

Emergency? Indians can dial 108 for help

India is gradually moving to use of one emergency telephone number across the country, 108, on the lines of America's 911 and Britain's 999.

In June, the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand adopted this number for providing emergency services. A 108 service for Delhi is in the pipeline.

The three-year-old Emergency Management and Research Institute (EMRI) service also operates in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Assam, and Jammu and Kashmir, hoping to provide services to 100 million people by 2010.

'This is India's first coordinated response service, at one number across the country, like the UK's 999 and Europe's 112, taking a call every two seconds,' Venkat Changavali, CEO of EMRI, told IANS.

The 108 service in India is ambulance-based. It has more than 600 advanced life-saving ambulances operating in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. The Tamil Nadu government has made available 200 such emergency medical technician-manned ambulances for the EMRI service.

'The service is free of charge,' Changavali said. 'Even necessary hospitalisation for the first 48 hours is free.'

Take the case of A. Teja. A letter the child wrote to 'Respected Satyam Computers Ramalinga Raju uncle' is revealing: 'I am A. Teja, studying in 5th Class. On Sep 30, I reacted to some medication that I took to control vomiting and had convulsions.

'It was 11 p.m. The government hospital is 10 km from our place. My parents called 108, I was taken at once to the hospital, my condition improved and I am now good.

'I wish that the Vijayawada Goddess Kanaka Durga will shower her blessings on you at all times. I shall study well at school. When I grow up I wish to become a collector (district administrator), do good work like you.'

The Byrraju Foundation and B. Ramalinga Raju and brothers set up the EMRI and the emergency services telephone call number 108 in Devar Yamzal on the outskirts of [Hyderabad](#) in August 2005 'with the objective of establishing capability to respond to 30 million emergencies annually across India.'

India's 28 states and seven union territories have long had different emergency numbers. There are different numbers for police and fire services. Hospitals provide different numbers for ambulance services, and disaster management services have different telephone numbers.

For example, 100 is for police, traffic police is 103 and if you are outside the city, it is 108. So whom should you call in case of an accident?

Perhaps, actually, it is the hospital service 102 that should be first called if lives are to be saved.

'In Tamil Nadu, we will keep all the other emergency numbers alive, but we will link 600 ambulances and police, fire services and as many hospitals as possible to the 108 service to ensure that not a single life is lost due to lack of emergency medicare at the earliest possible time from the receipt of the call,' P.W.C Davidar, special secretary in Tamil Nadu's department of health and family welfare, told IANS.

His department is overseeing the rolling out of the 108 service in the state.

EMRI officials say, 'Reaching assistance at the earliest' is most important. When blasts took place in Hyderabad's Mecca Masjid May 18, 2007, one EMRI ambulance managed to reach the blast site in one minute, and two more reached the site in another 15 minutes.

When a cyclist fell on a road divider in Kurnool, an iron rod pierced his throat. The EMRI ambulance that reached him, cut the rod and took the victim to hospital, with part of the rod still stuck in the throat of the man, providing him the necessary pre-hospital care to keep him alive.

At Tadepalligudem, a 65-year-old man, who fell into a borewell, was rescued by the emergency rescue team, which kept oxygen pumped into the well for five hours to keep him alive.

Be it an aircraft crash in a roadless field or a roadside delivery, the EMRI number 108 responds to all kinds of emergencies.

In Mehboobnagar, a family had buried a newborn girl child. Three hours later, the village head called 108 and the emergency team dug out the baby, it was still alive.

If people get to know and use just one number, saving a life becomes that much easier, say those who support 108.

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