The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Sakha Entrepreneurs Face Social Media Backlash Over South Africa Lion Hunt

July 08, 2026



Social media

Three businesspeople from Russia's republic of Sakha sparked a torrent of criticism on social media after posting photos and videos of a lion hunt in South Africa that critics said violated the traditional hunting values of their native region.

The backlash began when Galina Yakovleva posted a video on Instagram showing her husband, Alexei Yakovlev, shooting a resting lion at close range on Sunday.

"I went with my husband to see with my own eyes how he hunts. It turns out it's hard for a woman to be there in that moment. I thought, 'It takes guts to go after a predator.' I'm proud of my husband!" Yakovleva said.

In a separate post, fellow Sakha businessman Yuri Bolshakov said he had applied for a hunting permit a year in advance, traveled to a private hunting reserve near the Botswana border, tracked a lioness for several days and shot her in a way that would not damage the animal's pelt.

“It wasn’t a battle. It was a dialogue between two worlds, in which each remained true to itself,” he wrote.

Bolshakov said the hunt took place on a private game reserve.

It was not immediately clear whether the businesspeople were taking part in “canned hunting,” a controversial practice in South Africa in which hunters, typically foreign tourists, pay to kill an animal that has been bred and raised in captivity.

The posts prompted a wave of criticism from residents of Sakha, where many said the hunt conflicted with the region’s longstanding hunting traditions.

“For the people of Yakutia, hunting is not merely a means of obtaining meat, but a profound spiritual tradition rooted in a strict code of honor and respect for nature. Bolshakov’s actions were perceived by his fellow Yakutians as a direct affront to traditional values,” one critic wrote.

“What do you mean, ‘it’s either me or her?’ You flew thousands of kilometers to her enclosure and paid a fortune just to shoot a sleeping cat point-blank. Stop acting like a hero,” another wrote.

A third commenter said: “Yakutia's business elite has completely lost touch with reality. They've turned it into a contest to see who can kill a lion in the most spectacular way. It's a disgrace to the whole world.”

Following the backlash, Yakovleva and Bolshakov deleted the posts and made their Instagram accounts private.

Original url:
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