



The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024: An Analysis of its Provisions and Implications

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ABSTRACT:

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, passed in the Lok Sabha on December 12, 2024, amends the Disaster Management Act, 2005, to strengthen India's disaster management framework. The Bill empowers the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA) to directly prepare and implement disaster management plans, enhancing coordination and response at the national and state levels. It introduces Urban Disaster Management Authorities for urban centers, establishes State Disaster Response Forces (SDRF), and grants statutory recognition to existing bodies like the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) and High-Level Committee (HLC). With provisions for disaster risk assessment, preparedness audits, and the creation of disaster databases, the Bill aims to build a more proactive, data-driven approach to managing disasters, addressing emerging risks from climate change, and strengthening local response capabilities. The successful implementation of these provisions, however, will depend on effective resource management, inter-agency coordination, and capacity-building across all levels of governance. This paper explores the provisions of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, analyzes its implications for disaster preparedness and response in India and examines the potential challenges to its implementation, particularly concerning resource management, inter-agency coordination, and training of personnel. The amendments bring India closer to a more resilient, adaptable, and comprehensive disaster management system, addressing both natural and man-made disaster challenges more effectively.

Keywords: Disaster Management, NDMA, Urban Disaster Authorities, State Disaster Response Force, Disaster Risk Assessment

Introduction

The Disaster Management Act, 2005, was a ground-breaking piece of legislation in India, crafted with the primary objective of establishing a comprehensive disaster management system across the country. Its introduction came in the aftermath of several devastating disasters, such as the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and the recurring floods in different parts of the country, which highlighted India's vulnerability to various natural hazards.¹ The Act provided for the creation of a structured framework, consisting of national, state, and district-level authorities tasked with disaster preparedness, response, and mitigation. These authorities are designed to ensure that disaster management is not just a reactive process, but a proactive and coordinated effort involving multiple levels of government and local communities.²

The main focus of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, was to set up the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs), and the District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs), which are mandated to handle the different aspects of disaster management in a systematic way.³ These authorities were empowered to create disaster management plans, formulate strategies for disaster mitigation, coordinate relief efforts, and ensure that the nation, states, and districts are better prepared for any eventual disaster. The establishment of such a framework marked a shift in India's disaster management approach, emphasizing preparedness, risk reduction, and resilience-building rather than solely focusing on post-disaster relief.⁴

However, despite these significant steps, India continues to face an increasing frequency and intensity of disasters, exacerbated by climate change and urbanization.⁵ The impact of floods, cyclones, heat waves, and droughts is becoming more severe, and new types of disasters, such as health crises and environmental degradation, are emerging.⁶ Additionally, the vulnerability of rural and urban populations, particularly in densely populated areas, remains

¹ Government of India, *Report on the Gujarat Earthquake, 2001*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 2001.

² National Disaster Management Authority, *Disaster Management in India: A Vision for the Future*, NDMA, New Delhi, 2009.

³ Disaster Management Act, 2005, Section 3, *The Gazette of India*, New Delhi, 2005.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Section 6-8.

⁵ "Climate Change and Its Impact on Disaster Management," *Indian Journal of Environmental Studies*, 2022.

⁶ National Institute of Disaster Management, *Emerging Disasters: Future Challenges*, NIDM, New Delhi, 2020.

high due to gaps in infrastructure, resource allocation, and effective governance.⁷ In light of these growing challenges, there has been an urgent need to revisit and strengthen India's disaster management framework.

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024 seeks to address these pressing concerns by enhancing the existing disaster management system. The Bill proposes several important changes to the Disaster Management Act, 2005, aimed at improving the preparedness, response, and mitigation strategies at various levels of governance. It seeks to make disaster management more adaptive to emerging risks, particularly those related to climate change, and ensure a more localized and effective response to disasters.⁸ The Bill proposes a more active role for the National and State Disaster Management Authorities, empowering them to take proactive measures in disaster preparedness and mitigation, rather than just focusing on response.⁹

One of the key proposals of the Bill is the strengthening of disaster management capabilities at the urban level. As India continues to experience rapid urbanization, urban areas, particularly state capitals and cities with municipal corporations, face unique challenges in disaster management, including overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of coordinated response mechanisms.¹⁰ By establishing Urban Disaster Management Authorities, the Bill aims to create more focused and specialized disaster management systems for urban areas. This change is crucial in ensuring that cities are better equipped to handle disasters, especially those caused by extreme weather events, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

Furthermore, the Bill provides statutory recognition to existing bodies such as the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) and the High-Level Committee (HLC). These committees have played crucial roles in disaster management in India, and providing them with statutory status will enhance their capacity to coordinate national and state-level responses to major disasters, ensuring more effective decision-making and resource allocation during crises.¹¹ The Bill also empowers the National Disaster Management Authority to appoint experts and consultants, thereby ensuring that the country's disaster management authorities are equipped with the necessary technical expertise to address evolving challenges.

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, is a significant step towards improving India's disaster management framework. It seeks to make the system more comprehensive, adaptive, and efficient by enhancing the functions of existing authorities and introducing new provisions for urban disaster management. However, the Bill's success will depend on its implementation, which will require adequate resources, training, and coordination between various levels of government. This paper will explore the provisions of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, analyze its potential impact on disaster management in India, and examine the challenges that may arise during its implementation. The goal is to understand how the Bill can strengthen India's disaster management system and contribute to a more resilient and prepared nation in the face of future challenges.¹²

Provisions of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024

1. Preparation of Disaster Management Plans

Under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the responsibility for preparing disaster management plans was assigned to the National and State Executive Committees, which operated under the supervision of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA). However, the **Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024** introduces a significant change by directly assigning the responsibility for preparing these disaster management plans to NDMA and SDMA themselves.

- **Rationale for the Change:** This centralization aims to streamline the disaster management process by ensuring more uniformity, consistency, and coordination in the creation of plans at both the national and state levels. By directly involving the authorities responsible for oversight and decision-making, the Bill seeks to enhance the quality and comprehensiveness of disaster management plans. This shift also allows for a more coordinated approach to addressing disaster risks, with a clearer alignment between planning and execution.
- **Expected Outcomes:** The new approach should lead to more coherent disaster management strategies and prompt, organized responses to potential disasters. With NDMA and SDMA at the forefront, the disaster management plans can be developed with a clear, unified vision that aligns with national policies and local needs.

2. Expanded Functions of NDMA and SDMA

The Bill enhances the responsibilities of both NDMA and SDMA by adding several critical functions. These expanded functions reflect the evolving nature of disaster management, particularly in response to emerging threats such as climate change and the increasing frequency of extreme events.

- **Periodic Stock of Disaster Risks:** The Bill mandates NDMA and SDMA to periodically assess and monitor disaster risks, including emerging threats such as extreme climate events (e.g., heatwaves, storms, floods). This continuous evaluation is crucial for ensuring that disaster management strategies are adaptive to evolving challenges.

⁷ Government of India, *Report on Urban Disaster Vulnerabilities*, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2019.

⁸ Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, *Draft Bill*, Government of India.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Section 4.

¹⁰ Ministry of Urban Affairs, *Urbanization and Disaster Resilience*, Government of India, 2023.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC).

¹² Government of India, *The Future of Disaster Management in India: Enhancements and Reforms*, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024.

- **Technical Assistance:** In line with strengthening disaster management infrastructure, NDMA and SDMA are tasked with providing technical assistance to subordinate authorities. This provision ensures that local bodies and districts benefit from the expertise of higher-level authorities, facilitating more effective disaster management across various regions.
- **Minimum Relief Standards:** The Bill requires NDMA and SDMA to establish guidelines for minimum standards of relief during disaster situations. These guidelines will ensure that there is a consistent and adequate level of response and support for those affected by disasters, minimizing disparities in relief efforts.
- **National and State Disaster Databases:** One of the most significant aspects of the Bill is the creation of national and state disaster databases. These databases will aggregate vital information on disaster risks, the allocation of funds, and the status of disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts. These centralized databases will promote transparency and coordination, making it easier for stakeholders to access and share information critical to disaster management.
- **Post-Disaster Audit:** NDMA is given the responsibility to conduct post-disaster audits, evaluating the effectiveness of disaster preparedness and response. This audit process will allow authorities to learn from past events, assess the impact of their interventions, and adjust strategies for future incidents.

3. Urban Disaster Management Authorities

The Bill introduces a new provision for the creation of **Urban Disaster Management Authorities (UDMAs)** in state capitals and cities with municipal corporations. This provision recognizes the unique challenges faced by urban areas in managing disasters due to factors such as high population density, complex infrastructure, and limited space for evacuation.

- **Composition and Responsibilities:** The UDMA will be composed of the Municipal Commissioner as the chairperson, the District Collector as the vice-chairperson, and other members as designated by the state government. These authorities will be responsible for preparing and implementing disaster management plans specific to urban areas, ensuring that urban disasters are handled with greater focus and efficiency.
- **Rationale:** This localized, city-specific approach to disaster management is intended to improve responsiveness and effectiveness in addressing the unique vulnerabilities of urban centers. With the increasing occurrence of disasters in densely populated cities, this decentralized model will facilitate tailored solutions for urban disaster risks.

4. Formation of State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)

The Bill also empowers state governments to establish their own **State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)**, which will function similarly to the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) but at the state level. This provision enhances state-level disaster response capabilities by providing specialized forces dedicated to tackling disasters.

- **State-Level Specialization:** The SDRF will be specifically trained to handle disaster situations within the state, ensuring a rapid and effective response to emergencies. Each state government will define the functions of its SDRF and establish terms of service for its personnel, providing flexibility in terms of local requirements and expertise.
- **Significance:** The creation of SDRFs will strengthen the overall disaster response infrastructure in India by creating specialized units at the state level, thus ensuring quicker mobilization and more efficient handling of disaster scenarios.

5. Statutory Status to Existing Committees

The Bill grants **statutory status** to key bodies that play an essential role in disaster management:

- **National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC):** NCMC will serve as the central body responsible for managing major disasters with national implications. This committee will play a pivotal role in coordinating efforts across various levels of government and agencies, ensuring that the response to large-scale disasters is organized and well-supported at the national level.
- **High-Level Committee (HLC):** The HLC will provide financial assistance to state governments during disasters and approve funding from the National Disaster Mitigation Fund. By giving statutory status to these committees, the Bill formalizes their roles and ensures that they function with the necessary authority to manage large-scale disaster situations effectively.

6. Appointments to NDMA

Under the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, NDMA will gain greater autonomy in managing its staffing and appointments. Previously, the central government had the sole authority to appoint officers and consultants to NDMA. The Bill shifts this responsibility to NDMA, allowing it to specify the number and categories of staff required, subject to prior approval by the central government.

- **Flexibility in Staffing:** This provision gives NDMA the flexibility to hire experts and consultants as needed to address emerging challenges and ensure that the authority is adequately staffed to deal with disaster-related issues. This flexibility will be critical in responding to dynamic and unforeseen disaster scenarios, such as new types of climate threats or technological hazards.

- **Expected Outcomes:** With the ability to tailor its staffing structure, NDMA will be better equipped to build a more resilient disaster management framework, ensuring that it can respond efficiently to the evolving needs of disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response.

Implications of the Bill

The centralization of disaster management planning under NDMA and SDMA, along with the introduction of urban disaster management authorities has significant implications for the overall disaster management framework in India. First, the centralization of responsibilities for disaster management planning at the national and state levels enhances the coordination between various governmental bodies. By placing the responsibility for preparing disaster management plans directly with NDMA and SDMA, the Bill ensures that these authorities are more directly involved in the strategic oversight of disaster management. This shift in responsibility could lead to better resource allocation, as the national and state authorities will have a more cohesive and coordinated approach to planning and responding to disasters. Additionally, by creating national and state disaster databases, the Bill facilitates a more informed approach to disaster management, as the databases will provide comprehensive data on disaster risks, mitigation efforts, and financial resources allocated for disaster response. The ability of NDMA and SDMA to conduct post-disaster audits further strengthens the accountability and transparency of the entire disaster management process, improving both preparedness and response efforts.

The Bill also emphasizes localizing disaster management by establishing Urban Disaster Management Authorities and enabling the creation of State Disaster Response Forces (SDRFs). Urban Disaster Management Authorities are particularly important for managing the unique challenges posed by urban areas, such as high population density, inadequate infrastructure, and increased vulnerability to specific types of disasters like fires, floods, and infrastructure collapse. By giving these authorities the responsibility for preparing and implementing disaster management plans for cities, the Bill ensures that disaster management efforts are tailored to the specific needs of urban areas. Similarly, the creation of SDRFs empowers state governments to establish specialized response forces that can act swiftly and efficiently in disaster situations. Localized response forces can more effectively address the particular needs and risks of their respective areas, making disaster management more responsive and adaptable.

Finally, the empowerment of existing committees such as the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) and the High-Level Committee (HLC) through the provision of statutory status represents a significant step in strengthening the governance of disaster management in India. The Bill gives these committees formal authority, ensuring that their decisions carry greater weight in times of national or state emergencies. By institutionalizing these bodies, the Bill enhances the legitimacy and accountability of the decision-making process during disasters, which is essential for timely and effective action. Additionally, the Bill empowers NDMA to hire experts and consultants, emphasizing the importance of technical expertise in disaster management. This provision is particularly important as it ensures that NDMA can bring in specialized knowledge to tackle emerging challenges, such as those posed by extreme weather events linked to climate change. With these changes, the Bill strengthens the overall capacity of disaster management authorities and ensures that they are better equipped to manage disasters in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing environment.

Challenges in Implementation

1. Resource Allocation and Infrastructure

A key challenge in the effective implementation of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, lies in ensuring that the required financial and infrastructural resources are allocated and managed efficiently. The Bill's provisions introduce significant changes, including the establishment of new Urban Disaster Management Authorities and State Disaster Response Forces (SDRFs), the development of disaster risk databases, and the expansion of disaster preparedness and mitigation plans. These initiatives will require considerable funding, not only for setting up the infrastructure but also for continuous maintenance and operations. Furthermore, the establishment of new authorities and response forces will require substantial investment in physical infrastructure such as offices, equipment, communication systems, and transportation for emergency response. The challenge lies in securing adequate and timely funding for these provisions, especially in the face of competing government priorities. The central and state governments must ensure that budgets are allocated effectively and that resources are channelled to where they are most needed. Inadequate resource allocation could result in the failure to operationalize the Bill's provisions, leading to delays and inefficiencies in disaster management efforts. Additionally, the lack of investment in the training of personnel and the establishment of robust systems for monitoring and evaluation could undermine the long-term success of the disaster management framework.

2. Coordination Between Authorities

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduces a multi-layered governance structure aimed at improving coordination among disaster management authorities at the national, state, and local levels. While the Bill emphasizes collaboration between the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA), Urban Disaster Management Authorities, and the newly formed State Disaster Response Forces, coordinating these multiple entities may present significant challenges. The new provisions for urban disaster management and state-level response forces will increase the number of actors involved in disaster response, potentially complicating communication and decision-making processes. One of the primary challenges will be to avoid jurisdictional overlaps, where multiple authorities may have conflicting roles during a disaster. This could lead to confusion, delays in response times, and inefficiencies in resource allocation. Another potential issue is the lack of standardization across different levels of governance. Each authority may have its own set of protocols, plans, and frameworks, which may not always be compatible with those of other authorities. This could create gaps in response efforts, especially in the context of a large-scale disaster. Furthermore, the integration of emerging technologies and disaster databases into the existing system will require seamless communication between all authorities, something that

can often be challenging when dealing with different levels of government and varying levels of technological infrastructure. Thus, establishing clear communication channels, standardized procedures, and effective coordination mechanisms will be crucial to ensuring that these authorities can work together efficiently, particularly during high-pressure disaster scenarios.

3. Training and Capacity Building

The creation of new disaster management authorities, as well as the expansion of the roles of existing ones, necessitates a major focus on training and capacity building for personnel at all levels. The Bill calls for the establishment of new Urban Disaster Management Authorities, as well as the formation of State Disaster Response Forces (SDRFs), which will require specialized knowledge and skills for effective disaster management. These new bodies will be tasked with managing a range of complex and high-risk scenarios, from urban flooding to large-scale climate-related disasters, requiring expertise in risk assessment, emergency response, relief distribution, and recovery. Without a well-structured training framework, the personnel in these new bodies may lack the expertise to perform their roles efficiently, potentially delaying disaster response and exacerbating the impact of the disaster. Capacity building is not only about training personnel in basic disaster response techniques but also in the use of advanced technologies, such as disaster risk databases and early warning systems. The personnel will also need to be trained in coordination and communication skills to work effectively with other authorities during a crisis. Additionally, the existing personnel in the NDMA, SDMA, and other authorities may need to undergo retraining to adapt to new roles and responsibilities outlined in the Bill. Establishing a comprehensive, nationwide training program for disaster management personnel will be essential to ensure that all stakeholders are adequately prepared to respond to disasters. If the training initiatives are not properly implemented, it could lead to a lack of preparedness and poor disaster management outcomes, which would undermine the objectives of the Bill. This challenge is compounded by the need for continuous professional development to keep pace with evolving disaster risks, including emerging threats like extreme climate events and pandemics.

Conclusion

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, marks a significant step forward in strengthening India's disaster management framework. With the increasing frequency and severity of natural and man-made disasters, especially in the context of climate change, the need for a robust and adaptive disaster management system has never been more pressing. This Bill addresses these needs by proposing a comprehensive overhaul of the existing Disaster Management Act, 2005, through various provisions that aim to enhance coordination, improve preparedness, and streamline response mechanisms across different levels of governance.¹³

The Bill introduces several crucial changes to the disaster management landscape in India. Centralizing disaster planning within the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA) will ensure that disaster management plans are consistent, unified, and well-coordinated at both the national and state levels. By assuming direct responsibility for creating these plans, NDMA and SDMA can ensure that the plans are more comprehensive, addressing both existing and emerging risks. Furthermore, the addition of technical assistance, periodic risk assessments, and the establishment of disaster databases are proactive measures that could significantly enhance disaster preparedness, reduce vulnerabilities, and ensure quicker response times during emergencies.

Another key provision of the Bill is the empowerment of state governments to create Urban Disaster Management Authorities, specifically for urban areas, including state capitals and cities with municipal corporations. Urban centers are often the most vulnerable to the effects of disasters due to their dense populations, complex infrastructure, and high exposure to risks. The creation of specialized urban authorities will ensure a tailored, city-specific approach to disaster management, focusing on local needs and challenges. Similarly, the formation of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) will allow states to have specialized teams ready for rapid response, bringing expertise and local knowledge into the disaster management process.

Moreover, the Bill's provisions for granting statutory status to existing bodies like the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) and High-Level Committee (HLC) will enhance their authority and capacity to deal with major disasters effectively. These committees will play a pivotal role in coordinating disaster response efforts at the national level and ensuring that the necessary financial resources are made available for disaster relief and mitigation.

However, the true effectiveness of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, will depend on its implementation. One of the primary challenges will be ensuring the proper allocation of resources to support the Bill's provisions. While the Bill provides for expanded responsibilities at various levels, including the creation of new authorities and specialized forces, the practical success of these measures will require substantial financial investment and infrastructure development. Without adequate funding, the ability to train personnel, build response infrastructure, and maintain the proposed databases could be compromised, hindering the Bill's objectives.

Improved coordination between the newly empowered authorities and the existing disaster management framework is another critical aspect. The success of disaster response efforts is highly contingent upon how well different agencies—at the national, state, and local levels—can collaborate. This will require clear communication channels, defined roles and responsibilities, and effective data-sharing mechanisms. Additionally, the integration of urban

¹³ The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, reflects a global shift toward more integrated and proactive disaster management systems, particularly in response to climate change impacts on vulnerable populations. See United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, *Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation*, 2021.

and state-level authorities into the broader disaster management ecosystem will need careful planning to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure seamless coordination.

The capacity of institutions to implement these changes at the ground level is also vital. Despite the Bill's well-intentioned provisions, the effective implementation of disaster management plans requires trained personnel, expert consultants, and local knowledge. Ensuring that these institutions are adequately equipped with the skills, technology, and personnel to execute their tasks is essential. Capacity building at every level of government, from the central to the local level, will be a cornerstone of the Bill's success.

India continues to be highly vulnerable to a wide range of disasters—ranging from floods, cyclones, and earthquakes to industrial accidents, chemical spills, and the emerging risks posed by climate change. The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, offers a comprehensive framework to address these challenges. However, the real test will be in its implementation and the continuous adaptation of the framework to the evolving nature of disaster risks. By effectively addressing the provisions of the Bill, India will be better equipped to protect its citizens, safeguard critical infrastructure, and mitigate the devastating impacts of disasters. As the nation continues to grapple with the increasing complexity and unpredictability of disaster events, the successful implementation of these amendments will be crucial in ensuring a safer and more resilient India for future generations.

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