

Qatar diplomatic crisis: Kuwait trying to mediate to solve rift among Gulf nations

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Dubai: Kuwait is trying to mediate a diplomatic crisis in which Arab countries-led by Saudia Arabia have cut diplomatic ties to Qatar and moved to isolate the energy-rich, travel-hub nation from the outside world, Qatar's foreign minister said early Tuesday.

Passengers of cancelled flights wait at Dohar Airport

Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani saidÂ that Kuwait's ruler had asked Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, to hold off on giving a speech about the crisis late Tuesday night.

"He received a call from the emir of Kuwait asking him to postpone it in order to give time to solve the crisis," Sheikh Mohammed said in an interview with Doha-based satellite news network Al-Jazeera.

Still, the minister struck a defiant tone, vowing his nation rejected those "trying to impose their will on Qatar or intervene in its internal affairs."

The minister said that the move has put a question mark on the future of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

"This brings about real questions about the future of the GCC nations, which are basically one people who share the same language and have extensive family ties among its peoples. That said, however, we reject that some in the GCC are trying to impose their will on Qatar or intervene in its internal affairs. This is rejected. But overall, we think there is a big question mark on this GCC," he told Al-Jazeera.

Biggest diplomatic crisis in Gulf after 1991 war

The biggest diplomatic crisis in the Persian Gulf region since the 1991 U.S.-led war against Iraq pits several nations against Qatar. Airlines suspended flights and residents nervous about the peninsula's lone land border closing cleaned out grocery store shelves.

There are approximately 6.5 lakh Indians in Qatar, making the largest expatriate community there.

Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates announced Monday they would cut diplomatic ties. Yemen's internationally backed government, which has lost the capital and large portions of the war-torn country, also cut relations with Qatar, as did the Maldives and one of conflict-ridden Libya's competing governments.

Saudi Arabia said it was cutting ties due to Qatar's "embrace of various terrorist and sectarian groups aimed at destabilizing the region," including the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaida, the Islamic State group and militants supported by Iran in the kingdom's restive Eastern Province. Egypt's Foreign Ministry accused Qatar of taking an "antagonist approach" toward Cairo and said "all attempts to stop it from supporting terrorist groups failed."

Qatar long has denied funding extremists, though Western officials have accused Qatar of allowing or even encouraging funding of Sunni extremists like al-Qaida's branch in Syria, once known as the Nusra Front.

Chaos at airports amid Doha flight cancellations

The Gulf countries ordered their citizens out of Qatar and gave Qataris abroad 14 days to return home to their peninsular nation, whose only land border is with Saudi Arabia. The countries also said they would eject Qatar's diplomats.

The nations also said they planned to cut air and sea traffic. Doha-based satellite news network Al-Jazeera reported trucks carrying food had begun lining up on the Saudi side of the border, apparently stranded. The Qatar Stock Exchange fell more than 7 percent in trading Monday.

Qatar Airways, one of the region's major long-haul carriers, has suspended all flights to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain until further notice. On its website, the carrier said the suspension of its flights would take effect Tuesday and customers are being offered a refund.

The route between Doha, Qatar and Dubai is popular among business travelers and both are major transit hubs for travelers between Asia and Europe. FlightRadar24, a popular airplane tracking website, said Qatar Airway flights already had started to be affected.

"Many of Qatar Airways' flights to southern Europe and Africa pass through Saudi Arabia," the site said. "Flights to Europe will most likely be rerouted through Iran and Turkey."

- (With agencies)