

Hundreds Missing After Landslide Buries Settlement

Hopes faded on Monday that any of 100 people still missing would be found alive two days after a landslide near a jade mine in northern Myanmar smashed into a makeshift settlement, burying mine workers as they slept.

Rescue workers had recovered 104 bodies when the search was suspended on Sunday night, state newspaper the *Global New Light of Myanmar* reported on Monday.

It is unclear what caused a mountain of mining debris to give way early on Saturday in Hpakant, a mountainous area in northern Kachin State that produces some of the world's highest-quality jade.

The mines and soil dump sites are hazardous and deaths among workers picking through the slag piles for jade are common.

An estimated 100 people are still missing, according to officials in the region, and the death toll was expected to rise as the search resumed on Monday, said Tin Swe Myint, head of the Hpakant Township Administration Department.

"We just don't know how many people exactly were buried since we don't have any data on people living there," he told *Reuters* by telephone on Sunday. "It was just a slum with these ... workers living in makeshift tents."

Workers, many of them migrants from elsewhere in Myanmar, toil long hours in dangerous conditions searching for the precious stones.

Ko Sai, a miner who was at a nearby camp, said the landslide hit around 3 a.m., when many miners were sleeping.

"We just heard a loud noise sounding like thunder and saw that

the huge mountain collapsed and a huge wave of rubble was moving and sprawling on a wide area,” Ko Sai said.

“It was just like a nightmare,” he said.

Several companies had dumped mining debris at the 200-acre dump site, said Tin Swe Myint. The dump was near a mine controlled by the Triple One Jade Mining Company, he said.

Much of the jade that is mined in Hpakant is believed to be smuggled to neighboring China, where the stone is highly valued.

The value of jade production in Myanmar is estimated to have been around \$31 billion in 2014, according to researchers from environmental advocacy group Global Witness, which published a report on the opaque sector earlier this year. {eo}

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