

# Attempt on PM Mustafa Al-Kadhimi's life shows destructive effect of pro-Iran factions on Iraqi state

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IRBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: In the early hours of Nov. 7, three quadcopter drones armed with explosives detonated inside the grounds of the official residence of Iraq's prime minister, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, injuring seven members of his security detail.

Al-Kadhimi, who escaped with only light injuries, promptly released a statement appealing for calm. The question as to who was behind the attack, however, remained unanswered and open to speculation.

Topping the list of likely conspirators are fighters affiliated with Iraq's vast network of Iran-backed Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi militias, also known as the Popular Mobilization Forces.

Established in 2014 during the war against Daesh, these groups have since morphed into something of a fifth column within the Iraqi state, officially absorbed into the state security apparatus, but largely operating under their own chain of command.

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# MUSTAFA AL-KADHIMI IRAQI PRIME MINISTER

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- Born in Baghdad in 1967. He studied law in Iraq but left for Europe to escape the dictator Saddam Hussein, working as an opposition journalist.
- Returned to Iraq after the US-led 2003 invasion toppled Hussein, working as a human rights advocate.
- Handpicked by then PM Haider Al-Abadi in 2016 to head the National Intelligence Service (INIS).
- Became prime minister in May 2020.
- Survived an assassination attempt on Nov. 7, 2021.

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ARABNEWS

They have carried out similar drone attacks in recent months, targeting US troops stationed in Iraq and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region with the aim of forcing their withdrawal.

If Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi was indeed responsible for the attempt on Al-Kadhimi's life, it raises the question: Did Iran sanction the attack?

Kyle Orton, an independent Middle East analyst, believes the identity of the culprit or culprits behind the attack on Al-Kadhimi's residence is murky by design, giving the Iran-backed militias the luxury of plausible deniability.

"Iran's militia network, especially in Iraq over the last few years, has worked to create various splinter groups to claim responsibility for some of their more politically sensitive attacks," Orton told Arab News.

“It isn’t clear whether these groups actually exist beyond social media – at most, they are cells answerable to preexisting Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-run militias.”

The IRGC and its extraterritorial Quds Force exert tight control over their Iraqi militia proxies, their personnel, training, finances and access to weaponry, including explosive-laden drones, and demand total ideological loyalty to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Such a brazen attack “does not proceed if Tehran does not want it to,” said Orton. “Again, exactly how this came about – whether it was an order from IRGC Quds Force leader Esmail Qaani or a Qaani non-veto of a militia initiative – we will probably never know.”



Security forces inspect the aftermath of a drone strike on the prime minister’s residence. (AFP)

Then there is the question of whether the militias actually intended to assassinate Al-Kadhimi or simply wanted to intimidate him and send a message.

In May 2020, militiamen encircled Al-Kadhimi’s residence in Baghdad’s fortified Green Zone in an apparent attempt to apply pressure on him. That was most likely because Al-Kadhimi has consistently sought to strengthen Iraqi state institutions, curtail the power of these militias, and restore genuine Iraqi sovereignty since he assumed office.

Orton, however, has little doubt the attackers were out to kill Al-Kadhimi on Nov. 7. “There has been a lot of analysis suggesting that this was a warning to Al-Kadhimi, rather than an attempt to assassinate him, but this strikes me as too clever by half,” he told Arab News.





If Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi was indeed responsible for the attempt on Al-Kadhimi's life, it raises the question: Did Iran sanction the attack?

"Al-Kadhimi was injured in the attack and it strains credulity to believe that the IRGC agents who did this had calculated it to injure seven of his bodyguards and wound the prime minister, but kill nobody."

The timing of the attack was also hardly coincidental. In October, Iraq held parliamentary elections, which had been a core demand of the popular grassroots protest movement that began in October 2019 against rampant corruption, unemployment and Iranian influence.

Several of Tehran's consulates and missions across the country were torched by Iraq's young protesters, who have increasingly come to view Iran as a foreign occupying power. Iran-backed militias responded by killing hundreds of demonstrators.

The protest movement nevertheless succeeded in forcing then-prime minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi to step down, clearing the way for new elections. However, the Oct. 10 ballot saw the country's lowest ever turnout at just 41 percent.



The IRGC and its extraterritorial Quds Force exert tight control over their Iraqi militia proxies. (AFP)

Iran-backed political factions fared poorly. The Fatah Alliance won a paltry 17 seats, a substantial loss compared to the 48 they secured in 2018. Al-Sadr's alliance, Sayirun, meanwhile, increased its share, taking 73 of the parliament's 329 seats.

Given the desire of Al-Sadr and his supporters to reduce foreign influence in Iraq, the result came as a blow to Iran's regional strategy. Insisting that the election had been rigged, militia supporters came out in strength to demand a manual recount.

Qais Al-Khazali, leader of the Iran-backed Asaib Ahl Al-Haq militia, joined the protests against the result the night before the drone attack on the prime minister's residence, during which he accused Al-Kadhimi of orchestrating the "fraudulent" election results.

"The timing is surely related to the aftermath of the election," said Orton. "The attacks on people close to Al-Kadhimi, particularly senior officers, a number of whom were murdered, began months ago, when the militias could see Al-Kadhimi forging a coalition against them ahead of the elections."

## Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Orton believes that Al-Kadhimi will stay the course in his efforts to cement the authority of the Iraqi state. “The prime minister is likely to continue his policy of trying to rein in the militias through legal instruments, whether it’s indictments for attacks on demonstrators or corruption,” he said.

But, as the Nov. 7 attack shows, Al-Kadhimi’s success is not necessarily guaranteed. “If Iran feels seriously threatened in Iraq, it has tools beyond a no-confidence motion in parliament to change the Iraqi prime minister,” Orton said.

Not everyone is convinced that the perpetrators intended to kill Al-Kadhimi, or that the message was intended solely for him.

## FINGERPRINTS OF PRO-IRAN MILITIAS

Where the US has been targeted in recent months in Iraq and Syria



ARAB NEWS

“Certain Iran-backed militias with connections to both Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl Al-Haq were trying to send Al-Kadhimi a message to back off,” Nicholas Heras, senior analyst and program head for State Resilience and Fragility in the Human Security Unit at the Newlines Institute, told Arab



News.

“But they’re also trying to signal more widely, to Al-Sadr, that they can choose violence if they are frozen out of the political spoils in Iraq.”

Al-Sadr has burnished his credentials as an Iraqi nationalist by repeatedly calling for militias in the country to be disarmed and for their weapons to be handed over to state security forces.

“This attack likely occurred with the knowledge of Iran, but Iran likely tried to discourage it, and the attack happened anyway,” Heras said.



Al-Kadhimi has consistently sought to strengthen Iraqi state institutions, curtail the power of these militias

The question now is how Al-Kadhimi ought to respond to the attack. “Al-Kadhimi’s next move is fraught with peril,” said Heras. “He can escalate and take on these militias head-on and risk a civil conflict within the Iraqi Shiite community.

“But if he backs down and does not respond, he creates a bad precedent of tacit acceptance of this behavior that could establish a norm in Iraq for years to come.

“Therefore, Al-Kadhimi is most likely to go the route of police action, with arrests and trials.”

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Mustafa Al-Kadhimi is seen as Iraq's safest pair of hands

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## [Probe launched after video shows emaciated patients tied to filthy beds in Lebanese healthcare center](#)

Sat, 2021-11-13 22:11

BEIRUT: Lebanese health officials have launched an investigation after video images reportedly filmed by a doctor showed emaciated patients tied to filthy beds in a city healthcare center.

The footage documented by the Wataawanou Association charity, sparked public outrage when broadcast on news channels on Friday.

It highlighted poor conditions in rooms and corridors at the Santa Maria



Healthcare Center in Byblos that caters for 55 male and 15 female patients with neurological and mental illnesses.

Shots showed skeletal-looking patients sitting or lying on dirty beds, unable to speak, and some with their hands strapped to the bed. Pots with spoiled food and loaves of moldy bread were seen in a kitchen, and other images appeared to depict unhygienic bathrooms.

After the video went viral, Lebanese Health Minister Dr. Firas Abiad and Minister of Social Affairs Hector Hajjar visited the center on Saturday to inspect the premises along with a team of experts from the World Health Organization's office in Lebanon.

"An investigation has been opened to hold those responsible accountable and define the reasons why the center reached such a deteriorating state without informing the ministry, which has a duty to ensure that its patients are treated in good conditions," Abiad said.

The ministry has arranged for the Santa Maria patients to be moved to other facilities pending the completion of a clean-up operation there.

A similar health scandal was exposed in February 2019 at Al-Fanar Hospital in Al-Msayleh, in southern Lebanon. Again, patients were transferred to other health centers, including the one at Byblos which received 38 people out of around 90.

Following the airing of the latest footage, officials at Santa Maria Healthcare Center reportedly attempted a swift clean up and prevented journalists from entering the premises.

Abiad told Arab News: "Despite the attempt to clean up, what we have seen shows great neglect and the extent to which the economic crisis in Lebanon has affected the center."

Lebanon is in the midst of an economic and financial meltdown which has left 55 percent of the country's population below the poverty line.

"All social welfare centers in the world are facing problems, but many reasons have led us here in Lebanon," Abiad added. "The patients' families do not check on them. They leave them in the centers and forget about them. If one family had complained, we would have acted.

"In addition, the health observers affiliated with our ministry are no longer doing their job. The health observer who is supposed to visit the center said that the cost of coming here from Beirut has become equivalent to half of his monthly salary.

"The Ministry of Health pays the center 24,000 Lebanese pounds (\$15.88) per day on behalf of each patient it hosts, but this amount is no longer worth anything.

"The director of the center told me that the state is no longer pumping water in the region because of the lack of diesel in the stations, and he has to

buy water himself, which is extremely costly, so it is natural for cleaning services to worsen and consequently the patients' hygiene," the minister said.

However, he pointed out that none of these issues justified the situation at the healthcare center.

Abiad noted that there were around 50 other centers in Lebanon offering similar services, and that the ministry had distributed 2,000 cards to patients this year allowing them access to the facilities.

"Thousands of others already have this card while other patients have been placed in such centers by their families who cannot provide them with the required health services," he said.

Santa Maria Healthcare Center director, Joseph Harb, said he had "not received the fees the center is due since the beginning of 2021, amounting to 900 million Lebanese pounds, which constitutes a major obstacle to securing water, fuel, and food."

Abiad added: "These centers have not received their dues because of the delay in contracts awaiting transfer of credits for payment. The unpaid dues are calculated based on the official rate, that is 1,507 Lebanese pounds to the dollar, while the costs these centers have to endure are very high. This also applies to first-class hospitals and associations, which causes a major problem.

"The healthcare system in Lebanon is unfair. The severe economic crisis has further revealed its flaws and disadvantages," he said.



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## [Jordan dam reserves at all-time low as water crisis looms](#)

Sat, 2021-11-13 19:39

AMMAN: Amid a delay in rainfall, Jordan's major dams are either completely empty or facing critically low water levels, putting the country on the verge of an unprecedented drought crisis should dry weather conditions persist.

Of the kingdom's 14 major dams, three are now empty, according to officials, who said that emergency plans are being put in place to save farmers in the fertile Jordan Valley, known as the food basket of Jordan.



In recent remarks to Arab News, Omar Salameh, spokesperson of the water ministry, said that the Waleh, Mujib and Tanour dams in the southern desert regions have dried up due to crippling drought.

Salameh added that the King Talal and Wadi El Arab dams in the north are not yet empty, but are reporting critically low water levels.

“All in all, all the country’s dams have reached their lowest water levels due to extremely dry seasons over the past two years,” he said.

The official explained that the 2020-2021 rain season – from December to May – was “very low” and brought 60 percent less rainfall than the annual average.

“This coupled with high temperatures and high demand on water has led to all the consequences we are having now.”

However, citing data from the Jordan Meteorological Department, the official said that the delay in rainfall is “not exceptional” and that “it’s still too early to declare an emergency water situation.”

In a recent report, the JMD said that delayed rainfall is expected as a result of climate change, adding that rainfall in autumn makes up less than 20 percent of the total wet season.

Salameh said that the ministry has put in place short and long-term plans to address a possible dry season.

With low water storage in dams meaning less water to be portioned out to farmers, Minister of Agriculture Khaled Hneifat announced that farmers in the Jordan Valley are now permitted to drill wells to access groundwater for irrigation – a practice that was previously prohibited in the country.

During a recent meeting with the Lower House’s water and agriculture committee, Secretary General of the Water Authority of Jordan Bashar Bataineh said that Jordan’s water deficit in 2021 stands at 40 million cubic meters, of which half is in Amman, the densely populated capital of about 4 million people.

Head of the Jordan Valley Farmers’ Union Adnan Khaddam blamed the government for the “risky” water situation, adding that it “stood idly by and took no action.”

Khaddam was quoted in local media outlets as saying that the King Talal Dam, the largest in the kingdom, has reached “dangerously low levels.”

He added: “The dam covers 80 percent of the water needs of farmers in the Jordan Valley, but the available quantity in the dam is very low,” he said, warning of serious drought if rain does not arrive.

### **National conveyor project**

Jordan, classified as the world’s second most water-scarce country, announced

the launch of the Aqaba-Amman Water Desalination and Conveyance National Project (AAWDC), described as “the largest water generation scheme to be implemented in the history of the kingdom.”

During a meeting with lawmakers, Bataineh of Jordan’s Water Authority said that the megaproject will “ensure the country’s water stability until 2040.”

The water ministry announced that the AAWDC, once completed, will generate 130 million cubic meters of water each year.

Launching the project’s first phase in February 2020, the government said that the AAWDC will be implemented on a build-operate-transfer basis and will provide a sustainable water resource for future generations in all parts of the kingdom.

The government said at the time that the strategic scheme is part of the Jordan’s efforts to adapt to climate change, dwindling water resources and population growth.

### **Additional water from Israel**

On Oct. 12, Jordan signed an agreement with Israel to purchase an additional 50 million cubic meters of water outside the framework of the peace agreement and what it stipulates in regard to water quantities.

The additional water Israel will provide will come from the Sea of Galilee.

The water ministry issued a statement at the time, quoting an unnamed source who said that the agreement was signed following a meeting in Amman of technical committees from both sides.

The agreement “was proof that we want good neighborly relations,” Karine Elharrar, Israel’s minister of infrastructure, energy and water resources, told Israeli media.

Jordan and Israel in July said that they had reached a deal under which the latter will sell an additional 50 million cubic meters of water annually to the kingdom following a meeting between the foreign ministers of both countries.



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Forum offers game-changing solution for Arab water scarcity  
Saudi Arabia attends Cairo conference to discuss regional water security action plan

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## [Calls mount for Israel to free Palestinians on hunger strike](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-11-13 00:31

JERUSALEM: Israel is facing growing calls to release five Palestinians who have been on hunger strike for weeks to protest a controversial policy of holding them indefinitely without charge, including one who has been fasting for 120 days and is in severe condition.

Israel says the policy, known as “administrative detention,” is needed to detain suspects without disclosing sensitive intelligence, while the Palestinians and human rights groups say it denies them due process. Suspects can be held for months or years without seeing the evidence against them.

Palestinians have been holding rallies across the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza in solidarity with the hunger strike and to protest against administrative detention. Prisoners have held a number of hunger strikes in recent years to protest the policy and to campaign for better prison conditions, but the latest appears to be among the most serious.

The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment.

The five Palestinians, ranging in age from 28 to 45, have been on hunger strike for at least 32 days. A sixth prisoner ended his 113-day hunger strike on Thursday after being told he will be released in three months, his lawyer said.

Kayed Fafous, 32, has been on hunger strike for at least 120 days and is hospitalized in Israel. His weight has dropped from 95 to 45 kilograms, according to a recent evaluation by Dr. Amit Tirosh, an Israeli physician, on behalf of Physicians for Human Rights-Israel.

He drinks around 1.5 liters of water a day and takes a few grains of sugar at a time, but stopped consuming salt because it upset his stomach and is refusing infusions. He has difficulty speaking, suffers short-term memory

loss, hearing difficulty and a permanent headache, raising concerns of cognitive damage, the report said. Tirosh said his condition is "life-threatening" and that even if he stops the hunger strike, he will still need to spend several weeks in the hospital.

Tirosh said that a hunger strikes can cause "severe, prolonged and irreparable" brain and cognitive damage.

Fasfous' detention has been suspended on health grounds, but Israel has refused his request to be transferred to a hospital in the occupied West Bank, where he says he would halt his hunger strike.

"The hospital becomes kind of a prison," said Ran Goldstein, the executive director of Physicians for Human Rights-Israel. "He is not arrested anymore, however, he cannot leave Israel."

Fasfous would also be subject to arrest again once he recovers. Israel regularly detains Palestinian suspects from across the occupied West Bank, including in areas governed by the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority.

Hundreds of Palestinians, including Fasfous' brother, took part in a demonstration in the West Bank town of Dhahiriya on Thursday in solidarity with the hunger strikers.

"The only demand of Kayed is freedom," said his brother, Khalid Fasfous. He said his brother told the family "he will be victorious if he is released or if he is martyred."

An Israeli prison service official said three of the hunger strikers are in stable condition under 24-hour medical supervision in a prison medical facility, while another, who has been fasting for 30 days, does not require that degree of care.

Miqdad Qawasmeh, 24, who had been on hunger strike for 113 days, ended his strike early Thursday after being told he will be released in February, said his lawyer, Jawad Boulos.

Israel's prison service said it is holding at least 488 people in administrative detention.

Roy Yellin, of the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, said administrative detainees are held in "a Kafkaesque legal reality that Israel has created specifically for Palestinians under which they are detained for an indefinite period of time without real legal recourse to prove their innocence."

He said administrative detainees are often held on suspicion that they might carry out an attack, with military judges granting "rubber-stamp" approval.

"Administrative detention is a measure that Israel used almost exclusively for Palestinians and almost never for Jews," he said, calling it part of the "apartheid reality" of Israeli rule.



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[hunger strike](#)

Palestinians demand Israel release prisoner on 112-day hunger strike  
Palestinian prisoners in Israel call off planned hunger strike

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## [Egypt's Expo 2020 Dubai pavilion heralds a future well-grounded in the past](#)

Fri, 2021-11-12 23:11

DUBAI: The Egypt pavilion has proved, unsurprisingly, a major attraction of Expo 2020 Dubai. Since the inception of World Expos in the 19th century, the country has consistently taken part in the event, attending as a marquee participant in the 1851 Great Exhibition in London.

Egypt's pavilions and displays at previous World Expos have historically been among the most popular and prominent, often focused on the nation's agricultural and industrial growth as well as its rich history.



For instance, one guidebook from the 1851 show mentions “a fine exhibit of Egypt’s chemical products.” Then, between 1876 and 1904, Egypt used World Expos to stimulate interest in its cotton industry and the infrastructure that supported it, such as bridges and railroads.

But above all, Egypt has always been ahead of the game in developing an experiential format for World Expos, adding sensory richness and a feeling of “being there” to its displays.

Again, looking back to 1851, one commentator noted: “The Egyptian exhibit was one of the larger exhibits ... its entrance consisted of an arch suggesting entry into an ancient Egyptian temple.”



Since the inception of World Expos in the 19th century, Egypt has consistently taken part in the event, and always been a major attraction. Dubai 2020 is no different. (AFP)

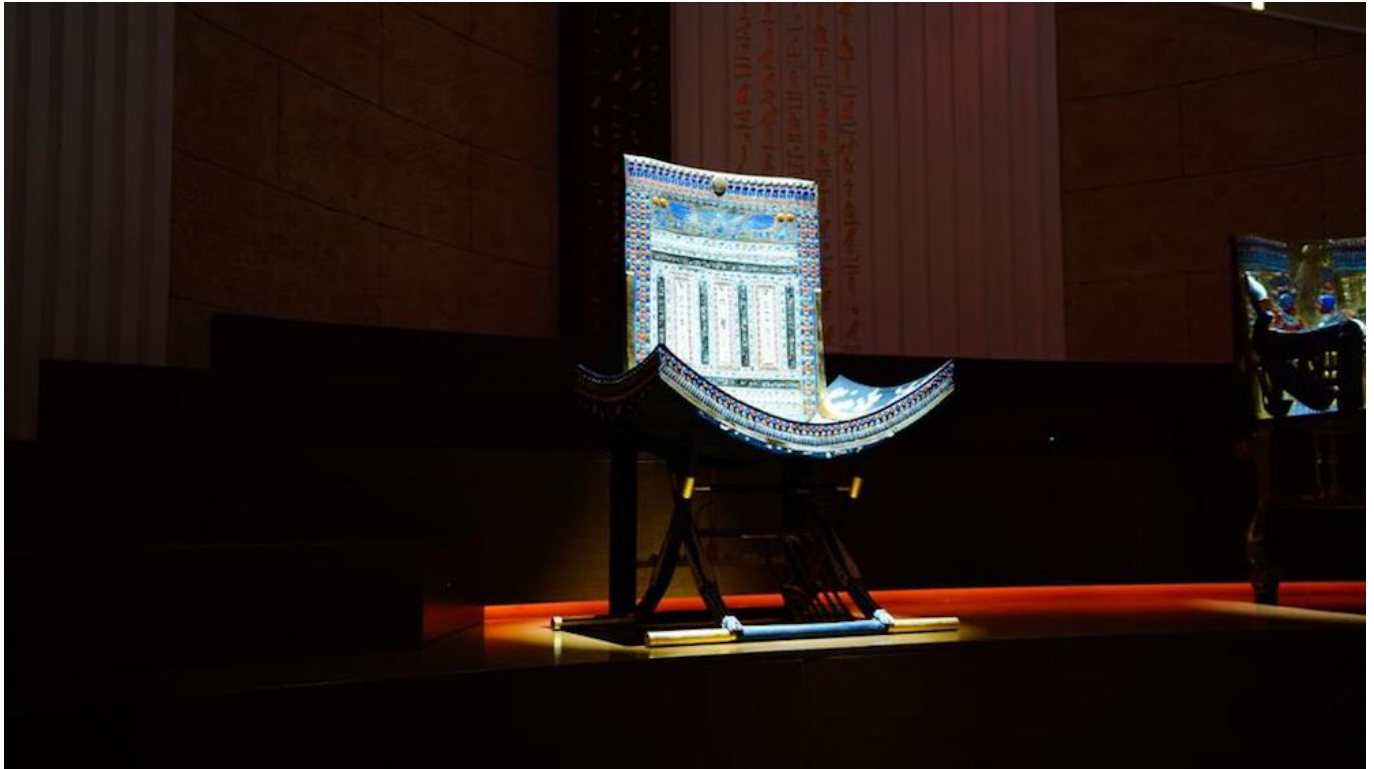
Similarly, media reports from the St. Louis World’s Fair of 1904 said: “The greatest attraction of all, undoubtedly, is the ‘Streets of Cairo’ with its 180 men, women and children, theaters, camels, donkeys, and dogs.”

Little of this showmanship has been lost in the decades since. At Expo 2020 Dubai, Egypt again used its pavilion to showcase its national story, while carefully curating an ambitious vision for its future.

Designed by Egyptian architect Hazem Hamada, the pavilion covers 3,000 square meters and combines the authenticity of Egypt’s remarkable history while simultaneously highlighting its ambitious Vision 2030 agenda.

The four-story pavilion has a prime location close to Morocco and Saudi Arabia in the Opportunity District. In a nod to its heritage, the building is imprinted with hieroglyphics, while three sharp angles near the entrance are

indicative of its iconic pyramids.



Designed by Egyptian architect Hazem Hamada, the pavilion covers 3,000 square meters and combines the authenticity of Egypt's remarkable history. (AFP)

The structure stands in stark contrast to its neighbor Switzerland, whose pavilion is a mix of steel, cubic architecture, and a mirrored facade – old and new, standing side by side, each bold and unique in their own way.

Upon entering the Egyptian pavilion, visitors are taken through a 15-minute guided tour of a series of displays drawing on the key moments of Egyptian history. Visitors are both guided by a “real life” host and welcomed by a virtual guide, highlighting Egypt's duality of authenticity and modernity.

The opening display welcomes visitors in music and cascading projections of golden hieroglyphics that flow down the walls like rain. Alongside these digital manifestations of modernity are the famed artifacts of Egypt's past.

One notable exhibit is the sarcophagus of the priest Psammitic, son of Pediosit, recently discovered in the archaeological dig sites of Saqqara. An instantly recognizable replica of King Tutankhamun's golden funerary mask is accompanied by replicas of three of his sarcophagi.

#### **FASTFACT**

**\* 3,000sqm – Area of the Egypt pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, standing at 19m in height & spread across 4 levels.**

**\* 3 – Original antique Pharaoh statues on display, offering a glimpse of what's in store at the Grand Egyptian Museum.**

**\* 4,000 – Years of trade & innovation attached to Egypt’s name – a unique brand to attract new investment.**

These pieces offer visitors a tantalizing glimpse of things to come when Cairo’s much-anticipated Grand Egyptian Museum finally opens its doors, where the largest collection of Tutankhamen relics will be put on display together – several for the first time since their discovery.

As with Egypt’s previous World Expo forays, the 2020 pavilion is carefully balanced to leave not only a lasting cultural impact but also to convey a bigger message.

Several displays emphasize Egypt’s Vision 2030 agenda and the range of sustainable development opportunities it has to offer. Organizers are keen to present Egypt as a favorable investment destination connecting the world to the African continent.

The Suez Canal Economic Zone, Egypt’s smart cities, and its tourism developments are just a few of the nation’s investment vehicles of choice.



The pavilion’s “finale” brings everything together in a digital collage of art, music, and dance, combining tradition with vision, old with new. (AFP)

By telling the story of its ancient civilization, the Egyptian pavilion’s message to investors is this: Let history be our guide. With some 4,000 years of innovation and trade attached to its name, Egypt can argue its vision is built upon raw experience.

The pavilion’s “finale” brings everything together in a digital collage of art, music, and dance, combining tradition with vision, old with new, water with desert, green landscapes with blue oceans, and modern trade with ancient crafts. It is a bold, unique, engaging, and impressive display.



Throughout the six months of Expo 2020 Dubai, the Egyptian pavilion will host important figures from science, sport, the arts, and culture. It is staging more than a hundred events on topics ranging from urban development and tourism to sustainable development, agriculture, and quality of life for women and young people.

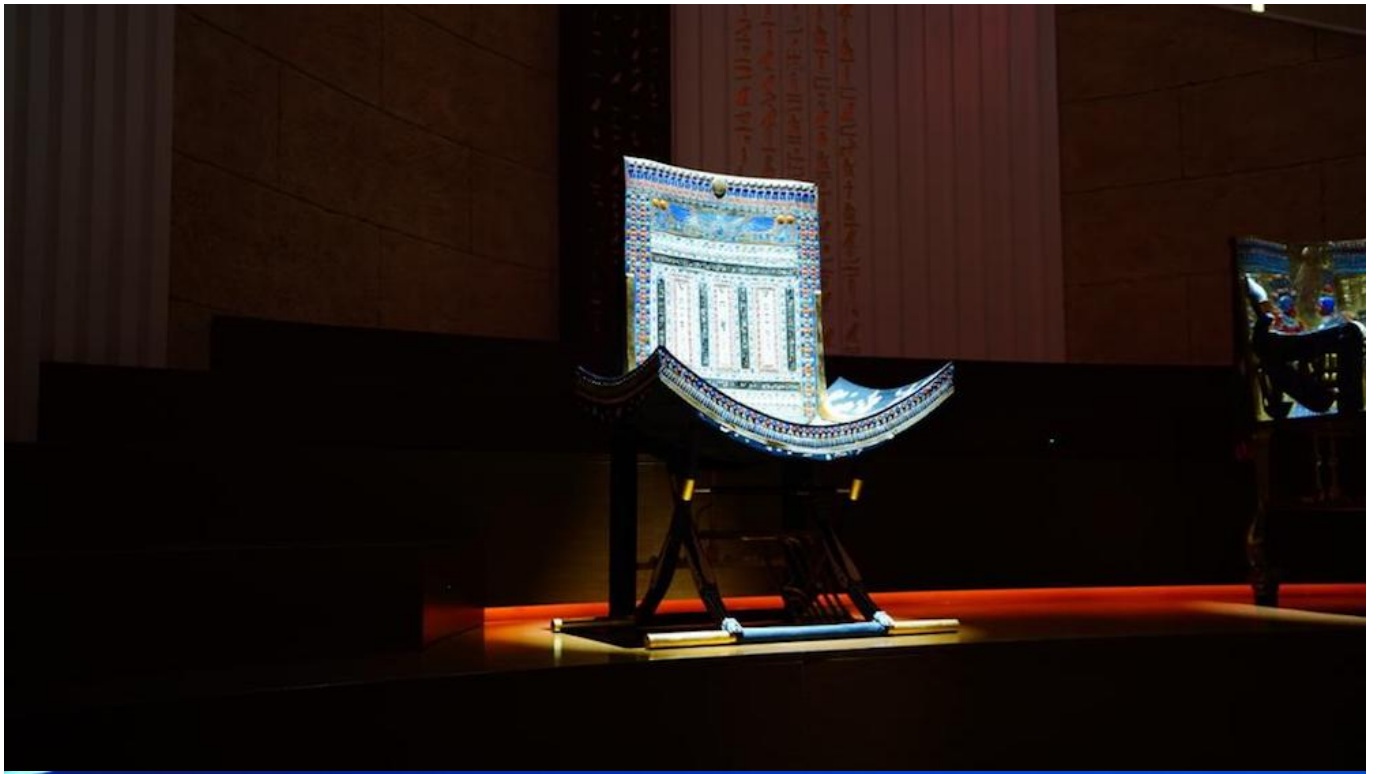
In addition, it is hosting nine exhibitions on antiquities, education, real estate, and investment, which will feature workshops, seminars, networking events, and cultural salons.

Given its long and proud history of World Expos, it is scarcely surprising that Egypt's organizing committee knows how to draw a crowd. And with such a jam-packed program of events on offer, it will no doubt build on this well-earned reputation, in this and many World Expos to come.















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Expo 2020 Dubai visit figure approaches 3 million Jordan's PM visits Dubai for Expo 2020