

Recalling India's Antarctica Activities

Why in news?

Parliament has just passed the Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022 in the Rajya Sabha.

What is the Indian Antarctic Bill 2022 about?

- Antarctica contains many very important minerals—especially atomic energy minerals and is one of the reasons why this area is attractive to various countries.
- The Bill seeks to give effect to
 - The Antarctic Treaty
 - The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
 - The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty
- It also seeks to protect the Antarctic environment and regulate activities in the region.

To know more about the bill, click [here](#)

The Madrid Protocol sets forth basic principles applicable to human activities in Antarctica and prohibits all activities relating to Antarctic mineral resources, except for scientific research.

How did India's engagement with the Antarctica begin?

- In 1956, at the instance of Jawaharlal Nehru and V.K. Krishna Menon, India became the first country to request for an item on the agenda of the eleventh United Nations General Assembly.
- It was entitled "The Question of Antarctica" that ensures that the vast areas and the resources of Antarctica were used entirely for peaceful purposes and for general welfare.
- Twelve countries who believed that they had a direct stake in Antarctica started discussions among themselves and in 1959, the Antarctica Treaty was signed in Washington DC.
- India was neither involved nor invited.
- The Treaty members worked on the development of the continent among themselves, inviting occasional criticism from other countries, including India.

What are the Indian expeditions in Antarctica?

The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa—an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Earth Sciences—manages the entire Indian Antarctic program.

- In 1982, India's first Antarctic expedition called **Operation Gangotri** started as soon as Indira Gandhi had returned to power two years earlier.
- The objectives were ecological dimensions - greater knowledge of the Indian Ocean and the monsoons, life in ice-bound regions and marine biodiversity.
- A second expedition led by one of India's top geologists V.K. Raina landed in Antarctica in 1982.
- With two expeditions successfully completed within a span of 11 months, India finally became a **member of the Antarctic Treaty** in August 1983 and China followed in 1985.

What are the notable achievements of India in Antarctica?

- **Research bases**- The first Antarctic team started wintering in Antarctica in 1984 and a few months afterwards an unmanned Antarctic research base -**Dakshin Gangotri** was established.
- Since then, India has set up two manned research stations in Antarctica — **Maitri** in 1988 and **Bharati** in 2012.
- As of today, Maitri and Bharati are fully operational.
- **Expeditions**- Forty expeditions to the continent have taken place.

What is the issue with the polar research vessel?

- **Issue**- So far, India has been chartering polar research vessels from countries like Russia and Norway while China has raced ahead and has two of its own.
- A decision was indeed taken by the Union Cabinet in 2014 for India to have its own research ship with ice-breaking and other advanced technological capabilities but it remains unimplemented.
- **Way forward**- A research ship could be acquired from abroad through the Make-in-India policy.
- There is also a need to revamp the quite old Maitri research station.

References

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3. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1771934#:~:text=The%20Indian%20Antarctic%20program%2C%20which,and%20Bharati%20are%20fully%20operational.>