

Qatari government revokes citizenships in crackdown on dissent

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The Qatari government has continued its crackdown on the Al Murrah tribe, this time targeting renowned Qatari poet Mohammad bin Futais al-Marri and stripping him of his citizenship in what rights groups labelled a flagrant violation of human rights.

Marri's citizenship was revoked after he opposed Doha's views on Saudi Arabia. Riyadh, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Qatar in June over its alleged support for radical groups, many with ties to Iran.

Al Arabiya news channel reported that Marri spoke out about four months into the dispute, saying he rejected the politicisation of the haj and the insulting of Gulf symbols and labelling those that do such things "mobs."

"If insulting homelands is a red line, then insulting sanctities and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and scholars is a line of fire and we will not allow anyone to cross it or violate it," Marri said in an audio recording played on the network.

Many social media comments were critical of Doha, accusing it of supporting and protecting the Muslim Brotherhood and its leader at the expense of its own people. The Arabic hashtag "Qatar naturalises agents and expels citizens" trended in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region.

Revocation of citizenship is frequently used as a weapon by Doha to deal with domestic dissent and the Al Murrah tribe has been a particular target. Thousands of members of the tribe have been displaced and are stateless.

The group, which has branches in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, has reportedly been harassed by Qatari authorities since the 1990s. Authorities revoked the citizenship of Al Murrah tribal leader Sheikh Talib bin Lahoum bin Shraim and 55 members of his family over alleged links to Saudi Arabia.

During a unified Qatari opposition meeting in London in September, Sheikh Talib said the incident occurred after he and other tribal leaders met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz.

Qatari officials recently revoked the citizenship of another tribal chief, Sheikh Shafi Nasser Hamoud



Free spirit. Qatari poet Mohammad bin Futais al-Marri recites a poem at the Million's Poet show in Abu Dhabi.

(The Cultural Programs and Heritage Festivals Committee - Abu Dhabi)

al-Hajri, head of Shaml al-Hawajer tribe, after the sheikh criticised the Qatari government's actions towards its Gulf neighbours.

The Qatari government's crackdown is by no means exclusive to regular citizens. Reports emerged that members of the Al-Thani royal family have also suffered Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's wrath.

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Sheikh Tamim also jailed members of the Al-Thani family, French magazine *Le Point* reported. The publication, quoting an incarcerated French businessman in Doha, said 20 members of the bin Ali branch of the royal family had recently been arrested on charges ranging from issuing bad cheques to drug use.

Many, however, said the arrests were because the royal family branch was at odds with Sheikh Tamim.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Jassem al-Thani, who lives in Riyadh, met with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud during the haj season seeking help for Qatar's pilgrims. He was then considered an alternative to Tamim and his branch of the family to rule Qatar.

The Geneva-based Arab Federation for Human Rights (AFHR) has condemned the moves by the Qatari government.

"The AFHR affirms that one's rights to a nationality or citizenship is an 'absolute' human right under international law and human rights instruments that cannot be contested or denied by anyone except through genuine legal restrictions not just on the basis of political differences," an AFHR statement said.

"Thus, the act of revoking a person's nationality on the grounds of differences in political opinions is a flagrant violation by the Qatari authorities against the poet Mohammad bin Futais al-Marri."

The group urged the UN Human Rights Council to intervene in the situation.

Riyadh and several other regional countries, including Qatar, severed diplomatic ties with Iran. However, on August 23, Qatar announced that it would reinstate full diplomatic ties with Tehran, going against one of the quartet of countries' chief demands for negotiations to commence with Qatar.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif arrived in Doha on

● **To preserve his domestic popularity, Sheikh Tamim should find a "middle-ground exit" from the crisis.**



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Qatar's troublesome path

Four months into the Gulf crisis, it has become increasingly obvious that the Doha regime is not only running into trouble with its neighbours but also with its own people.

Indeed, as citizens hold out hope for a way out of the stand-off with Arab countries and the regime uses its power to silence dissent, a sense of mistrust is growing.

Findings of a survey released October 2 by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy indicated that 81% of Qatari nationals who were asked said they hope the dispute with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain would be settled in an amicable fashion.

The Doha regime, however, does not agree with its people and has been silencing them or permanently banishing them.

The crackdown on dissent has been particularly severe recently, with authorities systematically revoking the citizenship of those who oppose the policies of Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

The latest victim of this punitive campaign was Mohammad bin Futais al-Marri, a celebrated poet who reportedly opposed his government's stance towards Saudi Arabia.

This comes after Sheikh Talib bin Mohammed bin Lahoum bin Shraim, the head of Qatar's Al Murrah tribe, and 54 of his relatives, including women and children, had their citizenship revoked in September.

Oddly, Qatar's campaign of citizenship revocation coincides with another strange policy – the granting of permanent residency status to foreigners deemed to have "given service to Qatar" or to have "skills that can benefit the country."

Beneath this talk of "permanent residency status" for "those who have given service to Qatar," however, lies a sinister reality.

Gulf media reports state the "permanent residency status" will benefit thousands of terrorists and wanted criminals who were hosted by Doha to escape justice in their home countries.

Even more troubling, the new status will allow "permanent foreigners" to join the Ahmed bin Mohammed Military College and, eventually, enlist in a foreign division of Qatar's national army. How can those with no sense of belonging to the country or its social and

cultural fabric be entrusted with serving in the military?

This policy is not only a source of concern for the Qatari people but also a threat to their future and that of their neighbours. It is obvious that the boycotted regime, which has put its full weight behind the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists, threatens to obliterate the country's national identity and ruin its Arab features.

The strange policy of revoking Qatari nationals' citizenship while granting permanent residency status to foreigners is disturbing on another level: It shows that the Qatari regime is willing to support opportunistic people as long as it is flattered.

Beneath the talk of "permanent residency status" for "those who have given service to Qatar" lies a sinister reality.

Qatar's true workers, those really contributing to the nation-building process, meanwhile, are left without assistance and subject to numerous rights violations, said reports by the United Nations' International Labour Organisation, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

Sheikh Tamim is surely walking in the footsteps of his father, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Hamad bin Abdullah bin Jassim al-Thani, the former emir who also used citizenship revocation as a punitive measure and, at times, as collective punishment.

From October 2004-June 2005, as many as 6,000 members of the al-Ghufran branch of the Al Murrah tribe were deprived of their Qatari nationality on spurious grounds. Some were reportedly forced to leave Qatar and resettle in neighbouring countries. Others were detained before being forced to leave.

The modern and wealthy Qatar that Sheikh Tamim is trying to promote to the West is also the Qatar that turned its back on its own nationals. It is the Qatar that has deprived its citizens of essential rights, displaced its people and silenced its poets.

The Qatar of Sheikh Tamim is not the Qatar for which the majority of Qataris yearn.

Qatari public unhappy with regime ties to Tehran

The Arab Weekly staff

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Most Qataris who participated in a recent poll said they would like to see a compromise solution to the dispute in which Saudi Arabia and its regional allies severed ties with Doha.

On October 2, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy released the results of a survey by a leading professional Arab market research firm that found that an overwhelming majority of Qatari respondents said they would like to see the conflict, which began in early June, resolved in an "amicable" manner:

81% of those surveyed said they supported a compromise in which all sides in the dispute agree to concessions.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Qatar over what the quartet of countries described as Doha's interference in their countries' internal affairs and its support for radical groups, such as Hamas, the Taliban and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Qatari government denied the allegations.

The survey's findings were released at a time when Qatar has been edging closer to Iran, one of the boycotting countries' main points of contention with the Doha leadership.

Following an attack on the Saudi Embassy in Tehran in January 2016,

October 3 for talks with the Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the first visit by an Iranian official to the tiny Gulf state since the crisis began.

Most Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members view Iran as a destabilising force due to its support of radical Islamist militias, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Yemen's Houthis rebels, who are fighting a Saudi-led coalition that supports the country's internationally recognised government.

The survey found that most Qataris asked said they were opposed to Iran's regional policies.

Tehran's regional proxies fare worse. The survey results indicated that "Hezbollah and the Houthis of Yemen get negative ratings from fully 90% of Qatar's adult popula-

tion and a narrow majority (53%) of Qataris even say that "the most important issue in this situation is to find the maximum degree of Arab cooperation against Iran," the institute said.

Despite the Doha government's support of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qataris in general reportedly have a negative view of the group, which is banned in several GCC countries. The survey's findings stated that Qataris disapprove of the government's support of Muslim Brotherhood 56% to 41%.

The survey advised that Sheikh Tamim, to preserve his domestic popularity, should find a "middle-ground exit" from the crisis and distance himself and his government from Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood.