



NEWS ANALYSIS

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BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY

Q) Examine the potential of river interlinking India to ensure greater equity in the water distribution by enhancing the availability of water in drought prone and rainfed area.

₹45,000-cr. Ken-Betwa link project launched

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Mehul Mahanti
BHOJAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday laid the foundation stone for the Ken-Betwa river-linking project in Madhya Pradesh's Khajuraho, aimed at solving the water woes of the Bundelkhand region, spread across parts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The project is estimated to cost around ₹45,000 crore.



Narendra Modi examines a project map during the event to lay the foundation stone for the river-linking project in Khajuraho.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Modi credited Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision for India's major river valley projects, and accused the Congress of not giving due recognition to the architect of the Constitution.

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hasahab Ambedkar. The Central Water Commission exists today because of the efforts of Dr. Ambedkar but the Congress never gave him credit for his water-conservation efforts. No one was even allowed to know about it," he said, amid the ongoing controversy over Union Home Mi-

nister Amit Shah's remarks on Dr. Ambedkar. The Congress had staged protests seeking Mr. Shah's resignation over the issue.

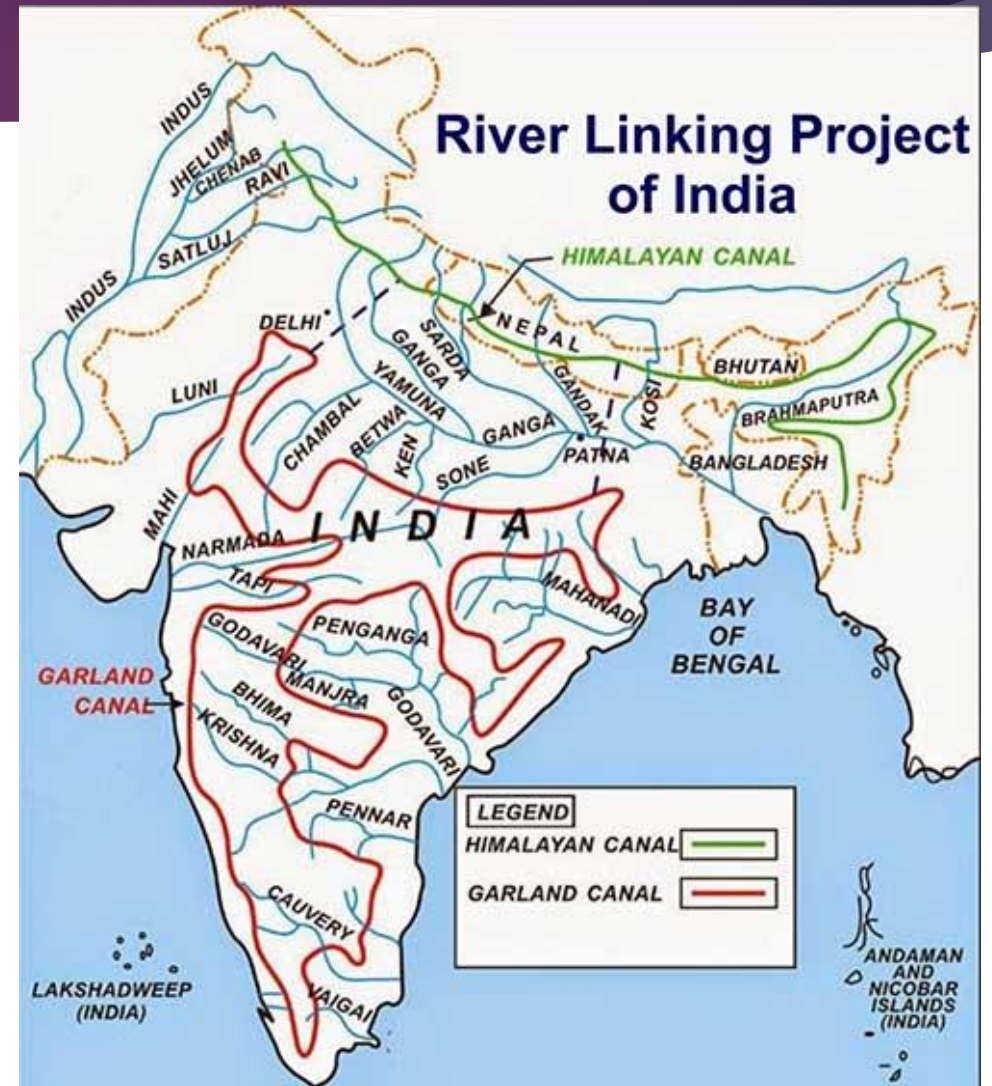
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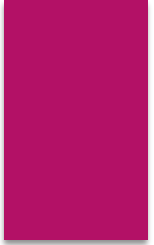
son. I tell you that after the country got independence, the credit for the foresightedness behind India's water management and construction of dams goes to Bhasahab Ambedkar," he said.

Mr. Modi said that the Congress governments of the past were "experts in making announcements" but did not have the "intention to implement the schemes".

He said the Ken-Betwa project would bring prosperity to the drought-prone Bundelkhand region. "The people of Bundelkhand struggled for every drop of water but the previous governments did not find any permanent solution to the water crisis."


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- ❖ The river interlinking project **aims to link India's rivers by a network of reservoirs and canals** that will allow for their water capacities to be shared and redistributed.
 - ❖ Some experts claim that this **will reduce persistent floods in some parts and water shortages in other parts** besides facilitating the **generation of hydroelectricity for an increasingly power hungry country.**


Potential of River linking projects

- ❑ India receives most of its rain during **monsoon season from June to September**, some places which will have shortage of water. Interlinking of rivers will help these areas to have **water throughout the year.**
- ❑ This will **cut farmers dependence on monsoon rains** by bringing millions of hectares of cultivatable land under irrigation.
- ❑ **Crop productivity would increase** and so would revenues for the State.
- ❑ The river linking project **will ease the water shortages in western and southern India** while mitigating the impacts of recurrent floods in eastern India.

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- ❖ **India needs clean energy** to fuel its development processes, and river water can be leveraged for this.
 - ❖ Fulfilling water needs impact socio-economic life of people which will **help end poverty.**
 - ❖ Need for interlinking of rivers to **prevent inter-state water disputes.**
 - ❖ Potential **benefits to transportation through navigation,** as well as broadening income sources in rural areas through fishing.

Potential challenges of River inter-linking

- ❑ Interlinking of rivers is a **very expensive proposal.** The amount required for these projects is so huge that government will have to take loans from the foreign sources
- ❑ The river interlinking project will adversely **affect land, forests, biodiversity, rivers and the livelihood of millions** of people.
- ❑ The Ken-Betwa link threatens about 200 sq. km of the **Panna tiger reserve.**

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- ❖ Less than positive experience that other countries have, like **diversion of Amu Darya and the Syr Darya** or the **Australia's experiments in its Murray Darling basin**.
 - ❖ It causes **massive displacement of people**. Huge burden on the government to deal with the issue of rehabilitation of displaced people.

Way forward

- ❖ Need to **build the responsibility, capability and accountability** in our water management institutions to revive our rivers.
- ❖ The **judicious use of canal water**, growing crops that are appropriate to a region, **encouraging drip irrigation** and reviving traditional systems such as tanks.
- ❖ **Invest in water conservation**, more efficient irrigation and better farm practices.

Ken-Betwa link project

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BHOPAL

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CONTEXT

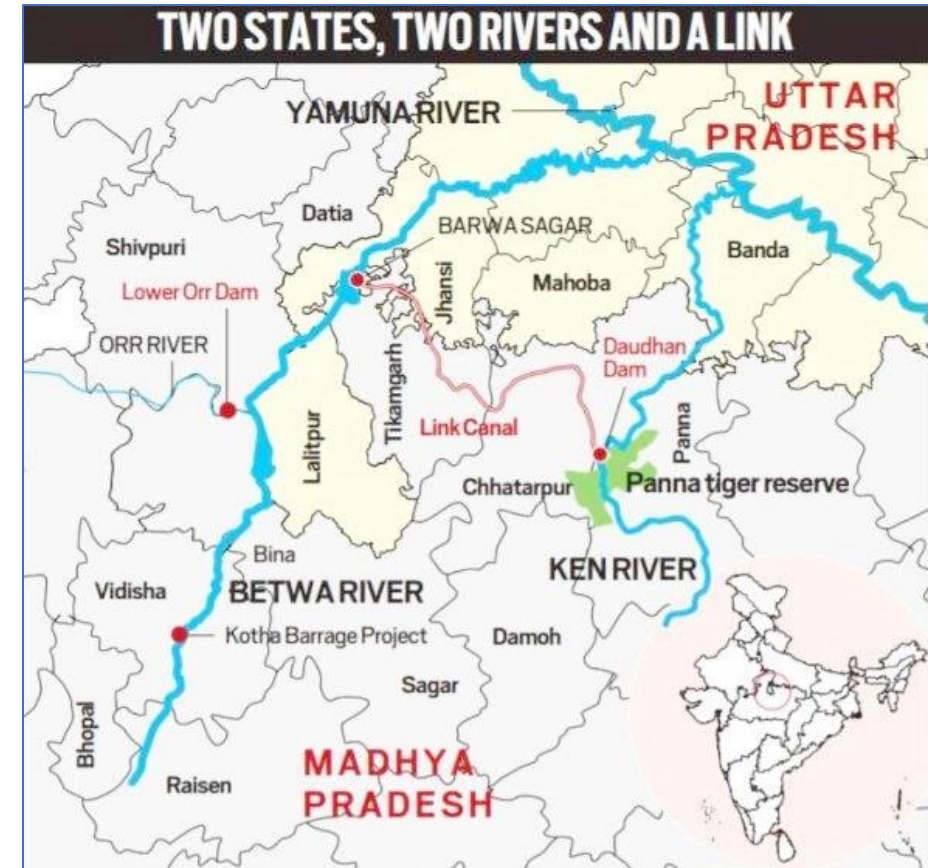
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Ken Betwa link project

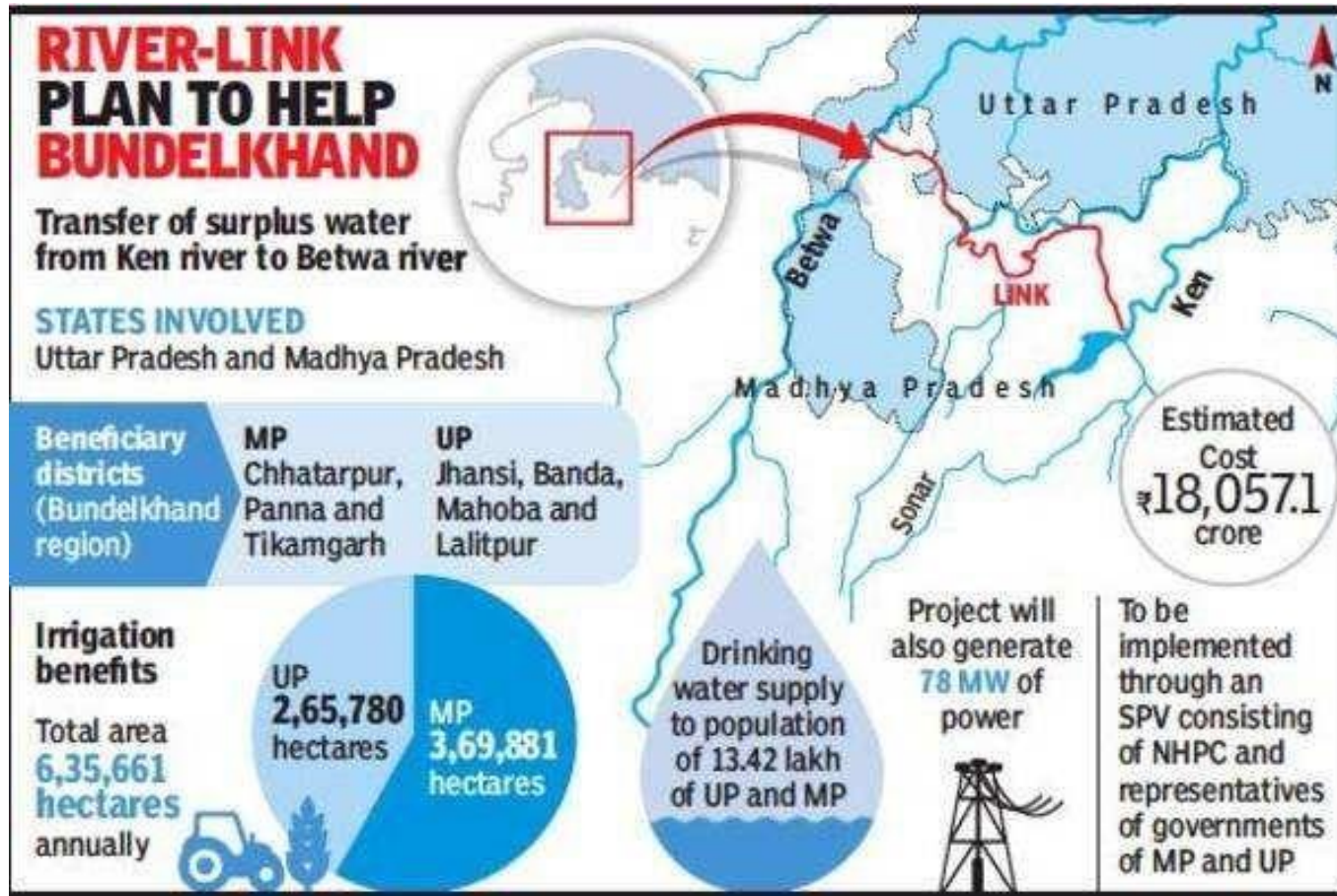
- The Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) is the river interlinking project that aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken River in Madhya Pradesh (MP) to Betwa in Uttar Pradesh (UP) to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region.
- The project involves building a 77-metre tall and a 2-km wide Dhaudhan dam (to be built within Panna Tiger Reserve) and a 230-km canal.
- Ken-Betwa is one of the 30 river interlinking projects conceived across the country.

Significance:

- It will not only accelerate the water conservation by construction of a multipurpose dam but will also produce 103 MW of hydropower and will supply drinking water to 62 lakh people.



- ❖ “The major river valley projects of India were based on the vision of Babasaheb Ambedkar. **The Central Water Commission exists today because of the efforts of Dr. Ambedkar.**
- ❖ The Ken-Betwa project would **bring prosperity to the droughtprone Bundelkhand region.**



Central Water Commission · 06 Dec 18 :
 #BabasahebAmbedkar, #MahaparinirvanDiwas
 Dr. B. R. Ambedkar played huge role in shaping the #Water #Governance in the country in pre-independence era through creation of institutions, #constitutional #provisions and advocacy for #multipurpose development of water resources!!!



Ambedkar chafed under the existing arrangement, under which the Central Government had no say in the matter of India's water Policy. Referring to the Act of 1935, he observed that:

We have not taken sufficient account of the fact that there is no difference between railways and waterway, at any rate those that flow from Province to Province. On the contrary we have allowed our Constitution to make distinction between railways and waterways. With the result that railways are treated as Central, but waterways are treated as Provincial.

Scrap Free Movement Regime with Myanmar

Centre yet to formally scrap FMR with Myanmar

Tighter guidelines issued to regulate movement of people between the two countries; earlier, those living within 16 km of border were allowed to cross but the limit has now been set at 10 km

Vijita Singh
NEW DELHI

Months after announcing that the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border has been entirely suspended, the Union Home Ministry has brought in fresh protocol to regulate the movement of people living within 10 kilometres on either side of the largely unfenced international border.

A senior government official told *The Hindu* that the notification ending the FMR, which involves a bilateral agreement with Myanmar, is yet to be notified by the External Affairs Ministry.

Home Minister Amit Shah had announced on February 8 that the FMR had been scrapped to ensure internal security of the country and to maintain the demographic structure of the northeastern States. However, the new guidelines indicate that the regime has not been done away with but stricter regulations, such as reducing the range of free movement to 10 km from the earlier 16 km, have been introduced.

"There have been verbal announcements on ending FMR but formal orders are awaited," the official said.

A February 16 order by the Manipur Governor regarding temporary suspension of the FMR along the



Dividing line: The 1,643-km-long border with Myanmar runs along Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram. FILE PHOTO

Manipur border said, "MHA, Government Of India has recommended for scrapping the FMR to MEA, GoI and a formal order in this regard is awaited."

The scrapping of the FMR was opposed by Nagaland and Mizoram. The Nagaland government, led by the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, an ally of the BJP, has passed a resolution in the Assembly against scrapping the FMR.

In Manipur, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh has attributed the ongoing ethnic violence, which has claimed more than 250 lives since May 2023, to the unregulated movement of people from across the border. On September 23, 2023, he urged the Home Ministry to cancel the FMR along the India-Myanmar border.

A senior government official said that pressure from political circles and civil society groups was one of the reasons for finalising

the States of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km) and Mizoram (510 km).

New rules

For entry into India from Myanmar, individuals will have to report at the designated border crossing points and fill a form.

The Assam Rifles will conduct the document inspection followed by a security and health check by the State police and health department officials, respectively.

The Assam Rifles will upload all the forms on the Indo-Myanmar Border portal, record biometrics, and issue a border pass with a photograph of the applicant and a QR code. The pass will have to be deposited on return at the same crossing point before completion of seven days.

The protocol stated that the police will do physical checks to verify the visit of Myanmar nationals as per the details provided in the border pass and anyone violating the conditions will face legal action.

Eight pilot entry and exit points will be made functional immediately on stabilisation of software and deployment of staff. Another 14 entry points will be activated on procurement and installation of biometric machines and the remaining 21 points after putting in place requisite infrastructure.

the "Instructions for regulation of cross-border movement of people of border area across the Indo-Myanmar Border" from 43 designated entry and exit points, instead of entirely scrapping the regime.

Familial and ethnic ties

The FMR came into existence in 1968 as people on either side of the border have familial and ethnic ties. The territorial limit of free movement then was 40 km, which was reduced to 16 km in 2004, and additional regulations were enforced in 2016.

According to the new guidelines, a resident crossing the border from India to Myanmar will be given a "border pass" by the Assam Rifles for stay up to seven days in the neighbouring country. The Assam Rifles is the primary border guarding force along the 1,643-km-long border with Myanmar along the States of Aruna-

6-year-long arrangement ends



Union home minister Amit Shah announced the government's recommendation to suspend the regime to ensure internal security

WHAT IS FMR?

The Free Movement Region allowed people from both sides of the India-Myanmar border to travel 16km into each other's territory without a visa, but with a border pass valid for one year that allowed a stay of up to two weeks per visit

1,643-km long India-Myanmar border passes through Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland & Arunachal Pradesh

GOVT'S ACT EAST POLICY

The regime was introduced in 2018 as part of India's effort to boost the region's economy by encouraging trade with Southeast Asian nations



SECURITY CONCERNS

Security officials cautioned in recent months that armed insurgents were using FMR to enter India, and to escape undetected

Context

- Months after announcing that the **Free Movement Regime (FMR)** along the Myanmar border has been **entirely suspended**, the Union Home Ministry has brought in **fresh protocol to regulate the movement of people living within 10 kilometres** on either side of the largely unfenced international border.

About Free Movement Regime (FMR):

- ❖ Under the FMR, all the hill tribes, whether they are citizens of India or Myanmar, **can travel within 16 km on either side of the Indo-Myanmar Border (IMB).**
- ❖ They can cross the border by **producing a border pass with a one-year validity** issued by the competent authority and can stay up to two weeks per visit.
- ❖ The FMR was **implemented in 2018** as part of the **Central government's Act East policy.**
- ❖ This helps locals get more **culturally assimilated with trans-border villages through weddings, celebrating common festivals** together, and trans-border trade.
- ❖ It is a reflection of the physical, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and fraternal linkages among the trans-border villagers.



- ❖ The FMR had been **scrapped to ensure internal security of the country and to maintain the demographic structure** of the northeastern States

Familial and ethnic ties

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- ❖ According to the new guidelines, a resident crossing the border from India to Myanmar will be given a **“border pass” by the Assam Rifles for stay up to seven days** in the neighbouring country.
- ❖ The Assam Rifles is the **primary border guarding force along the 1,643-km-long border with Myanmar**.



New rules

- ❖ For entry into India from Myanmar, individuals will have to report at the designated border crossing points and fill a form.
- ❖ The **Assam Rifles will conduct the document inspection** followed by a security and health check by the State police and health department officials.
- ❖ The Assam Rifles will upload all the forms on the **Indo-Myanmar Border portal, record biometrics**, and issue a border pass with a photograph of the applicant and a QR code.
- ❖ The pass will have to be deposited on return at the same crossing point before completion of seven days.

Disaster Management Bill and its potential lapses

Developments in Disaster Management

High Powered Committee set up in August 1999.

Until 2001 – Responsibility with Agriculture Ministry.

Transferred to Ministry of Home Affairs in June 2002.

National Disaster Management Authority established 28th September 2005.

On 23 December, 2005, Disaster Management Act .

The lapses in the disaster management Bill

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, raises serious concerns. Instead of filling in the gaps in the Disaster Management Act (DMA), 2005, the Bill has removed scope for participatory governance, accountability, and efficiency from the Act.

The lapses

First, the semantics. The Bill uses top-down guarded terminology such as 'monitor' and 'guidelines'. Instead, terms such as 'supervisor' and 'direction' could have established greater trust and bonding with communities and local governments. On the other hand, in global legal research documents, such as the Yokohama Strategy, the Hyogo Framework for Action, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, local communities are known as the 'first responders' to disasters. It is imperative to build on the capacities and wisdom of local communities.

Second, even though the Bill defines a 'hazard', 'vulnerance', and 'vulnerability', these definitions are mere mechanical words or inconsequential without acknowledging the substantive roles of local communities, panchayats, wards and NGOs in disaster management. Whether during Cyclone Aila in 2009 in the Sunderbans, the Kedarnath glacial lake outburst flood of 2013, or the floods in Kerala in 2018, villagers and fishermen began rescuing people before the National Disaster Response Force or Coast Guards could reach the victims.

The Bill is silent on intersectional discrimination. Whenever authorities are open to just approach to discrimination and vulnerability, the datasets change phenomenally. Ignoring intersectional vulnerability even after 20 years of the Act weakens the Bill's claim to be holistic and inclusive. Women, the disabled, "lower" castes, and LGETQA communities may not show the several layers of discrimination



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they suffer.

There is also nothing in the Bill on the performance evaluation of district authorities. If the authorities had failed to be prepared for a disaster and then a disaster strikes, sometimes they try to take attention away from their dereliction of duty and bring focus to individual philanthropy efforts. This makes the ground fertile for political poaching of the electorate.

The Bill excludes 'law and order' from the Act. It clarifies that, 'the expression "man made causes" does not include any law and order related matter'. Why then does it bring the State Director General of Police into the State Executive Committees (SECs)?

Accountability is the most casualty. Sections 12 and 13 of the DMA, which covered the minimum standards of relief for disaster victims and the possibility of loan repayment relief, have been omitted. Similarly, Section 15, which demanded that State governments follow guidelines on minimum standards of relief, has also been dropped. These Sections also carried special provisions for widows, orphans, the homeless, and provided ex gratia assistance on account of loss of life as also assistance on account of damage to houses and for restoration of means of livelihood. There is no replacement for this in the Bill.

The DMA had made some mandatory requirements for better enforcement of disaster management provisions by various departments and ministries under the Government of India. Section 25(2a) and Section 25(2d) that ensured integration and preparedness in the plans have been dropped in the Bill. At another place, the SEC no longer has to do basic homework for preparedness; sub clauses (2a) and (2b) of Section 22 are deleted in the Bill. There is little in terms of good governance in the Bill as most of its



measurable indices for performance assessment of officials in the field are fuzzy or inaccurately mentioned.

The Bill also suffers from specimenism. The thousands of animals which die after every disaster are not even mentioned. The District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMA) seem to have little responsibility in implementing the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023,

brought out by the same government. This gap fails the Rules as well as the preparedness for a disaster.

The Bill suggests an Urban Disaster Management Authority (UDMA) under Section of 41A. What brought the need for this additional authority? It is unclear. The Municipal Corporation is the highest revenue generator for any city as it controls land, buildings, builders, and property taxation. But in what way can a Municipal Corporation improve disaster management if it encourages urban flooding by allowing encroachments over aquifers, water bodies, city forests, tree beds and markets?

Regional collaboration Finally, the world is grappling with zoonotic and epizootic diseases. Given this scenario, a regional plan of action through increased trust, collaboration, and emergency strategies was awaited.

The Bill could have mentioned regional groupings such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and BRICS, to be approached in the event of a disaster. The Bill was expected to encourage international collaboration, democratisation, and decentralisation of the role and responsibilities of the National Disaster Management Authority. It could have at least referred to the 2011 SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters. Given the porous boundaries of South Asian countries, to ignore regional collaboration is a serious lapse.

Context

- ❖ **The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, has sparked concerns regarding its impact on participatory governance and accountability.**
- ❖ Critics argue that the Bill **fails to address key gaps in the Disaster Management Act (DMA), 2005, and weakens provisions meant to ensure a holistic, inclusive, and efficient disaster management system.**

Lapses in the Bill's Provisions

- ❖ The Bill uses terms like **'monitor' and 'guidelines'**, which may **undermine local communities' role as 'first responders'**, as emphasized in global frameworks such as the **Sendai Framework**.
- ❖ A more **collaborative approach using terms like 'supervision'** would have fostered greater trust with local entities.
- ❖ While the Bill defines concepts like **'hazard' and 'resilience'**, it ignores the **critical role of local communities, panchayats, and NGOs** in disaster management, evident in past disasters like **Cyclone Aila and the 2013 Kedarnath floods**.
- ❖ The Bill **neglects to address intersectional vulnerabilities**, failing to recognize the compounded discrimination faced by women, disabled individuals, and marginalized communities during disasters, thus **limiting the Bill's inclusivity**.

- ❖ The Bill overlooks the **death of animals in disasters**, neglecting the responsibilities of Disaster Management Authorities (DMAs) in implementing the **Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023**, and addressing the impact of disasters on wildlife.

Gaps in Regional and Urban Disaster Management

- ❖ The Bill **fails to mention regional collaboration frameworks** like SAARC, BIMSTEC, or BRICS, missing an opportunity to **strengthen cross-border disaster response strategies** in South Asia, especially in light of increasing zoonotic and epizootic diseases.
- ❖ The Bill **does not encourage international collaboration or decentralization of responsibilities** within the National Disaster Management Authority.
- ❖ A regional approach, as outlined in the **2011 SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response**, could have improved disaster resilience across neighboring countries.



Thank you

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