129 killed in Cuban jet crash

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HAVANA (Reuter) — A Cuban airliner carrying Italian tourists apparently clipped a runway fence in a storm and crashed in flames into a village on Sunday night, destroying homes and killing at least 129 people in the country's worst air disaster.

"The fuel tanks burst upon impact, sending napalm-like flames into the air," said a witness at the crash site, one mile from Havana's international airport. Only one person survived the crash of the Soviet-made Ilyushin 62M, which was carrying 11 crew, two Cubans and 113 Italian tourists returning to Turin after a holiday in Cuba. The other victims were inhabitants of the village.

The Italian ambassador to Cuba, Carlo Civiletti, said the sole survivor, an Italian, was in an extremely critical condition: "It will be a miracle if he lives." Several homes were destroyed and more than 60 villagers were injured. Mr Civiletti said that many of the bodies were burned beyond recognition. The cause of the crash was not known, but could have been a downward draught that prevented the plane from rising, the envoy said.

The Cuban government appointed a commission to investigate the crash, headed by General Rogelio Acevedo, director of Cuba's civil aeronautics agency. President Castro visited the crash site and hospitals.

■ RIO DE JANEIRO — A missing Brazilian airliner was found yesterdy on a ranch in the midst of the Amazon rainforest, and authorities said all 54 people on board were safe, UPI reports.

The Varig Airlines Boeing 737-200 disappeared from radar screens on Sunday evening on a flight to Belem after the pilot radioed that he was going to attempt an emergency landing because the airliner had lost its directional system. Varig sent out search planes, which were joined yesterday by air force units. Varig officials said several rescue planes received SOS signals while searching for the airliner, carrying 48 passengers and six crew.

Radio Jornal do Brasil reported yesterday that an Air Force plane participating in the search had disappeared, but the air force would not comment.