COVID-19 as a Notified Disaster

Why in News?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will treat COVID-19 as a notified disaster for providing assistance under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).

What is a disaster?

- The Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act, 2005) has given a definition for disaster.
- Disaster is a catastrophe, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes.
- It may result in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, property or environment.
- Disaster would be of nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area.

How are disasters classified?

- The High Power Committee on Disaster Management of 1999 had identified 31 disaster categories.
- This committee organised these categories into 5 major sub-groups,
    1. Water and climate related disasters
    2. Geological related disasters
    3. Chemical, industrial and nuclear related disasters
    4. Accident Related Disasters
    5. Biological related disasters, which includes epidemics.

What is SDRF?

- The SDRF was constituted under the DM Act, 2005.
- It is the primary fund available with the State governments for responses to notified disasters.
- This fund will help the State governments meet expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims.
- The disasters covered under the SDRF include cyclones, droughts, tsunamis, hailstorms, landslides and pest attacks among others.

How much does the Centre contribute?

- The Centre contributes 75% of the SDRF allocation for general category States and Union Territories.
- It contributes 90% of the SDRF allocation for special category States (northeast, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).
- For SDRF, the Centre releases funds in two equal instalments as per the recommendation of the Finance Commission.
- The National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), also constituted under the DM Act, 2005, will supplement the SDRF of a state.
- The NDRF will support the SDRF in case of a disaster of severe nature, if adequate funds are not available in the SDRF.

Have there been such instances in the past?

- In 2001, the National Committee on Disaster Management under then Prime Minister was mandated to look into the parameters that should define a national calamity.
- However, the committee did not suggest any fixed criterion.
- As of now, there is no executive or legal provision to declare a national calamity.
- In 2018, in view of the devastation caused by the Kerala floods, Kerala politicians demanded that the floods be declared a “national calamity”.
- There have been demands from states to declare certain events as natural disasters, such as the Uttarakhand flood (2013).

Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express

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