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Russian Officials Riled by Reports of Sanctions Ahead of Winter Olympics

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Thomas Bach, president of the International Olympic Committee (Republic of Korea /Flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0))

A report hinting that Russia could face sanctions at the upcoming Winter Olympics in South Korea has riled Russian politicians, with one lawmaker calling for a boycott.

On Monday, The New York Times newspaper reported that the International Olympic Committee could ban the Russian delegation from attending the Winter Games' opening ceremony or prohibit the Russian anthem from being played at the event.

Russia has been accused by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) of running a state-sponsored doping program after the former head of Russia's anti-doping lab admitted to providing athletes with banned substances, including during the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

Sports bodies imposed a blanket ban on Russian track-and-field athletes during the Rio Olympics and placed restrictions on other athletes.

The New York Times report comes a week after the first two Russian winter athletes received lifetime bans over the Sochi Olympics doping claims. The fates of 26 other Russian athletes implicated in a 2016 doping report are expected to be determined in December.

WADA will also meet next week to decide whether to uphold its 2015 ruling that said Russia was in violation of global anti-doping rules. Ahead of that meeting, emotions are running high.

"There's no bargaining here. This is an attempt to humiliate our country," State Duma Physical Fitness and Sports Committee chairman Mikhail Degtyaryov told the state-run news agency R-Sport late on Monday.

Senator Alexei Pushkov wrote on Twitter that the Russian team should boycott the Games altogether in protest of the "triumph of Russophobia."

His sentiment was echoed by the head of the Federation Council's Social Policy Committee Valery Ryazansky and Svetlana Zhurova, former Olympic speed skating champion and now a Duma deputy.

Measures such as banning Russia from the opening ceremony would be "unacceptable," Zhurova said. "How can that be? There are athletes, but there is no country," she told reporters on Tuesday.

Dmitry Svishchev, a member of the State Duma's sports committee, was skeptical about The New York Times report. "They want to see how we'll react," he told R-Sport, calling the report "bogus."

Russian Sports Minister Pavel Kolobkov said he did not see any need to respond to the threat of looming sanctions.

"Our team received an invitation to take part in the 2018 Games and is training for the competition as planned," he was cited as saying by the state-run TASS news agency,

"We haven't received any other official letters and don't deem it necessary to react to unverified information."

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