

Pilot 'not to blame' for crash that killed 260, Indian court tells father

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India's top court has said the pilot of an Air India flight bound for London, which crashed shortly after take-off, was not to blame for the disaster.

Just one person on board the flight survived the tragic crash after the Boeing 787 hit a medical college close to Ahmedabad Airport on June 12.

A judge ruled that "nobody" could blame pilot Sumeet Sabharwal for the crash, in which a total of 260 people died.

Some 169 Indian passengers and 52 British nationals who were on the flight died in the disaster, with just one person on board surviving the horror collision.

The Boeing 787 Dreamliner jet to Gatwick crashed into a medical college shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad Airport on June 12.

According to a preliminary report, published by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch in July, switches in the cockpit that controlled fuel were moved to a "cut off" position.

It added that, in an audio recording from the cockpit, one of the pilots is then heard asking the other why he "cut off" the switches. The other pilot responds that he did not do so.

US officials believe Sumeet Sabharwal (right), the captain, probably cut them off, it has previously been reported.

However, the preliminary report into the crash did not insinuate anything against Mr Sabharwal, the Supreme Court found.

The judge said "nobody" could blame the pilot for the crash.

The ruling comes after the pilot's elderly father Pushkaraj called for an independent probe into the disaster.

He called for an investigation by a panel of aviation experts, headed by a retired Supreme Court judge, weeks after he criticised the government investigation.

A plea from the pilot's father is expected to be heard on November 10 as part of the independent investigation.

Pilot Mr Sabharwal (56) had reportedly been considering leaving Air India to look after his 91-year-old father in Mumbai following the death of his mother in 2022.

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It's extremely unfortunate, this crash, but you should not carry this burden that your son is being blamed. Nobody can blame him for anything," Justice Surya Kant told Mr Sabharwal's father Pushkaraj.

Pushkaraj said two officials from India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau who visited him had implied that his son cut the fuel to the plane's engine after take-off.

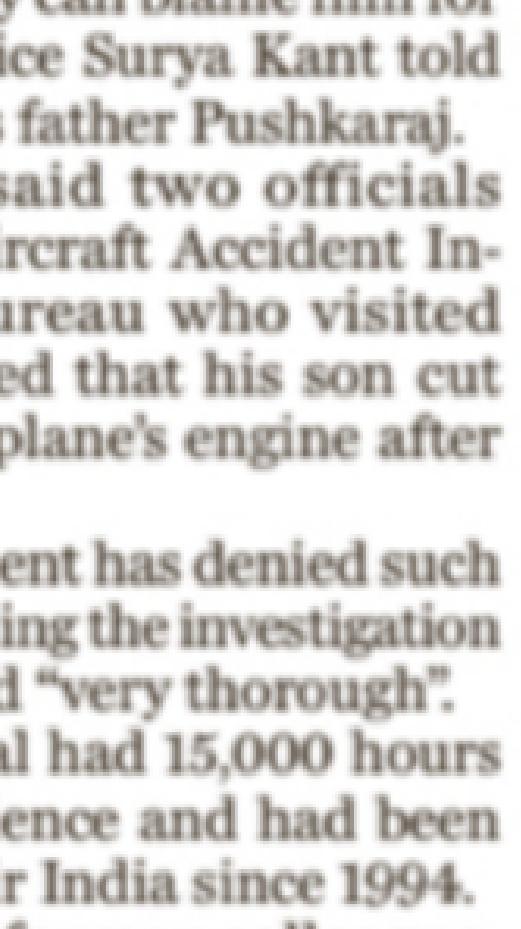
The government has denied such accusations, calling the investigation "very clean" and "very thorough".

Mr Sabharwal had 15,000 hours of flying experience and had been employed by Air India since 1994.

Neil Pais, a former colleague, previously described how Mr Sabharwal was a "thorough gentleman", saying: "He was actually considering early retirement in the next couple of years.

"His father is very old, 90, and he was going to look after him full-time," added Mr Pais.

Savitri Budhania, an elderly neighbour of Mr Sabharwal, added: "Whenever he wasn't flying, he would walk hand in hand with his father in the evenings."



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