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## 1. Disaster Preparedness

### Context:

- Recent reports suggest that the Union Cabinet will be taking up the proposal to amend the Disaster Management Act of 2005, which largely focuses on improving preparedness, providing immediate relief, and protecting infrastructure. However, it neglects a key aspect of disaster management – long-term recovery.

### Background:

- The Disaster Management Act was enacted to effectively prevent, mitigate and prepare for disasters. It came into being on the heels of three major disasters in the Indian subcontinent: the 1999 super cyclone in Odisha, the 2001 Bhuj earthquake, and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.
- The Act **rightly emphasises the need to move from responding to disasters to effective preparedness**, which has led to most States investing in resilient infrastructure, early warning systems and evacuation.

### Features of Disaster Management Act, 2005:

- The Disaster Management Act, 2005 has been enacted as the central Act to deal with the management of disasters. This act envisaged a **three tier Disaster Management structure** in India at National, States and District levels.
- Act mandates the Central Government to **establish National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) as nodal authority with prime minister as its ex-officio chairperson**.
- It lays down the policies on disaster management, approve the national plan, and approve plans developed by various ministries of the union, lay down the guidelines to be followed by the state authorities in drawing up state plans.
- NDMA also is mandated to recommend guidelines for the minimum standards of relief to be provided to persons affected by disaster.
- Apart from NDMA, the central government also constitutes a National Executive Committee which is responsible for assisting NDMA in execution of various functions for disaster management.
- The act envisages constitution of the National Disaster Response Force for the purpose of specialist response to a threatening disaster situation or disaster.

- The DM Act 2005 calls upon the central government to constitute the National Disaster Response Fund for meeting any threatening disaster situation or disaster.
- The act also calls upon the government to constitute a National Disaster Mitigation Fund for projects exclusively for the purpose of mitigation.

### **Concerns Regarding the Act:**

- The act hardly discussed the recovery and rehabilitation and of disaster-affected people.
- The Act's enormous emphasis on preparedness has translated into timely warnings, relief shelters and massive evacuation exercises. All these steps have reduced casualties.
- **Post-disaster rehabilitation and recovery are left to respective Ministries and Departments.** However, only select States like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Odisha have department-level disaster management plans.
- While integrating post-disaster rehabilitation measures with existing development schemes can be seen as the right step towards mainstreaming disaster management, it is marred by poor implementation and lack of intent from different ministries and departments.

### **Focus on Long Term Recovery:**

- Scholarship on disaster management conceptualises recovery as action taken to rebuild lives once the hazardous situation has passed. However, this has been commonly interpreted as providing food, water and medicines.
- Even, long-term recovery measures have largely focussed on addressing physical vulnerabilities such as the provision of shelter. While these interventions are crucial, long-term recovery needs much more.
- Recovery measures should address inherent vulnerabilities pertaining to livelihoods, education, water, sanitation, health, and ecology of the disaster-affected communities.
- Intangible losses such as psychosocial needs of the communities should be given equal emphasis. Long-term recovery needs to be thought of alongside development in an integrated and comprehensive manner by combining with health, skill building, and livelihood diversification schemes.
- This would ensure that communities have, at the very least, recovered to a new normal before the next disaster strikes.