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22 of family try to end lives

MUZAFFARNAGAR: Twenty-two members of a Muslim joint family, half of them women and children, tried to set themselves on fire in front of the district magistrate's office here alleging they were being harassed to vacate their residence, a senior police official said. The house, owned by brothers Mohd Wazir, Mohd Faqi and Mohd Alvi, was attached against a bank loan. It was later sold to a Samajwadi Party leader who asked them to move out, Deputy Superintendent of Police Pradeep Gupta said.

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54 miners die in methane inferno By Law Kumar Mishra/TNN methane caught fire inside the ered in the area, shouting slo

Dhanbad: At least 54 miners were killed after being trapped about 500 metres underground in an enclosed inferno of blaz-

ing methane gas.

Till Thursday evening, rescuers pulled out 30 bodies. The few who survived one of the worst mining disasters in 30 years, spoke of the deadly explosion on Wednesday night that sent people slamming against mine walls and coal wasons flying from the fury.

The blast occurred at the Nagda mine of Bharat Coking Coal Ltd near Katras, about 20 km from Dhanbad, on Wednesday night. With oxygen levels already low, the workers, who were carrying 30 minutes of breathing air, had little chance of survival when the trapped



A rescue team enters the mine on Thursday.

methane caught fire inside the mine where they were on a repair mission. Four miners clambered up to safety and were admitted in hospital with serious burn injuries.

One of the survivors, Nunu Lal, said, "The explosion was so powerful that I was thrown off and saw a trolley loaded with coal get ripped apart."

Rameshwar Sharma, who was also near the blast site, said, "After the explosion, water entered the mine and flooded it."

Even before Bharat Coking Coal officially announced that the trapped miners had been killed, Union coal minister Shibu Soren and Jharkhand chief minister Arjun Munda, on a visit to the disaster site, announced ex gratia for the victims' families.

More than 5,000 people gath-

ered in the area, shouting slogans against the mining company and the government, accusing them of flouting safety norms. Jharkhand DGP V D Ram said, "We will be able to identify the exact cause of the explosion after investigation. Gas leak can be one of the causes."

Announcing ex gratia of Rs 3 lakh for the victims' families, Soren said, "Dependants of the victims will be provided employment by Bharat Coking Coal Ltd from Thursday. A probe by the director-general of mines safety and the labour commissioner will also be initiated."

Soren also held discussions with Bharat Coking Coal officials and promised medical help to the four survivors.

Munda also announced ex gratia of Rs 1 lakh to each of the victims' families.

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creates hysteria nake god

By SUDESHINA SARKAR

Kathmandu, Sept. 7: While psychologists explained it as mass hysteria triggered by fear and tension, an alarmed Nepal town began ritual worships to propitiate a dead snake whose curse was said to be causing dozens of school students to faint, weep and scream.

The Laxmi Secondary School in Lekhnath town in Kaski district, west of the capital city Kathmandu, presented a strange sight for two days in a row. Students, mostly girls aged 14 to 17, began falling down in a dead faint,

NEDAL

weeping loudly, kicking and screaming and making signs of extreme fear and distress.

The first fits began on Tuesday, when nearly two dozen students displayed the symptoms. The alarmed school authorities and parents were non-plussed by the phenomenon and at a loss as to what to do. Nearly two dozen more students, including some boys as well, displayed the same bizarre behaviour on Wednesday as well, causing frantic parents to take their

wards to the district hospital. The principal of the school, Sribhadra Baral, decided to suspend classes for the rest of the week. Shamans have been called to exorcise the slain snake's spirit before the school reopens on Sunday. Some teachers and local residents told visiting journalists, including private television channel Kantipur, that the disturbance had been caused by the curse of a snake god. Last month, the school authorities killed a snake found on the premises. According to local superstition, the snake was a deity that has been haunting the school to avenge its slaughter.

The Asian Day

resto

Cellphone sounds the death knell

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 7: Staying glued to the cellphone while walking down the busy Strand Road cost a man his life today. According to eyewitness Brijmohan accounts. Pandit (38) was talking on his mobile phone when a bus, whose driver had lost control of it, crushed him, killing him then and there.

The driver of the Howrah-bound bus lostcontrol of the vehicle when its front wheel tire burst. The bus rammed into a roadside food stall at the Auckland Road and Strand Road crossing around 12.30 p.m. and killed Pandit and Kalipada Das (29), who was taking his lunch there. Two others customers present at the stall were injured.

pedestrian (Pandit) from the behind before climbing the pavement. The man was talking on his cellphone when the incident

the wall beyond the structure," Mr Bhuban Tewary, an eyewitness, said. The impact of the collision caused the wall to collapse.

Officers of the Maidan police station confiscated the bus. The bus driver fled the spot. With Pandit's lifelessness obvious, injured and Das were rushed to SSKM Hospital. where the 29-year-old was pronounced dead. The accident caused temporary traffic snarls on Strand Road as curious onlookers formed a crowd.

In a separate incident, Dukhiram Das (45) was crushed to death under the wheels of a speeding school van near the Kalighat Temple Road-Sadananda Road crossing this morning. The victim was crossing the road when he was hit by the "The bus first hit a vehicle, police said, Another person, Raju Mollah (25) was critically injured and admitted to SSKM Hospital. The driver of the vehicle, abandoned

occurred. The bus flattened the food stall on the payement before hitting before fleeing.

the vehicle on Hazra Road-Sadananda Road crossing



The flattened kiosk on Strand Road after a bus rammed into it on Thursday afternoon. I SNS

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