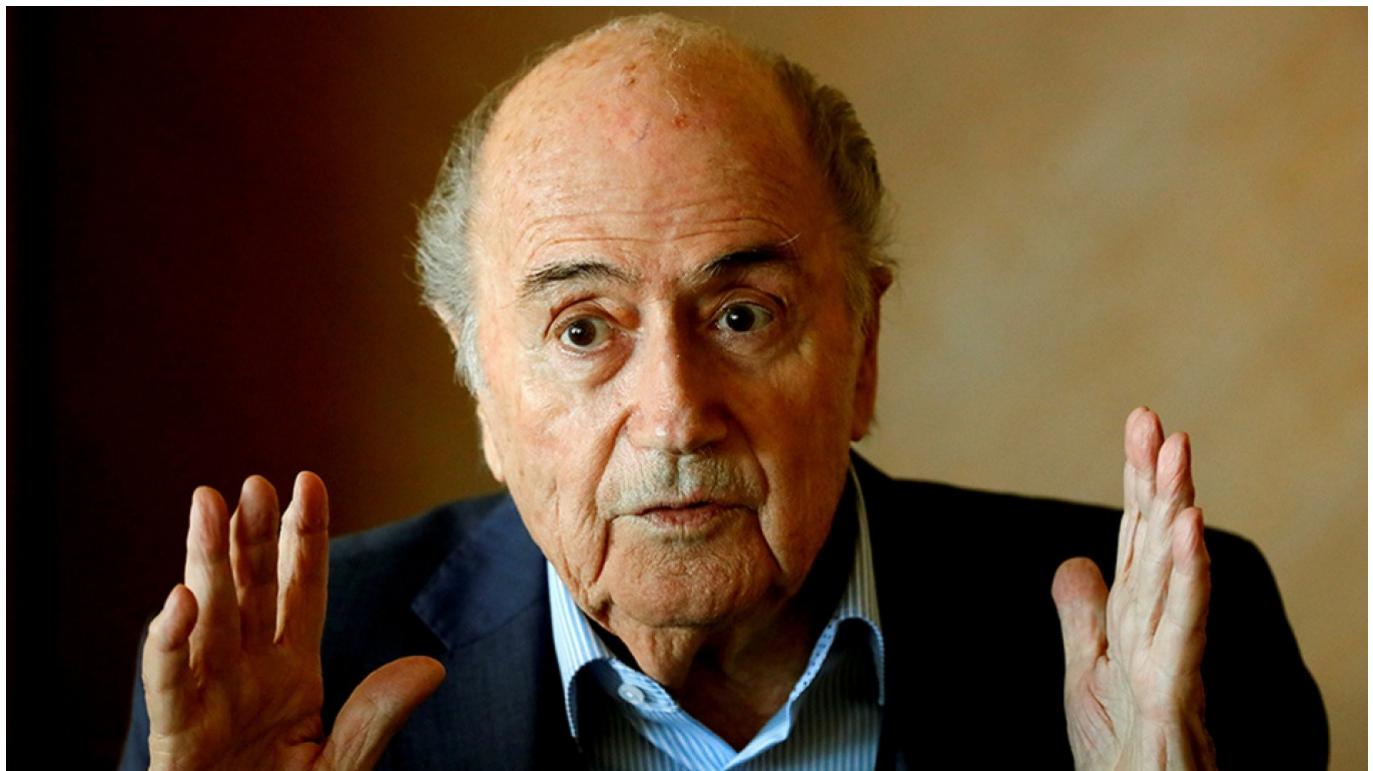


# Blatter Raves About Russia World Cup

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Arnd Wiegmann / Reuters

FIFA's disgraced ex-president Sepp Blatter was all praises for Russia's football squad, President Vladimir Putin and the Russian tournament in an interview to a local sports channel on Monday.

Blatter was banned from football activities in 2015 for his involvement in a global corruption scandal while head of FIFA. During his visit to the World Cup, Blatter met with Putin at the Kremlin.

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"I really like the national team," Blatter told Match TV. "Everyone in Europe said the Russians are stupid and can't win anything — now look at the scoreboard!"

Blatter complimented Russia's ability to put on a strong tournament while facing international political criticism. Russia is "doing everything right," even while being "pressured from all sides," Blatter said.

He also spoke candidly about FIFA's uncertainty in letting Russia host the tournament: "Believe me, FIFA was seriously pushing for Russia not to get the World Cup."

Blatter's praise extended to the Russian leader, whom he described as very strong. "You can't push around a person like Putin," said the former football official. "He believes in this World Cup."

*Includes reporting by Anton Muratov.*

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