

Bali volcano danger signs unabated week after high alert

September 29 2017, by Stephen Wright



Villagers watch the Mount Agung volcano from their an evacuee camp in Klungkung, Bali, Indonesia, Friday, Sept. 29, 2017. Warnings that the volcano on the tourist island will erupt have sparked an exodus of tens of thousands people as authorities have ordered the evacuation of villagers living within a high danger zone that in places extends 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from its crater. (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)

A week after authorities put Bali's volcano on high alert, tremors that

indicate an eruption is coming show no sign of abating, swelling the exodus from the region to at least 140,000 people.

Disaster authorities on the Indonesian island famed for its lush tropical interior and beguiling beaches said Friday that instruments recorded more than 450 tremors from cone-shaped Mount Agung from dawn until dusk.

The disaster agency said more than 144,000 people have now left areas around the volcano, including from places outside the immediate danger zone.

But Bali's governor, Made Mangku Pastika, urged people from officially safe areas—more than 75,000 people by his estimate—to return home.

He said there is no reason for them to evacuate and they've become a "burden" on genuine evacuees and the temporary shelters set up to receive them. Authorities can use village registration details to identify official evacuees, he said.

Near the edges of the danger zone, which extends as far as 12 kilometers (7 miles) in places, some hamlets appeared devoid of people but daily life continued in others.

"We don't know what's going to happen. We can't predict anything," said villager Wayan Sudarma, who still returns to the mountain to help evacuate cattle. He said he's not afraid despite the risks.



A boy sits in front of his shelter at an evacuee camp outside the Mount Agung volcano in Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia, Friday, Sept. 29, 2017. Warnings that the volcano on the tourist island will erupt have sparked an exodus of tens of thousands of people as authorities have ordered the evacuation of villagers living within a high danger zone that in places extends 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from its crater. (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)

Volcanologists say the past week's dramatic escalation in tremors indicates an eruption is more likely than not, but they can't say with certainty when it will happen.

Periodic plumes of vapor from the crater are another sign of rising magma within the volcano.

"Water in cracks and fissures is being changed to vapor because the temperature is rising," said David Boutelier, a geologist at Australia's University of Newcastle. "Vapor is more indirect evidence of magma

rising under the volcano. It could still explode or lead to a lava flow."

Agung's last eruptions in 1963 produced deadly clouds of searing hot ash, gases and rock fragments that traveled down its slopes at great speed. Lava spread for several kilometers (miles) and people were also killed by lahars - rivers of water and volcanic debris. About 1,100 people died in total.



Mount Agung volcano is seen at sunset in Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia, Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017. More than 120,000 people have fled the region around the Mount Agung volcano on the Indonesian tourist island of Bali, fearing it will soon erupt, an official said Thursday. (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)

The official figure for evacuees is more than double the estimated population within the immediate danger zone. The broader Karangasem

district surrounding the volcano is home to about 400,000 people.

Uncertainty about when the volcano will erupt is beginning to weigh on some people who have stayed for days in temporary shelters.

"I have my baby here and it's a difficult situation," said villager Wayan Cintia, who is staying at a public sports center in Klungkung district south of the mountain. "I'm confused and don't know what to do. I'm afraid to go home because of the earthquakes."

Agung, about 70 kilometers (45 miles) to the northeast of the tourist hotspot of Kuta, is among more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia. Another volcano, Mount Sinabung on Sumatra, has been erupting sporadically since 2010.



Women pray at an evacuee camp outside the Mount Agung volcano in Klungkung, Bali, Indonesia, Friday, Sept. 29, 2017. Warnings that the volcano on

the tourist island will erupt have sparked an exodus of tens of thousands people as authorities have ordered the evacuation of villagers living within a high danger zone that in places extends 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from its crater. (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)

Officials say tourists on Bali, which had nearly 5 million visitors last year, are not in danger but they have prepared evacuation plans if an eruption forces the closure of the island's international airport.

Indonesia, an archipelago of thousands of islands, 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.



Students queue for a meal at an evacuee camp outside the Mount Agung volcano in Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia, Friday, Sept. 29, 2017. Warnings that the volcano on the tourist island will erupt have sparked an exodus of tens of

thousands of people as authorities have ordered the evacuation of villagers living within a high danger zone that in places extends 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from its crater. (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)



Volunteers prepare a meal for villagers at an evacuee camp outside the Mount Agung volcano in Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia, Friday, Sept. 29, 2017. Warnings that the volcano on the tourist island will erupt have sparked an exodus of tens of thousands of people as authorities have ordered the evacuation of villagers living within a high danger zone that in places extends 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from its crater. (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)



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