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Japan Accuses Russia of Restricting Sea Navigation Around Kuril Islands

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Boats in the port of Yuzhno-Kurilsk on Kunashir Island. **Sergei Krasnoukhov / TASS**

Japan's government sent Russia a formal letter of protest over the closure of sea navigation around the Kuril Islands, Russian state media reported Thursday.

Tokyo accused Russia of introducing restrictions on the navigation of foreign military and civilian ships around the southern Kuril Islands from April 16 to May 1, according to the state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

"A protest was lodged to Russia through diplomatic channels," Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi was quoted as saying at a press conference.

Both Russia and Japan claim sovereignty over the island chain known in Russia as the Kuril Islands and in Japan as the Northern Territories, preventing the sides from signing a treaty formally marking the end of World War II.

Related article: Russia Bans Japanese NGO Amid Dispute Over Kuril Islands

Moscow abandoned talks on a WWII peace treaty and ended visa-free visits for Japanese people to the Kuril Islands after Japan sanctioned Russia over the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Japan also issued a diplomatic protest against what it called an "extremely unjustified" move at the time.

Earlier this month, Russian authorities designated Japan's Northern Territories Issue Association as an "undesirable organization," accusing it of promoting revanchist ideas and undermining Russian sovereignty.

Russia's Prosecutor General's Office claimed the group lobbies for the islands' return to Japan, distributes "propaganda" and holds educational events, all while being funded by the Japanese government despite presenting itself as an NGO.

Japan's Foreign Ministry said in its 2024 annual report that Tokyo remains committed to signing a peace treaty with Russia in hopes of reclaiming the southern Kuril Islands.

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