

Myanmar jade mine landslide kills 160

The disaster struck after heavy rainfall pounded the open-cast mines in Myanmar

AFP | Yangon

The battered bodies of more than 160 jade miners were pulled from a sea of mud after a landslide in northern Myanmar yesterday, after one of the worst-ever accidents to hit the treacherous industry.

Scores die each year while working in the country's lucrative but poorly regulated jade trade, which uses low-paid migrant workers to scrape out a gem highly coveted in China.

The disaster struck after heavy rainfall pounded the open-cast mines, close to the Chinese border in Kachin state, where billions of dollars of jade is believed to be scoured each year from bare hillsides.

A slice of mountain collapsed, sending a churning torrent of mud into an aquamarine-coloured lake of mine waste water as workers scampered uphill.

"There are so many people floating in the water," said a bystander.

Dozens "were smothered by a wave of mud", the Myanmar Fire Services Department said in a Facebook post.

Rescue workers, including the fire department and local police, worked throughout the day to



Rescue workers carry a dead body following a landslide at the mining site

pull bodies out of a mud lake under a continuous deluge of heavy monsoon rain.

"By 7:15 pm, 162 bodies were found," said the department, adding that 54 people were injured and sent to nearby hospitals.

Mud-slaked and bloodied bodies of miners were laid out in grim rows under tarpaulins, some missing shoes as a result of the force of the wall of mud which hit them.

A woman grieved over the

recovered victims, as rescue workers held her up.

Working through a torrent of heavy rain was a challenge, police superintendent Than Win Aung said, as it could spark another mine collapse on the unstable terrain.

"We can't dig and find the bodies buried underwater... so we are just picking up the dead bodies that float," he told AFP, adding that rescue efforts will be further hampered as night falls.

The workers were scavenging for gemstones on the sharp mountainous terrain in Hpakant township, where furrows from earlier excavations had already loosened the earth.

The victims had apparently defied a warning not to work

the mines during the monsoon rains, local police told AFP.

The United Nations in Myanmar said it was "deeply saddened by the terrible loss of life".

Chinese demand

Myanmar is one of the world's biggest sources of jadeite and the industry is largely driven by insatiable demand for the translucent green gem from neighbouring China.

The mines are mired in secrecy, although environmental watchdog Global Witness alleges operators are linked to former junta figures, the military elite, and their cronies.

It said the landslide should serve as a "wake-up call" for Myanmar's government led by Aung San Suu Kyi -- whose party vowed to reform and stamp out corruption.

The watchdog estimated that the industry was worth some \$31 billion in 2014, although very little reaches state coffers.

The mine where yesterday's accident happened belongs to the Yadanar Kyay company, according to the military's official news site.

Police said the death toll could have been even higher if authorities had not warned people to stay away from the mining pits the day before.

Landslides in the area are common, especially during Myanmar's notoriously severe monsoon season, and a major slip in November 2015 left more than 100 dead.

News in brief

Gun attack leaves 24 dead in central Mexico



Gunmen attacked a drug rehabilitation centre in central Mexico, killing at least 24 people and leaving seven wounded, local authorities said. According to preliminary information, the attackers "entered the scene, forced (the victims) onto the ground and shot them," said Pedro Cortes, secretary of public security in Irapuato, located northwest of Mexico City in Guanajuato state.



Hollywood star Geoffrey Rush won a record multimillion-dollar payout after an appeal by a Rupert Murdoch-owned newspaper against a defamation ruling was thrown out by an Australian court.

The Oscar-winner will receive US\$2 million for lost earnings and compensation after a court rejected an appeal seeking reduced costs and a retrial of the case.

Amazon forest fires in Brazil increased by 19.5 percent in June compared to the same month last year, making it the worst June in 13 years, authorities revealed.



June marks the start of the dry period and there were 2,248 recorded fires, leaving analysts expecting a worse year for the rainforest than the devastating 2019, which provoked anger throughout the world.

Almost 3,500 teachers and students at more than a dozen public schools in Japan's Yashio city have become sick with diarrhoea and stomach pains in a mass food poisoning outbreak. Saitama prefecture said that 3,453 people in 15 elementary and middle schools in Yashio, a city of 92,000 just north of Tokyo, had been affected after eating a lunch supplied by the TQC cooperative on June 26.

Iran's nuclear body said an accident had taken place at a warehouse in a nuclear complex without causing casualties or radioactive pollution. There was "no nuclear material (in the warehouse) and no potential of pollution," Iranian Atomic Energy Organisation spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi told state television.



Eight migrants who disembarked in Sicily this week after being rescued in the Mediterranean by a charity boat are in quarantine after testing positive

for coronavirus, the group Mediterranea said. The eight migrants were part of a group of 43 people aboard the humanitarian vessel Mare Jonio who disembarked at the Sicilian port of Augusta.



About 100 people were killed in a 2015 collapse which strengthened calls to regulate the industry. Another 50 died in 2019

Indian policemen arrested over custody deaths of father and son

Reuters | Chennai

India has arrested five policemen over the deaths of a father and son in custody, a senior investigating official said, following outrage that drew comparisons to the death of George Floyd in the United States.

Last week the men, J Jayaraj, 59, and Bennicks Immanuel, 31, were allegedly subjected to a brutal thrashing that resulted in rectal bleeding and eventual death, according to a letter to government officials written by Jayaraj's wife J Selvarani.

"All important police personnel involved in the incident have been arrested," K Shankar, Inspector General of Police, Crime Branch Central Investigation Department in the southern state of Tamil Nadu said.

"The investigation continues," Shankar said, adding that a murder case has been filed on the arrested policemen, who include two sub-inspectors, two constables and station's inspector.

Meghan felt 'unprotected' by royal family while pregnant

Reuters | London

Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, felt "unprotected" by the British royal family while she was pregnant with her son Archie, according to London High Court documents filed as part of her legal action against a tabloid newspaper.

Meghan, wife of Queen Elizabeth's grandson Prince Harry, is suing publisher Associated Newspapers over articles its Mail on Sunday newspaper printed last year which included parts of a handwritten letter she had sent to her estranged father, Thomas Markle, in August 2018.

Markle and his daughter have not spoken since he pulled out of appearing at her wedding to Harry in May 2018 after undergoing heart surgery and following news he had staged photos with a paparazzi photographer.

The Mail justified publishing the letter by saying five unnamed friends of Meghan, who gave birth to Archie in May 2019, had put her version of events in interviews with the U.S. magazine People.

Her legal team say it was untrue she had authorised or arranged for her friends to tell People about the letter.

"The Claimant had become the subject of a large number of false and



Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, leave after the annual Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey in London

damaging articles by the UK tabloid media, specifically by the Defendant, which caused tremendous emotional distress and damage to her mental health," her lawyers said in a submission to the High Court.

"As her friends had never seen her in this state before, they were rightly concerned for her welfare, specifically as she was pregnant, unprotected by the Institution, and prohibited from defending herself."

The couple are now living in Los Angeles after stepping down from royal duties at the end of March. Harry said he had fallen out with his elder brother, Prince William, and Meghan has spoken of a lack of support when pregnant and as a new mother.

