

IN NEED OF A SAVIOUR?

Collapsing roofs, striking workers and money wrangles...

Fernando Duarte asks Thiago Paes, the man in charge of 2014 World Cup venues, whether there is any cause to be worried.

WITH ONE YEAR to go to the kick-off of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Thiago Paes is a busy man.

As director of 'operational integration' for the tournament's organising committee, Paes spends his weeks touring the 12 venues that will be hosting the competition in Brazil next year. And the feedback he has been getting is, to say the least, a mixed bag.

Although six arenas have been delivered in time for the Confederations Cup - a crucial test event for all logistical matters relating to hosting a FIFA World Cup - the other six stadia are still buildings in progress, with FIFA setting December 31, 2013 as the final completion date for cities and arenas that want to see any World Cup action.

However, even the venues that have already been delivered have experienced hiccups. In May, heavy rain caused part of the Arena Fonte Nova stadium roof to collapse, while around the same time, a tussle between Rio de Janeiro authorities led the state prosecution service to file an injunction that prevented the use of the Maracana, something that threatened to turn last month's glamour friendly between England and Brazil into a PR disaster.

Nevertheless Paes remains upbeat, and with Fonte Nova's roof replaced and the injunction on the Maracana overturned, he is adamant that all 12 stadia will be ready on time.

"We monitor the arenas 24 hours a day and there is a control room in every stadium," he told *SportBusiness International*. "There are frequent reports checking all spectator safety and usability issues. Half of the stadia are already in place and will be tested during the Confederations Cup, and we are confident that the others will be ready in time."



Paes does admit, however, that "there is room to improve". Deadlines have constantly been changed, and finance issues have delayed work in several arenas and resulted, for example, in the exclusion of the stadium in Porto Alegre, the home town of president Dilma Rousseff, from use in the Confederations Cup.

"From the beginning, FIFA and the local organising committee shared the view that the arenas must be delivered in time, and with enough flexibility for the test events," says Paes. "We have always learned from the challenges and will work together with FIFA and the Brazilian authorities, as well as the 12 host cities, to overcome them [in the future]."

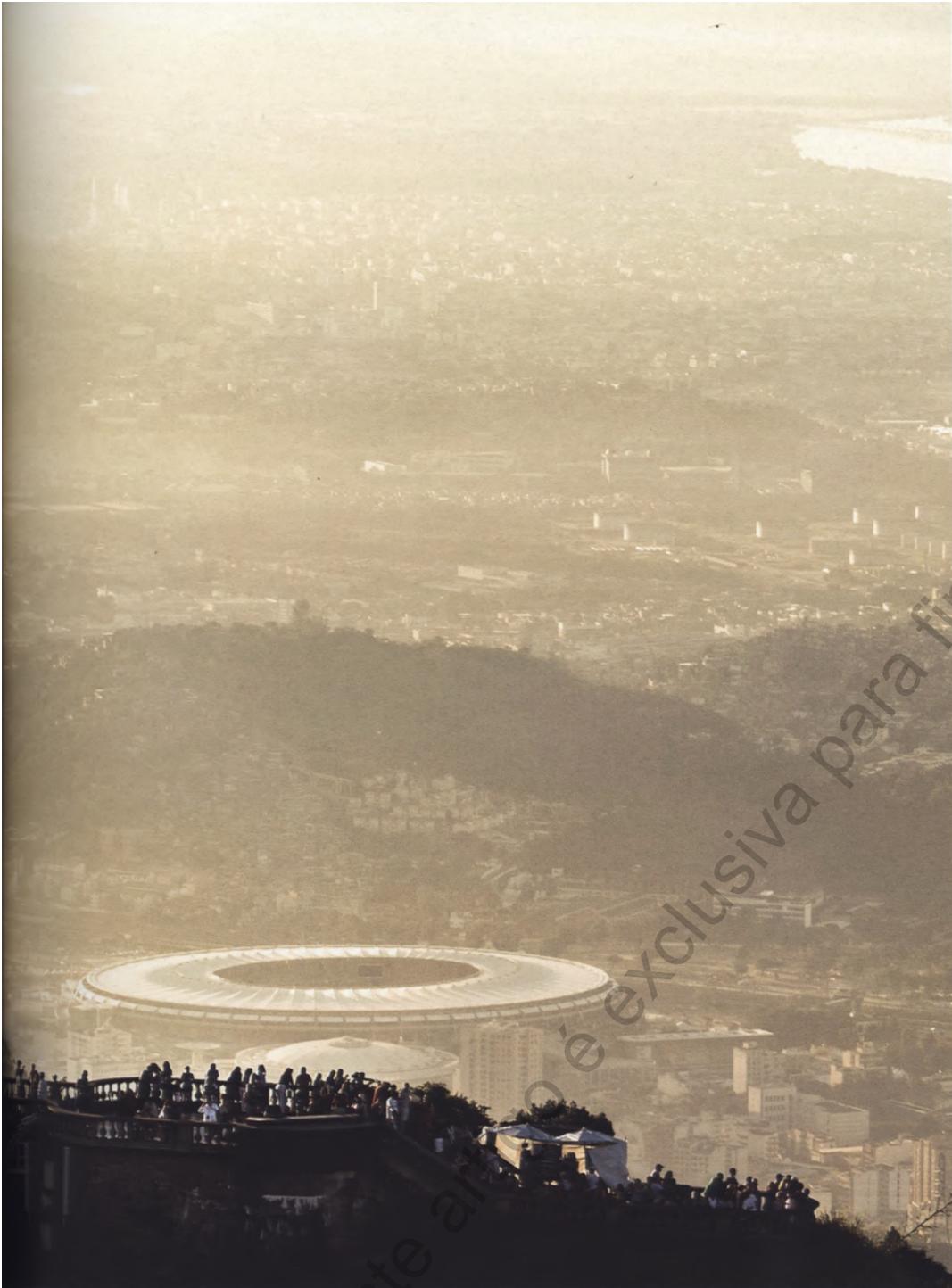
Paes does not accept the argument that Brazil should have accepted FIFA's "

original recommendation to use a smaller number of World Cup host cities in order to simplify the overall logistics, including the movement of teams and supporters in a country of continental dimensions with airports not used to accommodating the huge amount of fans anticipated when world football's showcase lands next year.

"The number of host cities was agreed between the organising committee and FIFA," he adds. "Brazil had an important rationale with regards to the number of cities, because we wanted to involve all the five regions of the country in the tournament."

Many observers believe taking the World Cup to all regions of Brazil was favouring politics over





The new Maracana - Getty Images Sport

organisational logic. After all, four host cities - Cuiabá, Natal, Manaus and Brasilia - have no teams in the top three tiers of professional domestic Brazilian football, and there are fears that the arenas will struggle to maintain the interest of the public after the World Cup.

The projects to make each of the 12 arenas World Cup-ready has not been handled directly by the organising committee, rather local governments with large funding from federal agencies. However, the committee has organised several seminars where representatives from stadia in the US and Europe have come to Brazil to share their major event experiences.

"We were not directly involved with the construction, but we have encouraged the host cities to engage in the exchange of information concerning legacy projects and sustainability initiatives," says Paes. "These arenas can lead the way for other venues in Brazil."

Paes also points out that several arenas will be constructed with removable stands so they can operate at a reduced capacity after the World Cup, and many have also been designed for multi-use after the event, something that is "a whole new concept for Brazilian football". Indeed, in the last few months, public visits to the new grounds have been promoted in order to offer a crash course to fans that after the World Cup will need to adapt to new matchday routines.

"Brazilian fans are about to be introduced to a new stadium culture and we have made the effort to try to show the way," says Paes. "Our message is that arriving with plenty of time for the beginning of matches, using public transport and respecting the assigned seating are important steps for fans to get used to. This will help Brazilians to enjoy the new football culture."

WHITE ELEPHANT DANGER

Ricardo Araujo may have a strong Rio de Janeiro accent that makes him sound like a surfer, but the former geologist is a popular voice in Brazil for discussions on stadium issues. An independent consultant who also blogs for *Exame*, one of the leading business magazines in the country, he never refrains from adopting critical tones - especially when the conversation is about building works around the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

Having worked as a consultant for Spanish football side Celta Vigo, Araujo argues that even though new arenas are necessary for Brazilian football, there are alarming issues in terms of profitability in the long term.

"My concern is not that stadium a or arena b will be ready for the World Cup, but that the new arenas are being rushed because of the huge gap in quality between South American and European grounds," he says, adding that even safety concerns aren't at the top of his concerns.

"The Joao Havelange Stadium is a complicated case that was marked by problems involving contractors and financial guarantees. Salvador actually needed a storm to test the stadium roof. That also happened in Frankfurt during the 2005 Confederations Cup."

Araujo believes Brazil missed a chance to improve its stadia long before it was awarded the World Cup in October 2007.

"We reached a point where our stadium infrastructure was stuck in the Stone Age and no new arenas had been built since the 1970s," he says. "The mega event will definitely deliver beautiful stadia but I do believe they will put a lot of pressure on authorities and football clubs to actually establish a legacy."

"I don't really believe many of the local authorities responsible for funding or overseeing the stadia have actually prepared proper studies regarding what is going to happen after the World Cup. The possibility of at least five 'white elephants' after the World Cup is real."