



Air India goes to families with personal belongings from Mangalore wreckage

Smita Aggarwal Posted online: Sun Feb 13 2011, 01:49 hrs

New Delhi : A couple of rosaries, toys, clothes for a newborn, handwritten letters to dear ones, family photographs—these are just few of the personal belongings retrieved from the wreckage of the Air India Express crash site last year. Now the airline is trying to find their owners.

“For the first time in the country, we made a special effort to return each and every unassociated item to respective families. A US-based disaster management specialist firm, Kenyon International, was hired to prepare a catalogue of all these items recovered from the crash site in Mangalore,” said Air India’s Quality Management Systems (QMS) head Harpreet A De Singh.

The national carrier began couriering a catalogue of these items to the families for identification. The crash killed 158 people, including cabin crew onboard the Dubai-Mangalore flight in May last year, leaving eight survivors.

The task was by no means easy, said Singh. It included cleaning all the items of any traces of human remains or burns, disinfecting them and restoring them, as much as possible, to their original state. Singh was questioned by some if the airline needed to go through this process. “If somebody very close to you passes away, and there are some belongings you can identify, that is your last bond with the person. And you can’t return them in a bad way,” she said. “If they don’t want it (these items), it is fine, but we have offered it (the catalogue) to every family.”

After the sanitisation process, it took another two months to prepare the catalogue. It was mailed to over 100 addresses in India and abroad, displaying 330 items along with a unique identification code. The items were divided into various heads such as electronics, jewellery and textiles. Once the deceased’s family or survivor revert with list of items identified, Air India officials, especially deputed for the task, will hand over the belongings following verification, said Singh. The families have to present an original cash receipt or a photograph or any other documentary evidence to support their claims.

So far, Air India has managed to return 40 such personal effects. “We plan to keep the rest (of the items) for one more year,” said Singh.