

What is Indian Antarctic Bill 2022?

- The Indian Antarctic Bill 2022 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Friday, with the goal of establishing India's own national measures for conserving the Antarctic environment, as well as its dependent and linked ecosystems, by extending Indian laws to the southern continent.
- Among Bill's various scientific and research-related provisions, it mentions "optimal use of government resources and formation of public partnership structures to promote and harness the full potential of benefits available under the Antarctic Treaty, including Antarctic Tourism."



Aims of the Indian Antarctic Bill 2022

- To establish national policies to conserve the Antarctic environment and ecosystems, as well as to give the Antarctic Treaty effect.
- Through a well-established legislative structure, create a unified policy framework for India's Antarctic initiatives.
- Facilitate Indian Antarctic programme initiatives, such as Antarctic tourism management and sustainable fisheries development.
- To make it illegal for Indian expeditions to Antarctica or certain operations in Antarctica to take place without a permit or written permission from another party to the agreement.
- To provide for inspection in India by a central government-designated inspector, as well as the formation of an inspection team to conduct inspections in Antarctica.

The committee on Antarctic Governance is a key element

- It will allow the government to form an Antarctic governance and environmental protection committee that will monitor, implement, and assure compliance with key international laws, emissions standards, and protection norms.
- The panel will be chaired by the secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, who will serve as an ex officio member.
- Since 2018, he has also served as vice-president of the International Science Council's Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, among other things.
- The committee will consist of ten members drawn from the Union government's numerous ministries, agencies, and organisations, as well as two specialists on the Antarctic environment or other related topics.

Concerning the Antarctic Treaty

- Antarctica covers 14 million square kilometers and has no indigenous population (i.e. "Antarcticans" don't exist).
- Throughout the year, though, a few thousand people live there, in some 40 research stations distributed across the continent.
- The 'Antarctic Treaty' was signed in 1959 by 12 countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Their goal was to keep the continent from becoming militarized and to make it a hub for peaceful activity.
- Later, more countries, including India, joined the treaty, bringing the total number of signatories to over 54.
- To ensure conformity with the protocol, the treaty requires each party to take suitable steps within its jurisdiction, such as the passage of laws and regulations, administrative proceedings, and enforcement measures.
- In 1991, countries ratified the Antarctic Treaty's 'Protocol on Environmental Protection,' which designates Antarctica as a "natural reserve, devoted to peace and science."

The Antarctic Legislation is Required

- The government was pushed to develop domestic law commensurate with its commitments as a member of the Antarctic Treaty system by the expanding presence of Indian scientists in Antarctica and their dedication to Antarctic research and protection.
- These laws will allow India's courts to deal with disputes or crimes committed in areas of Antarctica, as well as help India's participation gain credibility.

At the Poles, India

- On the continent, India has two research stations: 'Maitri' (founded in 1989) in the Schirmacher Hills and 'Bharati' (2012) in the Larsemann Hills.
- So far, it has launched 41 scientific missions per year.
- India joins an elite group of countries having various research stations in the polar areas, including the 'Himadri' station in Svalbard, above the Arctic Circle.