

Gauteng ready for Afcon spectacle

With just a few days left to the start of the Africa Cup of Nations (Afcon), the Gauteng provincial government says it is pulling all the stops to ensure the tournament is a success.

The province will be hosting the Afcon opening game on Saturday, 19 January and the final game on 10 February.

Approximately 86,000 soccer lovers are expected to fill the stadium during the opening and the closing ceremonies.

Gauteng MEC for Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation, Lebogang Maile, says the province is fully behind Safa and Bafana Bafana in their preparation for the tournament.

"The last friendly match versus Algeria this Saturday at Orlando Stadium will be a good platform to test our state of readiness," said Maile.

Soccer fans are encouraged to make use of several facilities that have been identified for park-and-ride in order to avoid traffic congestion outside the stadium.

These are WITS, Gold Reef City, Aeroton Cemetery, Constitutional Hill, Westgate and Shareworld. Prasa will provide trains to the stadium. Commuters using the Gautrain will use Rea Vaya buses to get to the match venue.

"A detailed plan of action in conjunction with the City of Johannesburg is already in motion to ensure a seamless and incident-free tournament. As we reach the 10-day countdown to Afcon kick-off this [afternoon], we call upon all South Africans to extend warm hospitality to thousands of guests who will be visiting our province during this celebration of African football," said Maile.

Following the agreement reached in line with the FIFA rule on the non-branding of stadiums for FIFA tournaments, the host venue, FNB Stadium, will be known as the National Stadium over the duration of Afcon.

Security personnel will be deployed to maintain peace and stability and regulate traffic movement on routes to the stadium and public viewing areas.

Paramedics and emergency personnel will also be on standby to respond to any emergencies. The Joint Operations Centre will also be activated to ensure general safety for thousands of soccer lovers during the busy period.

Public viewing areas will be operating throughout the tournament in various locations in Orange Farm, Diepsloot, Ivory Park, Diepkloof, Sedibeng, Tshwane and Merafong.

Training has commenced for informal food traders who are allowed to operate within the city. This drive is aimed at providing conditions conducive for economic growth for local businesses and ensuring that communities benefit from the soccer showpiece.

The province will also support the Volunteer Programme. These volunteers include those previously trained and operational in previous tournaments.

The upgraded Orlando, Milpark, Rand and Dobsonville stadiums will be the official training venues for the soccer teams.

The department will also give young, aspiring football enthusiasts an opportunity to have access to their football icons that are based in their cities.

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