

India Commences Strategic Defense Development on Lakshadweep's Bitra Island



India has initiated the process to acquire and develop Bitra Island in the Lakshadweep archipelago for strategic defense purposes, citing its critical location and national security relevance. This move, formalized by a notification from the Lakshadweep Revenue Department on Saturday, July 19, 2025, underscores India's deepening commitment to bolstering its maritime security and surveillance capabilities in the Arabian Sea. A Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has begun, expected to conclude within two months.

Bitra is the smallest inhabited island in the Lakshadweep chain, home to approximately 105 families. Its proposed acquisition is driven by its strategic position, about 220 to 440 kilometers off the coast of Kochi, the base for the Indian Navy's Southern Naval Command. The government intends to transfer the entire land area of Bitra to defense and strategic agencies, recognizing its importance for monitoring vital sea lanes and enhancing India's overall naval posture.

This development follows a period of heightened attention on Lakshadweep, particularly after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit in January 2024, which coincided with a diplomatic dispute involving the Maldives. The incident spurred a domestic push for Lakshadweep as an alternative tourism destination and highlighted the strategic value of India's island territories. The Ministry of Defence has also been actively enhancing its military infrastructure in the region, including the commissioning of a new naval base, INS Jatayu, on Minicoy Island.

However, the acquisition plan for Bitra has met with strong opposition from local residents and political leaders. Lakshadweep MP Hamdullah Sayeed has vocally opposed the proposal,

criticizing the administration for initiating the process without sufficient consultation with the islanders. Sayeed, in a video statement, expressed solidarity with the residents, assuring them of his support in fighting the move "politically and legally." Residents voice deep concerns about potential displacement from their ancestral lands, the preservation of their unique culture, and the impact on traditional livelihoods, primarily fishing, as Bitra's lagoon area is crucial for the fishing community.

While the notification states that consultations will be held with stakeholders, including gram sabhas (village councils), it clarifies that their consent is not mandatory under the existing land acquisition laws. This aspect has further fueled local anxieties and prompted legal recourse considerations. As the Social Impact Assessment proceeds, the delicate balance between India's national security imperatives and the rights and concerns of the indigenous island population will remain a focal point of this evolving situation.