

Hundreds evacuated after deadly Sri Lanka dump collapse

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Sri Lankan residents survey damaged homes at the site of a collapsed garbage dump in Colombo on April 16, 2017. Hopes of finding anyone alive under a collapsed mountain of garbage in Sri Lanka's capital faded as the death toll reached 23 with another six reported missing, police said. Hundreds of soldiers, backed by heavy earth moving equipment were digging through the rubbish and the wreckage of some 145 homes that were destroyed when a side of the 300-foot (90-metre) high dump crashed on April 14. AFP

SRI LANKA — Sri Lanka has moved over 400 families to temporary shelters after tons of rotting garbage collapsed onto a slum on Friday, killing 26 people.

Some 145 homes were destroyed when the 300-foot (90-meter) rubbish mountain came crashing down and police say many more buildings were damaged and could collapse at any time.

Hundreds of soldiers have kept up the search for survivors amid reports that at least six people were still missing after the disaster, which followed heavy rain the previous day and a fire hours earlier.

It came as the country celebrated the traditional new year and followed a warning to Sri Lanka's parliament that the 23 million tons of rotting garbage posed a serious health hazard.

“We are keeping up a search, but we are not very hopeful of finding anyone alive in these conditions,” military spokesman Roshan Seneviratne said on Monday.

Disaster management officials said 1,700 people had been moved to temporary shelters in state schools while the government looked for alternative accommodation.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was visiting Japan at the time, said arrangements had been made to remove the garbage dump, but it came crashing down before relocation work could begin.

About 800 tons of solid waste from the capital is added to the open dump every day and efforts are under way to generate electricity using the solid waste.

Police have stepped up security in the area following reports of looting and said they arrested 23 men suspected of stealing victims' belongings.

Wickremesinghe said Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe offered help with the recovery effort and a technical team would be sent to Sri Lanka to evaluate the situation.