

Indonesia's Marapi volcano erupts for the second day, halting search for 12 missing climbers

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Motorists ride past by as Mount Marapi spews volcanic materials during its eruption in Agam, West Sumatra, Indonesia, Monday, Dec. 4, 2023. The volcano spewed thick columns of ash as high as 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) into the sky in a sudden eruption Sunday and hot ash clouds spread several miles (kilometers). Credit: AP Photo/Ardhy Fernando

Indonesian authorities halted the search for 12 climbers after Mount Marapi volcano erupted again Monday, spewing a new burst of hot ash as high as 800 meters (2,620 feet) into the air, officials said.

The bodies of 11 climbers were recovered earlier in the day but attempts to move them were hindered by the renewed eruption, West Sumatra's Search and Rescue Agency head Abdul Malik said. The search operation would resume once conditions improved, he added.

A video released by the agency showed rescuers evacuating an injured climber on a stretcher off the mountain and into a waiting ambulance to be taken to hospital.

Marapi initially erupted on Sunday spewing clouds of hot ash.

The volcano has stayed at the third highest of four alert levels since 2011, a level indicating above-normal volcanic activity, prohibiting climbers and villagers within 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) of the peak, said Hendra Gunawan, the head of the Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation.

"This means that there should be no climbing to the peak," Gunawan said, adding that climbers were only allowed below the danger zone, "but sometimes many of them broke the rules to fulfill their satisfaction to climb further."

About 75 climbers had started their way up the nearly 2,900-meter (9,480-foot) mountain on Saturday and became stranded. Authorities rescued 52, including three on Monday. Eight of those rescued Sunday were rushed to hospital with burns and one suffered a broken limb, said Hari Agustian, an official at the local Search and Rescue Agency in Padang, the West Sumatra provincial capital.



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All of the climbers had registered at two command posts or online through West Sumatra's conservation agency before they proceeded with their climb, Agustian said. When asked about the total number of people who may be stranded, he said it couldn't be confirmed because some may have taken illegal routes up the mountain and residents could have been also in the area.

Marapi spewed thick columns of ash as high as 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) in Sunday's eruption and hot ash clouds spread for several miles. Nearby villages and towns were blanketed by tons of volcanic debris. Volcanic dust and rain smeared the faces and hair of evacuated climbers, according to a video on social media.

Falling ash blanketed several villages and blocked sunlight, and authorities distributed masks while urging residents to wear eyeglasses to protect them from volcanic ash.



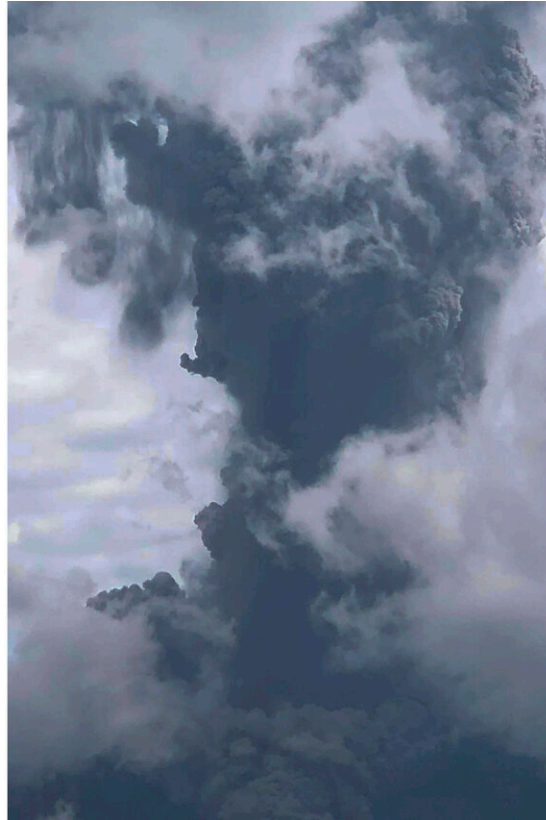
Motorists ride past by as Mount Marapi spews volcanic materials during its eruption in Agam, West Sumatra, Indonesia, Monday, Dec. 4, 2023. The volcano spewed thick columns of ash as high as 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) into the sky in a sudden eruption Sunday and hot ash clouds spread several miles (kilometers).
Credit: AP Photo/Ardhy Fernando



A woman sits outside a house as Mount Marapi spews volcanic materials during its eruption in Agam, West Sumatra, Indonesia, Monday, Dec. 4, 2023. The volcano spewed thick columns of ash as high as 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) into the sky in a sudden eruption Sunday and hot ash clouds spread several miles (kilometers). Credit: AP Photo/Ardhy Fernando



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Mount Marapi spews volcanic materials during its eruption in Agam, West Sumatra, Indonesia, Monday, Dec. 4, 2023. Mount Marapi in Agam district in West Sumatra province spewed thick columns of ash as high as 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) into the sky in a sudden eruption Sunday and hot ash clouds spread several miles (kilometers). Credit: AP Photo/Wica Harefa



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About 1,400 people live on Marapi's slopes in Rubai and Gobah Cumantiang, the nearest villages about 5 to 6 kilometers (3.1 to 3.7 miles) from the peak.

Gunawan said that Sunday's eruption was not preceded by a significant increase in volcanic earthquakes. Deep volcanic earthquakes were only recorded three times between Nov. 16 and on Sunday, while the deformation equipment or tiltmeter on the peak showed a horizontal pattern on the radial axis and a slight inflation on the tangential axis.

"This shows that the eruption process is taking place quickly and the center of pressure is very shallow, around the peak," he said.

Marapi has been observed regularly erupting since 2004 with a gap of two to four years, Gunawan said.

"Marapi eruptions are always sudden and difficult to detect using equipment because the source is near the surface," Gunawan said, "This eruption was not caused by the movement of magma."

Marapi has been active since a January eruption that caused no casualties. It is among more than 120 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.

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