

PhD THESIS

“ ROLE OF ARMED FORCES

IN

EFFECTIVE DISASTER MANAGEMENT ”

INTRODUCTION

1. On 23rd Dec 2005 the Indian Parliament passed Bill No. LV-F of 2005 - The Disaster Management Bill - thus bringing in to force Act No 53 of 2005, The Disaster Management Act. This event stands out as the single biggest landmark in the field of Disaster Management (DM) in India. **It is also the start point of this Thesis, so chosen to ensure that the research remains contemporary and oriented firmly towards the future, rather than the past.**

2. At the time of its enactment, the DM Act encapsulated the most distilled wisdom on the subject, as obtaining at that point of time in India, accumulated through years of study, debate and practical experience. Introduction of the Act rounded off many an ongoing debate on the issue, bringing many contentious issues to their logical conclusions, resolving conflicting suggestions and foreclosing unviable options ; thus in a way marking a culmination point of informed public discourse. With the Act becoming a reality, the Indian academia and its ‘think-tanks’ - which had been labouring on DM for a long time - shifted focus and changed tack to other more current, ‘flavor-of-the-day’ themes. Naturally, one outcome of this has been a perceptible dilution of interest in DM amongst the intelligentsia.

3. It is the author's considered view that this shift-in-focus is premature and inappropriate. "The DM Act is like a Menu Card", he contends, "and like you can not ascertain the quality of a meal merely by reading the Menu Card, **the efficacy of the DM Act can only be ascertained by seeing its 'actual implementation' on ground.** The proof of a pudding does lie in its eating. Therefore, with the passing of the Act the task is not over, in fact it has just begun."

4. Going by the fact that the Indian experience of the last 63 years since independence has been that the mere act of passing legislation in Parliament has not solved any of our problems on ground, the efficacy of the DM Act can truly be adjudged only by seeing it '**in action**'. We have some of the most water-tight laws in the world on traffic-offences, yet look at the utter chaos on our roads. That is the difference between 'theory' on one hand and 'ground reality' on the other. Similarly our anti-terrorist laws, heritage protection laws, anti-corruption laws, child-labor laws and the recently introduced child education laws - confined within the gilded covers of pedagogic texts - are indeed pearls of intellectual wisdom. But one look at what is in fact happening on ground lays bare the stark truth : they don't work. **Passing legislation is not enough, the laws need to be translated in to action on ground.** The author therefore contends that "While all of us wish the DM Act well, the wisdom of our past experiences warns us to be cautious, to keep our eye firmly on the ball till the goal is scored, to **ensure that the implementation of Act is done most scrupulously, meticulously and diligently - with the highest degree of efficiency, sincerity and integrity. We owe this to our nation and to our fellow citizens. Till this is done, the task is not complete.**" Hence **this Thesis.**

5. One more compelling reason for us to re-invigorate debate on this subject is that after signing of the DM Act in to law in Dec 2005, while the

strategists - armchair or otherwise - have gone off in search of new battlegrounds for intellectual combat, those assigned with the myriad responsibilities to implement the Act at various levels, have only recently swung in to action. They need direction, guidance, assistance. **While the broader concepts and doctrines have been enunciated, the 'nuts-and-bolts' and minute details of implementation at village, block, district and state levels still need to be given practical shape. There is a need for intellectuals, policy makers and those entrusted with the responsibility of executing the disaster response to now get involved with the grass roots level of implementation of the Act.**

6. With the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) spearheading the thrust towards 'conceptualizing as well as implementing' numerous provisions of the Act, a handful of Government (Govt) Ministries, Departments and Institutions - Central as well as State - have, laudably, swung in to action in right earnest. While they give us reason to cheer, it is equally true that at the grass roots level many of the stake-holders have done nothing at all or, at best, precious little. Thus for example, at last count (August 2010) out of the total number of 28 States, 7 Union Territories and 626 Districts of India only a handful had even drafted and submitted their detailed DM Plans to the central govt, let alone operationalising them. **In fact, as recently as 01 August 2010 the official Govt of India website, www.ndmindia.nic.in, could list the State and District DM Plans of only seven states and UTs : Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. This, after five years since enactment of the DM Act !** The number of blocks and villages who have still to draft, submit and operationalise their respective plans may well run in to thousands. **Such is the lethargy in our governance and the non-seriousness in our approach to DM that five years after passing of the DM Act all States and Union Territories have not even constituted their SDMAs and DDMA's ! When will they**

do all that that needs to be done ? More importantly, when will these 'plans on paper' become 'real plans on the ground ?' Admittedly, India is still many years away from realizing its DM dream.

7. It is important to note that preparation of a DM plan on paper is only the first, tentative step ; **the real test lies in putting in place the requisite infrastructure, trained manpower, stores and equipment and networking them all in to one functional and synergized whole.** To get an idea of the nitty-gritty's involved in DM at the implementation level, let us take the example of Letter No F.No.32-6/2009.NDM-I issued by the Govt of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, DM Division dated 25 March 2009. This letter was addressed to the Relief Commissioners/Secretaries of the Department of DM as well as all States and UTs, prior to the 'Annual Conference of Relief Commissioners/ Secretaries'. The letter asks some very pertinent questions, these very questions need to be asked at every village, block, district and State / UT of India : --

Quote

“(a) What is the status of implementation of the Crisis Management Plan (CMP) 2007 of MHA - cum - preparation of Standing Operating Procedures (SoPs) ?

(b) **Vulnerability Assessment** : whether a profile of the various districts vulnerable to different disasters has been prepared ? This should include vulnerability assessment, past history, geographical feature and the impact and intensity as also the damage of the past disasters. Based on this, whether a list of most vulnerable village-district wise has been prepared ?

(c) **Warning System** : whether a review of the existing Warning and Forecasting System has been made in the context of floods, heavy rains and cyclone in association with concerned Departments of the State

Government and the Government of India office located in the State ? This include India Meteorological Department (IMD), Central Water Commission, All India Radio, T.V., local sirens and other traditional means.

(d) **Emergency Response Activities**: whether State and District level coordination committees have met and reviewed the preparedness with all concerned ?

(e) **Rapid Damage Assessment** : whether the mechanism for rapid assessment of damage has been put in place ?

(f) **Maintenance of Essential Services**: during disasters like flood, heavy rains, cyclone, the first casualty are the essential services like Power, Tele communications, Roads. Whether coordination meeting has been organized with these Departments to ensure the immediate restoration of these services in the event of disruption due to floods and cyclone ?

(g) **Stocking Of Essential Commodities** : whether adequate stocks of essential commodities like food-grains, kerosene oil, salt, edible oil etc., have been made at different places ?

(h) **Medicines** : whether review of availability of essential medicines, needed in the wake of floods and heavy rains for likely diseases like diarrhea, has been done and these have been adequately stocked at various vulnerable centers ?

(i) **Arrangements of Drinking Water** : whether position has been reviewed with all concerned for ensuring supply of safe drinking water during crisis period ? This includes transportation of drinking water.

- (j) **Temporary Shelters** : whether a list of the shelters identified for organizing relief camps for persons evacuated from the low lying areas has been made ? Whether adequacy of these shelters has been reviewed and Plan for putting up temporary shelters has been put in place ? Whether provision of shelter material like tarpaulin, tents has been reviewed ?
- (k) **Pre-Contract** : whether a list of relief material required during emergency response phase has been prepared based on the past experience ?
- (l) **Evacuation Plan** : based on the vulnerability assessment, whether evacuation plan for the persons residing in the low lying areas has been drawn up ? This includes identification of places, means of transportation, evacuation routes, etc.
- (m) **Activating of Control Rooms** : whether Control Rooms at vulnerable districts and State Headquarters have been activated with adequate number of trained personnel and equipment ?
- (n) **Search and Rescue Teams** : how many search and rescue teams in the State have been trained and equipped for floods/heavy rains ? Whether the procedure for their deputation at short notice has been finalized ? Whether Search & Rescue Teams of your State can be deputed to the neighbouring States, during crisis period ?
- (o) **Procurement of Search, Rescue and Evacuation Equipments** : please indicate the list of equipments purchased out of CRF account.
- (p) **Installation of Public Utility Four Digit Code Telephone** : please indicate the status of installation of these telephones at the State/District headquarters.

(q) **Emergency Support Function (ESF Plan for Emergency Response in States/UTs)** : MHA had requested all the States/UTs to draw up a ESF Plan based on the model ESF Plan formulated at National level. This Plan was required to be reviewed periodically. Whether State Government has formulated the ESF Plan ? If yes, a copy of the same may be sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). If not, the latest status in the matter may be indicated.

(r) **Transparency in Relief Operations** : name and address of relief recipients along with quantity/volume and quality of relief distributed may be prepared and made available to the local representatives of the public in Panchayats and Municipalities. The consolidated list should also be maintained and displayed at the Block /Taluka levels and made available to general public on demand. Please indicate the action taken in the matter.

(s) **Identification of Nodal Officers** : whether a list of nodal officers in various concerned Departments of the State Governments and Government of India located in that State has been made ?

(t) **Preparedness Drill** : the State Government is required to organize preparedness drill and to carry out mock exercises. Whether such exercises have been carried out by the State Government during current year based on the field experience and lesson learnt from previous disasters ?”[®]

Unquote

8. **So much for the questions, where are the answers ? More importantly, what are the answers ? An honest soul-searching will reveal that the answer to a majority of the above questions is either**

[®] Excerpts From Letter No F.No.32-6/2009.NDM-I Issued By The Govt of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Disaster Management Division dated 25 March 2009.

‘No’ or ‘Not Done’. Therefore the deduction is obvious ; we Indians are still quite far from attaining our DM objectives.

9. Huge national resources - manpower, equipment and many crores of Rupees in DM funds - are now being made available for ‘capacity building’ at every level from District to the Centre. It is important to ensure their optimum and prudent utilization. Equally important is to prevent their misappropriation and siphoning off, otherwise when the next disaster strikes we shall, as has often been the case in the past, be again found wanting. Another major concern is the integration of the various stakeholders in the DM ambit : international agencies, NGOs, local communities, the scientific community, the corporates and the newly raised Disaster Response Forces (DRFs). Individually as well as collectively, these stakeholders have very significant roles to play in various facets of DM. There is a compelling and urgent need to **synergize their functioning** with each other as well as with the time tested and proven senior partner in DM, the Armed Forces.

10. It is axiomatic that to forge an effective disaster response at all levels it is the bounden duty of each and every stake holder in the DM domain to look within, identify its own weaknesses and take suitable corrective measures. **The aim should be to ensure that, when called out for duty, each and every agency involved in DM works at optimal efficiency in executing its assigned task. The Indian Armed Forces, being one of the largest, most potent and experienced stakeholders in DM, also need to carry out such a self-appraisal. From this will emerge tangible suggestions for their improvement and enhanced efficiency. This Thesis devotes itself to this pursuit.**

Aim

11. This thesis has been written with a single-minded and clear aim : to provide to our policy makers in the field of DM a document that can readily be translated in to action. Therefore, throughout the paper the focus is on 'practical implementability' of what is being suggested - rather than on pedagogic theory - so as to make the disaster response of the Indian Armed Forces far more effective than it currently is.

Scope

12. This research essentially concerns itself with the role played by the Indian Armed Forces in the vast field of DM. There being a plethora of other players, including regional and global institutions, their mention has been limited only to those areas where they interact with the Armed Forces. However, a broad coverage of the role played by some of the foreign militaries has been included.

(a) A holistic coverage of the selected topic has been attempted, right from the apex level - our National Policies and the DM Act of 2005 - to the nitty-gritty's of training and equipping an individual soldier to perform with maximum efficiency in delivering succor to his fellow countrymen during a disaster relief operation.

(b) The canvas being large, meticulous care has been taken to ensure that coverage of 'doctrinal issues' as well as 'ground realities' is appropriate and balanced.

(c) Extraneous issues – those not directly impinging on the Armed Forces have intentionally been kept to a minimum so as not to detract from the central theme of the research.

(d) **It has been ensured that no information of classified nature finds mention in this Thesis, material for which has been sourced only from open / public sources.**

Chapterisation

13. In order to ensure comprehensive and holistic coverage of the subject, yet continually maintain focus on the main theme, the research paper has been sequenced systematically as given in the 'Contents'.

Research Methodology

14. Due care has been taken to ensure that the thesis is original, authentic and well-researched. Therefore its foundation is laid primarily on material gleaned from **Primary Sources**, both Indian and international. A holistic examination of the subject has been attempted by encapsulating a wide cross-section of view-points and thought processes that are both contemporary and futuristic. Besides this, secondary sources including the INTERNET have been freely consulted to enrich the quality of the paper. These inputs have been combined with the latest feedback obtained from seminars, conferences and study workshops held in India and abroad on the subject. **Finally, the author's unique perspective, analysis, reasoning and convictions have been accorded the primacy they deserve to make this work as fresh and original as is rightfully merited by a thesis at this level.**

About The Author

15. The author himself has a rich, first-rate, practical experience in the

field of DM, having been an accredited member of Disaster Management Teams in India as well as at a United Nations Peace Keeping Mission abroad.

(a) He is one of the few Army officers to have formally cleared a 'Certificate in Disaster Management' in the first division from IGNOU as far back as September 2000.

(b) He has been fortunate to have had the unique opportunity of being intimately associated with the evolutionary process of DM in India, right from the late nineties when the subject of DM started attracting significant nationwide attention and media glare, through the early years of the new century when the DM Bill was undergoing a series of 'test-draft' formulations, to the actual passing of the Act in Dec 2005 and subsequently the five 'implementation test-bed' years from 2005 to date. His engagement with this subject therefore exudes a rich aroma of 'theory' mixed with 'practical experience' : the latter including a stint with the United Nations in Africa, being in charge of the DM portfolio at a formation HQ in the Army, developing an insight from apex (Central Govt) level in the Ministry of Defence and currently being a senior faculty member imparting instruction on the subject at The Army War College – India's premier military training institute and a Centre Of Excellence in Defence Studies.

(c) His experience, combined with constant study and research to keep himself updated with the latest developments on the subject, has - it is hoped - served to give this paper a more incisive analysis, deeper insight, more holistic coverage and, most importantly, a better set of recommendations than would otherwise have been obtainable.

(d) On a personal note, as the author I would like to dedicate this seminal work to all those institutions, NGOs, communities and individuals -

Govt , private, Indian or foreign - who have lent a helping hand to my fellow countrymen in times of such disasters. While my heart goes out to all those who have suffered at the hands of such disasters, the '*shakti*' of the human spirit to rise above all such vicissitudes, to endure and to overcome, fills me with hope and optimism for the future. May God give our great country the strength, vision and energy to rise up to this daunting challenge. May we all synergise our efforts to make doubly sure that not a single life is lost needlessly in any future disaster. I dedicate this work to the realization of this sincere dream.
