

Iraq priest who saved Christian heritage ordained Mosul archbishop

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Fri, 2019-01-25 11:05

MOSUL: An Iraqi priest who saved a trove of religious manuscripts from the Daesh group was ordained on Friday as the new Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Mosul.

Najeeb Michael, 63, was inaugurated in a ceremony in Mosul's St. Paul Church attended by Catholic leaders from the region and the US, as well as local officials and residents.

"Our message to the whole world, and to Mosul's people, is one of coexistence, love, and peace among all of Mosul's different communities and the end of the ideology that Daesh brought here," Michael said.

Michael entered religious life at 24 and spent years serving at Al-Saa Church (Our Lady of the Hour) in Mosul.

There, he managed the preservation of nearly 850 ancient manuscripts in Aramaic, Arabic and other languages, as well as 300-year-old letters and some 50,000 books.

In 2007, he transferred the archives to Qaraqosh, once Iraq's largest Christian city, to protect them during an Islamist insurgency which saw thousands of Christians flee Mosul.

And when Daesh – who was notorious for defacing churches and destroying any artifacts deemed contrary to its neoconservative interpretation of Islam – swept across Iraq in 2014, Michael again took action.

As the militants charged toward Qaraqosh, the Dominican friar filled his car with rare manuscripts, 16th century books and irreplaceable records and fled east to the relative safety of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

With two other friars from his Dominican order, Michael also moved the Oriental Manuscript Digitization Center (OMDC), which scans damaged manuscripts recovered from churches and villages across northern Iraq.

From the Kurdish capital Irbil, he and a team of Christian and Muslim experts digitally copied thousands of Chaldean, Syrian, Armenian and Nestorian manuscripts.

Iraqi forces recaptured Mosul from Daesh in the summer of 2017, and Michael returned to the city months later to attend the first post-Daesh Christmas mass.

He found his church in ruins, with rooms transformed into workshops for bombs and explosive belts and gallows had replaced the church altar.

But he insisted there was reason for hope.

"I'm optimistic. The last word will be one of peace, not the sword," Michael said last year.

On Friday, the head of the Chaldean Catholic Church called for more international support to Iraq's Christians.

"Bishops from outside Iraq are participating in this occasion to support the

Christians of Mosul,” said Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako. “They are encouraging them to return to their city, rebuild it alongside the other communities and turn a new page based on trust and peaceful coexistence.”



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Mosul celebrates first post-Daesh Christmas For Iraq's Christians, a bittersweet first Christmas home after Daesh

[Suspension of visas to EU diplomats hampers Syria aid work](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-01-24 23:10

BRUSSELS, BEIRUT: Syrian President Bashar Assad has suspended special

multiple-entry visas for EU diplomats to Damascus.

“We are continuing as the EU ... to do whatever we can to avoid it having an impact on the important work we are doing on the ground,” a European Commission spokeswoman said on Thursday.

The special permission to use multiple-entry Syrian visas for access to Damascus was rescinded at the start of January with no explanation from the Syrian regime, complicating efforts to distribute humanitarian aid to civil war victims.

Explosion

Meanwhile, a car bomb exploded in a northeastern neighborhood of the Syrian capital on Thursday causing damages but no casualties, state media said, the third such blast in a city under regime control this week.

State news agency SANA said the bomb hit the Al-Adawi neighborhood just north of the central Old City district. A witness said the blast occurred near a hospital and security forces were examining a blown-up blue car in the street.

SANA reported “a terrorist bombing in the Adawi area with an explosive device planted in a car, causing material damage but no casualties.”

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the blast hit near the embassy of key government ally Russia.

The Britain-based war monitor said four people were lightly wounded. On Tuesday, a car bomb detonated in the coastal city of Latakia, near Assad’s ancestral village, killing one person and wounding 14, state media reported.

On Sunday, a bomb exploded near a highway at the edge of Damascus and authorities arrested one attacker. Syria’s war has killed more than 360,000 people and forced more than half its pre-war population from their homes since it started in 2011 with the bloody repression of anti-government protests that dragged in global powers.

Though Assad has regained control over most of Syria with Russian and Iranian help, attackers have struck in cities he controls with suicide blasts and car bombs.

Latakia and central Damascus have stayed in the military’s hands throughout Syria’s eight years of war, avoiding the airstrikes that battered other big cities.

The Syrian regime in May retook a final scrap of territory held by Daesh in southern Damascus, cementing total control over the capital for the first time in six years.



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Car bomb hits Damascus: Syrian state media
Turkey says it has capacity to create 'safe zone' in Syria alone

[Cairo book fair gleaming new site opens far from historic market](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-01-24 16:01

CAIRO: The annual Cairo International Book Fair opened this week in a shiny new venue far away, literally and metaphorically, from the city's historic book souk – and many of the old market's merchants stayed away. Marking the prestige of the event, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi inaugurated the fair's 50th edition at the Egypt International Exhibition Center in the affluent New Cairo area on the outskirts of the capital. Back downtown, among the teetering stacks of mostly second-hand tomes at Azbakeya, a book market that dates back more than a century, merchants complained they had been sidelined.

Dozens of them used to exhibit at the fair's former home in Nasr City, a district easily accessed, including by metro. This year only six were allowed to sell books at the fair after agreeing to stringent conditions.

"We did not cancel the Azbakeya wall, but we set a booklet of conditions to participate in the fair which all publishers committed to," said Haitham Al-Hajj, head of the General Authority for Books, which organizes the event. Authorities are keen to prevent the sale of counterfeit books, which were rampant in the Azbakeya section of the fair last year, including best-sellers such as Michael Wolff's "Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House."

Also at issue for the Azbakeya merchants was the cost – around 1,200 Egyptian pounds (\$67) – of participating, and rules on how they must display their books – stacking them up in high, disorderly piles is no longer acceptable.

"When people are selling old used books, they have a thousand titles rather than one, so, they are unable to display them in any other way, unlike a publisher. A publisher has probably a hundred titles," said Harby Hassan, a 63-year-old Azbakeya bookseller.

The Azbakeya merchants announced their own month-long book fair from Jan. 15, competing with the international event that runs from Jan. 23 to Feb. 5.

Attendance at both was sizeable.

Customers flocked to New Cairo to avoid the crowds and squeeze of downtown, while others preferred Azbakeya for its highly competitive prices.

(\$1 = 17.8400 Egyptian pounds)









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Ministry sheds light on Saudi judiciary system at Cairo book fair
Book Review: The Tentmakers of Cairo looks at Egypt's overlooked art

[US sanctions Iranian militias for turning refugees into 'cannon fodder'](#)

Thu, 2019-01-24 18:13

WASHINGTON: The United States on Thursday imposed sanctions on two Iranian militias made up of Afghan and Pakistani refugees, including children, and sent as "cannon fodder" to Syria battlefields.

The Fatemiyoun Division and Zaynabiyoun Brigade prey on the millions of undocumented migrants and refugees in Iran "coercing them to fight in Syria under threat of arrest or deportation," the designation said.

They are overseen by the Quds Force, the branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps responsible for overseas operations, which the US and many other countries consider a terrorist organization.

Today, [@USTreasury](#) sanctioned [#Iran](#)'s regime for preying on refugees, using them as cannon fodder in Syria. This comes just days after Germany banned Mahan Air, and after recent action against the regime's despicable use of child soldiers. Maximum pressure continues.

– Secretary Pompeo (@SecPompeo) [January 24, 2019](#)

Several hundred Fatemiyoun Division fighters, including children as young as 14, have died fighting Iran's war in Syria, the department said.

Iran is accused of bringing in 80,000 Shiite fighters from countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan as part of its military support for Bashar Al-Assad during the nearly eight-year war.

The Fatemiyoun Division targets Afghans while the the Zaynabiyoun Brigade is comprised mostly of Pakistanis.

"The brutal Iranian regime exploits refugee communities in Iran, deprives

them of access to basic services such as education, and uses them as human shields for the Syrian conflict,” Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said.

The sanctions are part of an “ongoing pressure campaign to shut down the illicit networks the regime uses to export terrorism and unrest across the globe,” he added.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the sanctions punished Iran for using refugees as “cannon fodder in Syria” and the regime’s “despicable use of child soldiers.”

The sanctions come as the US is under pressure to show that it can still act as a bulwark against Iranian influence in Syria after Donald Trump said he would withdraw American soldiers from the country.

The sanctions, issued by the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, also targeted two companies linked to the blacklisted Iranian airline Mahan Air and two aircraft.

Qeshm Fars Air, which is staffed by Mahan employees, operates two aircraft which regularly deliver weapons shipments to Damascus on behalf of the Quds Force. Mahan had already been sanctioned by the US for flying fighters, equipment and funds into Damascus. On Monday, Germany banned Mahan from operating there because of its involvement in the Syria war.

The Treasury Department also sanctioned an Armenian based company, Flight Travel LLC, for providing services to Mahan.

The sanctions mean all property and interests in the US of the groups are blocked and anyone who engages with them may also be targeted.



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US sanctions Iranian militias for turning refugees into 'cannon fodder' Iran will not comply with US sanctions as they are 'illegal': oil minister

[Car bomb hits Damascus: Syrian state media](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2019-01-24 12:41

BEIRUT: A car bomb exploded in the Al-Adawi neighbourhood of Syria's capital Damascus on Thursday causing damage but no casualties, state media said. Syrian state news agency SANA called it a "terrorist explosion" and gave no further details.



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Foreign Ministry denies claims of Saudi Arabia opening embassy in
DamascusRussia says 'arbitrary' Israeli airstrikes on Syria must stop