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Russian Athletics Will Not Voluntarily Withdraw From Olympics

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A view through a fence shows the Russian Olympic Committee headquarters, which also houses the management of Russian Athletics Federation in Moscow, Russia.

Russia will not voluntarily withdraw from official competitions such as the 2016 Summer Olympics, Russian Athletics Federation (ARAF) Vice President Tatyana Lebedeva said in an interview with BBC Russia on Tuesday.

Lebedeva, winner of multiple track and field Olympic medals and a member of the Russian Federation Council, said that Russia "did not deny the existence of a doping problem, and was taking measures to combat it."

She was referring to a damning report by an independent commission of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), which provoked a backlash from some Russian officials.

"Of course, we will not withdraw from competition on our own initiative," she told the BBC. "We have so many new faces; these are athletes of a completely different caliber. They compete internationally, pass doping tests, they have not been accused of anything. Being

barred from the Olympics will be a tragedy for them."

She added that Russia had implemented "fundamental reforms" after the release of the documentary made by the German network ARD.

The film alleged that ARAF officials encouraged athletes to dope, and positive test results were covered up by anti-doping governing bodies. The allegations were investigated by a WADA independent commission, whose 323-page report was released on Monday.

"The ARAF president resigned, we hired a new head coach for the national team, older coaches in individual disciplines are also being replaced," Lebedeva said.

On Wednesday, International Olympics Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach said in an interview with New Zealand television that he expected Russia to compete in the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio.

Participation was conditional on the country "cooperating to make progress and to make sure Russian athletics are compliant [with WADA standards]," he said.

Meanwhile, the Moscow anti-doping lab accused of destroying blood samples had been suspended, and was preparing to pass new certification tests, Russian sports minister Vitaly Mutko said, the TASS news agency reported.

The lab's director Grigory Rodchenkov, who drew criticism for referring to WADA investigators as "idiots," resigned from his post on Tuesday.

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