

Lava spreads 3 kilometers from Mayon

LEGAZPI CITY—Lava has spread up to 3.6 kilometers from Mt. Mayon's crater since it began intense eruptions more than two weeks ago and volcanic ash has caused P165.5 million in damage to agriculture in Albay province.

Streaks of red glowed atop the summit of Mayon during a mild eruption on Thursday morning, hours after a rare display of a super blue blood moon.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said lava fountains and emissions of gas and ash had been sporadic.

The eruptions fed lava flows in two areas that already exceed 3 km, Phivolcs said.

The danger zone around Mayon extends 8 km, though authorities have struggled to keep villagers from returning to check on their homes and farms and tourists from trying to photograph the volcano's dramatic displays.

Mayon in northeastern Albay has been erupting for more than two weeks, forcing more than 84,000 villagers to flee to crowded emergency shelters.

Scientists fear a more violent eruption.

Damaging ashfall

The eruptions have blanketed swaths of farm land with ash.

The Office of Civil Defense (OCD) said on Thursday that as of Jan. 30, damage to rice fields had reached P139.8 million; high-value commercial crops, P20.9 million; corn, P4.4 million; abaca, P478,000.

Located about 10 km from Mayon is a 3-hectare rice field owned by Sonny Oliquino, 47.

Oliquino has been checking on his field at Barangay Libod in Camalig town every day

for almost three weeks now to manually shake off ash from the paddy rice stalks.

Although the village is outside the danger zone, it is not free from ashfall.

"Our work here is very much affected by ashfall," Oliquino said, adding he needed to keep the paddy rice free of ash to prevent it from dying.

"We need to move and work so we have food to eat," he said.

Gilma Morato, a councilor at Barangay San Jose, said paddy rice in the village had dried up from ashfall.

Early fish harvest

In Libon town, fish raisers expected to be affected by ashfall have been advised by the authorities to harvest their products early to avoid losses.

Ian Secillano, a municipal disaster risk reduction and management officer of Libon, said varying amounts of ash had reached the town since Mayon began to erupt.

In Guinobatan town, fruit and vegetable prices are unchanged but authorities have seen a decline in the number of vendors, especially those from villages within the hazard zone.

Elzer Orbeso, a public market supervisor of Guinobatan, said few vendors make it to town even on market days.

For consumers from neighboring municipalities, produce is cheapest in Guinobatan, Orbeso said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) has warned that ashfall will affect the towns of Libon, Oas, Polangui, Camalig, Guinobatan, Pio Duran and the city of Ligao when Mayon erupts again. —REPORTS FROM

REY ANTHONY OSTRIA, MICHAEL B. JAUCIAN AND AP INQ

* NATURAL DISASTER -
(ECON) VOLCANIC ERUPTION