

# India to facilitate the first-ever focused working group discussions on Antarctic tourism at the 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) in Kochi

Posted On: 21 MAY 2024 2:36PM by PIB Delhi

India is set to play a pivotal role in facilitating the first-ever focused discussions on regulating tourism in Antarctica at the 46<sup>th</sup> Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) and 26<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP). The occasion was graced by the presence of Union Minister Shri Kiren Rijiju, Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), today. National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa under Ministry of Earth Sciences, and the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat will organize these meetings in Kochi, Kerala, from May 20 to May 30, 2024. The gathering has over 350 participants from nearly 40 nations.



The ATCM and CEP are high-level global annual meetings conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty, a multilateral agreement of 56 Contracting Parties signed in 1959. During these meetings, member countries of the Antarctic Treaty discuss issues pertaining to the science, policy, governance, management, preservation and protection of Antarctica. The CEP was established under the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (the Madrid Protocol) in 1991. The CEP advises the ATCM on environmental protection and conservation in Antarctica.

India has been a Consultative Party to the Antarctic Treaty since 1983. With the other 28 Consultative Parties, India has a crucial role in governing Antarctica's scientific exploration and environmental protection. It has the right to propose and vote on decisions and resolutions made during the ATCM in matters of administration, scientific research, environmental protection, and logistical cooperation. Further, it can establish research stations, conduct scientific programs and logistic operations, enforce environmental regulations and access scientific data and research findings shared by Antarctic Treaty members. The Contracting and Consultative Parties are responsible for compliance with the Antarctic Treaty, environment stewardship, promoting scientific research, and maintaining Antarctica as a zone of peace, free from military activity and territorial claims. The ATCM is administered through the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat headquartered in Argentina.

Dr. M. Ravichandran, Secretary, MoES, and Head of the Indian delegation, while addressing the session, said, "Antarctica represents one of the last frontiers of wilderness and scientific discovery. As stewards of this extraordinary region, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that all activities, including research and tourism, are conducted in a manner that preserves its ecological integrity for future generations. India is

honored to lead this crucial initiative at the 46<sup>th</sup> ATCM, which is expected to bring a series of actionable recommendations to be incorporated into the broader framework of the Antarctic Treaty System." India, being a committed member of the Antarctic Treaty System, recognizes the pressing need to address the growing tourism activities in Antarctica and their potential impact on the continent's fragile environment. With the number of tourists visiting Antarctica increasing significantly over the past few years, tourism has become a front-burner issue, making it crucial that comprehensive regulations be framed to ensure the sustainable and responsible exploration of this unique and pristine region. He further highlighted that India has advocated for a comprehensive, proactive, and effective tourism policy anchored in precautionary principles. Discussions around regulating tourism have been ongoing in ATCMs since 1966, but these have been agenda items, sessions, papers, or resolutions. A dedicated working group for regulating tourism in Antarctica has been formulated for the first time at the 46<sup>th</sup> ATCM, hosted by India.

Dr. Thamban Meloth, Director of NCPOR, informed that India has a legal framework to regulate India's activities in Antarctica, including tourism, through the Indian Antarctic Act enacted in 2022. He said, "The Indian Antarctic Act aligns India's tourism regulations with international standards and collaborates with other Antarctic Treaty nations to achieve common conservation goals.

India hosted the 10<sup>th</sup> SCAR (Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research) conference themed 'Antarctica in a Changing World' for the first time in 2022 and contributed to the International Polar Year celebrations. There have been 11 Indian expeditions to the Southern Ocean, and one each in the Wedell Sea and South Pole. In 2007, India hosted the 30<sup>th</sup> ATCM in New Delhi, underscoring its commitment to the Antarctic Treaty System. India also collaborated with Norway and the UK to study the Antarctic ice shelf and ice rise, and drill ice cores for climate studies.

Dr. Vijay Kumar, Adviser, MoES and Head of the Host Country Secretariat, said, "Over the past four decades, India has established itself as a significant player in Antarctic research, environmental stewardship, and international cooperation within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty System." India will also provide a platform to discuss the possible induction of Canada and Belarus as consultative parties to the Antarctic Treaty System. Canada and Belarus have been signatories to the Antarctic Treaty System since 1988 and 2006, respectively. India's involvement in facilitating discussions for the induction of new consultative parties aligns with its broader objectives of promoting scientific research and international cooperation in Antarctica.

"The collaborative efforts of nations within the Antarctic Treaty System are crucial in preserving the pristine environment and advancing scientific research in Antarctica. Through its leadership and commitment, India continues to play a key role in shaping the future of Antarctic governance," said Ambassador Pankaj Saran, who was elected as the Chairperson of the 46<sup>th</sup> ATCM and 26<sup>th</sup> CEP.

The 46th ATCM plenary session included an invited talk by Padma Bhushan Dr. Shailesh Nayak, former Secretary of MoES, entitled 'Antarctica and Climate Change'. Shri Pavan Kapoor, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs, was also graced at the event.

\*\*\*\*

**PK/PSM**

(Release ID: 2021213)