

# Sri Lanka steps up relief as toll hits 113



Sri Lankan residents evacuate from a flooded area of Bulathsinhala in Kalutara district

## Colombo

Sri Lanka stepped up its military-led relief operations yesterday as nearly half a million people were displaced after a monsoon deluge killed at least 113 people.

Rainfall on Friday triggered the worst flooding and landslides in 14 years in the southern and western parts of the island and although the rain eased on Saturday, low-lying areas remained under water, the authorities said.

Government spokesman Rajitha Senaratne said a total of 113 people were confirmed dead while over 100 remained missing.

"Most of the fatalities were due to landslides and only a very few drowned," said Senaratne who is also the health minister. He said nearly 500,000 people were forced from their homes and most of them had moved into temporary shelters.

The military stepped up search operations in landslide-hit areas and the airforce deployed five aircraft for rescue operations and another five to transport emergency supplies to villagers who could not be reached by road.

At the village of Bulathsinhala, relatives were seen loading coffins of 10 victims onto army armoured

personnel carriers to transport them across flooded streets to high ground for burial.

The military vehicles also ferried villagers along roads converted into riverways by the rainfall, passing submerged traffic signs and flooded houses.

There were similar scenes in the adjoining Ratnapura district, the island's gem

capital, which was also flooded. The authorities arranged funerals for dozens of victims.

President Maithripala Sirisena, who returned from a state visit to Australia, travelled to Kalutara, one of the worst affected districts south of Colombo, to supervise relief operations.

"The government will give

new houses to those who lost their houses," he said on twitter.

The authorities dropped thousands of life jackets for marooned people in a bid to protect them until they could be moved to safer ground.

## Indian help

An Indian naval ship equipped with medical supplies docked in Colombo yesterday and Indian sailors were deployed with their Sri Lankan counterparts to carry out relief operations.

Indian High Commissioner Taranjit Singh Sandhu said a second larger vessel was expected in Colombo on Monday with more aid.

"When you feel the pain, we also feel the pain," the envoy said while formally handing over the Indian aid to Sri Lanka's Foreign minister Ravi Karunanayake at the Colombo port.

The Indian aid included

a medical team as well as inflatable boats and medicine. India has offered more aid, including helicopters, to boost relief operations, Senaratne said.

Pakistan said it was in talks with Colombo to send relief supplies. Pakistan recently gave 10,000 tonnes of rice to Sri Lanka to help drought victims.

Meteorological department said the latest monsoon ended a prolonged drought that had threatened agriculture as well as hydropower generation.

"The monsoon has firmly established and we could have evening showers at a lesser intensity," meteorological department chief S. R. Jayasekera said.

The flooding is the worst since May 2003 when 250 people were killed and 10,000 homes destroyed after a similarly powerful monsoon, officials said. (AFP)



Indian Navy troops offload emergency supplies

## CIA-trained Cuban ex-spy recounts his 'story of failure'

### Miami

A Cuban CIA spy who dedicated his life to trying to kill Fidel Castro and destabilize the communist government, Antonio Veciana today says his is "the story of failure." It is a tale he recounts with rage -- and no regrets.

"I was an unlikely terrorist," he said in his book "Trained to Kill," cowritten with journalist Carlos Harrison. "I was skinny, asthmatic, and plagued with insecurities."

The 88 year-old anti-Castro activist, sitting with a medical walker by his side in his daughter's Miami living room, clarifies those words.

"The work I did is what terrorists do. It's just that it wasn't called that."

The book details how CIA agent David Atlee Phillips -- known by the alias "Bishop"

-- recruited him in 1959 and trained him in Havana to kill Fidel Castro, who died last year of natural causes.

"Bishop invited me to lunch," he says. "It was easy, he didn't have to convince me about the danger of communism in Cuba."

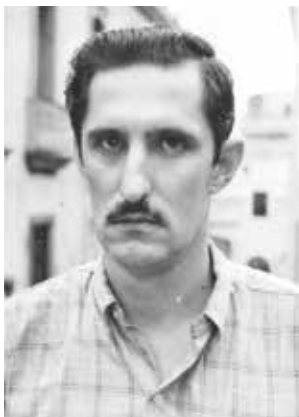
Originally an accountant at Cuba's National Bank, Veciana was taught to be invisible, to plot, to be unscrupulous and to distrust.

"At first, the idea was to destabilize," he says. "In countries with destabilization, people believe rumors."

"That was my job -- creating those rumors."

The first was an alleged bill under which the Cuban government would strip parents of legal custody over their children.

Parents then sent some



Antonio Veciana

14,000 children to the United States in an exodus known as "Operation Peter Pan."

"Many parents later met with their children, but others could not see them again, because they died or because they couldn't leave the country," Veciana said. Between 1960

and 1962, parents took their children out of Cuba via offices of the Catholic Church. Minors without adult companions were received at camps in Florida. Veciana says he has no regrets over his role in separating these children from their parents.

"It might have been irresponsible, but what I did was out of conviction," he says.

"At the time I was convinced I was doing the right thing, so I would do it again."

### 'A story of failure'

Veciana fled to the United States in 1961 following a botched attack on Castro that would have easily led authorities to him.

When contacted by Bishop in Miami, Veciana founded the anti-Castro paramilitary group "Alpha 66," which during the 60s and 70s carried out

commando-type strikes against the Castro regime.

"These attacks encouraged hope, and when they were published in the press there was euphoria -- people still had hope they could win the battle," says Veciana.

He acknowledged however that the success and magnitude of the attacks were "always exaggerated."

Like many Cuban-Americans of his age, Veciana holds a grudge against president John F. Kennedy for "betraying" Cuban exiles for withdrawing US military support from the failed anti-Castro Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.

He also claims to have seen Bishop meeting Lee Harvey Oswald three months before Kennedy's assassination in Texas in 1963. Oswald was later

identified as the sole attacker.

A later attempt to kill Castro in Santiago de Chile failed, and years later Veciana had to abandon another attempt on the Cuban leader's life.

Veciana's effort to discredit Ernesto "Che" Guevara after his 1967 death in Bolivia also fizzled. The Argentine revolutionary instead became a leftist icon.

"I really try not to think too much about it, because mine is a story of failure," Veciana says. "When you fail because of different circumstances you feel you did not do the right thing -- or that luck did not help you -- but you feel like a failure."

In 1979, after several attempts against his own life, Veciana finally threw in the towel and retired from the espionage and hit-man business. (AFP)