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SPA makes Jeddawis dance with anger

Turki Al-Dakheel | Al-Watan, www.turkid.net

The Saudi Press Agency's (SPA) reports on last Wednesday's rain have angered Jeddah residents. "The SPA reporter found the people, particularly children and women, enjoying the heavy downpour that the city was not used to over the past many years.

Many of them headed to the Corniche beach to enjoy this happy and wonderful weather," was how the news agency reported the catastrophe, as people struggled against the water that was engulfing their homes, claiming many lives.

This is how the official news agency reported the ravages of the unprecedented devastation that accompanied the torrential rain in Jeddah.

I wonder why SPA should stray far from the harsh realities in its reports. Even the minister of information said its coverage of the tragedy was humiliating to the families of victims.

I do not know the SPA reporter who prepared the report. It could be one of the many unproductive government reporters who enjoy the perks of the jobs but waste their time inside their offices.

I wonder whether someone who did not have the least idea of what was happening outside his office wrote the report. Did he actually see the Jeddawis dancing with joy while bodies were floating in the streets?

It is true the SPA's primary duty is to broadcast official news. It is undoubtedly the most reliable source of governmental information. But writing in a shameless manner about an incident, the reality of which is known to everyone, is deeply embarrassing even for the information minister. It is, in fact, a gross belittling of a tragedy. Instead of attempting to ignore it, our news agency could have criticized the circumstances that led to such a catastrophe.

Unlike in the old days, people now have access to the resources to record their own news. Even the most ordinary mobile phone can record and upload events to television channels and the Internet, or send directly to other people. The time of concealing news is a matter of the past. This is the age of real news. I wish the SPA would not be more governmental than the government.

Prince Ahmed Bin Salman



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