

International

'Disastrous' flood warning in California as another storm hits

'The entire city of Salinas is in danger of flooding'

LOS ANGELES: Disastrous flooding could hit parts of California this weekend, forecasters warned Friday, as the eighth storm in succession barreled in over land already too waterlogged to soak up any more rain.

The most populous US state has been pummeled by near-record downpours over a very wet three weeks, which have already caused flooding, landslides and widespread power outages. At least 19 people are known to have died as communities struggle to cope with the constant deluge.

On Friday yet another system moved in, with forecasters warning the Monterey Peninsula could be cut off and the whole city of Salinas-home to 160,000 people-flooded. "The entire lower Salinas Valley will have disastrous flooding," the National Weather Service said.

"The entire city of Salinas is in danger of flooding. Most of Castroville will flood. All roads near the Salinas River will be flooded and impassable. 90,000 acres or more of agricultural land in the Salinas Valley will have disastrous flooding. "Many roads, homes and agricultural land areas in the Salinas Valley will have major flood damage." The Salinas River, already swollen by weeks of torrential rain, was expected to peak some time Friday, breaching its banks in a flood that could last until Sunday.

Kelley O'Connell said the bursting of a levee near her home had worried her. "If they release water from the dams or we get more rain, we're just a field away," she told the San Francisco Chronicle as she collected sandbags.

Evacuation orders and warnings were widespread, with forecasters saying major roads could become impassable-including highways that link the Monterey Peninsula with the rest of the county. "Residents both on the peninsula

and in the Salinas area should expect to be cut off for two to three days," Monterey County officials said earlier this week.

Monterey County Sheriff Tina Nieto told reporters Thursday that floodwater could strand people. "This is a slow-moving event" and not all places will be impacted at once, she said. "The river crests at different times."

Resident John Guru said he was taking no chances, with four days' supplies at home and two days' worth in his car in case he is caught out on the road. "I'm not sure how bad it's going to be," he told the Monterey Herald. "I will find a place if needed and do whatever it takes," he said, adding: "This is crazy, I was not anticipating anything like this."

Snow

Workers have rushed out in between storms to clear up some of the mess left behind, shoveling mud from roads even in the heart of Los Angeles. Crews have cut up felled trees, and heavy machinery have been drafted in to move rockslides.

Hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses have been left without power at various times-sometimes repeatedly-as rickety infrastructure has taken a battering. And it's not over yet, forecasters say.

"The ongoing unsettled weather in the West associated with the active Atmospheric River pattern unfortunately continues into this weekend with another couple rounds of heavy precipitation forecast," the NWS said.

Over the mountains, that precipitation was falling as snow, with more than three feet (a meter) expected in the Sierra Nevada range, making travel dangerous or impossible, even as thousands of skiers and snowboarders head for fresh powder over the Martin Luther King,



MERCED: Residents look towards a flooded roadway in Merced, California, as an "atmospheric river". Relentless storms were ravaging California again, the latest bout of extreme weather that has left dozens dead. —AFP

Jr Day holiday weekend.

Among those who have died in the last three weeks were drivers who were found in submerged cars, people struck by falling trees, a husband and wife killed in a rockfall, and people whose bodies were discovered in floodwaters. Winter storms are not unusual in California, where most of the annual rain comes in a fairly concentrated period.

But global warming, driven by the industrial era's unchecked use of fossil fuels, is supercharg-

ing storms, making them wetter and wilder. At the same time, the western United States is aridifying, with much of the region in its 23rd year of drought. Hydrologists say the recent rains are helping-California has received an average of almost nine inches (23 centimeters) of rain since late December-but are not a fix. "A few weeks of storms is not enough in this drought for California, but it certainly is nice. It's certainly making a good dent," Jay Lund, director of University of California, Davis, told the Chronicle. —AFP

Zionist forces kill two Palestinians

RAMALLAH: Two Palestinians were killed Saturday during a Zionist army raid in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said. The two young men were shot dead by Zionist forces "during an assault on the village of Jaba, south of Jenin" in the north of the West Bank, the ministry said.

No further details were provided on the circumstances surrounding their deaths. The Islamic Jihad militant group condemned the killings in a statement, describing the two men as "heroic martyrs" belonging to the group.

It said they were killed while trying to intervene against the "occupation forces which were carrying out a cowardly assassination operation". The Zionist army said in a brief statement that it had launched "counterterrorism activity" near the village, during which "suspects shot live fire" at them from a passing vehicle. "The soldiers responded with live fire. Hits were identified," it said, adding that no Zionist soldiers were reported injured. An AFP photographer saw a white car in Jaba with its windshield riddled with bullets on the driver's side. The vehicle had crashed into a building under construction and its rear was completely gutted.

The Palestinian health ministry named the two young men killed as Ezzedine Bassem Hamamra,



JABA: Onlookers surround a bullet-riddled car in which two Palestinians were reportedly killed by Zionist troops in Jaba near the West Bank town of Jenin, on January 14, 2023. —AFP

24, and Amjad Adnan Khaliliya, 23. A third Palestinian, 19-year-old Yazen Samer Jaabari, died of his injuries after he was shot by Zionist forces earlier this month, the ministry said.

He was wounded during an Zionist army operation on January 2 in the village of Kafr Dan, near Jenin, in which two other Palestinians were killed, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa. The latest deaths bring up to 12 the toll of Palestinians killed this year during violence in the West Bank, occupied by Zionist entity since 1967.

Zionist forces have launched near-daily raids in the West Bank following a wave of deadly attacks in Israel last year. The surge in bloodshed last year saw at least 26 Zionists and 200 Palestinians killed across Israel and the West Bank, according to an AFP tally. More than 150 of the fatalities were in the West Bank. —AFP

Lebanese protest arrest of blast victim's brother

BEIRUT: Activists gathered in front of a police station in the Lebanese capital Saturday to protest the arrest of the brother of a victim of a deadly 2020 blast, witnesses said. William Noun-whose brother, a fireman, was killed in the August 2020 Beirut port blast-was arrested Friday over remarks made during a television programme, a judiciary source told AFP.

The young man is a leading figure among families of the blast's victims who have been calling for the continuation of a probe into the tragic event, on hold for over a year. Noun's arrest sparked protests Friday night, as his relatives and other victims' families, along with activists, cut off roads in the capital.

Known for his outspokenness, he had threatened during televised remarks Thursday to "blow up the palace of justice" to protest moves to replace the judge investigating the blast. Embattled judge Tarek Bitar has faced an endless series of complaints against him, part of a campaign led by Shiite group Hezbollah and its allies seeking to block his probe into the blast.

On Tuesday, relatives of the victims, including Noun, threw stones at the palace of justice in Beirut, where they gathered again on Thursday in a protest over Bitar's possible replacement.



BEIRUT: File photo shows Lebanese activist William Noun (C), whose brother was killed in the massive port explosion in Beirut in August 2020, during a demonstration outside the residence of the minister of interior in the Lebanese capital against the authorities' lack of action to achieve justice for the victims of the bombing. —AFP

Demonstrations were also held on Saturday in front of the police station where Noun was being held, according to witnesses.

"This is an attempt to intimidate but it won't work," Noun's lawyer, Ralph Tannous, told Lebanese television. "This is a political move, not a judicial one." MP and lawyer Melhem Khalaf meanwhile told AFP, "I wish they would implement with the same enthusiasm all the warrants issued by the judicial investigator" over the port blast.

He described the replacement of the investigator as a "distraction from all the abnormalities that are happening in the country". The 2020 disaster, one of history's biggest non-nuclear explosions, killed more than 200 people and decimated vast areas of the capital after a stockpile of haphazardly stored ammonium nitrate caught fire. —AFP

Iran executes 'British...'

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Mizan said he had retired a decade ago and moved to "research and business activities in the private sector". Prominent Iranian lawyer Saeid Dehghan said on Twitter that Akbari's sentencing and execution were "political". Dehghan noted his execution comes amid moves in the British parliament to list Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist group over its role in a deadly crackdown on protests.

Mahmoud Amiry-Moghaddam, director of Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights, made a similar

observation. "The fact that Iran carried out the execution while the UK and EU are considering putting the IRGC on terror lists shows it is part of the Islamic republic's policy of hostage diplomacy," he told AFP. Amnesty International says Iran is the world's most prolific user of the death penalty after China.

Another dual national also facing the death penalty is Swedish-Iranian citizen Ahmadreza Djalali, who has been held since 2016 and was sentenced the following year to death on espionage charges that his family vehemently denies. Iran has been rocked by protests that erupted over the Sept 16 death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, after her arrest for an alleged breach of the country's dress code for women. Eighteen people have been sentenced to death in connection with the protests, according to a count compiled by AFP from official announcements. Four of them have been executed. —AFP

His peer at the Faculty of Law, Dr Abdulaziz Al-Enezi, expressed his belief that motorists must adhere to ethics and sense of responsibility toward peoples' safety, rather than being solely concerned with paying fines. Nevertheless, the use of such cameras will be helpful to enhance traffic safety and instill a sense of fear among the drivers from breaking the law.

The interior ministry recently announced installing the sixth-generation cameras on roads and some public locations to monitor the illegal use of the mobiles while driving, failure to use the seatbelt, illegal turns or driving wrongly on main roads. Ministry statistics show the total amount of traffic violations from Jan 1 till the end of November in 2022 amounted to 3.4 million. Accidents claimed 170 lives, it said, noting that lack of attention by drivers is the prime cause of accidents. —KUNA

Smart cams aim to boost road...

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help in reducing accidents that inflict human and material losses.

Meanwhile, Dr Badr Al-Rajhi, a law professor at Kuwait University, said the cameras will deter violators and reduce the number of accident victims. Adherence to laws is the "guarantee for our traffic security and safety on the roads", Dr Rajhi said. He concurred that using mobile phones while driving has proven to be the prime cause of accidents, advising drivers and riders to buckle up.

US freedom at stake? Gas stove debate sets Republicans aflame

WASHINGTON: Talk of a possible ban on gas cooking in the United States due to health fears has become the latest rallying cry for US Republicans, joining other more established lines of attack such as gun rights. The noisy debate was sparked by Richard Trumka Jr, a member of the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), saying that a ban could not be ruled out due to the "hidden hazard" of gas stove emissions.

"Any option is on the table. Products that can't be made safe can be banned," he told Bloomberg News this week following new research showing an increased risk of asthma in homes using gas-burning stoves. Republican elected officials quickly seized on the comments as evidence of Democrats' supposed wish to undermine American freedoms. "Gas stoves are the next thing the Biden Administration is coming after in their latest power grab," wrote Jeff Duncan, a US Representative from South Carolina.

"Democrats are coming for your kitchen appliances," echoed Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas. "Their desire to control every aspect of your life knows no bounds-including how you make breakfast." Some pointed to the supposed superiority of gas stoves - "electric stoves are garbage," tweeted conservative commentator Matt Walsh - while others pointed to the high cost of modern alternatives, such as induction burners.

Like many others, Republican firebrand Matt

Gaetz shared a video of a gas stove burning. The representative from Florida wrote: "You'll have to pry it from my COLD DEAD HANDS!" - echoing a famous remark shouted by late actor and gun lobby president Charlton Heston while raising a musket over his head. About 35 percent of US homes have gas stoves.

Potential 'health risks'

To try and tamp down the rising temperature, the White House and CPSC spoke out against any possible ban. "The president does not support banning gas stoves," said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. "And the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which is independent, is not banning gas stoves," she added. The chair of the five-member CPSC, Alex Hoehn-Saric, a Biden appointee, took to Twitter to "set the record straight". "To be clear, I am not looking to ban gas stoves and the CPSC has no proceeding to do so," he wrote.

He did however add that the commission "is researching gas emissions in stoves and exploring new ways to address health risks," and would seek public input on "reducing any associated risks". Recent peer-reviewed research - which has received some pushback from academics-says that 12 percent of childhood asthmas cases in the United States and Europe could be attributed to indoor gas stoves.

But Republicans say their position is not up for debate. "God. Gums. Gas stoves," tweeted Ohio's Jim Jordan, who leads the Judiciary Committee in the newly-Republican-controlled US House of Representatives. The debate "exemplifies the silliest tendencies of American politics," said the Atlantic Magazine. "A big nothing can morph into a huge controversy for no good reason at all." —AFP