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In the Aftermath of the Jeddah Floods

30/11/2009

By **Ali Sharaya and Amal Baqzi**

Jeddah, Asharq Al-Awsat - The death toll from the Jeddah flood now stands at 98, and this figure is expected to increase further in light of the continuing search and rescue operations being undertaken by Saudi authorities, according to Mecca Civil Defense spokesman Captain Abdullah al Omari.

Saudi Civil Defense spokesman, Major Abdullah al Harithi, informed Asharq Al-Awsat that the civil defense operations [to locate flood survivors] are ongoing, and that professional Civil Defense divers are being used to search for missing persons in locations affected by the flooding.

At the same time, the Saudi Border Guards in Mecca revealed that 65 divers, along with a number of border guard officers and soldiers were [also] taking part in search and rescue operations in Jeddah. The Border Guards are using inflatable rubber life-rafts and [other] rescue equipments in these operations.

Colonel Ali Bin Zurban al Zahrani, the Saudi Border Guard's Director of Public Affairs confirmed to Asharq Al-Awsat that the Border Guards were searching the residential neighbourhoods affected by flooding, and that they had rescued a number of families who were trapped by the water, as well as recovering a number of bodies of people killed in the floods. Colonel al Zahrani stressed that there are no firm statistics regarding the number of people killed by the floods, and that the death toll will most likely increase as time goes by.

Jeddah also witnessed full mobilization by the security forces in order to protect cars and properties that have been affected by flooding from a wave of thefts over the past few days. Car parts in particular are being targeted by some individuals who are exploiting the presence of cars that have been abandoned or washed away due to the floods.

A security source who spoke to Asharq Al-Awsat on the condition of anonymity revealed that police departments are receiving a large number of calls about cars abandoned on the road being subject to theft.

The source added that criminals were exploiting the fact that the security services are too busy rescuing people and restoring the situation to normal to deal with the theft of cars that have been abandoned or swept away by floods, particularly since these cars have most usually been swept far away [from their original location] by the floods, while the majority of cars that were abandoned on the roadside are unlocked due to electronic malfunctions.

For his part, assistant spokesman for the Jeddah Police Department, Lieutenant Nawaf al Bawq, told Asharq Al-Awsat that sufficient police squads have been deployed throughout the streets of Jeddah to assist all other security agencies in the rescue operations, and the operations to move abandoned vehicles. He also revealed that the Department of Forensic Science is playing a direct role in inventorying vehicles and property, and members of the security apparatus are patrolling the entire area to prevent further thefts.

The Ministry of Health issued a decree that all government and national hospitals be prepared to receive those injured in the flooding, with all medical staff required to deal with such cases working on duty, according to Dr. Sami Badaoud, the Director of Health Affairs in Jeddah.

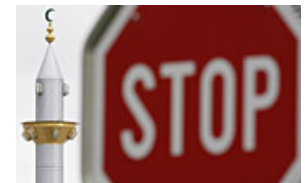
Dr. Badaoud told Asharq Al-Awsat "the refrigerated mortuary is being used by a team of 28 forensic scientists, in addition to [other] scientists working elsewhere with the relevant police force or civil defense units with the goal of dealing with the deceased, and handing over their remains to their families. In accordance to official guidelines, the corpses that are identified are returned directly to their families, while those who have yet to be identified are stored in the refrigerated mortuary."

According to the Media Director of the Jeddah municipality, Ahmed al Ghamdi, the municipality was scheduled to host a conference dealing with the implications of this flood, but the

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In the Aftermath of the Jeddah Floods



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conference was postponed as the mayor of the municipality was busy attending another meeting with other parties.

For his part, engineer Ibrahim Ketabkhane, the Jeddah Undersecretary for Construction, revealed that there are around 160 incidents of collapse or cave-ins in the streets and roads of Jeddah, and he stressed that "repair work is under way."

Ketabkhane told Asharq Al-Awsat that "around 43 locations in Jeddah experienced a pooling of water due to the rainfall, and this water was continuing to flow into these sites until yesterday [Saturday]." He also pointed out that the municipality workers were dealing with these sites on a priority bases and that "the priority now is the Quwayza and Um al-Salam neighbourhoods, as well as the other most affected sites."

Ketabkhane told Asharq Al-Awsat that the road to Mecca had been closed so that the remnants of the flood could be removed, and so that the road could be secured in preparation of the return of the Hajj pilgrims.

The King Abdullah tunnel was flooded despite the fact that this tunnel is equipped with water pumps that can pump out water at a rate of 2,500 square meters per hour. However the flooding was estimated at around 7,500 square meters per hour, and with the rain falling for 10 hours unabated, this resulted in the King Abdullah tunnel being flooded by around 70 thousand cubic meters of water.

Ketabkhane also told Asharq Al-Awsat that operations to drain the water are taking place in a number of areas and neighbourhoods in Jeddah. He revealed that the Prince Majid tunnel near the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah was also flooded, and the Jeddah municipality is coordinating with the university to end this problem. Ketabkhane said that the municipality is currently pumping out the water that has flooded this tunnel, which was caused by the water flowing downstream from the university and the surrounding area.

Engineer Faisal Shawali, the Jeddah municipality Director of Roads, said that all the main streets in Jeddah have been drained of water according to the water drainage plan, and work is currently underway to do the same in other areas of Jeddah, particularly southern Jeddah. He said that every thing is being done to implement the directives of Jeddah Governor Prince Mishal Bin Majid to remove the effects of this flooding on the population of Jeddah.

As for the weather forecast over the coming few days, Hussein al Qahtani, the official spokesman for the Presidency of Meteorology and Environment said that the weather in Jeddah will be stable, with the possibility of intermediate levels of rain falling upon central and northern areas of Saudi Arabia.

Al Qahtani also told Asharq Al-Awsat that wind speed is normal, with sporadic rainfall expected to fall on central and eastern Saudi Arabia, and low levels of visibility in the early morning between 1.5 km and 2 km.



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