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Moscow Airport Losing Its 'Shot Glass'

By Anna Dolgov

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Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport is dismantling its famed modernist lounge — a 1964 building popularly dubbed the "shot glass," or "ryumka," for its apparent resemblance to that item. Fans of the building say it symbolized the "thaw" under Nikita Khrushchev — a brief period of liberalization during the Soviet era.

The dismantling of the building is part of the plan to renovate Sheremetyevo ahead of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Moscow's Moskva 24 news portal reported Tuesday.

The demolition is going ahead despite attempts by the regional Culture Ministry and local activists to stop it.

Videos posted online showed a construction crane ripping off parts of the building's dish-shaped upper section, perched atop a three-story-high stem.

To its fans, the building had been a product of a "romantic epoch of believing in a bright future," in the words of a petition posted online by activists trying to save the structure.

Completed in the final year of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's tenure, the building was sometimes viewed as a symbol of the "thaw" in Moscow's policies under his rule, following the terror of dictator Josef Stalin.

The Culture Ministry of the Moscow region had appealed to prosecutors to look into the planned demolition, and listed the building as a site possessing "attributes of an object of cultural heritage of the Moscow region," the ministry's spokeswoman Svetlana Volkhonskaya was quoted by the Fronde TV news portal as saying.

The ministry also urged the Sheremetyevo administration to avoid making changes to the building without checking with cultural officials first, regional Culture Minister Oleg Rozhnov said, local 360 TV reported.

The airport responded by saying a designation as a site with "attributes of a cultural heritage object" was meaningless, the report said.

"The activities of an array of organizations and activists lately create the impression of a well-coordinated campaign aimed at creating artificial hurdles and delay the realization of the strategic project on preparing for the 2018 World Cup," the airport added in a statement, 260 TV reported.

In a separate petition, activists called for preserving the modernist building, saying the structure was "unique in its architecture and engineering design" and that it "distinguishes the airport and makes it easily recognizable." The building could bring additional revenues if it were featured on the airport's logo or on souvenirs, the petition added.

Sheremetyevo declined to heed the appeals, and what is left of the "ryumka" building is expected to be razed by the end of this week, 360 TV reported.

It is expected to be replaced by a new terminal building, designed to accommodate more passengers.

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