

Beat: Miscellaneous

Tibet landslide rescue suspended as death toll hits 36

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USPA News - Rescue work at the site of a massive landslide in Tibet was suspended Monday for fear of further landslides, state-run media reported, hours after Chinese rescue workers reported that the death toll had risen to 36 with the recovery of more bodies. The state-run Xinhua news agency said the search-and-rescue operation was suspended on early Monday evening after geological experts found four cracks with lengths of more than 600 meters (1,970 feet) on the mountain top, posing risks of a subsequent landslide.

Small-scale landslides also hampered operations on Saturday and Sunday but did not halt rescue work. Xinhua said rescuers were told to retreat to a safe zone and wait for further evaluation from geological experts, but there was no immediate indication how long the suspension may last. More than 4,500 rescue workers and 300 large-scale machineries were working at the site earlier on Monday, an increase of 1,000 workers from Sunday. The accident happened at 6 a.m. local time on Friday when the landslide hit a workers' camp belonging to the Jiama Copper Polymetallic Mine in Maizhokunggar County, located about 68 kilometers (42 miles) east of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. The landslide, with some 2 million cubic meters (2.6 million cubic yards) of mud, rock and debris, covered an area approximately 3 kilometers (1.86 mile) long. Rescue workers recovered the first body at 5:35 p.m. local time on Saturday, nearly 36 hours after the landslide buried 83 mine workers at the camp. Seventeen additional bodies were located on Sunday and eighteen more bodies were recovered on Monday, raising the confirmed death toll to 36. Authorities had earlier said they believe more miners are buried near two locations where rescuers found a number of items such as tents, clothes and kitchen knives. But despite the large-scale operations at the site, officials have said they do not expect to find any survivors among the 47 workers who remain missing. The only survivor is a man who had left the camp on Wednesday but returned on Friday morning, just after the landslide happened. "Large swathes of rocks suddenly fell down from the mountaintop and the huge sound could be heard in the whole valley. It was a terrible scene," said a villager who lives near the camp, according to Xinhua. The difficult terrain, in combination with snow and small-scale secondary landslides, have repeatedly hampered rescue efforts at the site. Many of the more than 4,500 rescue workers have been using their bare hands in their efforts to find the missing, and some of them were suffering from altitude sickness. "The on-site rescue work which is being carried out is intense but orderly," Liu Sen, of the State Administration of Work Safety, said on Saturday. The Ministry of Civil Affairs earlier identified two of the buried workers as local Tibetans while the others are from neighboring provinces such as Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan.

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