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Mosul cowers behind its doors as children strut with machineguns

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In the heart of the new caliphate in Mosul, masked young fighters roam the streets while residents swelter in the inferno of Iraq's summer heat with electricity cuts and diminishing water supplies, reports Jane Arraf in Baghdad.

"We have two hours of electricity a day. There are no cars in the streets because you can't find fuel," one resident said by phone from Mosul. "This is the sixth or seventh day there has been no petrol."

The resident, Muhammad, did not want to give his full name for fear of retribution by the fighters who seized the city last month and last week declared a hardline Islamic state.

Muhammad said while many of the markets were open, offices linked to the central government which employed a large proportion of the workforce - were closed, leaving people with virtually no income.

He said the occupiers were trying hard to keep the city functioning but he had not returned to work because it was unclear what kind of activities would be tolerated under the new regime. "We don't know what the rules are so we don't now what we can do," he said.

"The main thing we are afraid of is a government attack," Muhammad said. At night, with no fuel to run generators, many families huddle around lanterns, listening in terror to airstrikes. On Wednesday, bombs hit a park on the outskirts of the city, setting fire to thousands of trees.

The government has cut all internet access, adding to the isolation of Iraq's second biggest city.

Mosul was seized by an uneasy alliance of Saddam Hussein loyalists and Sunni tribal fighters alongside the more powerful forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Isis).

With control of large areas of northern and western Iraq, Isis has rebranded itself as the caliphate and has seized state assets including banks in Mosul. Some Iraqis fear Mosul's rich heritage is at risk. It is built on the edge of biblical Nineveh and the sprawling remains of Assyrian palaces. Already, Isis has reportedly destroyed statues of poets at a 12th-century tomb.

In the first days after taking over the city, the occupiers made clear that their quarrel was with the Iraqi government and security forces and not the people. They took down concrete blast barriers to ease traffic jams, paid city employees to pick up rubbish and told Christians their churches would be protected.

Foreign fighters, battle-hardened in Syria, went on to other cities after taking Mosul, leaving much of the visible face of the occupation to young Iraqi men from the tribes, but Isis is deciding the new rules of behaviour for civilians.

Residents say a city charter distributed by Isis and disputed by its partners bans public gatherings and calls for women not to leave their homes. It is being adhered to by most people for fear of punishment, residents say.

"Women are staying at home. Nobody knows what to do," said a seminary student in the town of Tel Keppe about eight miles from Mosul.

"All traces of the Iraqi state are being erased," the website Niqash (Discussion), funded by western governments and organisations, said in a dispatch from Mosul last week. It quoted a gunman guarding the court buildings closed he said because the only law now was Islamic.

Another Niqash report focused on "Abdullah", a machinegun-wielding 10-year-old recruit to Isis, who joined after his father and older brother were killed in fighting by Iraqi security forces last year.

"We have a lot of hope for Abdullah and other children his age," an Isis figure said. "We believe they will conquer all of Iraq and Persia and that they will liberate Jerusalem."

Some western analysts throw doubt on the new regime's long-term prospects. Benjamin Friedman, a research fellow at the Cato Institute in Washington, said: "The history of hardcore Islamic organisations when it actually comes to governing is not a happy one.

"Politics in that part of the world is nothing if not fractious. It's one thing to manage a militia and get people to blow themselves up, it's quite another thing to govern."

Other experts argued that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Isis commander, may have overplayed his hand by declaring a caliphate.

HA Hellyer, an Arab politics expert at Brookings in Washington and the Royal United Services Institute in London, said: "At some point I think al-Baghdadi will be crushed. Iraq is not like Syria. I don't think they have enough support among the local tribesmen to withstand the Iraqi state indefinitely. Ultimately the state of Iraq will go after Isis."