

Indonesia volcano may erupt explosively or menace for weeks

By Stephen Wright
The Associated Press

BALI, Indonesia — Experts say a suddenly active volcano on the Indonesian tourist island of Bali is more likely to erupt than not.

But because every volcano has its own unique characteristics, scientists can't predict when that will be with total certainty. It could erupt suddenly or continue for weeks at its current menacing level of seismic activity.

What's led to eruption warnings?

The slow movement of the tectonic plates that make up the planet's surface carries massive quantities of rock deep into the earth, where they melt. As this molten magma rises, pressure increases inside a sealed chamber beneath the mountain until it explodes.

The type of magma that feeds Mount Agung traps more gas, which tends to produce larger eruptions. It's the rising volume of magma that is causing hundreds of tremors being recorded daily around the mountain.

"The volcano is bulging, causing a large number of small cracks to form and the earth to vibrate," said David Boutelier, a geologist and expert on plate tectonics at Australia's University of Newcastle.

How soon could it erupt?

Disaster officials said instruments recorded more than 800 volcanic earthquakes in late September. Many of the quakes have been strong enough to be felt by people in the surrounding region.

In theory, the current level of activity could go on for some time without an eruption. It is difficult to predict because each volcano behaves differently.

"It could continue for the next few days or weeks, but an eruption could also happen any time given its condition is very critical," said Gede Swantika, head of volcanology at Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation.

Heather Handley, an earth sciences specialist at Sydney's Macquarie University, said Agung's last eruption in 1963 was preceded by earthquakes, small ash eruptions, and lava flow. "It is hard to know for sure what will happen this time," she said.



MOUNTING PRESSURE. A woman works in a field with Mount Agung in the background in Amed, Bali, Indonesia. Authorities raised the volcano's alert status to the highest level on September 15 and announced a no-go zone that extends up to 7.5 miles from the crater. (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)

material, would "kill everyone in its path in a few seconds," he added.

Could the volcano suddenly go quiet again?

It's possible the volcano could calm back down, but that is unlikely without pressure being released in some way.

Handley said there were signs of activity such as gas releases and earthquakes in 1989 and swelling of the volcano between 2007 and 2009 without any subsequent eruptions.

But this time around, the buildup of activity is much more significant, she said.

"It is unlikely that the volcano goes quiet without the pressure being released one way or another," said Boutelier. "We can hope for a lava flow, which would allow pressure to decrease without the hazard of an explosion."

Associated Press writer Ali Kotarumalos in Jakarta contributed to this report.

What are the chances it will erupt?

Authorities raised the volcano's alert status to the highest level on September 15 and announced a no-go zone that extends up to 7.5 miles from the crater. More than 130,000 people have fled, including some who live farther away.

"We could say that the chance of an

eruption is very high, above 50 percent," said Swantika.

Entering the exclusion zone would be extraordinarily risky.

"I would not go now. The activity is too high and the risk much too large," Boutelier said. The pyroclastic flow, a rush of hot gas, ash, and other volcanic

U.N. meeting on Myanmar spotlights Security Council divisions

By Edith M. Lederer
The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council's first open meeting on Myanmar in eight years highlighted the body's deep divisions: China and Russia supported the Southeast Asian country's government while the U.S., Britain, and France demanded an end to "ethnic cleansing" of its Rohingya Muslim minority.

With the number of Rohingyas fleeing to Bangladesh since August 25 now topping 500,000, U.N. secretary-general Antonio Guterres urged the U.N.'s most powerful body to take strong action. He also called on Myanmar's authorities to immediately halt military operations, allow "unfettered access" for humanitarian aid, and ensure that all those who fled can return home.

U.S. ambassador Nikki Haley, using Myanmar's former name of Burma, told council members: "We cannot be afraid to call the actions of the Burmese authorities what they appear to be: a brutal, sustained campaign to cleanse the country of an

ethnic minority."

"The time for well-meaning, diplomatic words in this council has passed," she said.

"We must now consider action against Burmese security forces who are implicated in abuses and stoking hatred among their fellow citizens."

Haley urged all countries to suspend the supply of weapons to the country's military until its members are held accountable for the "brutal assault" on the Rohingyas.

The U.S., Britain, and France were joined by many council members in demanding an immediate end to the violence and a strong council response.

A global coalition of 88 civil society and human-rights organizations urged the Security Council to step up pressure on Myanmar's authorities "by seriously considering options such as an arms embargo against the military and targeted financial sanctions against individuals responsible for crimes and serious abuses."

But the prospect of a strong response from the council appeared unlikely after both China and Russia supported the

government's approach to tackling the crisis.

China's deputy U.N. ambassador, whose country has close ties to Myanmar, urged the international community "to view the difficulties and challenges confronting the government of Myanmar through objective optics, [exercising] patience, and [providing] support and help."

Wu Haitao stressed that "many of the differences and antagonisms" in Rakhine state have been building up over a long time and "there is no quick fix."

"As we speak, the situation on the ground is beginning to move toward stability," Wu said. "All parties should work constructively to help reinforce this momentum, de-escalate the situation, and alleviate the humanitarian conditions step-by-step."

Russia's U.N. ambassador Vassily Nebenzia warned that "excessive pressure" on Myanmar's government "could only aggravate the situation in the country and around it."

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