

'Possible' to clear ISIS bastion in Iraq before summer: Francois Hollande

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Paris: The international coalition and local forces fighting the Islamic State terrorists can take back Mosul before summer, French President Francois Hollande said on Thursday.

File pic - French President Francois Hollande

"In Iraq, the coalition operation allowed to reconquest of a large part of the lost territory thanks to the help of Iraqi forces and Peshmergas," Hollande said, adding that forces have advanced in the city area of Mosul, the group's stronghold in Iraq.

"IS is retreating and the objective is to oust it from Mosul ... I think it's possible ... to liberate the city before summer," he opined.

France was one of the first European countries to join the US-led coalition against ISIS. Its fighter jets have bombed the group in Iraq since 2014.

According to the Iraqi government, forces have extended their grip in the eastern side of Mosul as fierce clashes continued against the terrorists.

In the eastern front, the elite forces of Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) recaptured the neighbourhood of 7th Nisan and cleared the adjacent neighbourhood of Sukkar, amid fierce clashes with the terrorists, the Iraqi Joint Operations Command said in a statement.

The battles in the two neighbourhoods left some 40 terrorists killed and three booby-trapped cars destroyed, the statement added.

The CTS commandos also freed al-Maliyah and raised the Iraqi flag over some of its buildings, leaving dozens of ISIS terrorists killed and two of their car bombs destroyed.

The recapture of 7th Nisan, al-Maliyah and other nearby neighbourhoods will pave the way for the troops to seize the eastern bank of the Tigris River, which will be crucial to launch next phase of attacks on the western side of Mosul.

In the southeastern front, the Iraqi federal police and army soldiers continued their advance into al-Salam, Palestine, Sumer, Yarimja and Sahiron amid heavy fighting with ISIS terrorists, leaving dozens of them killed and destroying a car bomb and two vehicles carrying terrorists, the statement said.

In the northern front, the army soldiers backed by international aircraft continued their heavy battles in al-Hadbaa and nearby areas, leaving dozens of IS terrorists killed and wounded, along with destroying seven booby-trapped vehicles destroyed, it added.

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