



N. Gopaldaswami

गृह सचिव
HOME SECRETARY
भारत सरकार
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

North Block
New Delhi.

26 May 2003

Dear

You will recall that I had written to you on 18 December 2002 stressing the need to bring about a shift in focus from post-disaster response to prevention, mitigation and preparedness. I had enclosed a set of recommendations for the measures to be put in place by the State Governments in this regard. A copy of the set of recommendations was also given to your officers in the Conference of Relief Commissioners and Disaster Management Authorities held at New Delhi on 10 March 2003.

2. Two of the major recommendations made in my letter dated 18 December 2002 were that the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation may be re-designated as the Department of Disaster Management and that a State Disaster Management Authority be constituted. Currently, the focus is only on post-disaster relief and rehabilitation and the present designation of the Department as the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation reflects this orientation but this needs to be changed to a more proactive role with emphasis on prevention. It has therefore been recommended that a change in orientation be brought about and the designation of the Department be changed to Department of Disaster Management to reflect the change in the focus of responsibilities from merely providing relief of one of prevention and mitigation and in addition relief and rehabilitation.

3. Another aspect of the current orientation has been that disaster management/disaster response is considered to be the responsibility of the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation (or the Department of Disaster Management) alone. Other Departments get involved or assist in response only when called upon to do so. On the other hand, mitigation, preparedness and response are multi-disciplinary activities involving a number of Departments. Steps for mitigation and preparedness have to be taken across a number of Ministries/Departments. Appropriate preparedness also need to be put in place in all the relevant Departments in advance so that time is not lost in responding to a disaster when it strikes. In brief there has to be holistic owning of responsibility across Departments for both mitigation as well as preparedness.

4. The State Disaster Management Authority is the institutional arrangement envisaged for bringing about this holistic ownership of responsibility. The Authority can either be at the ministerial level with the Chief Minister as the Head and the Ministers for Water Resources, Agriculture, Health, Roads, Rural Development, Public Works, Public Health Engineering, Finance and Home as Members or at the official level with the Chief Secretary as the head and Secretaries of these Departments as members. The Authority then can look at the requirements for mitigation or preparedness in a holistic manner with all the relevant Departments being jointly responsible.

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5. Some States have expressed reservations that these institutional changes would necessitate sanction of additional posts. This is not necessarily so. What is being recommended is not the creation of a new Department of Disaster Management but the change of focus with the re-designation of the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation into the Department of Disaster Management.

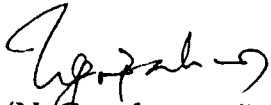
6. Similarly the creation of a state Disaster Management Authority either at the ministerial level or the official level need not involve the creation of posts. The Authority can have Ministries/Secretaries of relevant Departments as members with Secretary of Department of Disaster Management as Member-Secretary. The Authority can be serviced by Department of Disaster Management.

7. As you know, time is of essence in Disaster Management. We have suffered substantial losses in terms of human lives, property and damage to infrastructure during the last decade due to some major disasters. This was partially due to the fact the pre-disaster aspects were not meticulously addressed. We have to learn from our past experiences and in this context, pre-disaster aspects of preparedness, mitigation, awareness generation and human resource development need to be addressed with a missionary zeal.

8. With these clarifications I am sure there would be no more hurdles in converting the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation into the Department of Disaster Management and setting up a State Disaster Management Authority in your State/UT Administration. We shortly propose to take up separate mitigation projects for cyclones and earthquakes, and it will help if these institutional changes are in place before these projects are taken up.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,


(N. Gopalaswami)

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To

All Chief Secretaries (except Gujarat & Orissa) (as per list attached)