

## **Ecuador death toll rises to 654, over 100 rescued**

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**Quito:** The death toll from last week's devastating magnitude-7.8 earthquake in Ecuador has risen to 654 with another 58 people missing.

The website of the secretariat for risk management yesterday said that 113 people had been rescued alive following the quake that flattened coastal towns and more than 25,000 people remained in shelters.

The death toll from Ecuador's quake has surpassed that of Peru's 2007 temblor, making it the deadliest quake in South America since one in Colombia in 1999 killed more than 1,000 people.

Hundreds of aftershocks have rattled Ecuador since the Saturday night quake.

Several strong tremors and more than 700 aftershocks have continued to shake the country since the major quake, sparking momentary panic but little additional damage. Tremors are expected to continue for several weeks.

With close to 7,000 buildings destroyed, more than 25,000 people were living in shelters. Some 14,000 security personnel were keeping order in quake-hit areas, with only sporadic looting reported.

Survivors in the quake zone were receiving food, water and medicine from the government and scores of foreign aid workers, although Correa has acknowledged that bad roads delayed aid reaching some communities.

Correa's leftist government, facing mammoth rebuilding at a time of greatly reduced oil revenues for the OPEC country, has said it would temporarily increase some taxes, offer assets for sale and possibly issue bonds abroad to fund reconstruction. Congress will begin debate on the tax proposal on Tuesday.

Correa has estimated damage at \$2 billion to \$3 billion. Lower oil revenue has already left the country of 16 million people facing near-zero growth and lower investment.

The country's private banking association said on Saturday its member banks would defer payments on credit cards, loans and mortgages for clients in the quake zone for three months, to help reconstruction efforts.

President Rafael Correa has said the quake caused USD 3 billion in damage and warned that the reconstruction effort will take years.

- AP