

Indonesia evacuates more villagers from volcano area (Update)

June 15 2015, by Binsar Bakkara



In this photo taken with slow shutter speed, hot lava flows from the crater of Mount Sinabung as seen from Tiga Serangkai, North Sumatra, Indonesia, early Monday, June 15, 2015. Authorities have been closely monitoring the 2,460-meter (8,070-foot) -high volcano since June 2 when its status was raised to the highest alert level due to the growing size of its lava dome. (AP Photo/Binsar Bakkara)

Authorities in western Indonesia on Monday evacuated hundreds of

villagers living near a volcano that is spewing hot ash down its slopes almost daily.

Government volcanologist Gede Suantika said at least 28 hot ash avalanches occurred Monday at Mount Sinabung on Sumatra, one of Indonesia's main islands. There are indications the crater's lava dome continues to grow in size, Gede said.

Subur Tambun, head of the local disaster mitigation agency, said hundreds of residents were being evacuated Monday from several villages, bringing the number of people moved in recent weeks to more than 3,000.

"They have to be moved because of increasing activities of the volcano in past days," Subur said.

Evacuees included villagers living between 3 to 5 kilometers (2 to 3 miles) from the crater on its eastern and southeastern flanks. A small number of people who'd returned to villages within 3 kilometers also were evacuated again.

Jefri Bangun, a 33-year-old coffee farmer in Mardinding village, about 3 kilometers from the crater, is one of thousands of villagers who were reluctant to leave the slopes.

"We need money to live," said Bangun, who vowed to keep coming back to tend his plants.

Authorities have been closely monitoring Sinabung since June 2, when its status was raised to the highest alert level due to the growing size and unstable condition of its lava dome, then estimated at 3 million cubic meters (106 million cubic feet).

Subur said 99 families were moved from a village on Saturday when the mountain unleashed a new powerful burst, sending hot ash as far as 3 kilometers (2 miles) down its southeastern slopes.

Mount Sinabung is one of about 130 active volcanoes in Indonesia, which is prone to seismic upheaval due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin.

The 2,460-meter (8,070-foot) volcano has sporadically erupted since 2010, after being dormant for 400 years. An eruption last year killed at least 17 people.

Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, spokesman for the National Disaster Mitigation Agency, said almost 2,800 residents were evacuated when the mountain's alert status was raised two weeks ago.

Nearly 6,200 other people have been living in temporary shelters since last year, Nugroho said.

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