



PHOTO: AFP

HEROES' WELCOME: Fighter planes spray the colours of Italy above the Airbus that carried the world champion team back home at the Pratica di Mare Airport in Rome on Monday.

Azzurri celebrate in style



AFP, Rome

One million Romans faced a tough morning Tuesday after losing themselves in festive frenzy for their victorious World Cup football team, which wrested the title from France.

Rome's left-wing mayor, Walter Veltroni, estimated that one million people had turned out to welcome home the conquering heroes as the team held a victory parade through the city Monday.

Men, women and children screamed their joy as skipper Fabio Cannavaro proudly held aloft the gold trophy at the front of an open-topped bus. People scrambled atop stationary public transport buses and even Carabinieri Land Rovers to get a better vantage point as the bus turned into Piazza Venezia.

The team, some wrapped in the Italian tricolour, seemed eager to encourage even greater excitement as the bus inched its way through the throng.

The trophy in one hand, Cannavaro cupped a palm to his ear as if to encourage an even louder

response from the crowd, while Alessandro Del Piero stood precariously on a seat and pumped his arms up and down like a rock star.

"They're passing in front of me now, and they're beautiful, very beautiful. Bellissimi! It's stupendous!" screamed a young girl into a cellphone, as the bus toured the historic centre of the city.

Prime Minister Romano Prodi, perhaps indulging in a childhood dream, could not resist holding the cup aloft as he hosted a victory reception for the heroes at his offices earlier.

"We here at home shared with you a tension and suffering without equal," during the month-long competition, Prodi told the 23-member squad, many of whom proudly wore their gold winners' medals over their suits.

"Thanks for reminding the younger generation that achievement is wrought with effort, sweat and commitment," added Prodi. "Grazie. All Italians love you!"

The prime minister, whose beleaguered government is hoping to ride a wave of optimism to revive a near moribund economy after the World Cup triumph, handed each of the players a medal during the reception.

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The event began more than 90 minutes behind schedule after the team bus, followed by a cacophonous posse of scooters trailing flags, was repeatedly slowed to a crawl on its way into the city.

The team's plane had touched down at a military airbase outside Rome two hours earlier, and fans who had waited hours to welcome them finally erupted into cheers when Cannavaro emerged onto the gangway with the trophy.

Italy's air force acrobatic team, trailing smoke, painted the sky in the green, white and red colours of the national flag during repeated fly-pasts.

But the biggest reception was yet to come, as hundreds of thousands of fans waited for hours at the Circus Maximus, the venue for a giant victory party after the parade.

Pride of place at the venue was given to a black hearse wrapped in the French tricolour.

Players and supporters celebrated for about an hour, singing the national anthem and other songs, before the team left shortly before midnight followed immediately into the streets by the noisy crowd to a concert of car horns and shouts of joy.

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C ROLL OF HONOUR

Year	Champions	Runners-up
1930	Uruguay	Argentina
1934	Italy	Czechoslovakia
1938	Italy	Hungary
1950	Uruguay	Brazil
1954	West Germany	Hungary
1958	Brazil	Sweden
1962	Brazil	Czechoslovakia
1966	England	West Germany
1970	Brazil	Italy
1974	West Germany	Holland
1978	Argentina	Holland
1982	Italy	West Germany
1986	Argentina	West Germany
1990	West Germany	Argentina
1994	Brazil	Italy
1998	France	Brazil
2002	Brazil	Germany
2006	Italy	France

Calciopoli verdict delayed

INTERNET, undated

The eagerly awaited verdicts regarding the Calciopoli investigation may not be delivered until much later this week, reports are suggesting.

Juventus, Milan, Lazio and Fiorentina plus 25 individuals were initially expected to be told of their fate on July 10 but passed without any verdict being delivered on Monday.

Whispers suggested that any possible sentences would be

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PHOTO: AFP
SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT! French legend Zinedine Zidane (L) listens to President Jacques Chirac prior to a reception at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Monday after the team returned from Germany following their defeat in the World Cup 2006 final.

Tigers likely to start African trip Jul 23

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team are likely to leave Dhaka on July 23 to play a five-match one-day international series against Zimbabwe.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has decided to go five days ahead of the first ODI which is scheduled for July 29 as Kenya Cricket has requested them to put back this month's proposed three-match series.

"We are trying to arrange a warm-up match before the series in Zimbabwe. That is why the Cricket Committee has decided to send the team on July 23. Cricket Kenya rescheduled the matches on August 10, 12, 14 but we are yet to finalise the dates as both president and general secretary are abroad," said BCB joint-secretary Rafiqul Islam Babu yesterday.

The Tigers were due to leave for Nairobi on July 16 with matches scheduled for July 19, 22 and 23 but the series became uncertain as Cricket Kenya reportedly failed to arrange adequate sponsorship for

FIFA will probe Zidane send-off



AFP, Zurich

FIFA announced on Tuesday it had opened a disciplinary investigation into Zidane's conduct to enable it to clarify the circumstances surrounding the incident as exactly as possible.

Zidane became just the fourth player to be sent off in a World Cup final when he rammed his head into the chest of Italian defender Marco Materazzi in the second period of extra-time knocking him to the ground.

The referee did not see the off-the-ball incident but pulled out his red card after consulting one of his linesmen.

The game went to penalties after Zidane was sent off.

Any disciplinary action against Zidane will be largely symbolic as he has already announced his retirement as a professional football player.

Materazzi denies 'terrorist' claim

INTERNET, undated

Marco Materazzi has dismissed claims that Zinedine Zidane turned and head-butted him after calling the French ace a "terrorist".

The former Juventus playmaker ended his career in disgrace on Sunday when he reacted violently to something said by the Italian during the World Cup Final.

But Materazzi has distanced himself from claims that he threw the word "terrorist" at the 34-year-old.

"The whole world saw what happened on television," the ex-Perugia man, who scored in the Final, stated.

"Terrorist? It's not true, I did not call him a terrorist," he added. "I'm ignorant, I don't even know what the word means."

Zidane has yet to reveal his version of events, but a host of media organisations all over the world have been employing lip-readers to shed light on what made Zidane lose control.

According to the BBC, Materazzi is alleged to have said: "I wish an ugly death to you and all your family. Go *** yourself."

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The Italian football team members celebrate their World Cup triumph with fans as they ride atop an open-roof bus near Teatro Marcello in Rome on Monday.

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