

Medvedev Will Meet With Japanese Premier

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SEOUL, South Korea — President Dmitry Medvedev will meet Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan on the sidelines of a regional summit this weekend, talks certain to be dominated by their latest flare-up over islands both claim.

Medvedev infuriated Tokyo by visiting one of the islands — called the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan — on Nov. 1, ahead of this weekend's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Yokohama, Japan.

The Soviet Union occupied the four islands at the end of World War II, and the territorial dispute has weighed on relations between Tokyo and Moscow ever since.

"The timing [of the talks] is still being agreed. They will discuss the Russian-Japanese relationship," Medvedev spokeswoman Natalya Timakova told reporters.

She said the Russian position on the disputed islands had not changed and that Japan traditionally raises the territorial dispute issue at such meetings.

The two sides put off signing a memorandum on economic cooperation, planned at an investment forum in Tokyo on Friday, but the Japanese government denied a local media report that the islands spat was the reason.

"My understanding is that there is no direct connection to the Russian president's visit" to the island, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshito Sengoku said.

But Trade Minister Akihiro Ohata reiterated Japan's anger of the Medvedev visit.

"The [Russian] president's move was one that trampled on the feelings of the Japanese people," he was quoted as telling parliament.

Separately, the Nikkei business daily reported Thursday that an agreement between the Japanese government and Gazprom on a liquefied natural gas project has been delayed after the head of Gazprom canceled a trip to Japan.

The islands are close to oil and gas production regions of Russia, but most people live off fishing, and Japan, a major fish consumer, would gain rich fishing grounds.

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