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Putin Slams Doping Ban on Russian Skiers

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Alexander Legkov (Valery Sharifulin / TASS)

Four Russian skiers were banned for doping by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Thursday ahead of next year's Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

A probe by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) in 2016 accused Russia of running a state-sponsored doping program. The evidence for Thursday's bans came on the back of WADA's report compiled by investigator Richard McLaren.

The sanctioned athletes include Maxim Vylegzhanin who won three silver medals at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, bringing the number of skiers found guilty of doping at Sochi to six, the Associated Press reported.

The IOC cancelled Vylegzhanin's silver medals and a gold won by Alexander Legkov.

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President Vladimir Putin denied the Russian government ran a state-sponsored program in response.

He also claimed the doping scandal was instigated by the United States to influence presidential elections scheduled for March next year, the Associated Press reported.

"In response to our supposed interference in their elections, they want to cause problems in the Russian presidential election," he said.

The Russian Cross Country Ski Federation is preparing an appeal of the IOC decision to the Sports Arbitration Court (CAS), the state-run TASS news agency reported.

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