

Lifestyle | Features



In this aerial view, lights and decorations ornate the remains of the war-ravaged landmark Al-Nuri mosque, as Iraqis gather to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), known in Arabic as the 'Mawlid Al-Nabawi' holiday, in the northern city of Mosul. — AFP photos



In this aerial view, lights and decorations ornate the remains of the war-ravaged landmark Al-Nuri mosque, as Iraqis gather to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH).



Iraqis kneel to pray during the celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), known in Arabic as the 'Mawlid Al-Nabawi' holiday, in the courtyard of the war-ravaged landmark Al-Nuri mosque.

SYMBOL OF REBIRTH AT IRAQ'S HISTORIC AL-NURI MOSQUE

To the sound of drums, religious chants resounded on Sunday evening for the first ceremony of its kind at Iraq's historic Al-Nuri mosque, which is being rebuilt after damage by jihadists. The city of Mosul's 12th-century mosque, known for its leaning minaret, was severely damaged in 2017. Iraq's army accused the Islamic State group of blowing it up. It is now being rebuilt under a project from the United Nations cultural

agency, UNESCO. "For me it's an extraordinary day. I am joyful," said Marwan Muafak, 45, a teaching administrator. "This celebration symbolizes the return of the chant of the muezzin and prayer in this place," he added. "The residents of Mosul want to get their old lives back."

Several hundred people gathered at the site to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), in a courtyard decorated with multicolored lights

between the mosque with its gaping windows, surrounded by scaffolding, and the minaret-only the base of which survived. It was there, on a stage, that five men in traditional robes banged on their daf, a traditional drum, and chanted to the glory of the Prophet after the celebration began with a communal prayer. "It's the first celebration organized in Al-Nuri mosque on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday," said Abu Bakr Kanaan, head of Sunni reli-

gious properties in Nineveh province.

"Our joy is immense. Our feelings are indescribable in seeing all these people here." Abu Bakr Baghdadi made his only confirmed public appearance in July 2014 at the Al-Nuri mosque, declaring the establishment of a "caliphate". Iraq's army and an international coalition forced them out of the northern city in 2017. Eight Egyptian architects won an international competition to reconstruct the mosque as

part of UNESCO's "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" initiative for rehabilitating Iraq's second city and its cultural life. UNESCO raised more than \$100 million for the project, half of it pledged by the United Arab Emirates. The restoration is to be finished by 2023. "The minaret and the prayer room will be rebuilt just as they were," a local antiquities official told AFP. — AFP



French writer and designer Jean-Yves Ferri poses with French writer Anne Goscinny (right), daughter of late Rene Goscinny, during the presentation of the new 'Asterix' album at the Hachette Livre publishing house in Vanves, near Paris. — AFP

Draft 'Asterix' story revealed by author's daughter

The daughter of Rene Goscinny, one of the duo behind indomitable French comic-book star Asterix, has revealed that her father left a draft story featuring the Roman-bashing Gaulish warrior unfinished. "I often think about it, it's 20 pages, half a comic book," Anne Goscinny told German weekly Der Spiegel in a weekend interview. Typewritten by Rene Goscinny, the script

titled "Asterix at the Circus" was found in the family archives, looked after by Anne.

But she said that completing the story without her father would be a "very complicated" task. "We'd have to get a lot of people around the table, immerse ourselves in the story and find (Rene's) voice again," she said, adding, "it's as if there were a hole in a painting by Goya". "One day we'll give it a try, it would be an extraordinary adventure," Anne added. Asterix-defender of the last Gaulish village holding out against the Roman empire was dreamed up in 1959 by Rene Goscinny, who died in 1977, and Albert Uderzo, who died last year. The comic books have sold hundreds of millions of copies worldwide. Before the Asterix series, there was no history of comics having a scriptwriter.-AFP

Elton John: 'I'm more excited about music than ever'

Elton John might be 74 and struggling with a dodgy hip, but his musical taste remains far cooler than most guys half his age. While most ageing rockstars are happy to rehash the sounds of their glory days, Sir Elton is more likely to be found in a studio with the likes of Young Thug, Nicki Minaj and Lil Nas X. Admittedly, many of the collaborations for "The Lockdown Sessions", his new album out Friday, had to happen over Zoom due to the pandemic, but it remains a testament to his omnivorous taste for new sounds. "If you're my age and still learning from other musicians, that's the greatest gift of all," said John.

He was speaking in a press call last month ahead of a hip operation that has forced him to postpone several dates from his long-running farewell tour. "If you shut your mind off and say you can't learn anything more... that's the dead end," he said. "I'm more excited about music now than I've ever been."

'A thrill'

The new album spans the generations, featuring everyone from Stevie Wonder to Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder to his latest hit



"Cold Heart" with Dua Lipa. That approach is why the Rocketman has achieved the unparalleled feat of at least one single in the British top 10 in each of the last six decades — 33 in total. "It gave me a thrill to see Young Thug come into a studio and freestyle. He just sat down at the microphone and off he went. I was blown away," John said.

It's an attitude that also means he doesn't want any deference from his young collaborators, despite them knowing they are working with a guy who has sold more than 300 million albums. "When (27-year-old dance star SJ Lewis) gave me the first version of our song, it was too Elton John-ish. I said 'Just obliterate it - turn it into an SG Lewis track', and he did," John said. "I think he was frightened to insult me. But I wanted to be insulted! And he got there in the end. He didn't insult me at all - he made the record that I wanted to make with him."

"The Lockdown Sessions" brings together new tracks as well as recent collaborations for albums by other artists,

including his song for the last Gorillaz album and his cover of "Nothing Else Matters" that he recorded with Miley Cyrus for the 30th anniversary of Metallica's "Black Album". In some ways it marks a return to his roots. "I was a session musician before I became Elton," said the British star, who was born Reginald Dwight. The Lil Nas X track, he said, was recorded in the same Abbey Road studio where he played backing piano for The Holly's 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother' 54 years earlier. "I thought 'I've come full circle here and I'm really loving what I'm doing'."

Having never lost his love of record stores, keeping his finger on the pulse comes naturally. He rattled off a list of emerging artists that have barely registered with the mainstream media yet, including Trinidadian rapper Berwyn to teenage singer-songwriter Morgen. "She's 16!" he said of Morgen. "When I was 16 I was still picking my nose."

'Friendship and authenticity'

He has also used his radio show "Rocket Hour" on Apple Music to feed his habit. "It's given me access. When I play a record I love, I interview them on the show or phone them up. "It's important to me to offer friendship and authenticity," he said, recalling how musicians like The Beach Boys and The Band reached out and encouraged him when he first went to the United States in the 1970s. Having worked with almost every major popstar of the past half-century, is there anyone left on his bucket list? "Something with Billie Eilish one day," he said. "But not yet, because she's still forging her own path. — AFP

Barker and Kardashian are engaged

The Blink-182 drummer and the Poosh founder started dating earlier this year, and over the weekend, the 45-year-old rocker got down on one knee inside a circle of red roses on the beachfront of the Rosewood Miramar Hotel in Montecito, California. Kourtney's sisters, Khloe Kardashian and Kim Kardashian West, and Tristan Thompson were among those present as the pair took the next step in their relationship. An onlooker told E! News: "Travis escorted Kourtney down to the beach, where he had red and white florals set up in the shape of a heart.

"It looked very romantic. I could see Kourtney smiling from ear to ear and put her hand over her mouth looking surprised. The family cheered for them and went back into the hotel." Kourtney, 42, shared a picture of the romantic proposal on Instagram and captioned the post: "forever @travisbarker. (sic)" Kim, 40, took to her Instagram Story to share a video of the pair kissing and showed off her sibling's

huge dazzling diamond ring. The clip was soundtracked by Bruno Mars' 'Marry You' and was also shared by Travis' 15-year-old daughter Alabama on her Instagram Story. She wrote: "So happy for you guys I love you both!"

The 'Feeling This' hitmaker also has an 18-year-old son called Landon with his second wife Shanna Moakler. He's been married twice before, however, his first marriage to Melissa Kennedy lasted just nine months. Kourtney, meanwhile, has Mason, 11, Reign, six, and nine-year-old Penelope with ex-partner Scott Disick, and this will be her first marriage. Travis recently admitted he feels "invincible" when he's alongside the 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' star.

And Kourtney even convinced him to overcome his fear of flying. He said: "I made a deal with her that she had just said to me, 'I would love to do so much travelling with you. I want to go to Italy with you. I want to go to Cabo with you. I want to go

to Paris with you. I want to go to Bora Bora with you.' And I said, 'Well, when the day comes you want to fly, I'm telling you I'll do it with you. I would do anything with you. And just give me 24 hours notice.' And that's what she did." Kourtney's support led to him having a change of heart about flying, and Travis conceded that she's transformed his life over recent months.

The punk rock star - who was involved in a plane crash in 2008 - said: "It's still something very new to me, but having something that gives me the strength and hope to be able to overcome things that were so traumatic in my life, it just says a ton. "She's definitely that for me. I'm invincible when I'm with her. It's just like I never dreamed, I never even considered flying again." The pair - who have been nicknamed Kravis - have splashed their romance all over social media, sharing intimate PDA-filled snaps with their millions of followers.-AFP

