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World Cup Preparation: Is Brazil ready?

June 05, 2014

After seven years of planning and billions of dollars spent on infrastructure, Brazil is finally dismantling ubiquitous scaffolds and applying finishing touches to a myriad of World Cup projects.

Among them are sparkling new stadiums, airport upgrades and telecommunications, electric power and security initiatives.

But is Brazil ready to host football's premier event, to be held from June 12 to July 13. Xinhua analyzes key aspects of the country's World Cup preparations.

STADIUMS

Each of the World Cup's 12 stadiums has officially opened and football's governing body FIFA assumed control of their operations.

The venues in Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Recife, Salvador, Brasilia and Fortaleza proved they were ready by successfully hosting matches during last year's Confederations Cup.

Natal and Manaus have also satisfied FIFA after being inaugurated earlier this year. But workers are still scrambling to finish five other stadiums, including Corinthians Arena and Itaquerao stadium.

Sao Paulo's Itaquerao stadium has caused the greatest concern, and not just because of the deaths of three workers in the past six months.

The venue, which will host the World Cup opener between Brazil and Croatia on June 12, has yet to be tested at full capacity, prompting FIFA to insist another test event be played at the 68,000-seat venue.

After completing a tour of the stadiums in late May, FIFA secretary-general Jerome Valcke said: "The World Cup has already arrived in Brazil and the whole world is watching in anticipation. We have busy days ahead of us with still a lot to be done."

AIRPORTS

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff has guaranteed airports designated for World Cup upgrades will be ready.

More than 600,000 international visitors are expected to flock to the country during the tournament.

To handle increased demand, new terminals have been built in Sao Paulo, Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, Manaus and Belo Horizonte.

"[The airports] will be used for the World Cup, but they are chiefly made for the convenience of the millions of Brazilians who can now afford to travel by plane," Rousseff said.

"I can ensure that our airports are ready for the World Cup. We'll give all (visitors) a proper welcome."

Earlier this year the government said military airports would be on standby during the tournament if commercial terminals could not cope.

SECURITY

The federal government has spent 800 million US dollars on what has been described as the largest ever World Cup security plan.

The operation will include the deployment of 170,000 military, police and other security personnel.

Rio de Janeiro's government says a 20,000-strong force will be present across the city during the six matches at the Maracana stadium.

There will also be a no-fly zone, limiting air traffic within a seven-kilometer radius of the venue on game days.

And in a bid to prevent a repeat of incidents in Brazil's domestic competitions earlier this year, the federal government has vowed a stadium ban for fans previously convicted of racism offenses.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS, ENERGY SUPPLY

FIFA and the government have taken steps to ensure mobile telephone coverage at each World Cup venue.

But FIFA's marketing director Thierry Weil warned fans may still struggle to make calls and send text messages during matches due to congested networks.

"We've learned from the Confederations Cup, and put specific trucks outside the stadium to enhance the connectivity," Weil said. "But at the end of the day, to be honest, having 70,000 in a stadium, where everybody wants to make a phone call at halftime, well, I'd say you better talk to your boyfriend or girlfriend ahead of the game."

Operators have met their promise of providing 4G coverage in each host city. But handsets widely used in the US, Europe and Australia will not be compatible with Brazil's 2.5GHz spectrum, meaning many tourists will be limited to 3G access.

The government has also adopted measures to guarantee electric power supply.

Under an operational energy plan announced earlier this year, each stadium will be monitored around the clock by national power grid operator ONS.

Utilities have also been obliged to upgrade transmission and distribution infrastructure serving World Cup cities.

TICKETS

FIFA has moved to stop the sale of unauthorized tickets as scalpers attempt to profit from soaring demand.

In a briefing with media, FIFA's Weil said those found with resold tickets would be denied entry at stadiums.

"My advice is not to take risks," Weil said. "Don't buy tickets on the black market. If we find out, you'll be stopped and will be prevented from entering the stadium."

Fans left empty-handed during the internet sales phases have been given another chance to attend matches, with an extra batch of tickets available from June 1.

The tickets went on sale at official venue ticketing centers.