



INDIA - QATAR RELATIONS - GS II MAINS

Q. The release of the Navy veterans is a testament to the robust diplomatic channels and the goodwill shared between India and Qatar. Discuss the importance of rising India-Qatar relations for both individually. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Big diplomatic victory for India: Qatar frees eight ex-Navy veterans jailed on espionage charges*

What's in the news?

- Qatar has released eight veterans of the Indian Navy who were sentenced to death on espionage charges.
- Seven of the eight former Indian Navy personnel have now returned to India.

New Heights in India-Qatar Relations:

- The release of the Navy veterans is a testament to the robust diplomatic channels and the goodwill shared between India and Qatar.
- It not only reinforces the safety and security of Indian nationals abroad but also strengthens bilateral ties.
- Millions of Indians reside and are employed across the Gulf region, serving as a significant source of remittances for India and playing a key role in the prosperity of Gulf economies.
- This incident demonstrates India's growing influence on the global stage and its ability to protect its citizens' interests internationally.

Background of the Present Case:

Arrest of Eight Former Indian Navy Personnel:

- On August 30, 2022, eight former Indian Navy personnel, along with two others, were arrested on undeclared charges.
- They were put in solitary confinement.
- These personnel were working at Al Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services, a defence services provider company.
- As per different sources, the Indians had been working in their private capacity with the company to oversee the induction of Italian small stealth submarines U2I2.
- The company's old website, which no longer exists, said it provided training, logistics and maintenance services to the Qatari Emiri Naval Force (QENF).

Charges against the Men:

- The officers were jailed on charges that have not been made public.
- However, as per the media reports, the eight Indians had been charged with spying for Israel.



- Navy veterans were awarded death penalty
- In March 2023, the last of multiple bail pleas filed for the veterans was rejected.
- The trial began later that month and on October 26, 2023, the death sentence was handed to all eight men.

Appeal Filed by India:

- In November 2023, the MEA announced it had filed an appeal and that its legal team had details of the charges.

Commutation of Death Sentence:

- In December 2023, the Court of Appeal of Qatar commuted the death sentence of eight former Indian Navy personnel.

India-Qatar Relations Backdrop:

- India and Qatar established formal diplomatic relations in 1973, but their interactions go back centuries before that. Trade in pearls, dhows, spices, and textiles was the main driver of the early contact between the two regions, which also facilitated cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Since then, the relationship has evolved to encompass a wide range of areas, including political, economic, defence, and cultural aspects.
- The large, diverse, accomplished and highly regarded Indian community in Qatar is making an important contribution to Qatar's progress and in nurturing the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the two countries.
 - About 7 lakh Indians are living and working in Qatar, forming the largest expatriate community there.

Importance for Qatar:

1. Trade and Economic Collaboration:

- India is a crucial trade partner for Qatar, being its third-largest export destination and fourth-largest import source.
- In 2021, the bilateral trade reached \$10.3 billion, showcasing the significant economic interdependence between the two nations.
- The collaboration extends beyond trade, with Qatar investing in India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), promoting infrastructure development.

2. Energy Security:

- Qatar plays a pivotal role in fulfilling India's energy needs, particularly in liquefied natural gas (LNG).
- As the largest supplier of LNG to India, Qatar addresses approximately 70% of India's natural gas requirements.
- Additionally, Qatar supplies crude oil and petrochemicals, contributing to India's energy security.

3. Defence and Security Cooperation:

- Defence co-operation has been officially described as a pillar of Indian-Qatar ties.



- Both nations have strengthened their defence and security cooperation through joint exercises, training programs, information sharing, and counter-terrorism initiatives.
- Qatar views India as a reliable and strategic partner, fostering regional stability and security.
- Support from Qatar for India's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council underscores their shared commitment to global security.

4. Investment and Infrastructure Development:

- Qatar's investment in India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund reflects a commitment to collaborative infrastructure development.
- This cooperation not only enhances economic ties but also contributes to the growth and modernization of India's infrastructure.

5. Cultural Ties and Soft Power:

- Qatar values India's cultural diversity and recognizes its soft power on the global stage.
- Agreements on cooperation in various fields such as health, education, tourism, youth and sports, radio and television, information technology, and atmospheric and ocean sciences, demonstrate a commitment to fostering cultural exchanges and collaboration in diverse sectors.
- Hosting Indian cultural events and festivals in Qatar further strengthens people-to-people ties and promotes mutual understanding.

Importance for India:

1. Energy Security and Economic Growth:

- Qatar is a vital partner for India's energy security, supplying a significant portion of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) needs.
- The import of LNG from Qatar is crucial for meeting India's escalating energy demands supporting economic growth and development.
- Bilateral trade involves the export of Indian goods and services to Qatar, fostering economic ties and contributing to India's economic growth.

2. Diaspora and People-to-People Ties:

- Qatar is home to a sizable Indian diaspora whose contributions extend to the development of both nations.
- India places a high priority on the welfare of its nationals in Qatar, as evidenced by the signing of an MoU on skill development and qualification recognition.
- The Indian diaspora in Qatar serves as a cultural and economic bridge, fostering strong people-to-people ties between the two countries.

3. Regional Stability and Common Interests:

- Qatar's influence in the Gulf region and beyond positions it as an influential player in regional geopolitics.
- India and Qatar share common interests in issues such as regional peace, stability, maritime security, counter-terrorism, and climate change.
- Collaboration extends to multilateral forums like the United Nations (UN), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and Group of 77 (G77), where the two countries work together to address global challenges.



4. Cultural Exchange and Mutual Understanding:

- India values Qatar's cultural diversity and heritage, fostering cultural exchange programs to promote mutual understanding and respect.
- Participating in cultural events and festivals organized by Qatar allows India to showcase its cultural richness and heritage on the global stage.
- Cultural exchanges contribute to building strong ties between the people of both nations.

Challenges in India-Qatar Ties:

1. Balancing Relations with Other Gulf Countries:

- India has friendly relations with all the Gulf countries, but it also has to be mindful of their differences and disputes.
- For instance, the diplomatic crisis between Qatar and some of its neighbours since 2017 has posed a challenge to India's diplomacy in the region.
- India has maintained a neutral stance on the issue and called for dialogue and de-escalation.

2. Diversifying Trade and Investment:

- Although trade between India and Qatar is substantial, it is largely dominated by hydrocarbons.
- There is a need to diversify the trade basket and explore new areas of cooperation such as renewable energy, food security, digital economy, etc.
- Similarly, there is scope for increasing investment flows between the two countries, especially in sectors such as infrastructure, manufacturing, services, etc.

3. Enhancing Connectivity:

- Connectivity is an important factor in strengthening bilateral relations.
- However, there are some gaps in connectivity between India and Qatar, such as limited air links, lack of direct shipping routes, visa issues, etc. These need to be addressed to facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services between the two countries.

4. Promoting Cultural Awareness:

- Despite the historical and cultural ties between India and Qatar, there is still a lack of awareness and understanding of each other's culture, values, and traditions among the people of both countries.
- There is a need to promote more cultural exchanges, educational programs, media interactions, etc. to bridge the knowledge gap and foster mutual respect and appreciation.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Expanding Strategic Dialogue:

- The two countries should enhance their strategic dialogue at various levels to exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual concern and coordinate their positions and actions.
- They should also establish regular consultations on defence and security matters to address common threats and challenges.

2. Boosting Economic Engagement:

- The two countries should work towards increasing trade and investment flows between them by removing barriers, facilitating business-to-business contacts, creating joint ventures, etc.



- They should also leverage their complementarities in areas such as energy, infrastructure, technology, innovation, etc. to create win-win outcomes.

3. Improving Connectivity:

- The two countries should improve their connectivity by increasing air links, establishing direct shipping routes, easing visa norms, etc.
- They should also cooperate in developing regional connectivity projects such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the Chabahar Port, etc. to enhance their access to new markets and opportunities.

4. Strengthening Cultural Ties:

- The two countries should strengthen their cultural ties by organizing more cultural events and festivals, encouraging academic and student exchanges, supporting media collaborations, etc.
- They should also celebrate their shared heritage and diversity by promoting tourism, art, literature, music, etc.

India-Qatar relations are on a positive trajectory, driven by shared interests in energy, trade, security, and cultural exchange. The large Indian community in Qatar acts as a bridge between the two countries, and both sides are committed to further strengthening their strategic partnership.



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