

Doctors offer aid after Air India crash on their campus

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AHMEDABAD, India — Navin Chaudhary had just begun eating his meal when a loud bang startled him. He turned back to see a massive fire taking over the dining area where he and other trainee doctors had assembled for lunch.

The blaze approaching him, he rushed toward a window and jumped.

From the ground, the sight of the Air India plane's tail cone hanging from the burning building propelled Chaudhary and fellow medical students into action.

"There was fire and many were injured," Chaudhary said.

He said he felt lucky to be alive but knew he had a task at hand. He rushed to the hospital's intensive care

unit, where the injured, most of whom had burns, were wheeled in on stretchers.

"I felt that as a doctor I could save someone's life," he said. "I was safe. So I thought, whatever I can do, I should."

At least 270 died when the Air India flight crashed into the campus of a medical college in Ahmedabad shortly after takeoff Thursday. Only one passenger among the 242 people aboard survived. At least 29 others on the ground, including five medical students inside the hostel, were also killed.

Many believe that the death toll would have been higher if it had not been for the intervention of the trainee doctors and students who emerged from the smoldering hostel and rushed to save their colleagues.

Akshay Zala, a senior medical student, said the

crash felt "like an earthquake."

"I could hardly see anything as thick plumes of smoke and dust engulfed everything. I was barely able to breathe," he said.

Zala rushed to safety, running through dust and smoke. He cleaned and bandaged a wound on his left leg, then joined others at the medical college's trauma center to treat the injured.

On Monday, the crash site teemed with excavators and workers clearing the debris. Officials inspected the building in search of clues that could enable the investigators to figure out what led to the crash.

Less than a mile away, trainee doctors who survived one of India's worst aviation disasters were still working to identify the victims through DNA testing.

Indian authorities have so far handed over the re-



SHONAL GANGULY Associated Press

NAVIN Chaudhary and other trainee doctors helped save lives after surviving Thursday's crash in India.

mains of 47 victims. The bodies of 92 others have also been identified through DNA matching and will be transferred to relatives soon.

College dean Minakshi

Parikh said that many of the doctors who pulled their colleagues out of the debris later that day went back to their duties to save as many lives as they could. "They did that and that spirit has con-

tinued till this moment," Parikh said.

Images of the hostel's dining area shortly after the crash showed parts of the aircraft and pieces of luggage strewn on the floor. Plates with food lay on the few dusty tables that were unscathed by the impact.

"So that is human nature, isn't it? When our own people are injured, our first response is to help them," Parikh said.

"So the doctors who managed to escape ... the first thing that they did was they went back in and dug out their colleagues who were trapped inside."

"They might not even have survived because the rescue teams take time coming," she added.

Associated Press writers Ganguly and Nagpal reported from Ahmedabad and Hussain from Srinagar.