

Mine disaster deepens crisis of Turkish government

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30 October 2014

In an indication of its fear of another mining disaster plunging it into deeper political crisis, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government canceled Republic Day celebrations yesterday.

Eighteen miners remain trapped after a surge of water flooded a coal mine in Turkey's Karaman province, located roughly 300 miles south of Ankara.

Karaman Governor Murat Koca has stated that the flood, which occurred on October 28th around noon, was caused by water accumulating underground before bursting into the gallery where miners were working.

Twenty miners were able to escape the flood or were rescued, while the remaining eighteen are trapped 350 meters (1148ft) underground.

Şahin Uyar, an official at the mine, told the Turkish media that rescuers have not been able to contact the trapped miners and they may have drowned in the flooding.

One miner who survived the flooding told the Andolu Agency, "This is the third flood at the mine," adding, "It wouldn't happen if necessary precautions were taken."

Energy minister Taner Yıldız and transport minister Lütfi Elvan have both come to Karaman in order to oversee rescue efforts. According to a statement issued by Yıldız early on October 29, it took nearly 15 hours before the level of water in the mine started to decrease.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan canceled the annual Republic Day reception, which marks the Foundation of the Turkish Republic, in order to travel to Karaman's Ermenek district, where the miners remain trapped.

Erdoğan told reports, "We have entirely canceled tonight's reception. We will not hold it because we believe that, in regards to our values and traditions, it would not be appropriate to hold such a reception at a

time when the hearts of all families [connected] to the accident are burning."

The Istanbul Municipality has also called off a fireworks show over the Bosphorus, while scheduled Republic Day concerts in Izmir and Antalya have also been canceled because of the disaster.

The opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), have canceled all planned celebrations. Instead the CHP will be holding silent marches.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu announced from the Ermenek district that the cause of the accident would be "comprehensively investigated."

The pretense of the AKP and various opposition parties mourning over the trapped miners in Karaman is completely hypocritical. Since last May—when the worst mining disaster in Turkish history killed 301 workers in Soma—none of the political parties have addressed the dangerous conditions faced by Turkish miners.

Drawing parallels between Karaman and Soma, the Chamber of Mining Engineers (MMO) in a statement pointed out that in both cases three companies were mining separately in the same area without notifying each other of their production plans.

The statement went on to warn that the Energy Ministry's General Directorate of Mining (MİGEM) fails to enforce cooperation between private firms to avoid accidents. The MMO statement explained, "MİGEM doesn't take basin mining into consideration when issuing production licenses. It creates a fragmented process for planning and operation. Gas and flooding risks regarding companies working in the same field cannot be known and prevented because of this system."

Two days before the flooding in Karaman, on

October 26, a mine in Soma had to halt operations after a fire broke out due to an increase in gas levels. While all workers evacuated safely, the workers are still demanding back pay and safer working conditions from the Soma Mining Company, which operated the mine where the 301 workers died.

Deepening the AKP's fear that the new mining disaster could trigger a wider political crisis, it has emerged that the owner of the mine where the 18 miners are trapped was not only an AKP candidate for mayor of the Güneyyurt district in Karaman, but also a cousin of Azim Uyar, the owner of the Soma mine where the 301 miners lost their lives last May.

In last May's disaster, Prime Minister Erdoğan's remark that such mine accidents were "usual things" provoked angry protests by miners, who charged that the deaths amounted to murder by the AKP government.



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