

Iraq forces enter IS-held Mosul airport

Smoke billows (in background) as Iraqi forces attack Mosul airport



Mosul Airport

Irqi forces yesterday thrust into Mosul airport on the southern edge of the jihadist stronghold for the first time since the Islamic State group overran the region in 2014.

Backed by jets, helicopter gunships and drones, forces blitzed their way across open areas south of Mosul and entered the airport compound, apparently meeting limited resistance but strafing the area for suspected snipers.

“Right now thank God we’re inside Mosul airport and in front of its terminal. Our troops are liberating it,” said Hisham Abdul Kadhem, a commander in the interior ministry’s Rapid Response units.

Little was left standing inside the perimeter and what used to be the runway was littered with dirt and rubble.

Most buildings were completely levelled but Iraqi forces celebrated the latest

landmark in the four-month-old offensive to retake Mosul.

While Iraqi forces were not yet deployed in the northern part of the sprawling airport compound and sappers cautiously scanned the site for explosive devices, IS jihadists appeared to offer limited resistance.

As Iraqi forces approached the airport moments earlier, attack helicopters fired rockets at an old sugar factory that stands next to the perimeter

wall, sending a cloud of ash floating across the area.

As they moved past the factory, an explosive device detonated next to the convoy’s lead vehicle. It sent soldiers running back away from the blast but nobody was injured.

The push on the airport was launched at dawn and Iraqi forces stormed it within hours from the southwest.

The regional command said elite forces from the Counter-Terrorism Service

were simultaneously attacking the neighbouring Ghazlani military base, where some of them were stationed before IS seized Mosul in June 2014.

Control of the base and airport would set government forces up to enter Mosul neighbourhoods on the west bank of the Tigris, a month after declaring full control of the east bank.

The US-led coalition has played a key role in supporting Iraqi forces with air strikes

and advisers on the ground, and yesterday US forces were seen on the front lines.

The American troops are not supposed to be doing the actual fighting but in recent weeks have got so close to the front that they have come under attack, coalition spokesman Colonel John Dorrian said.

The latest push to retake Mosul, the last stronghold of the jihadists in Iraq, was launched on Sunday. -(AFP)

Hundreds protest Netanyahu in Australia

Sydney

Several hundred pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrated in Sydney yesterday against the first visit to Australia by an Israeli prime minister, branding Benjamin Netanyahu a “war criminal”.

A police helicopter hovered over the city as speakers slammed Canberra’s strong support of Netanyahu and his government.

“We are here to oppose Australia’s support for Israel, for a racist apartheid nation,”

said pro-Palestinian author and Australian lawyer Randa Abdel-Fattah.

“It’s disgusting to see that some of our Australian leaders have rolled out the red carpet and welcomed a war criminal into Australia,” she said.

Ahead of Netanyahu’s arrival, some 60 business leaders, academics and members of the clergy signed a letter saying Australia should not welcome Netanyahu, claiming his policies “provoke, and oppress” the Palestinians.



Protesters demonstrate against the visit to Australia by Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu



Top Philippine drug war critic dodges arrest

Manila

An arrest warrant was issued yesterday for the highest-profile opponent of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s deadly war on drugs.

The planned arrest of Senator Leila de Lima outraged her supporters and human rights activists, who said the

government had manufactured drug trafficking charges to silence her criticism of Duterte.

The 57-year-old lawyer, who has spent nearly a decade trying to link Duterte to death squads that have allegedly killed thousands of people, could be jailed for life if she is found guilty of drug trafficking.

Fukushima operator eyes plan to clean up plant



A TEPCO employee walks past storage tanks at the company’s nuclear power plant in Fukushima

Japan

The operator of Japan’s stricken Fukushima nuclear plant said yesterday it will craft a plan this summer to extract highly radioactive fuel from the damaged reactors, a key step in decommissioning work expected to take decades.

Operator Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) and the Japanese government have struggled to clean up the world’s worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986.

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 undersea earthquake off Japan’s northeastern coast sparked a massive tsunami that swamped cooling systems and triggered three reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Radiation spread over a wide area and forced tens of thousands of people to evacuate.

Shunji Uchida, top on-site engineer, said important data has been obtained from recent camera probes which

detected radiation levels inside the No. 2 reactor at record highs.

“We will also continue further research on units No. 1 and 3,” Uchida said. “Based on that data we will decide on a basic policy this summer for how to remove the fuel”.

Extracting the fuel believed to have broken through pressure vessels to collect at the very bottom of the reactors -- is a major step towards decommissioning the plant, a process which could take 40 years.

In the accident’s immediate aftermath, heavy protective gear had to be worn within 20 kilometres (12.4 miles) of the plant, he said.

“Such heavy gear is only necessary now for those working at the reactor and no turbine buildings and no longer away from them.”

When finished, TEPCO hopes it will block underground water from flowing into the complex and potentially contaminating the Pacific Ocean.