

Mudslides bury Philippine villages

Red Cross estimates 200 dead, 1,500 missing in destroyed community; 53 survivors found

By PAUL ALEXANDER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MANILA, Philippines

The farming village is gone, swallowed whole by a wall of mud and boulders that swept down with terrifying speed Friday from a mountainside in the eastern Philippines. Officials feared the death toll could climb past 1,500.

"There are no signs of life, no rooftops, no nothing," Southern Leyte province Gov. Rosette Leria said.

The village of Guinsaigon, once a community of 2,500 people, now looks like a 100-acre patch of newly plowed land.

Its 375 homes and elementary school were buried under mud up to 30 feet deep. Only a few small piles of debris hint at the devastation. Only a few jumbles of corrugated steel sheeting indicate Guinsaigon ever existed.

The official death toll stood at 23 after darkness forced suspension of rescue efforts, hours after the morning landslide. But the Philippine Red Cross estimated at least 200 dead and 1,500 missing. Significantly, only 53 survivors were plucked from the brown morass on Leyte island, 420 miles southeast of Manila.

"Our village is gone, everything was buried in mud," said survivor



This image taken from television shows rescue workers cleaning the face of a mud-covered landslide survivor at the disaster site on Leyte island in the eastern Philippines on Friday. A rain-soaked mountainside disintegrated into a wall of mud Friday, leaving at least 200 dead and 1,500 missing.

Eugene Pilo, who lost his family. "All the people are gone."

"It sounded like the mountain exploded, and the whole thing crumbled," added fellow survivor Dario Libatan, who lost his wife and three children. "I could not see any house standing anymore."

Rescue workers were hampered by the thick, soft mud that remained unstable, along with flash

floods spawned by two weeks of downpours, blamed on the La Nina weather phenomenon, that dumped 27 inches of rain on the area.

The governor asked for people to dig by hand, saying the mud was too soft for heavy equipment.

"I have a glimmer of hope, based on the rule of thumb, within 24 hours you can still find survivors," Leria said. "After that, you move

on to the recovery phase, but right now it's still rescue mode."

A second, minor landslide added to volunteers' jitters, and a helicopter pilot said the ground near the top of the mountain was still moving in late afternoon.

"Two other villages also were affected, and about 3,000 evacuees huddled at a municipal hall.

Aerial TV footage showed a wide

swath of mud alongside stretches of green rice paddies at the foothills of the scarred mountain.

Survivors and others blamed illegal logging for contributing to the disaster.

Pat Vendetti, a London-based campaigner with the Greenpeace environmental action group, said illegal logging may prove to have contributed to the mudslide.

"There were similar landslides at the end of 2004 and the end of 2003, both directly linked to illegal logging on land above villages, and both in the Philippines," said Vendetti.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies blamed a combination of the weather and the type of trees prevalent in the area.

"The remote coastal area of southern Leyte ... is heavily forested with coconut trees," the Red Cross said from Geneva. "They have shallow roots, which can be easily dislodged after heavy rains, causing the land to become unstable."

The Philippine Red Cross had 14 people on the ground dealing with rescue efforts and the recovery of bodies. More staff and volunteers were being sent to the region, along with dog rescue teams.

A relief plane was flying from Manila carrying 1,000 body bags, emergency trauma kits to help 1,000 people, rubber boots, ropes, clothing, flashlights and medicine.

The international Red Cross launched an appeal for \$1.5 million for relief operations. The funds will be used for buying temporary shelter materials and other emergency health and cooking items.

The U.S. military dispatched at least two warships and other forces to the scene to provide medical assistance and other relief.

Pakistani cleric offers reward for killing prophet cartoonist

Thousands join street protests

By RIAZ KHAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PESHAWAR, Pakistan

A Pakistani cleric announced a \$1 million bounty for killing a cartoonist who drew the Prophet Muhammad. In Libya, a demonstration against the caricatures left at least nine people dead and the protesters set fire to the Italian consulate.

Denmark, where a newspaper first published the cartoons, temporarily closed its embassy in Pakistan and advised its citizens to leave the country.

Police confined the former leader of an Islamic militant group to his home to prevent him from addressing supporters over the cartoons amid fears he could incite more violence after riots earlier this week killed five people.

Security forces were out in strength, particularly around government offices and Western businesses, as Muslims streamed onto the streets after prayers. More than 200 people were detained, but most gatherings were peaceful.

In neighboring India, police used batons and tear gas to disperse thousands of angry worshippers who rioted in the southern city of Hyderabad. They burned Danish flags, pelted police with



Pakistani protesters burn a mock Danish flag to condemn the publication of cartoons of Islamic Prophet Muhammad in Karachi, Pakistan, on Friday.

stones, and looted shops. Hundreds more protested in Bangladesh.

In the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar, prayer leader Mohammed Yousaf Qureshi announced the bounty for killing a cartoonist to about 1,000 people outside the Mohabat Khan mosque.

He said the mosque and the Jamia Ashrafia religious school he leads would give a \$25,000 reward and a car for killing the cartoonist who drew the prophet caricatures, considered blasphemous by Muslims.

He also said a local jewelers' association would give \$1 million, but no representative of the association was available to confirm the offer.

A Danish newspaper, Jyllands-

Posten, first printed the prophet pictures in September. The newspaper has since apologized to Muslims for the cartoons, one of them showing Muhammad wearing a bomb-shaped turban.

Other Western newspapers, mostly in Europe, have reprinted the pictures, asserting their news value and the right to freedom of expression.

In Islamabad, visiting former President Bill Clinton criticized the cartoons but said Muslims wasted an opportunity to build better ties with the West by holding violent protests.

"I can tell you, most people in the United States deeply respect Islam ... and most people in Europe do," he said.

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