India and Arctic Council

Why in news?

India was re-elected as an Observer to the Arctic Council in its recent ministerial meeting at Rovaniemi, Finland.

What is the Arctic Council?

- The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum for discussing and addressing issues concerning the Arctic region.
- These include scientific research, and peaceful and sustainable use of resources in the region.
- The Council was established by the 8 Arctic States through the Ottawa Declaration of 1996.
- These are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the US.
- Besides these, 6 organisations representing the indigenous people of the Arctic region is granted the status of permanent participants.
- All decision-making happens through consensus between the eight members, and in consultation with the permanent participants.

What are the objectives?

- The Arctic Council is not a treaty-based international legal entity like the UN bodies or trade or regional groupings like NATO or ASEAN.
- It is only an intergovernmental 'forum', to promote cooperation in regulating activities in the Arctic region, a much informal grouping.
- The six working groups each deal with a specific subject.
- Through this, the Arctic Council seeks to evolve a consensus on the activities that can be carried out in the Arctic region.
- It is driven by the overall objective of conserving the pristine environment, and biodiversity.
- The interests and well-being of the local populations are also its focus.

Who are the other participants?

- India had been given the Observer status in 2013, along with 5 other

countries - China, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore.

- India, along with 12 other countries now, has the Observer status in the Arctic Council.
- 13 other intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary organisations like the UN Environment Programme, UN Development Programme and 12 other NGOs also enjoy the Observer status.
- The Observer status is granted to entities that support the objectives of the Arctic Council.
- Those which have demonstrated capabilities in this regard, including the ability to make financial contributions, are included.
- The Observers are not part of the decision-making processes.
- They are invited to attend the meetings of the Council, especially at the level of the working groups.
- The renewal of Observer status is just a formality.
- The status, once granted, continues until the Observer engages in any activities that run counter to the objectives of the Council, and there is a consensus on this.

What is India's role in the Arctic?

- India is one of the very few countries to set up a permanent station in the Arctic for the purposes of scientific research.
- The polar regions offer some unique opportunities to carry out research related to atmospheric and climate sciences.
- The Himadri research station, located in Ny Alesund, Svalbard in Norway, was started in 2008.
- The Goa-based National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCOAR) is the nodal organisation coordinating the research activities at this station.
- The station has been used to carry out a variety of biological, glaciological and atmospheric and climate sciences research projects.
- [Besides, India's first permanent station in Antarctica was set up way back in 1983.
- India has almost 3-decade experience in carrying out scientific research in the polar regions of Antarctica.
- India is now among the very few countries which have multiple research stations in the Antarctic.]

Why is it significant to India?

- The Arctic Council does not prohibit the commercial exploitation of resources in the Arctic.
- It only seeks to ensure that it is done in a sustainable manner.
- So countries with ongoing activities in the Arctic hope to have a stake in the

commercial exploitation of natural resources there.

- India could derive some commercial and strategic benefits, given the fact that the Arctic region is rich in some minerals, and oil and gas,
- With some parts of the Arctic melting due to global warming, the region also opens up the possibility of new shipping routes.

Source: Indian Express

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