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Clinton apologises for slow aid effort

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Former US president Bill Clinton pledged on Friday to try to get aid flowing here as he was met by angry Haitians protesting the slow arrival of help since last month's quake.

Clinton said he was sorry that the aid efforts had been so slow, adding he also wanted to understand why more than three weeks after the Jan 12 quake, supplies were still not getting through to desperate Haitians.

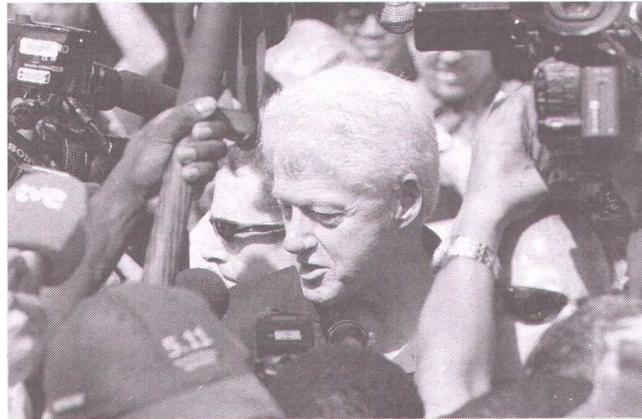
"I'm sorry it's taken this long," Clinton said, adding he and other relief workers were working hard to ease the suffering.

"I'm trying to get to what the bottlenecks are, part of it is just shipping the volume of food in here that is necessary," Clinton said as he visited a clinic here.

But the former president rejected suggestions he had in effect become governor of this small Caribbean nation.

"What I don't want to be is the governor of Haiti. I want to build the capacity of the country to chart its own course. They can trust me not to be a neocolonialist, I'm too old." Clinton also visited the government's de facto headquarters in a police building in the city, where about 200 people demonstrated outside to protest the lack of shelter.

"Our children are burning in the sun. We have a right to tents. We have a right to shelter," said Mentor Natacha, 30,



Former US president and United Nations Special Envoy for Haiti, Bill Clinton is on a day visit to deliver supplies and meet with Haitian leaders. — Reuters picture

a mother of two who gathered at one of the various points in the ravaged city that witnessed protests.

A similar number gathered in front of the US embassy nearby.

Participants said they hoped to meet Clinton, who was designated on Wednesday as coordinator of international aid for the impoverished Caribbean nation by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

An estimated 212,000 people were killed by the 7.0 magnitude earthquake, making it the worst recorded natural disaster in the Americas.

The US, which is spearheading the relief efforts, has deployed 20,000 troops plus helicopters, transport planes and other equipment, but coordination problems and the

sheer scale of the crisis have hampered operations.

Clinton visited Gheskio medical clinic here where his foundation said he would deliver "water, food, medical supplies, solar flash lights, portable radios, and generators donated by Home Depot (and) Walmart". The head of the clinic, Jean William Pape, said the clinic has been overwhelmed since the quake.

"It has been huge on us because in addition to providing the care to our HIV/AIDS patients, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, we have to take care of around 6,000 refugees.

"We don't have enough supplies. We don't have tents for them and the rainy season is coming and we live in a flood-prone area." — AFP