

ROLE OF THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR (DISTRICT MAGISTRATE OR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER)

IN A GLANCE

April 2020



While on-paper the primary role of the District Collector or Deputy Commissioner (DC)/District Magistrate is collection of revenue, in-practice their duties are wide-ranging. They are instrumental in carrying out the state's directives. Their responsibilities include general administration, land and revenue administration, supervision of welfare and social security, maintenance of law and order, developmental initiatives, coordination with various sectors and line departments, conducting elections, and disaster management. As the Coronavirus pandemic unfolds in India, DCs are once again playing a key role in mitigating its impact.

KEY INFORMATION

Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

- Under the Act*, officers such as DCs, Director of Medical Education, Municipal Commissioners, and Police Commissioners are given additional powers to prevent further spread of the contagion and ensure essential services are unhindered. The DC, specifically, is empowered to enact temporary regulations such as taking over isolation rooms, wards, and other medical infrastructure (including private facilities in states like Meghalaya). They can also reallocate funds towards containment and relief efforts.
- The Act has been invoked in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh, as of 21 April 2020.
- There are state-wise variations in DM's powers as states can frame their own regulations. In Delhi, for example, they are directed to take penal action against anyone discriminating against medical personnel and submit daily action reports of the same. Similarly, Odisha amended the Act on 9 April 2020 to allow for procurement of necessary goods, services and equipment, and stricter punishments in case of disobedience under the Act.

Disaster Management Act, 2005

- As per the Act, District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMA) are constituted under the chairpersonship of the District Collector, unless it is a Tribal Area listed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Through the Act, two funds are made available to the DDMA by the state government - the District Disaster Response Fund and the District Disaster Mitigation Fund.

*The Union Cabinet on 22 April 2020 approved an Ordinance to amend the Act for stricter punishments for attacks against health workers. This is now a non-bailable crime as part of which appropriate investigations will be done within 30 days and those found guilty can be sentenced from 3 months-5 years. A penalty ranging from Rs 50,000 up to Rs 2 lakh can also be levied.

- The DDMA is the planning, coordinating and implementing body for disaster management. The Act allows the DDMA to direct any resources, including officers or funds, available at the district-level to mitigate, prevent or respond to the disaster, as well as restrict movement of persons and vehicles.
- Various states have invoked the Disaster Management Act, including Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttarakhand.

Local Administrative Task Force

- DCs are central to district administration. Several states have set up District Administrative Task Forces with varying functions to help coordinate administration and containment efforts through the lockdown. While there are variations in state-wise mandates of these task forces, almost all of them are headed by the DC.
- The main functions of the task forces are: situation monitoring, executing state directives, coordinating effort with the state-level task force, and ensuring containment of the contagion.
- The table below provides an overview of district-level task forces implemented by some states (as on 7 April 2020):

State	Task Force	Headed by	Functions
Andhra Pradesh	i) Local Administrative Task Force ii) District Control Rooms	Both are headed by DC	- Administration and coordination - Monitoring and surveillance
Assam	i) District Task Force	DC	- Administration and coordination
Haryana	i) District-level team to monitor misinformation ii) District-level Crisis Management Coordination Group	i) Director, Information Public Relations, and Languages Department ii) DC	- To curb the spread of misinformation regarding the contagion - Administration, monitoring, and coordination
Jharkhand	i) District Coordination Committee	-	- Coordinating state effort to contain the pandemic and ensure essential services
Karnataka	i) Coronavirus Outbreak Control and Prevention Teams	Multiple teams under different heads	- Surveillance and Contact Tracing Teams - HR Management - Training and awareness - Infrastructure management - Media surveillance - Material management
Mizoram	i) District Task Force	DC	- Overall coordination, implementation, and monitoring

Odisha	i) District-level Empowered Committee ii) District-level Emergency Procurement Committee	Both are headed by DC	- Necessary decisions for preventing, containing and mitigating the spread of COVID-19 - Oversee procurement decisions
Punjab	i) District-level COVID-19 Management Group	DC	- Overall coordination, implementation, and monitoring
Rajasthan	i) District War Room	DC, ADM or CEO of Zila Parishad is the nodal officer	- Grievance redress, maintenance of essential items and services, social security provision, coordination, tracking and assistance for migrant workers
Sikkim	i) District Task Force	DC	- Overall coordination, implementation, and monitoring

