

INDIA LAUNCHES THE 41ST SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION TO ANTARCTICA

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Physical Geography of Antarctica incl. important Geopolitical regions

India has successfully launched the 41st Scientific Expedition to Antarctica with the arrival of the first batch of its contingent at the southern white continent. The first batch comprising of 23 scientists and support staff reached the Indian Antarctic station Maitri on last week. Four more batches shall be landing in Antarctica by air using DROMLAN facility and onboard chartered ice-class vessel MV VasilyGolovnin by mid-January 2022.

The 41st expedition has two major programs. The first program encompasses geological exploration of the Amery ice shelf at Bharati station. This will help explore the link between India and Antarctica in the past. The second program involves reconnaissance surveys and preparatory work for drilling of 500 meters of ice core near Maitri. It will help in improving the understanding of Antarctic climate, westerly winds, sea-ice and greenhouse gases from a single climate archive for past 10,000 years. The ice core drilling will be done in collaboration with the British Antarctic Survey and the Norwegian Polar Institute. In addition to accomplishing scientific programs, it will replenish the annual supplies of food, fuel, provisions, and spares for operations and maintenance of life support systems at Maitri and Bharati.

The Indian Antarctic program, which began in 1981, has completed 40 scientific expeditions, and built three permanent research base stations in Antarctica, named DakshinGangotri (1983), Maitri (1988) and Bharati (2012). As of today, Maitri and Bharati are fully operational. The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa—an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Earth Sciences—manages the entire Indian Antarctic program.

As India is committed to maintaining the continent of Antarctica free of COVID-19 and the highest standards of safety, the Indian contingent has reached Antarctica following a strict medical examination at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi; training for snow-ice acclimatization and survival at the Mountaineering and Skiing Institute, ITBP Auli, Uttarakhand; and a stringent sanitary protocol including a 14 days quarantine at Cape Town, South Africa.

The crew is expected to return to Cape Town in late March/early April of 2022, leaving a team of 48 members for over winter. It will also bring back the over winter team of the preceding 40th expedition. The 41st expedition is being led by Dr. Shailendra Saini, Scientist National Centre for Polar & Ocean Research (Voyage Leader), Shri. HuidromNageshwar Singh, Metrologist, India Metrological Department (Leader, Maitri Station) and Shri. AnoopKalayilSoman, scientist Indian Institute of Geomagnetism (Leader, Bharati Station)

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