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86 killed in landslides

Uganda mudslides swarm villages and bury hospital and church

BUDUDA (Uganda): Landslides swamped three villages in Uganda, killing at least 86 people and leaving hundreds missing after the rivers of mud swept through a church and hospital, officials said.

Uganda's minister of state for disaster preparedness said that 50 students who had taken refuge in a hospital were among the dead or missing.

"All of a sudden the church collapsed. Mud covered the whole place. Five people seated next to me died. I only survived because my head was above the mud," James Kasawi, 20, said from a hospital in Bududa, where he was recovering from a broken leg and arm.

Kevin Nabutwa, a Uganda Red Cross official, said 86 bodies had been recovered early yesterday.

Police and army forces were working to recover more bodies in the remote villages, which officials said were a three-hour walk from a main highway.

"The government is doing all it can to rescue those still alive," said Musa Ecweru, the disaster preparedness minister. "President (Yoweri) Museveni has instructed the army to join the organisations and volunteers who are carrying out rescue work."

Heavy rains began on Monday evening, triggering landslides in the Bududa region, 275km east of Kampala. The region has long suf-



Grim task: Military personnels searching for survivors after a landslide in Bududa village, east of the Ugandan capital Kampala, yesterday. — Reuters

fered from landslides but rarely has the death toll been so high.

Another survivor, Mohamed Mudindi, described a scene of panic.

"I was up in the mountain standing, then I heard a loud bang then

we saw smoke, then the landslide," he said. "So we started running away from the scene, we then went to the rescue place leaving many people and animals behind. So when we went back most of our people were gone."

Unusually heavy rains also battered eastern Uganda in 2007 and forced 2,000 people from their homes and affected 50,000 people in what humanitarian officials said were the worst rains in 35 years. — AFP