

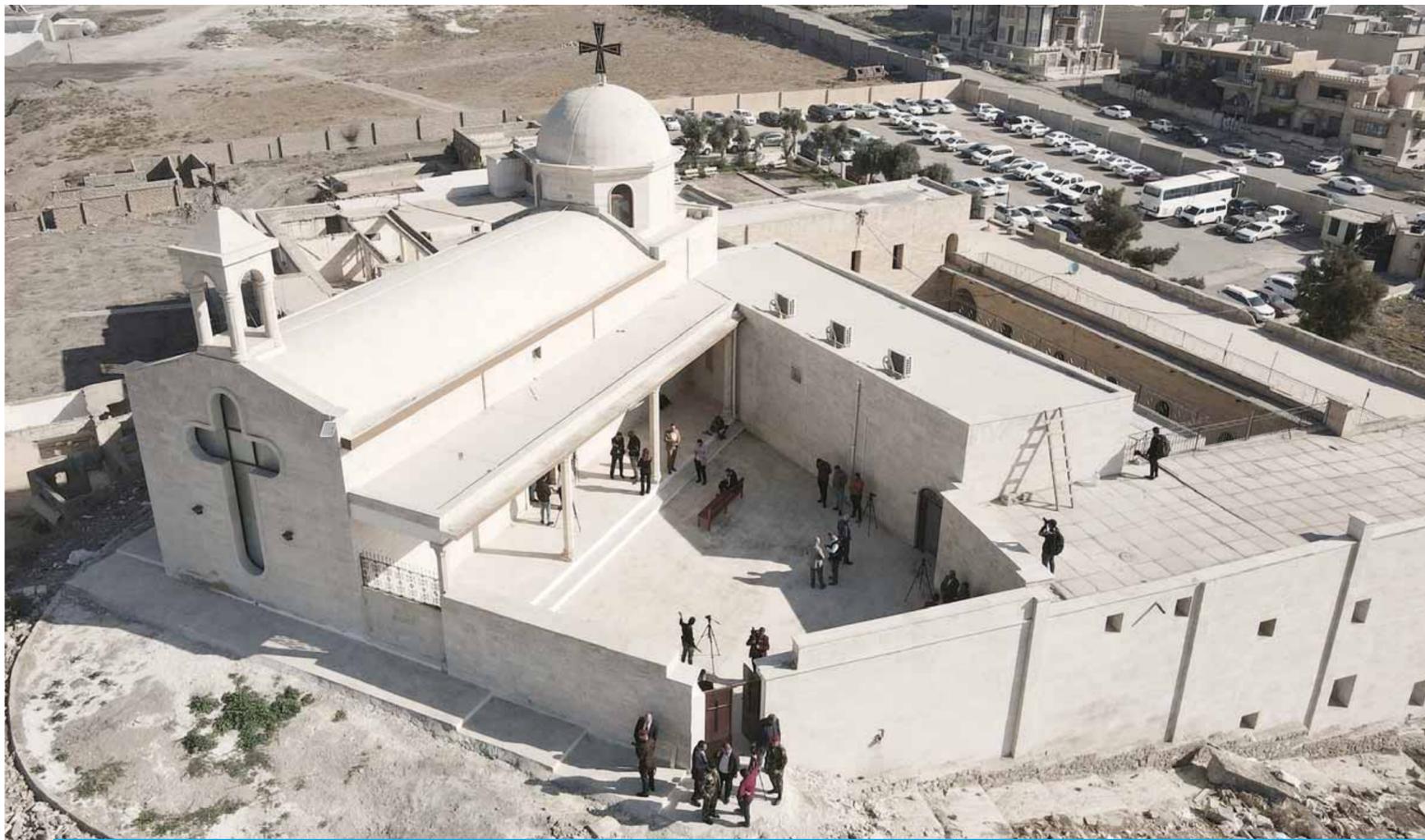


Georgia's ex-leader ends hunger strike

World weighs laws to rein in mighty algorithms

Page 6

Page 7



MOSUL: Photo shows an aerial view of the Chaldean Monastery of St George (Mar Korkis) in Iraq's northern city of Mosul. — AFP

Iraqi faithful rebuild churches

IS jihadist onslaught forced thousands of Christians to flee

MOSUL: Cymbals, prayers and Chaldean Catholic liturgy resounded in Mosul's Saint George monastery, where Iraqi faithful marked the restoration of two churches destroyed by jihadists in their former stronghold. Dozens gathered in one of the monastery's churches that have been rebuilt in stone six years after the Islamic State group (IS) pulverized them, in a city home to one of the world's oldest Christian communities. It is the latest sign of a slow return to normality in Iraq's second city. Mosul was left in ruins after three years of jihadist occupation which ended in 2017 when an Iraqi force backed by US-led coalition air strikes pushed them out.

"We have old memories in this monastery," said Maan Bassem Ajjaj, 53, a civil servant who moved to Arbil, capital of the neighboring autonomous region of Kurdistan, to escape the jihadists. "My son and daughter were baptized here," he said. "Each Friday, Mosul's Christian families would come here."

The US Department of State funded the project, which also had support from a Christian non-governmental group, L'Oeuvre d'Orient, according to Samer Yohanna, a superior of the Antonian order of Chaldean monks.

He told AFP that the jihadists destroyed 70 percent of the monastery the year after they occupied Mosul in 2014 and declared the establishment of an Islamic "caliphate". The IS onslaught forced hundreds of thousands of Christians in Nineveh province surrounding Mosul to flee. Iraq's Christian population has shrunk to fewer than 400,000 from around 1.5 million before the US-led invasion of 2003 that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. On a visit to Iraq in March, Pope Francis prayed outside another ruined church, one of at least 14 which IS destroyed in Nineveh.

Although the churches have been repaired, other parts of the centuries-old monastery still need restoration. "You can see walls that are still standing but are weak and which need to be reinforced," Yohanna said. Chaldean

Bishop Thabet Habib, from the Al-Qosh diocese, said further work was needed so the entire monastery "can regain its splendour". Last month, Mosul's Muslim community celebrated with a ceremony to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed at the historic Al-Nuri mosque, which too was severely damaged by IS but is also being restored. — AFP



Latest sign of a slow return to normality



MOSUL: Christian worshippers attend mass at the reopening ceremony of a church at the Chaldean Monastery of St George (Mar Korkis) in Iraq's northern city of Mosul. — AFP

Fuel rationed, travel limited in flooded western Canada

MONTREAL, Canada: Officials in flood-stricken western Canada announced travel and fuel restrictions Friday as the region grapples with supply difficulties, the latest on a list of struggles caused by torrential rains. Record rainfall hit southwestern British Columbia Sunday and Monday resulting in landslides and flooding which destroyed roads and infrastructure and forced the temporary closure of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

"We are asking people to limit their fuel consumption and vehicle travel at this time and are putting in place orders under the provincial state of emergency to support this," Mike Farnworth, the province's public safety minister, said at a press conference. Individuals will no longer be able to buy more than 30 liters (eight gallons) of fuel when going to the pump. "We are asking people not to travel through severely affected areas - for their own well-being, but also to make

sure the fuel we do have goes toward the services people need in this time of crisis," Farnworth said.

"These steps will keep commercial traffic moving, stabilize our supply chains and make sure everyone gets home safely," he added. Authorities are still searching for four missing people in the Pemberton region, where a woman's body was discovered this week by relief workers. The army, which has been mobilized since Wednesday, is working in several areas of the province to clear roads and build a new levee in the town of Abbotsford, which was partially submerged and could be subject to further rain forecast for next week.

Some 60 soldiers arrived in the city on Thursday. "Pretty much every army base in the country is standing by to be ready to deploy if they have to," Pamela Hogan, a public affairs officer with the Canadian Armed Forces, told AFP. "Canadian Armed Forces members will be assisting the civilian engineers that are in charge of the dike building," she said. Heavy rains are expected again in the area next week. In the course of months Canada's Pacific coast has suffered repeat natural disasters, including extreme summer heat at the end of June which experts attributed to climate change, followed by major wildfires. — AFP

Ethiopia insists airspace safe as US warns of risk

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia insisted on Friday that its airspace was safe after the United States warned of a possible risk to civilian aircraft because of the spiraling conflict. The Federal Aviation Administration this week advised US carriers to exercise caution while flying into or near Addis Ababa, as the year-long war moves closer to the Ethiopian capital.

Airlines "should plan to exercise caution during flight operations due to the potential inadvertent risk to civil aviation operating in or near areas of fighting," it said in a statement. "Civil aircraft may be directly or indirectly exposed to ground weapons fire and/or surface-to-air fire." But the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority dismissed the US warning as "baseless and quite contradictory to the reality". "Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority would like to state that any flight in Ethiopian airspace including Addis Ababa international airport is safe and secured."

The government declared a nationwide state of emergency earlier this month and ordered Addis Ababa residents to prepare to defend their neighborhoods amid fears that rebels from the northern region of Tigray were heading for the capital. The US

embassy has evacuated non-essential staff and is urging US citizens to leave the country while commercial flights are available. Washington has been among the most vocal critics of the war in Africa's second most populous nation, which has killed thousands of people and driven hundreds of thousands to the brink of starvation.

Top US envoy Jeffrey Feltman was in Ethiopia this week, along with his African Union counterpart, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, as part of intensifying efforts to try to end the war. Getachew Reda, spokesman for the rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), said Friday that Obasanjo had travelled to Tigray for "extensive discussions" with the group's leadership.

"They... agreed to continue to engage in the pursuit of peace and stability in the country," Getachew said on Twitter. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday renewed Washington's call for a ceasefire during a visit to Kenya, after warning last week that Ethiopia risked "implosion" unless the government and the TPLF negotiate a deal. Obasanjo had warned Sunday that peace talks "cannot deliver" without an immediate halt to the fighting. — AFP