

Last 45 Chinese Miners in Cave-in Pulled Out Alive

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BEIJING (AP) — Forty-five grimy, exhausted Chinese coal miners trapped by a cave-in were rescued Saturday, ending a 36-hour ordeal in the world's most dangerous country for the industry. Eight miners were killed in the accident.

After Thursday's cave-in, at least 200 workers dug a small rescue tunnel about 1,650 feet (500 meters) deep to reach the trapped miners, the People's Daily newspaper said. Seven trapped miners were pulled out alive Friday from the mine in the city of Samenxia in Henan province, in central China.

On Saturday, state broadcaster CCTV showed rescuers with helmets and oxygen tanks carrying the workers out of the mine shaft to ambulances. The miners lay on stretchers, wrapped with blankets and with towels shielding their eyes from damaging exposure to light.

The rescue was the biggest in the country since April 2010, when 115 miners were pulled out alive after being trapped for eight days in a mine in northern China.

Luo Lin, head of the State Administration for Work Safety, praised the rescue after the last miner was rushed away in an ambulance, but said more work needed to be done to promote safety.

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"The alarm bell of work safety must keep ringing. Enterprises should pay attention to work safety when the coal demand is high. ... They should not allow any operation that violates (safety) rules or regulations," he said.

Luo said a magnitude-2.9 earthquake had occurred Thursday near the mine shortly before a "rock burst" was reported. The phenomenon occurs when settling earth bears down on mine walls and causes a sudden release of stored energy. The exploding chunks of coal and rock, or the shock waves alone, can be lethal.

The rescue work was hindered by the large amount of coal dust thrown up by the explosion, CCTV said.

China's coal mines are the deadliest in the world, although the industry's safety record has improved in recent years as smaller, illegal mines have been closed. Annual fatalities are now about one-third of the high of nearly 7,000 in 2002.

On Oct. 30, a gas explosion at a coal mine in central China's Hunan province killed 29 workers, the worst accident in recent months.

The mine that caved in Thursday belongs to Yima Coal Group, a large state-owned coal company in Henan, the State Administration of Work Safety said on its website. Fourteen miners managed to escape when the accident happened, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

The fact that the accident was in one of China's big state-run mines may have improved the trapped miners' odds of surviving. Those mines tend to have better rescue equipment and safety practices than smaller mines.

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