

ISLANDERS SEEK WITHDRAWAL OF LAND NORMS IN LAKSHADWEEP

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A slew of regulations introduced by the new administrator Praful Khoda Patel of the Lakshadweep group of islands has sparked discontent among its inhabitants.

Islanders have pointed out that the legislation are out of sync with the social and environmental realities of the archipelago. Mr Patel, a BJP leader and former Home Minister of Gujarat, is the first political appointee as Administrator, a post mostly held by retired civil servants. The creation of the Lakshadweep Development Authority (LDA), with extensive powers, including eviction of land owners, is widely read as having been pushed by the real estate lobby and against the interest of the islanders.

Hundreds of islanders have written to the administrator demanding the withdrawal of the proposed regulation, which makes “provision for the orderly and progressive development of land in both urban and rural areas and to preserve and improve the amenities thereof; for the grant of permission to develop land and for other powers of control over the use of land; to confer additional powers in respect of the acquisition and development of land for planning; and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid.”

The regulation empowers the government, identified as the administrator, to constitute Planning and Development Authorities (PDAs) to plan the development of any area identified as having “bad layout or obsolete development”. An authority thus created would be a corporate body with a government-appointed chairman, a town planning officer and three “expert” government nominees besides two local authority representatives.

The islanders opposing the plan have pointed out that the ecologically fragile islands are tiny and thickly populated. “What sort of highway or tram-way you are planning to construct in that area?” asks Koya Arafah Mirage, lawyer and leader of Nationalist Youth Congress.

One of the petitions seeking the withdrawal of the regulation says the legislation vests extensive powers with the authority, allowing it to prepare comprehensive development plans for any area and relocate people.

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