The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Sports Minister Issues Warning Over World Cup Stadium Delay

July 14, 2016



St. Petersburg authorities and contractors must resolve conflict surrounding the construction of the Zenit Arena, a 2018 FIFA World Cup venue, Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko said, the R-Sport website reported Thursday.

“Why can’t they agree? If they are unable to agree, this situation will have to be resolved the hard way,” Mutko said, R-Sport reported.

The St. Petersburg authorities are disrupting the construction schedule, the TASS news agency reported Thursday, citing a statement made by the project's general contractor.

According to the contractor, the authorities have repeatedly made disruptive changes to the stadium plans and failed to pay 1 billion rubles ($15.8 million) for completed work, TASS reported.

In June, the stadium budget increased by 4.3 billion rubles ($68 million). The cost of the

69,000-capacity Zenit Arena, now five times over its original budget, stands at 35 billion rubles ($553 million) and has not been approved by the St. Petersburg authorities, TASS reported, citing the company statement.

The general contractor warned that, given the complex financial situation at the construction site, strikes might begin at any time.

Zenit Arena is to be a host venue for the 2017 Confederations Cup, a warm-up tournament for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

“The stadium is 85-86 percent ready,” Mutko said. The sports minister added that the possibility of the stadium not being ready to host Confederations Cup matches was “out of the question,” R-Sport reported.

The St. Petersburg stadium is not the only stadium experiencing difficulties. After building work was suspended in May over financial disputes, the budget for the World Cup stadium in Samara has increased by 900 million rubles ($14 million), the Dozhd news channel reported Wednesday, citing Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov.

Eleven Russian cities will host matches during the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

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