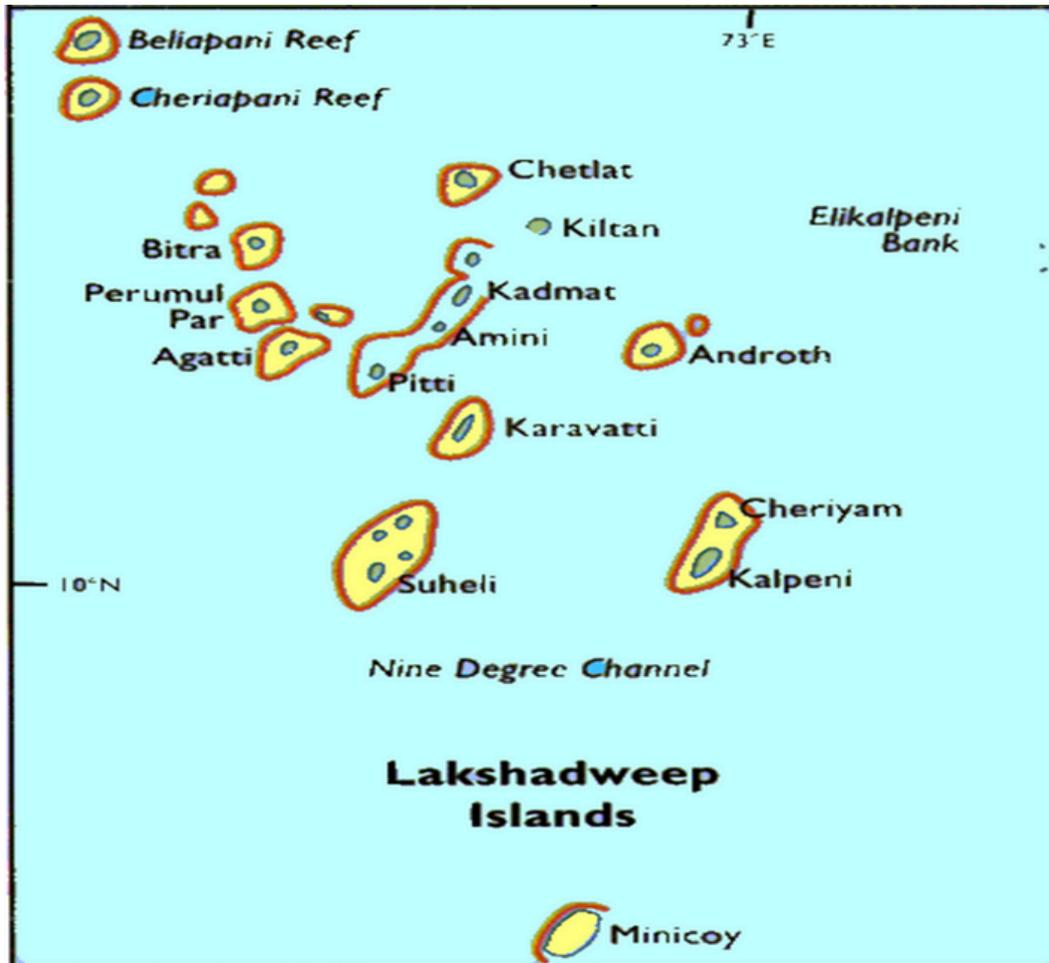




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Context: The Lakshadweep administration has issued a notification to acquire Bitra Island for defense purposes, which has sparked significant opposition from residents and political leaders who cite constitutional and livelihood issues.



About Bitra Island:

- Bitra is recognized as the smallest inhabited island within the Lakshadweep archipelago.
- It covers an area of merely 0.105 square kilometers, with a lagoon area measuring 45.61 square kilometers.
- The island is noted for its ecological importance and the shrine of Malik Mulla, a venerated Arab saint.

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Location and Administrative Control:

- It is situated at coordinates 11°36'N and 72°11'E, approximately 483 kilometers west of Kochi.
- It falls under the jurisdiction of the Union Territory of Lakshadweep, managed by the Lakshadweep Administration.

Geographical and Climatic Features

- The island features a lagoon protected by coral reefs, which ensures calm waters even during the monsoon season.
- The climate is tropical and humid, similar to that of Kerala, with an average annual rainfall of 1600 mm.
- According to the 2011 Census, the population stands at 271 residents, comprising 105 families.

Strategic and Defence Importance:

Geostrategic Location:

- Bitra is positioned along crucial international shipping routes in the Arabian Sea.
- It is in close proximity to the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca route, which are essential for maritime surveillance.

Defence Proposal:

- The island has been proposed for acquisition to establish a defense outpost, thereby enhancing India's maritime domain awareness.
- It would complement INS Dweepakshak (Kavaratti) and INS Jatayu (Minicoy) as part of India's naval presence.

National Security Argument:

- This acquisition is justified on the grounds of strategic positioning and the logistical difficulties associated with maintaining civilian habitation on an island sensitive to defense operations.

Controversy and Protests:

Local Opposition: Residents have initiated a "Save Bitra Island" campaign, which includes public demonstrations and mobilization through social media.

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Legal Framework:

- The acquisition is set to proceed under the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.
- A Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has been mandated, with the survey expected to be completed within two months.

Significance:

- This situation heightens the tension between national security interests and the rights of indigenous residents.