championship. The Group Japan belongs to is a relatively weaker one, and the added advantage of playing in front of huge supporters at home might also help the team to fulfill its dream of not only winning national team's first ever World Cup encounter, but also to play in the second round. But much of that will definitely depend on those 23 that Troussier has chosen to face the task.

EAST TIMOR

Independence Day: The absent dead

BY JILL JOLLIFFE *writes from dili*

EAST Timor's new flag fluttered to the mast in Dili at midnight on Sunday to a breathtaking cultural display in the presence of world leaders and about 100,000 Timorese onlookers.

There were cutlass-bearing mounted tribesmen wheeling their horses to thunderous drumbeats, a thousand white-clad schoolchildren singing sacred works, and a giant plastic crocodile - symbol of the island territory - that slithered its way into the stadium with a Timorese child aloft. As midnight struck, the unaccompanied voice of American opera singer Barbara Hendricks sang Freedom into the clear night air. Then the sky exploded with a display of 25,000 fireworks as the Democratic Republic of East Timor was declared.

Former US president Bill Clinton was there, as was Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, despite opposition in Jakarta from Timor veterans, and Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan presided, and there was a long list of regional leaders, including the prime ministers of Australia and New Zealand.

Some of us there could compare the event with that day on November 28, 1975, when the flag of the republic was hoisted for the first time. The circumstances were very different. There were no international leaders present and we were a tiny crowd anxiously scanning the horizon for Indonesian warships. The world seemed to be against the East Timorese dream of independence, and the UN didn't want to hear.

Dili was then a charming Portuguese colonial backwater. Today it is a chaotic Asian city bloated with refugees, prone to urban violence and teeming with fast-talking UN officials.

Then there were only three foreign journalists present - myself, a novice freelancer for Reuters news agency; Michael Richardson, Southeast Asian correspondent for The Age (today Asian editor for the International Herald Tribune); and Roger East, a newly arrived freelancer who had come to Dili chasing the story of the Balibo Five, the five Australian-based television reporters who had been killed during an Indonesian border attack that October.

Few people noted the presence of Jose Alexandre Gusmao, today known simply as Xanana, who was sworn into office on Sunday as president of the new nation. He was to us a little-known member of the central committee of the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin), although he was well known to the Timorese as a soccer champion and

a lad about town. Never an armchair revolutionary, within days he was to join frontline fighters at the border attempting to stem the Indonesian advance.

The circumstances of the declaration were quite unexpected.

The civil war that had erupted with a coup against Portuguese power by the UDT party in August 1975 had ended with a Fretilin victory in late September. Crossing into Indonesian Timor, defeated UDT troops had in effect become hostages of the Indonesian army.

The Portuguese had fled, their soldiers mutinous in the face of looming civil war in Lisbon, and the Australian government of Labor premier Gough Whitlam was covertly backing an Indonesian plan to annex the territory.

In this power vacuum Fretilin became an unwilling de facto administration - one of the few anti-colonial movements in history to entreat the former colonial power to return.

The first Indonesian troops came over the border in September, swelling to a tide in October. In early November Michael Richardson and I observed the Indonesian onslaught on the mountain garrison of Atabae, where Fretilin troops were holding out against terrible odds.

On the morning of November 28, Roger East walked into the Hotel Turismo with the news that Timorese soldiers were gathering in the town square. There had been rumors of a split in Fretilin ranks and we assumed that there may have been a power play against the de facto government. We gathered our notebooks and walked there.

Soon familiar faces appeared, among them Mari Alkatiri, today prime minister of the 21st century's new nation, and Rogerio Lobato, then Fretilin defense commander. They told us that they had decided to declare independence because Atabae had fallen to the Indonesian army that morning.

Atabae was only 40 kilometers away as the crow flies, and it was a last gamble for the Timorese. By declaring independence they hoped to win recognition and force the UN to act. Given the cynical politicians who defined the international framework for East Timor, it was a naive dream.

The flag that was to be hoisted on Sunday evening had been hastily designed the night before by Natalino Leitao, a Fretilin militant who was to die soon after resisting the full-scale invasion launched 10 days after his flag first flew.

This Sunday night, when it was raised again, I thought of Goixnet - Bernardino Bonaparte Soares - my loyal interpreter who became a friend. ("Think of 'Gunshot' and you'll get it right", Fretilin leader Francisco Xavier do Amaral had told me.) He was a passionate young nationalist

with a radical Afro hairstyle.

He was with me at the border during my baptism of fire in September 1975.

>From that time he had always been by my side, talking excitedly about the

new Timor and asking what I thought of its prospects of freedom. I'm not sure my answers satisfied, but I tried to be honest.

When Natalino's flag unfurled he embraced me excitedly, shouting "We're independent!" I was looking for the warships. Michael

Richardson's camera recorded my last glimpse of Goixnet, at Dili airport, as we evacuated five days before the paratroopers landed. His face is that of a kid with ideas.

Roger East, the other journalist to witness that first brave little independence ceremony, opted to stay with the Timorese. Witnesses to his death who arrived in Lisbon years later testified that he had been dragged to a firing squad on Dili wharf. Goixnet suffered the same fate, for the crime of being a journalist's translator.

How he would have loved to have seen this week's historic moment. I'm sure that in the crowd many Timorese of my generation were thinking of their own Goixnets and were also weeping a little. No doubt they, too, recalled the political amnesia that had gripped the international community for 27 years and wondered why it had to cost about 200,000 deaths before their dream could be realized.

Courtesy: Asia Times

MYANMAR

Is democracy nearer in Myanmar?

ASHFAK BOKHARI

MYANMAR'S charismatic opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, known for her exemplary courage, was freed in the first week of this month by the country's ruling military junta after 19 months of house arrest, giving rise to speculations that a gradual return to democracy was imminent in the country.

Human rights organizations were, however, quick to warn that her release does not mean that re-introduction of democracy was round the corner in a country which has been under military rule since General Ne Win staged a coup in 1962. The generals adopted what they called the "Burmese way to socialism" - an autocratic dispensation that virtually froze the country's prospects for economic growth and prosperity and instead blighted with poverty and repression.

Ne Win stepped aside in 1988 in the face of a popular uprising that was violently crushed by the military which put in place the current, equally repressive, government. It also renamed the country Myanmar, held a general election in 1990 but then nullified the results as being unacceptable to the ruling junta. Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), had won an overwhelming majority (82 per cent) of the seats in the legislature.

The junta's refusal to hand over power to the NLD prompted many western countries to impose political and economic sanctions on the military regime. Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest in 1989 and was freed after six years. On that occasion, too, her release had fuelled similar hopes and speculation in Myanmar and abroad about restoration of democracy.

Suu Kyi, 56, has become a legendary figure in Myanmar's history for maintaining a dignified poise in her devotion to the cause of democracy in her military ruled country. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for struggling against, in the words of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, "a regime characterized by brutality". The committee had described her as "one of the most extraordinary examples of civil courage in Asia in recent decades".

Suu Kyi had shown an early

interest in Gandhi's non-violent philosophy his political struggle for India's freedom from colonial rule but herself stayed out of politics until she returned to her homeland from Britain in April 1988 to nurse her ailing mother. Three months later, in July, she saw a popular uprising being mercilessly suppressed. She began travelling around the country to mobilize the masses against military rule. Her British husband, Michael Aris, who was been a visiting professor at Harvard University, was last seen by her in 1989. When he was dying of cancer in England in 1999, the Burmese government refused to let him visit his wife in Yangon. Suu Kyi decided not to leave the country to see her dying husband, because she knew she would not be allowed to return to Myanmar. She has also not seen her sons, Alexander, 27, and Kim, 23, since September 1989, when their passports were revoked. They are studying in England.

In a statement soon after her release on May 6, she surprised many by stating that she would now adopt a more conciliatory approach to the trioka of hard-line generals and that she was "ready to cooperate" with them in an effort to promote political reform. She carefully avoided criticizing the regime that has seriously harmed her party and kept her confined for more than six of the past 12 years. Instead, she preferred to give the government "credit where credit is due" for releasing her. The government suggested that it, too, was interested in reconciliation, saying it was committed "to allowing all of our citizens to participate freely in ... our political process".

In fact, the only option the two sides were left with and after an understanding between the junta and Suu Kyi (endorsed by major powers) was to bring an end to the international sanctions which have now begun to bite. At present, Myanmar's coffers are all out empty and there seems to be no way of raising revenue of any kind. The money it has earned from the sale of natural gas from the Andaman Sea to Thailand amounts to about 400 million dollars a year - not enough to run the country. Opium exports are the other means that help sustain the military regime economically. The West and the United

States, in particular, are also willing to soften their stance on Myanmar in the face of growing pressure of multinationals. It is evident from the fact that the Bush administration has been quick to waive a visa ban on the visit of a senior member of Myanmar's military regime to Washington in the wake of Aung San Suu Kyi's release. The US State Department has, however, tried to justify the visit from May 13 to 17 by saying that Colonel Kyaw



Freed Suu Kyi: "...The generals know she's not going to rock the boat too much, and they're getting a lot of good publicity for it."

Thein was not covered by the visa ban, which remains in place, because it applies to military officials of higher ranks. It also said the Burmese counter-narcotics official's visit to the United States was already on the cards and not related to the release of Suu Kyi.

The US gesture is a signal to the Burmese generals that Washington may help them wriggle out of the economic crisis if more concessions being demanded by Suu Kyi were made. Even Japan has announced recently that it will give Myanmar's military government five million dollars to renovate a hydro-electric plant apparently as a reward for freeing Suu Kyi. Secret talks between the two sides being conducted through the good offices of UN special envoy Razali Ismail since October 2000 have led to the release of over 250 political prisoners, allowed the NLD to reopen its offices in Yangon, and culminated in the release from house arrest of Suu Kyi.

The junta, known officially as the State Peace and

Development Council (SPDC), appears to have finally caved in under international pressure to soften its repressive policies - to avoid tougher political and economic sanctions. The European Union renewed its economic embargo on April 22 and the EU parliament is facing pressure from its members for a ban on investments in Myanmar. The US Congress has legislation pending before it for an additional ban on imports and Washington was already poised to impose a series of severe economic and travel restrictions on Myanmar, in addition to a ban on investment, bilateral aid and arms sales.

Analysts believe that Suu Kyi has struck a deal with the junta over her release, but both sides are maintaining a studied silence on its terms. Though the opposition leader has asked the international community to maintain its economic embargo, she has, at the same time, made a number of conciliatory gestures. She has not given any call for protest rallies or demonstrations and has agreed to inform the authorities if she wished to travel outside the capital. At a press conference in Yangon, Suu Kyi hinted at ongoing negotiations, saying "the phase of confidence building [with the junta] is over" and we "look forward to moving across to a more significant phase." Amnesty International estimates that 1,500 political prisoners still remain in Burmese jails.

Suu Kyi's preference for greater reliance on international sanctions and the West's sympathy for her cause than on people's power to achieve her objective of democratic restoration speaks of her adherence to the norms of capitalist democracy. In the midst of mass anti-government protests in 1988, she had adopted a similar stance and called off the demonstrations after reaching an agreement with the military junta on holding of national elections. The generals used the opportunity to crack down on more militant opponents and strengthened its hold on power. After losing the 1990 election, the junta simply ignored the result.

The US and other major powers, it seems, have been backing Suu Kyi against the military less out of any concern for democracy and more because of a realization that the junta has become an

obstacle to foreign investment in which the western firms are keenly interested, as the country is seen to promise good profits because of its cheap labour and the absence of trade union bodies. Myanmar's is a highly regulated economy.

President Bush has joined other western leaders in hailing Suu Kyi's release, calling it "a new dawn". The European Union's key leader, Javier Solana, has described it a vindication of her "long campaign for political and human rights" that could help begin the process of Myanmar's "re-integration into the international community".

After years of bitter confrontation, these developments are seen as the most hopeful indication that the military and its democratic opposition could be on way to a peaceful settlement. Their ultimate goal is a broader sharing or a transfer of power. But making that happen will require Suu Kyi to eschew both confrontational rhetoric and some of the demands she has made of the government. Striking a conciliatory posture, she has held out an assurance to the generals that she would not use her newly-won freedom to barnstorm the country or hold large public rallies. It is evident that the NLD has realized that confrontation won't work any more and that if it wants an orderly democratic transition to materialize, it will have to find a way to coexist with the ruling junta for some time more.

Such a prospect may not be easy for the NLD rank and file to swallow nor would the ordinary people be able to appreciate Suu Kyi's changed stance. There are already reports of concern among the common Burmese over Suu Kyi's failure to adopt a tougher stand against the generals. Although the generals had long opposed any public role for Suu Kyi, they appear to have calculated that the costs in lost aid and the threat of additional sanctions outweighed the political risks involved in setting her free. One diplomat commented to the Washington Post: "Releasing Suu Kyi was the easy step. The generals know she's not going to rock the boat too much, and they're getting a lot of good publicity for it."

Courtesy: The Dawn