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Putin to Visit Antarctica

By The Moscow Times

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President Vladimir Putin will soon recommence his "active hobbies" despite several months of speculation about his health, his spokesman said Monday.

"Vladimir Putin will continue his active hobbies. Maybe he will go scuba diving in the summer. He continues the fight to preserve endangered species," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Izvestia on Monday.

According to anonymous sources cited by the paper, plans for the coming year include playing ice-hockey and a visit to Antarctica.

Putin accepted an invitation from Chilean President Sebastian Pinera to visit a Russian-Chilean Antarctic research station in September last year.

Although it had earlier been assumed Putin would make the visit at the height of the Antarctic summer in January, Peskov said the date had not yet been set.

"But he will continue to pursue his activities in conservation as he has in the past," he told the paper.

Rumors about Putin's health began to circulate shortly after a much publicized microlight flight with endangered cranes in Siberia in September.

An apparent cancellation of several engagements, including the annual International Arctic conference he traditionally hosts, and a decision to work more from his residence outside Moscow instead of traveling in to work led to speculation that he had hurt his back during the flight.

Izvestia had previously led speculation that Putin's injuries and his advancing age — he turned 60 in October — had led his spin doctors to consider dropping his long-cultivated action man image in favor of a make-over as a "wise patriarch."

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