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Sinkhole destroys buildings at army camp

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ARAU, Tues. - A sinkhole believed to be the size of a football field is said to have destroyed at least two buildings at the Army Engineer Regiment Camp in Mata Ayer, about 12km from here, on Saturday night.

The camp has been closed to outsiders, including the media. Sources said the incident also caused a blackout at the camp which lasted until yesterday.

It is not immediately known if there were casualties. Sources said several soldiers were believed to have escaped narrowly. It is learnt that the buildings housed barracks and an administrative office.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, who was seen leaving the camp with Royal Malay Regiment Second Division Chief Mej Jen Datuk Khairuddin Mat Yusof this afternoon, declined to shed light on the incident.

"Something happened ... but I cannot tell you now. I have to brief the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) first ... I will hold a Press conference in two or three days," he said when asked to comment on the incident.

State Secretary Abdul Latib Omar and several officers from the Kedah/Perlis Geological Department were also seen at the camp, which has been sealed off by the authorities.

Not a single officer from the camp was willing to comment on the incident. Checks with the police also drew a blank. Several senior officers claimed they were also not allowed to enter the camp.

Meanwhile, a source said he managed to enter the camp on the night of the incident and saw the sinkhole which is about 30 metres deep.

"I went to the camp about 8pm on Saturday after receiving news about the incident. I saw a huge sinkhole the size of a football field and several smaller ones. I was told by soldiers the incident happened about 7.30pm and they barely managed to escape." The source was then immediately ushered out of the camp after the arrival of several senior army officers.

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