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Putin Leads Meeting on Hockey, Heating

By Olga Razumovskaya

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The traditional fall discussion about the country's preparation for winter was preceded by an optimistic discourse about hosting the Ice Hockey World Championship and welcoming a new Moscow mayor on board at Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's Cabinet meeting Thursday.

“The bid will be submitted by May of 2011, and the championship will be held in 2016,” Putin said.

Putin also said Russia would be ready for the upcoming winter, despite a debt of $4.4 billion by companies and individuals to the public utility sector.

Vladislav Tretyak, president of the Russian Ice Hockey Federation and legendary Soviet goalie, said there is a unique opportunity for the country to win the bid to host the championship.

The Czech Republic, Finland and Sweden will have hosted the championships by 2016, Tretyak said, so Russia's prime competitors will be Ukraine and Denmark. Latvia had also wanted to take part but changed its mind at the last minute, he said.

Tretyak proposed in the interim to organize a series of matches between Canada and Russia to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the 1976 successes for the Soviet hockey team.

Tretyak proposed holding the matches in August 2012, with four matches in Canada and four here at home, where Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan and possibly Sochi would be potential host cities.

“If the stadium in Sochi is ready [by 2012], holding it there will make a lot of sense because ... not all owners of professional hockey teams want to send us their players. This will be a good way to show the kind of level we will be holding this competition on,” Tretyak said.

The sport discussion segued into a review of the country's preparation for winter.

The government is planning to crack down on debtors to the public utility sector, Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko said. “We believe there is about 134 billion rubles worth of accumulated debt to public utility companies,” he said.

This money should be spent on repairs to the central heating system and equipment, he said, urging local officials to avoid cutting corners.

Shmatko promised increased oversight of repair works. “Under the conditions of possible budget deficit, some may get an urge to economize, which is why, together with the Federal Service for Environmental, Technological and Atomic Inspection, we will be conducting detailed checks,” he said.

Shmatko repeated earlier statements by Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin that Transneft will not be up for sale as part of the five-year privatization plan, but that 15 percent of Rosneft would go on the block. “The company is undercapitalized,” he said.

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