



India's New Post Office in Antarctica

For Prelims: [National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research \(NCPOR\)](#), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Himadri, [Dakshin Gangotri](#), [Maitri North](#), Indian Antarctic Program, [Antarctic Treaty System](#)

For Mains: Significance of India's Research Station in Antarctica

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the [Department of Posts](#) opened a second branch of the post office at the [Bharati research station](#) in Antarctica after almost four decades.

- Letters intended for [Antarctica](#) will now be addressed with a **new experimental PIN code, MH-1718**, typical for a new branch.
- **Currently, Maitri and Bharati are the two active research stations** that India operates in Antarctica.

What is the Significance of India's Post Office in Antarctica?

- **Historical Context:**
 - In 1984, India set up its **first post office** in Antarctica at [Dakshin Gangotri](#) (India's first research stations).
 - Unfortunately, in 1988-89, Dakshin Gangotri was submerged in ice and was subsequently **decommissioned**.
- **Continuing the Tradition:**
 - India established another post office at the [Maitri research station](#) in **Antarctica** on 26th January 1990.
 - India's two Antarctic research bases, **Maitri and Bharati**, though are 3,000 km apart but both come under the **Goa postal division**.
- **Operational Process:**
 - Letters meant for the post office in Antarctica are sent to the [National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research \(NCPOR\)](#) in **Goa**.
 - When a scientific expedition to Antarctica departs from NCPOR, a researcher carries the consignment of letters.
 - At the research base, the letters are 'cancelled', brought back, and returned via post.
 - The term 'cancellation' **refers to the mark placed** on a stamp or postal stationery to render it useless for reuse.
- **Strategic Presence:**
 - The existence of an Indian post office in Antarctica serves a **strategic purpose**.
 - Typically, an Indian post office operates within Indian territory. Antarctica, being foreign and neutral under the [Antarctic Treaty](#), provides a unique opportunity to **assert India's**

presence on the continent.

- It **symbolises India's commitment** to scientific exploration and environmental stewardship.

▪ **Antarctica's Governance:**

- The **Antarctic Treaty** neutralises territorial claims, **prohibits military operations** and nuclear tests, and emphasises scientific discovery.
- Having an Indian post office in this foreign land **aligns with the treaty's spirit**.

What is India's Antarctic Programme?

▪ **About:**

- It is a **scientific research and exploration program** under the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCPOR). It started in 1981 when the first Indian expedition to Antarctica was made.
 - NCPOR was **established in 1998**.

▪ **Dakshin Gangotri:**

- **Dakshin Gangotri** was the **first Indian scientific research base** station established in Antarctica, as a part of the Indian Antarctic Program.
- However, it **was submerged** in ice in 1988-89 and was subsequently **decommissioned**.

▪ **Maitri:**

- **Maitri** is India's **second permanent research station** in Antarctica. It was built and finished in 1989.
- Maitri is situated in the rocky mountainous region called **Schirmacher Oasis**. India also built a **freshwater lake** around Maitri known as [Lake Priyadarshini](#).

▪ **Bharti:**

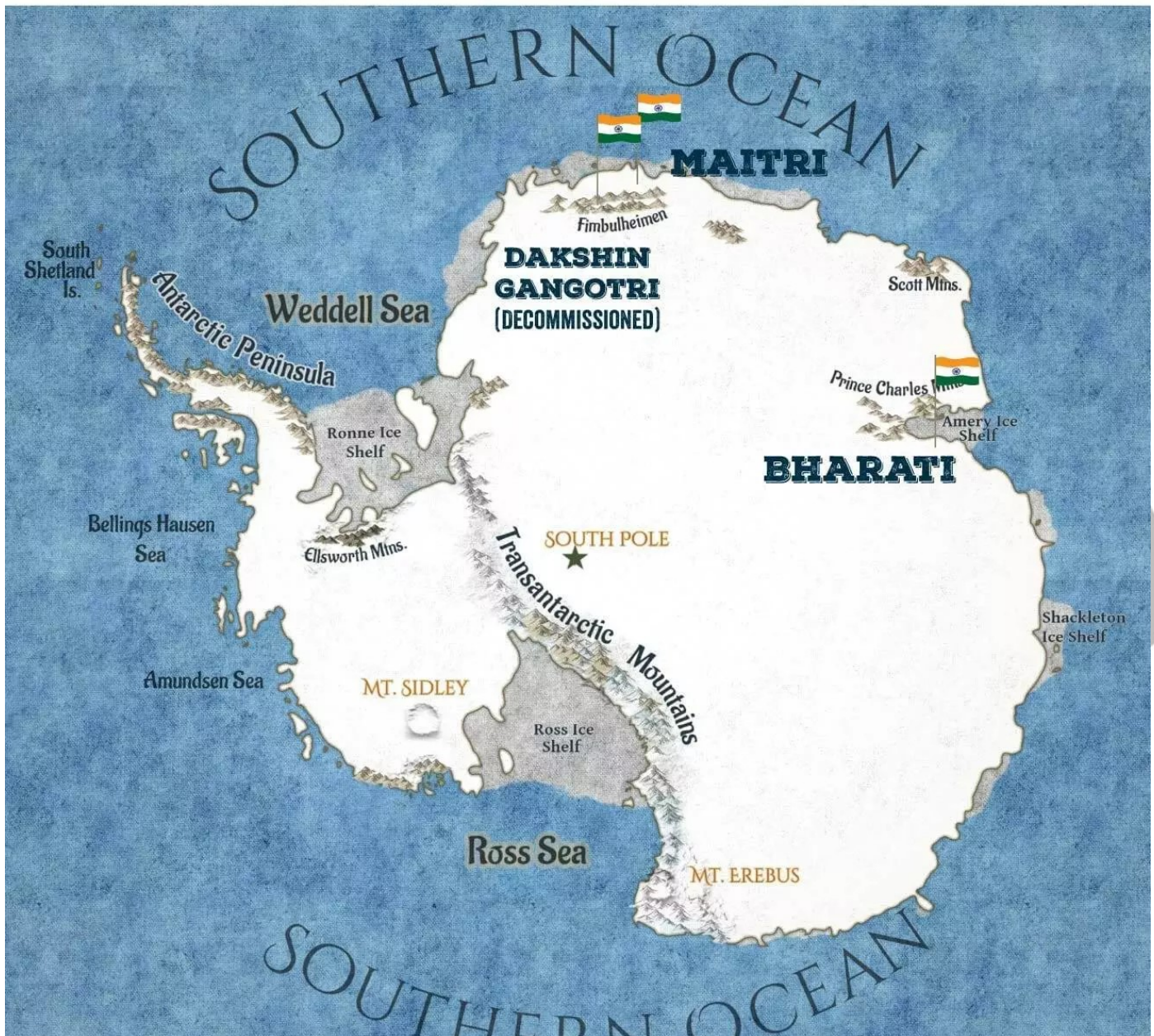
- **Bharti, India's latest research station operation since 2012**. It has been constructed to help researchers work in safety despite the harsh weather.
- It is India's first committed research facility and is located about 3000 km east of Maitri.

▪ **Other Research Facilities:**

◦ **Sagar Nidhi:**

- In 2008, **India commissioned** the **Sagar Nidhi**, the pride of the **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)**, for research.
- An ice-class vessel, it can cut through thin ice of 40 cm depth and is the first **Indian vessel to navigate Antarctic waters**.
- The ship is the first of its kind in the country and has been used several times for the launch and retrieval of remotely operable vehicles (ROV) and the deep-sea nodule mining system, as well as for tsunami studies.

INDIAN RESEARCH STATION IN ANTARCTICA



What is the Antarctic Treaty System?

▪ About:

- It is the whole complex of arrangements made to **regulate relations** among states in the Antarctic.
- Its purpose is to **ensure in the interests of all mankind** that Antarctica shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene or object of international discord.
- It is a global achievement and has been a hallmark of **international cooperation** for more than 50 years.
- These agreements are **legally binding** and purpose-built for the unique geographical, environmental, and political characteristics of the Antarctic and form a robust international **governance framework** for the region.

▪ Challenges:

- While the Antarctic Treaty has been able to successfully respond to a range of challenges, circumstances are radically different in the 2020s compared to the 1950s.
 - Antarctica is much more accessible, partly due to technology but also [climate change](#). More countries now have substantive interests in the continent than the original 12.
 - Some global resources are becoming scarce, especially oil. There is considerable speculation regarding **nations' interests in Antarctic resources, particularly fisheries and minerals**.
 - Therefore, all of the treaty signatories, but especially those with significant stakes in the continent, need to give the future of the treaty more attention.
- **Major International Agreements of the Treaty System:**
 - The 1959 Antarctic Treaty
 - The 1972 Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals
 - The 1980 Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
 - The 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty

National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)

- It was established as an **autonomous Research and Development** Institution of the [Ministry of Earth Sciences](#) on the 25th May 1998.
- Earlier known as the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR), NCPOR is India's premier R&D institution 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 responsibilities include:
 - Management and upkeep of the **Indian Antarctic Research Bases "Maitri" and "Bharati", and the Indian Arctic base "Himadri"**.
 - Management of the **Ministry's research vessel ORV Sagar Kanya** as well as the other research vessels chartered by the Ministry.
 - The Ocean Research Vehicle (ORV) Sagar Kanya is a versatile ocean observing platform equipped with technologically advanced scientific equipment and related facilities.
- **It is located in the state of Goa.**

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. What are the key achievements and challenges faced by India in its Antarctic endeavours? Also, explain how India's presence in Antarctica contributes to its global standing and scientific capabilities.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. On 21st June, the Sun (2019)

- (a) does not set below the horizon at the Arctic Circle
- (b) does not set below the horizon at Antarctic Circle
- (c) shines vertically overhead at noon on the Equator
- (d) shines vertically overhead at the Tropic of Capricorn

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. How do the melting of the Arctic ice and glaciers of the Antarctic differently affect the weather patterns and human activities on the Earth? Explain. **(2021)**

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

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