



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the environmental and strategic importance of the Arctic region for India. (250 words)

01 Oct, 2019 GS Paper 2 International Relations

Approach

- Explain the reason for increased significance of the Arctic region in the introduction.
- Mention its importance for India and India's efforts to engage in the Arctic.
- Conclude by giving an approach to gain maximum benefits from the region.

Introduction

The Arctic region has gained strategic relevance due to the opening up of new routes as a result of climate change-induced ice-melt. It has also paved the way for untapped hydrocarbon and mineral resources to be exploited.

The issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the region are overlooked by an intergovernmental forum, the Arctic Council. Though India is not strategically located in the region, yet it has been given the observer status of this forum.

Body

Importance of the Arctic region for India:

Environmental Importance:

- **Raising concerns for Climate change:** India is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. Also, studies indicate a strong correlation of melting Arctic ice and the Indian Monsoons. Therefore, Arctic Council can serve as a platform to raise India's bid for promoting sustainable development.
- **Scientific Research:** Study and research regarding warming of the Arctic will help India to develop an understanding of fast-melting glaciers in the Himalayas, which is referred to as the Third Pole.

Strategic importance

- **Extension of 'Act-East' policy:** An 'Indo-Arctic' initiative as a strategic construct could open political space for India to work with like-minded countries to expand its footprint in the Arctic through its coasts by the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea.
- **Harnessing unexploited potential in Arctic governance:** It provides opportunity to engage with the Arctic nations as well as other observer nations through Working Groups such as the Arctic Frontiers Conference in Norway.
- **Investment opportunity:** The region provides immense opportunity for investment in infrastructure development projects, icebreaker vessels, cargo delivery stations, and scientific activities for Indian firms.

Way Forward

India should take comprehensive measures in the environmental governance and strategic areas that are in consonance with its great-power aspirations. Following steps can be taken to increase its engagement in the region:

- India should utilize its good relations with the member states for cooperating on shared production projects and offshore oil and gas exploration.
 - For ex: Indian projects like ONGC holding stake in Sakhalin-I project, GAIL's 20 year agreement with Russian giant Gazprom for supply of LNG, can be seen in this light.
- India being unable to gain as much as China, Japan and South Korea due to their strategic locations, it should channel its energy towards science and environmental concerns in the region.
- Several research stations in the Arctic are functional all-year-round but India's research station, Himadri is not operational in the winter. In this respect, improved facilities that increase the operability of Himadri will aid its research programme.

Unlike Antarctica, the **Arctic is not considered a 'global commons'**. Therefore, India should steer away from advocating for an Arctic commons and instead, it must ensure that the environment is strongly considered at the centre of all debates at the Arctic Council.

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