



ERUPTION AFTERMATH. The remains of Alas-as elementary school are seen buried in volcanic ash near Taal volcano almost a year after it erupted, in Batangas province, the Philippines. A popular tourist destination because of its picturesque setting in the middle of a lake just south of Manila, Taal erupted on January 12, 2020. The eruption displaced thousands of villagers. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

Only ash, shells of homes left on volcano island

By Aaron Favila
The Associated Press

TAAL VOLCANO, The Philippines — The island is a ghost town, its trees just dead sticks in a gray landscape, its homes and school ash-covered and damaged by continuing earthquakes and the explosive volcanic eruption that occurred over a year ago.

Fisherman Rogelito Cacao regularly visits his home on the volcanic island south of the Philippine capital. “I miss our belongings but it is now covered in ash, our livestock like our cow, our horse, our pig, our boat, and engines are all covered by the volcano, these are what I miss.”

Luisa Silva used to live at the foot of the Taal volcano and said life will never be the same. “Right now life is very hard, we are not used to this. This is where we have experienced things that we have never experienced before, we don’t know where to start,” she said.

Silva wants to return to the island if the government allows it. She said they can grow vegetables and raise livestock at their homes on the island, saving them from needing to buy food. Their animals also once carried tourists to see the picturesque crater.

A popular tourist destination set in the

middle of a lake, Taal erupted on January 12, 2020.

More than 5,000 people, many of them working as tour guides, fled the small island as the ground shook and the volcano belched dark-gray ash and steam into the sky. Hundreds of horses, cows, and other animals were left behind.

The eruption delivered an early crisis in what would become a tough year in one of the world’s most disaster-prone nations. A couple of months after the volcano sent more than 376,000 people fleeing to safety, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country.

Many evacuees stayed in state-run emergency shelters for a while, then returned to the ash-blanketed towns and cities in Batangas province as the danger subsided.

But the volcanic island in Taal Lake is still too dangerous, and the government bans the former residents from returning.

Some have found other housing, but about 50 families are still living in tents a year after the eruption and are resorting to odd jobs. Calautit village chief Jimmy Tenorio said the families still living in tents will be relocated soon.

Meanwhile, Taal still rumbles, with small earthquakes and weak plumes of steam venting from its crater.

Wuhan returns to normal as world still battling pandemic

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Year holiday and are telling people not to travel and to avoid gatherings as much as possible. Schools are being let out a week early and many have already shifted to online classes. Mask wearing remains virtually universal indoors and on public transport. Mobile phone apps are used to trace people’s movements and prove they are both virus-free and have not been to areas where suspected cases have been found.

Since the end of the lockdown, Wuhan has largely been spared further outbreaks, something residents such as chemistry teacher Yao Dongyu attribute to heightened awareness resulting from the traumatic experience of last year.

“At that time, people were very nervous, but the government gave us huge support. It was a very powerful guarantee, so we got through this together,” said Yao, 24. “Since Wuhan people went through the pandemic, they’ve done better in personal precautions than people in other regions.”

China has doggedly defended its actions in the early days of the outbreak, saying it helped buy time for the rest of the world while pushing fringe theories that the virus was brought to the city from outside China, possibly from a laboratory in the U.S.

After months of negotiations, China

finally gave permission last month for the World Health Organization (WHO) to send a team of international experts to begin investigating the origins of the virus. They recently completed their two weeks of quarantine.

A panel of experts commissioned by WHO criticized China and other countries in January for not moving to stem the initial outbreak earlier, prompting Beijing to concede it could have done better.

Meanwhile, in Hong Kong in southern China, thousands of residents were locked down in January in an unprecedented move to contain a worsening outbreak in the city. Hong Kong has been grappling to contain a fresh wave of the coronavirus since November.

Woman’s salve for devastation of Lebanese blast: 100 dolls

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Labaki’s reward: photos with the beaming faces of girls who received her dolls.

“It’s a gift for me more so than it is for the children,” she said.

“One Good Thing” is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small.

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Have a safe and prosperous Year of the Ox!

February 12, 2021 to January 31, 2022