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Putin Proposes Building Bridge Connecting Russia to Japan as Sign of Peace

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President Vladimir Putin spoke of plans to build a bridge connecting Russia to Japan in a bid to resolve tensions over a chain of disputed Pacific islands, the state-run news agency TASS reported Thursday.

"We are planning to build a bridge on Sakhalin that would connect Sakhalin to Hokkaido," Putin said at the Third Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok.

"These are things of an absolutely global nature that could lead to significant changes in infrastructure, energy, and high technology," Putin was quoted as saying by TASS, while also announcing plans to extend the Trans-Siberian Railroad to South Korea.

Relations between the countries have been strained over a chain of islands in the western Pacific, known as the Northern Territories in Japan and the Southern Kurils in Russia. The

islands were seized by Soviet forces in World War II, and since then the two countries have not signed a peace treaty.

Speaking at the forum on Thursday, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the two countries had "a duty to draw a line under this abnormal situation, when there is still no peace agreement."

Large-scale construction projects undertaken by Russia and Japan "will form a completely different context for the Kuril Islands," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov said Thursday at the forum, Interfax reported.

The Sakhalin-Hokkaido bridge, which would span the roughly 42-kilometer La Pérouse Strait, could be built in the "foreseeable future," Shuvalov said, and should be seen as "a reflection of the trust that is being formed between the two countries."

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