

'Anti gay' law furore Western media invention: Mutko

MOSCOW, RUSSIA: Russia's Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko has accused western media of overplaying the anti-gay issue that has plagued the World Athletics Championships in Moscow.



Vitaly Mutko. (Image: Press service of the president of Russia - www.kremlin.ru - via Wikimedia Commons)

However, Mutko insisted the controversial law was not just about homosexuality but also to protect Russian youth from 'drugs, drinking and non-traditional relationships', the term used in Russia for same sex relationships.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law in June that punishes the dissemination of information about homosexuality to minors. But activists say it can be used for a broader crackdown against gays.

Fears it could be used against participants at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics have sparked calls for a boycott of the event in some quarters and Russian officials have said all athletes will have to obey the law at the Games.

It's '*all rights*' at the games

However, Mutko - minister of sport since 2008 - reiterated that at the Winter Olympics in the Black Sea resort of Sochi next February, athletes could conduct themselves as they wished in private.

"I think the Western mass media focus on this law much more than we do in Russia," he said at the end of championships press conference.

"The athletes who compete in the Winter Olympics will be granted all rights as they were here in Moscow.

"Aside from these championships we have also just held the University Games in Kazan with 11,000 athletes.

"I have not heard of any problems relevant to obstruction of human rights during those Games."

An 'invented problem'?

Mutko, formerly president of Russian football giants Zenit St Petersburg and subsequently the Russian Football Union, said that he wished to once again impress on people that the law had nothing to do with infringing human rights.

"I have had to reply to this question on several occasions these past few days," he said, smiling.

"I repeat again this law does not deprive anyone of their rights. I haven't heard of one incident here. This is an invented problem. We don't have a ban on non-traditional relationships.

"This law is about protection of the young generation whose psyche has not yet been formulated and formed and before they have reached maturity.

"It is to protect them against drinking, drugs and non-traditional sexual relationships. This law is all about protecting the rights of children and not to deprive anyone of anything."

Mutko, though, added that the athletes competing at major championships were there to compete and not for social reasons.

"I hope athletes come to compete," he said. They don't have time for other things as they have training in the morning, and in the evening and then qualifying."

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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