

# India's Arctic Policy

January 18, 2021

India's engagement with the Arctic has been multi-dimensional. It looks forward to increasing its engagement with this vital region and its governing bodies as a responsible partner.

**In news:** India Releases Draft Arctic Policy for comments from the public

**Placing it in syllabus:** Foreign Affairs

**Dimensions:**

- Policy highlights
- India and the Arctic
- Role of science
- Global governance and international cooperation
- Development of human resources

## Content

### Policy Highlights:

- The importance of the Arctic for India is constantly growing, primarily due to the challenges associated with climate change and global warming.
- India regards the Arctic as the common heritage of mankind.
- The **draft policy seeks to establish a roadmap for Sustainable Engagement in the Arctic Region.**
- It also lists a wide range of activities that **India seeks to pursue in the Arctic including economic, diplomatic and scientific activities.**
- The draft policy document further reflects ambitious planning, which is one of the key highlights of India's recent global engagements.
- One aspect of the draft Arctic Policy centers around climate change and it highlights the intricate link

between conditions in the Arctic and the monsoon and Himalayan systems.

**Through the draft Arctic Policy India seeks to achieve the following goals:**

- To **play a constructive role in the Arctic** by leveraging its vast scientific pool and expertise in Himalayan and Polar research.
- to contribute in **ensuring that as the Arctic becomes more accessible**, the harnessing of its resources is done sustainably and in consonance with best practices formulated by bodies such as the Arctic Council.

**India's Arctic policy will rest on five pillars:**

1. Science and research
2. Economic and human development cooperation
3. Transportation and connectivity
4. Governance and international cooperation
5. National capacity building



**India and the Arctic:**

- The Arctic is commonly understood to refer to the region above **the Arctic Circle**, north of latitude 66° 34' N, which includes the Arctic Ocean with the North Pole at

its centre.

- Much of this Ocean falls within the jurisdiction of **five Arctic littoral states**—Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Russia and the USA (Alaska).
- Three other Arctic nations – Finland, Sweden and Iceland – along with the five littorals form **the Arctic Council**.
- The Arctic is home to almost four million inhabitants, of which approximately one-tenth are considered as indigenous people.
- **India's interests in the Arctic region are scientific, environmental, commercial as well as strategic.**
- **India became the observer of Arctic Council** in 2013 and its membership as an observer was **renewed in 2018 for another five years.**
- **The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)**, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India, is the nodal agency for India's Polar research programme, which includes Arctic studies.
- India's Ministry of External Affairs provides the external interface to the Arctic Council.

### **Significance For India**

- The Arctic **influences atmospheric, oceanographic and biogeochemical cycles** of the earth's ecosystem.
- Moreover, the **Arctic is vulnerable to climate change and global warming**. The effects are manifested by the loss of sea ice, ice caps, and warming of the ocean and atmosphere.
- It will lead to lowering of salinity levels, rising temperature differential between land and oceans in the tropical regions, drying of subtropical areas and increase in precipitation at higher latitudes. **India is particularly impacted due to the likely effect of these changes**

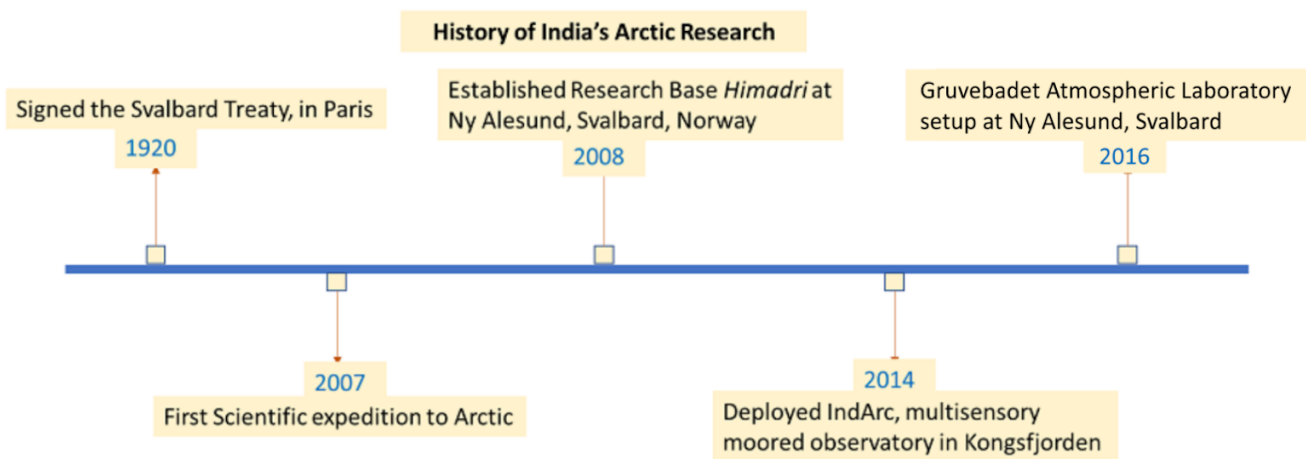
Changes in the Arctic and global ecosystem induced by melting

Arctic ice, can be highly disruptive for India in the following ways:

- Changes to Monsoon patterns caused by the Arctic changes **adversely impact Indian agriculture, food security and wellbeing of the rural sector.**
- Melting ice sheets and sea level rise can **accelerate coastal erosion.**
- The **thawing of permafrost soil** could potentially **release viruses and bacteria that have lain dormant** for thousands of years, thereby **increasing the propensity of pandemics**. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the scale of disruption that can be caused by pathogens.

Thus, the Arctic is important for India's national development, economic security, water security and sustainability.

**Role of science:**



- India's engagement with the Arctic began in February 1920, when it signed the **Svalbard Treaty** in Paris.
- **In 2007, India's first scientific expedition to the Arctic was launched** with the objective of initiating a series of baseline measurements in biological sciences, ocean and atmospheric sciences and glaciology.
- In 2008, the Indian research station '**Himadri**' was established in the international Arctic research base at Ny-Ålesund in Spitsbergen, Svalbard, Norway.
- **IndArc**, the country's first **multi-sensor moored observatory** was deployed in Kongsfjorden in 2014.
- In 2016, India's northernmost atmospheric laboratory was established at Gruvebadet. The laboratory is equipped with several instruments that can study clouds, precipitation, long-range pollutants, and other background atmospheric parameters.

***The major objectives of the Indian Research in Arctic Region are as follows:***

- To **study the hypothesized tele-connections between the Arctic climate and the Indian monsoon** by analyzing the sediment and ice core records from the Arctic glaciers and the Arctic Ocean.
- To **characterize sea ice in the Arctic** using satellite data to estimate the effect of global warming in the northern polar region.

- To conduct research on **the dynamics and mass budget of Arctic glaciers** focusing on the effect of glaciers on sea-level change.
- To carry out a **comprehensive assessment of the flora and fauna** of the Arctic and their response to anthropogenic activities. In addition, it is proposed to undertake a comparative study of the life forms from both the Polar Regions

## **Global governance and international cooperation**

Arctic is important from a **geopolitical point of view** because:

- The Arctic region is **very rich in minerals, and oil and gas**.
- 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
- With some parts of the Arctic melting due to global warming, the region also opens up the **possibility of new shipping routes** that can reduce existing distances.

***For Governance and International Cooperation, India's draft policy aims to :***

- Pursue international cooperation and partnerships with all stakeholders in the region;
- **Uphold international law and in particular UNCLOS**, including the rights and freedoms contained therein, and support common heritage of humankind in the deep seabed area in the Arctic;
- Actively **participate in international climate change and environmental treaty frameworks** relating to the Arctic;
- Enhance participation in organizations relevant to the region of which India is a member such as the **International Maritime Organisation and the International Hydrographic Organisation**;
- Participate in **economic activities in the region in**

accordance with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 framework.

## Geopolitics in the Arctic Region

### The Arctic Council

- The Arctic Council is the leading **intergovernmental forum** promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction **among the Arctic States, Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants** on common Arctic issues.
- The Council has the **eight circumpolar countries as member states**
- It is mandated to **protect the Arctic environment and promote the economies and social and cultural well-being** of the indigenous people whose organizations are permanent participants in the council.
- The **Arctic Economic Council (AEC)** was created by the Arctic Council during the 2013-2015 Canadian chairmanship. It is an independent organization that facilitates Arctic business-to-business activities and responsible economic development through the sharing of best practices.

### UNCLOS

- Being an ocean , **the Arctic Ocean is also governed by the UNCLOS** – the United Nations Convention on the Law Of the Sea.
- Among these are the arctic coastal states of Canada, Denmark, Norway and the Russian Federation.
- However, **USA has not ratified this convention.**
- This **complicates the demarcation of maritime zones and the determination of extended continental shelf claims**
- This has raised several conflicts over how Arctic shipping and resource management activities will be governed in the future.

### Chinese Interests

- China—which has linked its interest in the Arctic area with the Maritime Silk route.
- In January 2018, China declared itself a **“Near Arctic State”** and put out a white paper.
- According to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo China has invested nearly \$90 billion in the Arctic between 2012-2017.
- In its policy, **China states that the Arctic has “global implications and international impacts.”**
- **Thus geopolitics of the Arctic have gone beyond its original inter-Arctic States or regional nature.**

## **Development of human resources**

As new opportunities open up in the Arctic, **India needs to enhance its human resource capabilities**. Skilled workforce would be needed in sectors ranging from science and exploration, to seafaring and economic cooperation.

***To achieve these goals the policy has made the following provisions:***

- Expand capability, capacity and awareness for Arctic-related scientific research by **strengthening the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)**, involving academic and scientific institutions in India and identifying nodal institutes;
- Promote **domestic scientific research capacities** by expanding earth sciences, biological sciences, geosciences, climate change and space related programmes, dove-tailed with Arctic imperatives in Indian Universities;
- **Strengthen indigenous research capacity in global climate modelling** with special focus on South Asia, especially impact of Arctic warming on the variability of the monsoon;
- Put in place **Arctic related programmes for mineral/oil**



- **and gas exploration in petroleum research institutes;**
- **Encourage tourism and hospitality sectors** in building specialised capacities and awareness to engage with Arctic enterprises;
- Expand student programmes on the blue-bio economy of the Arctic through a gamut of institutions working on living and non-living marine resources;
- Strengthen **nautical training institutions** for training seafarers in Polar/ice navigation and build region specific hydrography capacity and skills necessary to undertake Arctic transits;
- Expand India's trained manpower in the services sector backed by **English-speaking skills in maritime insurance, chartering, arbitration and brokerage;**
- Build a wide-ranging institutional base on Arctic maritime, legal, environmental and governance issues.

**Mould your thought:** India's draft Arctic Policy is an assertion of India's global ambitions. Elaborate.

***Approach to the answer:***

- Introduction
- Write about India's Arctic interests
- Write about the provisions in the policy to addresses geopolitical, scientific and environmental concerns of India
- Write about how these provisions show India's ambitions
- Conclusion