Arctic Council

Prelims – *Current events of International Importance.*

Mains (GS II) – *Global Groupings.*

Why in News?

International observers have recently raised concerns about escalating tensions in the Arctic.

- It is an ***intergovernmental forum*** for cooperation and coordination on Arctic issues, including scientific research.
- **Formed in -** 1996 through the Ottawa Declaration.
- It promotes cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues.
- **Members (8) –** Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Russia, Sweden and the USA.
- These nations exercise sovereignty over the Arctic land and can also exploit resources within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).
- **Permanent Participants -** 6 organizations representing the indigenous people of the Arctic region.
- **Observer states (38) -** Other countries or national groups.
- **India** is currently an *Observer member* on the Arctic Council.
- All decision-making happens through consensus between the 6 members, and in consultation with the permanent participants.
- The 6 Working Groups carry out the Council's activities

1. Arctic Contaminants Action Program
2. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme
3. Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna
4. Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response
5. Protection of the Arctic Marine
6. Environment Sustainable Development Working Group

- **Northeast Passage –** It is a maritime route through the Arctic along the northern coast of Eurasia, connecting the *Atlantic and Pacific Oceans,* primarily off the coast of northern Siberia (Russia).
- It's also known as the Northern Sea Route.
- **Strategic importance of Arctic Region – Natural Resources -** The region holds 13% of the world's undiscovered oil reserves and 30% of its untapped natural gas reserves.
- Beneath the frozen landscape lie untapped reserves of natural resources such as fossil fuels, rare earth elements, phosphates, and copper as well as lucrative fishing

grounds.

- **Alternative sea routes -** The melting of Arctic sea ice has also prompted interest into the alternate trade routes like Northeast Passage and Northwest passage by passing suez canal.
- **Geopolitical interests -** Unlike Antarctic, Russia, the United States (Alaska), Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Iceland, Finland, and Sweden have their military bases in the Arctic.
- **Lacks legal safeguards -** Unlike the Antarctic, which is environmentally protected by a dedicated international treaty, the Arctic lacks similar legal safeguards and is primarily governed by the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).*

Reference

The Hindu | Why are tensions high in the Arctic?

