

2 Brigades of Troops to Protect Arctic

July 03, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

The armed forces General Staff will create two brigades to protect Russia's valuable Arctic resources, Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov said Friday.

Russia has walked a fine line between cooperation and aggression in the Arctic, which it believes could hold huge reserves of natural gas and oil.

"The General Staff is currently working on plans to create two such units," Serdyukov told reporters, Itar-Tass reported.

He said the brigades could be based in Murmansk, Arkhangelsk or other areas.

"The location will be determined, as well as weapons, numbers and infrastructure for the brigades," he said.

Global warming has boosted expectations that the Arctic may provide mining, fishing and shipping prospects for the countries that have claims on the region: Russia, the United States, Denmark, Canada, Norway and China.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Thursday that Russia would boost its presence in the Arctic to protect its interests. "As far as our own geopolitical interests are concerned, we shall be protecting them firmly and consistently," Putin told a meeting of his ruling United Russia party in Yekaterinburg.

Late last year, Russia delineated new Arctic borders with Norway and agreed to ease frontier controls in the hope of further cooperation in oil and gas exploration.

Gazprom runs two major gas projects in the Arctic, including one with Statoil, while state-run oil major Rosneft and BP operate at three Kara Sea fields.

Serdyukov also said Russia was in a position to start production of its intercontinental Bulava missile following the most recent successful test of the armament earlier in the week.

His ministry has said the missile, which the Kremlin wants to make the cornerstone of its nuclear arms program, will undergo four more tests this year before being introduced into service.

Previous failures — seven out of 15 tests — had called into question the viability of the program.

"The Bulava flew well. And that's good news," he said, Interfax reported. "We understand exactly that in this case it is possible to start serial production of the rocket."

Separately, Navy chief Vladimir Vysotsky said Friday that a Nerpa nuclear submarine would be delivered to India by the end of the year after repeated delays.

"We shall definitely supply this vessel to the customer by the end of this year," Vysotsky said, RIA-Novosti reported.

Vysotsky said a fully trained Indian navy crew was ready to receive the submarine, which some news reports said last year had already been handed over to India.

The Nerpa, an attack submarine, is usually armed with torpedoes and cruise missiles. It can go down to depths of 600 meters for about 100 days. It can carry 73 people.

Construction of the Nerpa began in 1991 — the year the Soviet Union collapsed — but funding was frozen in the chaotic 1990s and the submarine was only launched and started sea trials in 2008.

Twenty people died on the Nerpa after inhaling the toxic gas used as a fire suppressant when its fire extinguishing system switched on unexpectedly during sea trials in November 2008.

(Reuters, AP)

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