Qatari Crisis

Why in news?

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- The biggest political crisis to hit the Middle East in years.
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- Qatari nationals are now officially on notice to leave neighbouring countries within two weeks after an unprecedented diplomatic freeze of the nation by key allies and neighbours.
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What is the background of the issue?

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- A total of nine nations have so far moved to indefinitely sever ties with Qatar a country of nearly 2.3 million people, mostly foreign workers.
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- Gulf allies have repeatedly criticized Qatar for alleged support of the Muslim Brotherhood, a nearly 100-year-old Islamist group considered a terrorist organization by Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
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- The UAE accused Qatar of "funding and hosting" the group in its statement announcing the severance of ties.
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- The rift is also driven by the belief that Qatar is too closely aligned with Iran.
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- The diplomatic crisis came two weeks after Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt blocked several Qatari media outlets.
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- Saudi Arabia and Iran are at odds over a number of regional issues, including Iran's nuclear program and what Saudis see as Tehran's growing influence in the kingdom's sphere of influence.
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- Qatari diplomats have been given notice to leave their foreign posts.
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- Qatari citizens have been told they have 14 days to leave Saudi Arabia,

Bahrain and the UAE, and those countries also banned their own citizens from entering Qatar.
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How this will affect Qatar and rest of the world?

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- Qatar is rich in oil and gas but it doesn't really produce its own food -- almost all of comes from Saudi Arabia. Now the borders have been shut, food prices could skyrocket.
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- Qatar Airlines is a major global airline but it's no longer allowed to use the airspace above Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the UAE.
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- This causes raising of fuel costs, flight times and potentially ticket prices.
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- Qataris are a minority in their own country it's home to as many as two million foreign workers, mainly from India, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines.
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- Any kind of instability in the Middle East tends to send up oil prices, and the longer prices stay high.
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- Qatar is the world's biggest LNG exporter. It has pipelines in the Gulf and could retaliate but cutting off supplies to its neighbours.
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- The diplomatic crisis is also the latest complication for the 2022 World Cup, which Qatar is preparing to host.
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- The tournament is already facing allegations of worker misconduct, and it had to slash the budget for the soccer tournament by more than 40% because of the falling price of oil.
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How this crisis would affect India?

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- Qatar has a high number of foreign workers, and most of them are from India, there are over six lakh Indian workers in Qatar.
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- Ministry of External Affairs is trying to assess who and how many are stuck in the middle, and then It will make a move.
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- Securing the Indian diaspora in the Gulf is, of course, of paramount importance.
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- India must, however, look at the current crisis, and West Asia and North Africa as a whole, from a broader prism than just Indian labour in the region.
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What is the way forward?

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- Since the “Arab Spring”, the Iran-Saudi rivalry has been playing out in civil wars, diplomatic manoeuvrings and internal conflicts in Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Egypt.
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- For the Sunni-ruled countries of the GCC, that has serious implications Bahrain, for example, has a restive Shia majority ruled by a Sunni monarchy.
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- Qatar is also a US ally and houses arguably its most important military base in the region.
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- The situation in West Asia only looks to be escalating if the serial attacks in Tehran, for which the Islamic State has taken responsibility, are any indication.
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- The pressure on Qatar seems to be aimed at changing its policy direction, making it fall in line with Saudi interests.
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- If Iran intervenes or the royal family feud continues, India should be prepared to evacuate its people.
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- Over the longer term, India can’t continue with a mercantilist approach to the Gulf.
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- The region’s salience to India’s strategic and energy concerns demand a deeper engagement.
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Source: The India Express

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