

# Sepp denies crisis

## Football

AFP, Zurich

FIFA President Sepp Blatter has shrugged off the corruption allegations engulfing football's governing body, denying the sport is in crisis and ruling out a new vote for the 2022 World Cup.

After days of widespread claims and counter-claims of corruption that saw two top officials suspended pending a bribery investigation, Blatter broke his silence in a stormy solo press conference at FIFA headquarters on Monday.

"Crisis, what is a crisis?" a clearly irritated Blatter said. "We are not in a crisis. We are only in some difficulties and these will be solved."

Blatter also rejected suggestions that the vote for the 2022 World Cup -- controversially awarded to the oil-rich Gulf state of Qatar -- should be held again amid mounting allegations of bribery involving the bid.

"There is no issue for the World Cup in 2022," the 75-year-old Swiss said. "I believe that the decision taken for the World Cup in 2022 was done exactly in the same pattern and in the same way as the 2018 tournament."

Blatter was speaking two days before he is due to be re-elected unopposed by FIFA's congress following the stunning withdrawal of Qatari election rival Mohamed bin Hammam on Sunday.

Bin Hammam pulled out of the bitterly acrimonious election race just hours before FIFA's ethics committee suspended him and Jack Warner, the influential head of the Caribbean, North and Central American

federation (CONCACAF).

Asian Football Confederation chief bin Hammam -- who has vowed to appeal his suspension -- and FIFA vice president Warner were accused of attempting to bribe voters in the election with cash payments of up to \$40,000.

Blatter said the absence of bin Hammam from the election was no reason to postpone Wednesday's vote, where he will be seeking a final and fourth term following 13 years in power.

"If somebody wants to change something in the election on Wednesday, this is for the members of FIFA. It cannot be done by anybody else," said Blatter, who engaged in several testy exchanges with journalists during the press conference.

"We are not in a bazaar," he replied at one point as reporters shouted out questions to him.

Blatter's appearance followed another day of frenzied mud-slinging, where both Warner and bin Hammam railed against the leadership of the 75-year-old Swiss official.

"At the end of the day, Blatter has to be stopped," Warner said earlier, after accusing the FIFA chief of giving one regional confederation \$1 million with no questions asked at a meeting earlier this month.

Warner also released an email from FIFA general secretary Jerome Valcke in which the official said he believed Qatar had "bought" the hosting rights to the 2022 tournament, prompting a furious denial from Qatar's 2022 bid team.

"Qatar 2022 categorically deny any wrongdoing in connection with their winning bid," the bid committee said in a statement.



FIFA president Sepp Blatter gestures during a press conference at their headquarters in Zurich on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

## FAs call for reform

### Football

AFP, London/Sydney

The English Football Association called Tuesday for the scandal-tainted FIFA presidential election to be postponed to give "any alternative reforming candidate" to Sepp Blatter a chance to stand.

Football Association Chairman David Bernstein said the events of recent days had "reinforced" the FA's decision made earlier this month to abstain in the election, and he called for other national associations to support its stance.

Bernstein called for associations to push "to postpone the election and give credibility to this process, so any alternative reforming candidate could have the opportunity to stand for President".

The FA also called for FIFA to appoint an independent body "to make recommendations regarding improved governance and compliance procedures and structures throughout the FIFA decision-making processes for consideration by the full membership."

Bernstein added: "This has been a very damaging time for the reputation of FIFA and therefore the whole of football."

"To improve confidence in the way the game is governed at the very top, we believe these requests would be a positive step forward and the minimum that should take place."

Senior Australian officials have also demanded reform at FIFA, saying it is clear change is needed after the acrimonious mud-slinging that has rocked world football's governing body.

Les Murray, one of the 13 members of the FIFA Ethics Committee that suspended Mohamed bin Hammam and Jack Warner following allegations they offered bribes, said the organisation was tarnished.

"I think the reform has to be very deep," he told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"In all reality, there probably has to be complete structural and also constitutional reform," he said in comments published Tuesday.

"The structure of the organisation at the moment is too political. Decisions are based on political motives, and that's not healthy for any organisation. That simply has to change."

Australian Sports Minister Mark Arbib said it was clear FIFA needed to change.

"There is no doubt there needs to be reform of FIFA. This is something that we're hearing worldwide," he said on Monday.

## Allegri warns Cassano

AFP, Rome

AC Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri has warned Italy forward Antonio Cassano not to expect a place in the first team next season and also told young Brazilian Pato to improve.

Cassano moved to Milan from Sampdoria in January and although he is an automatic first choice for Italy, Allegri rarely used him from the start.

And the coach, who won the Serie A title in his first season at the San Siro, says that's not about to change.

"He scored four goals and made eight assists and that was after two months of inactivity so I'm happy with him," said Allegri.

"Without taking anything away from Sampdoria, where Antonio was the star alongside (Giampaolo) Pazzini, here at Milan we have many stars and there's a lot of competition so there's a chance he won't play."

# FIFA urged to postpone vote

## Football

AFP, Berlin

Anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International (TI) said Tuesday the sleaze-tainted presidential election at football's global ruling body FIFA should be postponed.

Berlin-based TI said FIFA should hold off electing its next leader until an independent probe of the allegations of corruption against its executives can be carried out.

"Free and fair elections cannot take place when there is a suspicion that voters may have been swayed," Sylvia Schenk, senior advisor on sport to TI, said in a statement.

"FIFA delegates know that they must clean house if their vote is to have legitimacy."

"All eyes in world football are upon the FIFA delegates. FIFA should be setting a better example to its billions of supporters

and especially to young fans (who) look to the sport for inspiration and role models," said Schenk.

TI said the proceedings of FIFA's ethics committee had been "shrouded in secrecy" and that the investigation "should be carried out externally to guarantee impartiality, transparency and accountability."

The organisation said FIFA needed clear rules on how to confront corruption allegations, as well as transparent reporting and accounting rules.

It suggested it appoint an empowered ombudsman capable of dealing with suspected graft, review its code of ethics, introduce compliance clauses for all contracts and review the tender and awarding procedure for events, media rights and sponsorship.

English football chiefs earlier urged FIFA to scrap its election, scheduled for Wednesday in Zurich, in order to allow a credible reform candidate to run against incumbent Sepp Blatter.

# Key sponsors worried

## Football

AFP, Paris

Key commercial partners of FIFA brandished the yellow card Tuesday at football's world governing body over a welter of corruption allegations, saying they had tarnished the image of the beautiful game.

Coca-Cola, sponsor of the World Cup since 1978, said it found the claims of vote-buying in the build-up to the election for FIFA president "distressing" while Dubai-based Emirates airline voiced its "disappointment".

Sportswear giant Adidas meanwhile warned that not only FIFA but the whole game was being tainted by the graft allegations which have already led to the suspension of two top executives suspended.

And US credit card giant Visa echoed the fears of Adidas by saying the claims were "clearly not good for the game".

"The current situation is clearly

not good for the game and we ask that FIFA take all necessary steps to resolve the concerns that have been raised," a Visa spokesman told AFP.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter, whose re-election appears assured after his only challenger was one of those suspended, insisted Monday that there was no crisis within the governing body and any problems would be dealt with in-house.

But Coca-Cola made clear they expected swift action in a rare public rebuke for the Zurich-based organisation.

"The current allegations being raised are distressing and bad for the sport," Coca Cola spokesman Petro Kacur told AFP.

"We have every expectation that FIFA will resolve this situation in an expedient and thorough manner."

Coca Cola are one of six official partners of FIFA along with Adidas, Emirates, Visa, Hyundai and Sony.

The organisation can also boast the likes of Budweiser beer, the

Castrol motor oil company, Continental Tyres and fast-food giant McDonalds as sponsors of the World Cup.

Those partnerships and tie-ups have been a key factor in FIFA's financial success helping the governing body's four-year revenues go above four billion dollars for the first time last year after the World Cup in South Africa.

In a statement, Adidas insisted that recent "events do not bring into question our cooperation" with FIFA but the company made clear its worries about the long-term impact.

"The repeated accusations (of corruption) are good for neither the image of football nor FIFA itself," a spokesman said.

Some of the most persistent corruption allegations have revolved around the controversial decision to award the tiny Gulf state of Qatar the right to host the 2022 World Cup, especially as temperatures at the time of the tournament can reach in the mid-40s.

# ‘Hammam still boss’

## Football

AFP, Singapore

Mohamed bin Hammam is "still the president" of Asian football, his Chinese deputy Zhang Jilong insisted Tuesday despite being confirmed as acting chief while the Qatari faces a corruption probe.

Zhang said FIFA had "no right" to suspend bin Hammam from Asian Football Confederation (AFC) duties while it investigates allegations the former candidate tried to buy votes for the world body's presidential election.

"FIFA suspended bin Hammam but he is still the president of the AFC. FIFA has no right to prevent him from acting (in) his role in the AFC," Zhang said, according to the China Daily.

FIFA said bin Hammam was barred from all football activities worldwide when it announced its ruling on Sunday. And despite Zhang's comments, the AFC confirmed the vice president had taken over as temporary leader.

"We, the members of the AFC executive committee, express our deepest concern at the latest developments within FIFA and that involves the AFC president Mohamed bin Hammam," an AFC statement said.

"We will be following the investigation as it takes its course. We hope the outcome of the investigation will be in the best interests of football in Asia and beyond."

Peter Velappan, the AFC's former general secretary and a known opponent of bin Hammam, said late Monday that Zhang's appointment was automatic under AFC rules.

"In the absence of a president, the deputy president will become the acting president. Bin Hammam cannot oppose this development," Velappan told AFP.



France winger Franck Ribery controls the ball on his chest during a training session in Clairefontaine on Monday ahead of their Euro 2012 qualifier against Belarus on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

## SPORTS POLL

### WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think Shakib Al Hasan is being overworked?

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## What to WATCH

### STAR Sports

#### French Open

Men's & Women's Quarterfinals

Live from 6:00pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

## DAY'S EVENT

### Bangladesh League

Rahmatganj v Farashganj

Time: 4:15pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium