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6A

Monday, April 12, 2004

Search for survivors of Russian mine blast continues this week

By Steve Gutterman
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OSINNIKI, Russia — The coal-blackened faces of exhausted rescuers and the red-rimmed eyes of anxious relatives told a grim story of disappearing hope Sunday, a day after a methane blast tore through a Siberian mine, killing at least 42 miners.

Five miners remained missing in the latest disaster to strike Russia's hard-scrabble coal country. "Most likely, they will all be corpses," said the head of a commission dealing with the disaster. The blast occurred early Saturday about 1,840 feet down in the Taizhina mine in a coal-rich strip of western Siberia called the Kuzbass.

On Sunday, emergency officials plotted rescue and recovery strategies at one end of the mine's Soviet-era administration building, which is topped by a red star, while grieving relatives sat or milled nervously in a run-down auditorium dominated by a painting of a strong, smiling miner carrying flowers.

"They told me to wait," said Tatyana Fatykhova, 34, whose husband, Rashid, was underground when the blast occurred.

"They've pulled up some bodies, but they haven't identified them yet."

Search for survivors continues

Emergency officials plotted rescue and recovery strategies a day after a methane blast tore through a Siberian mine, killing at least 42 miners.



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI AP

Her husband's name was not on the list of identified victims posted by the stairwell.

The head of a government commission created to deal with the disaster, Sergei Ovanesyan, said it was "practically impossible" that any of those still missing would be found alive.

"Most likely, they will all be corpses," he said.

Of the 42 bodies found, 36 had been retrieved and 29 of those had been identified, said

officials overseeing the recovery effort.

More than 600 miners worked the mine in the city of Osinniki according to ITAR-TASS. Taizhina opened in 1998 but was built on the foundation of a closed mine, and the equipment shown on Russian television transmissions appeared to be run-down.

Rescue workers dug through ground toward the blast from two sides — Taizhina and an adjacent mine in Osinniki, a sprawling community of shacks and derelict buildings set amid hills streaked with snow.

A handful of rescue workers discarded oxygen tanks and lit up cigarettes after shift underground.

Asked if there was hope of finding anyone alive, one of the rescuers shook his head to "no." The men refused to go underground, but the Interfax agency said the area was filled with carbon dioxide and El Moskvyy radio said work was hampered by heavy smoke.

Deputy Prosecutor General Valentin Simuchenkov said the blast occurred after the concentration of methane gas in the mine increased by roughly 10-fold in a short period of time.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Pope calls for end to Iraq, other conflicts as Christians worldwide celebrate Easter

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope John Paul II celebrated Easter Mass on Sunday with calls for world leaders to resolve conflicts in Iraq, the Holy Land and Africa, as Christians around the world marked the holiest day on the church calendar.

John Paul delivered a message of peace on the

flower-decked steps of St. Peter's Basilica, praying that hope would conquer the "inhuman" phenomenon of terrorism and urging Christians, Muslims and Jews to seek greater unity with each other.

"May the culture of life and love render vain the logic of death," he told tens of thousands of the faithful and tourists gathered in St. Peter's underground security on an overcast day.

The 83-year-old pope delivered the message in his traditional "Urbi et Orbi" Easter address, Latin for "to the City and the World."

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