

Islamic State-held Mosul completely surrounded, terrorists 'trapped'

13/03/2017 21:43 by admin

Baghdad: Islamic State (IS) terrorists are completely "trapped" and "the last road out of Mosul" has been cut off as the remaining western neighborhoods of the city held by the terror group are now completely surrounded, a senior coalition official said.

The IS has lost more than 60 percent of the territory the militants once held in Iraq, according to the official.

"ISIS is trapped," Brett McGurk, the special presidential envoy for the global coalition against IS, told reporters in Baghdad Sunday, using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State group. He told reporters the Iraqi army had taken control of the last road leading out of Mosul late Saturday night.

Iraqi forces are currently fighting IS in western Mosul after declaring the city's east "fully liberated" in January. The operation to retake Mosul was launched in October more than two years after the extremists took control of Iraq's second largest city.

"Mosul's liberation is increasingly in sight albeit with increasingly difficult fighting ahead," McGurk said, adding that Iraqi forces are retaking "some of the most difficult ground that we knew would have to be reclaimed. They're doing this in a dense urban environment facing a suicidal enemy that's using civilians as shields."

"Just last night, the 9th Iraqi army division, up near Badush, just northwest of Mosul, cut off the last road out of Mosul," Xinhua quoted McGurk as saying.

Coalition air support has been pivotal to Iraq's fight against IS, helping Iraqi forces slowly claw back territory throughout Iraq's western Anbar province and up the Tigris River valley to Mosul. In addition to helping Iraqi forces retake territory, McGurk said the U.S.-led coalition has killed 180 IS leaders since the campaign against the militants began more than two years ago.

IS overran Mosul in the summer of 2014 and swept across large swaths of the country's north and west. At the height of the group's power in Iraq, IS controlled nearly a third of the country.

Iraqi government forces have expelled IS fighters from about 30 per cent of western Mosul, a senior official from the elite Counter-Terrorism Service(CTS) said on Sunday, a major progress in the massive operation to retake the second largest city of Iraq.

The official said that CTS soldiers clashed fiercely with IS members in the old city centre in western Mosul, stressing that the enemy's power has been greatly weakened in the battle.

Iraqi government forces launched the offensive to liberate western Mosul on February 19 after declaring the full control of eastern Mosul late January.

McGurk also announced that Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi will visit Washington next week to hold discussions with US President Donald Trump on the further cooperation between two countries.

- IT