

40th Indian scientific expedition to Antarctica launched

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India today launched the 40th scientific expedition to Antarctica. This Indian expedition marks four decades of country's scientific endeavour to the southern white continent. The 40th expedition journey will be flagged off from Goa on January 5, 2021, with 43 members onboard. The chartered ice-class vessel MV Vasiliy Golovnin will make this journey and will reach Antarctica in 30 days. After leaving behind a team of 40 members, it would return to India in April 2021. On return, it will also bring back the winter team of the preceding trip.



The Indian Antarctic expeditions began in 1981. The first trip comprised of a team of 21 scientists and support staff led by Dr SZ Qasim. After a humble beginning, the Indian Antarctic programme has now credited to have built three permanent research base stations in Antarctica—named Dakshin Gangotri, Maitri, and Bharati. As of today, India has two operational research stations in Antarctica named Maitri and Bharati. The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa, manages the entire Indian Antarctic program.

The preceding 39th Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica was launched in November 2019. It mounted 27 scientific projects, focusing on climate process and its linkages with climate change, crustal evolution, environmental processes and conservation, the ecosystem of terrestrial and near shore regions, observational research, and polar technology. Two additional collaborative projects with the National Institute of Polar Research, Japan were also undertaken. After completing its mission mandate, it returned to India in May of 2020. It also replenished the annual supplies of food, fuel, provisions, snowmobiles, and spares for operations and maintenance of life support systems at Maitri and Bharati. It cruised a team of 48 members to Antarctica for winter operations.

The scientific and logistic activities of the 40th Indian Antarctic expedition are limited due to the existing challenges associated with COVID-19 pandemic. The focus is to support the ongoing scientific projects on climate change, geology, ocean observations, electric and magnetic flux measurements, environmental monitoring; resupplying of food, fuel, provisions and spare; and accomplishing the return of the winter crew. India is committed to maintaining the continent of Antarctica free of COVID-19. The expedition will duly follow all protocols for the deployment of men and material as per Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs(COMNAP). Extra precautions of sanitizing the cargo, mandatory fourteen days of quarantine (pre-, and post-expedition), and RT-PCR testing before boarding the ice-class vessel is also being conducted.

NB/KGS/(MoES inputs)

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