

The Guardian



Fifa corruption crisis: FBI inquiry now includes 2014 Brazil World Cup

FBI probes links between Brazil's football ex-chief Ricardo Teixeira and Fifa general secretary Jérôme Valcke, as UK MPs told England ready to host in 2022

Owen Gibson *Chief sports correspondent*

Thu 4 Jun 2015 19.55 BST

The FBI's investigation into Fifa corruption, which has already led to the downfall of president Sepp Blatter, has widened further to include the organisation of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil last summer.

With the FBI examining links between disgraced former Brazilian football chief Ricardo Teixeira and embattled Fifa secretary general Jérôme Valcke, the investigation now encompasses three of the past five World Cups and the controversial award of the next two tournaments in Russia and Qatar.

In explosive testimony from former Fifa executive committee member Chuck Blazer unsealed by a New York court on Wednesday, he admitted receiving bribes from South Africa related to the hosting of the 2010 World Cup and facilitating the payment of a bribe related to the 1998 tournament from losing bidder Morocco.

The FBI revealed this week that its own investigation had also widened to include the bidding processes for the 2018 World Cup in Russia and the controversial choice of Qatar to host the

2022 tournament.

The further revelations came as UK culture secretary John Whittingdale told the House of Commons that England was potentially ready to host the 2022 World Cup in the unlikely event the continental rotation policy was dropped and Qatar stripped of the tournament.

His comments risked playing to the perception in some parts of the world, fuelled by Russian president Vladimir Putin, that the American criminal investigation and English triumphalism at Blatter's removal are motivated by bitterness at losing their respective World Cup bids.

Teixeira was not among those charged in last week's damning US Department of Justice indictment, which alleged money laundering, tax evasion and kickbacks on an industrial scale among two generations of Fifa executives.

But the Brazilian newspaper O Estado de S Paulo has now reported that the FBI is examining the relationship between Valcke, Blatter's longstanding secretary general and fixer, and Teixeira, the controversial Brazilian football chief who was head of the Brazil 2014 organising committee until he fled for Miami in 2012. Investigators are thought to be focusing on more than 1,000 documents signed by World Cup organisers in the runup to the tournament.

Valcke was forced to leave his position as marketing director at Fifa in 2006 after being accused of lying by a New York judge in a case brought by Mastercard that cost the governing body €90m (£66m) in compensation.

Before returning seven months later with a promotion to secretary general, Valcke spent the intervening period writing Brazil's World Cup bid. As the only bidder, the 2014 World Cup was duly awarded to Brazil.

While Teixeira was not among those named in last week's indictment, his loyal successor Jose Maria Marin was one of seven arrested in a dawn raid on the Baur au Lac hotel in Zurich. Marco Polo Del Nero, the current head of the Brazilian federation, fled Zurich on the eve of the presidential vote.

Ronaldo and Romario are among the former Brazilian players who have called on Del Nero to quit.

"It's evident the kind of relationship he (Del Nero) had with Marin," said Ronaldo, who was an ambassador for the 2014 World Cup organising committee. "Therefore, it would be a good moment for him to resign."

A contract between a major American sportswear firm, thought to be Nike, and a \$150m (£97m) deal with the Brazilian football federation is also under investigation in the US.

Teixeira had previously been accused of accepted \$9.5m in bribes from ISL, the defunct marketing company that once held the TV rights to the World Cup, by the BBC's Panorama on the eve of the 2010 World Cup vote.

Teixeira quit after 21 years at Fifa in May 2012, weeks before court documents confirmed that he and Blatter's predecessor as Fifa president Joao Havelange pocketed 41m Swiss francs (£28m) in payments from ISL over an eight year period.

Teixeira's path to football's power-broking was smoothed by Havelange, whose daughter, Lucia, he married and divorced. Havelange was forced to give up his honorary Fifa presidency and his IOC membership.

Earlier this week, Brazilian prosecutors said they were investigating \$147m in payments from his bank accounts related to the 2014 World Cup.

Valcke, Blatter's longtime fixer and most trusted lieutenant, has longstanding links to Teixeira and has previously defended him against corruption allegations.

The Frenchman is already under pressure over a \$10m payment from the South African FA that ended up in an account linked to the Trinidadian former Fifa vice-president Jack Warner.

The US indictment alleged the payment, ostensibly for football development among the African diaspora in the Caribbean, was a bribe. The South African FA has denied the claim, insisting the money - paid by Fifa and deducted from money owed to the World Cup organising committee - was paid in good faith.

Valcke, who was revealed in a leaked letter to have known about the arrangement, has said he has nothing to hide.

"I have no reason to say that I shouldn't remain secretary general regarding what's happened in the last days, because I have no responsibility," he told France Info radio.

"I'm beyond reproach and I certainly don't feel guilty. So I don't even have to justify that I'm innocent," he added.

Warner has now warned of an "avalanche" of revelations that will implicate Blatter, who promised to resign on Tuesday just days after being re-elected for a fifth term as president.

The Trinidadian, one of 14 people charged with accepting bribes and kickbacks estimated at more than \$150m over a 24-year period, said he had lodged documents with his lawyers that linked Fifa, its funding and the 2010 election in Trinidad and Tobago.

Warner, who resigned from football in 2011 amid a new wave of bribery allegations, said in a televised address: "I will no longer keep secrets for them who actively seek to destroy the country."

Four others have already pleaded guilty, including Blazer, who agreed to help federal investigators after being threatened over millions in unpaid taxes.

Meanwhile, Whittingdale told MPs that England could theoretically step in to host the 2022 World Cup if required but said it was "very unlikely" that another European nation would be chosen to follow Russia even if Qatar lost the tournament.

"Obviously if Fifa came forward and asked us to consider hosting it, we have the facilities in this country and of course we did mount a very impressive, if unsuccessful, bid to host the 2018 World Cup," he said.

Chris Bryant, the shadow culture secretary, suggested that ITV and the BBC should refuse to broadcast the World Cup unless there was a revote. But Whittingdale said that would not be fair on fans.

Tracey Crouch, the sports minister, said she had met with FA chairman Greg Dyke and chief executive Martin Glenn. "They are seizing the initiative to make sure we have those positive conversations. Football needs to help itself. The fact we've seen Sepp Blatter go is going to enable others to step forward."

***i* Since you're here ...**

... we have a small favour to ask. More people are reading the Guardian than ever but advertising revenues across the media are falling fast. And unlike many news organisations, we haven't put up a paywall - we want to keep our journalism as open as we can. So you can see why we need to ask for your help. The Guardian's independent, investigative journalism takes a lot of time, money and hard work to produce. But we do it because we believe our perspective matters - because it might well be your perspective, too.

I appreciate there not being a paywall: it is more democratic for the media to be available for all and not a commodity to be purchased by a few. I'm happy to make a contribution so others with less means still have access to information. Thomasine, Sweden

If everyone who reads our reporting, who likes it, helps fund it, our future would be much more secure. **For as little as £1, you can support the Guardian - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support The Guardian



Topics

- Fifa
- Sepp Blatter
- World Cup 2014
- Football politics
- World Cup
- Brazil
- news