# Russia: At least 15 dead, five missing after illegal dam breaks in Siberia

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A dam collapse Saturday in the Krasnoyarsk region of Siberia unleashed a flood of water that killed at least 15 people, most of them gold miners, with another five still missing.

The collapse came at 6 a.m. local time, releasing flood waters, carrying clay, stones and dirt, that swept away poorly constructed shelters in which between 74 and 80 miners were living at the time. Besides the dead and missing, another 26 workers were injured and hospitalized, three of them in serious condition.

Since the mine was over 260 kilometers from the next town, it took a long time for rescue and medical teams to arrive. Hundreds of people were involved in cleaning up the site of the disaster. The dam that broke was one out of four dams that were illegally constructed in this area to facilitate the mining of gold in the river.

Both the dam and the construction of the shelters for the workers on the Seiba River near the village of Shchetikino were in flagrant violation of Russian law and basic safety measures. The liberal *Novaya Gazeta* reported that the plans for the dam were never reviewed, let alone approved, by the regulatory agencies.

However, it is highly likely that the regulatory agency Rostekhnadzor did not in fact want to know about the existence of the dam. The newspaper pointed out that all four dams had a height of 5 to 10 meters and were widely visible from afar as well as on satellite images.

Residents of surrounding villages had been complaining for months about the gold mining works which, among other things, have led to heavy pollution of the rivers. Moreover, there had been several dam collapses in the recent past. One possible explanation for the dam collapse is that it followed an earlier collapse of another dam farther up the river.

The construction of the shelters was likewise illegal. They stood downstream from the dams, making it inevitable they would be flooded completely in the case of collapse. The deputy head of the regional ministry of emergencies told *Novaya Gazeta*: “When the dam started to collapse because of the rain, the water flooded in the direction of the dwellings of the gold miners. Everything [bad] that could happen did happen.”

An investigation has been initiated into the causes of the disaster. According to the latest reports, the main theory considered by the investigation is that serious violations of the rules of the conduct of the gold mining work caused the dam to collapse. The head of the company that owns the gold mine, Sisim, and the head of the company’s mining department were arrested. The offices of the company have been raided. Sisim is part of the Sibzolot holding, one of the biggest gold mining companies in Russia. It has been fined repeatedly for illegal extraction practices in the past.

The Kremlin has promised the families of the dead miners a miserable compensation payment of 1 million rubles (roughly $15,660) per dead miner.

Whatever the immediate causes of the disaster, it lays bare the blatant criminality with which private companies operate in Russia, while enjoying the tacit consent of the state. It is the latest in a series of disasters that were entirely preventable and, ultimately, qualify as social murder.

The restoration of capitalism in the USSR was carried out by the Stalinist bureaucracy and openly criminal elements, which merged into a new ruling oligarchy that has based its vast fortunes on a combination of open plunder of social wealth, ruthless exploitation of the working class and mafia-like operations carried out, more often than not, in tandem with the state and government.

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The virtual absence of any kind of safety measures and regulations of workplaces and locations where large crowds gather has been the direct result of this counterrevolution. Workplace accidents and major fires in clubs, shopping malls and residential houses are a regular occurrence in Russia and throughout the former Soviet Union, and have claimed thousands of lives since 1991.

Most recently, a horrific fire in a shopping mall in March 2018 in Kemerovo claimed the lives of 64 people, many of them children. The region of Kemerovo has historically been a major centre for the mining industry and is directly adjacent to the Krasnoyarsk region where the dam broke. As was the case with this dam and the shelters for the miners, the company overseeing the construction of the shopping mall disregarded basic safety measures.

Like Kemerovo, Krasnoyarsk is an important mining region. In particular, it is the centre for the extraction and production of aluminum in Russia and home to large sections of the country's impoverished industrial working class.

In 2018, the average monthly income in the Krasnoyarsk region was 27,853 rubles per month ($436) but large sections of the population live on much less. In 2017, 15.7 percent of the population brought home between 14,000-19,000 rubles a month ($219-$300), 19.2 percent earned an average of 19,000 to 27,000 rubles a month ($300-$423) and 22.4 percent earned an average of 27,000-45,000 ($423-$704). Only 15.4 percent of the population earned over $704 a month and only 7.8 percent more than $940.

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