The Moscow Times
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Lukashenko Denied Accreditation for London Olympics

By The Moscow Times

July 25, 2012



Russian gymnast Viktoria Komova fanning a teammate with a towel as they practice in a hot arena in London. **Matt Dunham**

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has been barred from attending the London Olympics under travel sanctions imposed after his disputed 2010 re-election.

Alexander Zhukov, president of the Russian Olympic Committee, broke the news Wednesday that the organizing committee for the Summer Games had denied Lukashenko accreditation ahead of Friday's opening ceremony.

"The organizing committee didn't give Lukashenko accreditation. Are sports beyond the influence of politics?" Zhukov said on Twitter.

"And what about Olympic values and traditions? Every schoolchild knows that a truce was agreed on during the games in Greece," Zhukov said.

Reached by telephone, Zhukov's press secretary confirmed the remarks.

The British Embassy in Minsk said no exception should be made for Lukashenko, who was blacklisted by the European Union in connection with a brutal crackdown on the opposition after his re-election in December 2010.

"President Alexander Lukashenko is on a list of people who have been denied entry into the European Union, and this ban remains in force during the Olympic Games," embassy spokeswoman Inna Romashevskaya told Interfax. "The decision on this matter will not be changed."

In ancient Greece, an Olympic truce was declared so that athletes and spectators could travel safely to and from the games. Wars and legal disputes were stopped and the death penalty was banned during that period.

Belarussian officials did not immediately react to Wednesday's development.

But Lukashenko, who also chairs his country's Olympic committee, criticized the Olympics during a meeting with Belaruskali employees earlier this month. "The Olympic Games are not sports but politics. Dirty politics," he said, according to Interfax.

Lukashenko has said he expects Belarussian athletes to win 25 medals, including five golds, at the London games, which run from July 27 to Aug. 12.

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