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Filipino language daily newspaper published from Qatar!



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Tuesday 16 November 2010
10 Dhu'l-Hijja 1431
Volume 15
Number 4789
Price: QR2

www.youngpen.com

The Peninsula
YOUNG JOURNALIST

www.thepeninsulaqatar.com

editor@pen.com.qa | adv@pen.com.qa

Editorial: 44557741 | Advertising: 44557837 / 44557780

World Cup in Middle East to take football to a new high, says Qatar

A World Cup in Qatar could help create new player base of more than 1.35 million in the region: Hassan Al Thawadi

BY RIZWAN REHMAT

DOHA: A football World Cup in the Middle East could easily help create a player base of over one million across the region, bidding nation Qatar said yesterday.

Qatar is one of five countries bidding to stage the FIFA World Cup in 2022. Qatar's rivals are the US, Korea, Japan and Australia and the name of successful bidder will be announced on December 2, in Zurich, Switzerland.

"One of the biggest attractions of the Middle East is that it represents a vast untapped football market," Hassan Al Thawadi, CEO of Qatar 2022 Bid Committee, said yesterday.

"A World Cup in Qatar would increase football participation in the Middle East by 1.35 million (new) players, and would increase match attendance by an additional 4.2 million spectators by 2022," Al Thawadi said during his lecture on the first day of Aspire4Sport Conference being held at Aspire Academy.

Al Thawadi said if FIFA's Executive Committee awards the World Cup to Qatar on December 2, the decision would take the game forward.

"This translates to development of the football market, greater ticket sales and revenues, and increased profitability for the entire sports industry, which in

2009 was estimated to be worth \$500bn worldwide. The bulk of this growth is attributed to new and developing markets of the Middle East and Asia," he said.

"Hosting the World Cup will unleash this potential and serve as a platform to allow Qatar and the region to become key players in this rapidly growing industry and contribute even more to the football market."

"With a World Cup in Qatar in 2022, football TV broadcast rights in the region are expected to rise by 30% to \$550m. As an economic tool, football will help drive regional growth."

"A World Cup in Qatar is predicted to enhance interest in football to such an extent that additional players, spectators and television viewers will increase expenditure in the wider football economy by an additional \$10bn to \$37bn by 2022," the Qatari official explained.

"This is a huge opportunity. An opportunity that everyone needs to grasp and know that they have a key role to play in realizing it," he said.

"The Middle East is young, dynamic and passionate about football. Indeed, in terms of participation, football is the most popular sport while football viewership is three times more than the next sport. Yet the Middle East has never before had the privilege of hosting the

World Cup." Al Thawadi urged the game's ruling body to go for the bold decision of awarding the World Cup to Qatar.

"A World Cup in the Middle East is a once in a lifetime opportunity for everyone," Al Thawadi said.

"Bringing an event of this scale to the Middle East will change lives. FIFA's opportunity has arrived, and we hope they will not pass it up," he said.

"The world will witness how the Middle East can use the positive impact of the sport at the service of peace, transcending religious, social and political barriers. The world will experience our hospitality and culture."

"Indeed, whether you are player or a fan here in Doha or watching from home, you will take part in a global celebration that uses the power of football to foster knowledge, understanding and unity. That is the legacy that Qatar will create for the world," the Qatar 2022 Bid Committee chief added.

Al Thawadi confidently stated: "We have shown through resolve and hard work what Qatar and the region can do when it puts its mind and heart to a great challenge. Anything is possible. Today, what was once a dark horse candidate for the World Cup is a serious contender for the greatest tournament in sport."

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Hassan Al Thawadi, CEO of Qatar 2022 Bid Committee, speaking during the first day of Aspire4Sport Conference being held at Aspire Academy in Doha yesterday. PIC: ABDUL BASIT

OCA President backs Qatar bid

GUANGZHOU, CHINA: Asia's Olympic leader has backed Qatar's 2022 World Cup bid despite allegations of vote collusion.

On the day an ethics commission for football's governing body was due to start hearings in Zurich, Olympic Council of Asia president Sheikh Ahmad Al Fahad Al Sabah said yesterday that he had full confidence in Qatar's bid and its leaders.

"Yes, I still believe. I wish Qatar will have the games," Sheikh Ahmad, a Kuwaiti, said at the Asian Games.

"Still, Qatar will have the highest votes for the first round. I believe this." FIFA's ethics panel will hold a three-day hearing to determine whether two voters and at least two candidates should be barred from the 2018 and 2022 World Cup bidding contests for alleged corruption.

Sheikh Ahmad said he was awaiting the resolution of the FIFA hearing but had little doubt Qatar's bid team would be cleared.

"Until now there's no evidence. Until now there's no result," he said. "But in the end it will be a big competition between all the bidding countries for the World Cup." AP

Women have passion for sports, lack opportunities

BY FAZEENA SALEEM

DOHA: Women have a passion for sports but they get only a few opportunities, says a renowned sportswoman.

"Women have the passion for soccer and sports, its lack of opportunity which stops them," said Lorrie Fair, member of the USA World Cup winning soccer team.

Lorrie and Dr Leonieke Richardson, Acting Head, Aspire Active yesterday shared views at a forum held on Women in Sport at the Aspire4Sport event.

The forum discussed about the challenges faced by the society against women entering sports, including culture, traditions and myths.

"Women sport development has

an issue with history. History has showed if the opportunity is given women prove," said Lorrie.

She explained how football was popular among women in the Victorian age and was made unpopular citing false health reasons.

Women sport is not encouraged enough even in countries like the US and UK, said Lorrie.

Women haven't been in the international forum of sports as long as men. Also men are considered as better performers due to their strength. Lorrie explained how this factor has been proved wrong through research.

Lorrie was a member of the United States national soccer team. She currently plays for Chelsea in the FA Women's Premier League. In 1999, Fair

helped take the team to that year's FIFA Women's World Cup. She also discussed about the challenges and difficulties faced before succeeding in the 1999 World Cup.

Women sport events are not open for public in Qatar and other Gulf countries due to the cultural and traditional background of the Gulf countries.

"Cultural change happens slow... Either they play in or out, it's only the opportunity given is important," said Lorrie.

Support of the family is most important and it's a major deciding factor for women to take up sports.

"I have a very supportive family. With the prospect I played the piano and football," said Lorrie.

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Dr Leonieke Richardson (left) acting head of Aspire active and Lorrie Fair during the Women in Sport session at Aspire4Sport conference and exhibition, yesterday.
ABDUL BASIT