Challenges before Disaster Management Setup

What is the issue?

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India’s disaster management setup is facing various challenges in addressing natural disasters.

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What is the status of flood in Kerala?

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- In Kerala heavy rains lead to floods follow and people are stranded, many die.
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- Most of the state’s 39 dams had reached 85 to 90 per cent of their capacity by the end of July, a month that had seen 18 per cent more rainfall and much more was predicted for August.
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- The army is mobilised and the Indian public gets to watch dramatic footage of rescues by helicopter and rubber dinghies.
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- Relief funds are allocated and appeals are put out to contribute to all manners of relief funds.
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What is the role of NDMA?

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- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), that was set up by an Act of Parliament and is chaired by the prime minister.
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- It boasts an elaborate blueprint to coordinate with state disaster management authorities.
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- The NDMA had its origins in the tragedy of the 1999 Gujarat earthquake.
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- The broad idea being that the country needed a centralised authority that anticipated natural disasters and had a management blueprint that would be activated when disaster struck.
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- It involves coordinating between a host of scattered agencies that predict weather, earthquakes and so on, and working with each state to prepare a disaster management plan.
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What are the concerns with NDMA?

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- A recent World Bank study says India accounts for about a fifth of global deaths due to floods and climate change is likely to make matters worse.
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- If the death tolls from floods alone are to be gauged since the NDMA was set up Bihar (2008, over 400 deaths), Uttarakhand (2013, almost 6,000 deaths), Kashmir (2014, over 200 deaths), Chennai (2015, over 500 deaths), and Assam (2017, over 100 deaths) the approach of NDMA hasn't worked.
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- The NDMA is well aware of this, it recently predicted that more than 16,000 people could perish in floods in the next decade and the setup has not taken any actions in this regard.
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- Incredibly, the National Flood Forecasting Network that comes within the ambit of the NDMA's damage limitation blueprint does not have a single station in Kerala.
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What is the way forward?

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- Much of the NDMA's efficacy is, however, also reliant on the vigilance of the states, and this has been patchy at best.
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- In 2017, the Supreme Court pointed out that many states lagged behind on even basic compliance such as dredging rivers.
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- Perhaps the most telling indictment of NDMA’s inability is the ease with which governments continue to rely on the formidably efficient military to save the day every time a disaster strikes.
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Source: Business Standard

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