

Riders escape 2 bus fires; 1 dies in building blaze

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A private bus caught fire near Delhi's Sarai Kale Khan.

NEW DELHI: It was a fiery Sunday in the capital. While there were no casualties in the blaze at Parliament complex, one person choked to death in a fire at a commercial building in south Delhi and passengers in two buses had a narrow escape when these vehicles, in separate incidents, went up in flames seconds after being evacuated.

Both bus fires - one an air-conditioned DTC vehicle, the other an inter-city bus headed for Rewari - were reported in the morning from south Delhi. Initial probe suggests short circuits due to overheated engines caused both fires. The driver of the low-floor DTC bus averted a major tragedy by manually opening the automatically locked door the moment smoke was reported.

The early-morning fire at a building in Kotla Mubarakpur claimed the life of a 52-year-old driver.

The DTC bus (route no. 427) caught fire near Khanpur while heading towards Mehrauli from Nizamuddin. While travelling on the Mehrauli-Badarpur road, passengers seating at the rear noticed smoke coming out of the floor and alerted the conductor near the Asian Market. The driver immediately parked the vehicle by the roadside and opened the door manually.

As the last of the 20-odd passengers was getting off, the bus burst into flames. No one was injured and two fire engines reached the spot within 20 minutes due to the lean Sunday traffic. However, by then, the fire had spread and more than 70% of the vehicle was damaged before the blaze could be doused.

"Preliminary investigations suggest that the fire was caused by a technical snag. An enquiry has been initiated into the incident and we have also sought a report from the manufacturer," said R S Minhas, spokesperson of the DTC.

Police officials investigating the incident said that overheating of the engine had resulted in melting of the wire casing which had led to a short circuit. "We are also questioning the maintenance staff in this regard," said a police officer. A case under sections of causing mischief by fire has been registered.

This fire comes just over two months after 17 DTC buses were gutted as they lay parked at the Ambedkar Nagar depot after a short circuit on New Year's day.

In another incident, a private bus heading towards Rewari in Haryana caught fire near Sarai Kale Khan on Sunday morning. A handful of passengers present in the vehicle managed to get out after the driver raised an alarm.

Eyewitnesses told the cops that the bus was up in flames within five minutes of the passengers getting off the vehicle.

Police said that an enquiry suggests that the bus was more than 10 years old and was not maintained properly which resulted in a snag in the engine resulted in the accident.

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