

# Kuril islands

April 25, 2022

**In news-** In its **2022 Diplomatic Bluebook, Japan** has said that Russia has illegally occupied four of its islands near the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Japanese have called these islands – the **Northern Territories**, while Russia calls them the Kurils.

## **About Kuril islands-**

- The chain of islands extends for 1,200 km from the southern tip of the Kamchatka Peninsula (Russia) to the northeastern corner of Hokkaido island (Japan) and **separates the Sea of Okhotsk from the Pacific Ocean.**
- 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.
- Parallel to the chain, in the Pacific floor, is the Kuril Trench, which reaches a depth of more than 6.5 miles (10.5 km).
- The climate in the islands is severe, with long, cold, snowy winters and cool, wet, foggy summers.
- Vegetation ranges from tundra on the northern islands to dense forest on the larger southern islands.
- The average annual precipitation is 30–40 inches , most of which falls as snow.
- The Kurils were **originally inhabited by the Ainu**, and they were later settled by the Russians and Japanese, following several waves of exploration in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- Apart from being home to rich fishing grounds, the islands are significant from a strategic perspective as it is here that a large chunk of Russia's pacific fleet is docked.

## **Timeline of agreement between Russia & Japan over these**

## islands-

- In 1855 Japan and Russia concluded the **Treaty of Shimoda**, which gave control of the four southernmost islands to Japan and the remainder of the chain to Russia.
- In the **Treaty of Saint Petersburg**, signed by those two countries in 1875, Russia ceded possession of the Kurils to Japan in exchange for uncontested control of Sakhalin Island.
- In 1945, as part of the Yalta agreements (formalised in the 1951 **Treaty of Peace with Japan**), the islands were ceded to the Soviet Union, and the Japanese population was repatriated and replaced by Soviets.
- Japan still claims historical rights to the southernmost islands and has tried repeatedly to persuade Russia to return those islands to Japanese sovereignty.

