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### **India and the Arctic**

*Krittika Singh & Kamrul Hossain*

With an emerging economy, India gradually becomes an influential political actor on the global stage. The impacts of climate change in the Arctic, and its increasing role in the global geopolitical dynamic, make the region unique. India, along with other non-Arctic states, engages itself in the Arctic, primarily driven by an interest in polar research, but also climate change-induced developments in economic and commercial frontiers. On March 17, 2022, India released its first-ever Arctic policy, although India's presence in the Arctic is not entirely new. It has been a party to the Svalbard Treaty since 1920 – Svalbard is an archipelago placed under Norwegian sovereignty in the Arctic between mainland Norway and the North Pole – the Treaty ensures equal rights (or an equitable regime) for use and access to the archipelago and its territorial waters for parties, subject to Norwegian sovereignty.

However, during the last decades, India has tightened its efforts for robust Arctic engagement. In 2007, India launched its first scientific expedition in the Arctic. In 2008, India established its permanent International Arctic research base 'Himadri' at Ny-Ålesund in Svalbard. As a member of the International Arctic Science Committee, India increasingly plays a role in the Arctic scientific community. With its inclusion in the Arctic Council as an Observer in 2013, India has deepened its ties with Arctic States and stakeholders. Additionally, India justifies its Arctic link through its location in the cryosphere in the Himalayan region, the so-called Third Pole, which, too, suffers from threats from climate change similar to the Arctic, such as melting glaciers and the resulting socio-cultural and environmental impacts.

India's Arctic Policy has a set of missions, which underlines the following: enhancing cooperation in the Arctic region, harmonizing research on the polar region with emphasis on the third pole, advancing knowledge on the Arctic both nationally and globally, and contributing to efforts in combating climate change and the protection of the environment. To meet these goals, the policy identifies seven specific pillars around which India's Arctic policy is shaped:

<b>Science and Research</b>
<b>Climate and Environmental Protection</b>
<b>Economic and Human Development</b>
<b>Transportation and Connectivity</b>
<b>Governance and International Cooperation</b>
<b>National Capacity-building</b>
<b>Geopolitics and Arctic affairs</b>

India emphasized an ‘interlinked polar programme’ combining the three Poles– the Arctic, Antarctic and the Third Pole. India finds the linkages between the glaciers in the three Poles crucial. In this regard, India intends to bring its experiences drawn from the glacier-dominated Third Polar region to the Arctic. By conducting scientific expeditions and scientific research, especially relating to climate change, India seeks to harmonize its research on polar regions, including the Arctic. To further strengthen research expeditions, India stresses the urgent need for ice-class Polar research vessels for itself, which it intends to build through its domestic capability.

Over the years, India has developed expertise in operating a successful satellite program, which it intends to employ to promote a better understanding of the Arctic. For example, by utilizing its satellite operations, India can offer reliable scientific information to the Arctic on earth-changing ecosystems, ice mass, sea-level rise, etc., that can contribute to emergency preparedness, hydrographic surveys, environmental monitoring and surveillance. India’s science promotion efforts are supplemented by its commitment to creating an institutional setup nationally with an available funding mechanism for Arctic research.

Although India’s Arctic policy primarily focuses on scientific research, it also addresses other areas of interest, including economic and strategic interests and international cooperation in Arctic affairs. While India commits to moving towards renewable energy resources as its long-term goal, in the short- and medium-term scenario, its dependence on hydrocarbons is crucial – for which the Arctic remains important. India commits to work with Arctic states and actors towards sustainable resource extraction, for example, through responsible business practices complementing the spirit of the UN SDGs. India highlights the need to balance its energy needs with concerns arising from

climate change and also Arctic geopolitics. As such, India encourages its private sector to work closely with the Arctic Economic Council (EEC) to promote sustainable business relationships with Arctic stakeholders. India also seeks to collaborate towards building communication channels and digital connectivity in the remote Arctic areas, which can help provide support in education, food supply and health care amongst others.

India places itself as a responsible actor in the international legal framework that applies to the Arctic. India is a party to most international regulatory instruments within the Arctic governance framework, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and its MARPOL and SOLAS treaties, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and all major international human rights instruments, including the ICCPR, ICESCR and UNDRIP.

At the regional level, as an Observer to the Arctic Council, India aims to cooperate closely with various working groups of the Council, and with Arctic states and stakeholders, particularly in the area of marine environmental protection, environmental emergencies, search and rescue, Arctic biodiversity conservation, etc. India's increased participation in the AC and constructive role in internal Arctic affairs and decision making would be a significant milestone for its Arctic engagement. The Arctic Council conceives an influential role for the Arctic Indigenous peoples in its decision-making, to which India is respectful. Being mindful of this, and also as home to a large number of Indigenous communities, India can build a bridge between the Indigenous communities of the Arctic and the Third Pole to exchange traditional knowledge held by them, which may contribute to developing an alternative knowledge system to understand better the Arctic and Polar regions. In sum, India's Arctic engagement creates a platform not only to build a bridge between the Arctic and the Third Pole, but also to bring mutual benefits for both regions.

**For more on this, read...**

India's Arctic Policy, Ministry of Earth Sciences Website

<https://www.moes.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-03/compressed-SINGLE-PAGE-ENGLISH.pdf>

The Arctic Circle, Third Pole Process Website

<https://www.arcticcircle.org/third-pole-himalaya-the-process>

