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Putin Oversees Launch Ceremony for Russia's Newest Nuclear Icebreaker

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President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday presided over the launch ceremony for Russia's latest nuclear-powered icebreaker, as Moscow aims to expand its presence in the Arctic and replace markets lost to Western sanctions.

"Strengthening the nation's icebreaker fleet is crucial to our plans for Arctic development and boosting cargo traffic on the Northern Sea Route," Putin said via video link.

Russia touts the Northern Sea Route, which stretches some 5,000 kilometers (3,107 miles) between the Barents Sea and the Chuckchi Sea, as an alternative shipping lane between Europe and Asia, claiming it can shorten transit times by up to 15 days compared to the Suez Canal.

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The new icebreaker, named Chukotka, joins Russia's fleet of nuclear-powered icebreakers, built to endure extreme Arctic conditions and plow through ice up to 2.8 meters (9.2 feet) thick. Vessels in this series are around 173 meters long, have a displacement of 33,500 metric tons and an expected service life of 40 years.

The Chukotka is set to join its predecessors — the Arktika, Sibir and Ural — upon its commissioning in late 2026. Meanwhile, two more nuclear icebreakers, the Yakutia and the Leningrad, are under construction, with plans to begin work on a seventh vessel, the Stalingrad, in 2025.

"The creation of these powerful, modern vessels is yet another demonstration of Russia's industrial, scientific, human, and technological potential," Putin said Wednesday. "This is exactly how our entire national economy should develop — on the foundation of our own technologies and groundbreaking scientific solutions."

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