

# Mumbai firefighters get new uniforms in 100 years

**Mumbai:** In their plumed helmets, dark blue tunics with shiny brass buttons, trousers and rubber gumboots, Mumbai's firefighters cut a dash as they ride the streets on their ageing red engines.



A Mumbai Fire Brigade employee tries on the helmet that is part of a new uniform at the Colaba Fire station in Mumbai. AFP

But the time has now come for them to hang up the uniforms whose design has remained unchanged for nearly 100 years to meet the demands of 21st century fire-fighting.

"The woollen uniform we have been using dates back to British (colonial) times," said divisional fire officer P.S. Rahangdale. "It offered limited protection.

"Now the safety standards are very high. We are going for the whole revamp. New investment is required as technology progresses. Now we are getting the best quality in the world," he told AFP.

From this month, all the city's firefighters will be given helmets with protective visors, in-built radios, breathing apparatus and neck shields. The leather belts and brass buckles will be consigned to history.



In their plumed helmets, dark blue tunics with shiny brass buttons, trousers and rubber gumboots, Mumbai's firefighters cut distinctive figures as they ride the streets on their ageing red engines.

From head to toe, each suit costs 100,000 rupees (2,200 dollars) and meets international standards.

Rahangdale said it is a price worth paying for the confidence it gives his officers.

"It means you can go nearer the fire and effectiveness increases," he said.

Mumbai Fire Brigade, which can trace its history back to the 18th century and is modelled on the London Fire Brigade, is unique in India, as officers in the rest of the country wear khaki.



A Mumbai Fire Brigade employee photographs his colleague trying on a new uniform at the Colaba Fire station in Mumbai. AFP

The new kit arrives nearly 18 months after complaints that officers had sub-standard equipment when they braved the bullets of Islamist militants to tackle fires and rescue guests at luxury hotels during the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

One report said the equipment was equivalent to that used by their London counterparts in 1950.

Further concerns have been expressed about their ability to deal with large-scale industrial fires or chemical, biological or nuclear attacks.

India has an estimated 200,000 firefighters for a population of 1.1 billion, said M.V. Deshmukh, director of the fire service in Maharashtra state, of which Mumbai is the capital.



Fire Brigade staff wearing the old (L) and the new uniform (R) pose for a photograph at the Colaba Fire station in Mumbai. AFP

"A lot of improvement is required in terms of resources, equipment and manpower. There's a huge deficiency. After 60 years of independence we really need to upgrade," Deshmukh said.

Junior firefighters in Mumbai earn about 10,000 rupees (215 dollars) per month, and few ambitious young people in the city see it as an attractive career option.

Pramoud Rao, head of the Fire and Security Association, said the new uniforms were welcome but that the malaise caused by poor pay, dilapidated fire stations and lack of public respect still had to be tackled.

Source: AFP