

3. Kuril Islands

Prelims Syllabus: Physical Setting

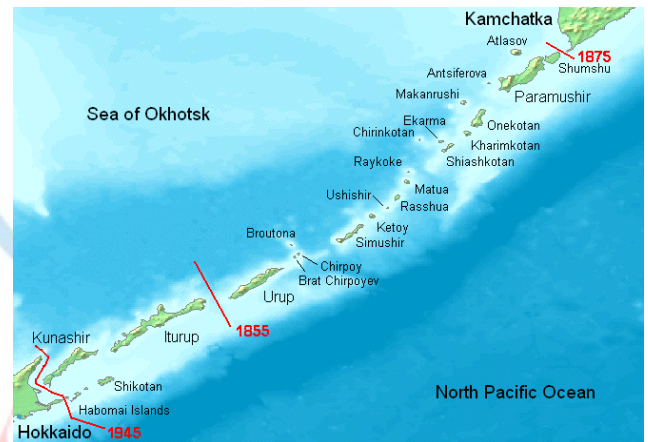
Mains Syllabus: GS-I Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic Activity, Cyclone etc., Geographical Features and their location - changes in critical geographical features (including waterbodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

Why in News?

- Recently, an earthquake of magnitude 7.5, struck in the northern Pacific, the closest shores on Russia's far eastern **Kuril Islands**.

About Kuril Islands:

- It is stretched from the Japanese island of Hokkaido to the southern tip of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula separating Okhotsk Sea from the North Pacific Ocean.
- It consists of 56 islands and minor rocks. The chain is part of the belt of geologic instability circling the Pacific and contains at least 100 volcanoes, of which 35 are still active, and many hot springs.
- It is surrounded by rich fishing grounds and are thought to have offshore reserves of oil and gas. The Rare rhenium deposits have been found on the Kudriavy volcano on Iturup.
- It consists Nickel-based superalloys of rhenium which is used in the combustion chambers, turbine blades, and exhaust nozzles of jet engines.
- Tourism** is also a potential source of income, as the islands have several volcanoes and a variety of birdlife.
- Strategic Importance:** Russia has deployed missile systems in the region. It also plans a submarine project and intends to prevent any American military use of the islands.



About Sovereignty - Kuril Islands:

- The Islands dispute between Japan and Russia is over the sovereignty of South Kuril Islands. The South Kuril Islands comprises Etorofu island, Kunashiri island, Shikotan island and the Habomai island. These islands are claimed by Japan but occupied by Russia as successor state of the Soviet Union.

- These islands are known as Southern Kurils by Russia whereas Japan calls them Northern Territories.

About Ainu People:

- It was originally inhabited by the Ainu people, and they were later settled by the Russians and Japanese, following several waves of exploration in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- The Ainu or the Aynu, also known as the Ezo in the historical Japanese texts, are an indigenous people of Japan and Russia.
- **Treaty of Shimoda (1855):** It is concluded between Japan and Russia, which gave control of the four southernmost islands to Japan and the remainder of the chain to Russia.
- **Treaty of Saint Petersburg (1875):** It is signed between two countries, Russia ceded possession of the Kurils to Japan in exchange for uncontested control of Sakhalin Island.
- **Yalta Agreement (1945):** As part of the Yalta agreements the islands were ceded to the Soviet Union, and the Japanese population was repatriated and replaced by Soviets.
- **San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951):** It is signed between the Allies and Japan, states that Japan must give up “all right, title and claim to the Kuril Islands”, but it also does not recognize the Soviet Union’s sovereignty over them.
- **Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration (1956):** It restored diplomatic ties between Japan and Russia by Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration. During that time, Russia offered to give away the two islands closest to Japan. But the offer was rejected by Japan as the two islands constituted only 7% of the land in question.
- However, Russia indicated that the joint declaration signed by Japan and the Soviet Union in 1956 neither mentions a basis for returning Habomai and Shikotan nor clarifies which country has sovereignty over the islands. Further, in 2019, Japanese PM made it clear that the country is not in the favour of withdrawing control over the Islands. Japan also believes that the islands are the inherent part of the nation’s territory. Therefore, Japan mentioned that it aims to sign the peace treaty after the territorial issue is resolved.