

## **FIFA wars flare again: Will Asia unseat Blatter?**

By Andrew Jennings

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*Sunday Herald*, Sunday August 15: **Turmoil at the top as Blatter faces possible challenge**

FIFA's Zurich headquarters is in turmoil following a spectacular confrontation between Sepp Blatter and Korean vice-president Chung Mong-joon who sources say stormed out of a meeting threatening to bring the president's 13-year reign to an end.

In Seoul in February Asian football president Mohamed Bin Hammam, with Chung at his side, had rocked FIFA's superficial serenity when he announced that the region would run a candidate against Blatter at the presidential election due in May next year.

Bin Hammam, from Qatar, is backing his country's bid to stage the World Cup in 2022 and Blatter hastened to pledge his whole-hearted support. It smelled of a deal to give Blatter one more term but that decision is in early December leaving the Asians free to organise a challenge in the following five months.

### **Shouting**

Sources at FIFA say that Chung walked out of the meeting shouting that nothing would stop him challenging the President for FIFA's leadership next year.

The chill between the three men was captured in what was scheduled to be a convivial photo-call in Singapore last Wednesday on the eve of the Youth Olympics with Chung

and Bin Hammam looking stony-faced and Blatter grinning sickly.

The bust-up is thought to have been triggered by Blatter's forced admission in late June that a handful of FIFA's leaders pocketed huge kickbacks from the now defunct ISL marketing company in return for awarding billion-dollar World Cup contracts.

Although former ISL executive Jean-Marie Weber admitted in a Swiss courtroom two years ago that around \$100 million had been trousered by FIFA bosses, Blatter cut a deal with prosecutors that a corruption probe would end in return for a payment of around £3.3 million and the formal statement of guilt. In return the names of the bribe-takers would be kept confidential.

## **Animosity**

Blatter also agreed that FIFA would foot the costs of the investigation. The compromise was reached after certain FIFA leaders refused to be interrogated in Switzerland, making it difficult for prosecutors to indict them.

In a bid to keep support for his plan to run for a further term Blatter announced at the FIFA congress in Johannesburg in June that he was giving a \$250,000 one-off handout to every national association – the voters in the upcoming presidential election - with few strings attached.

The animosity between the two men runs deep. In late 1995 Chung had fought – and failed - to block Blatter's determination to award lucrative World Cup marketing and television rights to the ISL company, holding a secret meeting with executives from the rival IMG company who insisted they would bid more than ISL - but would not pay bribes to get the business.

Chung made no attempt to hide his disgust with Blatter in his speech opening the FIFA congress in Seoul, on the eve of the 2002 World Cup. Side-stepping the expected platitudes he told shocked delegates, “FIFA is now in a serious organisational crisis. FIFA’s pride, our pride is damaged. FIFA is divided.’

Chung was backing a bid to unseat Blatter and continued. ‘I believe this congress will decide the long-term fate of FIFA and world football. The real problems of FIFA will not disappear with the election. The issue is, will FIFA be able to restore our prestige and respect?’ Efforts to topple Blatter failed.

Since then the scandals of Blatter’s reign have intensified with allegations of bribes, ticket rackets and vote-rigging reaching a new low this year with the revelation that the President’s nephew Philippe Blatter had been awarded a World Cup corporate hospitality contract.

## **Frustration**

Chung, a billionaire 15 years younger than the 74-year-old Blatter, may have been voicing his frustration before weighing up whether he can launch a successful bid. But if elected next year he would be expected to fumigate FIFA after three decades of corruption and clear out senior executives who have helped Blatter cover up the deep-rooted malaise.

Several long-serving Blatter aides are said to fear that if he is evicted they may also be forced out before qualifying for their pensions. Sources inside FIFA HQ say that Blatter is currently diverting FIFA resources to a campaign to have him awarded a Nobel Peace prize before he departs.

Blatter's dilemma is whether he should try to marshal enough support for a fight with the canny member of the family that owns the Hyundai company that includes Kia cars or retire on health reasons before any challenge is made public.

THE *Dagbladet* newspaper in Oslo alleges that an employee of MATCH, the English-based company given the exclusive rights by FIFA to sell World Cup tickets and accommodation, stole client's confidential personal information and sold it to black market operators. Among the victims are a former Swedish Prime Minister, the head of the National Bank and former Swedish manager Lars Lagerbäck. This could prompt an investigation under the Data Protection Act.