

Mt. Bulusan emits ash; quake rocks Bicol

Cet Dematera, The Philippine Star, 11-7-10

LEGAZPI CITY – Mt. Bulusan in Sorsogon yesterday spewed ash columns up to 600 meters above its crater rim, but scientists assured the public an explosive eruption is not expected.

This came as the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) recorded earthquakes in several areas in the country early yesterday.

Phivolcs stressed the earthquakes were tectonic in origin.

On the other hand, groundwater interacting with hot rocks and not rising magma caused Bulusan to spew ash, Phivolcs said.

“The current activity may indicate a hydrothermal disturbance underneath the volcano which could lead to more steam and ash ejections,” Phivolcs regional chief Crispulo Diolata Jr. said.

Phivolcs recorded a cloud of steam and ash from Bulusan that rose 600 meters and fell over areas as far away as 10 kilometers from the volcano.

“Bulusan volcano ejected a light grayish steam and ash column that reached an approximate height of 600 meters above the crater rim,” Phivolcs reported in its 9 a.m. bulletin.

The ash ejection also reflected an explosion-type earthquake that lasted 57 seconds.

Phivolcs said there could be more hydrothermal disturbances and warned people to stay away from the four-kilometer permanent danger zone around Bulusan.

Office of Civil Defense (OCD) regional director Bernardo Alejandro warned residents not to venture inside the four-kilometer danger zone, pointing out that heavy rains could trigger landslides near the ash-laden slopes.

Alejandro said the danger of landslides is a great possibility, citing the presence of a low-pressure area in the country’s eastern seaboard that could trigger heavy rains in the coming days.

Volcanologist Abner Ete said ash fell on Barangays Rangas, Anyog and Cogon, and the town proper of Juban, as well as in the towns of San Antonio and Casiguran.

Ete, however, maintained that the two tremors that were felt in Masbate and Batanes did not cause Bulusan to spew ash.

Ete said the earthquakes were tectonic in origin and did not trigger the volcanic activity of Bulusan.

“The earthquakes were of tectonic origin, while the quakes we recorded around Bulusan were of volcanic origin,” Ete said.

The Phivolcs recorded a magnitude 5.2 tremor in Basco, Batanes at around 1:43 a.m.

A magnitude 6 tremor was also recorded off Burias Island and was felt as far as Cebu City early yesterday morning.

The Phivolcs said the center of the tremor was located 36 kilometers south and 11 degrees west of San Pascual in Burias Island of Masbate province.

The earthquake was shallow and tectonic in origin with the Sibuyan Sea Fault as the possible source, Phivolcs said.

An Intensity 5 quake was felt in Lignon Hill in Legaspi, Albay, with a lower intensity tremor in Masbate, Sorsogon, Irosin, and Sto. Domingo in Albay.

Phivolcs also recorded an Intensity 3 quake in Guinayangan, Quezon and Intensity 2 in Roxas City.

The last major earthquake to cause widespread death and destruction was in 1990, when a 7.7-magnitude quake killed more than 2,000 people in central and northern Luzon.

The series of earthquakes yesterday were recorded just before Bulusan erupted.

Phivolcs raised the alert level for Bulusan from zero to level 1, indicating abnormal activity, possibly a sign of more ash eruptions to come.

Authorities, however, reported no casualty or injuries during the tremors while the military raised its alert level to help out in the possible evacuation of residents near Bulusan.