Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Qatar and the world before and after the World Cup: Changes for which money is not enough

Will Qatar be a different country after December 18 and the World Cup final? It certainly will, but perhaps the more important question is whether the world will be different after this unique experience: hosting the largest and most popular sports mega-event in an Arab world country.

The changes will be global. That was clear 12 years ago when FIFA decided to award Qatar, small and weak in terms of football, the organisation of the World Cup, to the great surprise of many. In the final vote, with 12 to 8, Qatar won against the USA, which had been considered the front runner.

What made FIFA take such a risky decision: to entrust the organisation of the biggest football event to an anonymous in the world of football? Principally, because "Qatar is not anonymous in the world of business, economic and political influence." And Qatar is an ambitious country that recognised this football mega-event contributed to its long-term, strategic plans for the distant future. Its future in the post-oil era.

The decision for Qatar to host the World Cup was a mistake (Sepp Blatter)

Sepp Blatter, who was FIFA president in 2010, now says that the decision for Qatar to host the World Cup was a "mistake". Blatter has described awarding the World Cup to Qatar as ?a bad choice? and again suggested it was linked to the Gulf state's agreeing an arms deal with France.

Blatter, who was at the helm of the football's world governing body in December 2010, when Qatar was announced as the 2022 hosts, claimed there had been a pre-arranged agreement among many on FIFA's executive committee before the vote, that the 2018 World Cup would go to Russia, and four years later to the United States. However, Qatar triumphed in the 2022 vote.

Blatter told the Swiss newspaper Tages-Anzeiger: "It's too small a country. Football and the World Cup are too big for this. It was a bad choice and I?was responsible for it as FIFA president."

The Times notes that back in 2016, Blatter said that the key to Qatar's victory was UEFA's president in 2010, Michel Platini, who switched from supporting the US to Qatar after pressure from the then French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, at a lunch with Qatar's ruler.

He repeated this allegation to Tages-Anzeiger, adding, "A week before the 2010 FIFA congress, Michel Platini called me to say that our plan would not work. It turned out exactly like this: thanks to Platini's four votes, the World Cup went to Qatar instead of the United States. That is the truth. Of course it was also about money." Six months later, Qatar bought fighter jets from the French for $14.6 billion.

If this is just about money, Qatar will pay off this purchase of the French planes with World Cup earnings, and have a few billion left over.

Expected financial return on the Qatari economy from the World Cup will amount to $17 billion

The CEO of the Qatar World Cup, Nasser Al-Khater, said he expects to reap profits of up to $9 billion from organising the 2022 World Cup.

During an interview with the Baad Ams (After Yesterday) podcast on Al Jazeera on Tuesday, Al-Khater said that the cost of the World Cup projects and expenses amount to about $8 billion, adding that this is less than previous tournaments held in Brazil and Russia.

He said that the expected financial return on the Qatari economy from the World Cup will amount to $17 billion.

Al-Khater added that there will be revenues during the World Cup and revenues afterwards, including the increase in the number of tourists, which is one of the most important criteria that were set to study the financial return.

But, of course, the World Cup is not only about money, and Qatar is fully aware of this. For the past 12 years, the country has been viewed through the prism of World Cup organiser, and regardless of all the doubts that accompanied the preparations, football and sports are always globally followed by positive emotions. Thus, Qatar can "buy" a global positive global image.

Three to four billion people around the world will follow matches of 32 national teams during one month of competition. Practically everyone in the world will know about the small but rich Gulf monarchy, and they will have positive reactions to it generally, as the host of the biggest and wealthiest sports caravan. Tens of thousands of fans will come to the stadiums and tour Doha and its surroundings, spend money and return home with positive impressions.

> Qatar will be forced to pay a social price, primarily through adapting its traditional culture to globally accepted values

This is especially true for Western Europeans, whom Qatar sees as its important economic "audience", in which it has been investing through football for some time. The Qatar World Cup will, in terms of financial parameters, be very Eurocentric, given that as much as two-thirds of the market value of the national teams (the sum of the contracts of individual players) goes to teams from Europe. The richest teams are from England (1.29 billion EUR) and France (1.06 billion EUR), the very places which Qatar and other economies from the Gulf are "fighting" in the market for sponsorships and ownership in football clubs and stadiums.

If Qatar "buys" influence on the regional level through the World Cup, among the rich Gulf competitors, but also on a global level, what kind of concessions does it give in return? It will be forced to pay a social price, primarily through adapting its traditional culture to globally accepted values, which will inevitably reach the World Cup.

A recent interview by Qatar FIFA World Cup ambassador and former footballer, Khalid Salman, for German broadcaster ZDFcaused a significant outcry. He said that homosexuality is "damage in the mind". During the interview, Salman was discussing the issue of homosexuality being illegal in Qatar. Salman told ZDF that being gay was "haram," meaning forbidden according to Islamic law. "It is damage in the mind," Salman said.

The interview, filmed in Doha less than two weeks before the start of the tournament, was immediately stopped by an official from the World Cup organising committee.

The hosts will have the complicated task of reconciling the West's tolerance for the LGBT population and their own conservative culture during the World Cup, but they will try not to let any sensitive issue, like this or the poor treatment of foreign workers, damage the huge investment they have made in the World Cup. It's primarily an investment in image, regional and global influence, and money is the least of its worries. Qatar has plenty.

The World Cup will change Qatar. It will become more globally recognisable and popular than before, and this will increase its economic and even political influence. In addition to money, this change will lead Qatar to invest in social energy, and above all, tolerance towards diversity. Without that investment, the money will not be enough.