

South Korean stem-cell researcher resigns over doubt

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korean researcher Hwang Woo-suk resigned from his university on Friday after the school said he fabricated stem-cell research that had raised hopes of new cures for hard-to-treat diseases.

A university panel, releasing initial findings of a probe, accused Hwang of damaging the scientific community with his deception, while South Korea's government ruled the scandal surrounding the country's star scientist and said it may pull its funding for his research.

"I sincerely apologize to the people for creating a shock and disappointment," Hwang told reporters as he was leaving his office at Seoul National University, considered the country's top institution of higher learning.

"With an apologetic heart ... I step down as professor," he said.

However, Hwang still maintained that he had produced the technology to create patient-matched stem cells as he claimed in a May article in the journal Science.

"I emphasize that patient-specific stem cells belong to South Korea and you are going to see this," said Hwang, a veterinarian.

Earlier Friday, a panel of Seoul National University experts said Hwang had faked results of at least nine of 11 stem cell lines he claimed to have created in the May paper the first confirmation of allegations that have cast a shadow over all his purported breakthroughs in cloning and stem-cell technology.

"This kind of error is a grave act that damages the foundation of science," the panel said.

The South Korean government, which had strongly supported Hwang and designated him the country's first "top scientist," said Friday it was "miserable" over the reported results of the investigation and will start its own probe over ethics breaches.

Choi Seong-sik, vice minister of science and technology, said it's impossible to recover money already spent for Hwang, a total \$39.9 million for research and facilities since 1998. But his ministry, which admitted errors

Militant outfit

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He however did not substantiate his claim and failed to answer property queries from journalists.

Categorically blaming Jamaat-e Islami for militancy in the country, the Ahab leader said, "There is no need to find out who are behind militancy. They (Jamaat) themselves confessed to such crimes. Has Nizami (Jamaat chief and minister Motiur Rahman Nizami) been arrested although most people and organisations are holding him responsible (for militancy)?"

In an oblique reference to Jamaat, he said political vengeance of an Islamic party was responsible for arrests of Galib and other Ahab leaders.

Muslehuddin, a Madina University scholar and teacher at Chittagong Islamic University established by the suspect Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), said false propaganda by some expelled Ahab leaders, newspaper reports and wrong intelligence reports also led to arrests of Ahab leaders.

"Intelligence agencies of our country appear to be ever asleep, we doubt if they are alerted even after August 17 (countrywide blasts," he said.

The press conference was attended by, among others, Ahab General Secretary Abdul Wadud, Galib-run At Tahreek editor Dr Sakhawat Hossain, Ahle Hadith Jubo Sangha (AHJS) acting President Kabirul Islam and Rajshahi Ahab President/Abul Kalam Azad.

AL QAEDA LINKS

Asked how he can deny Ahab links to Al Qaeda when Osama Bin Laden's close associate Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Al Rahmani of Pakistan was welcomed at an Ahab conference, Muslehuddin said, "We invited him as a famous alamy (Islamic scholar)."

Criticising the US, Muslehuddin said, "Someone's being on America's list of terrorists does not mean one is a terrorist."

At a 1997 Ahab conference, Galib named a number of guests from India, Pakistan, Nepal, the Maldives, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, including Nasser Al Rahmani, an alleged leader of Saudi Hizbullah, US Federal Bureau of Investigation announced rewards of \$5 million for his arrest.

MATIN SALAFI

On the presence of Abdul Matin Salafi from India, who was expelled from Bangladesh in 1988 for militancy, Muslehuddin said, "We invite people irrespective of ideologies and anyone can address our annual conference."

He kept mum when asked how Matin Salafi can be 'anyone' when Galib had a joint account with him at Motiuljhe Branch of Islami Bank Bangladesh between July 1989 and May 1990 (after his expulsion).

Matin Salafi helped Galib collect funds and establish links to militants abroad, especially in the Middle East and South Asia, investigators said.

MILITARY ISSUE

Muslehuddin confirmed Galib's speeches in 1997 revealing his outfit's underground activities inside Bangladesh army's UN peacekeeping mission in Kuwait as reported in different national newspapers.

He said, "Our Daoat (invitation) is no secret and we convinced military men through reaching them our publications."

Replying to questions, Ahab central Muballigh (preacher) Maulana SM Abdul Latif said not only Akramuzzaman (former AHJS worker and now a director of RIHS) worked inside the mission and (Entaz Ali) Zakaria (of Tangail) is still working there.

Rumsfeld

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A brigade typically consists of 4,000 to 5,000 soldiers.

Asked about the possibility that the United States might want permanent military bases in Iraq -- something that could be controversial across the Arab region -- Rumsfeld did not rule that out, saying only discussion had so far not been possible in the absence of a fully empowered Iraqi government.

In any event, Washington's stated goal is a sharp reduction in its forces in Iraq as local forces are able to take over.

The administration has admitted progress has taken longer than expected, and analysts say local forces have a long way to go before they can operate without help from US forces.

The Adhaim attack was the latest in a series of large, frontal assaults over more than a year that betray the force of numbers and the military training of the guerrillas and raise concerns about how well government forces might survive in a civil war if US forces withdrew.

Lacking sophisticated armour or equipment, Iraqi police and soldiers are among the most exposed to attacks by insurgents.

As mortars slammed into the main army base in Adhaim at dawn, police said, gunmen launched their attack on an outlying post some 10 km (six miles) to the north, on the main road to Kirkuk, firing rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machineguns.

When reinforcements finally arrived, they turned on them too, a senior police officer in the area added. In all, the fighting raged for several hours before the attackers broke off.

Ethnic and sectarian tensions in Iraq appeared to soften somewhat during last week's elections, when Sunni Arabs turned out in larger numbers to vote. But animosity between rival sects has grown after partial election results showed Sunni Arab-led parties fared poorly in areas like Baghdad.

Some Sunni Arab leaders have warned that the informal truce called by insurgents eager for a bigger voice in parliament could end because of disappointment with the results that have triggered complaints of fraud. al-Qaeda-linked militants have always violently opposed the US-backed political process.

A UN official with Iraq's Electoral Commission told Reuters he saw no reason to hold a rerun of the election, as a common front of Sunni and secular parties have demanded, threatening to boycott the new parliament if they are refused.

But behind the scenes, participants say, even those parties accusing the government and Commission of rigging the result are engaged in negotiations for posts in a coalition government with the dominant Shia Islamists and their present Kurdish allies.

Talk of vote fraud appears to be partly a tactic to improve the losers' leverage, officials and analysts say, in a process of government-formulation that may take weeks and possibly months.

JRC to survey

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and attend the next region level committee meeting in Sylhet.

The meeting also discussed preparing a plan of action and a model test for dredging the Surma. It suggested further model study in both the countries for flood protection in the Barak valley along the Indian borders.

It reviewed the progress of the joint survey of the Barak and the Surma and Kushiara in Bangladesh conducted from 2000 to 2003.

The region level survey was started in 2000 and the JRC later held national level meetings in Dhaka and Delhi. The JRC Standing Committee also made a field visit of the Sylhet-Assam border in 2003.

Based on the previous work and reports, the latest meeting agreed to dredge the Surma to increase its navigability and check severe erosion along the Kushiara.

The Barak emerges from the hills of Manipur in India and bifurcates into two rivers -- the Surma and the Kushiara -- in Bangladesh.

The Kushiara and the Surma share the total discharge of the Barak at a proportion of about 80:20 during the monsoon, causing serious erosion of all concave banks from Amolshid to Gazukata affecting both the countries.

Vessel capsizes

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Magistrate M Munir Chowdhury witnessed the accident and immediately detained the lighter vessel and its master. The CPA also filed a case yesterday with Bandar Police Station.

Sources said an influential leader of Chittagong Lighter Vessel Owners Association owns MV Jewel-2.

They said all lighter vessel owners take advantage of their links with a section of association leaders to violate port rules.

The MV Jewel-2 was registered in 1965, they added.

Bigots clash with cops

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police, asking them to do the job in their stead. But the police dismissed the request.

"No question arises of putting up the signboard there. The signboard will remain in our custody," Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner SM Mizanur Rahman told the press. "We will not tolerate any attack on the Ahmadiyyas," he affirmed.

Anti-Ahmadiyya agitation since 1987 has claimed the lives of eight people. The smear campaign got fresh vigour in November 2003, when the zealots attacked an Ahmadiyya Mosque in Nakhla para in the city. They have continued the anti-Ahmadiyya campaign since then and have hung similar signboards at four key Ahmadiyya mosques in Chittagong, Khulna, Bogra and Patuakhali.

A government ban on the Ahmadiyya publications on January 8 last year further encouraged the religious zealots to carry on with their agenda.

The IKNMB activists started gathering in the city's Muktangan yesterday in the noon. About 1,000 IKNMB members clad in panjabi, pajama and topi from different parts of the country occupied the road between Paltan and the Zero Point to hold a pre-announced rally.

They made a podium by putting two trucks together. A group of some 40 IKNMB activists took position in front of the podium, posing as handcuffed prisoners with the upper part of their body bare and hands tied in front with rope.

IKNMB leaders speaking at the rally stressed the need for branding the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim and enacting a law towards this end.

As the participants chanted slogans like 'Qadianis [Ahmadiyyas] are Kafir' and 'let's set fire to their dens', their leaders continued with delivering instigating speeches.

"The government has betrayed the Tuhiddee Janata [monotheist people] by showing indifference to our demand. Now we have no demand from the government. It's time to implement our demands ourselves," IKNMB President Mahmudul Hasan Manttazi told the rally.

IKNMB Secretary General Nazmul Haque directed the IKNMB members to list the Ahmadiyyas, excommunicate them, bar them from using Islamic terms and not allow them burial in Muslim graveyards.

The IKNMB leaders claimed the 4-party coalition had come to power banking on the Muslims' votes and threatened that they would not let it come to power again, as it betrayed the Tuhiddee Janata.

CLASHES

After the rally, Manttazi and Nazmul led a procession towards the Central Jail, but the police, who earlier had erected a barricade at the Zero Point, intercepted them there.

As the IKNMB activists attempted to break through the barricade at 4:20pm, the police baton-charged them, splitting the mob into two groups. One group of the demonstrators rushed to the south gate of Baitul Mokarram Mosque, while the police continued charging baton on the other group standing in front of Muktangan, injuring at least 30 of them.

The IKNMB group at the south gate of Baitul Mokarram started throwing bricks at the police. The agitators vandalised five vehicles including a police van and an oil lorry.

As the police chased them, they backtracked to the east gate of the mosque, with the police chasing them up the stairs.

At least 20 IKNMB activists were hurt this time, while seven policemen were injured in the zealots' attack.

IKNMB THREATS

After the clash, the IKNMB held a short rally in the Muktangan, where it vowed to evict the Ahmadiyyas from Bangladesh. The IKNMB leaders also announced to hold demonstrations across the country and bring out a procession from Baitul Mokarram after the Asr prayers today to protest the police attack.

They claimed the police injured some 200 of their activists and picked up 200 others. But, the police said they have not arrested anyone.

Talking to The Daily Star over telephone yesterday evening,

Mamtazi claimed the police also attacked IKNMB supporters at Rahim Metal Jame Mosque in Tejgaon and fired three tear gas cells, injuring three people including him. But, the IKNMB secretary general told The Daily Star no such incident took place.

KNAB PROGRAMME

Ten platoons of police were deployed at the Ahmadiyya headquarters yesterday morning to bar Knab zealots from besieging it after the Juma prayers, as they had announced earlier. Law enforcers were also deployed at different city points from Baitul Mokarram to Bakshibazar to check violence.

The Knab held a rally at the north gate of Baitul Mokarram after the Juma prayers. Speakers at the rally made a three-point demand including introduction of a law to stop 'insult' to the last prophet, Hazrat Mohammad, and deception in the name of Islam 'being done by the Ahmadiyyas', and declaring them non-Muslim.

"Bangladeshis have sacrificed their lives for their language in 1952. Thirty lakh people gave their lives during the Liberation War. Now 60 lakh others will offer their lives to oust the Ahmadiyyas and thus uphold the honour of Islam," Knab Amir Noor Hossain Nurani said.

"It has to be decided now whether the price of Bangladesh is more than that of the last prophet," he said, vowing to sacrifice lives in thousands to realise their demands.

"The Ahmadiyyas, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh militants, atheists and Murdats [deviators] are of the same roots," he told intelligence agencies.

After the Knab demonstrators failed to break through the police barricade, they held another short rally, where Nurani issued an ultimatum to declare the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim by the Eid-ul-Azha next month. He also announced to besiege the Ahmadiyya mosque at Dhanikola in Mymensingh on February 10 and another at Jyotondranagar in Satkhira on April 17.

CIVIL SOCIETY GUARDS AHMADIYAS

Civil society members and rights activists including members of Ain-O-Salish Kendra and Nari Pakkha gathered at the Central Shaheed Minar in the morning carrying the national flag. They later marched to the Ahmadiyya headquarters and stayed there until the afternoon to stop any attack on the Ahmadiyyas by the zealots.

GOVT'S STAND

There is no room of extremists in the country and they will not be spared, said State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharef Hossain Shajahan yesterday. "There may be difference of opinion among the followers of a religion, but no-one can attack others for such a difference," he maintained.

"We're taking steps against these people and will stop them," he told the BBC Bangla Service yesterday evening.

Asked why the government does not take any permanent step against the anti-Ahmadiyyas, the state minister said, "Steps can be taken against them under the existing laws, if they hold any programme. We are now burdened with bombings across the country and have our attention focussed on solving this issue."

AHMADIYYA GRATITUDE

"Today's incidents further prove" that the government is able to tackle the fundamentalists and the terrorists, Central Ahmadiyya Missionary Abdul Awal Khan told The Daily Star. He thanked the law enforcement agencies, rights activists and the media for taking steps to protect them.

15 sailors die

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Monitoring Mission (SLMM) to make arrangements for them to travel over land and sea under an 'agreed understanding reached earlier.'

"Please be advised that our members would continue this practice of travelling on the seas with arms for self-defence and it is essential that our request be officially responded to, to formalise travel in the future."

"Early action ... would avoid recurrence of such incidents," he told the SLMM.

Thamilselvan denied the LTTE had killed three sailors on Thursday during a sea battle and said the men had "drowned" after a fire-fight.

"When three of our boats were travelling in the Mannar seas, the Sri Lankan navy intercepted the fleet and started firing," Thamilselvan said. "Our members had to return fire for self-protection."

Thamilselvan said the navy retreated, leaving one of their patrol boats behind. The Tigers had then noticed three sailors aboard the abandoned craft, two of them dead.

They had rescued the wounded survivor, but later he too drowned when the rebel boat to which he was taken sank after taking on water, the Tiger leader said.

The Sri Lankan navy Thursday accused the Tigers of abducting three sailors after the gunbattle and said it believed the men had been

killed by the LTTE.

The worsening clashes between rebels and government forces have been a setback to diplomatic moves to arrange direct talks between the parties and prevent the island from sliding back to war.

Fifty-seven people have been killed this month alone in the ethnic conflict, heightening fears for the future of the ceasefire.

President Mahinda Rajapakse reiterated an offer Wednesday to hold talks with the Tigers anywhere in Asia, saying he was "ready for talks as soon as the Tigers are ready."

Japan has offered to host the talks. But the Tigers are insisting they be held in Oslo, a demand rejected by Colombo.

This week Sri Lanka's key financial backers -- the United States, the European Union, Japan and Norway -- urged the Tigers to end the latest cycle of violence.

The quartet has promised billions of dollars to rebuild the country's war-shattered economy if the two sides show progress in ending three decades of bloodshed that has claimed over 60,000 lives.

No plan

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Conscious Youth Council) and started "training" the local youths along with lessons on "jihad".

Many youths, however, stopped going there after seeing the mode of his training.

Alamgir shaved clean his beard after getting the police job.

Surprised at his son's getting the job, Alamgir's father Matiar Rahman said, "He may have the qualities of doing politics, but he never had the qualities to qualify for a police job."

He assumes Alamgir got the job with the blessings of the BNP leaders.

Alamgir's parents could not say where their son went after August 17. "He used to call us sometimes over phone and frequently changed his cell phone number," his mother told this correspondent.

After Alamgir got the job, Bogra police gave a false report on him, allegedly bowing to political pressure.

"There is no scope for making any probe into Alamgir's militancy link due to political pressure although departmental high-ups ordered to make one," said a police official seeking anonymity.

Alamgir's father told the press that police came to their house on August 21, four days after the countrywide blasts, and returned after failing to find his son.

Police, however, denied making any raid on Alamgir's house after the August 17 blasts.

Haji pilgrims

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pilgrim, Biman authorities had to charter two planes last month.

The authorities in a hurried manner chartered a 576-seater Boeing 747 from France and a 387-seater airbus from Portugal and were desperately looking for a third one.

But as the situation has changed, Biman now wants the other two to carry more pilgrims from December 28 to January 4.

Asked, acting Managing Director of Biman Mahmoodur Rahman just said Biman is not getting the third chartered aircraft. He declined to comment further.

Biman sources said after Prime Minister Khaleda Zia inaugurated this year's hajj flight on December 13, Biman has so far ferried 24,000 pilgrims through 50 flights operated by its own fleet and the chartered planes.

Biman requires another 36 hajj flights to ferry at least 16,000 intending pilgrims to Saudi Arabia by January 4, the sources added.

Biman has faced severe public wrath as it failed to maintain its hajj flight schedules from the very second day due to mismanagement and aircraft crises.

Many criticised Biman for still having the luxury of operating the most loss-making flights on Dhaka-New York route.

The national flag carrier is incurring a weekly loss of Tk 70 lakh on the route at a time when it is spending crores of taka for chartering aircraft for hajj flights.

Earlier, the hajj fare fiasco saw axing of the then state minister for civil aviation Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin, in a reflection of the government's sheer incompetence in pursuing any long-term hajj flight management.

Con cooperative

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savings to attract members, said Billal, a member.

About one year back they also took money from the solvent members offering two-katha plots in Gazipur. They also placed a signboard of 'Matrichaya Housing' on a piece of 20-higha land.

But going to Gazipur a few months after paying money, some members found the signboard missing, they said, adding that locals told them that the cooperative had not bought any land for the housing project.

After some 50 members on Thursday complained to the Adabor police that they can not draw their savings from the cooperative society, police went to the office but did not find the owners or any other person except the two peons and a guard whom they arrested.

Peon Foystal told police that the society owners incurred loss after starting housing business at Gazipur.

As most of the members pressed the office to pay back their savings, the owners fled, he said, adding that he also saved Tk 3,500 with the organisation.

BDB slams

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Chowdhury said at the dialogue on the present political crisis.

"The government now warns the opposition of sedition charge as they [government] have lost people's support," Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said.

Criticising the PM for not agreeing to the 14-party's electoral reform proposal, he said, "A free and fair election can be held only if the government accepts the opposition's electoral reform proposal."

BDB Secretary General Major (Rtd) Abdul Mannan and Organising Secretary Mahi B Chowdhury MP, BDB central leaders major (Rtd) MA Halim, Workers Party General Secretary Bimol Biswas and central leader Fazle Hossain Badsha also took part in the dialogue.

Italy issues warrant for CIA team

REUTERS, Milan

A Milan court has issued a European arrest warrant for 22 CIA agents suspected of kidnapping an Egyptian cleric from Italy's financial capital in 2003, Prosecutor Armando Spataro said on Friday.

The case is one of several investigations into whether U.S. intelligence agents used Europe to illegally transfer militant suspects to third countries for interrogation. The renditions have led to tensions between Washington and the European Union.

Milan magistrates suspect a CIA team grabbed Hassan Mustafa Osama Nasr off a Milan street and flew him for interrogation to Egypt, where he said he was tortured.

Prosecutors asked the Italian Justice Minister last month to seek the extradition of the suspects from the United States, but Justice Minister Roberto Castelli has not yet decided whether to act on the request.

A EU warrant is automatically valid across the 25-nation bloc and does not require the approval of any government.

The warrant was agreed by the European Union in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States in 2001 and was hailed as a key part of the bloc's fight against terrorism.

Under the agreement, any EU member state can ask another to hand over a suspect and in most cases, the other state will have to comply.

Spataro told Reuters he had also asked Interpol to try to detain the agents anywhere in the world.

The U.S. embassy in Rome was not immediately available for comment and telephone calls seeking comment from the White House, Justice Department, Central

Intelligence Agency and State Department were not immediately returned.

RULE BOOKS

Earlier this week, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said he did not believe CIA agents had kidnapped Nasr, but added governments would not defeat terrorism by playing by the rules.

Ship-breakers

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Talking to BSS, Divisional Forest Officer of the CCFD Dewan Zafrul Hassan said the forest department, not the district administration, is the owner of the land in Sonaichari area.

The department developed the mangrove forest spending a huge amount of public money. So, there is no scope to lease out the land to any private party for commercial purposes, which is a threat to environment, and lives and properties of the local people, he added.

Meanwhile, local people alleged that the vast area now looks like a barren land as the land grabbers felled hundreds of growing trees.

The CCFD authorities in a press release yesterday requested the administration, public representatives and conscious people in the area to help save the mangrove forest from the hands of the dishonest quarter for the greater interest of the local people and the environment.

He wondered if a member could be hanged simply on the ground of appeal to the conscience.

The Bansal committee in its report said the Lok Sabha may consider the expulsion of the 10 members "as continuation of these members will be untenable."

The committee report said that its sittings and cross-examinations of the accused lawmakers and the 'sting' operation team, it found no reason to doubt the authenticity of the video tapes, which showed these MPs accepting money to ask questions. All the 10 members, however, denied the charges.

Meanwhile, the Indian cabinet at its meeting here on Thursday night approved in principle state funding of elections in a bid to check the influence of money in electoral politics.

The meeting presided by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh referred the matter to the Election Commission which is expected to call a meeting of political parties to elicit their views how to go about state funding of poll expenditures, Mukherjee earlier told reporters outside parliament yesterday morning.

As part of electoral reforms, a committee headed by late communist leader Indrajit Gupta had proposed a plan envisaging a provision in the federal budget to help political parties and their poll candidates with publicity materials, microphones, telephone, petrol and other poll-related expenses.

The idea of state funding of elections discussed since long gained fresh urgency in the wake of the recent cash-for-questions scam involving the 10 lawmakers. After it BJP chief and leader of the opposition LK Advani wrote separate letters to the presiding officers of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha suggesting state funding of polls.

Gas explosion

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of Dujiangyan and Wenchuan, the State Administration for Work Safety said on its website.

The exact number of casualties remains unclear, officials said.

"We're still trying to determine the exact number of victims. We're still carrying out the rescue work," an official at Sichuan's work safety office told AFP.

Thirty-one bodies were found during an overnight search at the blast site, after 11 bodies had been found earlier, bringing the confirmed death toll up to 42, the Xinhua news agency said.

Most of the victims were construction workers, it said.

More than 50 rescuers were searching through the rubble on Friday while medical workers had arrived on the scene to treat the injured, officials said.

"We're mainly trying to find other victims and saving the injured now," the official said.

Work safety authorities have launched an investigation into the cause of the accident.

Local authorities were meanwhile blocking access for journalists. There were some 400 police officers posted at the scene, state television CCTV said.

The reports, however, did not give any details on how many people

ple were working at the site at the time of the explosion.

The company constructing the tunnel was the state-owned China Railway Engineering Company's branch in Sichuan, Xinhua said.

Construction of roads in China is rapid as the government considers good roads an important contributor to strong economic growth.

China built 352,000km (218,000 miles) of roads in rural areas in the past two years, more than that built since the Communist Party began ruling the nation more than half a century ago.

Labour and human rights critics argue safety standards are not keeping up with production in China with more than 100,000 people killed in workplace accidents each year, government statistics say.

And a lack of free trade unions also leaves workers little power to demand change, they say.

Two years ago Friday, China's worst industrial accident in recent memory occurred, with an explosion at the Chuandongbei gas field in the southwest Chongqing municipality that killed 243 people and poisoned more than 9,000 others.