

### Heavy Floods in Yemen Kill At Least 24

AL-MUKALLA (Arab News) – Torrential rain and flooding has killed at least 24 people in Yemen since the beginning of May, with the country's National Meteorological Center issuing a new warning to Yemenis against traversing watercourses. The meteorological center in Sana'a forecast rainfall across the country's central and northern highlands in Saada, Hajjah, Dhamar and other regions, advising residents to avoid traveling through and staying in flood courses. The same center issued a similar warning about excessive rainfall, inundation and landslides in mountainous regions of the country.

### Thought for Today

Though Allah knows them better than even they know themselves, yet those trials and tests are for the purpose of their realizing and knowing those deeds which merit reward or which deserve punishment.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

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# Documents: Hashd al-Sha'abi Fighters Doubled in Two Years

BAGHDAD (Middle East Eye)

The Hashd al-Sha'abi popular mobilization forces has doubled in size over the past two years, making it the third-largest force in the country, documents related to Iraq's draft budget seen by Middle East Eye suggest.

The proposed 2023 budget, which the government submitted to parliament last month and has been reviewed by MEE, shows the Hashd is about half the size of the regular military. Security forces under the interior ministry are about three times the size of the mobilization forces.

If passed, the new budget would give Hashd al-Sha'abi 3.56 trillion Iraqi dinars (\$2.7bn), which is a significant increase in Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters over just two years.

Hashd al-Sha'abi, also known as the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), was established in June 2014 to unite armed factions and volunteers to fight against the Dae-



A Hashd al-Sha'abi graduation ceremony at a military camp in Karbala in 2019

sh terrorist group. PMU is a governmental umbrella that oversees the various groups' activities.

Prominent armed factions, such as the Badr Organisation and Asaib Ahl al-Haq, represent the Hashd's backbone and strike force.

These forces have become part of the Iraqi military since 2016 and are funded entirely by the government.

MEE has obtained appendices

to the 2021 budget and 2023 draft budget, which are reserved for members of the government and parliament. These show the number of people on the state payroll.

They record that over two years, the ranks of the Hashd swelled by 116,000 fighters, now standing at 238,000 overall.

In comparison, the number of soldiers and other employees in the defence ministry grew by just

25,000 over the same period, up to 450,000 people. Similarly, the interior ministry's numbers grew no more than 22,250, to over 700,000 overall.

Though interior ministry security forces outnumber the regular military and the Hashd, the majority are non-combatant civil and policing units, Iraqi military commanders and security officials told MEE.

Some security officials noted that there are discussions about altering the responsibilities of the federal police, where the Hashd would instead take on its armed response role - which may explain the large increase in paramilitary fighters.

However, other sources saw the rise in numbers as indicative of a different trend.

A prominent security official told MEE that, "whether we like it or not", the Hashd is in effect the military wing of the Coordination Framework, a political alliance that dominates Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani's government.

## Saudi King Invites Syria's President Assad to Arab Summit

DAMASCUS (AFP) – Syrian President Bashar al-Assad received an invitation to next week's Arab summit in Saudi Arabia, the presidency said Wednesday, the first such invitation since the foreign-backed war began in the country.

The pan-Arab body had suspended Damascus in November 2011.

On Sunday, the Arab League welcomed back Syria's government, securing Assad's return to the Arab fold after years of isolation.

Assad received an invitation from Saudi King Salman "to participate in the thirty-second Arab League summit, which will be held in Jeddah on May 19", the Syrian presidency said in a state-

ment.

Assad said the summit "will enhance joint Arab action to achieve the aspirations of the Arab peoples," the statement added.

Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Jordan, Nayef bin Bandar al-Sudairi, delivered the invitation.

The last Arab League summit Assad attended was in 2010 in Libya.

The invitation comes a day after Riyadh and Damascus announced that work would resume at their respective diplomatic missions in Syria and Saudi Arabia, after more than a decade of severed relations.

The kingdom cut ties with Assad's government in 2012 and

Riyadh had long openly championed Assad's ouster, backing militants in Syria in earlier stages of the war.

But a flurry of diplomatic activity has been underway since a deadly earthquake struck Syria and Turkey on February 6.

A decision in March by former arch-rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran, a close ally of Damascus, to resume ties also shifted the political landscape.

In April, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan met with Assad in Damascus on the first such visit since the war broke out.

Regional capitals have gradually been warming to Assad as he clawed back lost territory with

crucial support from Iran and Russia.

In 2018, the United Arab Emirates re-established ties with Syria and has been leading the recent charge to reintegrate Damascus into the Arab fold.

Turkey, which supported early militant efforts to topple Assad and maintains a military presence in Syria's north, has also shown interest in mending ties with Damascus.

The foreign ministers of Syria and Turkey were meeting Wednesday in Moscow for the first time since the start of the war.

Russia's top diplomat proposed a roadmap to normalize Syrian-Turkish ties.

## A Year on, Palestinians Mourn Slain Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh



Pictures and other objects are displayed in memory of slain Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in the room that used to be her office at Al Jazeera in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

RAMALLAH (AFP) – A year after a bullet by a Zionist trooper killed Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, her West Bank office remains almost untouched, but mourners' flowers have piled up in an adjacent room.

The Ramallah street where the news bureau is located has been renamed after her, and a new museum will soon honor her work and that of other reporters covering the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

Fellow journalists say they still have not accepted the loss of Abu Akleh, 51, whose many years of fearless reporting had made her a household name across the Arab world.

Camera operator Majdi Bannoura, who was with her the day she died, said "despite the passing of a year since her death, I still don't believe that she is gone."

"Sometimes I feel that I'm living in a dream."

Walid al-Omari, the Qatari news channel's bureau chief for Al-Quds and Ramallah, said "Shireen's colleagues and I are unable to separate anything from Shireen's influence."

"So, we have kept the office as it was," he added, his voice breaking.

Abu Akleh died on May 11, 2022 while covering a raid by Zionists in the Jenin refugee camp in the north of the occupied West Bank.

The army would later admit one of its soldiers likely shot the reporter, who was wearing a helmet and a bulletproof vest marked "Press", having mistaken her for a fighter.

Her killing prompted a global storm of outrage and calls for an international investigation.

The anger flared further when Zionist police attacked mourners and pallbearers at her funeral in east Al-Quds.

Large murals have since been painted in honor of the journalist, including on the concrete wall the occupying regime has built as part of its separation barrier with the West Bank.

Al Jazeera took her case to the International Criminal Court in December.

"We continue to work and to press for the prosecutor and the court to act and take a stand on this case," Omari said.

The Committee to Protect Journalists this week noted the Zionist regime's military had taken no accountability for the killings of at least 20 journalists -- 18 of whom were Palestinian -- in the past two decades.

"The killing of Shireen Abu Akleh and the failure of the military's investigative process to hold anyone accountable is not an isolated case," said CPJ director Robert Mahoney.

He charged that the system "seems fashioned to evade responsibility."

Rodney Dixon, a lawyer appointed by Al Jazeera to take up Abu Akleh's case, has argued there was an attempt by the Zionist regime "to completely cover up" the circumstances of her death.

He described Abu Akleh's killing as part of a "systematic and large-scale campaign", noting the regime's bombing of the channel's office in Gaza in 2021.

In the year since her death, Abu Akleh has been memorialized by Palestinians, and the road where the office is located is now named Shireen Abu Akleh Street.

The cornerstone of a Shireen Abu Akleh Museum for Media will be laid during a ceremony in Ramallah on Thursday, one of a string of commemorative events.

Her brother Anton Abu Akleh said his family were still waiting for justice, speaking at a cultural event on Wednesday in Ramallah.

"During this past year we have gone through several stages, experiences and challenges as we try to obtain Shireen's rights, and achieve justice for her," he told the audience.

Bureau chief Omari said his slain star reporter "was not just a great journalist for Al Jazeera."

"She was a team on her own. It has left a huge void."

## UAE: World Not Ready to 'Switch Off' Fossil Fuels

ABU DHABI (Reuters/Al Jazeera) – The United Arab Emirates says countries should agree to phase out fuel emissions - not the production of oil, gas and coal - at the upcoming UN climate change negotiations that it will host this December.

The comments reflect deep divisions between nations over how to combat global warming ahead of the COP28 talks. Some wealthy Western governments and climate-afflicted island nations have been pushing for a phase out of fossil fuels, while resource-rich countries have campaigned to keep drilling.

UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment Mariam Almheiri said phasing out fossil fuels would hurt countries that either depend on them for revenue or cannot easily replace hydrocarbons with renewable energy sources.

She favors phasing out fossil fuel emissions using capture and storage technology while ramping up renewable energy, saying

this strategy allows countries to fight global warming while continuing to produce oil, gas and coal.

"The renewable space is advancing and accelerating extremely fast, but we are nowhere near to be able to say that we can switch off fossil fuels and solely depend on clean and renewable energy," Almheiri said on the sidelines of a climate conference in Washington, DC.

"We are now in a transition, and this transition needs to be just and pragmatic because not all countries have the resources," she said.

The comments reflect deep divisions among nations over how to combat the growing danger from climate change ahead of UN negotiations, known as COP28, to be held in Dubai from November 30 to December 12.

Some wealthy Western governments and climate-afflicted island nations have been pushing for a phaseout of fossil fuels while resource-rich countries have campaigned to

keep drilling.

At last year's UN climate summit in Egypt, more than 80 countries, including members of the European Union and small island nations, agreed to include language in the final agreement calling for "a phasedown" of all fossil fuels. Other countries, including Saudi Arabia and China, urged Egypt not to include that language in the final text.

This month, the Group of Seven countries with the largest and longest developed economies agreed to hasten their phaseout of fossil fuel consumption although they did not set a firm date.

Almheiri pointed to the UAE's example of relying on new carbon capture technology and renewables to decrease the emissions intensity of the OPEC member's oil and gas operations.

Some experts said capture technology is unproven at scale and could require huge investment at the expense of cheaper alternatives, such as solar and wind power.

## Explosion Near Damascus Kills 1, Injures 4

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) – An explosion close to a police station near the Syrian capital killed one officer and wounded four others Wednesday, state media reported.

The reports, citing the Interior Ministry, did not provide further details on the explosion in the town of Barzeh, just north of Damascus. Initial reports only mentioned five injured officers.

The state news agency SANA circulated photos of a charred car with investigators assessing the damage.

A pro-government radio station cited a police source and said the car that exploded was a "private vehicle." No group immediately

claimed responsibility for the explosion.

Britain-based opposition war monitor the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the explosion was a targeted attack, and that there were a total of seven wounded officers, some in critical condition.

The explosion comes as Syrian President Bashar Assad is making strides in restoring ties with the Arab world. Syria was readmitted into the Arab League on Sunday following a 12-year suspension.

On Tuesday, the Syrian and Saudi foreign ministries announced the reopening of their diplomatic missions.