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Hundreds flee in Japan after Shinmoedake volcano begins spewing ash, boulders

BY HELEN KENNEDY
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER
Sunday, March 13, 2011

Earthquake, tsunami, nuclear plant meltdowns -- as if the people of Japan didn't have enough to cope with, a volcano began erupting Sunday.

Hundreds of people were forced to flee when the Shinmoedake volcano on the southern island of Kyushu began spewing ash and boulders.

The explosion from the eruption could be heard miles away and an ash plume extended two miles into the sky.

Shinmoedake, one of several volcanic peaks in the Kirishima mountain range, is 950 miles from the epicenter of Friday's earthquake and scientists weren't sure if the quake triggered the eruption.

Eruptions and quakes are common in Japan's "ring of fire."

The volcano erupted in January - the first major seismic activity on the mountain in 52 years. Scientists say lava had been building up in recent weeks.

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Shinmoedake Volcano, seen here in a file photo, added to Japan's problems... (AP)

Shinmoedake is famous for standing in as the villain's secret rocket base in the 1967 James Bond film, "You Only Live Twice."

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