Lakshadweep Administrator Row

Why in news?

- Praful K. Patel, a BJP politician from Gujarat, was appointed as Administrator in Lakshadweep in December 2020.
- The draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021 was introduced recently. The proposals have led to many concerns.

What is the controversy over the Administrator?

- Mr. Patel is the first politician to become the Administrator of Lakshadweep.
- Since his arrival in Lakshadweep, he has demonstrated a unique disregard for the people's concerns and priorities.
- In March 2021, the Mumbai police named Mr. Patel as an accused in a case.
- It was related to the death by suicide of seven-time Dadra and Nagar Haveli MP Mohan Delkar.
- Mr. Patel was named in the suicide note.

What are the key provisions in the draft?

- The draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021 gives sweeping powers to the Administrator.
- It offers power to take over land and forcibly relocate people, and proposes harsh punishment to those who resist.
- The consumption or sale of beef, a part of the food habits of many, could be an offence punishable by 7 years in prison.
- Those who have more than two children cannot contest panchayat elections.
- Anyone could be held in prison without reason up to a year, under a new Goonda Act; in a place that has a very low crime rate.
- The traditional livelihood of fishing communities has been impeded by the regulations that deny them access to coastlines.
- Their sheds on the coastal areas have been demolished, saying they violated the Coast Guard Act.
- Dairy farms run by the administration have been shut.

What are the concerns?

- The changes introduced come as a serious threat to the people of Lakshadweep and the fragile ecosystem.
- There is clear absence of any administrative rationale or public good in the above arbitrary measures.
- There are thus fears of other motivations.
- Commercial interests could be at play.
- The land that inhabitants are forced to part with could be transferred to buyers from outside.
- There could also be ill-advised political plans to change the demography of the islands.

What is the larger priority?

- Lakshadweep is an archipelago of 36 islands totalling 32 square kilometres in the Arabian Sea.
- It has had an idyllic existence as a Union Territory (UT), with a population of around 70,000.
- The rationale for carving out UTs as administrative units is to protect the unique cultural and historical situations of their inhabitants.
- This being under threat, people have risen in protest.
- But far from listening to them, the Administrator seems insistent on his plans.
- The Centre is inverting its responsibility to protect into a licence to interfere.
- The Centre should recall the Lakshadweep Administrator and drop his ill-conceived plans.
- The territory and its ecology should be protected and the islanders should be reassured.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering