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Russia must act now on environment: Medvedev

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MOSCOW (Reuters) - Parts of Russia will be uninhabitable within the next three decades if the country does not take better care of the environment, Russian news agencies quoted President Dmitry Medvedev as saying on Saturday.

Medvedev, addressing law students in his home city of St Petersburg, said Russians had been more concerned about survival than the environment in the 1990s.

"As a result, there are now many places in Russia on the brink of an adverse ecological situation," agencies quoted Medvedev as saying in response to a question.

"If we fail to deal with the ecological situation now, then in 10, 20, 30 years large parts of Russia will be unfit for living," he said.

Medvedev has driven the environment to the forefront of the political agenda since assuming the presidency in May. He called an ad hoc meeting of top government officials this month to discuss clean and efficient energy, while June 5 was celebrated as the first ever "day of the ecologist".

Russia also this month pledged budget funds for clean energy and called for limits on greenhouse gas emissions in a reversal of its earlier reluctance to embrace the Kyoto Protocol.

The New York-based Blacksmith Institute, which compiles an annual list of the world's 10 most polluted places, last year included two Russian cities: Norilsk, the Arctic home of the world's largest nickel miner, and Dzerzhinsk, a chemical manufacturing centre 400 km (250 miles) east of Moscow.

(Reporting by Robin Paxton)

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