

## **IS FIFA'S 'PLAN B' AN INDICATION OF A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA?**

The recent announcement by FIFA that it had a 'Plan B' location for hosting the 2010 Soccer World Cup in case a natural disaster struck South Africa, has created unwelcome problems for the 2010 local organising committee (LOC) and for the country at large.

'Plan B' is basically a back-up or contingency plan that FIFA would enact to switch the 2010 Soccer World Cup's location to one of three back-up countries should a catastrophic natural disaster occur that prevents the games from being held in South Africa. According to FIFA, 'Plan B' would give any one of the three countries exactly one year to get ready to host the event.

This latest announcement raises new questions: "Is FIFA losing confidence in South Africa's ability to host a successful 2010 Soccer World Cup? Will 'Plan B' be used as an escape route to switch the 2010 Soccer World Cup to another country ahead of time?"

"These are not far-fetched questions," says Evan Bloom, MD of the Crisis Communications Consultancy. "It is perfectly feasible to think that FIFA is initiating a carefully thought out risk and crisis management strategy that will cover them should a man-made disaster, in addition to a natural disaster occur that could prevent a successful soccer world cup from being held. It must be noted that FIFA cannot be faulted for following best practice crisis management planning – they are taking all the necessary precautions to safeguard the 2010 Soccer World Cup."

The local stadium preparations have had numerous crises, including construction delays caused by striking workers and the recently highlighted budgetary challenges. There are also persistent concerns around this country's high crime rate and its inability to significantly improve safety and security. While power outages have decreased over the past few weeks, Eskom has warned that load shedding may be reintroduced.

Finally, South Africa has a serious transport issue. The country does not have an efficient and widespread public transport system that would get fans to and from the soccer games safely and rapidly. The recent sinkhole in Oxford Road, Johannesburg has briefly held up tunnelling for Gautrain, sparking debate as to whether it will be ready in time for 2010. The meltdown in Zimbabwe is also not helping matters much.

According to The Star (front page, July 10, 2008), the CEO of the LOC, Danny Jordaan, stated that a contract had been signed with FIFA that the 2010 Soccer World Cup could only be taken away from South Africa if a natural disaster occurs. He adds that the chances of that occurring are very small.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter was quoted in the media as saying that he "would be quite negligent if he did not have a Plan B tucked away at the back of a drawer."

"With all these issues going on, the LOC certainly has its crisis management work cut out," adds Bloom. "It has to reassure FIFA, the local and international media, the citizens of South Africa, international soccer supporters and tourists planning to come

to South Africa that the country, its infrastructure and stadiums will be ready to host a successful and risk free 2010 Soccer World Cup. Then the LOC and the host cities have to deliver the goods.”

At the time of writing this article, there are approximately 700 days to go before the tournament kicks off in South Africa.

The 2010 Soccer World Cup will see 64 football matches being played in nine South African cities in various parts of the country – Johannesburg, Pretoria, Nelspruit, Cape Town, Durban, Polokwane Port Elizabeth, Rustenburg and Bloemfontein.

On Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2008, it was announced that the stadium located in Port Elizabeth would most likely not be completed in time for next June's Confederations Cup warm up event. Is this an early warning sign?

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