

In the last chapter we studied various man-made and natural disasters. There are several agencies that work for disaster management. This chapter will focus mainly on the role played by the Armed Forces in this area.

Effects of Natural Disasters on Security of the Country

Disasters cause loss of lives and property and create socio-economic problems. They also have an adverse impact on the security of the country. Some of the examples of the past are as under:

1. **Earthquakes** : Earthquakes in Gujarat in 2001 caused damage to Air Force stations and Army areas. In Sikkim, earthquake caused landslides and disrupted road communications preventing logistic supplies and movement of troops to and from border areas.
2. **Cloud Bursts** : Cloud burst in Ladakh region, particularly in Leh, disrupted road communications and disturbed logistic supply lines of the army.
3. **Cyclones** : Cyclone in Odisha affected the Naval bases.
4. **Tsunami** : Tsunami of December 2004 caused damage to Naval bases in Visakhapatnam, Andaman and Nicobar islands. It also damaged the Air Force runways and infrastructure of the air bases in Andaman and Nicobar islands disturbing their operations for a few days.
5. **Floods** : The floods in Kedarnath region broke the land communications with the border areas in the Central Sector of the Himalayan ranges against China.
6. **Fires** : Fires have affected reserve ammunition stores & dumps of the Armed Forces.
7. **Marine Disasters** : The fire and explosion in a submarine resulted in loss of a submarine of the Indian Navy in 2013.

National Disaster Management Authority

The Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India is primarily responsible for coordination of relief, response and overall natural disaster management. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), headed by the Prime Minister, and State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) headed by respective Chief Ministers, are the organisations that look after disaster management issues in India. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was created for the purpose of specialized response to natural and man-made disasters.

The NDRF consists of battalions from the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB). Each battalion has specialist teams



(Ref.: www.ndrf.gov.in/ndrf)

including engineers, technicians, electricians, dog squads and medical/paramedics. All the battalions have been equipped and trained to respond to natural as well as man-made disasters. Battalions are also trained and equipped for response during chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) emergencies. These NDRF battalions are located at 12 different locations in the country based on the vulnerability profile of the country and to cut down the response time for their deployment at the disaster site.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Armed Forces in Disaster Management

While the NDRF is mainly responsible for disaster management, the Armed Forces under the Ministry of Defence are also called upon to intervene in times of a crisis. This activity is conducted by the Armed Forces as ‘aid to civil authority’. Safeguarding the people of the Nation, the assets and interests against natural calamities or human induced crisis form part of these duties.

To facilitate performances of such duties the entire country is divided into Operational Command structure for war time and peace time crisis. Availability of resources, high standard of discipline and training and responsive organizational structure make the Armed Forces highly effective during disasters. They are relied upon as the “last resort” by the government.

The role of Armed Forces can be seen at three stages: (i) planning done during the pre-disaster stage; (ii) preparations done during the warning period and (iii) post disaster response.

1. Pre-disaster Stage

This is the stage when planning is done for a possible disaster. The following are the main activities conducted during the pre-disaster stage :

- Assessment of possible threats (hazards) and the likely vulnerabilities and risks.
- Maps are updated with the help of GIS systems.
- Communication channels between the Armed Forces and civilian counterparts are examined.
- Possible helipads, landing grounds, resource bases are decided.
- Contingency plans are prepared.

2. Warning Stage

This is the stage when there is an advance warning about a disaster. This may be a flood, cyclone, tsunami, etc. In case there is likely to be a severe disaster the civil administration warns the Armed Forces about it so that they can be prepared for action. The Armed Forces then can ensure that communication channels are kept open, and the necessary resources are kept ready.

3. Post Disaster Response

Once the disaster takes place the Armed Forces take up the following tasks :

- Search and Rescue mission of the affected population.
- Evacuation and rescue of population and those who are threatened and establishment of shelter camps.
- Offering immediate relief to the victims to include emergency medical aid, supply of rations and essential commodities.

These operations are carried out by the Army, Navy and the Air Force depending on the need. For example the Navy can deploy under water diver's and ships for search missions, the Air Force can conduct rescue missions with helicopters or drop food packets during floods and the Army can provide shelter and medical help. The Army is also used to bring peace and order in an area that is affected by militant agitations.

Thus one can summarise that the Armed Forces perform the following main tasks

1. **Command and Control** : Having a central command centre for coordination and control of rescue missions.
2. **Logistics Support** : Provide supplies like food and water and ensure that communication channels are kept open.
3. **Setting up and running of Relief Camps** : These camps are necessary for disaster affected people.
4. **Medical Aid** : Temporary hospitals are set up for urgent medical attention.
5. **Construction and Repair/Restoration of Roads and Bridges** : It is necessary to restore road and rail communication as soon as possible after any disaster, like floods or earthquakes so that relief material is transported quickly.



IAF helicopter in relief operations



Medical evacuation



Army rescue during floods



Search and Rescue



Naval Divers

Activities

1. Find out how the Armed Forces have helped the people during the following disasters, discuss in the class and write notes on them :

- i. Gujarat Earthquake (2001) - Areas affected: Bhuj, Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Kutch, Surat, Surendranagar district, Rajkot district, Jamnagar and Jodia

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- ii. The Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004) - Areas affected: Parts of southern India and Andaman Nicobar Islands

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iii. Uttarakhand Flash Floods (2013) - Areas affected: Gobindghat, Kedar Dome, Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Western Nepal

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iv. Kashmir Floods (2014) - Areas affected: Srinagar, Bandipur, Rajouri etc.

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