

Together, towards a safer India

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CONTENTS

Massive disaster response to meet the situation created by unprecedented floods in several States

Annual Conference of Secretaries (Disaster Management) and Relief Commissioners

Fire accident in a school in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu

Finalization of National Emergency Communication Plan

Development of new Codes, Handbooks, Commentaries and Manuals on Earthquake Hazard Mitigation

Preparation of training course on Hospital Preparedness for Emergencies (HOPE)

Preparation of a Disaster Management Bill by the North-Eastern Council (NEC)

CII sensitization programme in Chennai

Landslide in Joshimath, Uttaranchal

Progress of Work under GoI-UNDP Disaster Risk Management Programme and the Urban Earthquake Vulnerability Reduction Project (UEVRP)

Central and State Governments mount massive disaster response to meet the situation created by unprecedented floods in several States

During July, the States of Assam and Bihar were affected by very severe floods. A number of rivers crossed their previous Highest Flood Levels (HFL) and continued to flow above danger levels disrupting road, rail and telecommunication links. Parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Daman were also ravaged by floods caused due to incessant rains, breaches of canals and release of water from dams. The Central Government and the concerned State Governments launched a well-coordinated and massive disaster response to handle the grim situation and to provide relief to the affected populace including shifting people to safer places, extending gratuitous relief, distribution of essential commodities, measures for health care, safe drinking water etc.

In Assam, all 27 districts were severely affected due to overflowing of Brahmaputra and Barak rivers and their tributaries at various places. The floods disrupted rail, road and communication links extensively with widespread damage to life and property. A number of roads, bridges and culverts were washed away and large areas remained cut off. Nearly 10, 560 villages, 122.98 lakh population, 28.51 lakh hectare area were affected and 5.89 lakh houses were damaged.

In order to ensure a speedy and efficient response, the Ministry of Home Affairs stationed an officer at Guwahati to coordinate provision of assistance. Experts from ISRO/Deptt. of Space were deployed in different districts with INMARSAT satellite phones and Wireless in Local Loop (WLL) phones for establishing emergency communication links. 128 rakes were specially commissioned to supply essential commodities to Assam. In addition, specialist Search and Rescue teams of CISF along with boats and medical teams were also deployed. Adequate quantities of kerosene, medicines and cattle feed was also made available to the State.

Assistance under the CRF and the NCCF was provided to the State and Hon'ble Prime Minister visited the State to assess the situation. An Inter-Ministerial Central Team was also sent to the State for detailed assessment.

In Bihar, the unprecedented floods made the situation grim for a number of days and many districts remained cut off. Nearly 20 districts including 9360 villages, 212.51 lakh population, 49.86 lakh hectare areas were affected and 8.59 lakh houses were damaged. Traffic on National Highways was paralyzed due to breaches or washing away of bridges or overtopping.

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The Central and the State Governments in a concerted joint effort at providing relief deployed 7840 boats, distributed 29,224 quintals of readymade food and provided polythene sheets, air-dropped food packets, candles, match boxes, kerosene oil and cash assistance to affected population. 10 Army columns were deployed in the worst affected districts of Madhubani, Khagaria, Darbhanga Samastipur and Kishanganj and 10 helicopters were made available to the State for relief and rescue operations. In addition, satellite phones and communication equipment were provided under the GoI-UNDP DRM Programme along with some officers to establish the communication link.

Hon'ble Prime Minister visited Bihar to make an on-the-spot assessment of situation and later on, an Inter-Ministerial Team also visited the State. Requisite assistance under CRF and NCCF was provided to the State of Bihar.

Incessant rains in Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Daman caused extensive damage to roads and telecom links besides damaging houses, bridges, culverts, power houses etc. Army was called in for carrying out flood relief operations in affected areas. The bridge connecting the two parts of Daman Moti Daman and Nani Daman collapsed due to excessive discharge in Daman Ganga river.

The Central Government provided assistance under CRF & NCCF to the affected States besides making the Army and Air Force available to them. Advance release of installations under CRF was made to the States to enable them to meet the flood situation.

Annual Conference of Secretaries (Disaster Management) and Relief Commissioners

The Annual Conference of Secretaries (Disaster Management) and Relief Commissioners of States and UTs was held in Delhi on 3rd July, 2004. In his Welcome Address, Secretary (BM), Ministry of Home Affairs stressed the need for a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach to managing disasters with emphasis on disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness response and relief to ensure sustainable development. Delivering the Keynote Address, the Union Home Secretary highlighted the need for better preparedness for responding to disasters quickly and effectively and called for requisite attitudinal changes, team work and institutional mechanisms in keeping with the change in orientation in the sphere of disaster management.

The Conference was inaugurated by Hon'ble Union Home Minister, Shri Shivraj Patil. In his Inaugural Address, he referred to increase in vulnerabilities to natural hazards due to population growth, industrialization, urbanization and environmental degradation. The goal of sustainable development could be realized only by factoring disaster risk reduction in all spheres of governmental and community efforts. He stressed the need for States to put in place a state policy on disaster management along with appropriate legislative backup so that the framework for action by all departments/agencies of State Governments is clearly laid down. He also emphasized the need for appropriate organizational changes

such as re-designating/ setting-up of Departments of Disaster Management and constitution of functional groups and plans for Emergency Support Functions.



Union Home Minister referred to the initiatives taken to create specialized response capabilities, finalization of National Emergency Operation Centres (EOCs). He called for taking necessary preparedness measures for professional and rapid response to disasters and emphasized upgradation of early warning systems, river basin and reservoir management, construction of safe shelters with adequate stock of relief materials. He observed that the role of Secretaries of Disaster Management and RCs had become crucial as disaster management is a multi-disciplinary endeavor requiring coordination with a number of departments/agencies.

During the day, deliberations were held on the institutional and policy changes; measures for multi-hazard mitigation and capacity Building; setting-up of EOCs at State and Districts levels; preparedness and planning; response preparedness and operation of CRF and NCCF.

Concluding the Conference, Secretary (BM) expressed the hope

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that States would initiate necessary steps at all levels to move towards a disaster-free environment.

Fire accident in a school in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu

A gruesome fire accident took place in a school in Kumbakonam, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu in which 90 young children were burnt to death due to lack of safety and preparedness measures. The incident shook the conscience of the nation and brought into sharp focus the need for disaster preparedness at the school level.

The primary school was being run in class rooms with thatched roof and a mid-day meal kitchen was set up close to the thatched roof. The fire allegedly spread from the kitchen and before students could escape, the thatched roof collapsed. The school had one narrow staircase further impeding the escape. Injured students are being treated at different hospitals.

The State Government ordered the closure of the school and intensive inspection of all schools throughout the State to ensure maintenance of safety standards including replacement of thatched roofs with non-inflammable materials.

Union Home Minister made a statement in Parliament on this tragedy and shared the concern of the nation to ensure minimum safety standards in schools.

Finalization of National Emergency Communication Plan

A meeting was held in the Ministry of Home Affairs to finalize the National

Emergency Communication Plan. Recognizing that in an emergency situation, the most vital link i.e. communication was often the first casualty, a need for a fail-safe multi-channel communication system with adequate redundancy has been felt for quite some time so that national level response to an emergency was prompt, swift and well-coordinated. It was also necessary that the emergency communication system met the requirements of not only handling natural calamities but also terrorist attacks. It was decided that EOCs at national, state and district levels will be connected by multiple channels including POLNET, NIC and BSNL networks.

It was also decided that a list of district, state and national EOCs along with their locations and the bandwidth requirement at each node will be sent to NIC and BSNL to work out the proposed system configuration for meeting the requirements of NEOC and that BSNL will also furnish information on a Closed User Group telephony network to be established among all nodal officers for emergency management.

Development of new Codes, Handbooks, Commentaries and Manuals on Earthquake Hazard Mitigation

A meeting was held in the Ministry of Home Affairs to review the process of revision and affirmation of existing Codes and need for development of new codes manuals, handbooks and commentaries for EQ hazard mitigation, which was undertaken by BIS, BMTPC and IIT, Kanpur.

The relevance to have updated

codes, manuals and handbooks for earthquake-resistant design and construction was outlined and periodical revision of codes and their availability at all locations was emphasized.

It was decided to constitute a Committee to expedite preparation of codes. The Committee would meet once in six months to review the process of development of codes for effective EQ risk mitigation. It was also decided that a meeting of experts from IITs Kanpur, Roorkee, Mumbai, Chennai and Director (Civil), BIS and National Seismic Advisor, MHA will be convened to finalize the list of new codes and also various handbooks and commentaries that need to be developed on priority basis for EQ hazard mitigation. The BIS was requested to submit a comprehensive action plan for revision of existing codes on EQ engineering; identification and formulation of new codes; awareness generation on these codes and their easy availability.

Preparation of training course on Hospital Preparedness for Emergencies (HOPE)

A meeting was held in Ministry of Home Affairs to discuss the proposed training course on Hospital Preparedness for Emergencies (HOPE). It was decided to constitute a Committee to go into the curriculum for the proposed HOPE courses and to integrate it in the health management systems. It was also decided to undertake the training of trainers from identified training institutions who would in turn organize training for doctors and para-medical staff.

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Preparation of a Disaster Management Bill by North-Eastern Council (NEC)

The North-Eastern Council has drafted a model State Disaster Management Bill for being shared with the States in the North-East for enactment with local modifications to address their specific vulnerabilities. The Bill has been drafted keeping in view the special disaster management scenario in the region. The Bill will be sent to all the States for adoption after its approval by the North-Eastern Council (NEC).

CII sensitization programme in Chennai

As part of MHA-CII partnership, a programme was organized in Chennai for sensitization of industries in disaster risk management.



Inaugurating the programme, Smt. Lakshmi Pranesh, Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu said that the industries must realize the risks and take steps to mitigate the same. She stressed implementation and enforcement of building by-laws and stated that the State Government was taking up Disaster Management activities in the State in order to avert

any catastrophe and to prevent a natural hazard from getting converted into a disaster.

Shri R. Santhanam, Commissioner Revenue Administration made a presentation on the vulnerability profile and disaster management initiatives in Tamil Nadu.

In the Technical Sessions, Prof. Meher Prasad, IIT Chennai made a presentation on earthquake effects on structures and earthquake-resistant designs and techniques. Deputy Fire Officer, Chennai made a presentation on fire safety measures for industries to make the processes inherently safe. Dr. N. Lakshmanan, SERC spoke about the requisite features for safer industrial structures. Prof. A.S. Arya, Capacity Building Advisor, MHA explained the process for rapid visual screening of existing buildings and necessary retro-fitting measures.

Landslide in Joshimath, Uttarakhand

A landslide occurred near Joshimath due to heavy rains and cloudburst washing away nearly 400 meters of National Highway. Thousands of passengers were stranded and were rescued by helicopters or through the tunnel of a hydro power project. In an other incident, landslide on Hathi Parvat pushed few vehicles into the Alaknanda river and the falling debris crushed few more vehicles. The State and the Central Governments launched a massive rescue operation and communication link was restored to enable the stranded pilgrims to convey messages to their families.

Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has issued a Circular along with a check-list to every school under it to make it mandatory for schools to review the school safety aspects and has stressed that it is the moral responsibility of the schools to ensure adequate safety of the students during school hours. CBSE has therefore suggested advance planning, effective implementation strategies, development of right attitude for safety, coordination and cooperation with concerned agencies for ensuring safety in the schools.

The States of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal have adopted the Class VIII text-book on Disaster Management brought out by CBSE in the school syllabus 128 teachers in Mizoram and 120 teachers in Sikkim have been trained in the course curriculum.

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