

Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025

Old Wine in a New Bottle?

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The promise of delivering a comprehensive and legislative framework through the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 remains unfulfilled. A majority of the provisions in the Amendment Act only goes on to strengthen centralised and top-down approach and does not contain sufficient mitigation strategies to manage even modern-day climate-induced disasters or public health exigencies and pandemics like COVID-19.

In the past four to five decades, India has experienced various disasters, both natural and anthropogenic, resulting in a significant loss of life, resource depletion, property damage and emotional distress (Hanspal and Behera 2024). As per the International Disaster Database (IDD), between 2000 and 2017, India has faced more than 300 natural disasters, including droughts, earthquakes, epidemics, floods, landslides, and cyclones (Raj 2017). According to the 2023 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations (UN 2023), from 1990 to 2023, India lost about \$79.5 billion economically due to natural disasters. Based on the International Disaster Database (2017), the estimated damage sustained by India in the last 17 years (2000–17) due to natural disasters amounts to \$63.6 billion. Comprising about 2.4% of the earth's total land area, India is home to nearly 17.78% of the world's population. India's demographic density imposes substantial stress on natural resources and escalates competition for delicate ecosystems, which in turn increases the probability of disasters. As per the 2024 Global Report on Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC 2024) in Geneva, 5,28,000 people were displaced in India due to natural disasters. In the category of displacement due to conflict and violence, the Manipur violence accounted for 67,000 displacements in 2023, making it the highest number of conflict-related displacements since 2018 in South Asia (IDMC 2024).

Prior to 2005, India never had any formal disaster management policy or framework and it resulted in a reactive approach instead of a preventive framework. It was only after the 2004 tsunami, which claimed 10,479 lives and a total of 2.79 million people directly affected by

it, that the Indian government and policymakers acknowledged the necessity for a structured disaster management strategy, culminating in the introduction of the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005 (Hanspal and Behera 2024). While the DM Act, 2005 was established to improve and organise disaster response systems, it had inherent deficits.

The first major problem was vagueness and a lack of clarity on roles. The DM Act, 2005 mandated the establishment of various organisations at the national, state and district levels; however, this led to some authorities having overlapping functions without clearly defined jurisdictions. For instance, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) serves as the primary authority for disaster management and is headed by the Prime Minister. Then there is the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) responsible for executing rescue operations under the Ministry of Home Affairs. In addition, Parliament has formed the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC), which is tasked with overseeing and directing different government agencies during national emergencies. The NCMC operates alongside the NDMA, which also has its own state and district units that collaborate with local governments. Then there is the District Emergency Operations Centre (DEOC), which acts as the central hub for disaster management and the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA)—the planning and coordinating body. All these have resulted in potential dual governance in the middle of a disaster. Challenges such as overlapping roles, insufficient coordination, favouritism/partisan attitude, mismanagement of resources and pervasive corruption had weakened the act's efficacy, especially at the implementation stage.

Another major criticism of the DM Act, 2005 is that it is heavily centralised and adopts a top-down approach. It was particularly evident during the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The DM Act, 2005 predominantly focuses on reactive instead of proactive measures and it also has created a considerable imbalance in disaster management efforts (Pandey 2023).

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The DM Act, 2005 only provided vague definitions to “disaster,” “hazards,” “prevention” and “mitigation” and it lacked consistency and clarity throughout the act. The act itself does not specifically mention examples of disasters. The DM Act, 2005 defines a disaster as a

catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes, or by accident or negligence which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering ... and is of such a nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area. (Disaster Management Act, 2005, Section 2[d])

An amendment to the DM Act, 2005 was a much-needed demand for years as there were widespread criticisms owing to its top-down and heavily centralised approach. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the deficits in the act became more visible as it was revealed that the DM Act, 2005 does not contain clear-cut provisions to manage even a 21st-century pandemic (Jha 2022). The interconnected and cascading nature of disaster and climate risks, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2024 Wayanad (Kerala) landslides, emphasised the critical need for a comprehensive understanding of handling multi-hazard situations (Chathukulam 2024). In addition, the lack of transparency and accountability at national and sub-national levels has affected the effective mobilisation, management and utilisation of funds for disaster management. To address these concerns, it was essential to amend the existing DM Act, 2005 to formulate a more resilient and efficient disaster management framework in India.

What Is New in the Amended Act?

On 1 August 2024, the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha. It was passed in the Lok Sabha on 12 December 2024, and in the Rajya Sabha, on 25 March 2025. The bill amended the Disaster Management Act 2005, India’s principal legislation for the mitigation and management of disasters. On 29 March 2025, it became the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025. This section looks into the novel additions or significant changes introduced in the Disaster Management

(Amendment) Act, 2025. They are (i) the Urban Disaster Management Authority (UDMA), (ii) disaster management database, (iii) state disaster response force, (iv) statutory status to national crisis management committee and high-level committee, (v) more powers to NDMA and state disaster management authority (SDMA), and (vi) appointments to NDMA (also see Table 1).

Urban Disaster Management Authority: UDMA, for state capitals and cities with municipal corporations, except for the National Capital Territory of Delhi and union territory of Chandigarh, is one among the novel announcements in the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025. In light of India’s increasing urbanisation, the UDMA is a fresh move

in the realm of city-specific disaster management strategies and a significant step towards urban disaster preparedness. The UDMA is entrusted with the task of the preparation and implementation of urban plans upon receiving approval from state governments. The municipal commissioner will serve as the chairperson of the UDMA. However, there are concerns regarding the efficacy of municipal commissioners to head these authorities, especially considering the fact that multi-agency coordination is required in the aftermath of a disaster. Whether urban authorities are capable of handling the multiplicity of agencies involved in disaster mitigation is a crucial question that does not have a definite answer. District collector/deputy commissioner will be the vice chairperson,

Table 1: Major Amendments in the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025

Sl No	Amended/Inserted Sections*	Major Additions Added through Amendment
1	Insertion of Clause (da) in Section 2	In Section 2 (ii) after clause (d), the following clause shall be inserted, namely (da) “disaster database” means a database which includes disaster assessment, fund allocation details, expenditure, preparedness and mitigation plan, risk register according to type and severity of risk and such other relevant matters, in accordance with such policy, as may be determined by the central government;
2	Insertion of new Section 41A	(1) The state governments may, by notification in the Official Gazette, constitute a separate Urban Disaster Management Authority for their state capitals and all cities having a municipal corporation, except for the National Capital Territory of Delhi and union territory of Chandigarh.
3	Insertion of new Section 44A	(1) The state government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, constitute a State Disaster Response Force for the purpose of specialist response to a threatening disaster situation or disaster.
4	Amendment of Section 11	In Section 11 of the Principal Act, (i) for sub-section (2), the following sub-section shall be substituted, namely (2) “The National Authority shall coordinate, in consultation with the central government and the state governments and other stakeholders in the field of disaster management, for preparation and approval of the National Plan having regard to the National Policy;” (ii) for sub-section (4), the following sub-section shall be substituted, namely “(4) The National Authority shall review the National Plan once in every three years and update at least once in every five years.”
5	Substitution of new section for Section 5	For Section 5 of the principal act, the following section shall be substituted, namely “5 (1) The National Authority may, with the previous approval of the central government, specify the number, nature and category of officers and other employees, as is necessary to carry out its functions. (2) The National Authority may also appoint experts and consultants as necessary to perform its functions. (3) The salaries and allowances payable to, and other terms and conditions of service of officers, other employees, experts and consultants of the National Authority, shall be such as may be prescribed by the central government.”
6	Section 8A(1)	The National Crisis Management Committee constituted by the Government of India prior to the commencement of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025, shall be the National Crisis Management Committee for the purposes of this act.
	Section 8 B(1)	The High Level Committee constituted by the Government of India prior to the commencement of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 shall be the High Level Committee for the purposes of this act which shall provide the financial assistance as envisaged under Section 46 to the state governments in the event of a disaster and approve the financial assistance for mitigation needs under Section 47.

*Only major amendments have been incorporated.
Source: Constructed by the author based on inputs directly sourced from Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025.

ex officio, along with such other members, with such pay and allowances as may be determined by the state government. Ward-level committees (Ward Disaster Management Committees) are crucial in disaster relief and mitigation operations, particularly in facilitating coordination, ensuring community participation, and act as first responders in emergencies, and no specific mention of their involvement is clearly mentioned in the Amendment Act 2025. The lack of focus on participatory governance is visible. In majority of the places, municipal commissioners are junior to district collectors/deputy commissioners in the administrative/bureaucratic hierarchy. Therefore, placing municipal commissioners in the post of chairperson and district collectors/deputy commissioners as vice chairpersons can result in administrative discrepancy and will in turn affect the functioning of UDMA. The Amendment Act 2025 also fails to address the economic impact of disasters on urban supply chains and infrastructure. In the absence of the requisite financial devolution, the efficiency to streamline disaster response needs to be revisited.

Disaster management database: One of the major objectives of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 is to provide for the creation of a disaster database at the national and state levels. The Amendment Act 2025 defined “disaster database” means a database which includes disaster assessment, fund allocation detail, expenditure, preparedness and mitigation plan, risk register according to type and severity of risk and such other relevant matters, in accordance with such policy, as may be determined by the central government (Disaster Management [Amendment], Act, 2025 Section 2, Clause da). Provisions for creating a disaster database at the national and state levels can help in informed decision-making. This data-driven approach is a unique addition in the proposed Amendment Act. Paucity as well as concerns regarding the accuracy and accessibility of data have always been a problem, and with the help of databases at the state and centre, these issues can be addressed to a large extent. It can

also pave the way for big data analytics in the near future in the field of disaster preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation and relief strategies.

State Disaster Response Force: The formation of SDRF is a new addition. The Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 empowers the state government to constitute a SDRF similar to the NDRF. The state governments are tasked with defining the functions of the force and prescribing the terms of service of its members.

Statutory status to national crisis management committee and high-level committee: The Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 provides statutory status to existing bodies (pre-existing entities) such as NCMC and HLC. The NCMC functions as the nodal authority for dealing with major disasters and the HLC will provide financial assistance to state governments from the National Disaster Mitigation Fund. The cabinet secretary will serve as the chairperson of the NCMC. As per the Amendment Act 2025, the chairperson of the HLC is

Minister in-charge of the Ministry or Department of the Central Government having administrative control over the disaster management as the Chairperson and such other members as may be notified by the Central Government. (Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 Section 8B[1][2])

All these provisions in the Amendment Act indicate the further centralisation of the already (heavily) centralised DM Act,

2005 and it can complicate the procedural framework for disaster response. Another major issue with the DM Act, 2005 was the excessive centralisation of decision-making regarding funds (National Disaster Response Fund [NDRF]). States rely on disaster relief funds (NDRF) during disasters. However, a comparable delay in response was observed when disaster relief funds from the NDRF were withheld from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala (particularly in Wayanad district of Kerala). The Amendment Act 2025 fails to sufficiently tackle the issue of financial devolution to the states, thereby reinforcing centralised authority over disaster relief and recovery initiatives. Excessive centralisation causes delays in response, prevents states from acting swiftly, and thereby compromises the principles of cooperative federalism. At present, the centre–state relations are already strained, and over-concentration of authority could further erode the spirit of cooperative federalism.

More powers to National Disaster Management Authority and State Disaster Management Authority: As per the DM Act, 2005, the National Executive Committee and State Executive Committee are to assist the NDMA and SDMA in performing their functions. A key function of these committees was to prepare national and state disaster management plans and the NDMA and SDMA approve the respective plans and coordinate their implementation. The Amendment Act 2025 has made a change here

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and it provides that the NDMA and SDMA will be directly responsible for preparing national and state disaster management plans, respectively.

The NDMA and SDMA are empowered to review the disaster management plans of government departments, formulate guidelines for the preparation of disaster management plans as well as recommend the provision of funds for disaster mitigation. The Amendment Act 2025 add further functions for these authorities, which include taking periodic disaster risks, providing technical assistance, setting guidelines to ensure minimum standards of disaster relief and preparing national and state disaster databases. In addition, the NDMA has special responsibilities, including assessing the disaster preparedness of the states and monitoring post-disaster audit of preparedness and response.

Appointments to NDMA: The DM Act, 2005, provides that the central government will provide NDMA with officers, consultants and staff. The Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 instead empowers the NDMA to specify the number of staff (officers, consultants and employees), with prior approval of the central government. In addition, the NDMA may also appoint experts and consultants as necessary.

Among the new additions, statutory status to the NCMC and HLC, more powers to the NDMA and SDMA, and the attempts to dilute the definition and purpose of the NDRF by removing the “specified purposes” for which the fund can be utilised show evidence of excessive centralisation (top-down approach). Disproportionate centralisation results in delayed response, restricts states from taking prompt and localised action and thereby undermines cooperative federalism. The Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 fails to address these issues.

District Disaster Management Authority

Both the DM Act 2005 and Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 have not made any change in the clauses (a) the collector/deputy commissioner, as the case may be, of the district who

shall be chairperson, ex officio; (b) the elected functionary of the local government who shall be the co-chairperson, ex officio (Disaster Management Act, 2005, Section 25). The NDMA is headed by the Prime Minister, the SDMA by chief minister, but when it comes to the DDMA, it is headed by the district collector/deputy commissioner instead of an elected functionary at the district level. At the national and state levels, political heads are managing the NDMA and SDMA, respectively, but when it comes to the DDMA, it is headed by a bureaucrat and an elected functionary of the local government is given the post of co-chairperson. This is also an indicator of centralisation. In Kerala, district panchayat presidents act as the co-chairperson in DDMA. However, their role and presence in the DDMA are rare. For instance, in many districts in Kerala during the COVID-19 pandemic, the district collectors were at the forefront in the management and mitigation of the pandemic during the DDMA meetings.¹

Discussion and Conclusions

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 does not contain promising provisions to rectify the flaws in the existing DM Act, 2005. The excessive centralisation remains and the scope for participatory governance, transparency and accountability has also reduced. The top-down approach is visible even in terminologies and phrases used in the Amendment Act, like “monitor” and “guidelines” instead of employing terms that can facilitate a supportive environment. The reluctance to give more role and acceptance to local governments and local citizens’ communities is a cause of deep concern. Even global disaster frameworks, including the 1994 Yokohama Strategy, 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action, and the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction identify local communities as “first responders” in disasters (Ullal and Yanappa 2024). Neither the DM Act, 2005 nor the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 have overlooked this aspect. The COVID-19 pandemic and other natural disasters have shown that the local communities and leaders were the first

responders to manage the critical issues (Kumar 2022). The DM Act, 2005 and the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 do not contain provisions for financial allocations for disaster management authorities at lower administrative levels and this also affects the preparedness and responsiveness of local responders.

Another major shortcoming is the absence of provisions to contain public health emergencies like a pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the defects in both the legislative intent and practical execution of the act, especially regarding public health administration and health equality (Narayanan 2023). However, the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 does not contain any comprehensive framework to deal with pandemic or public health exigencies in this regard. The definition of “disaster” in both the DM Act, 2005 and Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 is not broad enough to encompass climate-induced events like heatwaves. As per the DM Act, 2005, a disaster is defined as “a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made cause, or by accident or negligence which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of property, or damage to, or degradation of, environment, and is of such a nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area” (Disaster Management Act, 2005, Section 2d). The Disaster Management (Amendment), Act, 2025 does not address this issue.

Natural disasters exacerbate the vulnerabilities faced by women, children, individuals with disabilities, marginalised and downtrodden sections of society, but the latest amendment fails to address this aspect and thus lacks inclusivity in the disaster framework paradigm.

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Between 2005 and 2025, many countries across the globe have faced a multitude of disasters of varying intensities, and from all these occurrences, a lot of learnings and knowledge creation have taken place. However, these elements are absent in the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act 2025. The disproportionate power dynamics between the municipal commissioner and district collector/deputy commissioner can create problems in the functioning of the UDMA. The concentration of power in the hands of the district collector/deputy commissioner in the DDMA and not making attempts to share the responsibilities and powers with the elected functionaries of local governments could also contribute to more problems. A high degree of centralisation results in sluggish responses, inhibits states from acting quickly and threatens the principles of cooperative federalism. At a time when the relations between the centre and states are already strained (particularly in the case of disaster relief funds), excessive concentration of authority could further

compromise the integrity of cooperative federalism. In short, the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025 has fallen short of expectations.

NOTE

- 1 The author has come across several such incidents and had first-hand information regarding such incidents during discussions and field visits related to pandemic-related studies conducted between June 2020 and October 2021.

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