
Four employees of the Rio Tinto mining company have been detained by Chinese authorities. According to reports in China's state media, they are accused of stealing state secrets and bribing employees of Chinese steel companies. Chris Hogg reports from Beijing.

Stern Hu, an Australian who runs Rio Tinto's operations in Shanghai was the **lead negotiator** in the mining company's annual talks with Chinese steel makers over **iron ore** prices. China is the world's largest consumer of **iron ore**.

This year the **negotiators** failed to meet a **deadline** on June 30th to agree what's known as the **benchmark price** for supplies from Rio Tinto and the other big companies. The **statement** from the Shanghai office of the National Security Agency says Mr Hu and his colleagues used **improper methods**, including **bribery**, to obtain material from Chinese negotiators during the talks, according to media reports here.

Rio Tinto has denied that its employees were involved in **spying**. Australian diplomats say they've now been given permission to visit Mr Hu for the first time since he was **detained** on Monday. The country's foreign minister, Stephen Smith, says he's been **given assurances** by the Chinese the **mining executive** is being treated well.

Chris Hogg, BBC News, Beijing

Vocabulary and definitions

lead negotiator	the main person who tries to help two groups reach an agreement with each other
iron ore	the raw material from which iron can be obtained
deadline	a time or day by which something must be done
benchmark price	a standard value of iron ore
statement	an official written description
improper methods	wrong or unsuitable ways of doing something
bribery	the act of trying to make someone do something by giving them money, presents or something else that they want
spying	the act of secretly gathering and reporting information about the activities of another country or organisation
detained	to force someone officially to stay in one place, for example in a police station or in prison
given assurances	promised

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