

Sports



Mourinho eyes progress despite Chelsea date

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KAZAN: In this Nov. 26, 2016 file photo FIFA President Gianni Infantino, right, and Vitaly Mutko, Russia's deputy prime minister in charge of sport, tourism and youth policies, arrive for a news briefing ahead of the draw for the soccer Confederations Cup 2017, in Kazan, Russia. Russia World Cup head Mutko has been barred from seeking re-election to FIFA's top decision-making body after failing an eligibility check because of his role as a deputy prime minister of Russia.— AP

RUSSIA'S MUTKO 'BARRED FROM FIFA POST'

ZURICH: FIFA has barred Russian deputy prime minister Vitaly Mutko, chief organiser of the World Cup to be held in his country next year, from sitting on the world body's ruling council, a source close to FIFA told AFP yesterday.

Mutko, who has also been accused of involvement in Russia's sports doping scandal, is one of five European candidates for seats on the FIFA Council to be decided in April. The source said European football's governing body UEFA has been told he cannot stand. A FIFA watchdog blocked Mutko, who has had a seat on the FIFA top table since 2009, because of potential conflicts of interest with his government role, the source told AFP.

The decision is a new blow to the 58-year-old Mutko, an ally of President Vladimir Putin, who was barred from last year's Rio Olympics in the fallout from an inquiry which accused Russia of "state-sponsored" doping.

But the source denied that the doping scandal had played any role in the decision. Mutko has been elected by UEFA to represent them on FIFA's ruling body since 2009. But his FIFA seat is due for re-election in April and all candidates must be vetted by FIFA's control commission under new rules brought in after world football's corruption scandal.

Mutko has been ruled "not eligible" for a place, the source said. "This decision by the control commission was taken because of the deputy prime minister's post that Mr Mutko

occupies and so the possible interference and conflicts of interest," the source told AFP. FIFA's ethics code prohibits political interference in football affairs and the world body has in the past suspended national federations where governments have been judged to have taken control.

'POLITICALLY NEUTRAL'

Mutko said he would not appeal the decision, but stressed it would have no effect on Russia's preparations to host the 2018 World Cup. "They want the organisation to be politically neutral, so that civil servants and representatives of the authorities of different countries don't run in all bodies. It is their right," Mutko told the TASS news agency Friday.

Putin promoted Mutko from sports minister to deputy prime minister last October despite the controversy raging over doping in Russian sport.

A report by Canadian lawyer Richard McLaren for the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said the sports ministry had organised the doping.

Mutko and the Russian government have strongly denied any involvement in the use of banned substances however.

The McLaren report "played absolutely no role in the decision of the commission," according to the source close to FIFA.

The commission can also not prevent Mutko from remaining

as head of Russia's 2018 World Cup organising committee. He is also head of the Russian federation. "That is not part of FIFA's jurisdiction," the source said.

NEW UEFA RACE

The 55-member UEFA will choose its FIFA representatives at a congress in Helsinki on April 5.

The other four candidates are Hungary's Sandor Csanyi, Cypriot Costakis Koutsokoumnis, Dejan Savicevic of Montenegro and Iceland's Geir Thorsteinsson.

FIFA started its integrity check on candidates in December and there have been doubts about Mutko's eligibility since.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino denied however that he had asked Mutko to stand down as World Cup organiser because of the doping controversy.

When WADA released the first McLaren report last July, it called on FIFA to investigate Mutko.

A follow-up McLaren report implicated Mutko in the cover-up of a doping failure by an Uzbek player in the Russian Premier League. McLaren also said that as sports minister, Mutko must have known about the "state-sponsored" doping programmes used to help Russian athletes at the 2012 London Olympics, 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, and the 2013 world athletics championships held in Moscow. — AFP