

Muslim miners in Bosnia break fast underground

AP | Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Groups of men are preparing for long hours of hard labor deep underground in a trouble-plagued coal mine in Bosnia's central city of Zenica. During Islam's holy month of Ramadan, observant Muslims among them are easy to spot. Arriving for their shift and assembling for a roll call before riding an elevator into the mine tunnels, they carry with them transparent plastic bags containing simple meals brought from home with which they will break their daily fast 500 meters (1,640 feet) below the surface.

During Ramadan, observant Muslims abstain from eating, drinking and smoking from dawn until sunset and Zenica coal miners are no exception. For the entire duration of the Muslim holy month, they go about their normal work routine, insisting they feel no exceptional hunger, thirst or exhaustion.

"For someone who does not want to observe the fast, it is always easy to find an excuse. We work hard, it is hot here, but we want to observe the fast and Allah gives us strength to endure," said Salih Doglod, a miner.

Inside mine shafts, one can't see sunset, but miners consult their watches and smartphones for the right time to sit down, unwrap their food and break their daily fast together.

After a quick meal, one of the miners issues a call to prayer and



Bosnian coal miners pray after breaking fast in the underground at a mine in Zenica

the men break into groups of two or three before returning to their difficult and dangerous job.

Bosnia's coal mines, including the one in Zenica, have been badly maintained, and have seen almost no investment and modernization as the region was engulfed in an ethnic conflict in the 1990s.

In 2014, Fuad Hadzic survived a deadly collapse in the Zenica mine and insists it had only strengthened his faith. At the time, several mine tunnels collapsed leaving him and 33 other miners, including five killed

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by the rubble, trapped underground for hours.

"May it never repeat or happen to anyone else, but the people of faith among us trusted that God would save us, and we were saved by God," Hadzic said.

"We were saying all the prayers we knew out loud and telling one another to just keep praying because we knew only God can save us," he recalled.

Hadzic insists that God protected him in the most dangerous hours of his life and has always been giving him strength to observe his religion.

"I am working in this same mine for 30 years and with God's help I always fast during Ramadan. I do not find it difficult at all," he said.



Bosnian coal miners pray after breaking fast



A Bosnian coal miner breaks fast in the underground at a mine in Zenica



Bosnian coal miners break fast in the underground at a mine in Zenica, Bosnia



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Ramadan cooking

Ingredients

- 2 red peppers, deseeded and chopped
- 2 red onions, cut into wedges
- 250g cherry tomato
- handful black olives
- 1/2 x 680g jar passata
- 400g can butter bean, drained
- 4 skinless cod fillets (about 600g/1lb 5oz)
- small bunch basil

Cod & tomato traybake

Method

1. Heat oven to 220C/200C fan/gas 7. Put the peppers, onions, tomatoes and olives into a large, deep baking tray and cook for 15 mins until they start to soften and char at the edges.
2. Stir in the passa-

ta, butter beans and seasoning, then make 4 little areas and nestle in the cod. Return to the oven and cook for a further 15 mins until the cod is cooked through. Sprinkle over the basil and serve with crusty bread, if you like.

