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Belarus Olympic Body Vows to Protect Delegation From 'Discrimination'

By AFP

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Olympic Committee headquarters in Belarus. **noc.by**

The Belarusian Olympic Committee on Friday vowed to protect its members from "discrimination" after two Belarus coaches were stripped of Olympic passes over their alleged attempt to force an athlete to return home.

The pair were probed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) over their role in the case of Krystsina Tsimanouskaya, 24, who criticized Belarusian sports officials for entering her into a race in Tokyo without informing her first.

Earlier on Friday, the IOC said it had removed the accreditations of Artur Shimak and Yury Maisevich and they had left the Olympic Village in Tokyo.

In a statement on its Telegram channel, the Belarusian Olympic body (NOC) said it "fully defends and will continue to protect the interests of all Belarusian athletes and coaches from

any forms of discrimination."

NOC said the two coaches will soon return to the Belarusian capital Minsk, but "reserve the right to appeal the decision."

"We are still open to continuing the dialogue and are in close cooperation with the IOC to clarify all the circumstances of the decision," NOC added.

Tsimanouskaya said she feared for her safety if forced to return to ex-Soviet Belarus that has been in political turmoil since a disputed election last year sparked mass demonstrations.

The regime of Belarus's authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko -- who has been in power for close to three decades — has been cracking down on all forms of dissent in the aftermath of the opposition protests.

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