

China: Details emerge of safety violations and corruption in Tianjin

James Cogan
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The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime is using its state-controlled media to publish damning information on the contempt for safety and official corruption that lies behind the devastating explosions that tore through the port district of Tianjin last week, killing at least 114 people and injuring well over 700. The apparent transparency—after days in which Beijing sought to stem outrage over the disaster through outright censorship—is a desperate effort to regain public trust.

Chinese media announced details on Wednesday regarding the private owners of Rui Hui International Logistics, the company that operated the warehouse where the explosions took place. Its chairman, Yu Xuewei, was previously a high-ranking executive for a state-owned chemical corporation. Its vice-chairman, Dong Shexuan, is the son of the former Tianjin police chief. Utilising their connections, they reportedly secured authorisation in 2012 to store highly dangerous chemicals in close proximity to transport and industrial infrastructure and residential apartment complexes.

Dong Shexuan provided a public confession that was quoted by Xinhua news agency—more than likely after extensive police interrogation. The *New York Times* translation of the statement read: “The first safety appraisal company said our warehouses were too close to the apartment building. Then we found another company who got us the documents we needed.” In other words, approval was secured because of the owners’ political influence.

According to Dong, trial authorisation was granted in April 2014 and expired last October. The company continued to operate regardless and was able to obtain a new authorisation in June. The Supreme People’s Procuratorate—China’s highest prosecuting agency—announced this week that it is investigating two

Tianjin port officials over bribery allegations. The head of China’s State Administration of Work Safety, Yang Dongliang, the former vice mayor of Tianjin, has been removed from his position and is reportedly “under investigation.” Whether there is a direct relationship between Yang’s demise and the Tianjin disaster has not been revealed.

The warehouse was storing 2,500 tonnes of 40 separate hazardous chemicals on the day of the disaster. These included 800 tonnes of ammonium nitrate and 500 tonnes of potassium nitrate, both used in explosives, 700 tonnes of sodium cyanide, which is used in gold mining, and undisclosed quantities of calcium carbide and toluene diisocyanate.

The first explosion, triggered by a fire in the building, is estimated to have been the equivalent of three tonnes of TNT. The second, which sent a fireball 100 metres into the sky, was the strength of 21 tonnes of TNT. It shook buildings and blew out windows up to four kilometres away and was recorded on earthquake monitors. Many of those killed were young firefighters who were sent to combat the warehouse fire, with no knowledge of what was inside the building. Fifty-three firefighters are confirmed dead, with another 49 still listed as “missing.”

A week after the explosions, the regime is being compelled to begrudgingly acknowledge the possibility of severe chemical contamination. The Tianjin Environmental Protection Bureau reported on Wednesday that a test of water flowing from one drainage pipe recorded cyanide levels 227 times above the safe limit. Thousands of dead fish washed up on the banks of the Haihe River, six kilometres from the blast site, with photos immediately published on social media sites and shared across China and internationally. The phenomenon prompted frantic

reassurances by the authorities that it would be thoroughly investigated.

Authorities announced that other chemical storage facilities in Binhai New Area, which includes the Tianjin port, will be “relocated” to an industrial zone approximately 25 kilometres away. This follows a terrifying report, published in English by the *Wall Street Journal*, that Rui Hui was not alone in storing hazardous chemicals less than 1,000 metres from residential areas and public infrastructure.

The newspaper reported on Wednesday that Sinochem Group, a state-owned conglomerate and one of China’s largest companies, has been operating a chemical storage facility with 16 warehouses “just over 500 metres away from a residential district that includes dozens of housing blocks, restaurants, motels and other businesses.” According to the report, “a hospital and two schools are also located with a one-kilometre radius of the warehouse.”

The *Journal* cited a resident near the facility as stating that it had been in operation since the 1970s—before the construction of the residential neighbourhood. A second Sinochem facility, located just two kilometres north of where the Rui Hui warehouse once stood, has been in operation since 2006 and is adjacent to a highway.

Yixiu Wu, a toxics campaigner for Greenpeace East Asia, said this week that 13 chemical explosions have already occurred this year, just in China’s coastal industrial provinces of Jiangsu, Fujian and Shandong.

Three chemical tanks exploded at a plant in Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu, in July. The same month, storage tanks containing liquid hydrocarbon exploded at a petrochemical facility in Rizhou, Shandong, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of people who lived within 3,000 metres of the plant. In April, some 30,000 people were evacuated when an oil leak sparked a catastrophic fire in a chemical plant in Zhangzhou, Fujian province.

Industrial disasters, in which government and corporate disregard for safety play a major role, have gone hand-in-hand with China’s rapid development over the past decades into the world’s largest manufacturing centre and second largest economy. Transnational banks and corporations, along with the CCP-connected capitalist elite in China, have amassed immense wealth, not just through the exploitation of the labour of the Chinese working class, but the

squandering of millions of lives.

The extent to which the CCP regime has been forced to allow the Tianjin explosions to become the subject of national and international discussion points to its fear, and perplexity, in the face of the rebellious sentiment growing within the Chinese population over the subordination of their interests to the accumulation of profit.



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