

Lakshadweep

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The Lakshadweep Administration, which is now facing a storm over its draft rules introduced by its Administrator, has now provided a fresh rationale for its proposals, shifting from public policy to public purpose ignoring public interest, whereas the strategic issue is the interplay of ecological fragility, insular cultural geography and strategic location.

In news: State interventions, Lakshadweep's future

Placing it in syllabus: Geography

Dimensions

- Its geography and demography
- Its biodiversity
- Development potential
- State intervention and the latest controversies

Content:

Its geography and demography

- Lakshadweep is an **archipelago** of **36 islands** in the Arabian sea, located 200 to 440 km off of the mainland's southwestern coast..
- It is a **union territory** of India.
- The total area of the Lakshadweep islands is thirty-two square kilometers. The islands form the smallest union territory of India
- The capital of these islands is Kavaratti.
- Only ten islands are inhabited by people. The other 26 left isolated till now.
- Total population of Lakshadweep as per 2011 census is 64,473 of which male and female are 33,123 and 31,350 respectively.
- It has the highest population share of Muslims (96%) and

Scheduled Tribes (94.8%) among the UTs.

- Malayalam is the official as well as the widely spoken native language in the territory.
- The islands have no aboriginal inhabitants. Local traditions attribute the first settlement on these islands to the period of Cheraman Perumal, the last king of Kerala



Geography:

- Its topography is a perfect combination of beautiful islands, coral reefs and atolls, lagoons, crystal clear seawater and the silvery sand beaches.
- Apart from the thirty-six beautiful islands, the union territory of Lakshadweep also contains three reefs, twelve atolls and five banks that are submerged into the Arabian Sea.
- The **atolls** have been **formed because of the coral gathering on the volcanic crests** in the Indian Ocean that **have been submerged long ago**.
- The Lakshadweep soil is made up of **limestone**.
- The soil of Lakshadweep is formed due to the disintegration of limestones from the corals and sedimentary rocks.
- The fine soil that is made up of the coral dust is silvery white in colour and shimmers in a kind of supreme sensational sublimity in the beautiful Lakshadweep beaches.
- As you move towards the interior of the islands, the white coloured soil becomes ash in colour.
- Recently, the entire Lakshadweep group of islands has

been declared as an **organic agricultural area** under the **Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)** of India.

- Currently there are 35 visible islands, as the Parali 1 island is submerged in water due to sea erosion.

Kolkali and Parichakali are the two popular folk art forms in the Territory. They are an integral part of the cultural milieu except in Minicoy where **“LAVA”** is the most popular dance form. Some of the folk dances have a resemblance with those in North Eastern India.

For marriages **“OPPANA”** is a common feature, a song sung by a lead singer and followed by a group of women

Biodiversity:

- The significant aspect of the Lakshadweep atolls is its high biodiversity.
- The Lakshadweep Archipelago, together with the Maldives and the Chagos, forms the **Maldives-Lakshadweep-Chagos Archipelago tropical moist forests ecoregion**.
- In the island ecosystem, a wide variety of flora and fauna are found.
- The coral ecosystem having more than 140 species provides an ideal habitat for a variety of flora and fauna.
- From Lakshadweep 400 species of plants, 101 species of birds and 603 species of marine fishes are recorded.
- The region does not have a rich flora and almost all the plants can be found on the mainland of India. There is also **an absence of forest** in the region.

Development potential:

Tourism:

- The most outstanding strength of the islands is their immensely attractive seascape and the marine wealth.

(The blue water lagoon, corals, coral reefs).

- The unspoilt virgin beaches are a piece of attraction to all connoisseurs, especially international tourists.
- These attractions and the possibilities of sea based aqua sports are not adequately publicized in the international markets

Economic Potential:

- The economic activities of the islands are mainly restricted to the primary sector, fisheries and coconut cultivation being the mainstay.
- Value added activities based on these two resources are also not very popular in the islands.

Real Estate:

- The land area of each of these islands is extremely small and consequently bringing the density of population at a higher level.
- All land-based activities in the islands are restricted for want of adequate vacant land. Moreover, the real estate transactions are allowed only among the islanders and hence outsiders cannot
- own assets in the island.
- All developmental processes can take place only through contractual agreements of leasing for a period of years.

Transportation:

- Transport bottlenecks between mainland and the island, difficulties encountered at embarkation and disembarkation points do not augur pleasant experiences to the tourists at all.
- Non availability of an international airport or even large airport cause considerable rethinking on the part of the international tourists in choice of destination
- Inadequacy of inter-island ferry service in a faster and convenient manner is yet another important constraint in

transport infrastructure.

There are two competing visions for Lakshdweep's future.

- **NITI Aayog, in 2019**, identified **water villas and land-based tourism projects** as the development issue faced by the islands, suggested zoning based on land acquisition and focused on sustainable development ignoring the fragile environment and culture.

The Integrated Island Management Plan prepared under the guidance of the Supreme Court and National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, in **2016**, had rejected 'home stays' in view of the strict social customs and strong resistance of the vast majority. It stipulated that development programmes be implemented in consultation with the elected local self-government bodies adhering to scientifically determined plans.

State intervention and the latest controversies:

- The Lakshadweep Administration is now facing a storm over its draft rules introduced by its Administrator.
- For the local people, and across the political spectrum, these changes are arbitrary, authoritarian and will destroy the way of life.

Two-child norms for Contesting Panchayat Elections

- Under the Draft Panchayat Regulation 2021, the Administration aims to bar people with more than two children from becoming a member of the gram panchayat.
- For those who already have more than two children, the regulation does not disqualify them provided they do not have further children after the date on which the rule comes into effect.

Relaxation of Liquor Sale:

- The Administration has decided to allow liquor to be served at resorts on inhabited islands.
- Currently, prohibition is in place on all inhabited islands, with liquor served only at resorts on the uninhabited Bangaram Island.
- The Dist Collector clarified that liquor permits would be given only to resorts for tourists, not for locals.
- Residents have alleged that the move will lead to a proliferation of liquor sales on the island, which had been observing near-prohibition until now.

Land acquisition powers:

- The Administration brought in a draft **Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation (LDAR)** to oversee the development of towns on the islands, with sweeping changes in the way land can be acquired and utilized.
- It talks of the declaration of 'planning areas' and constitution of 'planning and development authorities' for preparing a land-use map and register, ostensibly for large projects. Lakshadweep Development Authority
- Residents have protested against the way it was prepared and pushed through without consultation.
- They fear large infrastructure and tourism projects can destabilize the ecology, and that the notification gives powers to the Administration to remove small landholdings of ST residents.

Anti-social activities regulation:

- The draft Lakshadweep Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation provides for powers to detain a person for up to one year to prevent him from "acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order".
- It allows for detention for anti-social activities from six months to a year without legal representation.
- The Collector said while the island remains peaceful,

there have been reports of drugs being found along with weapons and live ammunition.

- He said the regulation is required to keep the “youth from getting misguided by illegal businesses”.
- Residents are skeptical of the need for such stringent law in a UT with one of the lowest crime rates in the country. They allege it has been brought in to arrest those opposed to the Administration.

Cow slaughter & beef ban:

- An order from the Administration seeks to ban the slaughter of cow, calf, bull, and buffalo without a certificate from a competent authority.
- It prohibits the sale, transport, and storage of beef and beef products. Penalties include a jail term of up to one year and a fine of Rs 10,000.
- The Administration has not provided an explanation on why the rule was brought in.
- Residents view the rule as a direct infringement on their culture and eating habits. They allege the rule was decided without consultation with local bodies.

Mould your thought: Write a short note on the geography, demography and the development potential of Lakshadweep Islands

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Discuss the location and geography of the islands
- Mention the demographic details including social/ population composition
- Discuss the potential for tourism, infrastructure, transport development
- Conclusion