

Indian Antarctic Bill 2022

The Indian Antarctic Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in April 2022. It is an important piece of legislation since it is the first one in India with respect to the continent of Antarctica. What is the Antarctica Bill? What are its provisions? How is it significant for India? Get answers to all these questions in this article for the [UPSC exam](#).

What is the Antarctica Bill?

The proposed bill is the first domestic legislation in India with regard to Antarctica.

- The Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022 establishes a comprehensive set of regulations for scientific expeditions, as well as individuals, businesses, and tourists visiting Antarctica.
- The bill gives Indian courts jurisdiction over crimes committed on the continent by Indian citizens or foreign citizens participating in Indian expeditions.

Objectives of Antarctica Bill:

- To demilitarize Antarctica.
- To establish it as a zone free of nuclear tests and the disposal of radioactive waste.
- To ensure that it is used for peaceful purposes only.
- To promote international scientific cooperation in Antarctica.
- To set aside disputes over territorial sovereignty.

Need for Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022:

- It is becoming increasingly important to protect the pristine Antarctic environment and the ocean surrounding Antarctica from the exploitation of marine living resources and human presence.
- India expects increased activity in Antarctica in the coming years, necessitating the implementation of domestic protocols.
- For the past 40 years, India has sent expeditions to Antarctica, but these expeditions have been limited by international law.
- There was a need for legislation because there had previously been no recourse for crimes committed during an expedition, including environmental crimes.
- The Antarctic Treaty and subsequent protocols, to which India is a signatory, will gain more legitimacy as a result of domestic legislation.

Antarctica Bill Provisions

In this section, we discuss the important provisions of the Antarctica Bill, 2022.

- The Bill is a comprehensive set of regulations aimed at environmental protection and preserving the region's fragile environment.
- The Bill's most significant provision is the extension of Indian courts' jurisdiction to Antarctica, as well as the investigation and trial of crimes committed on the Antarctic continent.
- The bill establishes a quota system for commercial fishing in the area. However, in accordance with international law, strict guidelines are in place.
- Although the Bill allows Indian tour operators to operate in Antarctica, it is subject to strict regulations.
- The bill also includes detailed environmental protection and waste management standards.

Indian Antarctic Bill 2022 – Significant Aspects

Under this section, you can read the significant features of the Indian Antarctic Bill.

- **Permit System:**
 - The bill establishes a complex permit system for any expedition or individual wishing to travel to the continent. These permits will be issued by a government-created committee.
 - Officials from the Defence, Ministry of External Affairs, Finance, Fisheries, Legal Affairs, Science and Technology, Shipping, Tourism, Environment, Communication, and Space ministries, as well as a member from the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, the National Security Council Secretariat, and experts on Antarctica, will make up the Committee.
 - The Committee has the authority to revoke permits if flaws are discovered or illegal activities are detected.
- **Prohibitions:**
 - Drilling, dredging, excavation, and collection of mineral resources are all prohibited under the bill. The only exception is scientific research that has been approved.
 - Damage to native plants, flying or landing helicopters or operating vessels that may disturb birds and seals, using firearms that may disturb birds and animals, removing soil or biological material native to Antarctica, engaging in any activity that may adversely affect bird and animal habitat, and killing, injuring, or capturing any bird or animal are all strictly prohibited.
 - The introduction of animals, birds, plants or microscopic organisms that are not native to Antarctica is also prohibited.
 - Extraction of species for scientific research needs to be done through a permit.
- **Penalty system:**
 - A separate designated court for crimes committed in Antarctica is proposed in the new Bill.
 - The bill also includes harsh penalties, with the lowest penalty ranging from one to two years in prison and a fine of Rs 10-50 lakh. Extraction of any Antarctic species or introduction of an exotic species to the continent can result in a seven-year prison sentence and a fine of Rs 50 lakh.
 - The penalty for dumping nuclear waste or causing a nuclear explosion can range from 20 years to life in prison, plus a fine of Rs 50 crore.

International Law Governing the Antarctic

- **Antarctica Treaty:**
 - Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, French Republic, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Union of South Africa, Soviet Union, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America signed the Antarctic Treaty in 1959, and it entered into force in 1961.
 - The Treaty applies to the area south of 60 degrees South latitude.
 - The Antarctic Treaty currently has 54 signatories, but only 29 have voting rights at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings.
 - In 1983, India ratified the Antarctic Treaty and was granted consultative status in the same year.
 - Know more about the [Antarctic Treaty](#).
- **Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty**

- The Antarctic Treaty Protocol on Environmental Protection was signed in 1991 and entered into force in 1998.
- Antarctica is designated as a “natural reserve dedicated to peace and science,” according to the treaty. The protocol was signed in Madrid, Spain, in 1991.
- **Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR):**
 - The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) was established in 1980 to protect and preserve the Antarctic environment, specifically the preservation and conservation of Antarctic marine living resources.
- Unlike the Antarctic, the Arctic does not have a comprehensive international treaty governing its regulation.
- It is governed by a complicated web of domestic laws and policies in the Arctic States, as well as international treaties like the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea ([UNCLOS](#)).
- There are numerous ‘Intergovernmental Bodies’ (IGBs) that make up the Arctic region’s governance structure.
- The Arctic Council is one of these IGBs dedicated to discussing and working on Arctic issues such as environmental protection, sustainable development, and indigenous people’s rights.
- Because it is not a treaty body, the [Arctic Council](#) lacks legal personality.

Significance of Antarctica for India:

- Given its wealth of natural resources, Antarctica has grown in importance in today’s geopolitical landscape.
- Because these areas are not part of any territory in the traditional sense of a nation-sovereign state’s territory, their governance has become increasingly important to world powers.
- India ratified the Antarctic Treaty on August 19, 1983, and received observer status the following year. On January 14, 1998, the protocol became effective for India.
- The Indian Antarctic programme includes three permanent research base stations in Antarctica—named Dakshin Gangotri, Maitri, and Bharati. As of today, India has two operational research stations in Antarctica named Maitri (since 1988) and Bharati (commissioned in 2012). Read about India’s research station in the Arctic, [Himadri](#), in the link.