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Putin Slams Doping Sanctions Ahead of Olympics

By AFP

February 03, 2022



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President Vladimir Putin on Thursday slammed sanctions against Russia over doping in sports ahead of a meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing at the Winter Olympics.

In an interview with Chinese media, Putin denied his government had orchestrated a massive doping program at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia, revelations that spurred a raft of penalties from international sporting bodies.

"Russia has been and remains committed to traditional Olympic values," Putin said in an interview with China Media Group president and chief editor Shen Haixiong.

"We oppose the politicization of sports and attempts to use this as an instrument of pressure, unfair competition or discrimination," he said, according to a transcript of the interview

released by the Kremlin.

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Russian officials including Putin are banned from attending competitions unless invited by the head of state of the host country. China's leader Xi has invited Putin to attend.

"The practice of 'collective punishment' is unacceptable for offences carried out by individuals," Putin said.

Russian athletes are allowed to compete as neutrals at the Olympics — without the Russian flag or anthem – if they can prove their doping record is clean.

The team takes part under the name of Russian Olympic Committee (ROC).

Beijing and Moscow have denounced a diplomatic boycott of the Olympics from several countries over what Western governments argue are widespread rights abuses by China.

Putin was the first foreign leader to confirm his presence at Friday's opening ceremony.

The two leaders are set to meet in the Chinese capital Friday as their countries pursue deeper ties in the face of increasing criticism from the West.

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