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India and Qatar relations

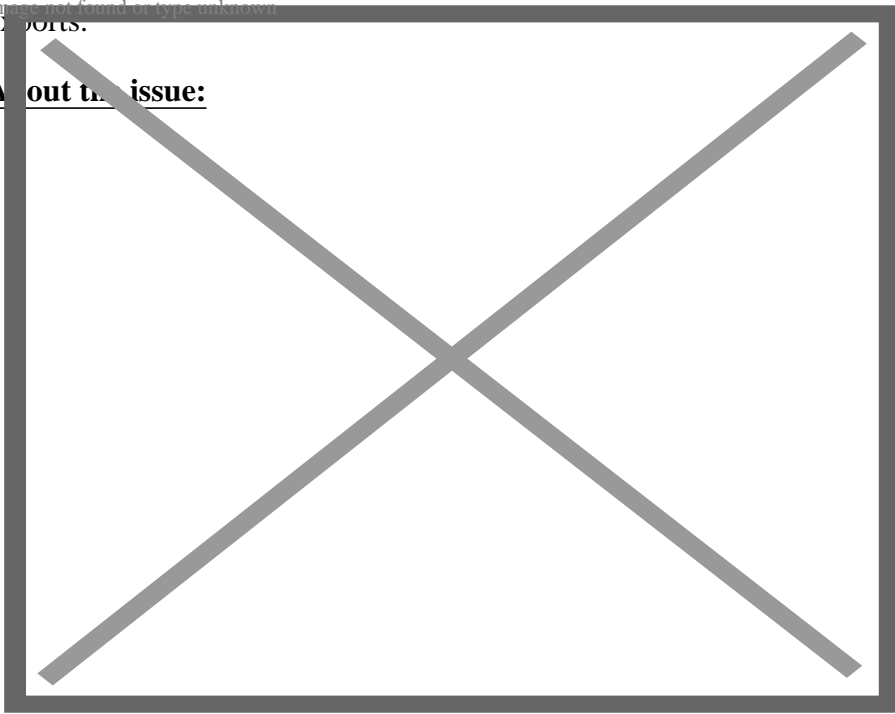
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Why is in news? How natural gas is central to ties between India and Qatar

The death sentence given to eight former personnel of the Indian Navy by a court in Qatar presents the biggest challenge yet to New Delhi's historically friendly ties with Doha.

In the relationship between nations, trade relations play a significant role. In the case of India and Qatar, the balance of trade is tilted heavily in the latter's favour — which means imports from Qatar far outweigh India's exports.

About the issue:



Eight retired veterans of the Indian Navy,

who were detained in Doha in 2022, were sentenced to death by a Qatari court on October 26. The men — seven officers and one sailor — were working in their personal capacity for Dahra Global, an Omani private defence consultancy, to help oversee the induction of Italian U212 stealth submarines into the Qatari Emiri Naval Force.

The reasons for their arrest and death penalty **are yet to be made public**, although unconfirmed speculation has hinted at they were involved in espionage for a foreign state.

Leaked reports suggest that the **men have been accused of sharing secret information pertaining to the stealth submarine programme** they worked on, with a third country, a charge their families have denied.

Reacting to the news, the Ministry of External Affairs said that it was “deeply shocked by the verdict of death penalty” and that it was “exploring all legal options”.

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Relations:

Historical ties:

India and Qatar are natural partners with ties going back to 1973

Political Relationship:



2023 marks 50 years of establishment of full diplomatic relations between India and Qatar.

India was among the few countries which recognized Qatar soon after its independence in 1971.

India and Qatar have **maintained friendly relations** for decades. PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Qatar in 2008 marked a significant turning point, followed by reciprocal visits from the Emir of Qatar and PM Narendra Modi.

Economic Ties:

In 2021, India was among the **top four export destinations for Qatar**. It is among the **top three sources of Qatar's imports**.

The **bilateral trade** between India and Qatar, valued at **\$15 billion**, primarily involves **LNG and LPG exports** from Qatar to India.

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India's export to Qatar during 2021-22 was US\$ 1.83 billion and India's import from Qatar was US\$ 13.19 billion.

India's other major imports from Qatar are also fossil fuel-linked commodities and products, such as liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), plastics, and other petrochemicals.

On the other hand, **India's exports to Qatar** were valued at just \$1.97 billion in FY2022-23. The major exports include cereals, copper articles, iron and steel articles, vegetables, fruits, spices, and processed food products.

Collaborative ventures in India's PSU disinvestments, participation in the **National Infrastructure and Investment Fund (NIIF)**, and bids for hydrocarbon blocks under the HELP policy were discussed. This could significantly address India's infrastructure investment needs amid banking sector stress and stalled corporate projects.

Energy sector:

India's **import dependency in natural gas is around 50%**, and given the government's concerted push to increase natural gas consumption, imports are only likely to rise in the coming years, even if domestic production of natural gas increases.

India's total imports from Qatar in FY2022-23 were valued at \$16.81 billion, of which **LNG imports alone were worth \$8.32 billion, or 49.5%**, an analysis of official trade data shows.

The global LNG market is a seller's market after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the sanctions that have disrupted Russian natural gas supplies to Europe. The **war has put Qatar, the world's largest exporter of LNG**, in a unique position of strength.

Defence Cooperation:

Defence cooperation is a key component of India-Qatar ties, with the **India-Qatar Defence Cooperation Agreement** serving as a pivotal milestone.

Exercise Zair-Al-Bahr: It is a **bilateral maritime exercise** between the two navies. It aims to further strengthen the maritime exchanges between the two countries and enhance maritime security in the region.

India also **offers training slots in its defence institutions** to Qatar, and Indian Navy and Coast Guard ships regularly visit Qatar as part of the bilateral cooperation.

NRI in Qatar:

Indians are the **largest expatriate community** in Qatar and are engaged in a wide spectrum of professionals, including medicine; engineering; education, finance; banking; business; media and labour.

Qatar hosts 0.74 million Indian expatriates.

Its **210-strong delegation** at the **Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas event** in Indore last year was the second biggest, next only to the Mauritius delegation.

Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) sent Covid medical relief material to India.

14 Indian schools in Qatar are offering CBSE curricula to over 30,000 students, most of whom are the children of Indian nationals working in Qatar.

Cultural exchanges:

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Cultural ties between India and Qatar are deep rooted and actively nurtured by both sides. Qataris admire India's cultural diversity.

Cultural festivals showcasing Indian and Qatari arts and heritage, Exchange programs for artists and intellectuals.

Both countries had signed an **Agreement on Cultural Cooperation** during the former Emir's visit in April 2012. Qatari side has proposed to **celebrate India-Qatar Year of Culture in 2019**.

India deeply appreciates Qatar's support, as a co-sponsor, to its Resolution at the UNGA, **adopted unanimously with a record 177 co-sponsors, declaring 21 June as the International Day of Yoga (IDY)**, and for various activities to celebrate the first IDY in Qatar.

Terrorism Eradication:

Agreements were made on sharing information to prevent money laundering and combat terrorism, affirming a collective commitment to eliminate these threats.

This collaboration is expected to curb terrorism financing, reduce the flow of illicit funds, and enhance stability in the Middle East, consequently safeguarding India's diaspora and ensuring uninterrupted energy supplies.

Qatar matter to India – Why?

Indians constitute the **largest expatriate community** in Qatar, with approximately 800,000 individuals working and living there.

The **flow of remittances** from Qatar and the safety of Indian citizens make Qatar vital for India's interests.

Qatar is the **largest supplier of LNG to India**, making it critical for India's energy security.

Qatar's **membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** is strategically significant for India, especially concerning issues like Kashmir.

India's bid for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council requires support from countries like Qatar.

Several Indian companies, including Tata Consultancy Services Ltd, Wipro, MahindraTech, and Larsen & Toubro Limited, operate in Qatar.

The **stability of the Gulf region** is of paramount importance to India's energy and maritime security.

India has **invested a lot to improve bilateral relations** with Qatar, in line with India's greater engagement with other Gulf states.

Qatar also **hosts a plethora of opposition and militant movement leaders** from the Islamic world, including from Palestinian Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood, and Taliban.

Conclusion:

The detention and sentencing of eight Indian nationals in Qatar have posed a complex diplomatic challenge for India.

Against the backdrop of India-Qatar relations, this incident underscores the importance of navigating cultural sensitivities and geopolitical dynamics to secure the release of these individuals.

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