

Foreign media robbery: police meet Spanish, Portuguese journos

Senior South African police officials, including national police commissioner general Bheki Cele met yesterday afternoon, Thursday, 10 June 2010, with a large contingent of Spanish and Portuguese journalists in Magaliesburg to discuss the criminal attacks on foreign journalists visiting the country to cover the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

 Bylssa Sikiti da Silva 11 Jun 2010



This follows the case of three journalists, two Portuguese and one Spanish, who were robbed this week at their lodge in Magaliesburg. Three people have since been arrested over this incident and all the stolen goods apparently recovered.

Cele, who expressed "regrets" over the incident, said however that the police force had devised an operational plan to ensure the safety of the journalists staying in the Magaliesburg area. This includes the deployment of additional members to patrol the area, holding roadblocks, visiting hotels and lodges, interacting with owners and managers and a link up with the local station commander.

Apart from morpho-touch machines to be made available to trace culprits operating in the vicinity, a helicopter and a surveillance aircraft are being tasked to sweep the area from time to time.

Three Chinese journalists

Meanwhile, a group of three Chinese journalists also had a violent encounter with criminals after their equipment was stolen at gunpoint on their way to the main venue in Soweto, Reuters reported yesterday, quoting *Beeld* newspaper.

Private TV station e.tv also reported last night that three Greek players had cash stolen from their bedroom. Details of the incident were still sketchy last night and Durban police said they were investigating the allegations but, according to media reports, the Greek team does not want to open a case and say that this kind of thing could happen anywhere.

Criminal attacks on foreign journalists definitely leave a stain on the 2010 FIFA World Cup and should be eradicated, Wang Lei, of China's Titan Sports, told Bizcommunity.com yesterday. Titan Sports is China's largest sport publication, based in Beijing.

"These incidents are terrible, very terrible," Lei said, speaking at Melrose Arch on the sidelines of the launch of Pele's art collection in Johannesburg.

Lei said journalists have the duty to go all over the country to interact with local people and discover new

perspectives of life of SA society, but these attacks prevent them from doing that.

Concentrated safety efforts on teams, officials

"Apart from going to the teams' training grounds and press conferences, we are just staying at the hotel because we are very scared," he said, adding that police have concentrated their safety efforts on teams and officials, and in the process leaving the media to criminals.

"Cops also need to patrol hotels where the media are staying," he said, adding that these attacks are a bit of a pill to swallow for all journalists and have portrayed a bad image of the world cup.

Rafael Pirrho, of Brazil's Globo TV, said: "Cops need to be everywhere, not only at places where teams are staying and training, but also where the media are living. It is their job to protect all of us during this competition.

"What can I say really? This is a sad reality, but I am not afraid to be here. Violence is a big problem not only in SA, but also in Brazil and in the rest of Latin America, and even in the US. But while we have to learn to live with it, we just have to be careful," Pirrho said.

It remains unclear if police will be deployed at all media hotels to watch over journalists. Police spokesperson Vishnu Naidoo was not available for comment. "Call me after 30 minutes," he said, and he then hung up. Naidoo did not answer his phone afterwards.

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ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.
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