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**India's Growing Interest in  
Arctic**

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## INDIA'S GROWING INTEREST IN ARCTIC

### In Context

- In March 2024, India's first winter experience at the Arctic came to a successful end.

### About Arctic

- It is the northernmost region of Earth, centred on the North Pole and characterised by distinctively polar conditions of climate, plant and animal life, and other physical features.

### India's Presence in Arctic

- Its involvement in the region goes back to 1920, with the signing of the Svalbard Treaty in Paris.
- **In 2007**, India undertook its first research mission to investigate Arctic microbiology, atmospheric sciences, and geology.
- In 2008, India became the **only developing country**, aside from China, to **establish an Arctic research base** named **Himadri**.
  - ♦ It has been mostly hosting scientists during the summer (April to October).
- After being granted 'observer' status by the Arctic Council in 2013, India commissioned a multi-sensor moored observatory in **Svalbard** in 2014 and an **atmospheric laboratory in 2016**.
  - ♦ The work at these stations focuses on examining Arctic ice systems and glaciers and the consequences of Arctic melt on the Himalayas and the Indian monsoon.

### Latest Developments

- **In December 2023**, when four Indian climate scientists arrived in Oslo to begin acclimatisation for **India's maiden winter expedition at the Arctic**
  - ♦ Himadri had until then hosted missions only in the summer.
  - ♦ Indian scientific expeditions to the Arctic during the winter (November to March) will allow researchers to conduct unique scientific observations during polar nights, where there is no sunlight for nearly 24 hours and sub-zero temperatures (as low as -15 degrees Celsius).
    - This will aid in expanding understanding of the Arctic, especially climate change, space weather, sea-ice and ocean circulation dynamics, ecosystem adaptations, etc., which affect weather and climate in the tropics, including monsoons.

### Potential for collaboration

- India's present policy is to cooperate with Arctic countries in green energy, and green and clean industries, as a way of bolstering its 'responsible stakeholder' credentials.
- With Denmark and Finland, for instance, Indian collaboration has come in areas such as waste management, pollution control, renewable energy, and green technology.
- Many believe a partnership with **Norway** could be transformational for India as it would enable greater Indian participation in the Arctic Council's working groups, tackling issues such as the blue economy, connectivity, maritime transportation, investment and infrastructure, and responsible resource development.
- While the Indian government seems keen to benefit from seabed mining and resource exploitation in the Arctic, it ought to unequivocally back a sustainable mode of extraction.
- India is seized by the opening up of Arctic Sea routes, primarily the Northern Sea Route, and would like to route Indian trade through the region.
  - ♦ This might help India reduce costs for shipping companies along with time, fuel, and security costs for transmitting goods.

### Emerging Challenges

- The issue of Indian engagement in the Arctic divides the country's academic and policy communities.

- Opinions are split over the potential impacts of the changing climate in the Arctic on India's economy.
- The concern **primarily stems from mining** in the region for fossil fuels, an area where India has yet to articulate a clear economic strategy.
- The proponents of economic exploitation in the Arctic advocate a pragmatic approach in the region, especially around oil and gas exploration, and mining.
- The sceptics warn about the **potential environmental consequences** and underscore the need for a more balanced policy framework that recognises the negative aspects of maritime resource exploitation.
- **China's growing investments** in the Arctic have raised concern in India.
  - ◆ Russia's decision to grant China expanded access to the Northern Sea Route has deepened this anxiety.
  - ◆ India's increasing focus on the Arctic comes at a time of heightened tensions in the region, fuelled by the Russia-Ukraine conflict and exacerbated by the suspension of various regional cooperative forums

### Conclusion and Way Forward

- Arctic is an area of scientific, climatic, and strategic importance; hence, scientists will have to play a vital role in addressing areas that affect life and survival on this planet
- India would perhaps still look to explore economic opportunities in the Arctic.
  - ◆ Norway could help India design a sustainable policy that accommodates the needs of both the scientific community and industry.
  - ◆ A partnership with Norway is likely to be focused on scientific research and climate and environmental protection.
    - These are two of the six pillars that comprise India's Arctic Policy (the other four being economic and human development; transportation and connectivity; governance and international cooperation; and national capacity building).
- As global geopolitical tensions are also mounting in the Arctic, finding constructive and non-sensitive ways to alleviate pressure will be in the interest of both India and Norway.
- India's Arctic policy would play an essential role in preparing the country for a future where humankind's biggest challenges, such as climate change, can be addressed through collective will and effort.
- India's Arctic policy shall be implemented through an action plan, and an effective governance and review mechanism involving the inter-ministerial Empowered Arctic Policy Group.
- Implementing India's Arctic policy will involve multiple stakeholders, including academia, the research community, business, and industry.

#### Daily Mains Practice Question

**[Q]** Why has India been active in the Arctic region for over years? Discuss emerging challenges and solutions to address them.

