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### Editorial: Agony continues

Jeddah continues struggle with the catastrophic consequences of last week's flooding, as public anger rises, both at the extraordinary infrastructural failures that exacerbated the effects of the sudden downpour and at the grievous inadequacy of the official response to the disaster.

The public mood is all too understandable. What is less fathomable is the continuing patchiness of the response from the authorities and the general lack of coordination. It seems that too many officials are waiting for someone else to take the initiative, with the result that those few who are really trying to sort out part of the mess are effectively working in isolation.

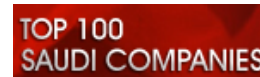
The issue of disease is a case in point. After the rains hit Makkah with less horrific consequences, helicopters were used to spray standing pools of fetid water, to reduce the risk of malaria, dengue fever or typhoid. No such spraying appears to have yet taken place in Jeddah. Nor has there been any significant effort to draw up these stagnant pools into tankers and take the water away for safe disposal outside the city.

This continuing incoherence in the official response is all the more remarkable given the investigation into the handling of the floods ordered last Tuesday by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah. It might have been expected, since the inquiry has been tasked with identifying any culprits, that officials would have been galvanized into taking proper and coordinated action. They may have got it wrong at the beginning but now they had a chance to redeem themselves, to some extent at least by getting on with the jobs, (especially in health and safety) that they are paid to do. But not a bit of it. The response to the disaster remains woefully piecemeal. Therefore, as if the original massive destruction and loss of life were not enough, there is a very real possibility of further terrible damage from outbreaks of deadly disease.

The inquiry will clearly face three big questions. The first is how the rains, however exceptional, could cripple a city with supposedly advanced and efficient new infrastructure. The second is how the authorities could become so paralyzed for so long by the sheer scale of the disaster, leaving some communities to fend for themselves for days. The third, and undoubtedly most important of the questions, is what now has to be done to ensure that disruption and tragedy on this scale will never occur again.

It is not just Jeddah who are livid. Throughout the Kingdom the anger at what was surely an almost entirely avoidable calamity is very real. Unfortunately, anger by itself is an unreliable motor for judgment. The best result from the king's inquiry will come from dispassionate and forensic investigation. And maybe the few officials who seem to have discharged their duties faithfully deserve praise just as much as those who have failed abysmally deserve censure. The end result should be a clear plan to fix what has gone wrong both in terms of organization and infrastructure and which will then be executed quickly and thoroughly.

Prince Ahmed Bin Salman



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