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Flood relief: Why is state asking for more but Centre may not give it?

Karnataka has suffered nature's fury in the form of floods for three years now. In order to help provide relief and post-disaster reconstruction, the Centre gives states financial assistance under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF). Recently, Karnataka received Rs 577 crore under the NDRF, but Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa said his government would try to get more. Here's the lowdown on how disaster relief works:

What is the National Disaster Response Fund?

The National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) was constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. It supplements the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), allocated annually by the Centre to the states. If SDRF funds are inadequate — as was the case in the past two years when Karnataka battled some of its worst floods — money is released from the NDRF to compensate for the losses suffered during disasters such as floods, droughts, cyclones and so on.

How does the funding work for disaster relief?

States, once they exhaust the SDRF funds, have to petition the Centre for additional funding under the NDRF. The Centre also contributes 75% of the SDRF allocation to states like Karnataka, as mandated under the Disaster Management Act. Karnataka has sought a revision of SDRF and NDRF funds, noting that relief released as per guidelines was insufficient.

How is eligibility determined?

Soon after a natural disaster occurs, the deputy commissioners concerned submit reports of losses. These reports are compiled to calculate the overall loss suffered and eligible compensation. The report is then forwarded to the Centre, which sends an inter-ministerial team of officials to visit disaster-hit areas and submit their own assessment. Based on the team's assessment, funds under the NDRF are released to the state. But over the past three years, Karnataka has released compensation over and above the eligible limit. For example, it released Rs 5 lakh for houses completely damaged by floods, against the eligible compensation of Rs 95,100 as per SDRF and NDRF norms.

What does the funding cover?

The funds cover flood relief and compensation for damage to public infrastructure. Under flood relief, crop loss (agriculture, horticulture, sericulture and plantation crop), house damage, animal death, expense for relief camps, cattle camps and other relief items are covered. The damage to infrastructure includes damage to roads, bridges, minor irrigation projects, tanks, government buildings, and water supply and sanitation projects.

How much has Karnataka sought and got recently?

In 2019-20, Karnataka received a total of Rs 3,544.28 crore as relief — Rs 336 crore under the SDRF and Rs 3,208.28 crore under the NDRF. Karnataka had estimated the losses at Rs 35,160 crore and was eligible for a relief of Rs 3,891 crore as per the norms. The floods in August, September and October this year had caused losses to the tune of Rs 24,941 crore, according to the state government. It is eligible for Rs 2,384 crore as compensation. Though SDRF funds increased to Rs 1,054 crore as per the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission this year, Karnataka had to spend two-thirds of it on Covid-19 relief, leaving only Rs 276.08 crore for flood relief. This month, the Centre released Rs 577 crore from the NDRF. The amount released is yet to cover the actual losses.

Why is there politics around it?

Politics around fund allocation came to the fore ahead of the 2018 assembly elections after national BJP national leaders made extravagant claims about allocating funds to Karnataka. The tables turned after the BJP came to power, and Karnataka faced severe floods in 2019 and again in 2020. Initial estimates by the state government on the extent of losses also allowed the Congress to corner the BJP, saying 25 of its MPs from the state were unable to get the required funds from the Centre for Karnataka.

— Akram Mohammed