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Pele says protests may hurt World Cup

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Thousands of Brazilians have been taking to the streets to protest against the high costs of hosting of the tournament.

Pele said he sympathised with the demonstrators, adding that many foreigners could cancel their trips to the World Cup as a result.

"This is a great loss for the country," said Pele, speaking in Mexico.

The footballer said he agreed with many of the protesters' grievances, such as their calls for more schools and hospitals.

But Pele said the Brazilian national team should not have to pay for the corruption and politics involved in organising the tournament.

"We have nothing to do with corrupt politicians and thieves," he said. "It is not our fault."

He said now was not the time for protests.

"People should have demonstrated when Brazil was chosen to organise the World Cup, and not now that the tournament is very soon."

Pele, a triple World Cup winner and special advisor to the World Cup organising committee, also said he was dismayed that some of the stadiums have yet to be finished.

But, turning to football, the 73-year old said he felt his country could do well.

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"We have confidence in the Brazilian team. The only problem I see is that Brazil has more World Cups than everybody else and people think it must win at home," he said.

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