

Egyptian president and Iraqi defense minister discuss issues of common interest

Sun, 2021-08-08 22:45

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi met Iraqi Defense Minister Juma Inad Saadoun and discussed issues of common interest with him.

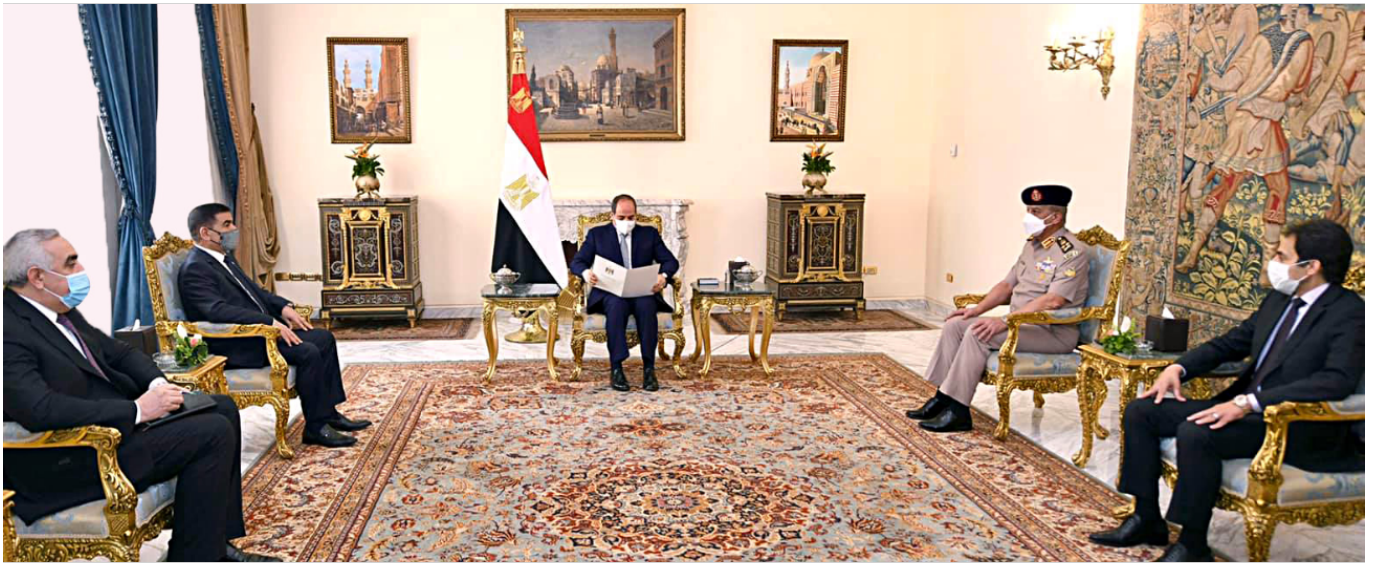
The official spokesman for the presidency said the minister conveyed a message from Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi and that the message included appreciation for Egyptian efforts in support of Iraqi issues.

Iraq was looking forward to strengthening cooperation with Egypt and considered its role a "strategic depth for the Arab nation," the message said.

Al-Kadhimi stressed that the main challenges were combating terrorism and achieving security, stability and development.

According to the spokesman, El-Sisi affirmed Egypt's keenness to cooperate with Iraq in all fields and pledged to continue working on issues that would achieve the interests of Iraq and its people at various levels, help it overcome all challenges, combat terrorism, and maintain its security and stability.

The meeting also dealt with bilateral military cooperation, including joint training programs, exchanging experiences and raising capabilities, said the spokesman.



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Egypt's El-Sisi extends services of financial regulator, Suez canal heads
Egypt FM delivers message from El-Sisi to Bahrain's king during official visit

Tunisia launches vaccine 'open day' against Delta-driven spike

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Sun, 2021-08-08 15:51

TUNIS: Tunisia on Sunday launched a Covid-19 vaccination drive for the over-40s, after receiving more than six million doses from abroad to combat surging infections.

More than 300 centers across the country held an "open day" for vaccinations, drawing large crowds, AFP correspondents said.

Tunisia, in the thick of political and economic crises, has received more than six million doses from Western and Arab countries, and the same number of additional vaccines are on the way, President Kais Saied said Thursday. Saied, who last month dismissed the government – in part due to its alleged bungling of the Covid crisis – and suspended parliament, has announced the establishment of a coronavirus crisis unit supervised by a high-level military official.

Tunisian authorities now aim to have vaccinated 50 percent of the country's 12-million population with a first jab by mid-October.

A first "open day" of inoculations held in July was abandoned when the vaccination centers were overwhelmed by high demand and lack of organization. The World Health Organization said last week that Tunisia, which has the world's worst officially declared Covid-19 death toll, may be over the peak of the latest wave but the government must still speed up inoculations.

"The epidemiological data are going in the right direction," the WHO representative in Tunisia, Yves Souteyrand, told a press conference.

The Delta variant is responsible for "more than 90 percent" of cases in Tunisia, which on Sunday registered 2,546 new cases, raising infections to a total of 610,660 with almost 21,000 deaths.





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Gold medal success at Tokyo 2020 gave Tunisia 'hope': swimmer Ahmed Hafnaoui
Tunisia's president says there is 'no turning back'

[Iran's Raisi names US-sanctioned Mokhber as first VP](#)

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1628437650647755000

Sun, 2021-08-08 14:28

TEHRAN: Iran's new ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi on Sunday named the chairman of a powerful state-owned foundation sanctioned by the United States as his first vice president, the president's official website said.

Mohammad Mokhber, long rumored by local media to be top pick for the position, has for years headed the foundation known as Setad, or the Execution of Imam Khomeini's order, in reference to the Islamic republic's founder Ruhollah Khomeini.

Mokhber was appointed to the position by the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2007, following a string of official positions at the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

The Setad was originally founded in the late 1980s to manage confiscated properties following the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

It has since turned into a sprawling conglomerate with stakes in various industries, including health, and its Barekat Foundation produced out Iran's first local Covid-19 vaccine project.

The vaccine received emergency approval in June from health authorities in the Middle East's worst-hit country.

The Setad and Mokhber were blacklisted by the US Treasury in January.

Washington had said that Setad "has a stake in nearly every sector of the Iranian economy, including energy, telecommunications, and financial services."

Raisi, who won a June 18 election marked by record abstention, takes over from moderate Hassan Rouhani.

On Thursday, Raisi took the oath of office before parliament, to which he must present a list of ministers within two weeks.

A former judiciary chief, Raisi has been criticized by the West for his human rights record and sanctioned by the US since 2019.

Raisi also picked Gholamhossein Esmaili, the judiciary's spokesman during his tenure, as his chief of staff.

A former prosecutor, Esmaili is under sanctions by the European Union.

He was first blacklisted in 2011 as Iran's prisons' organization chief over "serious human rights violations."

Raisi's presidency is due to consolidate power in the hands of conservatives following their 2020 parliamentary election victory, which was marked by the disqualification of thousands of reformist or moderate candidates.

Also on Sunday, ultraconservative MP and 2021 presidential candidate Alireza Zakani was elected as mayor of Tehran, state news agency IRNA reported.

He won the majority of conservative-dominated city council votes, but he cannot take over before resigning from the parliament, it said.

He succeeds Pirouz Hanachi, a veteran public servant with a background in urban development seen as close to the reformist camp.

Zakani has served in parliament between 2004 and 2016, and won a seat again last year.

A doctor in nuclear medicine, aged 55, he dropped out of the June presidential race in favor of Raisi.



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Iran sees highest daily virus case, death counts in pandemic UAE minister meets Iran's newly elected president in Tehran

[Beirut blast survivors lose hope as Lebanon lurches from one crisis to another](#)

Sat, 2021-08-07 23:02

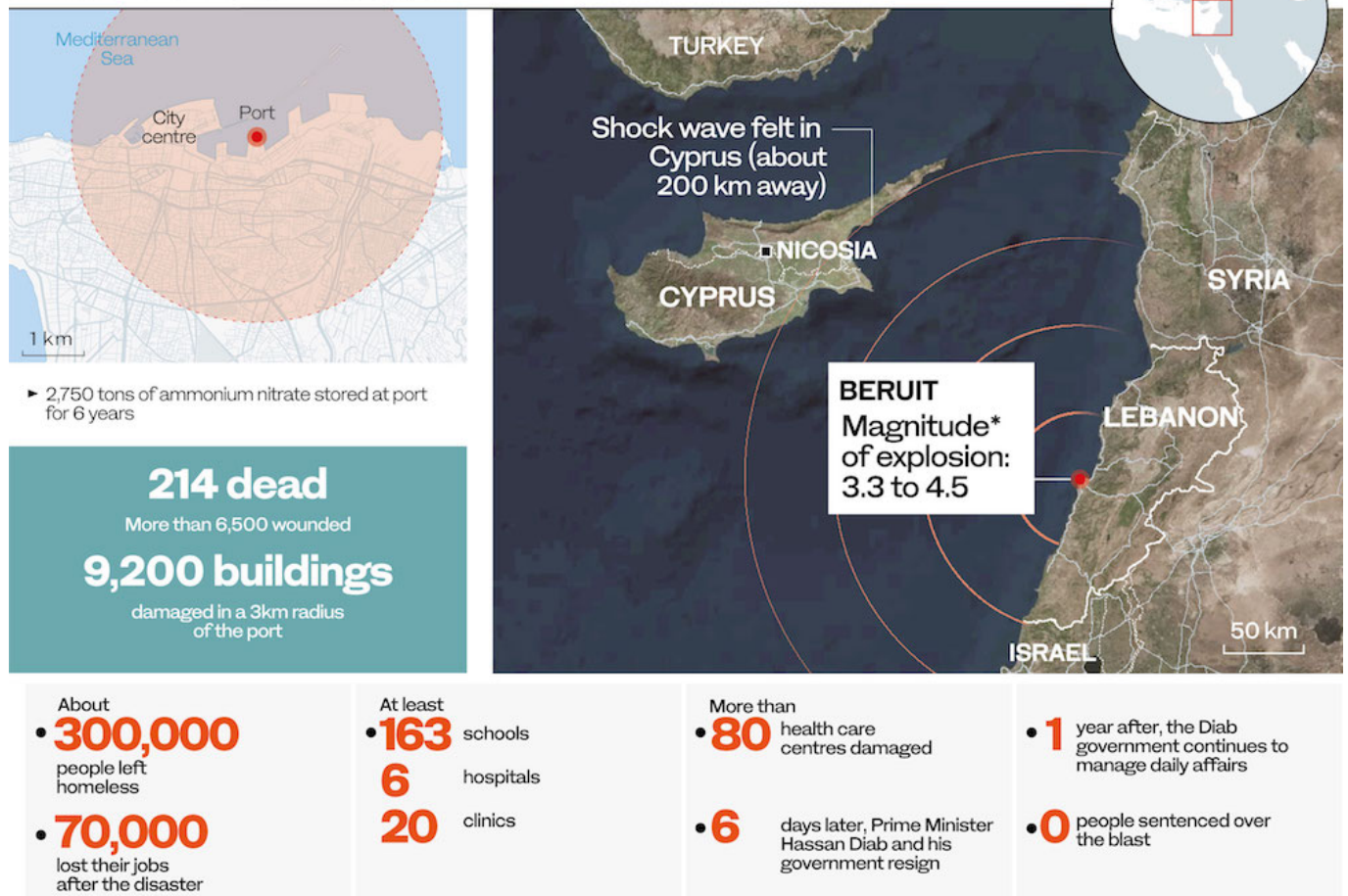
DUBAI: A year has passed since an explosion devastated Beirut and the lives of its inhabitants. More than 200 people died and tens of thousands were left homeless when a huge cache of improperly stored ammonium nitrate ignited inside a warehouse at the Port of Beirut, triggering a blast from which the shockwave was felt as far away as Cyprus.

The disaster befell a population already reeling from months of hardship following the collapse of Lebanon's banking system, multiple waves of COVID-19 outbreaks, and a government too paralyzed by infighting to respond.

Baydzig Kalaydjian, a Lebanese-Armenian teacher and journalist, was in Cyprus when the blast occurred. She quickly returned to Beirut and now volunteers at DAFA, a campaign group that provides food parcels, clothes, and helps renovate homes.

A YEAR ON FROM THE EXPLOSION IN BEIRUT

On Aug. 4, 2020, the explosion of hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate stored at the port shook the Lebanese capital



Sources: UN, AFP bureaus

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*Richter scale

ARAB NEWS

“That day, as Lebanese, we were brutally killed,” said Kalaydjian, one of whose friends lost both eyes during the explosion. “No matter how much time passes, we still carry with us the need for truth, justice and accountability. What else can we do? We continue to fight for justice and demand for real change in the Lebanese political system.”

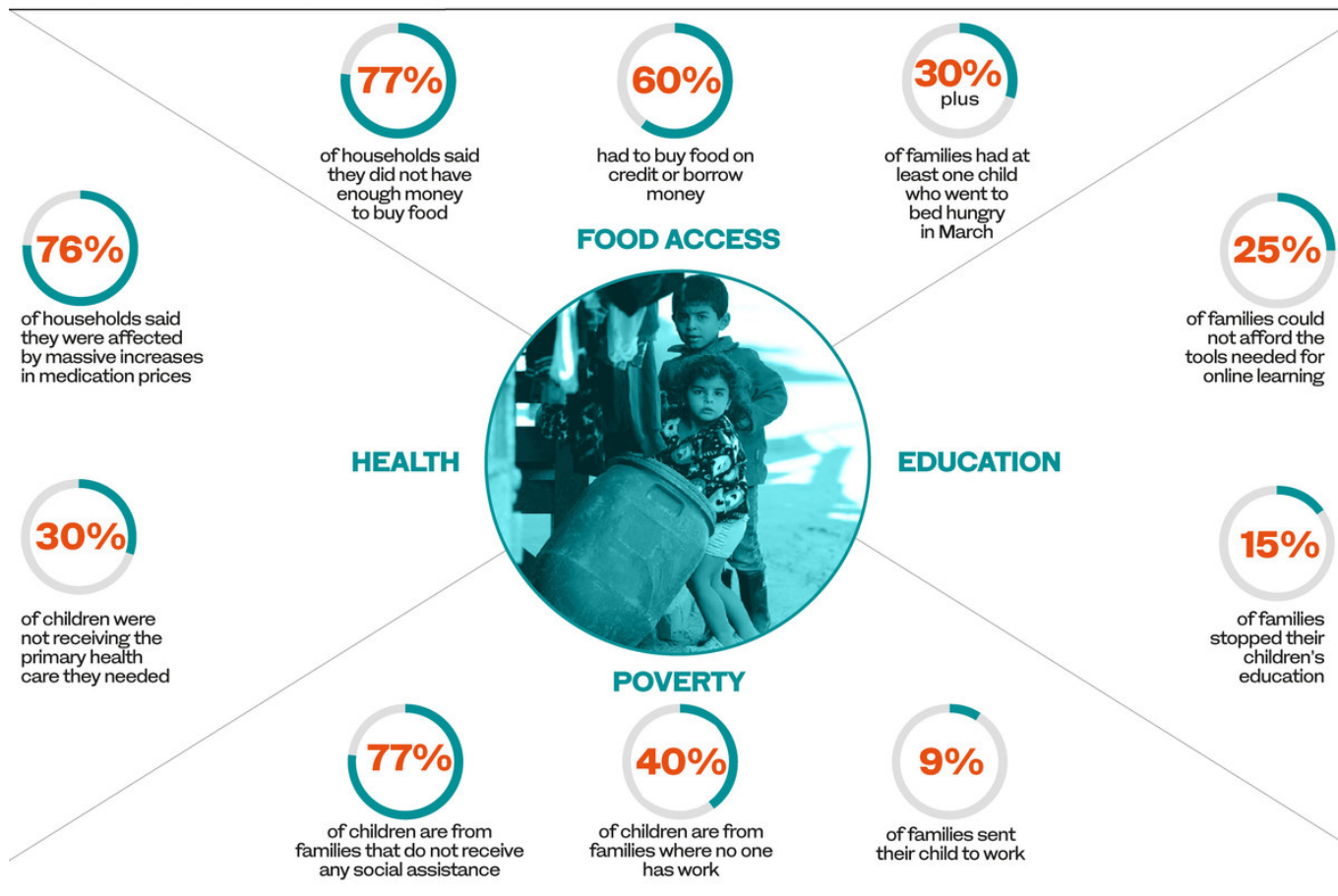
Indeed, to mark the first anniversary of the August 4 blast and to reaffirm their demand for justice, thousands of Lebanese spilled onto the streets of the capital, calling for the removal of the caretaker government.

In scenes reminiscent of the 2019 social movement known as the “thawra” – or “revolution” in Arabic – protesters once again clashed with security forces in downtown Beirut.

Survivors look back on the past year with a mixture of bewilderment, anguish, anger and even guilt. Marwa Darazi, 25, left Beirut and moved to Dubai in January 2021, where she works in public relations. The guilt of leaving her country behind weighs heavily on her conscience. "It doesn't get any easier," she told Arab News on the anniversary of the blast.

CHILDREN AT RISK IN CRISIS-HIT LEBANON

Economic, health and political crisis, coupled with the deadly explosion in the port of Beirut, is taking a toll on every aspect of children's lives, according to a survey by UNICEF in April



Source: Unicef, survey among 1,244 households

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"August 4 changed the definition of what I thought life was. I was 24 and on the right career path. I had just rented my first apartment overlooking the port, I had my car, my freedom, my family, and my friends were around. I felt stable.

"Even though I knew my country wasn't safe, the idea of it being my home automatically made me feel safe. But, in just seconds, it betrayed me."

Darazi, who was seriously injured in the blast, was working for a luxury PR company in Beirut. But after the disaster, she began volunteering for *Beb w Shebbek*, a local charity launched by Beirut residents Mariana Wehbe and Nancy Gabriel to help rebuild people's lives.

"I gave everything to Beirut," Darazi said. "Every flight back I cry as if it is the first time I am leaving. There's also the guilt of living here (in Dubai) while my parents are suffering without electricity in the heat, with rotting food in the fridge.

“Food is super-expensive now given the devaluation of the currency. Nothing seems right, no matter what I do or where I am. All I can do is sleep another night and pray the windows don’t explode. Is this normal?”



One year later, no politicians held to account and the country facing soaring poverty, a plummeting currency, angry protests and shortages of basic items from medicine to fuel, many blast survivors are simmering in the lead up to the tragedy’s first anniversary. (AFP/File Photo)

Annie Vartivarian, a Lebanese-Armenian gallerist and art collector, lost her daughter Gaïa Fodoulian, 29, in the blast. Vartivarian chose to stay in Beirut and continue her daughter’s work by launching AD Leb, an online platform for art and design that Fodoulian had been working on at the time she died.

Vartivarian held its first big exhibition in Beirut in April titled “Everyone is the creator of one’s own faith” – a reference to a Facebook post her daughter had published just hours before she was killed.

“After one year, I am not surprised we haven’t got anywhere,” Vartivarian told Arab News. “As a person who was born and raised in Lebanon, and lived through the whole civil war here, I know how the country operates, how things are done and how officials hide themselves.

“But this doesn’t mean I don’t have hope that things will change, especially with what Judge Tarek Bitar is doing.”

Bitar, the head of the Beirut Criminal Court, was appointed to lead the investigation into the blast in February 2021 following the removal of Judge

Fadi Sawan. In early July, Bitar announced that he intended to question senior politicians and security chiefs and has requested their immunity be lifted. So far, officials have rejected his appeals.

Amnesty International, the international human rights-advocacy group, has accused Lebanese authorities of "shamelessly obstructing victims' quest for truth and justice" in the months since the blast, actively shielding officials from scrutiny and hampering the course of the investigation.



Gaia Foudalian, the daughter of Annie Vartivarian, killed in the blast.
(Supplied)

“I know that, whatever we do, Gaia will not come back,” said Vartivarian. “As a mother who wants her children to be happy, I just hope she is happy now wherever she is. But I think she will rest when there is justice for what

happened, when the reality is known.”

Other survivors have chosen to leave Beirut behind. Walid Alami, a cardiologist at Beirut’s Clemenceau Medical Center, has decided to emigrate to the US. He recalls the carnage of that night one year ago.

“Within 10 seconds, the degree of destruction and the loss of life was something we hadn’t experienced even during the civil war or the Israeli invasions,” Alami told Arab News. “I was taking care of minor cuts, but my brother Ramzi, who is a surgeon, was also working throughout the night and the days and weeks that followed.”

Ramzi recently relocated to Washington D.C. “He is among thousands of doctors who have left,” said Alami. “Personally, I am working on moving back to the US because it is hard to live in Lebanon right now under these circumstances, not to mention our financial issues. Our salaries are now a tenth of what they used to be.”

He added: “It’s a dire situation and I don’t see a glimmer of hope. It will take a long time to work our way up from this deep, deep hole that we are in.”

Artist, curator and publisher Abed Al-Kadiri moved from Beirut to Paris in January 2021, but returned to Beirut to join commemorations of the anniversary.

“I wanted to be with my friends, colleagues and survivors,” he told Arab News. “We haven’t had the time or the circumstances to consciously face what happened and what we lost. I left. I was traumatized and broken. I haven’t been able to work much since leaving. I have been trying to heal. But it was really important for me to come back.”

Sarah Copland got a posting to Beirut to work in the Center for Women at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) with a focus on gender equality and women’s rights.

She was just weeks away from leaving Lebanon to return to her native Australia to give birth to her second child when the explosion happened. It killed her son, Isaac, who was just two years old.



The explosion killed the son of Sara Copeland, Isaac, who was just two years old. (Supplied)

“Isaac was struck in the chest by a piece of glass,” Copland told Arab News. “We rushed him to Rafik Hariri Hospital. I was also injured and had a lot of glass embedded in me, including in my face. Being heavily pregnant, they took me away to see to my injuries. My husband stayed with Isaac, but he died a few hours later.”

Copland is still with the UN but currently on leave in Australia. She does not plan to return to Beirut, as much as she loves Lebanon and the Lebanese.

“We don’t plan to go back to Lebanon. I don’t know how most Lebanese experience the trauma of seeing the remnants of the explosion every day. It just adds to so much trauma and I don’t think we can inflict that on ourselves.

“Lebanon has quickly declined since the explosion. It was already on the way, but now everything has gotten worse so much faster.”

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Why the trauma does not end for Beirut blast survivors

[Egypt denies halting Dabaa nuclear plant project](#)

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CAIRO: The Ministry of Electricity and Renewable Energy has denied that the construction of the Dabaa nuclear plant project in Egypt will be suspended. The ministry confirmed that the construction of the plant – which is expected to be commissioned in 2026 – will continue without interruption. It added that it is one of the country's most important projects, combining the latest technologies with the highest safety levels.

The ministry said all licensing documents required from the Nuclear Power Plants Authority have been handed over to the Nuclear and Radiological Regulatory Authority to obtain a construction permit for the first and second units of the plant, to ensure the safe and reliable operation of the nuclear facilities in the future.

The ministry said the long-term equipment manufacturing operations for the first Egyptian nuclear power plant in Russia were launched during a visit headed by the minister of electricity and renewable energy to the "Tiagmash" plant, located in the Russian city of Syzran.

The Nuclear Power Plants Authority obtained a site acceptance permit from the Nuclear and Radiological Regulatory Authority on March 10, 2019.

The permit affirms that the site complies with the standards of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The Nuclear Power Plants Authority is currently constructing infrastructure facilities, residential neighborhoods for Egyptian and foreign workers, and the marine berth.

The site's preparatory work is also being completed with the construction of the base, buildings and structures for excavation work.



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Feryal Abdelaziz wins glorious gold for Egypt in Tokyo women's karate