



Russia's Nuclear-Powered Icebreaker

For Prelims: Arctic Council, Climate Change, Arctic Region, India's Arctic Policy.

For Mains: India's Arctic Policy. Significance of Arctic for India.

Why in News?

Recently, Russia touted its Arctic power at a flag-raising ceremony and dock launch for two nuclear-powered icebreakers that will ensure year-round navigation in the Western Arctic.

What is the Significance of the Russian Icebreakers?

- **To Strengthen Russia's Status as a Great Arctic power:**
 - Both icebreakers were laid down as part of Russia's large-scale, systematic work to re-equip and replenish the domestic icebreaker fleet, to **strengthen Russia's status as a "great Arctic power."**
 - In the last two decades, Russia has reactivated several Soviet era Arctic military bases and upgraded its capabilities.
- **For Studying Arctic Region:**
 - For Russia, it is essential to study and develop the Arctic, **to ensure safe, sustainable navigation in this region, and to increase traffic along the northern sea route.**
- **Cut Down Time to Reach Asia:**
 - The development of this most important transport corridor will **allow Russia to more fully unlock its export potential** and establish efficient logistics routes, including to South East Asia.
 - For Russia, the opening of the Northern Sea Route will cut down time to reach Asia by up to two weeks compared to the current route via the Suez Canal

What is the Significance of the Arctic Region?

- **Economic Significance:**
 - The Arctic region has **rich deposits of coal, gypsum and diamonds** and also substantial reserves of zinc, lead, placer gold and quartz. [Greenland](#) alone possesses about a quarter of the world's rare earth reserves.
 - The Arctic already supplies the world with **roughly 10% of its oil and 25% of its natural gas**, mostly from onshore sources. It is also estimated to hold 22% of the Earth's undiscovered oil and natural gas reserves.
- **Geographical Significance:** The Arctic **helps circulate the world's [ocean currents](#)**, moving cold and warm water around the globe.
 - Also, Arctic Sea ice acts as a **huge white reflector at the top of the planet**, bouncing some of the sun's rays back into space, helping keep the Earth at an even temperature.
- **Strategic Importance:**
 - The **Arctic is taking on greater strategic significance** due to [climate change](#), as a shrinking ice cap opens up new sea lanes.

- There has been a **race among Arctic states and near-arctic states to augment their capabilities** in a bid to be ready to capitalize on the melting Arctic.
 - **Eg:** [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) has been conducting regular exercises in the region.
 - **China, which calls itself a near-Arctic state**, has also announced an ambitious plan for a polar silk route to connect to Europe.
- **Environmental Significance:**
 - The Arctic and the [Himalayas](#), though geographically distant, **are interconnected and share similar concerns.**
 - The Arctic meltdown is **helping the scientific community to better understand the glacial melt in the Himalayas**, which has often been referred to as the ‘third pole’ and has the largest freshwater reserves after the North and South poles.

Where does India stand with respect to the Arctic?

- Since 2007, **India has an Arctic research programme** with as many as 13 expeditions undertaken till date.
- In March 2022, **India unveiled its first Arctic policy** titled: ‘India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development’.
 - **The policy lays down six pillars:** strengthening India’s scientific research and cooperation, climate and environmental protection, economic and human development, transportation and connectivity, governance and international cooperation, and national capacity building in the Arctic region.
- India is also one of the **13 Observers in the Arctic Council**, the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic.
 - The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental body that promotes research and facilitates cooperation among Arctic countries on issues related to the environmental protection and sustainable development of the [Arctic region](#).

What is the Arctic?

- The Arctic is a polar region located at the northernmost part of Earth.
- Land within the Arctic region has seasonally varying snow and ice cover.
- It consists of the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas, and parts of Alaska (United States), Canada, Finland, Greenland (Denmark), Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden.

Way Forward

- As the earth further heats up, which is more profound at the poles, **the race for the Arctic is set to accelerate which makes the Arctic the next geopolitical hotspot** with all interests converging on it – environmental, economic, political and military.
- India’s Arctic Policy is timely and is likely to provide a direction to India’s policy-makers on contours of India’s engagement with the region.
- There is a **need to promote safe and sustainable resource exploration and development in the arctic region**, with efficient multilateral actions taking into account cumulative environmental impacts.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following countries: (2014)

1. Denmark
2. Japan

3. Russian Federation
4. United Kingdom
5. United States of America

Which of the above are the members of the 'Arctic Council'?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
(b) 2, 3 and 4
(c) 1, 4 and 5
(d) 1, 3 and 5

Ans: (d)

Exp:

- 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, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.
- The **1996 Ottawa Declaration** established the 'Arctic Council'. The Declaration lists the following countries as members of the Arctic Council: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States. **Hence, 1, 3 and 5 are correct.**
- Japan and United Kingdom are not the member states of the Arctic Council. However, they have been accorded with observer status. **Hence, 2 and 4 are not correct.**
- The Arctic Council's mandate, as articulated in the Ottawa Declaration, explicitly excludes military security.
- **Therefore, option (d) is the correct answer.**

Mains

Q.1 Why is India taking keen interest in the resources of the Arctic region? **(2018)**

Q.2 What is the economic significance of the discovery of oil in the Arctic Sea and its possible environmental consequences? **(2015)**

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