

# 'FIREFMEN GAVE ME A SECOND LIFE'

K N Jagirdar, assistant to the state agriculture minister, who made a narrow escape from the Mantralaya fire with 10 per cent burns, says he isn't sure he will ever set foot in the building again

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K N JAGIRDAR believes he has been born again. The 56-year-old, who made a miraculous escape from the Mantralaya blaze, is recuperating at JJ hospital. Unlike bureaucrats who have been blaming 'slow' fire-fighters for the debacle, the personal assistant to the state agriculture minister wants to 'touch their feet' in gratitude. Speaking to MiD DAY, Jagirdar shared details of the harrowing experience, and his appreciation of his saviours, the firemen.

When the blaze broke out at Mantralaya on June 21, Jagirdar was at deputy CM Ajit Pawar's office. By the time he escaped, he had already sustained 10 per cent burns.

## Traumatised

Jagirdar was shifted from the Cardiac Critical Care Unit (CCCU) of JJ hospital to its special nursing home yesterday, where he is recuperating. Though weeks have passed, the mere thought of the Mantralaya building now sends shudders down his spine. Shaken by the experience, he doesn't think he will ever be able to step into the building again. Jagirdar now wants to meet the firemen who saved his life. "I am alive today only because of the firemen; I want to touch their feet and thank them for giving me a second life," he said.



## TRIAL BY FIRE:

Jagirdar (left) collapses on the window ledge, seconds before he is rescued by firemen; a fortnight later, he is recuperating at JJ hospital, having sustained 10 per cent burn injuries. PICS/SHADAB KHAN, DATTA KUMBHAR

Jagirdar recalled accompanying his boss state agriculture minister Gulabrao Deokar to Ajit Pawar's sixth floor office on the day of the fire. While Deokar went into a meeting with Pawar, Jagirdar and a few others who were there to meet the deputy CM, waited at his office room.

"A few minutes later, someone came rushing towards the office, telling us that there was a fire on the fourth floor. All of us who were present in the room assumed that it would be a minor fire, which would soon

be contained," he said.

Jagirdar added, "Within five minutes, smoke started entering the room we were sitting in. Around 30 of us were stranded. I opened the main door only to find thick black smoke rushing in. The columns of smoke gradually became thicker, and one of the people in the room lifted a chair and broke the window-pane. The entire room plunged into darkness."

## Nick of time

"When I couldn't bear the fumes any longer, I climbed down through the window — I could see thick flames spreading in my direction from the room. I lost consciousness on the window ledge, but within seconds, someone pulled me out. The rescue came in the nick of time, as seconds later

the entire office room was engulfed by the fire," recalled Jagirdar.

## In safe hands

Head of the medicine unit at JJ hospital Dr Shaikh said, "Jagirdar had burn injuries on his nose, left ear, eyebrows, hand, and had inhaled a lot of smoke, due to which he developed pneumonia and severe bronchitis. He is presently being treated by the plastic surgery team for his burn injuries."

Hospital dean Dr T P Lahane said, "Other than Jagirdar, another Mantralaya official Hemant Khaire is in the CCCU."

"I never thought that a fire would break out in Mantralaya, which is the seat of power in the commercial capital of the country. But I was wrong," Jagirdar signed off.

**I am alive today only because of the firemen; I want to touch their feet and thank them for giving me a second life — K N JAGIRDAR**