



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

China

China – CHN36158 – Mining – Unsafe working conditions – Bribery – Ningxia
16 February 2009

- 1. Please advise whether there are any reports of unsafe working conditions in mines and the payment of bribes to authorities to allow the mines to continue to operate without complying with safety standards?**

There are numerous reports of unsafe working conditions in mines in China, particularly in privately owned and operated coal mines. There are equally many reports of bribes paid to authorities to keep mines open and operating in violation of safety laws. Mine disaster media reports are regularly suppressed by authorities, or by mine owners who bribe journalists not to report incidents.¹

The 2008 US Congressional-Executive Commission *Annual Report on China* states “[Mine] Facilities operated by private contractors failed to maintain even the minimum mine safety standards...and unsafe mines remain in operation”. The Commission also comments that “collusion between mine operators and local government officials reportedly remains widespread...”. The Commission’s report also states that following mining accidents, the central government often encourages local governments to put pressure on families of victims to accept out of court settlements offered by mining companies to avoid lengthy court cases.²

The *New York Times*, in a 24 February 2009 article on Chinese mining disasters characterises the Chinese mining industry as one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. Even though the Chinese government has recently taken steps to correct this problem, 3,200 miners still died in China in 2008. The article also reports that 80% of the approximately 16,000 mines in China are operating illegally and therefore outside of the protection of safety regulations. A named senior Chinese official in charge of coal mine supervision even stated for the *New York Times* that: “The industry also sees the most frequent covering up of accidents”.³

Corruption contributes directly to the continuing operation of unsafe mining operations in China. According to *Transparency International’s* ‘Corruption Perception Index 2009’, China placed 79 out of 180 countries with a score of 3.6 out of ten, with ten representing very low levels of corruption.⁴ A *Stratfor Global Intelligence* ‘China Security Memo’ from January 7 2010 states: “The central government is trying to tighten mine-safety regulations, but many

¹ Xu, D. 2010, ‘The rotten red envelope’ *Global Times*, 5 January <http://special.globaltimes.cn/2010-01/496402.html> - Accessed 10 February 2010 – Attachment 3.

² US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008 *Annual Report* 31 October, p.52 – Attachment 4.

³ Wong, E. 2009, ‘Chinese Mine Disaster Ends With 74 Dead’, *New York Times*, 24 February <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/world/asia/24miners.html> - Accessed 10 February 2010 – Attachment 1.

⁴ ‘Corruption Perceptions Index 2009’ *Transparency International* website, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table - Accessed 12 February 2010 – Attachment 5

mines are illegal and unregulated, and the problem is worsened by bureaucratic corruption”⁵. Even in the tightly monitored Chinese media there are numerous reports of officials taking bribes to allow mines to continue operating in violation of safety rules. A 21 January 2010 article in the *People’s Daily*, entitled ‘Officials removed after corruption probe into north China landslide tragedy’, reports that five officials took several million US dollars in bribes and ...” and covered up illegal practice that triggered the fatal landslide accident”, killing 277 people at a mine in Shanxi Province.⁶

A *BBC News* article dated 9 August 2009 entitled *Deadly blast in China coal mine* points out that most coal mine accidents in China are due to a failure to follow safety guidelines and independent labour groups claim “...many accidents are covered up in order to avoid costly mine shutdowns”.⁷ In a *Forbes.com* report entitled the ‘Price of Corruption’, the Beijing bureau chief for Forbes writes “Some Chinese reporters take payoffs not to report on deadly coal mine accidents, and the rule there is that the bigger the news outlet, the bigger the pay-out”.⁸

2. Is there a newspaper in circulation called Northern Weekend?

A publication named *Northern Weekend Newspaper* (北方周末报) was located on the internet at http://www.15525.com/work/f2009_08_27/193639.htm. A Google translation of the main page of the newspaper website reveals that the *Northern Weekend Newspaper* is self-described as a broad-based news weekly with a focus on news from Inner Mongolia, the “large autonomous region” (likely a reference to the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region), and the western region of China.⁹

Please note: Google translations can often be poor and can contain errors - as such they give only a rough indication of the contents of a document. For any further reliance on this information, or in-depth analysis of this Chinese language website, a professional translation service should be obtained.

List of Attachments

1. Wong, E. 2009, ‘Chinese Mine Disaster Ends With 74 Dead’, *New York Times*, 24 February <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/world/asia/24miners.html> - Accessed 10 February 2010.

⁵ ‘China Security Memo 7 January 2010 - A deadly mine scam’ 2010, *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, 7 January http://www.stratfor.com/stratfor_search?s=china+security+memo+january - Accessed 12 February 2010 – Attachment 6

⁶ ‘Officials removed after corruption probe into north China landslide tragedy’ 2010, *People’s Daily’ Online*, 21 January <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6875750.html> - Accessed 8 February 2010 – Attachment 2.

⁷ ‘Deadly blast in China coal mine’ 2009, *BBC News*, 9 August <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8243175.stm> - Accessed 11 February 2010 – Attachment 7

⁸ Epstein, G. 2009, ‘Beijing Dispatch The price of corruption’, *Forbes.com* website, 30 October <http://www.forbes.com/2009/10/30/china-coal-corruption-communist-party-beijing-dispatch.html> - Accessed 12 February 2010 – Attachment 8

⁹ *Northern Weekend Newspaper* website http://www.15525.com/work/f2009_08_27/193639.htm - Accessed 9 February 2010, and Google translate version: http://translate.googleusercontent.com/translate_c?hl=en&u=http://www.15525.com/work/f2009_11_22/261099.htm&rurl=translate.google.com&usg=ALkJrhg_68SwCPZRKC0wpyWdaaNPgAzuzw - Accessed 9 February 2010 – Attachment 9.

2. 'Officials removed after corruption probe into north China landslide tragedy' 2010, *People's Daily' Online*, 21 January
<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6875750.html> - Accessed 8 February 2010.
3. Xu, D. 2010, 'The rotten red envelope' *Global Times*, 5 January
<http://special.globaltimes.cn/2010-01/496402.html> - Accessed 10 February 2010.
4. US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2008 *Annual Report* 31 October, p.52.
5. 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2009' *Transparency International* website,
http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table - Accessed 12 February 2010.
6. 'China Security Memo 7 January 2010 – A deadly mine scam' 2010, *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, 7 January
http://www.stratfor.com/stratfor_search?s=china+security+memo+january – Accessed 12 February 2010.
7. 'Deadly blast in China coal mine' 2009, BBC News, 9 August
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8243175.stm> - Accessed 11 February 2010.
8. Epstein, G.2009, 'Beijing Dispatch The price of corruption', Forbes.com website, 30 October
<http://www.forbes.com/2009/10/30/china-coal-corruption-communist-party-beijing-dispatch.html> - Accessed 12 February 2010.
9. *Northern Weekend Newspaper* website
http://www.15525.com/work/f2009_08_27/193639.htm - Accessed 9 February 2010,
and Google translate version:
http://translate.googleusercontent.com/translate_c?hl=en&u=http://www.15525.com/work/f2009_11_22/261099.htm&rurl=translate.google.com&usg=ALkJrhg_68SwCPZRKC0wpyWdaaNPgAzuzw - Accessed 9 February 2010.