

Construction scaffolding collapses, killing 74 at Chinese power plant

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At least 74 building workers were killed on November 24 after 70-metre high scaffolding collapsed inside a cooling tower at a state-owned power plant project at Yichun city in China's Jiangxi province.

While no official statement has been released about what caused the disaster, the *China Daily* said a tower crane collapsed, triggering the disintegration of the entire construction platform at about 7:30 a.m., during a shift change.

According to news reports, 90 percent of the site's workforce lost their lives in the disaster, China's worst building accident in the past two years. Most victims were low-paid migrant workers from Hebei province in northern China. The youngest was just 23 years-old.

Video footage and photographs screened by CCTV, the state broadcaster, showed massive piles of twisted metal and debris, and scores of workers, many forced to use their bare hands, attempting to locate victims. Police have taken 17 people into custody over the accident but provided no information about their identities.

The cooling tower was part of a \$US10 billion project to build two 1,000-megawatt coal-fired power units at the site. The state-owned Jiangxi Ganneng power company expected construction, which began in July 2015, to be completed by early 2018.

According to the *China Daily*, the Jiangxi Ganneng corporation launched a "Work Hard for 100 Days" campaign in September, urging workers to speed up construction. Thursday's disaster came just over 70 days into the new productivity regime.

The *GB Times* web site reported that Hebei Yinen Tower Engineering Ltd, the principal contractor on the project, has been involved in several construction accidents in recent years. Unnamed experts suggested that the disaster was caused by the use of lower grade

materials and the lack of proper safety inspections.

Tsinghua-Gammon Construction Safety Research Centre director Fang Dongping told the *South China Morning Post* today: "In China, you seldom see builders who are not rushing to get projects done. The faster companies promise to complete them, the more likely they are to be awarded the contracts."

President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and provincial government officials issued perfunctory statements calling for improved safety. China's State Administration of Work Safety chief Yang Huanning said there would be an investigation and the lessons of the accident would be learnt to expose the "hidden dangers" in the workplace. Such comments, routinely issued after every industrial disaster, are worthless.

Tens of thousands of Chinese workers are killed in their workplaces each year. In 2015, over 66,000 people died in industrial accidents at an average of 181 deaths per day. This massive death toll is not simply the result of "accidents"—unpredictable and unavoidable events—but the deliberate avoidance of basic safety procedures in order to cut costs, boost output and drive up profits.

Corruption is rife, with health and safety rules largely ignored, and workplace inspections rare. Whenever a major accident occurs, a few officials or managers are scapegoated and the underlying reasons for the disaster are either censored or brushed aside, so that similar practices continue.

In August 2014, a metal dust explosion at a car parts factory in eastern China killed at least 75 people and injured more than 18 others. Last year, the Chinese port city of Tianjin was rocked by two massive blasts, killing at least 173 people and injuring hundreds of others (see: "The Tianjin explosions and the discrediting of capitalism").

Last month, an industrial explosion hit Xinmin township in Shaanxi province, killing over 14 people , injuring more than 150 and leaving a crater several metres deep. The blast was reportedly caused by improperly stored construction chemicals. Earlier this month, over 30 miners were killed in a series of mine explosions and cave-ins.

The deaths of more than 70 building workers at the Jiangxi power-station construction site occurred on the same day that former head of the State Administration of Work Safety, Yang Dongliang, was placed on trial for allegedly accepting bribes. Yang said in court he took bribes and gifts worth 28.5 million yuan (\$US4.1 million) while head of the government’s “work safety” agency.

While Yang is to be made an example, his conduct is emblematic of the corruption and profiteering that riddles the entire capitalist regime in China.



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