

Nation Counts 500 Days to Sochi Winter Olympics

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Flash-mob participants in Sochi on Tuesday displaying windbreakers that say “500 days until the games.” **Igor Yakunin**

Correction appended

Russians across the country celebrated the 500-day countdown to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi on Tuesday with a series of events and the launch of a new slogan: “Hot. Cool. Yours.”

Sochi organizing committee head Dmitry Chernyshenko said that infrastructure in the Black Sea resort is now 70 percent complete and that preparations are on schedule for Russia’s first Winter Games.

“Sochi will be the showcase for Russia for the world to see,” he said in an interview.

Across Russia, volunteers took part in 500-meter relay races mimicking all 22 Winter Olympic events.

Racers in Moscow imitated ice hockey by donning in-line skates and taking penalty shots on

the track. Bobsledders in the southwestern city of Novocherkassk slalomed past obstacles on longboards. More than 12,000 people in 15 cities formed giant human figures representing all Winter Olympic sports by moving colored shields in coordinated displays.

Organizers introduced the new slogan, “Zharkiy. Zimniy. Tvoiy” in the original Russian.

“Hot” refers to Sochi’s climate, unusually warm for a Winter Olympic venue, and the passion for the games. “Cool” stands for the winter sports played and the cold weather commonly associated with Russia. “Yours” indicates organizers’ wish that the event be all-inclusive.

President Vladimir Putin has made the Sochi Games a cornerstone of his third term. He views it as a key project for improving Russia’s international image.

About \$30 billion has been earmarked for building facilities and developing infrastructure in Sochi, parts of which were only single roads until a few years ago.

Right now, Sochi is “the biggest construction site in the world,” Chernyshenko said.

More than 355 kilometers of roads and 200 kilometers of railroads have been built for the games. Facilities in the mountains and along the coast will be tested this winter.

This will be the first time Russia hosts the Winter Olympics, although it is traditionally one of the strongest competitors.

Russians will be hoping their athletes improve on their results from the 2010 Games in Vancouver, when they won only 15 medals and finished 11th in the table, the country’s worst-ever performance.

Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that the word "cool" was chosen for the Sochi games' slogan due to the frosty reception Russia typically receives on the international stage. The Associated Press subsequently clarified that "cool" stands for the winter sports played and the cold weather commonly associated with Russia.

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