

Economy Robust, Sportsmen Poor

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Putin lamented the 100 ruble (\$3) a day allowance that athletes at state training camps get for their daily needs. **Vladimir Filonov**

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Tuesday mocked the amount of funding provided to athletes to cover their daily expenses in training camps, saying the money would be hardly sufficient to buy matches.

"They get 100 rubles per day, what a ridiculous figure. What time are we living in? What is 100 rubles? One can probably buy matches," Putin said with a laugh, while he chaired a Presidium meeting.

He ordered both the Sports, Tourism and Youth Politics Ministry and the Finance Ministry to provide suggestions on how to increase the funding.

Meanwhile, the government was encouraged by the country's macroeconomic indices, as acting Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said the budget surplus might reach 300 billion rubles (\$9.9 billion) this year.

"We expect a budget surplus of about 300 billion rubles, or about 0.3 percent to 0.4 percent of gross domestic product," Siluanov said.

He said the windfall would allow the government to reduce domestic borrowing next year.

The Finance Ministry said last month that it expected the budget deficit to reach 0.1 percent of GDP this year, but Putin said later that Russia could attain a balanced budget.

He said attaining a balanced budget is possible in 2012 as well, if oil prices increase slightly.

The State Duma passed the federal budget for the next three years in the third and final reading Tuesday, with the budget deficit expected to reach 1.5 percent of GDP next year if oil prices remain at \$100 per barrel.

The budget deficit could reach 1.6 percent of GDP in 2013 before decreasing to 0.7 percent of GDP in 2014, if oil prices are at \$97 a barrel and \$101 a barrel, respectively, according to the document.

The government also expects that this year's inflation could be slightly below the initial forecast of 7 percent.

"We have every reason to believe that we'll meet the recent forecast of 7 percent. Maybe it will be even below 7 percent," Economic Development Minister Elvira Nabiullina said at the Presidium meeting.

The domestic economy increased 4.3 percent in January through October, with agriculture and industry being the major drivers of growth, Nabiullina said.

She said agriculture, which is recovering after a severe drought last year, has shown record growth of 52 percent in October compared with the same month last year.

Among other issues discussed at the meeting was a program to ensure safety in the metro, airports and at railway stations. Transportation Minister Igor Levitin told journalists after the meeting that a total of 46.7 billion rubles would be spent from the federal budget by 2014 to take measures aimed at protecting passengers from terrorist attacks and during emergency situations.

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