

Close to 100 buried alive in Benguet landslide

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MANILA - At least 45 bodies have been recovered while dozens more remain missing after a massive landslide buried dozens of houses in La Trinidad, Benguet on Thursday night while tropical depression Pepeng (international codename Parma) was pouring heavy rains over northern Luzon provinces.

Rescue teams worked round-the-clock in Sitio Little Kibungan, Buguias after a landslide buried 30 houses at 10:30 p.m. Thursday night.

One resident named Viviana Kidapan was rescued from the rubble Friday afternoon and brought to Baguio General Hospital. Several of Kidapan's relatives, however, were not so lucky and were killed in the landslide.

A classroom in one of the schools in Buguias was used as a temporary morgue where relatives could come and identify the bodies.

Officials have placed the number of residents in Sitio Little Kibungan at 150 at the time although many residents reportedly fled the area before the landslide.

Senior Superintendent Loreto Espineli, Benguet provincial police director, said landslides have also taken place in other areas of La Trinidad. He said at least 11 more bodies have been recovered in three more villages, including Poblacion, Balili and Bineng.

Espineli added that 13 more people were reported killed in landslides in the municipalities of Mankayan, Buguias, Tublay and Sablan.

He said police station commanders have been spearheading separate rescue and retrieval operations in the landslide-hit areas of the province.

Mountain Province Governor Maximo Dulag, meanwhile, reported that five people have been confirmed killed and 32 more missing in Tadian municipality.

Earlier reports said there were also 17 people killed in landslides in several parts of Baguio City.

Threats of more landslides have forced city officials to close major access roads, literally isolating the city from nearby provinces.

Social Welfare Secretary Esperanza Cabral said Baguio City and the rest of Benguet province has posed a challenge to rescue teams since many of the roads going to these areas have been rendered impassable by the landslides.

An ABS-CBN News report said Kennon Road, Naguillan Highway, Marcos Highway, as well as, Ambuclao

Road and another road connecting Baguio City and La Trinidad town in Benguet, have been closed due to several incidents of landslides.

The report added that floodwaters at the City Camp Lagoon have reached three storeys high and nearly 10 landslides have been recorded overnight.

Lt. Gen. Victor Ibrado, Armed Forces Chief of Staff, meanwhile, said the military will try to bring assistance and relief goods to the area by Saturday morning.

Weather bureau PAGASA said tropical depression "Pepeng" continues to move away from the country and is forecast to reach 420 km west of Vigan City by Saturday afternoon.