

GCC Summit today as unjust blockade of Qatar continues



The 39th GCC Summit takes place today in Riyadh amid an ongoing blockade on Qatar imposed in June 2017 by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

Without even giving the slightest hint, Saudi Arabia closed the Salwa border, Qatar's only land crossing, cutting off a vital link for food and medical supplies, on June 5 last year. The blockading countries, three of them Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) members, cut off all diplomatic ties and banned Qatari citizens from their territories.

The ban affected Qatari students pursuing their studies in the siege countries and Qatari citizens and residents who have invested huge sums in real estate and business ventures in the blockading countries. As their own nationals were asked to return to their home countries, thousands of Gulf family members were stranded or separated in one stroke of unjust, political one-upmanship.

The crisis did not even spare animals – thousands of camels that used to graze in the vast Saudi deserts – were rushed across the border. Many of the animals perished in the ensuing

stampede and as a result of lack of feed or water.

The blockading countries even closed their airspace for Qatari aircraft in their efforts to heap further trouble on their neighbour who they called a brother until the previous day.

Not being satisfied with these unjust measures, the blockading countries, launched a vicious anti-Qatar media campaign that employed an army of social media 'influencers' who spread fake news about Qatar in an effort to sully its fair name.

They used hate speech to spread hatred among the people of the GCC member states and did not hesitate even to use religious platforms against Qatar.

In one of the most ignominious and unprecedented acts of victimisation, Riyadh politicised Umrah and Haj, depriving Qatari nationals from performing one of the main obligations of Islam. On the other hand Haj visas were used as a political tool to intimidate poor countries in Africa to declare their loyalty to Saudi Arabia.

When nothing worked and Qatar continued to grow from strength to strength, the card of tribal affiliations was played to divide the people of the region but that too to no avail.

All the while, the campaign against Qatar went unabated, both at the regional and international levels. 'Protestors' and 'panelists' were paid to participate in anti-Qatar events organised by hired firms abroad.

In the face of such serious provocations, Qatar has continued to keep decorum and maintained that the crisis has to be solved through talks.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani recently said he regrets the continuation of the conflict with other Arab states, but added that the "crises will pass".

Addressing Qatar's Shura (Advisory) Council last month, the Amir said the country would continue to develop its oil and gas industries as it is keen to preserve its status as the world's top liquefied natural gas exporter.

"History teaches us that crises pass, but if they are handled badly then this may leave traces which last for a long time," the Amir said.

“It is very regrettable that the continuation of the Gulf crisis exposed the failure of the Gulf Co-operation Council ... which has weakened its ability to face challenges and threats and marginalised its role in the region,” he added.

Experts say it remains unclear how today’s summit will affect the ongoing dispute, as the “largely-symbolic” body has for years abandoned its functional role of building closer ties between member states.

With the GCC unable to resolve the crisis, analysts say the organisation itself has proven to be futile, both politically and to an extent, economically.

This year’s meeting also comes amid pressure from the West, as the United States – a GCC ally – and Europe say the council is vital for keeping the region secure.

While the agenda of this year’s summit has not been made public, experts predict that the Gulf crisis will not be a top priority.

This year’s summit also comes amid the diplomatic crisis over Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s assassination, which has put Riyadh in the dock.

Since the crisis began, Qatar has secured new strategic alliances, most notably with Turkey.

The GCC, a political and economic alliance of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, was established in 1981 to foster socioeconomic, security, and cultural co-operation.