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1. Qatar frees Indian Navy veterans

What happened recently?

Qatar has released the eight former officers of the Indian Navy after dropping their death sentences, crediting the Qatari emir for the decision more than 18 months after the arrest challenged diplomatic relations.



A combination of pictures shows the ex-Indian Navy veterans, who were in custody in Qatar, have arrived at the Delhi airport. Seven of the eight Indian Navy veterans were sentenced to death on 'espionage' charges.

What were the charges?

The Indian Navy veterans were accused of spying for Israel, news agency Reuters reported, though India and Qatar did not confirm the charges against them. Their death sentence, handed down in October, was dropped in December.

The veterans, who were released by the Qatar court, are Captain Navtej Singh Gill (retired), Captain Saurabh Vasisht (retired), Commander Purnendu Tiwari (retired), Captain Birendra Kumar Verma (retired), Commander Sugunakar Pakala (retired), Commander Sanjeev Gupta (retired), Commander Amit Nagpal (retired) and Sailor Ragesh (retired).

The veterans, employed by a private company, were supporting a number of programmes and activities for the Qatari Navy, a person with knowledge of the case told Reuters.

Why the case was so important for India?

India engaged in talks for months with Qatar after the veterans were arrested in August 2022 and the case challenged ties with Doha, a crucial natural gas supplier to India, which is one of the world's top energy importers.

The news of the release comes days after Qatari and Indian companies signed their biggest single deal for supplies of liquefied natural gas and after Modi met Sheikh Tamim on the sidelines of the COP28 climate summit in Dubai in December and discussed the "well-being of the Indian community in Qatar".

More than 8 lakh Indian citizens live and work in Qatar.

Where is another veteran?

People familiar with the matter said Commander Purnendu Tiwari stayed back in Doha and is likely to come back to India soon.

The ministry of external affairs in a statement said India appreciates the decision by the Emir of Qatar to enable the release and homecoming of the Indians, who were arrested in August 2022.

Timeline of the case

- On October 26, 2023, the Indian Navy veterans were given death sentences by Qatar's Court of First Instance.
- On December 28, the Court of Appeal in the Gulf nation commuted the capital punishment and sentenced them to jail terms for durations ranging from three years to 25 years. The Court of Appeal had also given 60 days to appeal against the prison terms.
- In December last year, Prime Minister Modi met Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the sidelines of the COP28 Summit in Dubai and discussed the well-being of the Indian community in Qatar.
- It is learnt that National Security Adviser Ajit Doval played a role in the negotiations with the Qatari authorities in securing the release of the Indians.
- The charges were filed against the eight Indian Navy veterans on March 25 last year and they were tried under Qatari law.
- In May last year, Al-Dhara Global closed its operations in Doha. All those working there (primarily Indians) have since returned home.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Bilateral Relations

Source: Hindustan Times

2. The blurring lines between makers of GenAI software, hardware

Chat with RTX

Nvidia Corporation, the undisputed king of advanced chips that are now driving artificial intelligence (AI) applications, is releasing a new tool that lets owners of its latest series graphic cards run an AI-powered chatbot offline on a Windows PC.

The tool, called 'Chat with RTX', will allow users to customise a generative AI (GenAI) model on the lines of OpenAI's ChatGPT or Google's Bard by linking it to files, documents, and notes that they can then query.



Nvidia's chatbot push comes at a time when OpenAI CEO Sam Altman is seeking trillions of dollars in investments to revamp the global semiconductor industry, The Wall Street Journal reported last week. Altman, who is behind the startup that launched ChatGPT, the fastest-growing consumer software application in history, has repeatedly voiced concern over the supply-and-demand problem with AI chips which, he has said, is limiting the growth of OpenAI.

Nvidia's advantage

The gen AI boom has been the major reason for the soaring demand for specialised chips of the kind that Nvidia makes. Graphics processing units (GPUs) — the advanced chips that were earlier targeted at gaming applications but which are now driving AI applications — have the computing power and operational efficiency to run the calculations that allow companies working on large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT or Bard to chomp down on massive volumes of data.

Nvidia Corp has seen its valuation surge since the LLM boom, and is now swamped with orders that it is struggling to deliver. The pioneering graphics chipmaker is already one of the world's most valuable companies, riding on its dominance in the gaming sector and now, the AI space and the potential that generative AI has to reshape the technology sector.

Analysts say Nvidia is ahead in the race for AI chips because of its proprietary software that makes it easier to leverage all of the GPU hardware features for AI applications. It also has the systems to back the processors up, and the software that runs all of it, making it a full stack solutions company.

Nvidia also offers an application programme interface (API) — which is a set of instructions that enable different applications to communicate with each other — called CUDA, which allows the creation of parallel programmes using GPUs, and are deployed in supercomputing sites around the world.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: The Indian Express

3. 'Specific duration' clause in draft India-EFTA pact may affect drug industry

Specific Duration Clause

A clause in a draft free trade agreement text being negotiated between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) could delay access to affordable, generic versions of patented drugs in India by a minimum of six years.

A leaked draft of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) says that within six months of the agreement being signed, signatories should include a "specific duration" during which applicants seeking consent from their country's regulators to sell a drug would not rely on "undisclosed test data" to gain market approval for at least six years.

The "signatories", here, refer to the countries and "applicants" being the pharmaceutical companies. The "undisclosed test data", in this case, is on the drug's efficacy and impact on people.

India's Generic drug industry

India, which has over decades, mushroomed a thriving generics drug industry has resisted attempts by foreign pharmaceutical companies to extend monopoly rights over patented drugs.

This is mostly because India's generic drug industry has over the years made affordable versions of expensive drugs and become a large global supply itself.

The Indian pharma industry is the third largest in the world and produces over 60,000 generic drugs across 60 therapeutic categories and had an annual turnover of ₹3.4 lakh crore, Minister of State (Chemicals and Fertilizers) Bhagwant Khuba told Parliament in July 2023.

Unavailability of drugs

"These effectively mean that drugs such as bedaquiline (for TB) under provisions of data exclusivity wouldn't be available.

Patented drugs give exclusive marketing rights to the inventor, or whoever files for the patent first, for 20 years.

This has often resulted in essential drugs and medicines being unaffordable in several countries, including in India. Under internationally accepted provisions of compulsory licensing, Indian law allows drug maker to reverse-engineer and sell generic, or copy-cat versions of the drug, after only three years of it being patented in India.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics
Source: The Hindu

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