

8 children critical at National Burns Centre, Masina



■ Riya Gupte's mother outside the ICU at Masina Hospital in Byculla on Thursday.

ANSHUMAN POYREKAR / HT PHOTO

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NAVI MUMBAI: The bus ferrying 38 students of Changu Kana Thakur School in New Panvel that caught fire off the Sion-Panvel highway on Thursday morning, had been hired by the parents two years ago.

The school authorities said they are not responsible for the incident. "The bus did not belong to us nor was it hired by us," said Ramseth Thakur, chair-

man of the school and former MP. "The parents had hired the bus and made direct payments."

Arun Gore, father of 14-year-old Ronit who suffered 67 per cent burns and being treated at the National Burns Centre in Airoli, confirmed this.

"We have been using the bus for two years. We never had any problems," he said.

Suman M., a Class 5 student, said: "There was fuel smell and suddenly there was fire. The driver and cleaner started

pulling us out from the windows and the door. The fire spread so quickly, not everyone could get out."

Thakur said as the emergency door was engulfed by flames and the entrance had been locked for safety. "The children took time to open the door and get out of the bus as they were carrying bags," he said.

Of the 38 students in the bus, eight suffered 40 to 70 per cent burns and are critical.

The injured children were

first rushed to nearby MGM Kamothe, Shastrabudhe and Lifeline hospitals in Panvel. Two of the students who sustained serious burn injuries have been admitted to Masina hospital in Byculla, while six at the National Burns Centre in Airoli.

Riya Gupte (11), who suffered 60 per cent burns, and Kaustubh Puranik (10), who has 35 per cent burns, "are stable but not out of danger".

"Riya has deep burns on her body and is in the ICU," said

Arvind Vartak, head of department, burns, Masina Hospital.

Riya's aunt Mansi Deshmukh said her niece is brave. "She was consoling her mother saying she will be fine," said Deshmukh.

(Inputs from Pratiksha Puri)

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■ Do you have any suggestions on how the state can enforce stringent guidelines for school buses?

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