

Spiritual caretaker of Indonesian volcano dies

AP, Mount Merapi

He was the keeper of Mount Merapi -- an 83-year-old man entrusted to watch over the volcano's spirits, dispatching his assistant to go to the gaping crater and bring back ash as a symbolic offering.

And when the eruption came, Maridjan was among those who died, along with dozens of villagers who believed him, not seismologists or government officials, about the danger.

As Merapi began spewing 1,800-degree gases and thousands of panicked people streamed down the mountain's slopes, Maridjan refused to budge from his home deep in the evacuation zone, just four miles from the crater.

His rigid body was found Wednesday, prostrate in the Islamic prayer position and caked in heavy white soot. Nearby was an Indonesian Red Cross volunteer who had been trying to persuade him to leave.

"I never thought he was going to leave us in such a way," said Prabukusumo, whose brother, the sultan in the nearby court city of Yogyakarta, is now tasked with choosing Maridjan's successor.

"He's lived through so many, much bigger eruptions. I'm still in shock."

On Thursday, politicians, soap opera stars and singers were among hundreds of people who flocked to Maridjan's funeral on the fertile slopes of the mountain entrusted to his care by a late king.



Mount Merapi volcano emits hot clouds of lava and volcanic ash as seen from Kali Tengah Lor district in Sleman yesterday. A volcanologist said the activity was not a fresh eruption but could help stabilise the mountain following its deadly eruption on October 26 that killed 32 people.

Warning systems often don't help tsunami victims

AP, Mentawai Islands

Costly warning systems installed across Asia since the deadly 2004 tsunami did nothing to save villagers on these remote Indonesian islands who saw homes and loved ones swept away by a giant wave this week.

Such systems can be effective for people living hours away from where a tsunami is forged but are often unable to help those most at risk. A 10-foot (3-meter) wave struck the Mentawai islands Monday just minutes after a massive earthquake offshore, killing more than 400 and destroying hundreds of homes in 20 villages.

There are questions about whether Indonesia's system was working properly, but even if it was, a tsunami generated by an earthquake so close to shore can reach land long before there's a chance to raise an effective warning, experts say.

Piatoro, a coconut farmer on the wave-battered island of Pagai Selatan, said he and his family ran toward higher ground when the water slammed into their home, but it was too late. The water snatched his feet from under him, and he was sucked under the waves, tumbling over and over. His wife was torn from him.

"I felt like I was boneless," Piatoro, 49, said Friday as he sat alone on a hospital mat, skin scraped from his calf and stitches

on a foot wound. Like many Indonesians, he has only one name. It was not clear if his wife had survived.

Tsunami alerts were sounded by scientists within minutes of the earthquake, but some villages have no telephone lines, making it extremely difficult for a warning to get through in time.

Renato Solidum, the director of the state-run Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, said sea-side communities needed to learn to read natural signs -- such as earthquakes and unnaturally receding seas -- and immediately move away from the coast even before alarms go off.

Delegates deadlocked as UN nature talks near end

AP, Tokyo

Delegates from more than 190 countries struggled yesterday to break a deadlock on setting ambitious goals to protect animals, plants and ecosystems, raising the prospect that the two-week UN meeting might end in failure.

The biggest sticking point, participants said, was a division between developing and industrial nations over working out a system to fairly share genetic resources, such as medicine extracted from plants -- long a sore point for poorer countries.

Delegates to the UN Convention on Biodiversity meeting, held in Nagoya, southwest of Tokyo, have agreed on most goals, attendees said, but have failed to reach consensus on the most contentious targets.

One of the conference's key goals is to set measurable targets that will slow or halt the rate of extinctions and damage to ecosystems from pollution, overexploitation and habitat

destruction. Scientists warn that unless action is taken to prevent such biodiversity loss, extinctions will spike and the intricately interconnected natural world could collapse with devastating consequences, from plunging fish stocks to less access to clean water.

Government ministers gathered yesterday afternoon to try to hammer out final agreements and avoid the kind of collapse that befell last year's UN climate talks in Copenhagen. The concluding session that was supposed to end at 6 p.m. stretched into the evening hours without a deal, participants said.

"It's a race against the clock to get something agreed upon," said Nathalie Rey, an oceans policy adviser with Greenpeace International. "Everybody's saying we can't go home empty-handed. So there's real pressure to make this happen."

Decisions at the conference must be reached by consensus, meaning any country can block agreements.

Internet reaches Everest summit

AFP, Kathmandu

Climbers at the top of Mount Everest, the world's highest peak, will now be able to make video calls and surf the Internet on their mobile phones, a Nepalese telecom group claims.

Ncell, a subsidiary of Swedish phone giant Teliasonera, said Thursday it had set up a high-speed third-generation (3G) phone base station at an altitude of 5,200 meters (17,000 feet) near Gorakshep village in the Everest region.

The installation will also help tens of thousands of tourists and trekkers who visit the world's highest mountain every year.

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Obama for larger Indian role in East Asia

IANS, New Delhi

China will be the elephant in the room when US President Barack Obama holds talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Nov 8 as the two countries prepare a joint statement that could talk of a bigger role for India in East Asia to counterbalance what is being seen widely as increasing Chinese assertiveness in the region.

The India-US joint statement that is being crafted together by top officials of both sides will envisage greater cooperation between India and the US in Southeast Asia, East Asia and in the larger pursuit of evolving an Asian architecture.

"The US supports a bigger global role for India in the world and in Asia, specially in East Asia," senior officials told IANS. The US, however, advised India to maintain a positive relationship with China.

China will be among an array of global issues that will figure in discussions between Obama and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh when they sit down for wide-ranging talks here Nov 8, said officials. A bigger role for India in East Asia will be a key theme of Obama's address to the joint session of parliament here Nov 8, said the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

China will be watching closely Obama's maiden visit to India as it has watched warily the growing strategic congruence between Washington and New Delhi since the forging of the 2005 landmark India-US nuclear deal.

The US will try to assuage hurt feelings in India caused by the Nov 17, 2009 US-China joint statement that envisaged a monitoring role for China in resolving tensions between India and Pakistan and greater dialogue on issues relating to South Asia.

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Table-A		
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SSC/HSC or equivalent	3 Points	2 Points
Graduation with 3 years Hons./Pass or equivalent	3 Points	2 Points
Post Graduation or equivalent	3 Points	2 Points
4 years Integrated Hons.	4 Points	3 Points

Table-B			
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3.00 & above	3	2.50 & above	3
2.00 to below 3.00	2	1.50 to below 2.50	2

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