

Syrian Army recaptures Palmyra as Islamic State defenses crumble

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Cairo: Syria's military on Thursday announced that it has fully recaptured the historic town of Palmyra from the Islamic State militants.

The development marks the third time that the town – famed for its priceless Roman ruins and archaeological treasures ISIS had sought to destroy – has changed hands in one year.

The city, which is home to Greco-Roman ruins on the United Nations cultural body's World Heritage list, had been the scene of heavy fighting for months.

"Units from our armed forces, in cooperation with our allies, have recovered the city of Tadmur (Palmyra in Arabic) and the surrounding area," the Syrian Army command said in a statement.

The units led by Iranian and Russia entered the city on Thursday three months after ISIS took it over.

According to the Army, driving the extremists from the city, whose ancient ruins are a UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation world heritage site, is a serious setback for ISIS, which began to collapse.

Retaking the city was achieved shortly after the Syrian army took control over the archaeological citadel of Palmyra, communications hill to the west of the city and the Dedeman Hotel Palmyra to the south of the city.

Earlier in the day, most ISIS combatants withdrew from Palmyra, according to a war monitoring group.

In their retreat, the terrorists planted mines in various points of the city, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

News agency SANA confirmed that Army engineering units have dismantled explosives and mines planted by ISIS fighters in the area.

The Syrian Army, along with pro-government militias and Russian aerial support, on Wednesday entered Palmyra, which has been under the control of ISIS since December.

The terror organisation conquered Palmyra in May 2015 and was driven from the city eight months later by Syrian troops, but regained control of the ancient Greco-Roman city in December.

The city has faced heavy damage due to the fighting and the ISIS-occupation.

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