



Mining Accident News No.1030

16 to 21 October 2010

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Saturday 16 October 2010

Chile to punish those responsible for mine accident

Extract from English.news.cn

SAN JOSE MINE, Chile, (Xinhua) -- Chile says it will prosecute those responsible for the mine collapse that trapped 33 miners for more than two months before being freed Wednesday.

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera said Thursday that, although all the miners were saved, those responsible for the accident could not go unpunished.



Chilean President Sebastian Pinera (Front) attends a news conference in Copiapo hospital in Chile, Oct. 14, 2010. Sebastian Pinera inspects health status of the rescued miners who were trapped in the San Jose mine for more than two months in the hospital on Thursday. (Xinhua/Nicolas Celaya)

Pinera said the mine accident was a big lesson for both the government and the public, and the government and judiciary would prosecute those responsible.

The government would soon promulgate new measures on labour safety, requiring such industries as mining, construction, transport, agriculture and fisheries to create conditions that ensured work safety, he said.

He also said the rescue operation had cost 10 million to 20 million US dollars and two-thirds of the expense came from the Chilean government and the state-run companies.

Any companies failing to meet the safety standards would be ordered to stop their business operations, he said.

The San Jose gold and copper mine, located in the desert in northern Chile, collapsed on Aug. 5, trapping 33 miners some 700 meters underground.

NOTE: Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual sender, and are not necessarily the views of Industry & Investment NSW.

Sunday 17 October 2010

China mine accident kills 21, leaves 16 missing: govt

BEIJING — Dozens of rescuers were battling through thick coal dust late Saturday in a bid to reach 16 miners trapped underground after a coal mine accident killed 21 of their colleagues, Chinese state media reported.

The mine in the central province of Henan was hit by a "sudden coal and gas outburst" as 276 miners were at work below ground, the national work safety agency said on its website, confirming the toll.

It is the latest tragedy to highlight appalling safety conditions in the nation's mines, in which over 2,600 miners perished last year according to official figures.

A total of 239 miners made it to the surface following the accident in the city of Yuzhou, but 21 others have been found dead and 16 remain missing, the Xinhua report said.

Rescuers said they had located the missing miners around 50 to 80 metres below the pit entrance but their progress through the narrow tunnels was slowed by the heavy dust.

The condition of the trapped miners was unknown.

"The thick dust in the shaft is hampering the rescue. We must clear the dust first," an engineer called Du Bo was quoted by Xinhua as saying.

He said more than 2,500 tonnes of coal dust had smothered the pit after the gas leak, suffocating most of the victims.

Officials said work crews are struggling to retrieve the victims' remains from the mine.

Chinese mines are notoriously dangerous due to the widespread flouting of safety rules, typically blamed on corrupt mine operators trying to keep costs down, with coal mining particularly accident-prone.

China's poor safety record has come under fresh scrutiny after the successful rescue of 33 miners trapped underground in Chile for more than two months gripped the world, sparking comparisons with China's litany of deadly disasters.

Last year 2,631 Chinese miners were killed, according to official statistics, but independent labour groups say the true figure is likely to be much higher as many accidents are believed to be covered up.

The government has repeatedly vowed to shut dangerous mines and strengthen safety, but the accidents continue with regularity as mines hustle to pump out the coal on which China relies for about 70 percent of its energy.

The Henan mine was jointly owned by China Power Investment Corp. -- a major state-owned power producer -- and another firm, Xinhua news agency said.

With grim irony billboards reading "Safety is a fortune of the family; Safety is of heavenly importance to miners", were hung at the entrance to the mine, the report said.

Local government officials and police in the area refused comment when contacted by AFP by phone.

In July, Premier Wen Jiabao lamented China's "serious" work safety situation, ordering mining bosses to work side-by-side with workers in the pits to ensure that companies more closely observe safety rules.

The government said Friday it would carry out a nationwide 10-day inspection in late October to determine whether mine operators were following the order.

Internet chatrooms -- a rare platform for relatively open debate in Communist-controlled China -- slammed the country's safety record after the Chilean rescues.

Some state media editorials said China should learn from the better training and safety systems of the Chilean miners. Many Chinese miners are

ill-trained migrant workers toiling in pits where even basic safety is ignored.

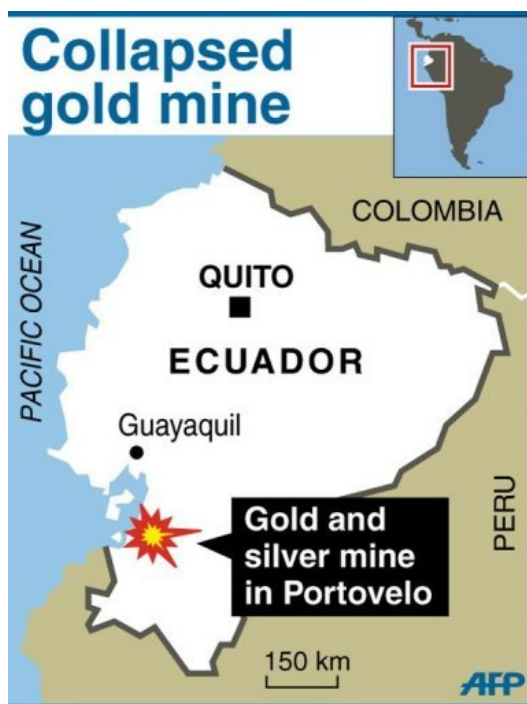
China had its own "miracle" mine rescue in April when 115 miners were rescued after more than a week trapped underground in a flooded mine shaft in the northern province of Shanxi.

Some of them survived by eating tree bark, sawdust and even coal. One survivor said he strapped himself to the shaft wall at night as he feared drowning in his sleep.

Ecuador mine collapse traps four

Extract from BBC News, UK

A cave-in at a gold mine in southern Ecuador has left four miners trapped 150m (492ft) underground.



Rescuers have been trying to push a metal pipe through the rubble to supply oxygen while they try to dig them out. It is not known if they are alive.

The accident happened at a small mine near the town of Portovelo in the province of El Oro.

The collapse comes two days after the dramatic rescue of 33 miners in Chile who were trapped for 69 days.

The collapse in Ecuador is thought to be have been caused by water filtration inside the mine.

Around 50 rescue workers were trying to clear the main entrance, Ecuador's deputy mining minister, Jorge Espinosa, said.

They were also preparing to dig another shaft in the hillside to reach the gallery where the men are thought to have been working, he added.

Chile miners return to Camp Hope

Extract from AFP

COPIAPO, Chile — A group of Chile's rescued miners returned to the scene of their ordeal on Sunday, visiting the "Camp Hope" tent city outside the San Jose mine where anxious relatives had awaited the men's return.

The miners, who were mobbed by reporters, were expected to attend a mass at the mine and tour the makeshift campsite where their relatives had monitored efforts to rescue them during the nearly 10 weeks that the men were trapped deep below ground.

Police were forced to step in to protect the six miners, who arrived with their relatives at the site at 10:00 am (1300GMT), after journalists crowded them seeking interviews.

Amid calls around the world for greater mine safety in the wake of their accident, rescue operations to reach trapped miners were underway in both China and Ecuador.

In China, at least 26 people were killed after a gas explosion in a coal mine and hope was fading that 11 others would be found alive.

In Ecuador, at least two men were confirmed dead after a rock collapse blocked the exit of a gold mine, and rescuers were working to find two others.

At the site of Chile's miraculous rescue, the first miner to arrive was Juan Carlos Aguilar, 49, who came with his wife and son.

They walked around the site of the now-abandoned Camp Hope, and took a look at the tent where Aguilar's family waited for his rescue.

Next to return were Luis Urzua, the shift supervisor who served as de facto leader of the men, the sole Bolivian among the miners, Carlos Mamani, and Juan Illanes, who carried his one-and-half-year old daughter in his arms.

Two others, Jimmy Sanchez and Dario Segovia, arrived at the San Jose mine, in Chile's forbidding Atacama desert, shortly afterwards.

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera, who embarked Friday on a tour of Europe, has suggested turning Camp Hope into a memorial or museum to honor the men.

Not all 33 were expected to attend the mass planned for Sunday, with some still too tired, and others recovering from family celebrations that ran late into Saturday night.

One of the men, Victor Zamora, is still in hospital, and is expected to stay there for medical observation until Tuesday, after having dental problems.

The return to the mine was part of what is expected to be a long process of adjustment for the 33 men, who have become national heroes and garnered global attention for their miraculous survival and dramatic rescue.

Some were finding it difficult to come to terms with their new lives.

"This isn't right," miner Victor Segovia said when he went home to find a crowd of camera-toting news crews waiting, according to an account in the newspaper La Tercera.

"We are nobodies. We are only simple people who survived," he was quoted as saying.

"What they are facing in the week to come is very difficult," said Health Minister Jaime Manalich.

Miner Ariel Ticona admitted he wasn't sleeping much, but not because of nightmares or anxiety

-- his baby daughter was keeping him up all night.

"It's okay, I've got a backlog of sleep," he told AFP Saturday.

His little girl Esperanza, which means "hope" in Spanish, was born while Ticona was still trapped over 600 meters (2,000 feet) below ground.

"She's pretty, very pretty. She's beautiful, just lovely," he told AFP.

Details of the amazing survival have emerged gradually, with the men describing the horror of the initial period after the August 5 collapse that trapped them, when they feared they had been given up for dead.

"The confinement was terrible," said miner Juan Illanes, a 52-year-old mechanic and former soldier.

"The first 17 days were a nightmare. Then everything changed. But the hardest thing was to be down there. Buried for two months."

After more than two weeks, rescuers finally reached the men on August 22, and then began working furiously to build the rescue shaft through which they were pulled to safety last week.

Above ground, in the gritty mining town of Copiapo, the men have a chance to turn their fear and despair into profit, perhaps even riches beyond their wildest dreams, if book deals and Hollywood film rights come.

In a sign of the special bond that sustained them through their terrible entrapment, relatives say the men want to pool the proceeds of any payments so they can be shared equally.

Monday 18 October 2010

South African mine safety under scrutiny

Extract from Times Live, South Africa

The Chilean mine disaster that saw 33 miners trapped underground for more than

two months has put renewed focus on safety and health standards in mines.

Last year, 165 workers died in mine-related fatalities in SA. This compares with 171 in 2008 and 221 in 2007.

The US recorded 26 fatalities in 2007 and 23 in 2008, according to the figures from the US Mine Safety and Health Administration. Australia recorded 13 deaths in the 2006/7 period and four in 2007/8 period, statistics from Mineral Council of Australia show, while Canada recorded six in 2007 and eight in 2008.

In Chile, all 33 miners were brought to the surface alive after spending two months 700m underground.

Their harrowing ordeal began when the main access tunnel to the San Jose Mine, near the town of Copiapó in northern Chile, collapsed on August 5.

South African engineering and construction company Murray & Roberts Cementation Group, which is operating in Chile through a joint venture, Terracem, with local company Terraservices, played a key role in the rescue.

Industry role-players and observers said there is much that can be learnt from the Chilean accident.

Derrick Sibanda, business development manager at DuPont Sustainable Solutions, said SA was well equipped to deal with situations similar to this one.

"The equipment and technology is available. But we tend to battle with the willpower to do such an exercise. It was so encouraging listening to the Chilean president (Sebastián Piñera) saying the costs of the rescue mission were not an issue because it was a worthwhile exercise," he said.

He said preventative rather than reactionary measures should be prioritised and the government should take the lead in putting in place minimum safety standards across the board.

"Mine leadership is key in terms of implementing these standards and mine safety should be prioritised just like other business operations. SA mines are very deep and some are very old and full of rocks.

"Therefore workers need to be empowered to ascertain whether the environment is safe to work in," Sibanda said.

National Union of Mineworkers secretary general Frans Baleni said there are two lessons that could be drawn from the Chilean accident.

"Firstly, it shows that there was no alternative route for escaping a disaster which is a must in every mine.

"A similar incident happened at Harmony Gold's Elandsrand (now Kusasaletu) mine three years ago where it appeared that the alternative route was flooded with water and not ready for emergency evacuation. That cannot be compromised," he said.

Baleni said the second lesson is the state of technical preparedness to drill swiftly if such a disaster occurred.

"We must be ready at all times to drill and be in a position to know exactly how to deal with the situation immediately.

"After this accident I believe that the safety landscape in Chile will never be the same again," he said.

He said miners knew very well that in incidents like the one in Chile, the odds of surviving are slim.

"It was very emotional and as an ex-miner I did shed a tear.

"You must remember how many people we lost at Coalbrook in the '60s," Baleni said.

In January 1960 about 437 miners at the Coalbrook North Colliery near Sasolburg in the Free State were trapped underground and, despite all attempts to rescue them, none survived. It is still SA's worst mining disaster.

2 miners killed in Ecuador mine collapse

Extract from People's daily Online, China

Two miners were found dead and two others remained missing in a gold mine collapse on Friday, authorities said Saturday.

The dead miners were Walter Vera and Paul Aguirre, deputy Mining Minister Jorge Espinosa confirmed, adding that "the other two have a good chance of being alive" as "they were in a spot that probably was not affected."

Rescuers were making every effort to get to the area where the missing two were thought to be working. A small probe with a camera would be inserted to find them.

The four miners were trapped on Friday some 150 meters underground in El Oro province, about 400 km southwest of the capital. The collapse occurred at 3:30 a.m. local time (0830 GMT) and officials blamed the accident on water leaks.

The accident and the one in Chile that trapped 33 miners for over two months have put Latin America's mining safety in spotlight.

Quote of the week



"Every man dies. Not every man really lives."

**William Wallace
(Scottish knight and landowner, 1272-1305)**

Illegal mining continues in Aravalli

Extract from the Times of India

ALWAR/JAIPUR: The death of four labourers in an illegal mine in the Aravalli ranges in Alwar has exposed the inability of the state government to act against wanton excavations despite Supreme Court's orders to adhere to mining norms.

The accident on Saturday took place when labourers were installing explosives to blast a portion of the mine.

However, police and the district administration are in a denial mode indicating a larger complicity, including political patronage to the strong mining mafia active in the region.

Several such accidents have recently been reported in Tonk, Bhilwara, Dausa, Bharatpur, Nagaur, Ajmer and Pratapgarh districts of Rajasthan. In Alwar district alone, reports suggest that over a hundred illegal mines are functioning allegedly under the patronage of a ruling party leader. Of these, maximum are present in Tijara in Alwar district.

Reports say while there are only 33 legal mines in the Tijara area, over 3,000 dumper trucks ply in the area almost daily. The active mining mafia has unleashed a reign of terror in the entire region.

Chile to boost mine safety after accident

Extract from AFP, Santiago

Following the dramatic rescue of 33 miners trapped underground for nearly 70 days, Chile government and industry officials have moved to ensure there are no similar accidents in the future.

"This should not happen again either in Chile or in any other country," said Edison Pena, one of the workers at the San Jose mine who was brought to the surface amid a much publicised rescue operation on Wednesday.

In the weeks after the August 5 accident that trapped the miners, the government announced safety reforms in the mining industry worth 15.5% of Chile's gross domestic product and more than half of its export earning.

These earnings reached more than \$30bn last year.

The mine safety budget will be more than doubled to reach \$56mn, while the number of mine safety inspectors will be tripled to 45.

Even with the increased staff, inspections will be a daunting task in an industry that employs 174,000 miners, who work for nearly 3,500 businesses.

Chile is the world's leading producer of copper. Its mines also produce gold, silver and zinc.

The reform is also likely to affect the national Service of Geology and Mines, with a committee of experts recommending that the current mine safety legislation be reviewed no later than the end of November.

"We will no longer tolerate working conditions that are not very safe and humane that existed at the San Jose mine and in a lot of other places," declared Chilean President Sebastian Pinera after the 33 men were brought to the surface.

NSW: Coal mine sexual harassment dismissals upheld

Extract from ABC News online, Aus

Fair Work Australia has upheld a Hunter Valley coal mine's decision to dismiss two employees for sexually harassing a fellow worker and drinking alcohol at the mine site.

Nathan Rollason and Jonathon Rowland were sacked from the Austar mine, near Cessnock in December last year, accused of bullying their colleague Ben Donaldson.

The behaviour included drawing pictures of male genitalia on Mr Donaldson's safety equipment and drinking alcohol at the mine gate at the end of a shift.

The workplace tribunal also heard Mr Rollason regularly displayed his penis and openly masturbated in front of his colleague.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union told the tribunal that the practice of drinking at the gate was well known to management and supported by supervisors at the mine.

Both Mr Rollason and Mr Rowland denied many of the accusations of bullying, but the tribunal was satisfied that the incidents described by Mr Donaldson did take place.

Tribunal Senior Deputy President, Anne Harrison found the conduct of both Mr Rollason and Mr Rowland reprehensible and intolerable, and described the arguments they had put to defend their behaviour as astonishing.

She found no lack of procedural fairness or any other mitigating factors that would warrant overturning their dismissal.

Rescued miner meets Bolivia's leader, gets state job

Extract from Reuters & msnbc.com

LA PAZ — The only non-Chilean among the 33 men freed from a mine last week returned to his native Bolivia Monday and received a hero's welcome and a \$1,000-a-month job at a state company.

Carlos Mamani, 21, was welcomed at El Alto's airport by two ministers and escorted to the presidential palace, where leftist leader Evo Morales had lunch with him and offered him a job at state-run energy company YPF.

"I'm very grateful. I wasn't expecting anything like this," Mamani told reporters after leaving the presidential palace. Five days ago he was pulled from the San Jose mine in northern Chile as part of a dramatic rescue operation.

The miners were hauled out in a metal capsule

Extract from ABC News online, Aus

barely wider than a man's shoulders and dubbed "Phoenix" after the mythical bird that rose from the ashes.

After resurfacing Wednesday, the miners were showered with job offers and gifts, including free vacations to Jamaica, the Greek isles and Elvis Presley's Graceland mansion, as well as invitations to European soccer matches.

But Mamani, the only non-Chilean among the 33 miners trapped for 69 days half a mile underground, said he decided to come back to Bolivia to work for the state.

"President Morales has offered me a safe job and a home. I'm very proud and I'm coming back to Bolivia," Mamani said.

According to a relative that also met with Morales, Mamani will earn about \$1,000 a month -- 10 times the minimum wage in the impoverished Andean country.

Bolivia's consul in Chile, Walker San Miguel, told local media that Mamani returned to his home country because "he could no longer live" in Copiapo, the town where the San Jose mine is, due to harassment by journalists.

Most of Chile's 33 rescued miners have not discussed the worst moments of their ordeal.

This week in mining accident history

16 October 1915
Oakbank Shale Mine
Newfarm, Scotland, UK
Underground shale mine
1 killed by rock fall
Source: www.scottishmining.co.uk

Fatal Accident a Mid-Calder Mine - An accident, resulting in the death of a shale miner named Robert Dudgeon, residing in Oakbank, happened in the Oakbank Shale Mine, Newfarm, Mid-Calder, on Saturday. Dudgeon was engaged in brushing at the time, when a heavy fall of shale fell upon the unfortunate man, and when the body was recovered life was found to

be extinct. He leaves a widow and three of a family. [Scotsman 19 October 1915]

Tuesday 19 October 2010

Rescuers retrieve last China mine bodies

Extract from ABC News online, Aus

Rescuers have pulled out the bodies of the last five trapped workers from a colliery in central China, putting the final death toll from the gas blast at 37, the government said.

The State Administration of Work Safety said in a statement that "all 37 victims had been found" in the mine in Henan province's Yuzhou city.

A total of 276 miners were at work below ground when the accident happened early Saturday, and 239 made it to the surface.

Since then, hundreds of rescuers had been working to find the missing, believed to have been 50 to 80 metres below the pit entrance at the time of the incident, but heavy coal dust slowed their progress.

Du Bo, deputy director of the rescue operation, said the missing miners were likely to have been buried in the more than 2,500 tonnes of dust that smothered the pit after the blast.

Last year more than 2,600 miners died in job-related accidents, according to official data - about seven people a day. But independent labour groups say the actual number of deaths was probably much higher.

Wednesday 20 October 2010

Zambia charges Chinese in mine shootings

Extract from CNN, Africa

Lusaka, Zambia -- Officials in Zambia have charged two Chinese mine managers with the attempted murder of 11 of their employees at a coal mine in the southern part of the African country last week.

The suspects, Xiao Li Shan and Wu Jiu Hua, are expected to remain in custody as they await trial.

The managers at the Chinese-run Collum coal mine in Sinazongwe district -- some 186 miles (300 kilometers) south of the capital, Lusaka -- allegedly shot and wounded 11 miners during a work dispute, said Sinazongwe District Commissioner Oliver Pelete and Zambia Police Inspector-General Francis Kabonde.



Doctors removed bullets from Collum coal miner Vincent Chenjela's body at Lusaka's University Teaching Hospital on Saturday.

The mine's management has repeatedly locked horns with its employees over the years because of pay and working conditions. In June, about 22 miners were injured underground.

The Zambian government closed the mine, temporarily, because it lacked adequate safety standards last year.

After the shooting, Zambian Labour Deputy Minister Simon Kachimba warned the government would not allow investors to abuse workers, the state-run Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) reported. He did not specifically single out companies from China.

The Asian giant is a significant investor in Zambia, which is rich in coal and copper reserves.

But its companies fall under near constant criticism from labor unions, opposition politicians and ordinary people over what they say are the unsafe working conditions and low wages offered to locals by the Chinese-run firms. Mines Minister Maxwell Mwale and other government ministers have warned Chinese

investors to abide by Zambian laws and to do a better job of protecting their employees.

Opposition leader Michael Sata, who partly campaigned on an anti-China platform during the 2006 elections, has repeatedly condemned what he sees as Chinese investors' mistreatment of local workers.

The worst accident involving a Chinese company in Zambia happened in 2005 when close to 50 people were killed in an explosion at the Beijing General Research Institute of Mining and Metallurgy factory in the town of Chambishi.

Rescuers 'close' to trapped Ecuadoran miners

PORTOVELO, Ecuador — Rescuers worked frantically in hopes of opening a path to two miners missing for five days in the collapse of an Ecuadoran gold mine that killed two of their colleagues.

"They reached an opening above the gallery where the miners are presumed to be, but it is blocked by wood and rocks," said an official with MINESADCO, the operator of the Casa Negra mine.

"We have to clear the way to get into the channel that the miners were supposed to be exploring when the cave-in occurred," the official said.

Officially, rescuers remain upbeat. "We are keeping up our hopes that they are alive," Non-Renewable Resources Minister Carlos Pareja, who is at the mine overseeing operations, said earlier.

The miners have been missing since the cave-in early Friday, days after Chile completed its historic, successful rescue of 33 miners who had been stuck underground in the San Jose mine for a record period of nearly 10 weeks.

Cesar Lopez, a MINESADCO technician, reported that the rescuers had "a visual toward the area where it is thought that the comrades might be, and the distance to reach them is about six meters (20 feet)."

The distance may be short, but the diggers estimate it will take at least 10 hours of hard work to break through.

Ecuadoran rescuers have been working around the clock since the accident in their attempt to reach Angel Vera, 29, a machine operator, and worker Pedro Mendoza, 28.

Two other men -- Vera's older brother Walter, 31, the shift leader, and Paul Aguirre, 21 -- died after the Friday accident blocked the passage to the exits of the Casa Negra gold and silver mine in the coastal town of Portovelo, 400 kilometers (250 miles) southwest of Quito.

Vera and Aguirre's bodies were recovered on Saturday.

Rescuers have been unable to contact the two missing men, but believe they are in a section of the mine 150 meters (500 feet) below the surface, in a gallery about 60 meters wide and two meters high.



Officials supervise the rescue operations of two miners still missing in Ecuador

Pareja said that there were no indications that the miners were buried under the rubble during in the Friday accident.

"We have not yet detected signs of life, but neither have we detected other negative signs such as a bad smell," Pareja told reporters.

There is also water and an air draft in the area, he said. "Every minute is very important," he said. "We are doing everything humanly possible" to reach the trapped men.

One rescue worker was injured on Monday when the muddy ground in a mine gallery a team was working in began to give way. The

rescuers "fled of the area, and one of them tripped, so he was evacuated with bruises," a MINESADCO official told AFP.

MINESADCO manager Fernando Velez told AFP Walter Vera had three children, including a 22 day-old infant. He had been a miner for the past decade.

Angel Vera, 29, is a machine operator who joined the company two years ago and also has three children.

About 100 people are employed at the mine, according to MINESADCO.

Aguirre and Mendoza are Peruvian temporary workers, both of whom had been working at the mine for less than a month.

Portovelo, established in the 16th century by the Spanish on the western slopes of the Andes, has a population of 14,000 and is one of the main mining centres in the province.

Thursday 21 October 2010

Chile mine managers denied receiving earlier warnings

Extract from ABC News online, Aus

Managers of the Chilean mine where 33 men survived a record 10 weeks underground denied having received warnings of dangerous noises and refusing to let workers leave the site.

Chilean MP Carlos Vilches, a member of a parliamentary committee investigating the disaster, said Tuesday that miner Juan Illanes had told him they asked, unsuccessfully, to be allowed to surface three hours before the mine collapse after reporting deep rumbling noises.

This was strongly denied in a statement from mine operators San Esteban by the San Jose mine's general manager, Pedro Simunovic, and operations chief Carlos Pinilla.

"No worker or shift leader communicated to us, who were responsible for mine operations at the time, any concerns about unusual noises or explosions, and there was no request to

abandon the mine on account of some presumed risk," they said.

"We must once again insist that never did any of us have the slightest indication that such a catastrophe as the one on 5 August could happen."

Vilches said he did not know who the miners warned about the rumblings, but he has invited them to tell his committee what happened to determine who was responsible. He said four or five miners were expected to testify.

Several of the miners have filed a lawsuit against San Esteban, and claims that an evacuation plea was rejected are likely to figure in the case.

Missing Ecuador miners found dead

Extract from ABC News online, Aus

Days of frantic rescue efforts abruptly gave way to tragedy as two missing miners were found dead six days after they were lost in a collapsed mine shaft, a rescue worker said.

Giorgy Ramirez, a member of the rescue team at the Casa Negra mine some 400 kilometres from Ecuador's capital Quito, says the bodies were found on Wednesday (local time).

"They are dead, and we need another 10 men to get them out," he said.



The body of a miner is loaded onto a truck at the Casa Negra mine in Portovelo, Ecuador. Photo / AP

"We got up there and we found them; one up against a wall but without his clothes and the other, you can't see well because there are

boards and beams all over the place, and he is up against a wall on the opposite end."

Four miners went missing on Friday, two days after Chile completed its historic, successful rescue of 33 miners stuck underground in the San Jose mine for a record 69 days.

Of the four who were trapped in the collapse, two were found dead last week.

They were identified as Walter Vera, the 31-year-old team leader, and Peruvian miner Paul Aguirre.

Now rescuers and mine officials have set about recovering the bodies of the last two men - Vera's brother Angel, 29, a machine operator, and worker Pedro Mendoza, 28.

Just hours before the last two bodies were found, rescuers had punched into a shelter where they found lamps and a workman's boot, but no miners.

Then a sudden rush of debris down a mine chute briefly blocked passage to the area where the men were believed to be some 150 metres below ground, a mining company official said.

President Rafael Correa travelled to the scene at midday, prior to the second cave-in, to console relatives of the trapped miners amid what officials had taken as hopeful signs.

Yet what had been a hopeful mood was crushed by the hardest of facts.

Rescuers believed the men were in a space with enough oxygen to sustain them for about four to five days.

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

A

ACTIVE WORKINGS Any place in a mine where miners are normally required to work or travel.

-Ed



The 20th Electrical Engineering Safety Seminar will be held at Sydney Olympic Park, on Wednesday 10 November and Thursday 11 November 2010. http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/354538/EESS-2010-rego-brochure.pdf