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# Nicolas Sarkozy 'colluded' to get Qatar 2022 World Cup



Magazine claims former French President held secret meeting 10 days before FIFA decision

JOHN LICHFIELD | PARIS | Tuesday 29 January 2013

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Nicolas Sarkozy, the former French president, held a secret meeting in November 2010 which influenced the decision by football's governing body to award the 2022 football World Cup to Qatar, it was alleged.

In a 20-page investigation headlined "Qatargate", the respected magazine France Football said that "acts of collusion and corruption" shaped the much-criticised FIFA decision to award the 2022 competition to the tiny, oil-rich Gulf state.

Among the alleged "acts of collusion", the magazine listed a secret meeting called by President Sarkozy at the Elysée Palace on 23 November 2010. Ten days later – to worldwide astonishment – Qatar was chosen by a FIFA executive committee meeting in Zurich to host the World Cup in June-July 2022, despite summer temperatures in the Gulf of up to 50C.

Mr Sarkozy's lunch guests included the crown prince of Qatar, Tamin bin Haman al-Thani, Michel Platini, president of the European Football Association (EUFA), and a representative of the investment fund which owned the then struggling French football club, Paris Saint-Germain (PSG).

France Football said that Mr Platini – a star of the France team of the 1980s – came under pressure at the lunch to switch his vote from the United States to Qatar. In exchange, the magazine alleged, the Qataris discussed the possibility that they would buy Paris Saint-Germain and create a new TV sports channel in France to compete with Canal Plus, a channel that Mr Sarkozy loathed. Before he became president in 2007, Mr Sarkozy was a match-going PSG fan. The magazine did not directly allege that a deal was struck at this meeting but said "all the elements" were "discussed".

In 2011, the Qatari state investment fund paid €50m for PSG. Last year, the Qatari-owned Al-Jazeera TV company created a French sports channel beIN Sport after paying €150m for the rights to screen French football until 2016.

Mr Platini has admitted before that Mr Sarkozy asked him to switch his vote. He issued a statement angrily denying this was part of a deal involving PSG. "To say that my choice... was part of a deal between the French state and Qatar is pure speculation... and lies," he said. "I do not rule out legal action against anyone who casts doubt on the honesty of my vote."

Mr Sarkozy's office did not comment on the story.

The award of the 2022 World Cup to Qatar was greeted with derision in much of the football world. France Football says there is growing pressure for the decision to be reversed.

A US lawyer, Michael Garcia, appointed last year as FIFA's chief ethics investigator, has accumulated preliminary evidence of corrupt influence on both the 2018 and 2022 World Cup decisions, France Football reported. England bid for the 2018 competition but was eliminated in the first round of voting. Russia won in the final vote.

There are also growing doubts about Qatar's ability to deliver its promise to reduce the temperature during matches to 20C. Some senior football officials, including Mr Platini, are campaigning for the 2022 World Cup to be shifted to November-December.

One of the few international figures to have consistently supported the choice of Qatar is Mr Sarkozy. Just after the FIFA vote in 2010, he said: "Sport does not belong to a few countries. It belongs to the world... I don't understand those who say that events should always be held in the same countries and the same continents."

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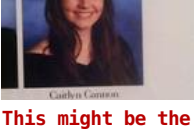
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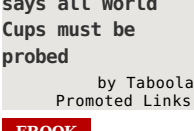
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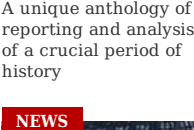
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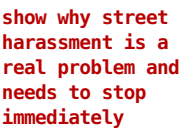
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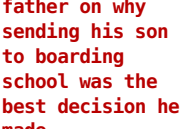
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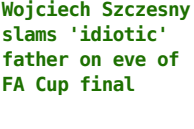
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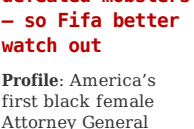
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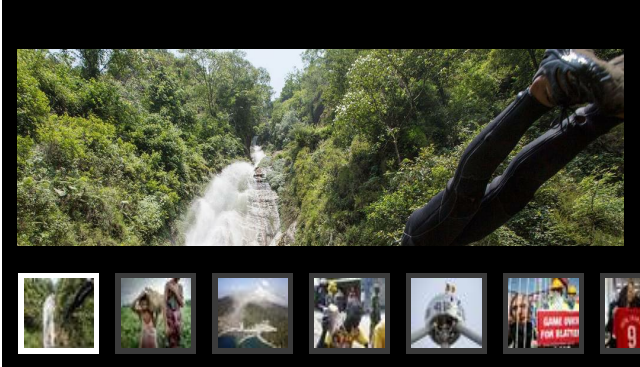
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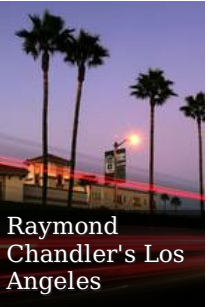
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