

Air India families in Britain 'have received the wrong bodies'

Harry Goodwin

The grieving families of Britons killed in the Air India crash have been sent the wrong bodies in a bungled repatriation scheme, according to a lawyer acting for them.

Air India Flight 171 lost power and hit a building on June 12 after taking off from Ahmedabad airport for London. All but one of the 242 people aboard and 19 others on the ground died. Fifty-two of the victims were Britons returning home from India. The remains of a

number of British victims were wrongly identified before they were flown home, it was reported yesterday. One victim's relatives had to abandon funeral plans after they were allegedly told the coffin contained a different passenger's body. The body in the coffin has not yet been identified.

In another case reported by the Daily Mail, the remains of more than one person killed in the crash were "commingled" in a single casket. The remains had to be separated before the funeral could go ahead. The mishandling was

uncovered after the coroner, Dr Fiona Wilcox, compared DNA from the bodies with samples provided by victims' families.

An inquiry into the scheme has begun in both Britain and India, and Sir Keir Starmer, the prime minister, is expected to discuss the case with Narendra Modi during the Indian prime minister's state visit to Britain this week.

James Healy-Pratt, a lawyer representing several British families, said that the remains of at least 12 British victims have been repatriated. He told

the newspaper: "I've been sitting down in the homes of these lovely British families over the last month, and the first thing they want is their loved ones back. But some of them have got the wrong remains and they are clearly distraught over this. It has been going on for a couple of weeks and I think these families deserve an explanation."

Healy-Pratt is seeking formal responses from Air India and its emergency response contractor, Kenyon International Emergency Services. It is understood that the families affected

by the repatriations are in contact with their MPs and the Foreign Office.

The circumstances of the crash, in which the plane was engulfed in a fireball, have made identification of the victims extremely difficult. Some families received their loved ones' remains from Ahmedabad in a plastic container, rather than a coffin. The families relied on officials in Ahmedabad to identify and label the remains accurately.

The Indian authorities claimed on June 28 that DNA tests had identified all 261 victims of the crash.