

U.S. Investigators Arrive In India to Assess Crash

By ANUPREETA DAS
and PRAGATI K.B.

NEW DELHI — Crash investigators from the United States have reached Ahmedabad, India, to help piece together how one of the country's worst plane disasters unfolded, with Indian government officials saying the cockpit voice recorder had been recovered.

The investigators, from the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, are conducting "a parallel probe under international protocols since the aircraft is American-made," the Indian government said in a statement late Sunday.

Government officials also said that both the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder had now been located. The flame-resistant "black box" devices could hold information about what happened leading up to the disaster,

Anupreeta Das reported from New Delhi, and Pragati K.B. from Ahmedabad, India.

including the final communications between the pilots of the plane, which crashed less than a minute after takeoff on Thursday.

At least 270 people, including 241 passengers on an Air India flight bound for London Gatwick Airport from the city of Ahmedabad, in the western Indian state of Gujarat, died as a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner plane smashed into buildings, including the dining hall of a medical college.

The intensity of the flames from the crash has made the identification of passengers a mammoth task. As of Monday afternoon, 99 victims had been identified by matching their DNA with samples from relatives, said Dr. Rakesh Joshi, superintendent at the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, where most of the bodies were being held. The remains of 64 victims had been handed over to family members.

"Slowly and steadily the process is becoming faster," Dr. Joshi said. "We'll finish in a day or two."



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Hundreds of people were milling about the Civil Hospital on Monday, where grief mixed with frustration as relatives waited for news of their loved ones.

The body of the former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani, one of

the crash victims, was handed over to his family on Monday in a coffin wrapped in the Indian flag.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration said last week that it would coordinate with the American transportation safety board if

the Indian government asked for assistance. An Indian agency, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau, opened a formal investigation on Thursday.

Before the Ahmedabad disaster, there had been no fatalities

Indian officials examined the site of an Air India plane crash in Ahmedabad on Friday, the day after the disaster. The aircraft's cockpit voice recorder has now been found.

tied to the Dreamliner model, although the plane has experienced problems that caused passenger injuries. Air India, the country's flagship carrier, also has a mixed safety record that it has been working to improve after a number of dangerous episodes nearly 15 years ago.

On Monday, the pilot of an Air India flight from Hong Kong to New Delhi turned back in midair and landed safely, Hong Kong airport officials said. Technical issues were behind the pilot's decision, according to Indian news reports, which said the plane was also a Dreamliner.

Another Dreamliner, operated by British Airways and flying from Heathrow Airport in London to Chennai, India, returned on Sunday after reporting technical issues.

"This was not an emergency landing, and it is not unusual for an aircraft to return to its origin if there are reports of any technical issues," British Airways said in a statement.