

Non Traditional Security Digest

India in the Arctic

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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

Brief History

India's Arctic Connection

India has prehistoric connections with the Arctic. The reference to the dates go back to the Vedic period. Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the legendary leader of the independence movement, argued in his work, [The Arctic Home in the Vedas](#) (1903) that the original home of the Aryans during the pre-glacial period was the North Pole (Arctic), and that they moved from their dwelling due to an ice deluge around 8000 B.C. The Aryans migrated southward in search of better land settlements and took two routes: one towards Europe and the other to India. Tilak justified his argument by detailing accounts of Vedic calendars, Avestic passages, Vedic chronology, and interpretation of the various Vedic hymns in his book. His work is a priceless account on Vedic history and its ancestral links with the Arctic.

Colonial and Modern linkages

In 1920 India, as part of the British overseas dominions, became signatory to the [Spitsbergen Treaty](#). In 2007, India sent its first scientific expedition to the Arctic and the following year it set up a scientific research station *Himadri* at Ny-Ålesund, on Svalbard Island of Norway. India got [permanent observer status](#) in the Arctic Council in 2013, which was renewed in May 2019. India has sent [13 expeditions](#) to the Arctic and 23 science projects are in progress.

Current Engagements

The Arctic is warming [three-times the average global normal](#). The melting Arctic sea-ice has direct links to the Indian monsoon system. Scientific evidences suggest that the receding polar ice caps and river runoff will result in sea level rise and will significantly impact the world's ocean current circulations. This variation in ocean levels present potential challenge for India's densely populated coastal cities and islands in the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. India's endeavor in the Arctic has remained mainly focused on scientific research.

The [National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research](#) (NCPOR) in Goa, under Ministry of Earth Sciences is the nodal agency for Polar research, which includes Arctic studies. The Ministry of External Affairs acts as an external interface to the Arctic Council. Several other ministries and institutions are involved in Arctic activities and are poised to expand their engagement. In January, 2021 India came up with its first draft document on the Arctic for public comments. On 17 March, 2022 India released the [Arctic Policy](#) outlining its near and long term objectives in the region.

India's Arctic Policy

India's Arctic Policy defines the Arctic as the region above the Arctic Circle, north of latitude 66° 34' N, which includes the Arctic Ocean with the North Pole at its

centre. Five Arctic littoral states—Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Russia and the USA (Alaska) maintain national jurisdiction in the Arctic Ocean. Finland, Sweden and Iceland along with these five littoral states form the Arctic Council. The Arctic region has almost four million inhabitants, of which approximately one-tenth are indigenous people.

India's Arctic Policy rests on six important pillars:

Science and Research

India has been actively engaged in scientific research in the Arctic, Antarctic and the Himalayas. In the Arctic the research aims at strengthening existing infrastructure capabilities including the acquisition of a dedicated ice-class Polar Research Vessel. The Policy also calls for funding support for Arctic research in India and for strengthening national and international collaborations with the Arctic states. The Arctic Policy underlines India's expertise in satellite communications which could provide effective digital connectivity solutions in the Arctic.

Climate and Environment Protection

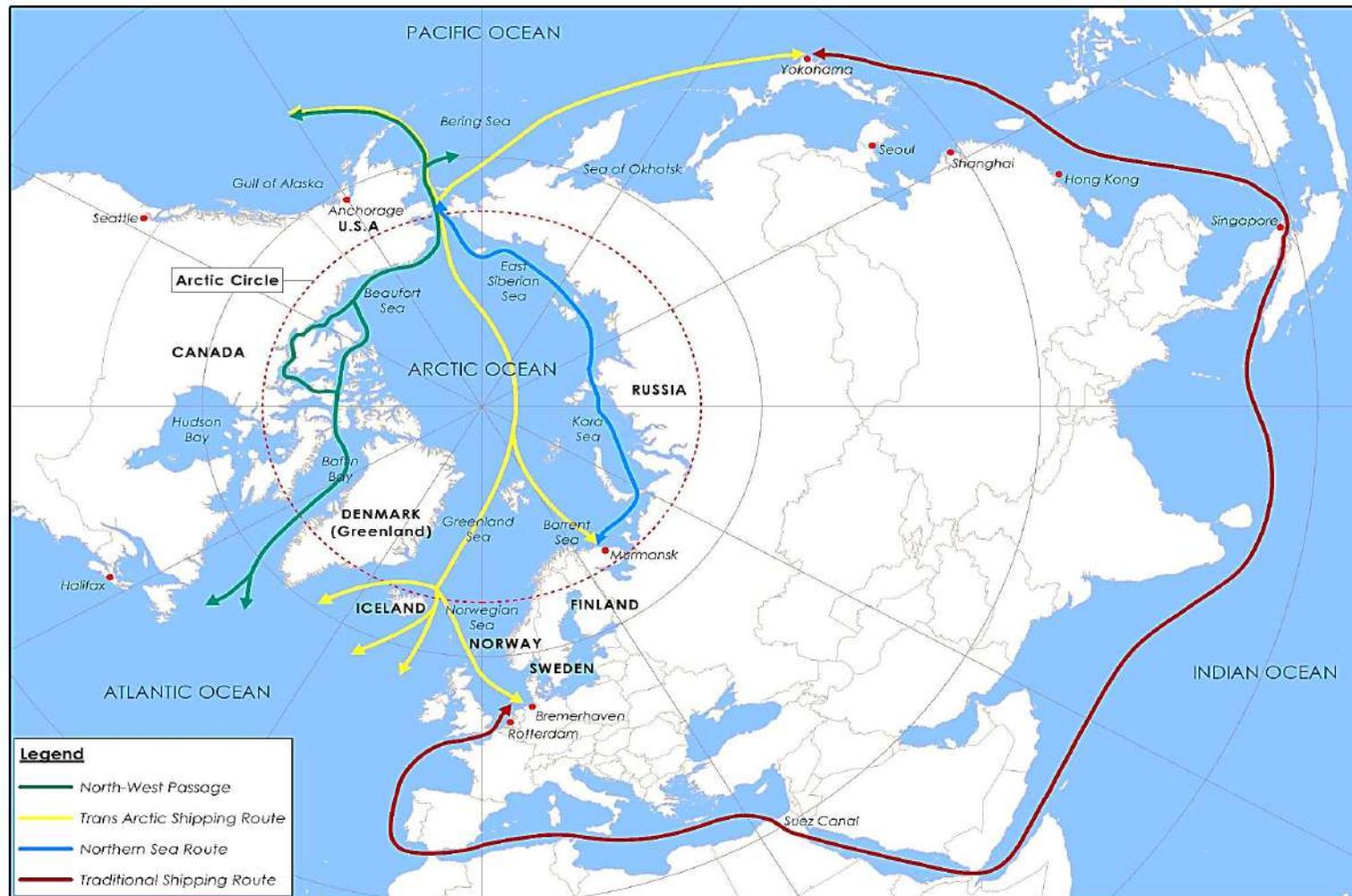
India's Arctic Policy lists climate change as an urgent and existential global challenge. The Policy calls for undertaking research in the Arctic to understand the climate linkages between Arctic sea-ice melt and Indian monsoons. Further, the document

calls for undertaking scientific research in understanding methane emissions, issues of black carbon, and micro-plastic in the Arctic Ocean. Finally, India's Arctic Policy calls for active engagements with all the Arctic Council's working groups to promote and exchange knowledge for enhancing Indian scientific expertise in the region.

Economic and Human Development

As one of the six-pillars, the Economic and Human Developments stresses on developing and benefiting from Arctic natural resources. India seeks economic development of the Arctic region as per the United Nations Economic Development Goals and participation with all the Arctic states and observer countries. India aims to establish digital partnership with Arctic countries to promote e-commerce in the region. In the coming years, India would also be interested in undertaking infrastructure development projects such as rail, roads, ports, airport and developing Information and Communication technology (ICT) projects in the Arctic.

Under its Human Development pillar, India plans to share its expertise and gain knowledge in governance and welfare of the Arctic indigenous communities. The policy encourages Indian tourism to the Arctic region as well as collaboration in developing traditional medicine and healthcare system through its knowledge expertise of Ayurveda, Sidha and Unani.



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Figure 1: Map showing Arctic Circle and major shipping routes connecting Europe with Asia

Transport and Connectivity

India's Arctic Policy highlights that ice-free conditions in the Arctic are resulting in the opening of the new shipping route that could reshape global shipping route. Traffic through the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is expected to rise by 80 million tons by 2024. This would require hydrological and meteorological data charts, skilled manpower and efficient communication network in the region. India ranks third in the list of seafarer supplying to nations shipping expertise. Through its well-developed hydrographic capacity, India could assist in the survey and mapping of Arctic routes. India also seeks to participate in the environmental monitoring study to evaluate the predicted emissions of ships likely to traverse through the Arctic region.

Governance and International Cooperation

The Arctic Policy underlines the importance of upholding international law, in particular UNCLOS. It simultaneously calls for India's active participation in international climate change and environmental treaty frameworks. India to note is a member of the International Maritime Organization and the International Hydrographic Organization.

National Capacity Building

The Arctic Policy under its sixth pillar of National Capacity Building calls for enhancing human resource capabilities in the Arctic. From science and exploration, to seafaring and economic cooperation, India

seeks to augment its domestic capacity, capability and awareness on Arctic-related events and strengthen NCPOR and other related institutes. It also seeks to enhance domestic scientific research by expanding earth sciences, biological sciences, geosciences, and space related programmes. The Policy impresses on developing Indian trained manpower in the services sector and skills in maritime insurance, chartering, arbitration and brokerage. Finally it calls on building a wide-ranging institutional base on Arctic maritime, legal, environmental and governance issues.

Arctic News Latest

India releases its first Arctic Policy

On 17th March, 2022 India released its first Arctic Policy. India's Arctic policy aims at strengthening national capabilities and competencies in science and exploration, climate and environmental protection, maritime and economic cooperation with the Arctic region. The policy document aims at strengthening country's institutional and human resource capacities within the government, academic, research and business institutions. It further seeks to for developing better understanding on Arctic climate change and its impact on India's climate, economic and energy security. The policy also aims to study the linkages between the [Polar Regions and the Himalayas](#) from climate change and various other perspectives.

UGC invites proposals for developing course on Arctic

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has invited online proposals from higher education institutions for [development of courses for arctic, polar studies](#). The UGC has asked the vice chancellors of universities, directors of Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), principals of colleges to submit proposals for development of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) at undergraduate (UG), postgraduate (PG) levels for the Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM).

The Indian Antarctic Bill introduced in Lok Sabha

Nearly 40 years after India first signed the Antarctic Treaty, the government has brought in a draft [Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022](#). Earth Sciences Minister Dr Jitender Singh tabled the draft Bill in Lok Sabha on April 1, 2022. The Bill now puts into place a [comprehensive list](#) of regulations related to Antarctic, for such scientific expeditions, as well as for individuals, companies and tourists.

PM Modi participated in second India-Nordic Summit.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 4 May, 2022 participated in the second India-Nordic summit in Copenhagen. The PM pledged to continue to deepen cooperation between the Nordic countries and India and focused the discussions on key issues related to international peace and security, including the conflict in Ukraine, multilateral cooperation, green transition and climate change, the blue economy, innovation and digitalisation. India reaffirmed the

importance of free trade as a driver for achieving inclusive growth and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Some suggested Indian readings on the Arctic

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Non-Traditional Security Centre

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