

## **Iraq says forces recapture refinery town from ISIS militants**

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**Baghdad:** Teamed up with paramilitary forces, Iraqi government troops on Tuesday drove Islamic State militants out of a key oil refinery town north of Baghdad, a government spokesman said.

The Joint Military Command spokesman, Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, told The Associated Press that the troops imposed "full control" on the town, about 250 kilometers (155 miles) north of Baghdad. Rasool wouldn't give more details on the fighting and casualties.

State-run TV aired footage of what it said was a residential area in Beiji. Soldiers could be seen waving Iraqi flags from rooftops as thick black smoke billowed into the air. The privately-owned al-Sumaria satellite channel showed troops firing into the air in celebration near demolished buildings. The troops were gathered around a famous bearded militia fighter who refers to himself as Abu Azrael, or the Father of the Angel of Death, saying his catchphrase "illa tahin" - meaning he will crush the IS militants like flour.

The IS group captured Beiji and then parts of a nearby oil refinery - Iraq's largest - during its blitz across the country's north in June 2014. The town and the refinery have been heavily contested since then. Iraq announced that troops had recaptured the entire refinery last week.

Iraqi launched a wide-scale operation last week as the second phase of an operation to drive IS militants out of Iraq's central Salahuddin province. The government troops were backed by paramilitary forces, made up mainly of Shiite militia fighters.

According to US Maj. Mike Filanowski, an intelligence officer with the military's joint task force in Baghdad, about a dozen Iraqis have been killed and 30 wounded in the fight over the last 72 hours. Filanowski and other US officials in Baghdad, said there are about 15,000 Iraqi forces in the Beiji area, including about 5,000 government soldiers and 10,000 members of the militias known as the popular mobilization forces.

Speaking to reporters traveling to Iraq with Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Filanowski added that the Iraqi forces, largely special operations troops, secured the refinery's perimeter and the power plant to the north, and are slowly moving toward the center of the refinery, clearing out enemy fighters and encountering booby traps and sniper fire.

In April, Iraqi troops backed by U.S. airstrikes and Shiite and Sunni militias recaptured Salahuddin's provincial capital, Tikrit, but their efforts have since stalled. Iraqi and US officials have said the extreme summer heat has slowed their progress.

- AP