

# Qatar Commutes India ex-Navy Officers' Death Penalty

## Why In News

- An appellate court in Qatar has commuted the death sentence handed out to eight former Indian Navy officers earlier this year, allegedly over charges of espionage.
- A statement from the **Ministry of External Affairs** said, “We have noted the verdict today of the Court of Appeal of Qatar in the Dahra Global case, in which the sentences have been reduced.”



- It added, “The detailed judgement is awaited. We are in close touch with the legal team as well as the family members to decide on the next steps.”
- In October this year, a Qatari court sentenced the men to death, following which the MEA said it was “exploring all legal options”.

## Who Are The Eight Former Navy Men In Qatar

- **Eight former Indian Navy personnel** — Captain Navtej Singh Gill, Captain Saurabh Vasisht, Commander Purnendu Tiwari, Captain Birendra Kumar Verma, Commander Sugunakar Pakala, Commander Sanjeev Gupta, Commander Amit Nagpal and Sailor Ragesh — were working in Qatar at Al Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services, a defence services provider company.



- Of them, Commander Sugunakar Pakala (Retd) served as an engineering officer in the Navy, holding the unique record of crossing the equator twice aboard INS Tarangini, a 500-tonne sailship. A decorated officer, he received a commendation from the commander-in-chief

## What Were The Charges

- The men were **arrested in August 2022**. At the time, MEA spokesman Arindam Bagchi said that questions of charges of arrest “should be directed to the Qatari authorities”.
- The family members and MEA officials also said that Qatar had not informed them of the charges.



- Sources said the Indians had been **working in their private capacity with Dahra Global** to oversee the induction of **Italian small stealth submarines U212**. According to a report at the time of the death sentences being announced, “A

person briefed on the case confirmed, That the eight Indians had been charged with spying for Israel.”

- The men met **India’s Ambassador** in Doha in October 2022 and received limited access to relatives via phone calls. It was later learnt that they were undergoing solitary punishment.

## Conclusion

- The people cited above said the **Qatari court** had commuted the death sentence of all eight men and given them prison terms of varying duration.
- “The death sentence is off the table. The prison terms vary from a few years to several years,”



- The **commutation of the death sentence** makes it possible for India to invoke a 2015 agreement with Qatar on the transfer of sentenced persons.
- The pact allows **citizens of India and Qatar** who have been convicted and sentenced for criminal offences to serve their sentences in their home country.
- The agreement – signed during a visit to India by the emir of Qatar, **Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani**, in March 2015 – is not applicable to persons sentenced to death.
- The external affairs ministry said the Indian side is in close touch with the legal team and the families of the eight men to “decide on the next steps”.