Qatar and Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC)

What is the issue?

Relations between the oil-rich states of the Gulf Cooperation Council have been fraught since Saudi Arabia, joined by Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, imposed an economic and diplomatic blockade on Qatar in 2017.

What is Gulf co-operation Council (GCC)?

- The GCC is a political and economic alliance of countries in the Arabian Peninsula.
- It was established in 1981 to foster socioeconomic, security, and cultural cooperation.
- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are its members.
- They gather every year to discuss cooperation and regional affairs.

Why was the blockade imposed on Qatar?

- Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt have imposed an air, land and sea blockade on Qatar since June 2017.
- Among the four, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates are the GCC countries.
- The blockading quartet has accused Qatar of supporting "terrorism".
- Qatar has denied the charges and said the boycott aims to impinge on its sovereignty.
- Kuwait did not take part in the blockade.
- Kuwait’s government maintains smooth relations with Doha and has made several attempts to mediate between Qatar and its Gulf neighbors to help quell the conflict.

What are the recent developments?

- In October, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is believed to have ordered the Khashoggi hit, surprised observers by praising the Qatari economy.
- The personal invitation to the GCC meet from King Salman bin Abdulaziz to the Qatari Emir followed the Crown Prince’s remarks.
- Qatar stayed away from the recent Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Riyadh.

- After the summit, the GCC issued a customary statement, emphasizing regional stability and economic challenges.
- This shows the growing disunity among the Gulf countries.
- Doha has also announced its decision to quit OPEC, the first Arab nation to do so since the cartel was formed in 1960.

What are the implications of the blockade?

- The blockade has triggered tensions among other GCC countries as well.
- Saudi Arabia is upset that Oman and Kuwait did not join the embargo.
- Kuwait was trying to mediate between the rivals camps.
- However the act of mediation hasn't gone down well with Riyadh.
- Oman continues to be independent of Saudi influence by keeping ties open with both Qatar and Iran.
- The blockade has made Qatar only more independent in its foreign policy decisions.
- It has stepped up assistance for Hamas in Gaza, accelerated a plan to allow Turkey to set up a military camp in the country and resisted calls to cut ties with Iran.
- The decision to quit OPEC and its absence at the GCC meet, point to an increasingly confident Qatar.
- But the intra-Gulf quarrels have dampened hopes for the integration of the region.

Source: The Hindu

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