



**Rising Powers Initiative- Sigur Center for Asian Studies  
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### **Rising Powers Celebrate as Curtain Falls on Sochi Olympics**

The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics ended on Sunday night after bringing countless cheers and tears to spectators around the world. In this Policy Alert, we examine commentary from Russia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil on their performances and controversies that emerged in the world's largest sports festival.

#### **RUSSIA**

Host nation Russia won the medal count, bringing home 33 medals (13 gold, 11 silver, and 9 bronze). Despite concerns of a terrorist attack in the build-up to the Games, the Olympics were lauded by IOC president Thomas Bach as an event that "[delivered all that it promised](#)," drawing in [record numbers of television viewers](#) across the globe. Russian commentary condemned the West's negative portrayal of Sochi and contemplated Russia's future following the Olympics.

- In an op-ed for *Russia Times*, Andranik Migranyan, director of the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, blasted Western media for never aspiring to "give objective coverage to events unfolding in Russia." He concluded that "with their anti-Russian, anti-Putin, and anti-Olympic campaign, the [Western media actually helped Putin's triumph](#), Russia's triumph, and the success of the Sochi Olympics."
- Edward Lozansky, president of American University in Moscow, denounced Western media for "doing its damndest to broadcast across the world any fault or mishap at the Games...frequently in a [grossly inflated form](#) to enhance the effect."
- "Influential outsiders do not want to admit that [Russia has overcome its domestic crises](#) and is progressing along a path of development," wrote Sergei Markov, vice rector of Plekhanov Economic University in Moscow.
- The *Moscow Times* outlined [two possibilities for Russia's future](#) following the Olympics. "Putin could become swell-headed from the success of the Games and feel emboldened to act in an even more authoritarian manner, or his new-found sense of pride might free him from the need to see an enemy in every critic and in every foreign-supported NGO an agent of sedition."
- Boris Nemtsov, co-chairman of the liberal opposition party RPR-Parnas, predicted that "[repressions will increase](#) in direct proportion to the decline of [Putin's] rating" following the Olympics.

#### **CHINA**

China finished 12<sup>th</sup> in the overall medal count with nine total medals. Commentators looked ahead to the 2022 Winter Olympics, which China is launching a bid to host.

- Chinese media regarded the Olympics on the whole positively, noting that, "the [close rapport](#)

[between China and Russia](#) demonstrates to the rest of the world that it is possible for major world powers to coexist peacefully and harmoniously."

- The state-run *Xinhua* credited Chinese Olympic debutants for "keeping the country in the upper-middle of the medals table," expressing content with the growth of China's [young talent](#). "The good news is [we are still the best in Asia](#)," commented Xiao Tian, China's Olympic deputy chef de mission.
- China thanked Russia for the country's support of China's bid for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games and said it would "[draw experience](#)" from the Sochi Olympics. Beijing launched a joint bid with neighboring city Zhangjiakou City to host the 2022 Winter Olympics last November.

## INDIA

India's participation in the Olympics was overshadowed by Indian Olympic Association's (IOA) [corruption scandal](#) that led to India's decommission from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and a ban on the use of the Indian flag in the Games.

- India became the first nation to [win readmission](#) to the Olympic family during an ongoing Games, as the IOC lifted the ban on February 11 following the election of new IOA President N. Ramachandran. Ramachandran thanked IOC President Thomas Bach for the quick decision, saying: "For us having been out for 15 months and to come back within two days after our elections is something I could not believe."
- The *Hindustan Times* bemoaned that "India's sporting reputation...is [skating on thin ice](#) as it earned the distinction, definitely dubious, of becoming the first nation to be allowed by the IOC to fly its flag after the Games had commenced."
- Sushil Kumar, the 2008 and 2012 Olympics gold medalist wrestler, responded to the IOC decision: "It's [a great day](#) for all the athletes who put their blood, sweat and tears to represent the country under the Indian tri-color and win medals...My humble request to all the officials is we don't want a repeat of the Sochi Olympics. The ban should not have happened at all in the first place. All this brought disrepute to our country."

## JAPAN

Japanese athletes won [a total of eight medals](#)-one gold, four silver, and three bronze-marking the second-best performance on record for Japan. Among all the athletes, it was two-time world champion figure skater Mao Asada who attracted most public attention, despite her 6<sup>th</sup> place in the ladies figure skating competition.

- Asada's 16<sup>th</sup> place, error-filled short program received unexpected criticism from Yoshiro Mori, former Prime Minister and chairman of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics organizing committee, who said that Asada has a habit of "[always falling at the most critical time](#)" of a competition.
- Asada's [personal best-score performance](#) in the free skate, however, won the Japanese people's hearts. The *Asahi Shimbun* dedicated a column titled "[Mao Asada's legacy more colorful than Olympic medals](#)." Komei Party's secretary general, Yoshihisa Inoue, responded to Mori's remark, lauding Asada for "[always succeeding at the most critical time](#)."
- Former Prime Minister Mori also faced public resentment for criticizing Japan's ice dance pairing, Cathy and Chris Reed, who, being born in the U.S. to a Japanese mother, surrendered their American citizenship as young adults. Mori said "They live in the U.S. We let them be part of the Japanese team because [they are not good enough](#)" to represent the U.S.

## SOUTH KOREA

South Korea secured the [13<sup>th</sup> place](#) in the total medal count, winning three gold, three silver, and two bronze. Korean newspapers discussed the controversial silver medal won by figure skater Kim Yu-na while shifting attention to the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

- Despite a near flawless performance, Kim Yun-a earned a silver medal next to Russian gold medalist Adelina Sotnikova raising controversy about the judges' impartiality. An online petition demanding an investigation of judging irregularities has gathered [over 2 million signatures](#). The *Chosun Ilbo* questioned whether Kim Yu-na was "[robbed of a rightful Olympic gold](#)."

Despite the controversies, Korean media unanimously lauded Korea's "figure skating queen." The *JoongAng Ilbo* concluded that Kim Yu-na "[transcends medals](#)," adding that "[h]er farewell performance was very graceful, flawless and miraculous, even if the seemingly biased panel of judges at the Sochi Olympics did not think so."

- With the next Winter Olympics in sight, the *JoongAng Ilbo* argued that the 2018 Pyeongchang Games "[could make more history](#)" than the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics, which it called "the first major international competition that brought athletes from the two sides of the cold war." The *Chosun Ilbo* urged the Koreans to strive for this "[another milestone](#)" in the nation's history.

## BRAZIL

Brazil's performance bolstered hopes of improving results in future Winter Olympics.

- [Folha de Sao Paulo reported](#): "Again, there were no medals. But in its seventh participation in a Winter Olympics, Brazil finished for the first time with some top finishes, enough for leaders to praise the country's campaign."
- Additionally, the country which has yet to medal in a Winter Olympics is investing greater amounts in athlete training hoping to yield better results. The [paper further reported that Brazil](#) "will have real results by 2026. You can count on it."

*POLICY ALERTS of the Rising Powers Initiative inform U.S. policymakers and media professionals of the ongoing debates in China, India, Russia, Japan, and South Korea on current issues and events relevant to American foreign policy. The Rising Powers Initiative includes a research project that identifies and tracks the worldviews of major and aspiring powers in Asia and Eurasia. This project is supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.*

*The Elliott School's new [Brazil Initiative](#) has joined the Rising Powers Policy Alerts, giving voice to the 'B' in 'BRIC.' The Brazil Initiative promotes improved understanding of Brazil through hosting special events and research related to Brazil.*

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