

## **Iraqi forces declare 'victory' over Islamic State after recapturing Mosul**

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**Mosul:** Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Sunday arrived in Mosul and declared victory over the Islamic State group in the eight-month operation to drive the militants from the city. Iraq's state-owned Al-Iraqia TV said that al-Abadi "congratulated the fighters and the people on the big victory" in the key city.

### **Iraqi forces celebrate after recapturing Mosul from Islamic State**

Dressed in a black uniform of a type worn by Iraqi special forces, al-Abadi was shown on Sunday as descending from a military plane and was greeted by senior security forces commanders.

"The commander in chief of the armed forces (Prime Minister) Haider al-Abadi arrived in the liberated city of Mosul and congratulated the heroic fighters and Iraqi people for the great victory," his office said in a statement.

Backed by the U.S.-led coalition, Iraq launched the operation to retake Mosul in October. Iraqi state TV says government forces have driven the militants from all areas and are "chasing" them in some areas in the city. Iraqi troops were celebrating the clearing of the militants from some of their last strongholds in Mosul, but heavy fighting was still underway.

Lt. Gen. Jassim Nizal of the army's 9th Division said Sunday his forces have achieved "victory" in the sector allotted to them, after a similar announcement by the militarized Federal Police. Iraqi special forces are still fighting a few hundred meters (yards) away.

Nizal's soldiers danced to patriotic music atop tanks even as airstrikes sent plumes of smoke into the air nearby.

The militants captured Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, in a matter of days in the summer of 2014. Nizal acknowledged that many of his men were among those who fled the city at that time in a humiliating defeat for the country's armed forces.

Iraq launched the operation to retake Mosul in October, 2016. IS now controls less than a square kilometer (mile) of territory in Mosul's Old City, but is using human shields, suicide bombers and snipers in a fight to the death. There are more than 897,000 people displaced by the fighting in Mosul.

Much of Mosul's Old City and surrounding areas have been devastated by months of grueling urban combat. On Sunday a line of tired civilians filed out of the Old City on foot, past the carcasses of destroyed apartment blocks lining the cratered roads.

The loss of the city would mark a major defeat for the Islamic State group, which has suffered a series of major setbacks over the past year.

U.S.-backed Syrian forces have pushed into the group's de facto capital, the northern Syrian city of Raqqa, but a final victory there could be months away, and the extremists still hold several smaller towns and villages across Iraq and Syria.

- (With AP inputs)