



FURY IN BEIJING: (L) A Chinese fan is led away by a policeman. (R) Emotion spills on to the streets as angry supporters voice their frustration after watching the hosts go down 3-1 to Japan in Asian Cup final.

Beijing goes wild in rage



REUTERS, Beijing

Chinese fans vented their fury at the final whistle after Japan scored twice in a controversial second half to beat the hosts 3-1 in the final of the Asia Cup on Saturday.

Several hundred bottles were hurled on to the pitch and Japanese flags were burned.

Koji Nakata had given Japan a 2-1 lead in the 65th minute with a hotly disputed goal, the midfielder bundling in a Shunsuke Nakamura corner though replays showed he used his hand.

Keiji Tamada added a fine solo goal

in stoppage time to give the scoreline a flattering look for Japan after a tension-filled match laced with political and historical overtones.

China coach Arie Haan refused to collect his runner-up medal in protest at the officiating of Kuwaiti referee Saad Kamel.

"The first goal was from a free kick to Japan that should have gone to us, the second was handball and the third was after a foul on Sun Jihai," fumed the Dutchman.

"I didn't ready to take the medal. How can you win when this happens? I will say Japan have more experience, experience to make fools the referee does not see."

Japan coach Zico praised his team for battling through the intimidation factor.

"It was important to stay calm against the hosts and 60,000 fans," said

the Brazilian. "Nobody thought we could win this tournament but we kept faith in ourselves and made it to the top."

Japan has been booed relentlessly during the tournament and it was subjected to similar treatment again, its national anthem drowned out by a cacophony of noise before kickoff.

The Japanese players were jeered as they celebrated but more than 6,000 security staff, including riot police, armed troops and SWAT teams, were on call to prevent violence.

Trouble flared outside the stadium after the match, however, with police in riot gear battling to restore order among furious Chinese fans amid wailing sirens and flashing police lights.

A bus carrying delegates was attacked, with bottles and garbage thrown, and police charged the crowd with batons and riot shields to clear a path.

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Meanwhile, around 2,000 Japanese fans, heavily protected during the match by security officials, were locked inside the stadium for over almost three hours to save them from being attacked.

The road outside the Japanese embassy in eastern Beijing was also cordoned off, while there was a heavy police presence at the Japanese ambassador's residence in the northeast of the city and at the hotel where both teams are staying.

Chinese harbour bitter resentment over Japan's military invasion and brutal occupation of parts of the country from 1931 to 1945, when tens of millions died.

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Asian Cup in the group stages when three defenders were suspended for violent conduct after a fiery 2-2 draw with Oman.

Mohammad Nosrati was kicked out of the tournament after stamping on an opponent, along with referee Abdul Rahman of Bahrain, who was sent home for failing to spot the incident.

However, a tournament plagued by controversy threatened to descend into farce when Japan beat Jordan in a penalty shootout that started at one end and finished at the other.

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time, reached the semifinals amid ugly scenes having persuaded the referee to switch ends after missing their first two penalties.

Jordan, dubbed the 'Greece of Asia' by their coach, missed four of their six kicks at the other end as their first Asian Cup campaign ended in heartbreak and bitter recriminations.

The backlash from the state-run Chinese media was swift and furious, forcing Velappan to make a face-saving apology.

However, it was too late to avoid serious embarrassment to the AFC.

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Three-time champions Iran were serial offenders, with four combined dismissals in their semifinal defeat and 4-2 victory over Bahrain in the third-place game.

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