Corruption scandal may jeopardize Sapporo's 2030 Olympic bid

Sapporo only remaining rival to Salt Lake City for the Winter Games

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SAPPORO, Japan — Sapporo's bid for the 2030 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games may be in jeopardy after a former executive board member of the 2020 Tokyo Games committee finds himself embroiled in a bribery scandal.

A report from The Japan News, the English-language arm of Japanese news outlet Yomiuri Shimbun, says the bid has "been drenched in ice water."

At the center of the corruption scandal is Haruyuki Takahashi, who was a member of the organizing committee of the 2020 Summer Games in Tokyo and has since been arrested at least four times as of Oct. 19 for allegedly taking large sums of money from corporate sponsors in exchange for special favors.

The companies involved in the cases include Aoki Holdings, Inc., the clothing company that sold suits with the Olympic emblem among other items; Kadokawa Corp., a major publishing company that produced official guidebooks and other printed materials for the Games; Sun Arrow, which sold stuffed toys of the Tokyo 2020 mascots, Miraitowa and Someity; and major advertising companies Daiko Advertising Inc. and ADK Holdings Inc.

The total amount of bribes Takahashi allegedly took was approximately ¥196 million, which converts to roughly over $14 million US dollars.

The scandal prompted Japanese Olympic Committee President Yasuhiro Yamashita and Sapporo Mayor Katsuhiro Akimoto to issue an emergency statement on Sept. 8.

"Although the arrest of the former board member is not directly related to Sapporo’s bid, we must be fully aware that the image of the Olympic and Paralympic Games as a whole has been severely damaged," the joint statement reads. "We will work on reforming the operational aspects of the organization responsible for preparations for the Games and firmly demonstrate transparency and fairness."

The final vote on the hosting city for the 2030 Winter Games won't take place until the fall of 2023, but the fallout of this scandal may have improved Salt Lake City's odds of securing the bid even further. This comes after another potential city, Vancouver, Canada, opted not to bid for the 2030 Winter Games, citing substantial direct costs and liability risks.