

Philippine volcano spews lava fountains, 56,000 people flee (Update)

January 23 2018, by Bullit Marquez



Mayon volcano erupts for the second straight day as lava cascades down its slopes Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 as seen from Legazpi city, Albay province, around 340 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

The Philippines' most active volcano spewed fountains of red-hot lava

and massive ash plumes anew Tuesday in a dazzling but increasingly dangerous eruption that has sent 56,000 villagers fleeing to evacuation centers.

Lava fountains gushed up 700 meters (2,300 feet) above Mount Mayon's crater and ash plumes rose up to 3 kilometers (1.9 miles) at night and at least twice Tuesday, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology. An explosive eruption at noon Monday was the most powerful since the volcano started acting up more than a week ago.

"We couldn't sleep last night because of the loud rumblings. It sounded like an airplane that's about to land," Quintin Velardo, a 59-year-old farmer, told The Associated Press at an evacuation center in Legazpi city where he took his wife, children and grandchildren on Tuesday.

Despite the danger, he said he needed to return to his village, about 8 kilometers (5 miles) from the erupting volcano, to take his cow and water buffalo to safety. A few minutes later, the volcano belched a massive column of grayish ash that punched through white clouds into the blue sky.

"There it goes again," Velardo said, his family huddled near him.

Authorities warned a violent eruption may occur in hours or days, characterized by more rumblings and pyroclastic flows—superheated gas and volcanic debris that race down the slopes at high speeds, vaporizing everything in their path.



Residents watch as Mayon volcano spews ash anew during its eruption for the second straight day Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 as seen from Legazpi city, Albay province, around 340 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

After Monday's explosion, officials raised Mayon's alert level to four on a scale of five, and the danger zone was expanded to 8 kilometers (5 miles) from the crater, requiring thousands more residents to be evacuated, including at least 12,000 who returned to their homes last week as Mayon's rumblings temporarily eased and then scrambled back to the emergency shelters this week.

At least 56,217 people were taking shelter in 46 evacuation camps Tuesday and army troops and police were helping move more villagers

from their homes, officials said.

Authorities struggled to prevent villagers from sneaking back to check on their homes and farms and to watch a popular cockfight in Albay's Santo Domingo town despite the risks and police patrols and checkpoints, said Cedric Daep, a provincial disaster response official.

In a sign of desperation, Daep told a news conference that he has recommended electricity and water supplies be cut in communities within the no-go zones to discourage residents from returning.



Pyroclastic materials cascade down the slopes of Mayon volcano as it erupts anew Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 as seen from Legazpi city, Albay province, around 340 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

"If pyroclastic flows hit people, there is no chance for life," Daep said. "Let us not violate the natural law, avoid the prohibited zone, because if you violate, the punishment is the death penalty."

The daytime eruptions have plunged nearby villages into darkness and sent lava, rocks and debris cascading down Mayon's slopes toward the no-entry danger zone. There have been no reports of deaths or injuries. Airplanes have been ordered to stay away from the crater and ash-laden winds, and several domestic flights have been canceled.

Volcanic ash fell Monday in more than a dozen towns in coconut-growing Albay and nearby Camarines Sur province, with visibility heavily obscured in a few towns because of the thick gray ash, Jukes Nunez, another Albay provincial disaster response officer, said by telephone.

"It was like night time at noon, there was zero visibility in some areas because the ash fall was so thick," Nunez said.



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More than 30,000 ash masks and about 5,000 sacks of rice, along with medicine, water and other supplies, were being sent to evacuation

centers, Office of Civil Defense regional director Claudio Yucot said late Monday.

Food packs, water, medicine and other relief goods remain adequate but may run out by mid-February if the eruption continues and new supplies fail to come on time, officials said.

With its near-perfect cone, Mayon has long been popular with climbers and tourists but has erupted about 50 times in the last 500 years, sometimes violently. The 8,070-foot (2,460-meter) volcano has generated tourism revenues and jobs in Albay, about 340 kilometers (210 miles) southeast of Manila.

In 2013, an ash eruption killed five climbers who had ventured near the summit despite warnings. Its most destructive eruption, in 1814, killed more than 1,200 people and buried the town of Cagsawa in volcanic mud. The belfry of Cagsawa's stone church still juts from the ground in an eerie reminder of Mayon's fury.



Residents living within the 9-kilometer radius around Mayon volcano continue to be evacuated to safer grounds as the volcano continue to erupt for the second straight day Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 in Legazpi city, Albay province around 340 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

Since childhood, Velardo, the farmer, said he has gambled his and his family's lives in Mayon's shadow but that he and thousands of other landless farmers have no place else to go. "I tell my grandchildren to study hard so they can live elsewhere without a volcano to keep an eye on all your life."

The Philippines, which has about 22 active volcanoes, lies in the "Ring of Fire," a line of seismic faults surrounding the Pacific Ocean where earthquakes and volcanic activity are common.

In 1991, Mount Pinatubo in the northern Philippines exploded in one of the biggest volcanic eruptions of the 20th century, killing about 800 people, covering entire towns and cities in ash and partly prompting the U.S. government to abandon its vast air and naval bases on the main northern Luzon island.



Quintin Velardo, 58, leads his family as they arrive to take shelter following the eruption of Mayon volcano for the second straight day Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 in Legazpi city, Albay province, around 340 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)



Pyroclastic materials cascade down the slopes of Mayon volcano as it erupts anew Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 as seen from Legazpi city, Albay province, southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)



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A resident takes photos of Mayon volcano as it spews ash during a lull in its eruption Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 as seen from Legazpi city, Albay province, around 340 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)



A foreign tourist, left, takes photos of an erupting Mayon volcano Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 as seen from Legazpi city, Albay province, southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)



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Lava cascades down the slopes of Mayon volcano during its eruption for the second straight day Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018 as seen from Legazpi city, Albay province, southeast of Manila, Philippines. The Philippines' most active volcano ejected a huge column of lava fragments, ash and smoke in another thunderous explosion at dawn Tuesday, sending thousands of villagers back to evacuation centers and prompting a warning that a violent eruption may be imminent. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)



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