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Putin Arrives in Sochi Ahead of Winter Olympics Curtain-Raiser

By Christopher Brennan

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President Vladimir Putin arrived in the Winter Olympic city of Sochi on Tuesday to play host to visitors three days before the opening ceremony.

After arriving in Sochi, Putin visited Sochi National Park and an animal breeding and rehabilitation center that was built using budget funds set aside for the Olympic preparations and includes endangered leopards.

A statement on the Kremlin website said that Putin will later address members of the International Olympic Committee in what will be a busy week before the kick off of an event that many see as the president's pet project.

Wednesday will see Putin meet with members of the Russian Olympic Committee and the Russian winter Olympians before a flurry of meetings on Thursday with foreign dignitaries including Chinese President Xi Jinping, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, Japanese Prime

Minister Shinzo Abe and Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan.The Kremlin statement said that Putin will hold a reception for more than 40 foreign heads of state and government before Friday's opening ceremony.

Some prominent Western leaders will be noticeably absent at the Olympics, including U.S. President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron. Gay activists previously called for a boycott of the Games to protest Russia's "gay propaganda" law that prohibits the promotion of homosexuality to minors, though Obama and Cameron said that their decisions not to attend were based on their schedules.

Putin has been personally invested in Russia's first Winter Olympics since the Games were give to Sochi in 2007 after he made a rare English-language appeal to IOC voters in Guatemala.

The president has been a consistent apologist for the Games, which have been surrounded by concerns about the potential ill-treatment of gay athletes and spectators, as well as accusations that the event's estimated $51 billion price tag was inflated by large-scale corruption.

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