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(WFI) South Korea's World Cup bid chairman Han Sung-Joo says there is "hope" that the 2022 tournament could be hosted by his country.

Han spoke to World Football Insider at the end of a 40-minute meeting between Korean President Lee Myung-bak and FIFA chief Sepp Blatter at the organization's headquarters in Zurich Wednesday night.

"I think the key words were what kind of legacy a World Cup will leave," Han said. "And the corresponding key words are hope and peace."

When asked whether he was optimistic his country would be picked to host the 2022 finals, Han would only say "we all have our fingers crossed".

He declined to elaborate further on what was discussed at Wednesday's meeting. A statement from Korea's presidential office said: "President Lee asked for President Blatter's cooperation and backing for South Korea's bid to host the 2022 World Cup."

It said Lee emphasized South Korea's experience and knowledge gained from its co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup with Japan, the country's well-established football infrastructure, the government's strong support and the public backing for the bid to stage the event again.

President Lee, who is en route to the World Economic Forum in Davos, was joined by FIFA vice president Chung Mong-joon, who also heads the Korean FA.

Korea has so far had a low-profile bid campaign, but the meeting with Blatter marks a new phase in their attempts to win the bid to stage the 2022 competition.

Its co-hosting of the 2002 tournament was the first time the finals were played in Asia. However, South Korea still remains an outsider in the 2022 bid race.

In the past year, Blatter has criticized preparations for the last Asian World Cup, citing the lack of coordination between the two organizing committees, which proved a headache for FIFA chiefs.

Qatar, the USA and Australia appear favourites to land the 2022 World Cup if the 2018 competition goes to Europe.

Blatter's meeting with President Lee marks the third time in a week the FIFA chief has met a world leader. Last Friday, he met Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow. On Monday, he traveled to Madrid for talks with Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Russia and Spain-Portugal are vying with each other to host the 2018 finals.

FIFA quiet on 2018 World Cup plans

FIFA is playing down reports that a deal is being negotiated for Europe to stage the 2018 World Cup.

Earlier this week, Blatter told reporters he had held discussions with UEFA president Michel Platini about only European candidates being evaluated for the 2018 World Cup.

"There is a movement at the moment among the various candidates that in the end it would be a good solution... if the candidates for 2018 would only be those from Europe," Blatter told reporters.



Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Sepp Blatter at FIFA headquarters in Zurich yesterday (WFI/ M. Falconi)

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"It's still not decided, but it's an idea to help facilitate the work of FIFA and its executive committee," he said after a Madrid meeting with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero.

But in a statement to World Football Insider, FIFA refused to back up Blatter's declaration or confirm that a deal had been hatched that would see England, Holland-Belgium, Russia or Spain-Portugal chosen to stage the 2018 tournament.

FIFA declined to elaborate on Blatter's comments or how an agreement for Europe would help "facilitate the work of FIFA and its executive committee".

It's hard to see how limiting the field for 2018 would reduce the workload for FIFA.

FIFA officials will still have to wade through dossiers from the 10 bids for the 2018 and 2022 World Cup due for submission by May 14. Inspection visits to each of the bidding nations will follow to assess their ability to successfully stage the event.



Former England midfielder John Barnes led a coaching session at an orphanage in Luanda, Angola to promote the England 2018 bid during the Africa Cup of Nations tournament (England 2018)

News of a deal for Europe has upset Australia, Japan and the U.S. who have also bid to stage either the 2018 or 2022 World Cup. It means their chances would be limited to only 2022, with bids from South Korea, Indonesia and Qatar also competing to stage that edition.

A decision on the hosts for the 2018 and 2022 tournaments will be made by the FIFA Executive Committee in December.

Premier League offer England 2018 hand of friendship

England's World Cup bid team, currently based at Wembley Stadium, will have a city centre base after the English Premier League agreed to provide office space and meeting rooms for the bid team at its Gloucester Place headquarters.

The deal marks a warming of relations between the bid team and the EPL which had seemed irrevocably broken following the high-profile resignation of its chairman Dave Richards from the England 2018 board in November.

England 2018's permanent base will remain at Wembley – a 25 minute underground journey from central London – but the deal allows for 'hot desking' when its staff are in town.

The EPL has also granted the use of a meeting room at its HQ. "The bid team has an excellent working relationship with the Premier League and we're delighted they've offered us this facility," an England 2018 spokesman told WFI.

With reporting by Marta Falconi in Zurich, Mark Bisson and James Corbett

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