

Zhukov Pledges Easy Visas for Figure Skating Championship

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LONDON — Russian authorities will expedite the visa process for the world figure skating championships that Moscow has taken over from earthquake-ravaged Japan, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Zhukov said Friday.

Zhukov, who heads the Russian Olympic Committee, said officials would provide easier access to visas for the athletes, coaches, officials and fans going to next month's rescheduled event.

"For major sports events, we have had a special procedure for the visa process," Zhukov said in a telephone interview from Sochi, host of the 2014 Winter Olympics. "We're going to make it much easier, not just for the Olympics Games in Sochi but also for the world championships."

He said the process will be similar to that used when Moscow hosted the 2008 Champions League football final between Manchester United and Chelsea.

"We had a very good experience for the final with 50,000 English fans in Moscow," Zhukov

said.

The figure skating worlds initially were scheduled to be held last week in Tokyo, but Japanese officials said they could no longer serve as host following the March 11 earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis.

On Thursday, the International Skating Union said the championships would be switched to Moscow's Megasport arena from April 24 to May 1.

"We are very proud to have been selected the host," Zhukov said. "We are deeply saddened by the events that led to this decision."

The Russian and Japanese Olympic committees signed a cooperation agreement last week.

"There is enormous support and solidarity between our two nations," Zhukov said. "We will help Japan to have the figure skating world championships next year."

France, which is scheduled to hold the 2012 championships in Nice, has offered to give the event to Japan as a sign of solidarity.

"We will support our Japanese friends," Zhukov said.

He cited the influence of Vladimir Putin in bringing the 2010 championships to Russia. The prime minister publicly threw his support behind the bid, saying, "This is not a very expensive event and we are capable of taking care of all the expenses."

"I think it was very important for the decision of ISU," Zhukov said. "Of course, it's important that the Russian government is supporting this event. This was a very important detail in this decision."

Zhukov said Russia would have no problem organizing the championships on short notice, noting that Moscow hosted the same event in 2005.

Officials announced Friday that Moscow would also host this year's modern pentathlon world championships after Cairo dropped out because of the recent political instability in Egypt.

The international federation, UIPM, said the championships would be held in the city from Sept. 1 to 7. The event had originally been scheduled for Cairo from Sept. 16 to 14.

"There is absolutely no problem for Russia to host all these sports events," Zhukov said. "We have very good experience."

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