Indonesia issues red alert as volcano erupts

March 18 2011

This undated picture received in 2006 shows Karangetang volcano spewing smoke. Indonesia issued a red alert Friday after Mount Karangetang on the island of Sulawesi erupted, sending lava and searing gas clouds down its slopes, a volcanologist said.

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"We raised the volcano's status to the highest red alert level today at 5:45 pm (1045GMT) and ordered an evacuation in three villages on the slopes," government volcanologist Surono told AFP.

He said that the 1,784-metre (5,850-foot) mountain on the sparsely-populated island off North Sulawesi oozed lava, heat clouds and debris reaching as far as 3,800 metres away down its slopes.

"The eruption is still going on and its current activity remains high," he said.

"The main threat is heat clouds that will be fatal for people living in villages on the slope."

The volcano killed four people during an eruption in August 2010.

Indonesia sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire" where continental plates collide, causing frequent seismic and volcanic activity. The archipelago nation is home to 129 active volcanoes, including 21 on Java.

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Citation: Indonesia issues red alert as volcano erupts (2011, March 18) retrieved 26 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2011-03-indonesia-issues-red-volcano-erupts.html

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