

Defense Minister Visits South Kurils

February 06, 2011

The  Moscow Times

TOKYO — Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov inspected military facilities Friday on the disputed southern Kuril Islands also claimed by Japan, prompting a sharp protest from Tokyo, officials and reports said.

Serdyukov arrived on the islands to inspect a machine gun and artillery division and check on troops' combat readiness and living conditions, the Itar-Tass news agency said.

"We are planning to upgrade its weapons," Serdyukov said, according to state television.

Japan's Foreign Ministry said it confirmed that Serdyukov had arrived on the islands and lodged a protest with Moscow's ambassador in Tokyo that called the trip "extremely regrettable."

Although economic ties between Japan and Russia have grown, little progress has been made in resolving the island dispute, which remains a source of deep political tension and distrust between the two countries.

Russia has recently taken a more assertive approach to its claim.

Three months ago, Medvedev landed on the island closest to Japan, the first time a Russian leader has done so. Tokyo immediately protested, temporarily recalled its ambassador and warned against future visits.

Medvedev said afterward that he reserved to the right to visit the islands whenever he chose.

Serdyukov's trip comes a week before Japan's foreign minister is to visit Moscow, where the dispute is expected to be the focus of talks.

The islands are surrounded by rich fishing grounds and are believed to have offshore oil and natural gas reserves, plus gold and silver deposits.

They have been under Russian control since the waning days of World War II.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/02/06/defense-minister-visits-south-kurils-a4778>