

Sochi Organizers Give Themselves High Marks

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Chernyshenko opening the official Sochi store at GUM shopping mall.

Dmitry Chernyshenko, the head of the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee, put his own spin on the Russian-language slogan of the Winter Olympics at a Moscow news conference on Monday.

Declaring the Games a major success, Chernyshenko joked that the Sochi slogan of "Winter. Hot. Ours" could be replaced by a new phrase: "Successful. Profitable. Ours."

A month and a half after the closing ceremony of the Sochi Games, the Organizing Committee gave itself an unequivocally positive self-evaluation, leaving little room for introspection or self-criticism.

"We have fulfilled all international standards regarding the organization of an event of this magnitude," Chernyshenko said. "The Sochi Games have also created new standards

for future Olympic Games. We have nothing to be ashamed of."

In the lead-up to the Winter Olympics, organizers and Russian authorities were the targets of heavy criticism by human rights groups and the anti-Kremlin opposition. Politicians including Boris Nemtsov and Alexei Navalny reported that rampant corruption plagued Olympic construction contracts, something officials have denied, while rights groups decried the Games' effect on the local population and migrant construction workers.

Security analysts also feared that terrorists from the North Caucasus would strike during the Olympics, although the Games remained free from attacks.

President Vladimir Putin on Monday praised the work of the security apparatus in keeping the Games safe.

"Now we can say that the integrated, multi-tier system for ensuring security at the Olympics and other events has proven its effectiveness," Putin said, addressing members of the Federal Security Service. "This is to the credit and the immense effort of thousands of people — members of the antiterrorist forces, border guards, operations personnel and analysts."

Organizers also lauded the security setup at their news conference on Monday. Alexei Nemov, the former gymnastics star and 12-time Olympic medalist, and Sergei Shilov, a six-time Paralympic champion in cross-country skiing and biathlon, who served as the "mayors" of the Olympic and Paralympic athletes' villages, supported the general consensus that the Games had been safe.

"I have participated in 10 Olympic Games and I can safely say that the conditions found at the Sochi Games were unmatched," Shilov said. "The security system was set up in such a way that it was simple and did not cause problems for athletes and spectators. The security was quick and friendly. Everybody felt safe."

Chernyshenko did not directly address any of the issues raised by the international community before and during the Games, including logistical concerns like unfinished accommodation for tourists and media or isolated protests against Russia's anti-gay legislation, which before the Games had raised doubts for many as to whether Russia should be allowed to host the world's largest celebration of sport.

Instead, Chernyshenko said that the absence of a boycott of the Games was "very important" and showed the world's "interest toward Russia."

"It is just silly when someone tries to talk about any kind of boycott," Chernyshenko said. "We had a record-breaking number of top officials from different nations in Sochi compared to other Olympics."

Thirty-two heads of states, 18 heads of government and 58 ministers of sport were present at the Sochi Olympics, according to the official count. In February, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that heads of state who were not attending the Games had "rejected an invitation from the International Olympic Committee, and not from Russia."

But among those who shunned the Games were some of the world's top leaders, including U.S. President Barack Obama, French President Francois Hollande, British Prime Minister David

Cameron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

According to Chernyshenko, the Organizing Committee made about 5 billion rubles (\$1.4 billion) in operating revenues, 20 percent of which will be invested in the development of sport in Russia. For comparison, the operating revenues of the Vancouver Organizing Committee totaled nearly \$1.9 billion, or about \$500 million more than Sochi. (On Tuesday, a Sochi 2014 spokesman said in a statement that in fact all operating revenues would be invested in sport and that the investment plan was currently being developed.)

The Sochi Organizing Committee also announced that it sold 1.1 million tickets to the Olympic Games and that there had been no cases of counterfeit tickets. Chernyshenko proudly said that there had been "no empty seats" at the Sochi Games, despite visual evidence to the contrary.

When pressed for clarification on his claim regarding attendance, Chernyshenko said that the empty seats that could be seen at venues or on television had been vacated by spectators who had left before the end of competition. He added that the "show-up" rate was close to 100 percent.

The Sochi Organizing Committee also boasted that 2 billion people tuned into the Games for at least one minute. Organizers said the Sochi Olympics garnered 200 million more television viewers than the Vancouver Games.

According to organizers, Sochi provided the International Olympic Committee's client groups with 26 percent more hotel rooms than had been available in Vancouver in 2010.

The Sochi Organizing Committee's assertion that the Sochi Games had outshone the Vancouver Olympics was echoed by Shilov, the Paralympian champion, who hinted at more mystical reasons behind the unique success of the Sochi Olympics.

"What differentiates these Games from the other ones I have participated in is the soul," Shilov said. "The Sochi Games had a soul."

Notice to readers: This article has been updated from its original version to include a statement by a Sochi 2014 spokesman issued Tuesday.

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