

More Filipinos leave homes as volcano spills lava

December 18 2009, By BULLIT MARQUEZ , Associated Press Writer



Lava continues to cascade further down the slopes of Mayon volcano as viewed in Legazpi city, Albay province, about 500 kilometers (300 miles) south of Manila, Philippines, before dawn Friday Dec. 18, 2009. Security forces will forcibly evacuate thousands of residents reluctant to leave their farms around the slopes of the country's most active volcano despite fears of a major eruption, officials said. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

(AP) -- Security forces in army trucks Friday sent about 3,000 residents outside the danger zone surrounding the smoldering Mayon volcano, which looked set for a major eruption after days of shooting ash plumes and spilling lava.

Authorities in central Albay province declared a round-the-clock ban on anyone being within the five-mile (eight-kilometer) zone around the

8,070-foot (2,460-meter) mountain, the most active of the country's 22 volcanoes.

More than 35,000 evacuees were given sleeping mats and food as they settled down in evacuation centers, mostly schools, where social workers were organizing Christmas parties and games to keep children busy, said provincial emergency management official Jukes Nunez.

Mayon shot two plumes of smoke early Friday, one reaching almost 1.2 miles (2 kilometers) into the clear blue sky. Lava continued to trickle down its steep slope, and two lava domes had formed from rising magma inside the crater, said chief state volcanologist Renato Solidum. He said the domes could grow bigger and plug the crater, leading to a gas explosion.

Scientists have raised a five-stage alert to two steps below a hazardous eruption, which they said is possible within weeks.

Solidum said cascading [lava](#) could trigger a pyroclastic flow - superheated gas and volcanic debris racing down the slopes at very high speed, vaporizing everything in its path.

Albay Gov. Joey Salceda said a provincial board had authorized police and soldiers to move out some 2,000 remaining families - or 10,000 people - from around two towns in Mayon's foothills.

Many had refused to leave their coconut and vegetable farms during the harvest time. Police will show them pictures of victims of a 1993 eruption that killed more than 70 people to persuade them to evacuate the area, he said.

Nunez said people were cooperating. "They know the danger. We have to enforce our objective of zero casualty," he said.

At the Bagumbayan Central School in Legazpi, the provincial capital, Guilly Anonuevo, a 75-year-old veteran of five evacuations, will spend Christmas for the first time in a shelter.

"We do not know where we will get our Christmas dinner. We have no money," she said. "It's all right to be sad as long as we are safe from Mayon's eruption."

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