

## Saving Ghouta

**Given the deal to evacuate one militant group, Syria should reach out to the rest**

The agreement reached between armed groups in Eastern Ghouta and a UN delegation to **evacuate** some militants from the **besieged enclave** is the first major concession the **rebels** have made since Syrian government attacks began a month ago. Under the deal, the Jaish al-Islam, the main rebel group, will evacuate militants linked to the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly an al-Qaeda front, from Ghouta on the outskirts of Damascus. HTS militants will go to Idlib, a province in north-western Syria run by the rebels mainly the HTS. Over the past month, the rebels had refused to strike any deal with the **regime** even after repeated **bombardment**. At least 1,000 people have been killed in one month, with the UN warning of an “**apocalypse**” in Syria. The regime’s argument was that it was seeking to liberate Eastern Ghouta from terrorist occupation. But about 400,000 people are **stuck** in the enclave; some report say the rebels are using them as human **shields**. But the regime and its Russian backers are paying little attention to human suffering. Last month, the UN Security Council **unanimously** passed a resolution calling for a **ceasefire** in Eastern Ghouta. Thereafter, the Syrian government eased the **siege** of the city, allowing aid groups to supply assistance. But the ceasefire is yet to take effect. The Russians, who voted for the resolution at the Security Council, continued to justify attacks by citing the presence of the HTS, which is linked to an internationally designated terrorist organisation.

With HTS fighters now being evacuated, it is an opportunity for Russia and the Syrian regime to cease **hostilities** and engage with the other armed groups, including Jaish and Faylaq al-Rahman, an affiliate of the Free Syrian Army. Both the rebels and the government can learn from the battle for eastern Aleppo, which regime forces captured in late 2016. After the rebels ran out of all options in the face of continued Syrian/Russian **assaults**, both from land and air, they finally decided to leave the city under Turkish mediation, handing it over to government forces. The battle for Eastern Ghouta bears an **eerie** similarity to that of eastern Aleppo. In Ghouta, the rebels do not have any meaningful support coming from outside that could allow them to resist regime forces. What they do now to **deter** regime advances is to shell the government controlled parts of Damascus and its suburbs, killing more civilians and giving further reason for the regime to justify its military operations. This will only **prolong** the conflict, **endangering** civilians on both sides. Given the Aleppo example and the reality on the ground in Eastern Ghouta, the sooner the government forces and the armed gangs reach an agreement for evacuation, the better it will be for the hundreds of thousands of people in the enclave.

### Words

### Kind

### Meaning

Evacuate

abandon, depart, desert, discharge, displace,  
expel, leave, move out, pull

Besiege

beleaguer, beset, blockade, encircle, trap,  
assail, attack, confine, congregate

Enclave	ascendancy, authorization, command, commission, control, country, district
Rebel	guerrilla, insurgent, opponent, rioter, separatist, agitator, anarchist
Regime	administration, establishment, government, management, reign, rule
Bombardment	: assault, attack, blitz, bombing, onslaught, shelling
Apocalypse	annihilation, cataclysm, catastrophe, devastation, holocaust
Stuck	Stranded, perplexed, fastened, cemented, fast
Unanimously	collectively, commonly, consistently, universally, all together, communally
Ceasefire	armistice, truce, peace treaty, suspension of hostilities
Siege	annoy, bedevil, beset, plague, badger, harry, nag
Hostility	aggression, animosity, antipathy, bitterness, enmity, hatred, opposition
Eerie	awesome, bizarre, creepy, fantastic, frightening, ghostly, mysterious, scary
Deter	avert, block, dampen, daunt, discourage, dissuade, forestall, frighten, hinder
Prolong	continue, delay, drag out, lengthen, perpetuate, protract, stall, increase

## **A welcome quietus**

### **The Supreme Court finally ends unjustified curbs on Hadiya's personal freedom**

Hadiya has at last won her freedom. The curious aspect of her case is that it took such a long time for the courts to acknowledge that the 25 year old woman from Kerala enjoys as much freedom of choice in her marriage as in her religious belief. The Kerala High Court had caused quite a **muddle** when it **annulled** her marriage **solely** on the **suspicion** that it was a ruse to scuttle habeas corpus proceedings before it. On her father's complaint that she had

been **indoctrinated** and brainwashed into embracing Islam, and his fear that she was a victim of a movement to convert Hindu women and send them to overseas battle zones, the high court ordered her confinement in her parents' home. The Supreme Court's categorical ruling that the high court was wrong in invalidating a marriage under its writ jurisdiction constitutes a welcome end to the unjustified **curtailment** of her freedom of movement and her life choices. The **verdict**, for which detailed reasons are yet to be **pronounced**, restores the liberty of Ms. Hadiya, who chose to convert to Islam more than a year ago and later married a Muslim man. Last November, the **apex** court had freed her from her parents' custody and allowed her to complete her **internship** as part of a homoeopathy course she had taken up in Tamil Nadu. However, even this was somewhat unsatisfactory, as it appeared to be a compromised between being in parental custody and being allowed to live with her husband.

It is possible that her father, K.M. Asokan, was **gripped** by fear as her conversion came **amid** reports of **radical** groups recruiting young people on behalf of the Islamic State. The high court did not question her conversion, but suspected the **veracity** of her claim that she was married, as it happened in a day's break between hearings. However, these facts were not enough for the court to annul the marriage and label it a "sham". The court made odd observations on how a woman's marriage requires the involvement of her parents and that Ms. Hadiya was "at a vulnerable age". Even in the Supreme Court, Ms. Hadiya could explain to the judges that she stood by her marriage to Shafin Jahan only after other parties had advanced arguments on "indoctrination" and "**conspiracy**" and the National Investigation Agency had its say. Finally, the court has now given primacy to her view. The implications of her **ordeal** are disquieting: it is not difficult in this country to question the life choices of an adult woman by casting doubts on her volition and personal autonomy, and her freedom to choose her way of life can sometimes be judicially curtailed. While a lawful investigation into organised recruitment by radical groups must not be impeded, courts should strive even harder to protect personal freedoms without being swayed by mere suspicion.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Muddle		ataxia, awkwardness, chaos, clutter, complexity, complication, confusion
Annul		abolish, abrogate, cancel, declare, delete, dissolve, invalidate, nullify, quash
Solely		completely, entirely, exclusively, individually, merely, purely, simply, totally
Suspicion		conjecture, cynicism, distrust, impression, jealousy, misgiving, mistrust
Scuttle		abandon, sink, submerge

Indoctrinated	brainwashed, persuaded, programmed, educate, indoctrinate, convince
Curtailment	abbreviation, condensation, cutback, reduction, devaluation discount, rebate
Verdict	answer, award, conclusion, decision, decree, finding, opinion, ruling,
Pronounced	clear-cut, conspicuous, decided, definite, marked, noticeable, obvious
Apex	apogee, culmination, pinnacle, climax, crest, crown, height, maximum, peak
Internship	graduate, fellowship
Grip	clutch, grasp, clasp, clinch, nab, seize, snag, snatch
Amid	amidst, among, amongst, between, during, mid, over, throughout
Radical	profound, basal, bottom, cardinal, constitutional, essential, native, natural
Veracity	accuracy, authenticity, credibility, fairness, genuineness, honesty
Conspiracy	Plot, scheme, sedition, treason, cabal, connivance
Ordeal	agony, anguish, calamity, difficulty, nightmare, torment, torture, trial