

Standing Committee Report Summary

Cyclone Ockhi–Impact on Fishermen and Damage caused

- The Standing Committee on Home Affairs (Chair: Mr. P. Chidambaram) submitted its report on ‘The Cyclone Ockhi – Its impact on Fishermen and Damage Caused by it’. The cyclone had hit the coasts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Lakshadweep on November 29, 2017.
- **Forecasting:** The Committee observed that Ockhi was an unusual cyclone due to its rapid intensification. It observed that while forecasting rapid intensification of cyclones is an area of concern, the occurrence of such cyclones is not rare. It noted that several countries had developed prediction models for such a phenomenon. It suggested that the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) should develop forecasting models for rapid intensification of cyclones. The Committee also noted that one of the reasons for rapid intensification was the heat content at the ocean surface. It suggested that IMD should acquire inputs on sea surface temperature from satellites and integrate them into prediction models.
- **Tracking systems:** The Committee noted that the Indian Space Research Organisation had developed a satellite-based vessel tracking system to track fishing vessels and send messages. It recommended that a trial of the system should be completed at the earliest and that the system should be expanded to every boat that ventures out for deep sea fishing.
- **Missing fishermen:** The Committee noted that several fishermen had gone missing as a result of the cyclone. It noted that while IMD had issued an advisory, the advisory did not warn of an impending cyclone. The Committee recommended that IMD be more proactive in the future and take every instance of weather disturbance with more seriousness. It also suggested that the Ministry issue cyclone advisories to the state government, and give it wider publicity through the media and radio.
- The Committee noted that search and rescue operations for missing fishermen had been abandoned. It suggested that the government should make adequate arrangements for providing viable means of livelihood to the families of the missing fishermen.
- **Assistance to states:** The Committee observed that the central and state governments contribute to the State Disaster Response Fund in the ratio of 75:25. The Committee recommended that revised sharing formula of 90:10 between the central and state government, as recommended by the 14th Finance Commission, should be implemented. The Committee further noted that there is a big difference in the assistance sought by states and the amounts approved by the central government. The Committee recommended that the central government should sensitise the state governments about the approved norms of assistance. Further, the central government should re-examine its funding policy to ensure adequate relief.
- **Deployment of National Disaster Response Forces (NDRF):** The Committee observed non-optimal deployment of NDRF during the cyclone. It noted that there was a standard operating procedure (SOP) for deployment of NDRF during a disaster. As per the SOP, states can requisition for forces. The Committee noted that states may make competing demands for mobilisation of forces in disaster-stricken areas. The Committee recommended that the National Disaster Management Authority make an independent assessment of the number of battalions required to be deployed. This would ensure rational assessment of needs and optimal prepositioning of NDRF.
- **Damage assessment:** The Committee recommended that the existing Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) should make a preliminary visit to the disaster affected areas, within one week of the disaster. Further, a joint preliminary damage assessment should be done with the state governments concerned. This would eliminate variance in the amounts assessed by the state government and the IMCT, thereby expediting the sanctioning of funds.
- **Assistance to families:** The Committee recommended that the proposed assistance of two lakh rupees to the families of the deceased be increased to at least five lakh rupees. Further, the assistance of Rs 50,000 to families of the seriously injured be increased to at least one lakh rupees.

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