

Mosul and the threat of chemical attacks

Why in news?

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- The International Committee of the Red Cross issued a statement condemning the use of chemical weapons in Mosul, the second largest city of Iraq where the Iraqi troops have been fighting the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group.
- The Red Cross said seven people, including children, with symptoms consistent with an exposure to a toxic chemical agent were being treated.

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What is the issue about?

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- It has been conclusively proven that the Islamic terrorist organisation is using chemical weapons.
- U.S. military officials have repeatedly warned of the IS's chemical warfare capabilities.
- This is not the first time the IS has been accused of using chemical weapons.
- Last year, IS fighters launched at least three chemical attacks south of Mosul
- The IS is targeting more civilians at a time when it is facing a huge military setback.
- The IS has used chemical weapons, including chlorine and sulphur mustard agents, at least 52 times on battlefields in Syria and Iraq since 2014.
- But it's not clear from where IS got sulphur mustard, a chemical warfare agent.
- The threats they pose could be minimal as their capacity to make high-grade

weapons and delivery systems may be limited.

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- Still, terror groups possessing chemical weapons pose a challenge to the international security architecture.

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What is a chemical warfare agent?

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- Chemical warfare agent also known as “vesicants,” or blister agents.
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- The various chemical agents are- sulphur, chlorine, mustard gas etc
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- Chlorine is commercially available as an industrial chemical, and terrorist groups often use it to make bombs.
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- The use of chemical and biological weapons is a war crime.
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- Efforts to eradicate their use date back to the 19th century and the first universal ban came into effect after First World War.
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- In 1997, the Chemical Weapons Convention treaty prohibited the use and production of chemical weapons.
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- At least 190 states have so far accepted the treaty, while 93% of the world’s declared stockpile of chemical weapons has been destroyed.
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- But these regulations are meant for nation-states, whereas the attack in Mosul suggests that non-state terrorist actors also possess chemical weapons capabilities.
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- The regime of Saddam Hussein and that of Bashar al-Assad in Syria had possessed the weapons earlier.
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- The Saddam regime is gone, and Syria gave up its chemical weapons as part of an international agreement to avoid American invasion.

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Source: The Hindu

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