Non-Inclusion of Heatwaves in Notified Disasters

Why in news?

The current severe heatwave across the country has revived talks about officially recognizing heatwaves as a disaster under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

How India manages a disaster?

- There is *no mention of disaster in the Constitution* of India.
- **Disaster management in India** – In the wake of the 1999 Odisha super-cyclone and the 2004 tsunami, *Disaster Management Act (DMA)* was enacted in 2005.
- The ***National Disaster Management Act (NDMA)*** is the key piece of legislation *governing the roles of the Centre and States* in responding to a natural disaster.
- The *Ministry of Home Affairs* is the nodal body that governs the execution of this Act.
- **Disaster** – NDMA defines a disaster as a "*catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence*" arising from "*natural or man-made causes*" that results in substantial loss of life, destruction of property, or damage to the environment.
- It must also be of such nature which is "*beyond the coping capacity*" of the community.
- **Notified Disaster** – They are disasters which are notified in the *Guidelines on Constitution and Administration* of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) and National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).
- Such disaster are called as notified disasters.
- **Categories of Notified disasters** – Currently, there are ***12 categories of disasters*** which are notified under this Act.
- These are cyclones, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, and frost and *cold waves.*

What are the benefits of notifying a disaster?

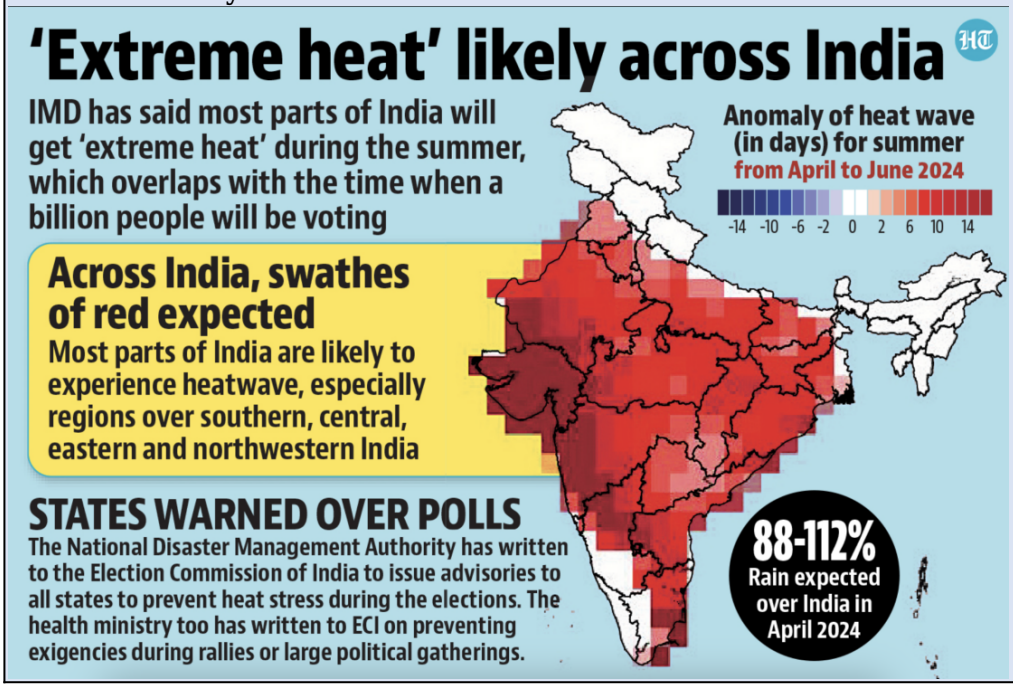
- Several disaster management authorities draw their powers from NDMA and they define which natural calamities qualify for ***state-backed compensation***.
- Thus a notified disaster in India is eligible for financial assistance in times of such calamities.
- **Financial assistance** – In case of occurrences of a notified disaster, the states are allowed to draw money from the two funds that were established under NDMA.
- **At National level** – The funds can be drawn from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).
- The *entire money* of the NDRF comes *from the central government*.
- **At State level** – The funds can be drawn from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).
- *States contribute 25%* of the money in the SDRF (10% in case of special category states), the rest comes from the Centre.

Why heatwaves were not included as notified disasters?

- **Need** – If included, states could use disaster response funds for compensation, relief, and managing heatwave impacts.
- Currently, states must use their own funds for these activities.

Heatwave

• **Heat wave** – It is described when maximum temperatures reach over 40 degrees Celsius in plains and over 30 degrees Celsius in hilly regions.
• It occurs when temperatures are 4.5 to 6.4 degrees Celsius above normal for two consecutive days at two stations.



To know about Heatwave crisis in India, click here

- **Common Summer Events** – Heatwaves weren't classified as disasters in the 2005 Disaster Management Act because they were typical summer events.
- They are common in northern, eastern, and central India, cause illnesses and deaths.
- **Varying definitions of a heatwave** – While temperatures above 45 degrees Celsius are considered to have heatwave-like conditions, it can also mean temperatures that are 4.5 degrees or more above what's normal for any place.
- **Finance Commission Reluctance** – The issue of inclusion of more calamities in the existing notified list of calamities/ disasters, was considered by the 15th Finance Commission.
- It reported that it did not fin any merit in the states request of inclusion of heatwave in notified disaster list.
- The Centre resists national classification, citing the Finance Commission's stance.

> *15th Commission has allowed the state government to use up to 10% of the annual fund allocation of the SDRF for providing immediate relief to the victims of natural disasters, other than the aforesaid 12 disasters, that they consider to be 'disasters' within local context in the State.*

Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Kerala have utilized this provision to provide relief for heatwave related relief measures.

- **Financial burden on the government** – The government has to provide *monetary compensation of Rs 4 lakh for every life lost* because of a disaster that is in the notified list.
- **Problem in attributing deaths to heatwaves** - In most cases, *heat itself does not claim lives*.
- Most people die due to other pre-existing conditions, made worse by the impact of extreme heat.

What lies ahead?

- **National Classification** – Recognize heatwaves as disasters to ensure a coordinated national response.
- **Early Warning Systems** – Enhance and expand early warning systems to provide timely alerts to vulnerable populations.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns** – Increase awareness about heatwave risks and preventive measures.
- **Urban Planning** – Implement urban planning strategies to reduce heat island effects, such as increasing green spaces and using heat-reflective building materials.
- **Creating Heat Action Plans** – Develop and enforce local heat action plans, focusing on high-risk areas.
- **Healthcare Preparedness** – Strengthen healthcare infrastructure to handle heatwave-related illnesses.
- **Water Management** – Improve water management systems to ensure adequate water supply during heatwaves.
- **Climate-Resilient Infrastructure** – Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure to mitigate heatwave impacts.

Heat Action Plans (HAPs)
• HAPs provide a snapshot of a *region's heat profile*, including information on - The number of *past heatwave events* - The *yearly trends* in the summer maximum temperature - The *land surface temperature*, and so on. • It is followed by a *vulnerability assessment* which maps out regions that require immediate attention and a response plan. • **India** - With the frequency of heatwaves rising, State, district, and cities have prepared heat action plans (HAPs). • The *NDMA and the India Meteorological Department* are working with *23 States to develop HAPs*.

References

1. The Indian Express| Non-inclusion of Heatwaves in Notified Disasters
2. The Hindu| Notified Disasters



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering