

# Role of armed forces during disaster relief



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1. Although the man has made extensive progress in his relatively short existence on earth, he is still virtually helpless in front of vagaries of nature. Natural disasters such as cyclones, flood and earthquakes ravage man's domain at will and cause much loss to life and property. Despite everyone's concern for disasters and technological developments in the world, the response to disasters has been knee jerk and uncoordinated at international, national and state levels. The problem is more acute in developing countries rather than in developed ones. The United Nations and its specialised agencies have always had an interest in and commitment to disaster relief. Therefore, there are various disaster relief, preparedness, prevention and mitigation programmes being carried out by various United Nations Organisations[1].

2. The trend of occurrence of disasters is increasing and will escalate in future. Disasters like tsunamis and earthquakes, which have been the most destructive, along with the floods and droughts that arise from extreme weather conditions, are expected to get worse due to adverse impact of climate change. In the 21st century, the 2001 Bhuj earthquake; the 2004 tsunami; the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir; heavy rainfall in Mumbai in 2006 when nearly 1 m rain fell in a single day; the 2008 Bihar Kosi disaster; the August 2010 cloud burst in Leh; and, most recently, the September 2011 Sikkim earthquake have seen the armed forces as first responders[2].

3. In Indian context it is unlikely that the local civil administration will have the resources available immediately to deal with a major disaster such as the earthquake that occurred in Gujarat in 2001 or the Tsunami of 2004.

Therefore, it is essential that the state governments prepare detail disaster

management plans and keep the resources in terms of men and material ready for use at short notice. There is a need for civil administration at the district and state levels to organise disaster relief cells with a pool of reserve. At present due to the inability of local administration to deal with natural calamities, armed forces are invariably employed for disaster relief.

4. In spite of breakdown of communications and the absence of a major strength of troops and resources, the response of the armed forces has always been prompt and won the respect of all concerned. The mainstay and strength of the Armed forces vis-à-vis civilian organisations has been the sense of discipline, training to respond to orders, adaptability, selfless dedication to the cause, genuine concern and focused action. These factors have always resulted in many individuals and NGOs wanting to route assistance through the Armed forces. Seeing the good work being done by the Armed forces, the government organisations, NGOs and civil agencies then join in the relief effort. This generates a spirit of cooperation. The mere presence of Armed forces troops instils a sense of security and gives solace to the affected people[3].

## **Disaster Response Activities**

5. Disaster management, which involves assessment and response, can be seen in various activities. The following are various activities of emergency response.

Warning.

Search and Rescue.

Evacuation and Migration.

Response and Relief.

Logistics and Supply.

Communication and Information Management.

Rehabilitation.

Post-Disaster Assessment[4].

6. Natural calamities impart lessons at a huge cost of life and property. But if these lessons do not lead us to learning, then the cost will seem even heavier. At the time recurrence of disaster, the failure to learn from the previous incidents hurts the most. The massive earthquake in Gujarat and the subsequent chaos were indicators of how important prior planning is in managing relief and rehabilitation during various disasters. The Kutchh region required massive immediate assistance, however civil administration was unprepared for such crisis. Indian armed forces were employed for the relief from the beginning. This made the need for a proper disaster mitigation plan very apparent. Learning from experience is essential in building a knowledge resource which would help in being better prepared in the future.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHODOLOGY**

1. Hypothesis. A common thread in a country's response to disaster situation is military support to civilian authorities. India disaster relief mechanism in

the present form lacks the required synergy between civil and military organisations to facilitate a synergised response.

2. Statement of Problem. The civil administration often falls back on the armed forces for assistance in crisis situations. Efficient disaster management mechanism, therefore, should incorporate the armed forces at each stage. The formulated plans should specify the assistance likely to be required in disaster situations. The most efficient system will be to have seamless integration in operations, with an aim of 'core competency' areas of each establishment giving its best in least time. The aim of the study is to examine the disaster relief mechanism existing in the country and analyze the interplay of various organizations in handling the disaster situation.

#### Justification for the Study

3. Over the past few years, the Government has introduced a paradigm shift in the approach to disasters. Corner stone of this approach is the realisation that disaster management has to be multi-disciplinary and spanning across all the sectors of development. As calamities evoke extraordinary response, the civil authority's reliance on the Armed Forces has also ever increased. Due to their quick response, Armed forces have become a 'mantra' in the hands of the state to respond to such calamities spanning from Law and Order problems to large scale disasters. Despite our country being extremely vulnerable and prone to natural calamities, no detailed hazard and vulnerability assessments have been carried out either at the State or the National level[5].

4. Is the country adequately prepared with infrastructure and strategy against various natural disasters? There are differences of opinion on this issue. According to some, there are certain limitations, but overall, the country is well equipped. Others, however point out that the country does not have detailed vulnerability assessments, forcing it to only respond to calamities and organise reconstruction[6]. It is in this context that this study assumes greater importance. It will analyse various facets of disaster preparedness, evaluate existing structures for disasters management and put forward its recommendations.

5. For the purpose of this study disasters related to war, civil disturbance and slow disasters (Like crop failure, famine etc) will be kept out. Natural disasters (Like floods, earthquake etc) and the response of armed forces in helping civil administration would be the focus of the study. The study is basically confined to the role of Armed forces, to include Air Force and Navy in providing assistance to the civil authorities in all natural calamities.

6. Method of Data Collection. Data and information has been collected from Military Papers, periodicals, newspapers and books. Disaster management setup of the country has been derived from NDMA 2005 & Ministry of Home Affairs documents on disaster management.

## **7. Organisation of the Dissertation. The research paper is covered under the following Chapters :-**

(a) Introduction.

(b) Methodology.

(c) National policy on disaster management.

(d) Role of armed forces.

(e) International disaster relief system.

(f) Current concerns and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **NATIONAL POLICY ON DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

“ As of now, the government has no concrete disaster management policy.

Many disasters are first created by us and then crores of rupees are spent on rescue and relief operations. The government should focus more on a sustainable model of development which can avoid disasters.”

Sunder Lal Bhauguna

1. Evolution of Disaster Management in India. Disaster management in India has evolved from an activity-based reactive setup to a proactive institutionalized structure; from single faculty domain to a multi-stakeholder setup; and from a relief-based approach to a ‘ multi-dimensional pro-active holistic approach for reducing risk’. The beginnings of an institutional structure for disaster management can be traced to the British period following the series of disasters such as famines of 1900, 1905, 1907 & 1943, and the Bihar-Nepal earthquake of 1937. Over the past century, the disaster management in India has undergone substantive changes in its composition, nature and policy[7].

2. Emergence of Institutional Arrangement in India. A permanent and institutionalised setup began in the decade of 1990s with set up of a disaster management cell under the Ministry of Agriculture, following the declaration of the decade of 1990 as the 'International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction' (IDNDR) by the UN General Assembly. Following series of disasters such as Latur Earthquake (1993), Malpa Landslide (1994), Orissa Super Cyclone (1999)

and Bhuj Earthquake (2001), a high powered Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. J. C. Pant, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture was constituted for drawing up a systematic, comprehensive and holistic approach towards disasters[8]. There was a shift in policy from an approach of relief through financial aid to a holistic one for addressing disaster management. Consequently, the disaster management division was shifted under the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2002 and a hierarchical structure for disaster management evolved in India<sup>2</sup>.

#### Organisation and Structure of Disaster Management

3. Disaster management division is headed by Joint Secretary in ministry of home affairs, who is assisted by three Directors, Under Secretaries, Section Officers, Technical Officer, Senior Economic Investigator consultants and other supporting staff. The upper echelon of the structure also consists of Secretary (Border Management), Home Secretary, Minister of State in charge and the Home Minister.

4. Shifting from the relief and response mode, disaster management structure in India started to address the issues of early warning systems,

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forecasting and monitoring setup for various weather related hazards. A structure for flow of information, in the form of warnings, alerts and updates about the oncoming hazard, also emerged in this framework. A high powered group was setup by involving representatives of different ministries and departments. Some of these ministries were also designated as nodal authorities for specific disasters<sup>3</sup>.

#### Disaster Management Act, 2005

5. This Act provides for the effective management of disasters in the country. NDMA provides institutional mechanisms for formulating and monitoring the implementation of the disaster management. It also ensures measures by the various branches of the Government for prevention and mitigation of disasters and prompt response during any disaster situation. The Act provides for setting up of National Disaster Management Authority under Chairmanship of the Prime Minister, State Disaster Management Authorities under the Chairmanship of the Chief Ministers, District Disaster Management Authorities under the Chairmanship of Collectors/District Magistrates/Deputy Commissioners.

6. The Act further provides for the constitution of different Executive Committee at national and state levels. Under its aegis, the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) for capacity building and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for response purpose have been set up. It also mandates the concerned Ministries and Departments to draw up their own plans in accordance with the National Plan. The Act further contains the provisions for financial mechanisms such as creation of funds for response,

National Disaster Mitigation Fund and similar funds at the state and district levels for the purpose of disaster management. The Act also provides specific roles to local bodies in disaster management<sup>4</sup>.

#### National Level Institutions

7. National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was initially constituted on May 30, 2005 under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister. The NDMA has been mandated with laying down policies on disaster management and guidelines which would be followed by different ministries, departments of central government and state government in taking measures for disaster risk reduction. It has also laid down guidelines to be followed by the state government authorities in drawing up the State Plans and to take such measures for the management of disasters, Details of these responsibilities are given as under :-

(a) Lay down policies on disaster management.

(b) Approve the National Plan.

(c) Approve plans prepared by various ministries or departments of the government of India in accordance with the National Plan for disaster management.

(d) Lay down guidelines for the State Authorities in drawing up the State Plan.

(e) Lay down guidelines for the different ministries or departments of the government for the purpose of integrating the measures for prevention of disasters and the mitigation of their effects in their development plans & projects.

(f) Coordinate the implementation of the policy and plan for disaster management within the country.

(g) Recommend provision of funds for the purpose of disaster mitigation.

(h) Provide support to other countries affected by disasters on the recommendation of Central Government.

(j) Take other measures for the prevention of disaster, mitigation, preparedness and capacity building for dealing with the disaster situation .

(k) Lay down policies and guidelines for functioning of the National Institute for Disaster Management[9].

8. Composition of NDMA. Besides the nine members nominated by the Prime Minister, Chairperson of the Authority, the Organisational structure consists of a Secretary and five Joint Secretaries including one Financial Advisor.

There are 10 posts of Joint Advisors and Directors, 14 Assistant Advisors, Under Secretaries and Assistant Financial Advisor and Duty Officer along with supporting staff[10].

9. State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA). The Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides for constitution of SDMAs in all the states and UTs. The Act envisages establishment of State Executive Committee, to be headed by

Chief Secretary of the state Government with four other Secretaries of such departments as the state Government may think fit. It has the responsibility for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the National Policy, the National Plan and the State Plan.

10. District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA). NDMA provides for constitution of DDMA for every district of a state. The District Magistrate/ District Collector/Deputy Commissioner heads the Authority as Chairperson besides an elected representative of the local authority as Co-Chairperson. The District Authority is responsible for planning, coordination and implementation of disaster management and to take such measures for disaster management as provided in the guidelines. The District Authority also has the power to examine the construction in any area in the district to enforce the safety standards and also to arrange for relief measures and respond to the disaster at the district level.

11. National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM). In the backdrop of the International decade of Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), a National centre of disaster management has been established at the Indian Institute for Public Administration in 1995. The Centre was subsequently upgraded and designated as the National Institute of Disaster management on 16th October 2003. Disaster management act, 2005 entrusts the institute with various responsibilities, such as to develop the training modules, undertake research and documentation for disaster management, organise the training programmes, organise study courses, conferences, and seminars to promote disaster management. It is also responsible for publication of journals, research papers and books on disaster management[11].

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12. National Disaster Response Force. The National Disaster Response Force has been constituted under Disaster management act, 2005 by up-gradation/conversion of eight standard battalions of central para military forces i. e. two battalions each from Border Security Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Central Industrial Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force to build them up as a specialist force to respond to disaster or disaster like situations.

13. The eight battalions of NDRF consist of 144 specialised teams trained in various types of natural, manmade and non-natural disasters. 72 of such teams are designed to cater to the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear(CBRN) calamities besides natural calamities. Each NDRF battalion consists of 1149 personnel organised in 18 teams comprising of 45 personnel, who are being equipped and trained for rendering effective response to any disaster situation, both natural and manmade. All these eight battalions are being trained in natural disasters while four of them are being additionally trained for handling CBRN disasters. Based on vulnerability profile of different regions of the country, these specialist battalions have been presently stationed at the following eight places:-

Bhatinda.

Gr. Noida.

Vadodara.

Pune (talegaon).

Bhubaneshwar (mundali).

Kolkata.

Guwahati.

Patna.

Chennai (Arakkonam).[12]

14. The Government of India has approved the raising of two additional battalions of National Disaster Response Force by up gradation and conversion of one battalion each of Border Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force to be located in the states of Bihar (Bihata, Patna) and Andhra Pradesh (Vijaywada) respectively. The administrative approval for raising the two battalions was issued on 13-10- 2010[13].

15. State Disaster Response Force. The states/UTs have also been advised to set up their Specialist Response Force for responding to disasters on the lines of National Disaster Response Force by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Central Government is providing assistance for training of trainers. The state governments have been also advised to utilise 10 percent of their State Disaster Response Fund and Capacity Building Grant for procuring the search and rescue equipment and for training purposes of the Response Force[14].

Civil Defence

16. Role of Civil Defence. During times of emergencies, the CD organisation has the vital role of mobilising the citizens and helping civil administration for saving life and property, minimising damage, and raising public morale. 225 towns have been nominated as CD towns.

17. Each town has nucleus of four Permanent Staff along with 400 CD Volunteers for a two lakh population. It is expected that each state will have one CD Training Institute with permanent strength of 36 personnel, five vehicles and other equipments. The District Magistrate is designated as a Controller for CD Towns. The present strength of CD volunteers is 5. 72 lakhs, out of which 5. 11 lakhs are already trained. The target strength of CD volunteers has been fixed at 13 lakhs based on the population of CD towns as per 2001 census[15].

#### National Crisis Management

18. For effective implementation of necessary relief measures in the wake of a natural disaster, the Cabinet has established a Committee. On the constitution of this committee of the cabinet, the concerned Secretary will provide all the necessary information and data to and seek directions of the cabinet committee in all the matters concerning disaster relief. In the absence of this cabinet Committee, all matters relating to disaster relief will be reported to the Cabinet Secretary.

19. National Crisis Management Committee. A National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) has been constituted in the Cabinet Secretariat. The composition of the Committee is as under[16]:-

- (a) Cabinet Secretary - Chairman.
- (b) Secretary to Prime Minister - Member.
- (c) Secretary (MHA) - Member.

(d) Secretary (MOD) – Member.

(e) Director (IB) – Member.

(f) Secretary (RAW) – Member.

(g) Secretary (Agriculture) – Co-opted Member.

(h) An Officer of Cabinet Secretariat – Convener.

20. Calamities Relief Fund. The government has earmarked two funds i. e. Calamities Relief Fund and National Fund for Calamities. The nodal agency for recommending release of these two funds is the Crisis Management Group in the Ministry of Agriculture, which is headed by Central Relief Commissioner. The allocation for the all the states under these funds is done by the Finance Commission for a duration of five years, based on the vulnerability of the states to Natural calamities and average expenditure. National Fund for Calamities is additional fund besides Calamities Relief Fund ; while 75 percent of CRF is contributed by the centre, the allocation under National Fund for Calamities is entirely by the centre and more or less discretionary[17].

### Forecasting & Warning

21. Forecasting about climate change is pre requisite for taking preparedness measure to respond to the disaster is the most important element of disaster management. The Ministry of Environment & Forest , Ministry of Earth Sciences , Ministry of Science &Technology, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Human Resource



Development, Ministry of Non-conventional Energy, Defence Research & Development Organization, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Indian Space Research Organization and Indian Meteorological Department promote and undertake climate and climate change related research in the country[18].

(a) Atmosphere Watch Stations. A network of 10 Global Atmosphere Watch Stations consisting of Allahabad, Jodhpur, Kodaikanal, Minicoy, Mohanbari, Port Blair, Pune, Nagpur, Srinagar and Vishakhapatnam, is maintained by IMD as per WMO protocols and standards since 1974 to generate data and information on the exchange of trace materials between the atmosphere and the earth's surface, making atmospheric turbidity and air quality measurements to quantify trends and acid rain threats.

(b) Atmospheric monitoring. There are 25 types of atmospheric monitoring networks that are operated and coordinated by the IMD. This includes meteorological, climatologically, environment, air pollution and other specialized observation of atmospheric trace constituents.

(c) Cyclone Warning. The IMD has established an observation network for detecting cyclones through 10 cyclone detection radars along the coasts. The detection range of these radars is 400 km. INSAT-1B satellite also monitors cyclonic movements. Ships and commercial radars are also utilized for cyclonic warnings. About 260 merchant ships have meteorological observation systems.

(d) Flood Forecast. The Ministry of water resources has an effective flood forecast system with 157 flood forecasting centres covering 62 river basins.

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Along with IMD, they monitor rainfall & water levels in the reservoirs. India has also developed radars which give accurate estimate of rainfall up to 200 km around the radar site.

(e) Tsunami warning. Post tsunami dated 26th December, 2004, Ministry of Earth Sciences has established the Indian National Tsunami Warning System at Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad. The Tsunami Early Warning System (TEWS) was made operational on 15th Oct 2007. This agency has developed a protocol for issue for Tsunami Watch, Alert and Warnings. The Centre gives information to all responders about the origin, time, location of the epicentre, magnitude and depth of an earthquake inside the ocean and accordingly issues bulletins.

(f) Avalanche Warning. DRDO's network of more than fifty laboratories is deeply engaged in developing Defence technologies. Centre for Snow and Avalanche Study Establishment (SASE) is one of the laboratories of the DRDO located at Chandigarh with its primary function to do research in the field of snow and avalanches and to provide avalanche control measures and forecasting support to Armed forces.

### Role of Voluntary Organisations

22. The role of voluntary organisations is to help people overcome the problems created by natural calamities by providing relief services to the people. They also works as the eyes and ears by acting as the intermediary between the masses and the government agencies to avoid duplication,

ensure proper distribution of resources and organise vigilance groups for preventing of misuse of resources.

23. Some of the activities under taken by voluntary organisations are:-

(a) Establishing free food distribution centres, distributing blankets, clothes and medicines to prevent epidemics.

(b) Organising necessary relief camps, first aid centres, and immunisation camps.

(c) Organisation relief teams and sending them to far-flung affected areas to provide relief and monitor relief programmes.

(d) Organising awareness programmes about different relief activities initiated by Government and Non Government Organisations.

(e) Generating employment opportunities in the affected areas.

(f) Adoption of families of the affected areas.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ROLE OF ARMED FORCES**

1. The armed forces of any nation are probably best organised to provide support for establishing a various of public services like public works, communications, transport, medical services, search & rescue, and support activities. They are able to react quickly in a self contained, self sufficient and mobile fashion. Armed forces personnel are well trained in the skills necessary to perform their professional activities and can function under an integrated / flexible management system. So there is an enormous potential

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inherent in them to provide enormous capability to restore emergency services.

2. During the natural calamities, when many parts of the country are affected by them and it is beyond the capability of local administration to organise the rescue and relief, armed forces may be called upon to provide / organise relief measures. Armed Forces may also be called upon to provide assistance to other friendly countries, in case this has been requested for. One such example is that of Bangladesh. In 1991, when it was hit by worst cyclone in the history of the country the US armed forces, carried out relief operations[19]. In addition Indian Air Force also sent six helicopters for airlifting relief material to the affected areas.

3. Each year Armed Forces are called upon on several occasions for rendering assistance to civil administration throughout the nation during monsoon season for providing rescue and relief during the floods. The role of the armed forces during relief, rescue operations after Uttarkashi earthquake, Latur earthquake in Maharashtra, Chamoli earthquake and Floods in Orissa are well known.

#### **4. Assistance Provided by Armed Forces. The Armed Forces may be called upon to render following type of assistance during natural calamities[20]:-**

(a) Infrastructure for Command and Control.

(b) Medical Aid.

(c) Transportation of Relief Material.

(d) Establishment of Relief Camps.

(e) Construction and Repair of Roads and Bridges.

(f) Maintenance of Essential Services.

(g) Evacuation of People to Safer Areas.

(h) Stage management of International Relief.

5. Since the civil administration remains ill equipped for undertaking quick response to major disasters, the armed forces has been the primary option. As one of the most dedicated, professional, and modern armed forces in the world, the Indian armed forces respond to any disastrous situation with all their might. It is due to their technical competence, trained manpower, and logistical capabilities that they are always ready to rapidly undertake any kind of disaster-related rescue and relief operations.

6. They are also located in most remote areas where natural calamities are frequent. For instance, when the tsunami hit the Indian coast on December 26, 2004, the Indian armed forces, co-coordinated by the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), efficiently handled relief, rescue, and evacuation work under Operation Sea Wave, including extending aid to Sri Lanka and Maldives under Operation Rainbow and Operation Castor, respectively.

7. Whether, it was the Kashmir earthquake of 2005, the tropical cyclone in Bangladesh in, 2007, the fire at Burrabazar in Kolkata in 2008, the serial blasts at Bangalore and Ahmedabad in 2008, or the Mumbai attack of November 2008, the roles played by the armed forces are numerous. In

August 2010, when Leh, was hit by flash floods which killed many people and left many other injured, the Indian Armed forces's resp