

## Briefing Note

# Rashtriya Raksha University Steering Global Sustainability: India's First International Workshop on Polar Region Policy - A Commitment towards the Global Partnerships and Sustainable Approaches as it's "Our Planet, Our Responsibility"

Manish Kumar Singh

*Rashtriya Raksha University, an institution of national importance under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, took a significant step towards fostering global partnerships and sustainable approaches by hosting India's first International Workshop on "India's Polar Region Policy Towards Building Partnership with Sustainable Approach" on March 12th – 13th, 2024. This event was a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), and the University of the Arctic (UArctic) Network. The workshop was a testament to India's commitment to engaging with polar region policies, focusing on sustainable approaches and global partnerships, all under the theme "Our Planet, Our Responsibility."*

## Keynote Addresses

**Prof. (Dr.) Bimal N. Patel** shed light on the recent strategic developments such as the signing of a Free Trade Agreement with the European Free Trade Association. He delved into the details of India's enhanced engagement in the polar regions, stressing upon the importance of environmental protection and scientific research. He further highlighted the legal policy framework, such as "The Indian Antarctic Act, 2022" and "The India's Arctic Policy, 2021." In his concluding remarks, he called out like-minded states towards global cooperation for dedicating the region to science and betterment of humankind, maintaining peace and stability in the polar regions.

**Rear Admiral TVN Prasanna** praised the initiative taken by RRU in the field of maritime and polar law and governance. He emphasized the significance of recent policy formulations including the Antarctic Act and Arctic Policy. Furthermore, pointing out the key development, 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) to be held in Kochi, India.

**Amb Pankaj Saran** commended the Indian government's efforts in establishing a national security-oriented university and discussed India's longstanding connection with the polar regions. He highlighted the global interconnectedness that climate change and economic growth entail, advocating for a robust polar law and governance framework for enhanced capacity development for the future generations.

## Thematic Discussions

### I) Polar Science

**Dr. Rasik Ravindra** emphasized the interconnected role of science in India's Arctic and Antarctic policies. Further emphasizing its importance in strategic planning and environmental protection in the polar region. He noted that India's commitment to the Antarctic Treaty and the Madrid Protocol, is clearly reflected in the Indian Antarctic Act (2022) and the Arctic Policy. Questioning whether science or geopolitical manoeuvring drives nations' actions in Antarctica.

**Dr. Naresh Chandra Pant** highlighted India's Arctic connection and a need for strategic preparation due to climate change and geopolitical shifts. He emphasized upon bridging the scientific research and policy formation, noting the challenges in understanding Earth's system. He highlighted the importance of research on Antarctica's ice to study historical greenhouse gas levels and the complexity of Antarctic governance.

**Dr. Rahul Mohan** elaborately discussed Antarctica's role in international cooperation among states and climate change research, its history and territorial claims. He highlighted India's interest in the continent, the Antarctic Treaty System, and India's Antarctic Scientific Programme. He also mentioned "The Indian Antarctic Act, 2022", which addresses environmental emergencies.

### II) Polar Security

**Ms. Cecilia Ines Silberberg** underscored Argentina's commitment to the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), its operation of 13 Antarctic bases, and the challenges it faces, including climate change and expanding fishing activities. She mentioned Argentina's leadership in Antarctic tourism and environmental protection negotiations, and potential Argentina-India cooperation in Antarctic research.

**Prof. Lassi Heininen** discussed 'security' and 'functional cooperation' in the Arctic, emphasizing the 'Arctic Model' as a zone of peace and cooperation. He highlighted the role of 'sustainable development' in cross-border cooperation and the importance of knowledge transfer. He noted the Arctic's militarization, the need for legal certainty, and the potential gains from continued cooperation.

**Dr. Irina Strelnikova** and **Dr. Ekaterina Serova** explored India's strategic interests in the Arctic, particularly in partnership with Russia, highlighting the importance of environmental protection and research.

**Prof. Rasmus Gjedso Bertelsen** discussed the impact of historical international affairs on Arctic law and world order, noting the shift from a bipolar to a unipolar order post-Cold War. They highlighted the influence of Russia's transformation and organizations like the WTO, EU, and NATO. They contrasted the GDP in the Arctic with China's BRICS++ pursuits and emphasized the strategic implications of USA-Russia, China-Russia, and China-USA relationships. Despite US advocacy for a rule-based order, Arctic tensions persist.

### III) Polar Law and Governance

**H.E. Mr. Juan Angulo** highlighted Chile's active role in the Antarctic Treaty System, its national policy prioritizing Antarctic research, and its contribution to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research. He highlighted Chile's extensive Antarctic research, historical claim, and joint proposal for a Marine Protected Area. He also mentioned the Chilean International Antarctic Centre, emphasizing the balance between conservation and economic interests.

**Mrs. Kanagavalli Suryanarayana** discussed the Arctic region's complex governance, home to approx. 500,000 Indigenous people, and the need to recognize diverse stakeholders. Highlighting the history of cooperation among Arctic states, the creation of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, and the Arctic Council. She further discussed India's observer role in the Arctic Council, its active contribution towards climate change studies, and collaborations with the member/observer states.

**Prof. Brooks Alexandra Kaiser** highlighted the significant impact of climate change on the Snow Crabs in the Antarctic and shifts in the fishing practices due to their presence. Svalbard became a key harvesting location, with Norway and Russia designating the snow crab as a secondary species. Further discussing the challenges, the methods of conservation and sustainable harvesting, prioritizing the need for global efforts in balancing the economic and ecological principles.

**Mr. Manish Singh** highlighted India's Arctic enforcement mechanisms, emphasizing maritime law and sovereignty. He highlighted India's cooperative relations with polar states and commitment to environmental protection. He mentioned India's domestic maritime laws and the Indian Antarctic Act, 2022, reflecting India's commitment to polar law. He emphasized the importance of policy shaping and soft law frameworks in Arctic governance.

### IV) Polar Trade, Geopolitics, and Indigenous People Rights

**H.E. Mr. Kimmo Lähdevirta** discussed the repercussions of rapid climate change in the Arctic, noting new maritime routes and their strategic challenges, along with the shifted security landscape influenced by geopolitical dynamics. He underscored Finland's dedication to sustainable Arctic development, and highlighted the Arctic Council's role in fostering inclusive governance to maintain a peaceful, stable, and sustainable region.

**Capt. Anurag Bisen** highlighted the strategic interests of the USA, Russia, and China in the Arctic, emphasizing the legal and strategic challenges in enhancing scientific cooperation despite the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation. He noted each nation's distinct Arctic policies and investments.

**Dr. Romain Chuffart and Cmde. Debesh Lahiri** focused on the environmental strategies and challenges in Arctic governance, emphasizing the importance of integrating Indigenous rights and addressing logistical difficulties.

### Conclusion: Forging a Path Forward in Polar Region Policy

The workshop successfully fostered dialogue among key stakeholders from various sectors, contributing significantly to the discourse on polar region policies. The discussions highlighted the complexity of challenges in the polar regions, from environmental to geopolitical, and underscored the need for integrated international cooperation in the polar

regions. India's proactive approach in these discussions not only reinforces its commitment to global sustainability but also positions it as a strategic leader in fostering global partnerships. This event has set a precedent for future international cooperation, aiming to ensure the stability, peace, and sustainable development of the polar regions.