

8 school children have narrow escape as bus catches fire in Andheri

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Eight kindergarten students of Millat high school, Jogeshwari, had a narrow escape on Saturday after a mini bus ferrying them home suddenly caught [fire](#) near [Andheri](#) railway station. The incident took place around 12:15pm, reportedly due to a short-circuit.

The children were evacuated in the nick of time with the help of the driver, cleaner and by-standers. A fire engine rushed to douse the flames. “All kids are safe and sent back home by another school bus,” said principal Shoaib Hashmi.

In 2008, five kindergarten students of the same school had lost their lives when a Maruti Omni ferrying children caught fire.

The school management and bus operator Sahbbir Bus Services (SBS) don't have the mandatory contract as per a government resolution of July 23, 2012.

The resolution was brought about to ensure children's safety by making the contractor and school accountable in case of mishaps. SBS runs 10 buses, including mini and full-sized ones, to ply 800 of the 2,500-plus children that study across different mediums in Millat high school.

The exact cause of the fire was not immediately ascertained and is being investigated by the DN Nagar police.

However, SBS manager Shahid Shaikh said, "The fire broke out due to a short-circuit. It was spotted by the driver, who immediately evacuated the students, which included six girls."

When asked why the school didn't have a contract, Hashmi claimed contracts were required only for buses. "Schools are supposed to have contracts only with bus operators, not van operators.

This was not a bus, but a 28-seater van which was hired by parents," Hashmi said.

Shaikh, however, admitted that it was a mini bus. He also admitted, "We don't have a contract but have an undertaking with the school. We are plying buses on parents' demand."

Indrani Malkani, the activist who was instrumental in framing the school-bus policy, however, says vehicles with 12 or lesser seats are called vans.

Vehicles bigger than these are included in the bus category, and are allowed to ply schoolchildren, provided they have a permit with the transport department and a contract with the school."

Inspector Dilip Shinde of the DN Nagar [police](#) station said, "We have registered a case and the [RTO](#) is verifying the vehicle's documents. The fire department report that will ascertain the cause of the fire is awaited, following which legal action will be taken." It was also not clear if fire extinguishers and other precautions were in place or not.

In the 2008 incident, three students were charred to death on the spot in the fire that followed a gas leak in the Maruti Omni. Two more children succumbed to their injuries.

Six children suffered critical burn injuries while the driver, who was also injured in the blaze, was charged under Section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Indian Penal Code.
