A shanty destroyed last night

Residents after dousing the fire

A house on the garbage dump

Colombo's garbage mountain explodes

Bloemendhal garbage dump

Text and Pix by Nihal Chandrakumara

In the wee hours of yesterday, the huge garbage dump located at Bloemendhal, Colombo 13 exploded as gases formed underneath thick layers of garbage as deep about 100 feet in some places caught fire. Squatters in the area sprang into action to douse the flames which would otherwise have gutted hundred of shanties in the vicinity.

Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Patali Champika Ranawaka upon assuming duties as Minister on February 01, 2007, promised to get rid of the Bloemendhal garbage mountain. But, it still stands firm ever growing as if to mock the Environment and the Local Government authorities concerned.

What *The Island* said on August 27, 2008

Bloemendhal garbage dump in danger of exploding - CMC

by Lakshmi de Silva and Dilanthi Jayamanne

Colombo's mountain of garbage, growing in height day by day, near Bloemendhal Road, Colombo 13 has become a terrifying menace. It could explode if fire spreads to the methane gas emanating from the lower levels of the dump, the Colombo Municipal Council Public Health Department warned yesterday.

The garbage is already a hazard to the people of Madampitiya and Mutwal especially after a fire broke out in a section of the dry garbage, residents of the area complained some days ago.

The Colombo Municipal Council Public Health Department warned that the mountain of garbage was burning from inside even after the Sri Lanka Air Force had doused the burning dump from above. The CMC PHD said the dump contained methane fumes emanating from the bottom and that it had caused the fire.

The land that had become the garbage hill of Colombo was a wetland of 22 acres before the Municipal Council started dumping garbage in it and about 70 – 80 tons of the city's garbage is dumped but there is no effective recycling or disposal system adopted by the CMC to get rid of this public menace, residents complained.

The fire that had broken out had spread an offensive smell in the environs of the area and residents said they could not bear the stench during the day or night and when it rains the stench increased and germs and vermin are multiplying around the dump that could cause health hazards to the people living in the vicinity of the dump they said.

Director of the Disaster Relief Services Centre Nimal Hettiarachchi said there was a fire last year and that 43 houses had been completely damaged by it. The Centre had donated Rs. 50,000 to put up temporary shelters for the victims.

However, he said that these residents were illegal settlers of the area. The Director said the number of families too seem is to grow year by year.

There are around 10,000 families living in the area surrounding the garbage dump while around 1,500 families lived quite close to it." We attempted to evacuate them from the vicinity of the garbage dump but they were reluctant to leave their homes, sources said. They have taken steps to treat the people of the area for asthma and bronchial infections caused by the fumes. We don't know what the long term health effects would be on these people," they said.

The CMC fire department too had attempted to douse the fire and one of their fire fighting vehicles had got stuck in the dump.

The CMC has issued notice to the company that is responsible for dumping the garbage in that area to clear it up as soon as possible. However, they held that there should be a long-term solution to the problem before there is greater harm caused to the surrounding areas.