

# Spain sends thousands more troops to flood-hit region

AFP- Spain will deploy 10,000 more troops and police officers to the eastern Valencia region devastated by historic floods that have killed 211 people, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Saturday.

Hopes of finding survivors more than three days after torrents of muddy water submerged towns and wrecked infrastructure were slim in the European country's deadliest such disaster in decades.

Almost all the deaths have been recorded in the eastern Valencia region, where thousands of security and emergency services personnel were frantically clearing debris and mud in the search for bodies.

Sanchez said in a televised address that the disaster was the second deadliest flood in Europe this century and announced a huge increase in the security forces for relief works.

The government had accepted the Valencia region leader's request for 5,000 more troops and informed him of a further deployment of 5,000 police officers and civil guards, Sanchez said.

Spain was carrying out its largest deployment of army and security force personnel in peacetime, he added.

– More deaths expected –

Restoring order and distributing aid to destroyed towns and villages – some of which have been cut off from food, water and power for days – is a priority.

Authorities have come under fire over the adequacy of warning systems before the floods, and some stricken residents have

complained the response to the disaster is too slow.

“I am aware the response is not enough, there are problems and severe shortages... towns buried by mud, desperate people searching for their relatives,” Sanchez said.

Susana Camarero, deputy head of the Valencia region, told journalists on Saturday that essential supplies had been delivered “from day one” to all accessible settlements.

But it was “logical” that affected residents were asking for more, she added.

Authorities in the Valencia region have restricted access to roads for two days to allow emergency services to carry out search, rescue and logistics operations more effectively.

Officials have said dozens of people remain unaccounted for.

But with telephone and transport networks severely damaged, establishing a precise figure is difficult.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska on Friday told Cadena Ser radio station that it was “reasonable” to believe more fatalities would emerge.

It is also hoped that the estimated number of missing people will fall once telephone and internet services are running again.

– ‘Overwhelmed’ by solidarity –

Thousands of ordinary citizens pushing shopping trolleys and carrying cleaning equipment took to the streets on Friday to help with the clean-up effort.

Camarero said some municipalities were “overwhelmed by the amount of solidarity and food” they had received.

The surge in togetherness continued on Saturday as around 1,000 people set off from the Mediterranean coastal city of

Valencia towards nearby towns laid waste by the floods, an AFP journalist saw.

Authorities have urged them to stay at home to avoid congestion on the roads that would hamper the work of emergency services.

The storm that sparked the floods on Tuesday formed as cold air moved over the warm waters of the Mediterranean and is common for this time of year.

But scientists warn that climate change driven by human activity is increasing the ferocity, length and frequency of such extreme weather events.

AFP