

FIFA Upbeat on 2018 Cup

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ST. PETERSBURG — FIFA president Sepp Blatter said he was certain the 2018 World Cup would be in good hands after he and Russian officials signed a formal declaration Sunday awarding the football tournament to Russia.

Russia has never before organized a World Cup and has an enormous amount of work to do to get ready. In addition to building stadiums and hotels, Russia will need to upgrade airports and roads to transport 32 football teams and millions of visitors to 13 cities spread across much of its vast territory.

Blatter was less focused on the organizational challenges than on his greater vision of bringing football to largely uncharted territory such as Russia and Qatar, which will hold the World Cup in 2022.

"Football is more than just kicking the ball," he said at a news conference after the signing ceremony. "It is also important to connect different nations, and our philosophy this time was to give the World Cup to territories that had never hosted it."

Sports minister Vitaly Mutko picked up on the theme in thanking FIFA for choosing Russia

over countries that already have much of the necessary infrastructure in place.

"FIFA is not just a football organization," he said. "It develops the world and it goes to new countries."

On Saturday, Blatter met with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who has promised that Russia would follow through on its commitments to spend tens of billions of dollars on new stadiums and infrastructure.

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