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**Ibania Ceases Quake Rescue Operations As Death Toll Hits 50**

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Authorities in Albania have ceased rescue operations in earthquake-stricken areas, with the death toll reaching 50, Prime Minister Edi Rama has said.

"The number of the earthquake victims reached 50 and rescue operations have ended," Rama told a cabinet meeting on November 30, adding that damage assessment had begun.

The 6.4-magnitude quake -- the most deadly in decades -- razed buildings to the ground in Thumane and the port city of Durrës, leaving thousands of people homeless who are being housed in tents, hotels, schools, gyms, and other temporary accommodation.

Authorities have said that 900 people were injured in the quake, of whom 41 are still hospitalized.

Rama said after a cabinet meeting that 1,198 buildings were damaged and another 265 required expert evaluation.

The cabinet discussed drafting a construction law with harsh punishments, of up to 15 years in prison, for violators who jeopardize construction safety codes, he added.

Rama expressed "deep gratitude" to rescue teams from Albania and around Europe who had pulled more than 40 survivors from the ruins.

The U.S. Embassy in Tirana said that an emergency dispatch of experts from Virginia and

California would help coordinate international teams conducting damages assessment.

Albania is one of the poorest countries in Europe.

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