

There is currently a debate going on regarding classifying heatwave as a recognized disaster under India's Disaster Management Act amidst extreme heat and the resulting lives. This change is believed to allow states to create specific disaster categories for heatwave management. Currently, heatwaves aren't included, leading to funding and resource challenges for states.

What are Notified Disasters?

Notified disasters are specific disasters recognized under the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005. The DM Act was created after the 1999 Odisha super-cyclone and the 2004 tsunami.

It defines disasters as events causing substantial loss of life, property, or environmental damage beyond the community's coping capacity.

Recognized disasters allow states to use the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). In 2023-24, only two states drew money from the NDRF.

What are the arguments for recognizing heatwaves as a disaster under India's Disaster Management Act?

Increasing Frequency and Severity: Over the last 15 years, heatwaves have become more severe and frequent, posing greater risks to public health and safety. The rising number of heat-related illnesses and deaths, especially among those who work outdoors, underscores the need for heatwaves to be recognized as disasters.

Improved Disaster Response Funding: Recognition would allow states to use funds from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) and potentially the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) for heatwave management, including financing Heat Action Plans (HAPs). These plans involve creating shaded spaces, ensuring water availability, and adjusting work and school schedules to mitigate heatwave impacts.

What are the arguments against recognizing heatwaves as a disaster under India's Disaster Management Act?

Financial Constraints: Recognizing heatwaves as a national disaster could significantly increase financial burdens. The 15th Finance Commission expressed that the existing list of notified disasters covers the needs of the states to a large extent, suggesting that the financial implications of adding heatwaves could be substantial.

Compensation Costs: Official recognition would require the government to compensate for heatwave-related fatalities and injuries. This year alone, more than 500 heat-related deaths have been reported, and official recognition could lead to higher compensation costs.

Attribution Challenges: Determining if a death was directly caused by a heatwave is complex, as heat often exacerbates pre-existing conditions rather than being the sole cause, making direct attribution difficult.

Existing Provisions for Local Disasters: The enabling provision by the preceding Finance Commission allows states to use up to 10% of their State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for local disasters like heatwaves. States such as Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Kerala have already designated heatwaves as local disasters, utilizing this provision for management and relief, which may reduce the urgency for national recognition.

Expected Question for Prelims

Que. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Notified disasters are specific disasters recognized under the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005.
- 2. The Disaster Management Act in India was enacted after the 1999 Odisha super-cyclone and the 2004 tsunami.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: Discuss the pros and cons of notifying heatwave under the Disaster Management Act of India.

Answer's Approach:

- ❖ In the first part of the answer briefly discuss the Disaster Management Act in India.
- ❖ The second part discusses the pros and cons of notifying a heatwave.

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Finally give a conclusion giving suggestions.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.