

FIFA confident of higher spectator numbers

JOHANNESBURG: FIFA is expecting a spectator turnout of between 95 and 97 percent to the upcoming World Cup - numbers also achieved in Germany in 2006. The world football body is also confident that the more than 300 000 tickets left for the tournament will be sold out before kick-off on 11 June.



Speaking during a press conference broadcast live in Johannesburg from Zurich, FIFA President Sepp Blatter said judging by the tickets sales and the excitement around Africa's first World Cup, there was no reason to get numbers below what was achieved in Germany.

He alluded to the fact that more than 200 000 tickets were sold in eight days during last week's over the counter sales phase.

"If we can sell so many tickets in eight days, what can stop us from selling 300 000 in the next days left," Blatter said.

FIFA is also considering reviewing its ticketing policy following lessons learnt in South Africa.

"This World Cup has taught us a lot of lessons. Maybe we need to be more flexible moving forward to 2014," said the federation's general secretary Jerome Valcke.

Blatter, who has played an instrumental role in bringing the tournament to Africa, said the excitement shown by South Africans towards the tournament over the past weeks has made him even more confident.

Millions of South Africans have risen to the occasion by taking part in several initiatives aimed at boosting the country's image as a soccer loving nation.

These include the football Friday initiative Blatter described as "phenomenal" and the fly the flag campaign. The 50 days countdown, a campaign organised by the Local Organising Committee, also attracted a lot of international media attention.

"I wouldn't say I'm nervous, I'm like an actor getting ready to go to the stage...the adrenalin is pumping," Blatter said.

It was Blatter who in 1998, amid protest from several football associations across Europe, called for the rotation policy in FIFA to give an African country an opportunity to host the world cup.

It took him months of lobbying and convincing to get the majority of FIFA members for the rotation system to be passed.

South Africa and Egypt were among the first African countries to show interest in hosting the event when they launched their bids in 2000.

South Africa lost to Germany by vote after one FIFA member decided to abstain from voting.

Blatter admitted that had it not been for the rotation system, it was unlikely that the current generation would be able to see the soccer spectacular live on their door step.

He was too happy to see the tournament being played in the country of Nelson Mandela. "Our only wish is for him to attend

and we are crossing our fingers that Nelson Mandela can realise his goal to attend the first world cup in South Africa and are told he is doing very well," said Blatter.

He confirmed that FIFA will be staging its two-day congress in Johannesburg from 9 to 10 June. The congress is also expected to be another draw card for the country.

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