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Gas Deal With Japan May Stall

By The Moscow Times

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Gazprom chief executive Alexei Miller canceled a visit to Japan to discuss a potential natural gas project, raising the possibility that an agreement may be postponed, a Japanese trade ministry official said Thursday.

Viktor Timoshilov, head of Gazprom's Eastern projects division, will still meet with trade ministry officials Friday, said Hirohide Hirai, director of the petroleum and natural gas division at the trade ministry.

Gazprom told Japanese officials that Miller canceled because he had other matters to address, without being specific, Hirai said.

The cancellation by the CEO of the state-owned company comes after Japan recalled its ambassador to Moscow in response to President Dmitry Medvedev's Nov. 1 visit to islands claimed by both countries.

Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan said earlier this week that he hoped to meet separately

with Medvedev during an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Yokohama over the weekend and that he would assert Japan's claim to the disputed island chain.

Gazprom, the world's largest gas producer; Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry; Itochu Corporation; and Japan Petroleum Exploration Company in May 2009 signed an initial agreement to study the feasibility of an LNG plant in Vladivostok on Russia's eastern coast.

Vladivostok lies across the sea that separates Russia from Japan, the world's biggest buyer of liquefied natural gas.

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