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MAYON watchers: Beware of fake volcanologists

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LEGAZPI CITY, Albay — State scientist based here are waging a war against fake volcanologists who have suddenly sprouted in social media and making flimsy if not false analyses of the developments on restive Mayon Volcano since its series of phreatic and magmatic eruptions last January 13.

There seems to be no hitches as everybody is entitled to express their opinion on their social media accounts, according to Dr. Cedric Daep, head of the Albay Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO).

But the problem is that the opinions of some netizens who suddenly became experts on volcanoes and disaster management are being believed by some residents reading their posts.

"We received a lot of complaints and we have been the subject of attacks because of these fake analyses on Mayon Volcano being posted in the social media," Daep told The Manila Bulletin.

Even radio stations here are receiving commentaries in the social media about the various inaccurate and conflicting advisories and analyses which, ironically, did not come from the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs).

"The problem is when the people started to believe on what these fake volcanologies have to say because it affects our strategies on evacuation and public safety from the threat of Mayon," said Daep.

For instance, when a decrease in volcanic activities was monitored since Thursday, a lot of commentaries and analyses had sprouted in the social media that any hazardous eruption is already unlikely.

This led an expert from the Phivolcs to raise the issue in a press briefing here which comes with an appeal not to believe them.

"I would like to dispel any notion that since there were decreases in its activity, the explosive eruption is already unlikely. That is not true. We are still looking at several parameters," said volcanologist Mariton Bornas.

"We have to look at all the parameters on a daily, hourly basis for changes because anything could still happen any time," she added.

Evacuation and safety

Daep said that they do not totally shut themselves from the analyses on the social media especially on the aspect of evacuation and evacuation center management.

"That is okay because they are entitled to their opinions and they also wanted to help. And there are some brilliant ideas there that we are also taking into consideration," said Daep. "But in order not to create confusion, it should be scientific and technical," he added.

The official said that they are aware that most of the Mayon evacuees have access to social media especially Facebook.

And these false analyses, he said, have immediate impact on them.

In the end, it is the proper authorities who would be held responsible especially if it already endanger the lives of the people living near the Mayon Volcano.

* PDRRMO (provincial disaster risk reduction and mgmt. office)

* PHIVOLCS

* VOLCANOES