



Covid in Antarctica

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Why in News

36 people at a Chilean research station in Antarctica have been found infected with the **novel coronavirus**. This is the **first instance of the virus** Antarctica.

Key Points

- Antarctica is uninhabited except for those manning the nearly **60 permanent stations** established by **several countries**, including India, for carrying out scientific research.
- Antarctica is **Earth's southernmost continent**. It contains the geographic South Pole and is situated in the **Antarctic region of the Southern Hemisphere**.
At 14,000,000 square kilometres (5,400,000 square miles), it is the **fifth-largest continent**.
- The **Indian Antarctic Programme** is a multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional programme under the control of the **National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research, Ministry of Earth Sciences**.
- India officially acceded to the **Antarctic Treaty System** in August **1983**.

- **Research Stations in the Antarctic:**
 - **Dakshin Gangotri:**
 - Dakshin Gangotri was the **first Indian scientific research base station** established in Antarctica, as a part of the Indian Antarctic Program.
 - It has weakened and become **just a supply base**.
 - **Maitri:**
 - Maitri is India's second **permanent research station** in Antarctica. It was built and finished in 1989.
 - Maitri is situated on the rocky mountainous region called **Schirmacher Oasis**. India also built a freshwater lake around Maitri known as **Lake Priyadarshini**.
 - **Bharti:**
 - Bharti, India's latest research station operation **since 2012**. It has been constructed to help researchers work in safety despite the harsh weather.
 - It is India's first committed research facility and is located about **3000 km east of Maitri**.
 - **Other Research Facilities:**
 - Sagar Nidhi:**
 1. In 2008, India commissioned the Sagar Nidhi, for research.
 2. An ice-class vessel, it can cut through the thin ice of 40 cm depth and is the first Indian vessel to **navigate Antarctic waters**.

Antarctic Treaty System

- Antarctic Treaty and related agreements are collectively known as the Antarctic Treaty System.
- It regulates **international relations with respect to Antarctica**.
- Antarctica is defined as all of the land and ice shelves **south of 60°S latitude**.
- Antarctic Treaty Secretariat Headquarters is in **Buenos Aires, Argentina**.
- **Antarctic treaty:**
 - Entered into force in **1961**
 - Currently has **53 parties**
 - Sets aside Antarctica as a **scientific preserve**
 - **Provisions:**
 - Antarctica shall be **used for peaceful purposes only**.
 - Freedom of scientific investigation in Antarctica and cooperation toward that end shall continue.
 - Scientific observations and results from Antarctica shall be exchanged and **made freely available**.

National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research

- National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) was established as an autonomous research and development institution of the **Ministry of Earth Sciences in 1998**.
- It is located in **Goa**.
- It is responsible for the country's research activities in the **Polar and Southern Ocean realms**.
- It is the nodal agency for planning, promotion, coordination and execution of the entire gamut of polar and southern ocean scientific research in the country as well as for the associated logistics activities.
- **Its major responsibilities include:**
 - Management and upkeep of the Indian Antarctic Research Bases "**Maitri**" and "**Bharati**", and the Indian Arctic base "**Himadri**".
 - Himadri:** India launched its **first scientific expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 2007** and opened a research base named "Himadri" at the **Svalbard, Norway** in July 2008 for carrying out studies in disciplines like Glaciology, Atmospheric sciences & Biological sciences.

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