

## Chinese president visits quake-hit area

by UPI

BEIJING -- Chinese President Hu Jintao Friday assessed earthquake damage in Sichuan province where the death toll may top 50,000. Hu described the rescue and relief effort mounted by tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians as "forceful, orderly and effective," the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. "The challenge is still daunting, the task is still arduous and the time pressing," Hu said in Mianyang city. He said while the so-called "golden time" of 72 hours after an earthquake had passed for relief work, "saving lives is still the top priority of our work." Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, who had been in the quake-hit areas since the disaster struck Monday, said, "We won't give up if there is even the slightest hope of finding more survivors." Xinhua said the confirmed death toll in Sichuan alone as of Thursday was 19,509 but more than 50,000 people are feared dead. The Voice of America reported some survivors expressed frustration with the government's response as time seemed to be running out for an estimated 40,000 people still buried under buildings. Heavy rains until Friday had severely hampered air drops of emergency food and medical supplies. Many roads to the disaster area remained blocked by falling rocks and mudslides. The VOA said 90 helicopters were working non-stop to airlift supplies and evacuate survivors and another 101 choppers and 30,000 soldiers have been called in.

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