

# International

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**MOSUL:** An elderly Iraqi man comforts a wounded boy as he receives treatment from military doctors in Mosul's Al-Sahiroun neighborhood yesterday, during a military operation by Iraqi security forces against IS militants. — AFP

## IRAQI FORCES MAKE GAINS AGAINST IS IN MOSUL

### HEAVY CLASHES INSIDE MOSUL UNIVERSITY COMPLEX

**MOSUL, Iraq/BAGHDAD:** Iraqi special forces stormed the Mosul University complex in the city's northeast yesterday and pushed Islamic State back to reach two further bridges across the Tigris river, the military said. The militants were fighting back at Mosul University, which they seized when they took over the city in 2014. A Reuters reporter witnessed heavy clashes inside the campus.

Iraqi forces have recaptured most districts in eastern Mosul in nearly three months of a US-backed offensive, which accelerated at the turn of the year with new tactics and better coordination. They aim to take full control of the eastern bank of the Tigris river, which bisects Mosul from north to south, before launching attacks on the west, still fully in Islamic State hands.

Driving the ultra-hardline Islamist group out of its Mosul stronghold will probably spell the end for the Iraqi side of the caliphate it has declared, stretching into Syria. By late yesterday, Iraqi elite forces had taken control of part of the university complex and reached

two more of the five bridges that link east and west Mosul, Sabah al-Numan, spokesman for the counter-terrorism service (CTS) said.

"God willing, in a very short while we will announce the clearing of the entire left bank ... there are not many areas left (under IS control) on this bank," he told state television. Iraqi forces have now reached Mosul's three southernmost bridges, having battled their way to the Fourth Bridge several days ago.

#### BULLDOZERS

Senior CTS commander Sami Al-Aridhi said the university was the most important Islamic State base in the eastern half of the city. "Forces are heading into the depths of the university," Aridhi said early in the day, after bulldozers smashed through a wall surrounding the campus and dozens of CTS troops sprinted through carrying rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

An Iraqi officer said army units backed by air strikes had also taken control of Hadba district, north of the university, and would aid

the assault on the complex.

Another CTS commander said the capture of the university would enable further advances as it overlooks areas closer to the river. Advances by Iraqi forces have gathered pace in the last two weeks after troops got bogged down in fierce street fighting in late

November and December and militants hid among the civilian population.

New tactics employed since the turn of the year, including a night raid and better defences against suicide car bombs, have given the campaign fresh momentum, US and Iraqi military officials say.—Reuters

### GANDHI OUT, MODI IN ON KHADI CALENDAR

**NEW DELHI:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has replaced independence hero Mahatma Gandhi as the 2017 face of the government's traditional handloom and cotton industry, triggering criticism yesterday. The image of the bespectacled Gandhi, wearing a loincloth and sitting cross-legged at a spinning wheel, is one of India's most iconic and has long been used to promote the khadi, or homespun cotton, industry. The government-run Khadi Village Industries Commission (KVIC) defended its decision to use a photo of Modi, sitting in

an almost identical pose while spinning cotton, on the cover of its 2017 calendar and diary. "He is khadi's biggest brand ambassador," Chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena told media. Saxena said figures other than Gandhi had been used as the faces of the calendar before, and that Modi deserved the honor because he had helped boost cotton sales.

Some KVIC workers staged a silent protest after seeing the new calendar, media reported. Opposition leaders were quick to ridicule the image.—Reuters