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'Municipality responsible for flood'

Arab News

JEDDAH: The Jeddah flash flooding of Nov. 25 was caused not because of heavy rains alone but because of a lack of a drainage system in the city and a 30-year-old controversy involving then Mayor Muhammad Farisy, according to Yahya Hamza Kaushik, a civil engineering and environment consultant.



"Jeddah is a meeting place of wadis," he said, referring to the natural depressions in the desert where rainwater collects and grows into torrents. "We should not blame citizens for building houses on the pathways of floods, rather we should hold responsible the officials who allowed them to build those houses."

He said citizens would not have constructed houses in those dangerous spots without the permission of concerned officials in the municipality and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Saudi Electricity Company.

Kaushik held Jeddah's municipality (Baladia) responsible for not implementing the flood drainage project about 30 years ago when Farisy was the mayor. According to him, King Faisal had instructed the Finance Ministry to implement a project to protect Jeddah from floods.

Despite the order, the municipality did not construct these flood measures as instructed.

"They said the construction of soil levees would prevent floods," he said.

Speaking to Al-Madinah Arabic daily, he said all subsequent mayors failed to implement projects for flood control. Meanwhile, the city grew and entire neighborhoods were built on land that is dry most of the time but exposed to the danger of the rare flash flooding in an otherwise arid climate. Years can pass with no problems until a deluge occurs like the one experienced recently.

Kaushik emphasized that the construction of floodwater sewerage was essential for the protection of Jeddah. He proposed either to open the existing sewerage pipelines or to construct a new floodwater drainage system to pump rainwater to the Red Sea.

"We should have a long-term plan and build residential districts away from floodwater courses. We should also complete the canals on the north and south of Jeddah," he said.

Abdullah Al-Ammar, chairman of the National Committee for Contractors, shed light on another aspect that caused the catastrophe.

He said many floodwater drainage projects in various parts of Saudi Arabia were canceled in the past on claims that the Kingdom gets so little rain. As a result, the Kingdom has witnessed several rain-related calamities.

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Prince Ahmed Bin Salman



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He said the cancellation of such projects began during the first economic boom witnessed by the country. He blamed some officials for the cancellation of such projects. He said the contractors who caused the Jeddah floods should be questioned and held responsible.

"We always instruct Saudi contractors to give priority to national and public interests rather than their vested interests," Al-Madinah quoted Al-Ammar as saying.



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