

Volcano spews more hot ash, lava in east Indonesia

August 12 2013, by Jacob Herin



Mount Rokatenda spews volcanic material as it erupts on Palue island, Indonesia, Sunday, Aug. 11, 2013. Nearly 3,000 people have been evacuated from the island, according to the National Disaster Mitigation Agency. The volcano has been rumbling since last October. (AP Photo)

A volcano spewed more hot ash and lava on a tiny Indonesian island Monday after causing six deaths over the weekend.

More than 500 Palue island residents who had earlier refused to leave

the 3-kilometer (1.9-mile) exclusion zone around Mount Rokatenda have been evacuated to the neighboring island of Flores, said Mutiara Mauboi, an official at a disaster command post.

The bodies of two children who were among six people killed by lava as they slept early Saturday have not been recovered.

"There is no more searching for the victims. The main activity now is evacuation," Mauboi said from her office in the town of Maumere. "All of the residents in eight villages on Palue have to be moved gradually."

The eruptions were smaller Monday but the potential danger was high because the volcano continues to release hot gas clouds, said government volcanologist Surono, who uses only one name like many Indonesians. Molten lava and ash have covered most of Palue, an island in East Nusa Tenggara province with only a 4-kilometer radius.

"Mount Rokatenda remains on high alert," Surono said. "There has been no significant decline in activity."

About a quarter of the island's 12,000 people moved to Flores after the volcano began erupting last October, said Tini Thadeus, head of the local disaster agency, adding the government has agreed to build new houses for the displaced.



Villagers who have been affected by Mount Rokatenda's eruption on Palue island rest at a temporary shelter in Maumere, Indonesia, Sunday, Aug. 11, 2013. Nearly 3,000 people have been evacuated from the island according to the National Disaster Mitigation Agency. (AP Photo)

Food and thousands of blankets have been sent to several temporary shelters, said Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman. More than 3,500 displaced people remain in desperate need of sleeping mats, tents and clean water.

The six victims were among residents who had refused to leave last year when the safety zone was established, he said, adding that many who stayed believed in old customs that requires their presence to keep lava from destroying villages, Thadeus said. Among the dead was a 58-year-old woman, the grandmother of the two children whose bodies have not

been found.

During past eruptions dating to the 1930s, lava had typically flowed south, but this time it moved north toward the beaches where the victims slept, he said.



Indonesian police officers help villagers who have been affected by Mount Rokatenda's eruption on Palue island to disembark a boat upon their arrival in Maumere, Indonesia, Sunday, Aug. 11, 2013. Nearly 3,000 people have been evacuated from the island according to the National Disaster Mitigation Agency. (AP Photo)

Mount Rokatenda is one of 129 active volcanoes in Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands that's home to 240 million

people. The country is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity because it sits along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of fault lines.

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