

7. Antarctic Law- International Relation

How is China framing its Antarctic ambitions?

In late 2025, China proposed the 'Antarctic Activities and Environmental Protection Law', a landmark domestic legislation aimed at regulating its expanding footprint in the southernmost continent. This move signals China's transition from a participant in Antarctic exploration to a proactive "rule-shaper" within the global Antarctic Treaty System (ATS).

Key Provisions of China's Proposed Legislation

The draft law, consisting of 57 articles, focuses on governance, environmental safeguards, and legal liability.

Extraterritorial Jurisdiction- Applies to Chinese citizens, legal entities, and foreign expeditions organized in or departing from China.

Licensing Regime- Mandates compulsory permits for all activities, including scientific research, tourism, fishing, and shipping.

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)- Strict protocols for waste management and marine pollution must be cleared before any activity commences.

Prohibited Activities- * Military Operations- Bans weapons testing and troop deployments (peaceful use only).

Mineral Mining- Strictly prohibited except for purely scientific research.

Grey Zone Regulation- Formally regulates emerging sectors like Antarctic tourism and krill fishing, which were previously in a legal blind spot.

Comparative Analysis- China vs. India Antarctic Laws

Feature	China- Proposed Law (2025-26)	India- Antarctic Act (2022)
Primary Goal	Transition to "Rule-Shaper" in ATS	Protect environment; give effect to ATS
Permit Authority	National People's Congress/State Council	Committee on Antarctic Governance (CAG-EP)
Scope of Jurisdiction	Citizens & anyone departing from China	Citizens, Indian companies, & Indian vessels
Key Prohibitions	Mining and Military activities	Nuclear tests, mining, and non-native species
Criminal Liability	Specific articles on "legal liability"	20 years to Life for nuclear violations
Nodal Agency	Noted as multiple state organs	NCPOR (Goa)

India's Presence and Operational Infrastructure

India has maintained a continuous presence in Antarctica since 1981, operating under the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR).

Active and Historical Stations

Dakshin Gangotri (1983)- India's first station; now used as a supply base after being buried in ice.

Maitri Station (1989)- Located at Schirmacher Oasis. India constructed Lake Priyadarshini (a freshwater lake) nearby to sustain its year-round operations.

Bharati Station (2012)- A state-of-the-art facility in the Larsemann Hills, focused on oceanography and atmospheric sciences.

Maitri-II (Upcoming)- Approved with an outlay of ₹2,000 crore, it is expected to be operational by **January 2029** (replacing the aging Maitri station).

Strategic Way Forward for India

As China solidifies its legal and physical infrastructure, India is focusing on Strategic Autonomy and

Scientific Credibility.

Operationalizing the 2022 Act- Establishing the Antarctic Fund and enforcing strict inspection systems for Indian tour operators.

Logistics Independence- Reducing reliance on chartered foreign ships by acquiring a dedicated Polar Research Vessel (PRV).

Strategic Partnerships- Collaborating with "Consultative Parties" like Australia, France, and Norway to ensure the Antarctic remains a "Global Common" free from unilateral claims.

Monsoon Research- Deepening the study of teleconnections between Antarctic ice melt and the Indian monsoon system to maintain scientific leadership.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/how-is-china-framing-its-antarctic-ambitions-explained/article70553958.ece>

