



T-storm 90/74 • Tomorrow: T-storm 90/74 B20

Democracy Dies in Darkness

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Constraints hampered FEMA in Texas

New DHS expenditure rules delayed agency’s response to deadly floods

BY BRIANNA SACKS AND HANNAH NATANSON

Two days before torrential rains turned the Guadalupe River into a raging flood, a veteran official with the Federal Emergency Management Agency told The Washington Post that one of the main concerns for this disaster season was the agency’s ability to quickly deploy specialized search and rescue teams. The Trump administration’s new rules mean disaster specialists can no longer “make decisions” on their own.

The official then watched it happen in real time in Texas.

Deployments of critical resources, such as tactical and specialized search and rescue teams, were delayed as a result of a budget restriction requiring Homeland Security Secretary Kristi L. Noem to approve every purchase, contract and grant over \$100,000, according to a dozen current and former FEMA employees who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak with the media.

When rapidly responding to billion-dollar disasters, that “is basically everything,” said one current official.

Other efforts by the administration to constrain spending have hampered FEMA’s opera-

SEE FEMA ON A7

Out-of-blue removals stir fear at Justice, FBI

Firings, often without a reason given, have many worried they will be next

BY PERRY STEIN

The Trump administration is firing and pushing out employees across the Justice Department and FBI, often with no explanation or warning, creating rampant speculation and fear within the workforce over who might be terminated next, according to multiple people with knowledge of the removals who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid retribution.

Some people are simply fired, delivered a notice signed by Attorney General Pam Bondi that cites the broad powers afforded to the president in the U.S. Constitution. Others, particularly at the FBI, are told they can leave or be demoted or terminated.

The removals appear more individually targeted — and are happening in smaller numbers — than the high-profile ousters of senior Justice Department and FBI officials in the early months of President Donald Trump’s second term, when he vowed to clean house at the department that had brought two criminal cases against him.

SEE DOJ ON A4

Whistleblower: Messages support claim of DOJ defying court order. A4



For these survivors, life is a miracle

Astonishing stories emerge from the Texas tragedy’s floodwaters

BY DANA MUNRO, BRADY DENNIS, TIM CRAIG AND HOLLY BAILEY

KERRVILLE, TEXAS — The rain began as Stephanie Rodriguez started her nightly rounds as a security guard at Camp La Junta, an all-boys camp on the Guadalupe River. Within a few hours, it was pooling across the grounds and starting to rise.

She called her wife at about 1:30 a.m. and her boss about 45 minutes later to report the water was closing in on the campus. Rodriguez sought refuge on the second floor of the cafeteria building, she later recalled.

But the water kept coming and was soon rushing through the building’s doors. Before long, Rodriguez said objects in the room below her were floating, including the kitchen’s large gas oven, which had dislodged from its fuel line with a hiss. Water started rising up the staircase,



PHOTOS BY DANIELLE VILLASANA/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

FROM TOP: Joan Connor, 81, looks at her waterlogged items on her back patio in Ingram, Texas. Connor and her 98-year-old husband swam out of their flooded home. Mud lines from the flood mark the highest water levels in a home in Ingram.

step by step.

The building began to creak. The water below had merged with the river, she saw, its swift current whisking everything in its path out the back door, including the stairs. Within seconds, the walls of the building began to cave, and the second floor where she stood began to buckle.

“I just said, ‘God I’m going to die,’” Rodriguez, 30, recalled, her voice cracking and her eyes swelling with tears. “I went in.” Swallowed up, she fought to stay above the water, grasping for something to keep her afloat.

Aware she was being sucked into the river, Rodriguez finally grabbed a large orange water cooler, her body tumbling as she dodged cars, boats, tables, doors, trees, and jagged pieces of broken fence that shot through the water like deadly spears. She feared she might not see her wife and children again.

“I just said, ‘God please ... God please give me my family back,’” she recalled.

Rodriguez fought to keep her head above water. At one point, she became lodged in a fence, where she “held for my life.” She screamed for help, but there was

SEE TEXAS ON A6

War, amputation and the toll of all she’s lost

Far from strife that tore at her body and family, Gaza teen learns to walk again

BY CAITLIN GIBSON

From the moment she awakened, even before she knew where she was, she understood what she had lost. Immobilized in a hospital bed, 17-year-old Marah Maher surfaced into a new awareness of her body: There was shrapnel embedded in her shattered shoulder, a deep wound sewn shut across her throat, bruises and abrasions covering her face and torso. She felt the pain first, and then, below her thighs, she felt nothing at all.

After five days in a coma at the Emirati field hospital in southern Gaza, Marah’s eyes fluttered open, and the doctors ran to get her father from a nearby waiting area.

His stricken face soon appeared above hers. “Oh, my daughter,” he said, “I am broken.” She knew then that she must be seriously injured.

“How is my niece?” Marah asked immediately. She needed to know that her sister’s youngest daughter — the lone survivor of an Israeli missile strike that had killed her parents and only sibling in northern Gaza nearly three months earlier — was safe.

“She’s fine,” Marah’s father assured her. “She’s with your aunt.” This was not true, but he couldn’t bear to tell his daughter, not yet. He didn’t want her to know that her niece had been killed in the bombing Marah had just survived; he didn’t want Marah to know that her mother was in another room in the same hospital, one of her legs burned nearly to the bone.

Marah heard his answer, then sank back into unconsciousness.

When she awoke again, her cousin was beside her. “What happened?” Marah asked her. “Why can’t I feel my legs?”

“There was a bombing,” her cousin said, “but you are okay — your legs are okay.”

SEE AMPUTATION ON A10

Strike at Gaza clinic: Over a dozen died, many of them children. A12



WASHINGTON POST ILLUSTRATION; FAMILY PHOTO

Marah Maher went to the U.S. after a 2024 attack that led to her legs’ amputation above the knee.

IN THE NEWS

‘Triage’ for customers The Social Security Administration is reassigning field office staff to answer its overwhelmed 1-800 number amid cutbacks and a surge in callers. A2

Russian attacks continue Forces hit Ukraine with hundreds of drones and missiles — Kyiv in particular — in an overnight barrage. A13

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