

Medvedev Vows to Visit Islands Claimed by Japan

September 29, 2010

The  Moscow Times

PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKY — President Dmitry Medvedev said Wednesday that he would soon visit a disputed island chain off Japan, the focal point of a territorial dispute preventing the signing of a post-World War II peace treaty.

Medvedev pointedly called the South Kurils "an important region of our country."

He made his comments as Japan remained locked in a territorial dispute with China over islets in the East China Sea.

Japan's chief Cabinet secretary, Yoshito Sengoku, when asked about the comments, recalled that Russia had been asked not to take such a step. He said at a news conference that he believed Medvedev was not referring to any specific travel plan.

Medvedev, speaking on the Kamchatka Peninsula north of the islands on his return from a three-day visit to China, said plans to visit the Kurils this week had been thwarted by bad weather.

"This is an important region of our country, and we will certainly go there in the near future," he told reporters.

Japan claims a string of islands just northwest of its main northern island of Hokkaido as its own and calls them the Northern Territories.

The islands were occupied by Soviet troops in the dying days of World War II and, despite numerous high-level diplomatic discussions, no formal peace treaty has been signed.

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