

Samurai scared!

AFP, George



Alarmed by South Africa's notoriously high crime rate, Japan coach Takeshi Okada has told his charges to stay firmly inside their luxurious hotel while at their base camp.

"This is a country where you can rent a machine gun for 10,000 yen (110 dollars)," Okada said when asked what he had told the Blue Samurai players at the start of their first training session upon arrival in George on Sunday.

"There are people who may think it is alright to borrow 10,000 yen and then earn 50,000 yen," he told reporters. He was quick to ask diplomatically: "Don't you write about such a thing."

But it was too late as the Japanese media were hungry for news while stuck in this sleepy, sun-kissed tourist resort along South Africa's scenic "Garden Route" coastline which is considered relatively safe.

Okada said he had told the players "not to go out in a carefree manner." He also advised them to ask the hotel manager for a guard to accompany them when they want to go out shopping. "They should stick with other people."

Underdogs Japan, fighting back from four straight international defeats before their World Cup Group E opener against Cameroon on Monday, are being lodged at the five-star Fancourt, South Africa's premier hotel and golf estate.

They are occupying 50 of the 150 rooms there, accompanied by chefs from home and paying an estimated 670 dollars a night for a room in four-room cottages.

The sprawling, 613-hectare estate is surrounded by an electric fence with four guards

seen at its main gate, as big as a football goal. Two of them are armed with guns.

Fancourt has three golf courses designed by the legendary Gary Player, a conference centre, recreational facilities with a spa, and a variety of restaurants including a sushi shop.

It has been considered a good luck spot for Japanese since 2005 when Japan's Ai Miyazato teamed with Rui Kitada to lift the inaugural women's golf World Cup there.

Kashima Antlers defender Atsuto Uchida, set to join Schalke 04 after the World Cup, quipped about the near curfew. "Being a football player, I can learn about different cultures."

Fancourt's peaceful atmosphere has caught the fancy of key centre-back Yuji Nakazawa. "There are many spots to stroll around. I want to visit them all while I am here for one month," the 32-year-old said, indicating he hopes to stick around for the grand final.

Japanese journalists, accustomed to safety in their disciplined country, have been also told to put up guard after two South Korean television producers were reportedly attacked by thieves in Johannesburg.

"Japanese are seen as easy targets for thieves," Hideyuki Sakamoto, the minister at the Japanese embassy in Pretoria, said at a media seminar before the Samurai's training on Monday.

He said one Japanese was robbed of everything in Cape Town on New Year's eve. "He really looked as if he was saying, 'Come and rob me.'"

His embassy will deploy a five-men "mobile unit" to help Japanese in distress at every venue for Japan's matches against Cameroon, the Netherlands and Denmark.

"They will be dressed in orange jackets. But don't mistake them for the Dutch team."



PHOTO: REUTERS

Japan winger Shunsuke Nakamura perfects free-kicks during a training session in George yesterday. Japan, who take on Cameroon in Bloemfontein on June 15, will rely on the dead ball specialist.

Fakers back Spain

AFP, Beijing



If China's booming market for fake goods is any guide, Spain are on course to end their long World Cup drought next month.

Counterfeit versions of the Spanish jersey -- whose vibrant colours evoke the red and yellow of the Chinese communist flag -- are the top-selling World Cup merchandise on auction sites such as Taobao.com.

More than 100,000 jerseys of World Cup teams have been sold online, most of them fakes costing around 50 yuan (7.30 dollars) each, the China Daily said Tuesday, citing online sales data.

Pirated Spain kits lead the way with 17,430 sold, followed by the shirts of Germany, England, France, Argentina, Italy, Brazil, Portugal, the Netherlands and Japan, it said.

An authentic Spain shirt from Adidas sporting a player's name costs as much as 1,499 yuan -- more than most Chinese earn in a month.

"For those who would like to wear the shirts when playing soccer themselves, the pirated ones are obviously the better choice," Cai Haibing, an online vendor from the southern city of Guangzhou, told the paper.

"After all, who is willing to have their expensive copyright shirts dragged or scraped on the green field?" said Cai, who sold 590 fake Argentina jerseys last month alone on Taobao.com.

China's counterfeit and piracy market is the biggest in the world, with fake products such as clothes, electronic gadgets and software readily available in stores and on the Internet, at a small fraction of the cost of the real thing.

The World Cup opens on Friday in South Africa and climaxes on July 11. Spain have never won the tournament but are the bookmakers' favourites, ahead of Brazil. China failed to qualify.

Real want star duo

SOCCERNET

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez has hinted that Maicon and Steven Gerrard are amongst the "three big players" he will be looking to sign over the summer.

Real coach Jose Mourinho has spoken publicly about the need to strengthen his squad with an experienced midfielder and a specialist full-back.

Having won Serie A and the Champions League with Maicon at Inter Milan last season, Mourinho is eager to be reunited with the Brazilian international at the Bernabeu.

Asked if Real would be making a move to sign the Internazionale right-back, Perez told Spanish TV station Antena 3: "I think there's no hurry. But Maicon is one of the great players in his position."

Real have also been heavily linked with a move for Liverpool midfielder Gerrard, who Mourinho was very close to signing during his time as Chelsea manager, along with an audacious bid for Barcelona target Cesc Fabregas.

FIGHT TO BE WORLD CUP TOP SCORER

For the boot of gold

AFP, Paris

The world's deadliest finishers will be out prospecting over the coming month in South Africa as they look to land the World Cup golden boot award.

Ronaldo, Gerd Muller, Gary Lineker, Paolo Rossi - the roll call of previous winners trims off the tongue and at least a dozen of today's top strikers will be vying for the honours at this year's finals in South Africa.

Brazilian legend Ronaldo

Four years ago, it was German sharpshooter Miroslav Klose, who bagged seven goals in qualifying for this year's event, who won the accolade on home soil even though his country only reached the semifinals.

Klose will be looking to become the only man to win the golden boot for a second time as the Germans - always there or thereabouts - hunt down a fourth World Cup win.

But he has competition

Lineker it's the Manchester United forward.

In normal circumstances, the odds would be fairly short on his former United teammate Cristiano Ronaldo, who netted 42 goals in all competitions while still at Old Trafford in 2008 and top-scored (in all competitions) for Real Madrid in his maiden season in Spain.

For rivals Argentina, take your pick from Lionel Messi, Carlos Tevez, Gonzalo Higuain - who outscored Ronaldo in the league - and Sergei Aguero - son-in-law of coach Diego Maradona.

Fabiano doesn't think Messi will be the man taking home precious metal footwear, however, despite his 34 goals for Barcelona.

"He is ruthless with

Barcelona, but he becomes more timid with Argentina."

Diego Forlan will be out to spearhead Uruguay's assault on a first World Cup win in 60 years while Roque Santa Cruz will assume the gunslinger's role for Paraguay.

Then there's France, whose Just Fontaine scored a record haul of 13 in 1958 but who this time qualified rather ignominiously following Thierry Henry's handball against the Republic of Ireland in their play-off.

Nicolas Anelka is coming off a strong season with



FABIANO



VILLA

THE KNOWLEDGE
Gabriel Batistuta of Argentina is the only player ever to score a hattrick in two different World Cup Finals

Italy scored 58% of their goals from setpieces during the 2006 World Cup (7/12)

Frank Lampard had more shots than any other player at the 2006 World Cup (23), though still failed to score.

Uruguay strikers Diego Forlan (Atletico Madrid) & Luis Suarez (Ajax) have between themselves scored 77 goals in 2009/10 with their respective teams.



ROONEY



KLOSE

the Brazilian said in a recent interview with Italian media.

Anyone looking for a two-way bet on the top scorer might like to try Spain, with both Fernando Torres and sidekick David Villa as cute as they come when it comes to finding the net.

In scoring the goals which won Atletico Madrid the Europa League title former Manchester United misfit

Chelsea but has never been prolific in the national shirt.

However, the French things a little differently.

On the way to glory in 1998 their centre forward Stephane Guivarc'h did not score a single goal.

That mattered little, as the likes of midfielders Zinedine Zidane and Emmanuel Petit assumed the responsibility of putting the ball in the net.



A fan shows off his World Cup special haircut before Paraguay's training session at the Michaelhouse School in Balgowan on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Benitez's Inter deal imminent

Football

SOCCERNET

Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti believes the appointment of former Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez is "more or less done" and expects the Spaniard to sign on Tuesday.

Inter are searching for a replacement for Jose Mourinho as a result of his decision to join Real Madrid and have identified Benitez as a prime target. And Moratti believes the last few days will be sorted out in the next 24 hours.

"The deal is more or less done," Moratti said. "It's not sealed yet because you don't sign something before hearing what you're signing, but we decisively targeted Benitez from the beginning and he is the person we consider most useful for the continuity of Inter at the same level."

Reports in Italy suggest Benitez will sign a three-year deal worth 5 million Euros per season. However, Moratti insists that media speculation is wide of the mark.

"Who wrote that is off the track," he continued. "For the duration and the amount."

"We talked about everything but the transfer market. And the numbers of assistants that I read in the papers are also fortunately wrong."

"I read frightening numbers but in reality they will be numbers which belong to the norm of other coaches we have contracted in the past."

Krasic set for Juve

SOCCERNET

CSKA Moscow winger Milos Krasic says he expects to complete a move to Juventus in the near future.

Krasic, 25, has been linked with a number of top clubs around Europe but his agent revealed on Monday that he was closing in on a deal to join Juve.

"The negotiations between the two clubs are still in progress," Krasic told Sport. "I expect them to be concluded rapidly."

"CSKA have established a price. We will see what happens, but I believe that there won't be any problems and that everything will be resolved positively so I can play for Juventus."

The Serbia international believes new Juventus boss Luigi Del Neri's tactics will help him find his best form in Serie A.

"I knew that Del Neri was Juve's new coach and I have to say that I am very happy."

DRY AND CLOUDY FOR OPENER

The opening game of the 2010 World Cup between host nation South Africa and Mexico on Friday will be played in dry but possibly cloudy conditions, according to the latest forecast from the South African Weather Service.

The tournament opener takes at Soccer City in Johannesburg.

While Cape Town suffered heavy rain showers Tuesday morning, Johannesburg was bathed in sunshine although there could be light rain showers Thursday when the official World Cup Kickoff concert at Orlando stadium in Soweto takes place.

Singer Shakira, who is also the lead singer of the official World Cup song Waka Waka, was the first star to arrive Monday and will be joined by John Legend, Alicia Keys and pop group Black Eyed Peas.

The international stars will share the stage in Soweto with local musicians, including Kwani Experience, Tumi Molekane, Loyiso Bala, Lira and Freshlyground.

SCHIAVONE AZZURRI'S INSPIRATION

Marcello Lippi has urged his Italy side to draw inspiration from their compatriot Francesca Schiavone's French Open tennis triumph. "On Saturday afternoon I was glued to the TV. [Her performance was] symbolic of my Italy: passion, determination, class and heart," he said. "In 2004 I had the example of the Olympic Setterosa [the gold medal-winning women's water polo team] as a reference point. Today it is Schiavone."

ROBBEN VERY UPBEAT
Arjen Robben is confident he can take part in the World Cup after his first physiotherapy session on a small tear in his left hamstring. Despite an initial gloomy diagnosis, Robben was upbeat yesterday. "It is impossible to say whether a return will be only about four days or a week away. But I'm very hopeful. Now we will see how fast we can make progress."

NEW ZEALAND SMOKED OUT

The All Whites' first training session was cut short yesterday when smoke from household fires in a surrounding township made a full workout a threat to the players' health in Daveyton, 40km east of Johannesburg. "It's probably not ideal but it's out of our control," the coach, Ricki Herbert, said.

BARRY OUT OF USA MATCH

Gareth Barry confirmed on Tuesday that he will miss England's World Cup



SCHIAVONE



CASILLAS

opener against the United States.

Barry suffered an ankle injury at the beginning of last month, and had been in doubt for the squad, but he recovered ahead of schedule and will resume full training on Tuesday.

The 29-year-old will not, though, be fit enough for Saturday's match in Rustenburg.

"I have been told I'm not playing against USA to give me more time," Barry told www.newsfortheworld.co.uk.

In Barry's absence, Capello looks likely to team Steven Gerrard and Frank Lampard in central midfield on Saturday, with Joe Cole occupying the left-sided berth, as they started in Monday's 3-0 warm-up win over league side Platinum All-Stars.

CASILLAS LIKES THE GREEN

The Spain captain, Iker Casillas, has hit back at criticism over the cash bonus each player will be paid if the European champions win the World Cup. Reports suggest Casillas and his teammates will each get

• 600,000 (almost £500,000) should they win, the largest bonus among major contenders. "You can comment and talk, especially at this time when everyone is suffering," Casillas said, referring to soaring unemployment in Spain. "Everyone sees it as they want, but you shouldn't mix one thing up with another."

AUSTRALIA SWITCH FROM 'HOPELESS' PITCH

Australia moved their World Cup training session on Tuesday back to their old ground in Johannesburg after complaining about the Ruimsig pitch where they are officially based.