

# Qatar's isolation: What lies ahead

**T**he vested interests of a few sheikhs in Saudi Arabia, and their yes-men in the UAE (United Arab Emirates), that led to the isolation of Qatar is indeed yet another example of how Islamic society is getting divided day by day. It is said that by the time the world, as we know it, ends, Islam will have more than 72 sects. Instead of forming a Middle East Union for economic growth, these countries nurse ego-based politics and let the West control them.

The 10-day deadline for Qatar to bend its knees and bow down to the Saudi-led four-nation bloc (UAE, Bahrain and Egypt) has ended on Monday. As there was no sign of Qatar budging on its stance, Saudi Arabia has extended the deadline by two more days.

Qatar, one of the fastest growing gulf economies with the world's highest per capita income, has always been aloof to the Saudi dominance. Saudis, who were in awe of Iran's success, with its principled stance, against the superpowers, found the right opportunity to "teach" Qatar a lesson for its "disobedience" in leaning towards Iran. If the Saudi-led bloc expected Qatar to come down begging for pardon, that would not turn out quite that way even after the extension.

Although there are temporary economic and social setbacks for Qatar, their natural gas wealth and global investments will help them overcome

this embargo. The diplomatic juggernaut worked tirelessly to ensure smooth sailing with other countries apart from the supportive Turkey and Iran. The disaster will be in the realignment of the regional politics. Divided, they are happy to be conquered by others in different ways. The House of Saud owes their power to the Americans and the British.

Any sane person in the Middle East, let alone the Qataris, will term the 13-odd demands on Qatar as nothing but atrocious and intended to weaken it. The demands in question include shutting down the blatantly honest *Al Jazeera* and severing ties with Iran. Even senior US government officials believe this to be a no-go.

What could happen in the region once Wednesday's extended deadline is over? Will there be a war, as in Yemen? Is that why Saudi Arabia is buying war machines and helping US President Donald Trump? Or does it want the gas prices to fall so that Qatar suffers as much as the Saudis are doing from lower oil prices?

Is there a possibility for Saudi Arabia to impose more sanctions against all things Qatari, including individuals and businesses owned by Qatar citizens in these countries? This has a high chance, and if done, it will prove that the real agenda for isolating Qatar had nothing to do with terror funding.

As a senior diplomat from the Saudi-bloc indi-

cated, they might "force" their trading partners across the world to impose stringent conditions on Qatari businesses. It may not be practical as it violates international treaties and laws. Qatar Airways is already seeking legal remedy to recover costs from countries that banned it.

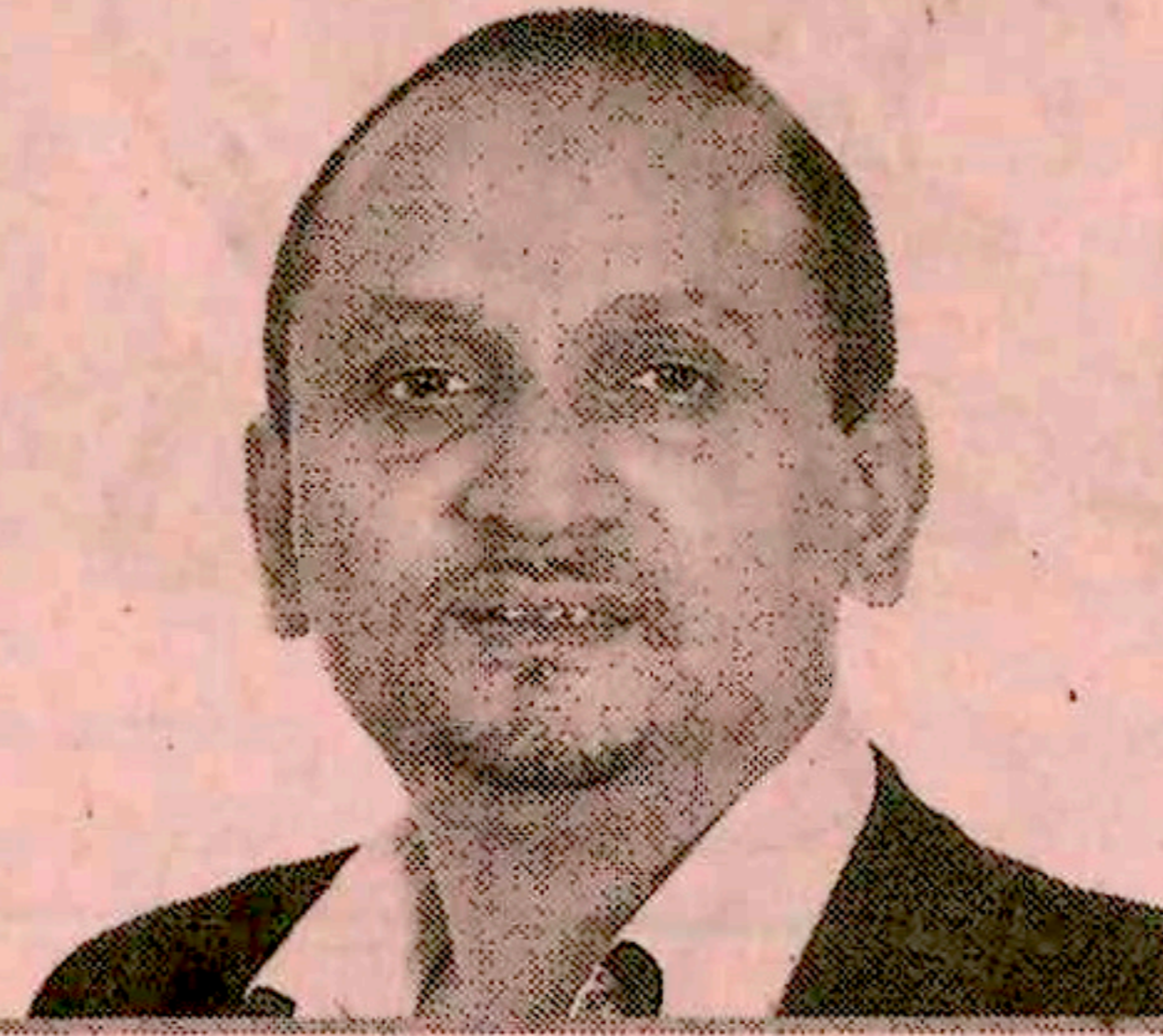
They may impose a travel ban for anyone with a Qatari visa on passport just as it is the case for Israeli visa holders. Indians working in Qatar will be affected by this in the short term before Qatar devises paper visa, just as Israel. This extreme step will lead to deep erosion of relations, making it impossible for any patch-ups.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE might initiate a move to kick Qatar out of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) but that is possible only if all five members agree. Arm-twisting Oman and Kuwait, the other two GCC members, may not be easy, though.

Finally, as a face-saving measure for all, Qatar might work with the intermediary Kuwait and agree to some of the atrocious demands while keeping *Al Jazeera* closure out of it. HH Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the ruler of Qatar, may just demonstrate his political and diplomatic negotiation acumen in this graceful step.

That the impasse is not over the issue of terror funding is clear. If that were the case there would be many other nations in the sanction list for their citizens' contribution to terror outfits.

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