Indian's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief – Beyond Battlefield

Mains: *GS-III – Defence & Disaster Management*

Why in News?

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) is a key part of India's global role, when civilian resources are insufficient, the Government of India deploys the Armed Forces to strengthen relief efforts at home and abroad.

What is Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)?

- **HADR –** It refers to the rapid, coordinated, and efficient response by governments, militaries, and organizations to save lives and alleviate suffering during, or immediately following, natural and man-made disasters.
- **Integrated approach** – It integrates disaster management, diplomacy, and specialized military capabilities to provide immediate aid, such as medical care, evacuation, and infrastructure restoration.
- **India's role** – India uses its extensive disaster management experience to provide timely, coordinated, and well-organized assistance both at home and abroad.
- **Humanitarian Focus** – India's humanitarian aid to partner countries focuses on quick support to save lives, reduce suffering, and uphold human dignity during and after disasters.

What are the roles played by various Armed Forces of India?

- **Role of Armed Forces** – The armed forces are often the ***first responders*** during crises.
- Their ability to operate in hostile environments, combined with organizational skills and logistics expertise, makes them highly effective in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).
- **Indian Army** – Deployment of troops for rescue and relief, establishment of field hospitals, restoration of essential infrastructure, and delivery of humanitarian aid.
- **Indian Navy** – Evacuation of Indian nationals from abroad, transportation of relief material, and deployment of ships and helicopters for maritime and littoral assistance.
- **Indian Air Force** – Provides strategic and tactical airlift by ferrying relief supplies, medical teams, and disaster response personnel to affected areas, also undertaking evacuation and rescue missions.
- **Indian Coast Guard** – Assists during cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, oil platform fires, and flooding in coastal regions, ensuring rapid response and maritime safety.

What about the Genesis, Policy & Institutional Framework?

- **HADR system** – It is built on strong policy and institutions, enabling quick, coordinated, and credible responses both domestically and internationally.
- The term HADR mainly applies to international missions, while domestic disaster response is managed under a statutory framework.
- Together, they reflect a *whole-of-government approach* that brings together diplomacy, defence, disaster management, and public health.
- **International HADR operations** – Guided by
  - PM's 10-point agenda (Agenda No. 10: cohesion in disaster response) and
  - NDMA's International HADR Guidelines (2024).
- **Key principles of these guidelines** – Includes

  - Respect sovereignty and territorial integrity of affected states
  - adherence to humanitarian law and human rights standards
  - commitments to transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct
  - Promote inclusivity (aligned with UNDRR Gender Action Plan, 2024)
  - Recognize Indian Armed Forces as key enablers (rapid lift, logistics, medical, evacuation, engineering)
  - Integrate technology (drones, AI enabled forecasting)

- **Domestic Response** – Governed by the *Disaster Management Act, 2005*, with a three-tier institutional system (national, state, district) through the NDMA, SDMAs, and UDMAs/DDMAs.
- **Alignment with Global Frameworks** – India's HADR approach is consistent with the ***Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030)***, emphasizing preparedness, resilience, effective response, and coordinated recovery.
- **Domestic Governance**
  - **Primary responsibility** in India – Rests with *State Governments*; Central's role is supportive (finance, logistics, technical aid)
  - **National command** – National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) under Cabinet Secretary
  - **Nodal ministry –** Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)
  - **Ground-level response** – District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) via Incident Command Teams (ICTs)
  - **Legal basis** – The act provides legal backing for civil–military coordination under the principle of Aid to Civil Authorities.
  - **Other Key Institutions involved** – Various ministries like external affairs, home, health& family welfare, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), etc.

India's Preparedness Priorities

- Focus on multi-agency engagement for faster crisis response.
- Promotes synergy among Civil Administration, Armed Forces, NDMA, NDRF, and other stakeholders.
- Enhances communication, interoperability, and joint operations during emergencies.
- Encourages exchange of knowledge, best practices, and coordinated mobilisation.

What are some of India's domestic and international HADR examples?

Domestic HADR

- Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004) – Watershed moment for India's HADR framework, tri-service deployment, IAF's *Operation Seawave* helicopters.
- Uttarakhand Floods (2013) – IAF's *Operation Rahat* and Army's *Surya Hope.*
- J&K Floods (2014) (*Operation Megh Rahat*), Kerala Floods (2018), Cyclones Fani (2019) & Amphan (2020).
- **Recent (2023–25)** – Tunnel rescues, glacial lake outburst response (Sikkim), nationwide flood relief, major coal mine rescues.

International HADR Operations

- Operation Castor (Maldives) & Operation Rainbow (Sri Lanka) – During 2004 Tsunami.
- Operation Maitri (Nepal, 2015).
- Operation Devi Shakti (Afghanistan, 2021) – 669 evacuated, sacred manuscripts safeguarded.
- Mission Sagar (2020–22)
- Operation Ganga (Ukraine, 2022)
- Operation Dost (Türkiye & Syria, 2023)
- Operation Kaveri (Sudan, 2023)
- Operation Brahma (Myanmar, 2025) & Sagar Bandhu (Sri Lanka, 2025)
- **Other recent developments & preparedness** – Includes Exercise Samanvay (2022) (Air Force), Exercise Chakravat (2023) (Navy), Exercise Sanyukt Vimochan (2024) (Army), and Exercise Tiger Triumph (2025) – Tri-Service (India–US).

What is the strategic important of HADR for India?

- **Soft Power Projection** – Enhances India's image as a responsible regional power.
- **First Responder** in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) – Strengthens leadership role.
- **Countering China's Influence** – Competes with China's "disaster diplomacy".
- **Trust Building with Neighbours** – Strengthens defence and diplomatic ties ('Neighbourhood First' policy).
- **Maritime Security Integration** – Links HADR with SAGAR vision (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

What lies ahead?

- India's commitment to HADR is firmly anchored in its strategic vision of promoting regional stability and strengthening global cooperation.
- These missions highlight the Armed Forces' commitment to *"Nation First,"* transforming adversity into opportunities for resilience.
- The humanitarian assistance underlines India's commitment to its *'Neighbourhood First' policy* and the timeless Indian ethos of *'VasudhaivaKutumbakam'* – the world is one family.
- The Indian Army continues to stand shoulder to shoulder with friendly nations in times of crisis, reflecting India's resolve to be a first responder in the region.

Reference

PIB | Indian Armed Forces in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

