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'Death hole' at Kilo 11 holds many bodies

Arab News

JEDDAH: No one paid much attention to the huge gathering of people around a big hole located at Kilo 11 near Um Al-Salam district east of the Haramain Expressway.

People are now used to seeing such gatherings everywhere because of the rescue operations and recovery of bodies. That location is particularly unique because many people are calling that location "the death hole," because underneath is a large number of bodies that are not yet recovered.

People gathering in that hole ignore the simple rule of safety: Stay away from danger areas. Nosy people are camping in that area day and night, waiting for a body to be discovered. The nosy people are gathering next to the backhoe, which could accidentally hit one of the bystanders during excavation efforts.

According to the residents in the area, the hole belongs to the National Water Company. The company has been conducting a project on that site for the past 18 months, but in the past five months the company put the project on hold and covered the hole. The hole is 16 meters deep.

The fast-moving floodwater dragged all the cars to this hole. One of the worst tragedies ever to be told about this hole is the discovery of the body of 10 people, five of them from one family. Efforts are still continuing even after more than one week from the rain to recover the bodies and cars buried underneath.

Ahmad Al-Harhi, working for an iron company located near that hole, said to a local daily that the company dug this hole to connect pipes to the areas nearby. "Five months ago the company stopped work and covered the hole in a very bad way and created some barriers from the north side of the project to block it from the street. Some said that they put these barriers after the floods. I was in the company looking at the tragedy when most cars were swept into this hole. I saw people screaming from inside their cars. If the hole was not there, maybe many people would have not died."

Mersil Al-Harhi, working in an area nearby, said he participated in the rescue operation from day one of the tragedy. He said: "I tied myself with a rope and I rescued a man and his son from their car before it went inside the hole. There were women in the back of the seat but I could not save them. I watched them as the floodwater swept the car away to the hole."

He said because of his location near the hole, he saw many bodies. "One of the worst scenes that I will never forget was four young men swept away while shouting for help and I could not do anything about it," he said. Abdul Aziz Al-Hazzazi, a resident in Al-Adel neighborhood, said that after the rain had stopped, "We went to the hole after hearing that many people are stuck underneath. I saw at least 23 bodies dug from that hole and I knew that there were more. The smell of death is in the air and I cannot stay there for more than few hours. What I am surprised at is why there are no ambulances in the area? There are so many people waiting for their relatives to be discovered."

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Saeed Sairafi, owner of a fish market in the area, said that he saw a car recovered with six people inside, all from one family. He said: "My customers are not coming to me anymore because of the disaster and because of the smell of the bodies in the area. The area looks like an open graveyard."

Ahmad Al-Ghamdi, official spokesman of Jeddah municipality, said that its teams are still searching for missing people inside that hole with the help of the responsible authorities.

An official at Um Al-Salam district said that the rescue work continues. He said people believe that there are more bodies inside. The citizens in the area objected to a decision to stop searching for bodies and fill-in the hole. The official said they postponed covering the hole and continued the work. One of the volunteers threatened to bury anyone who will come to bury the hole. Ahmad Al-Malki, a Saudi lawyer, said that relatives of the dead who were found in that hole have the right to file a law suit. He said: "The municipality is responsible for the public places and monitoring the streets and maintaining it."

Turki Al-Amri said: "The municipality did not help us at all. We have been working for five days alone. I even asked one of their officials to help us with water pump but he refused saying that he will only give it to us when a Civil Defense official is present."



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