

Hope fades in Philippines

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Rescue for dozens trapped in landslides unlikely, says mayor



Racing against time: Rescuers and villagers searching for people trapped in the landslide at a small-scale mining camp in Itogon, Benguet. — Reuters

ITOGON: A Philippine mayor said it's unlikely any of the dozens of people thought buried in a huge landslide set off by Typhoon Mangkhut will be found alive, though rescuers were still digging through the massive mound of mud and debris covering a chapel where they had sheltered.

Mayor Victorio Palangdan of Itogon town in Benguet province, among the worst-hit by the typhoon that struck on Saturday, said at a news conference that of the 40 to 50 people thought buried, there's a "99% (chance) that they really are all dead."

Mangkhut has killed 65 people since it tore through the Philippines. The storm killed another four people in China, where Mangkhut weakened to a tropical storm as it churned inland yesterday.

Palangdan said rescuers have dug out 11 bodies from the slide, which is covering a former miners' bunkhouse that had been turned into a chapel. Dozens of residents sought shelter there during the

pull them away. What can we do?"

Hundreds of rescuers, including police and soldiers, scrambled to search for the missing as grief-stricken relatives waited nearby, many of them quietly praying.

"We will not stop until we recover all the bodies," Palangdan said.

Most of those buried in the slide are thought to be poor miners and their families. In order to prevent such tragedies going forward, Environmental Secretary Roy Cimatu said the government would deploy soldiers and police to stop illegal mining in six mountainous northern provinces, including Benguet.

Philippine officials have said in the past that gold mines tunnelled by big mining companies legally or by unauthorised individuals and small outfits have made the hillsides unstable and more prone to landslides. Tens of thousands of small-time miners in recent years have come to the mountain provinces from the lowlands and established communities in high-risk areas like the mountain foothills of



Devastation: The area where people are buried after the typhoon at the mining camp in Itogon. — Reuters

strong winds were expected to continue through Tuesday.

On Monday afternoon, Mangkhut was about 200km west of the city of

Life was gradually returning to normal along the hard-hit southern China coast, where high-rises swayed, coastal hotels flooded and