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Disaster Management Act 2005 — Architecture, Three-Tier Structure, and India's Evolving Response

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Disaster Management Act 2005 — Architecture, Three-Tier Structure, and India's Evolving Response

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WHY IN NEWS

The May 2, 2026 launch of India's nationwide **Cell Broadcast (CB) emergency alert system** by Home Minister Amit Shah and Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia operates within the framework of the **Disaster Management Act, 2005** — the foundational legislation that created India's disaster management architecture. Two decades into its operation, the Act remains the legal basis for India's increasingly complex disaster response.

THE TRIGGER — 2004 INDIAN OCEAN TSUNAMI

On December 26, 2004, a 9.1 magnitude earthquake off Sumatra triggered a tsunami that killed over **230,000 people** across 14 countries. India's affected areas — Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Puducherry — recorded approximately **12,000 deaths**. The disaster exposed major gaps:

- No early warning system for tsunamis
- Multi-state coordination was ad-hoc
- District-level response capacity was inconsistent
- No statutory backbone for disaster management

The Disaster Management Act, 2005 was passed within a year of the tsunami.

THE THREE-TIER INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

National Level — NDMA

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is the apex body for disaster management at the national level.

FEATURE	DETAIL
Headed by	Prime Minister (ex-officio Chairperson)
Members	Up to 9 (appointed by PM); Vice-Chairperson designated by PM
Functions	Lay down policies, plans, and guidelines for disaster management; coordinate enforcement
Bound by	Disaster Management Plans (NDMP) prepared by it
Funding	NDRF (National Disaster Response Fund)

State Level — SDMA

State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) in each state and UT.

FEATURE	DETAIL
Headed by	Chief Minister (ex-officio Chairperson)
Members	Up to 8 (appointed by CM); Vice-Chairperson designated
Functions	Lay down state policy and approve State Disaster Management Plan
Funding	SDRF (State Disaster Response Fund)

District Level — DDMA

District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in each district.

FEATURE	DETAIL
Headed by	District Magistrate / Collector (ex-officio Chairperson)
Members	Elected representative; CEO of Zilla Parishad; Senior Police Officer; Chief Medical Officer; Superintending Engineer
Functions	Plan, coordinate, and implement disaster response at district level
Critical role	Executes evacuation, relief, rehabilitation operations

OPERATIONAL FORCES

NDRF — National Disaster Response Force

National Disaster Response Force is India's specialised disaster response force.

FEATURE	DETAIL
Founded	2006 (under Disaster Management Act 2005)
Composition	16 battalions (~12,000 personnel) drawn from CAPF — BSF, CRPF, CISF, ITBP, SSB, Assam Rifles
Deployment	Deployed to disaster sites across India and internationally (Nepal earthquake 2015, Turkey earthquake 2023)
Specialisations	Earthquake rescue, flood rescue, chemical-biological-radiological (CBRN) response, building collapse
Director General	Senior IPS officer

NDRF has earned a strong reputation domestically and internationally as one of the world’s most effective disaster response forces.

NIDM — National Institute of Disaster Management

National Institute of Disaster Management is the premier institute for disaster management training and research.

FEATURE	DETAIL
Founded	2003 (predecessor); reconstituted under DM Act 2005
Functions	Training, research, capacity building, documentation
Affiliations	Works with NDMA, state governments, international agencies
Headquarters	Delhi

FUNDING ARCHITECTURE

FUND	PURPOSE	SOURCE
NDRF (National Disaster Response Fund)	National-level disaster response	Central Government via Finance Commission allocations + cess
SDRF (State Disaster Response Fund)	State-level disaster response	75% Centre + 25% State (general states); 90:10 for special category states
NDMF (National Disaster Mitigation Fund)	Mitigation projects	Established 2021 under 15th Finance Commission

The 15th Finance Commission’s allocation for disaster management (2021-2026) was approximately **₹2.32 lakh crore** — split between NDRF/SDRF (response) and NDMF/SDMF (mitigation).

LEGAL PROVISIONS AND ENFORCEMENT POWERS

The Disaster Management Act gives extraordinary powers during declared disasters:

PROVISION	POWER
Section 6	NDMA’s policy and planning powers
Section 11	National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) preparation
Section 35-37	Central Government’s disaster powers — including coordination and resource mobilisation
Section 51-60	Penalties for obstruction (up to 1 year imprisonment)
Section 65	Powers to requisition resources during disaster

The Act was used during the **COVID-19 pandemic** (declared a “disaster” under DMA 2005) — this was the most extensive non-natural disaster invocation of the Act in its history.

SACHET WITHIN THE DM ACT FRAMEWORK

The May 2, 2026 launch of Cell Broadcast — within the **SACHET system** developed by C-DOT — operates under the DM Act’s institutional umbrella:

- NDMA initiates SACHET deployment
- DoT (Department of Telecommunications) provides telecom infrastructure
- C-DOT develops technology
- Mobile network operators (Jio, Airtel, Vi, BSNL) execute alerts
- SDMA-DDMA structure receives and acts on alerts

This integration of telecommunications with disaster response represents the Act’s evolution beyond physical relief to information-driven preparedness.

LIMITATIONS AND REFORM DISCUSSIONS

CONCERN	ISSUE
State-Centre coordination	DDMA-SDMA-NDMA cascade is uneven; some districts have weak DDMA capacity
Climate change adaptation	DM Act 2005 framed in pre-climate-emergency language; needs explicit climate adaptation provisions
Pandemic-specific provisions	COVID-19 use of Act revealed framework gaps for biological disasters
Mitigation vs response balance	NDMF's 2021 establishment was acknowledgement that response-only focus was inadequate
Tribal and remote area coverage	DDMA capacity in tribal districts lags national standards

The 2024-2025 Standing Committee on Home Affairs recommended significant amendments to the Act, including explicit climate change provisions and strengthened mitigation framework.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS3 — Disaster Management	NDMA, SDMA, DDMA architecture; NDRF; NIDM; DM Act 2005
GS2 — Governance	Centre-State coordination in disasters; Finance Commission disaster allocations
GS3 — Science & Tech	Cell Broadcast; SACHET; tsunami early warning

Mains Keywords: Disaster Management Act 2005, NDMA, SDMA, DDMA, NDRF, NIDM, NDRF SDRF, NDMF, 15th Finance Commission, SACHET, Cell Broadcast, 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, COVID-19 disaster declaration

Facts Corner

ITEM	FACT
DM Act enacted	2005
Trigger	2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (Dec 26, 2004; 230,000+ killed)
NDMA Chairperson	Prime Minister (ex-officio)
SDMA Chairperson	Chief Minister (ex-officio)
DDMA Chairperson	District Magistrate (ex-officio)
NDRF formed	2006; 16 battalions
NIDM	National Institute of Disaster Management; Delhi
15th FC disaster allocation	~₹2.32 lakh crore (2021-2026)
ITEWS	Indian Tsunami Early Warning System; INCOIS Hyderabad (since 2007)
SDRF Centre-State split	75:25 (general states); 90:10 (special category)

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