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Q18

Discuss the recent measures initiated in disaster management by the Government of India departing from the earlier reactive approach.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS III · 15 marks · Disaster Management

Disaster and disaster management.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the recent measures initiated in disaster management by the Government of India departing from the earlier reactive approach
- Keep the explanation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

The **DM Act, 2005** institutionalised prevention and preparedness beside relief.

NDMA, **NDRF**, SDMA, and disaster funds are the standing architecture.

Cyclone warning and mass evacuation (Fani, Phailin versus 1999) show the new approach in lives saved.

CDRI (2019) and the PM's DRR agenda push resilient infrastructure, not only tents.

Zoning and building-code failure remain the reactive residue.

Introduction

- **For decades India treated disaster as relief:** a collector's tent after the flood, a finance ministry's ex-gratia. The shift, marked by the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**, is toward **prevention, mitigation, preparedness, and a professional response force**. Recent years added early warning, cyclone drills that actually evacuate, and infrastructure resilience - Sendai in administrative form, not only in a UN speech.

Body

From reactive to a legal-institutional cycle

- **DM Act, 2005** created **NDMA**, **SDMA**, **DDMA**, and a statutory policy-plan-guidelines chain. Relief is one phase; mitigation is supposed to be first.
- **National Disaster Management Plan** (2016, revised later) and hazard-specific **NDMA guidelines** (flood, cyclone, heat, landslide) try to make departments own risk before the event.
- **NDRF** (and **SDRFs**) are standing specialised responders, a break from ad-hoc army-only rescue as the default civil picture - the army still leads many ops, but the civil capacity exists.
- **Finance:** National and State Disaster Response Funds, plus a growing **mitigation fund** logic after the **Fifteenth Finance Commission**, so money is not only post-facto.

Recent measures that show the departure

- **Early warning:** IMD's cyclone track and coastal warning, INCOIS tsunami and ocean, CWC flood forecasts, and last-mile SMS/sirens. **Phailin (2013), Fani (2019), Amphan (2020)** deaths were far below the 1999 Odisha super-cyclone scale because evacuation and warning, not only relief camps, worked.
- **Heat-action plans** (Ahmedabad model spreading), urban flood SOPs, and **school/hospital** safety campaigns - slow, but mitigation-minded.
- **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI, 2019):** India-hosted international coalition so roads, power, and telecom are designed for shocks, not rebuilt after every cyclone.
- **Prime Minister's Ten-Point Agenda** on disaster risk reduction (after the Asian Ministerial Conference): international cooperation, risk mapping, women's leadership, and building codes as politics, not only engineers.
- **Aapda Mitra**, community volunteers, and civil-defence refresh - capacity in the village before the **NDRF** column arrives.
- **GIS, drones, and satellite** (ISRO Disaster Management Support) for maps in hours, which is preparedness technology.
- **COVID-19** as a biological disaster stretched the Act and showed the unfinished shift: health infrastructure is mitigation; one-time PPE airlift is still reactive. The honest lesson is mixed.

What remains reactive

- Encroached floodplains, unsafe hill construction, and relief politics after every urban flood show the old muscle memory.
- Early warning without **enforced zoning** is still a better forecast of a preventable ruin.

Recommendations that fit the new approach

- Make **building-code compliance** and **land-use** the real mitigation spend.
- Integrate **climate projections** into dam and city drainage design.
- Keep **NDRF** professional; do not let every event wait for a ministerial aerial survey to start work.

Flow diagram

Relief after event -> DM Act NDMA NDRF
 DM Act NDMA NDRF -> Early warning evacuation
 DM Act NDMA NDRF -> CDRI codes mitigation funds
 Early warning evacuation -> Fewer deaths per cyclone
 CDRI codes mitigation funds -> Fewer deaths per cyclone

Conclusion

India's departure from a purely reactive culture is the DM Act system, **NDRF**, early warning, cyclone evacuation success, mitigation finance, and CDRI. Relief still happens - it must - but the centre of gravity has moved toward risk reduction. The remaining gap is enforcement of land and codes, where the approach is still too often a cheque after the funeral.

Facts & figures

Disaster Management Act, 2005

Statute that created NDMA and the prevention-preparedness-response cycle.

NDRF

National Disaster Response Force: specialised battalions for rescue, a civil professional arm.

CDRI 2019

Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, launched by India for global and domestic infrastructure resilience.

Fani 2019

Odisha cyclone with large pre-emptive evacuation; often cited against the 1999 death toll.

Sendai Framework

2015-2030 global DRR compact that India's plans formally align with.

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