

Movie Star Announces Kremlin Bid

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Okhlobystin

The upcoming presidential race took a distinctly eccentric twist Monday, when a movie star and ex-priest who moonlights as a creative director for mobile phone retail chain Yevroset announced his decision to run.

"It's true. I am dead serious," Ivan Okhlobystin, 45, said at a news conference in Moscow.

"I want to give the fatherland a certain philosophical and ideological strategy that it is lacking — that which we lack to become a nation," he said, Interfax reported.

Okhlobystin, a self-proclaimed monarchist, said he would propose to extend the presidential term from six to 14 years.

He also said restoring the prestige of the army was a crucial task. He has no such plans for the State Duma, which he called "a pointless institution."

Okhlobystin promised more details at an upcoming six-hour talk show-style meeting, to take

place at the 87,000-seat Luzhniki stadium on Saturday.

The announcement boosted Okhlobystin to the top five of global Twitter trends for Monday.

The Russian Orthodox Church, which suspended Okhlobystin from the priesthood last year because he was starring in movies while serving in the church, did not take kindly to his presidential ambitions.

The clergy is banned from running for any office, which includes the presidency, church spokesman Vsevolod Chaplin told RIA-Novosti.

He did not comment on the church's own decision in February that priests may, in fact, run for office if authorized by the holy synod.

Opposition leader Eduard Limonov and political analyst Mark Urnov said Okhlobystin had no chance of winning the election, expected to be swept by President Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin or a third candidate supported by the two.

Okhlobystin is the third candidate to announce a bid, after Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov and the Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Right Cause leader Mikhail Prokhorov said he may also run. As an independent, Okhlobystin needs to collect 2 million signatures to support his bid.

Okhlobystin, known for his trademark round glasses and flamboyant attire, including leather jackets, has starred in 42 movies and television shows since 1983, including "Down House" (2001), a psychedelic take on Dostoevsky's "Idiot," and Pavel Lungin's 2009 "Tsar," a Cannes entry. He also has written screenplays for 21 films and shows.

A born-again Christian, Okhlobystin was ordained into the priesthood in Uzbekistan's capital, Tashkent, in 2001.

A gun enthusiast, Okhlobystin unsuccessfully ran for the State Duma in 1999. Since 2010, he has also worked for Yevroset as its creative manager and starred in several of its commercials. He also is the star of TNT's hit medical sitcom "The Interns," now in its fourth season.

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