

Silence shrouds fate of deluge victims

Jakarta - Floodwaters that killed scores of people in north-western Indonesia have begun to recede, as rescuers search remote areas for up to 200 missing people.

State news agency Antara said one district official reported 500 bodies found in a remote village in Aceh province, but senior government and Red Cross officials said they had no confirmation of that.

Officials said the floods and subsequent landslides have killed at least 100 people in Aceh and neighbouring North Sumatra province, with tens of thousands forced to flee their homes for higher ground.

In Aceh, still reeling from the devastating tsunami two years ago that left about 170 000 dead or missing in the



AWASH: Houses are seen partly submerged by floods that ravaged parts of Sumatra island. **PICTURE: AP**

impoverished province, the death toll rose to 69, they said.

Another 31 had died in neighbouring North Sumatra, including 22 killed in a landslide in Muara Sipongi district after getting approval to

return home following an earthquake last week.

Syahbuddin Usman, head of Aceh's hard-hit Tamiang district, said by phone: "Today we are continuing to search for victims. Two hundred people

are reported missing."

Washed-out bridges, impassable roads and lack of communications in some areas meant it was impossible to know whether the missing were dead or simply unable to alert their relatives or the authorities that they had survived.

Provincial spokesperson Hamid Zegin said the water was receding but some areas remained largely cut off. Authorities were using lorries and helicopters to deliver food, medicine and other emergency supplies.

Authorities have blamed heavy rains and the effects of deforestation for the destruction. Lack of adequate forest cover leaves the ground less able to absorb excess water. - Reuters