Humanitarian Crisis in Syria

What is the issue?

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- High civilian causalities are being reported in the Syrian regime’s offensive to retake Eastern Ghouta from the rebels.
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- The UN has called for a 30-day cease-fire, but that looks unlikely.
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How is the ground situation?

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- Eastern Ghouta, is a locality on the outskirts of the capital city of Damascus, with an estimated population of 4 lakh.
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- It was taken over by the rebels during the early phase of the civil war (7 years ago) and is currently one of the last significant areas held by them.
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- A wide range of militant groups are believed to be active here, which including the Saudi and Qatar funded groups, and the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda.
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- While the areas were under a government blockade for years, it now appears to have been surrounded by ground forces who are preparing for the final assault.
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- The government says the city is occupied by terrorists from these groups and that the few civilians remaining there are used as human shields.
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- But despite the government’s assertions, the rebels appear to have largely lost their momentum in the war and are on the run.
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- Nonetheless, the government narrative is problematic as it seems to be pinning the blame on all the residents for the rebel occupation.
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How deep is the humanitarian crisis?

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- The recent airstrikes and bombardments launched by government forces to wash out the rebels from here saw at least 270 die in the past 3 days.
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- Significantly, it was also here that chemical weapons were used in 2013, killing hundreds of people and highlighted the brutality of the war.
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- Also, the years-long blockade has deprived Eastern Ghouta of food and medicines, and the bombing is only expected to worsen the plight further.
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- While it is a certainty that Eastern Ghouta will fall to the regime's assault, the cost in terms of lives is proving to be morally unacceptable.
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- Notably, from very early in the war, strategic consideration have dominated the narrative and there has been very less concern for human lives.
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- After 7 years of war and over 4 lakh deaths, the Syrian regime seems to be parading to victory with little worry about the devastation it had co-precipitated.
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Source: The Hindu

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