A Peep into Logistic Operations in Antarctica

Logistics is the art of careful organization of a complicated activity so that it happens in a successful and effective way. Its definition varies with the nature of activity or kind of operation, be it; Business, Government, Military, Construction, Social, Travel, Health Care, Transportation, Scientific, Religious etc. Managing logistics in civilized areas of the globe is relatively simpler compared to harsh, unsympathetic, desolate and forsaken place like Antarctica perhaps, because of lack of opportunity for year round connectivity with the mainland.

Most campaigns engage in one or few aspects of logistic activity but the Indian Antarctic Operations handles multi modular responsibility as enabler of scientific research in Antarctica which primarily incorporates planning and optimization of resource including team building and trainings. It manages Indian infrastructure in Antarctica; organises procurement &transportation of inventories; hiring, deployment and management of ship, helicopter and air-networks and also maintaining public relations, collaborations with national and international agencies.

Indian Antarctic Programme commenced in 1981 and after operating from ship and temporary shelters for two years the first permanent research station “Dakshin Gangotri” was established in 1983 followed by Maitri in 1987 and Bharati in 2012. Dakshin Gangotri got buried, in about three years, under accumulated snow but continued until 1991 when it was decommissioned and abandoned. With commissioning of Bhartai and start of regular year round operations the logistic activities have grown manifolds mainly because of diverse requirements at both stations and management of inventories. With a narrow window of opportunity between November and February for both stations, Maitri and manned and stocked with food, medical supplies, diverse spares for life support systems and all sorts of inventories that can be imagined and with no scope for inaccuracies, slips and oversights.

With rapid advances in technology, though the delivery systems have become faster but the beneficiary expectations astronomically elevated and the processes have become more complex. Process design and its implementation has always been a challenge especially for the most beautiful and most unforgiving continent of Antarctica which keeps throwing newer challenges by the day and that added with years of experience and passion has helped evolve a self-propelling system for accurate planning, efficient execution and effective management of its operations which keeps the mission going.