



**By: Mr. Ashok Menon,
Director
Directorate of Fire & Emergency Services,
Govt. of Goa
St. Inez, Panaji Goa.**

The then Fire Adviser to Government of India had recommended in the year 1983 that Goa Fire Brigade Service as it was then known to be constituted as an independent department of the then Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu. The then Chief Minister of Goa Shri Pratapsingh Raoji Rane accepted the recommendation and a policy decision was taken to make the department an independent entity. The Order was issued by the Government on 21st January'1984. This Service was initially called the Goa Fire Brigade Services which was established in 1967 and was under the direct control of the Goa Police and an Officer of the rank of Superintendent of Police (IPS) used to look after it as an additional charge.

The most significant change has been the emergence of the Department as a Multi-Hazard Emergency Response Force. Goa has been witnessing tremendous growth in economic and commercial field. Growing population has increased the demand for residential space, leading to vertical growth in most towns with many high rise buildings in major towns. Growth in commercial activities has similarly led to growth in shopping complexes and Malls. These changes have warranted creation of 8 more Fire Stations. Except Sanguem every Taluka has its own Fire Station. Sanguem is served by Curchorem Fire Station. Other than the Territorial Fire Stations, there is one Fire Station catering to the Heritage Complex at Old-Goa and one Industrial Fire Station at Verna. Approval for Industrial Fire Station at Kundaim is awaited shortly. One new Fire Station is under construction at Saligao/Calangute. Land acquisition for a new Fire Station premises at Curchorem is in progress.

The increasing major fire incidents in the Country prompted the Government of India to frame a Model Fire Force Bill for the whole Country and circulate it to the States for adoption. This led to the enactment of Goa, Daman & Diu Fire Force Act & Rules. The Ex-Director of the Department Dr. P.K. John initiated the legislation and subsequently framed various rules under the Act. More importantly he ensured that vulnerable establishments are mandatorily inspected for Fire Safety Clearance for ensuring safety of life and property.

The Directorate's training expertise is well recognized. It has been approved as a Regional Training Centre of National Fire Service College, Nagpur for training Sub-Officers. We are conducting the B.Sc. Fire Technology Course through a Public Private Partnership model tie-up with the Dempo Charities Trusts, Dhempe College of Arts and Science, Miramar Panaji. The Training Centre is conducting Basic Fire Fighting Courses of 6 months duration for professional Fire Fighters and also short duration courses in Fire Safety for Security and Management staff of Hospitality Industry and major Industrial firms like the Tatas, Reliance Petrochemical etc. and earning training fees as recurring revenue. Trainees from Cochin University of Science and Technology and S S M Polytechnic, Tirur, Kerala, receive practical training at our training centre. 6 months initial induction training of Fire Fighters of various Union Territories is also imparted by this Training Centre. A Hostel for trainees is under construction. A moderate sized Laboratory and a Library provide back-up for our training Centre. Besides routine fire fighting, the department provides search and rescue operation. A team of our Fire Fighting personnel had participated in the Post Earthquake Search and Rescue mission at Bhuj in Jan/Feb'2001 and earned commendations for their exemplary work. The Department now stands re-designated as Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services.

Responsive and Transparent Governance:

In keeping with the State's policy of Transparency in Administration, the Department has published its Citizen Charter and made copies available to every Municipality, Panchayat and Consumer Group in the State. It is also displayed on the Departments Website www.dirdfes.org for ready access by citizens. As a part of the Government initiative Tuesday (F.N.) in every week is reserved as Public Grievance Day and designated officers hear grievances of the general public. Details of the arrangement can be seen at the website and in the Citizens Charter.

Resource Gaps:

The Fire and Emergency Services in the State in the year 1983 had only four Fire Stations at Panaji, Margao, Mapusa & Ponda with a total of 4 Water Tenders and 110 Firemen. High rise buildings and growth in industrialization have necessitated the possession of specialized equipment for search and rescue in various scenarios.

The Directorate is equipped with various specialized Fire Fighting Equipment and Rescue Equipment such as; Hydraulic Cutting & Breaking Rescue Tools for urban Search Rescue, High Pressure Pneumatic Lifting Bag, Twins Saw double cut rescue saw, Encapsulated Gas tight one piece Chemical Protective Suit, Canister Mask, 3 Layer Fire Fighting Suit, Search Camera System (Victim Location Unit), Inflatable Lighting System (Portable), Instant Liquid Leak Sealing or hazardous and toxic liquids, Portable Breathing Air Compressor, Inflatable Rescue Boats, Self contained Breathing Apparatus Sets, etc.

A Fire Station is the basic unit of fire service organization. Two or three Water Tenders or specialized appliance as per the risk profile of the areas and an ambulance are provided under the charge of a Station Fire Officer/Asst. Station Fire Officer depending upon the risk potential and area to be covered by the fire station. With a humble beginning with 4 Water

Tenders in 1983 today this Directorate has 64 Nos. of specialized Fire Fighting Appliances of various categories Viz; Hydraulic Platform, High Pressure Co2 Foam Tender, Emergency Tender, Multipurpose High Pressure Tender, Water Tender, Water Bouser, Industrial Fire Tender, Rescue Tender, Utility Van, Recovery Van, Ambulances, Motorcycle for Officers and Staff Cars for Fire Department. There is a need to equip the present day Fire Fighters with Personal Protective Equipment such as 3 layered thermal suit and Infra red goggle for working in Smoke Clogged atmosphere for Search and Rescue in darkness. Presently the Directorate is in possession of only 20% of such requirements for the whole complement of staff. The deficits in this regard are partly met from Calamity Relief Fund sanctioned by Government of India. More needs to be done, subject to availability of Funds. On high priority there is the need for three 32 Metre height Aerial ladders for fire fighting and rescue at high rise structures. These are being acquired in phases in keeping with the availability of funds.

The Vision Ahead:

The Fire Station of Bicholim, Pernem, Valpoi, Canacona, Curchorem, Old-Goa are at present housed in make shift facilitation. It is necessary to make appropriate accommodation for all this Fire Station, so that they can be upgraded to desired level of operational efficiency. A step along this direction has been taken by initiating land acquisition for Modern Fire Station at Curchorem. In the case of Old-Goa Fire Station a new fire station will form part of the heritage complex planned for Old-Goa. Besides upgrading the facilities for the above Fire Station there is a need to setup a Fire Station at Cuncolim to address the frequents Fire and Emergency incidents involving Chemical tankers, besides providing Fire cover to the Coastal area and Southern parts of Quepem Taluka. Sanguem which is the largest taluka of Goa but has a scattered population over a wide area calls for a different approach. However, one more Fire Station at Usgaon is being proposed which cater to the Industrial belt at Curti to Darbandora and the Northern plank of Sanguem Taluka.

The Goa Fire and Emergency Services is a Regional Training Centre approved by National Fire Service College, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The present training Centre need to be upgraded to a full fledged Fire Training Institute with adequate facilities for Research and Development. The detail of the project will be worked out by the Department before the commencement of the next 5 Year Plan.

Presently Heavy Duty Fire Fighting Appliances are deployed in V.V.I.P. duties. Smaller appliances fitted with advanced equipments will be a better choice for this duty. Tata 207 vehicles with Mercedes Benz engine or other suitable vehicle are being considered for this purpose. The smaller towns of Goa in the hinter land with narrow roads and lanes will also benefit from deployment of such appliances.

The experiments conducted abroad with motorcycle borne 2 men team with back pack fire suppression equipments have shown encouraging results. An initial effort of creating such Motor Cycle First Response Units is being considered for the current plan at Panaji, Margao and Ponda. Besides fire fighting the 2 Fire Fighters will also be trained Para-medics and rescue works. A preliminary professional assessment will be conducted for the need for additional appliances & manpower required in case of Complex incidents. The performance of this Motorcycle First Response Unit will be evaluated and the decision on scaling up will be recommended on the basis of such evaluation. A Public Private Partnership Model in this regard is also a desirable choice.

The Department has envisaged introduction of insurance cover of Rs.5 lakh for every member of the operational staff. The proposal is in advance stage of approval.

It is proposed to explore the prospect of the Department Training Centre and subsequently the Fire Training Institute to be accredited by the Institution of Fire Engineers (U.K.) for validation of Training qualification, so that students can have appropriate career enhancement. The present B.Sc. Fire Technology Course can also similarly be benefited by the accreditation process.

While we can be justifiable to be proud of the progress made so far, there is also the sobering thought that much more remains to be done. We are looking forward with confidence that we will be able to meet the new challenges as and when these arise. This confidence comes from the strong backing and encouragement bestowed on us by the successive Chief Ministers and the present Home Minister Shri Ravi S. Naik.

We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done.

-----00000000-----