**A new silver lining in Saudi Arabia**

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January 31, 2021

The recent surge for reforms supplementing earlier steps initiated by Saudi Arabia can be seen as a new silver lining for the Muslim world. The induction of fifty female prosecution investigators in June, for instance, imparted a new dimension to the two previous proclamations to reform the judicial system made on consecutive days in May. The first outlawed flogging as a mode of punishment while the second scrapped decapitation as a way of capital punishment, for under-18 convicts. Flogging, a routine religious punishment, was also inflicted for intoxication, harassment and some other misdemeanours. The steps softening some of the refractory taboos and strictures against females similarly, are also equally promising.

Women were elected to the Kingdom’s first ever elections to the local councils. A female squad competed at the London Summer Olympics in 2012 and again at Rio in 2016. Even earlier than this, some princesses exhibited their equestrian skills in the Emirates. Restrictions on female drivers have been relaxed. A female was selected as the first-ever spokesperson, followed by a princess as an ambassador to the USA. Their participation in education, health, scientific research, sports and entertainment sectors is rising. The country has long maintained a string of modern hospitals and scientific research institutions, sent students to the west for higher education and even instituted an award for research excellence. Coeducation introduced at the King Abdullah University in 2009 has been extended.

[Pfizer vaccine effective against UK, SA strains: Study](https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2021/pfizer-vaccine-effective-against-uk-sa-strains-study)

Women can now keep their passports, travel abroad and acquire bank loans without the consent of their male guardians and female tourists can enter the kingdom without their ‘mehrums’. They are allowed at sports stadiums, cinemas, music concerts and entertainment events. The country, in fact, hosted its first ever three-night music festival outside in December 2019. Known as the Jeddah World Fest, it flaunted legends like Janet Jackson, Mariah Carey, the Black Eyed Peas, Sean Paul, David Guetta and others. With an audience of around a hundred and thirty thousand, it was the biggest milestone of music in the Muslim world.

Even more stunning were the resolve and declarations against terrorism, at the first Mecca Conference, convened by the new sovereign and the crown prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS). It denounced the macabre policies of militants perpetrated under “a falsified banner of Islam,” that nurtured its negative perception, tainted its image, brought ignominy to the Muslim fraternity and triggered tensions between the Muslim states and other nations. It pledged to wipe out this “plague” mentality and the hordes that forced the masses to forego the faith they had cherished. The conference thus seemed to sweep aside the controversies about any covert support and patronage of various fundamentalist and militant organisations.

[US: House team rejects call to dismiss Trump case](https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2021/us-house-team-rejects-call-to-dismiss-trump-case)

This dynamism, despite some festering concerns, demonstrated that the present Saudi power constellation, has realised the imperatives of emerging global realities. The lesson for the fundamentalist Muslims, mesmerised by their erstwhile model thus evidently is that if this second-largest world oil giant—ranked in the top twenty economies—could not maintain its straitjacket conservative codes, then it would be far more difficult for any other Muslim country with meagre resources, mounting debts, dependency and deprivation. This would be even more disastrous for the militant organisations so ruthlessly ravaging the Muslim regions to replicate almost similar systems.

This transformation, treated in a broader context, reconfirms the evidence already epitomised by the saga of the state-structured Soviet ideology in the 1990s and the mammoth axis powers in the 1940s. Earlier, medieval Europe, ravaged for centuries by sectarian strife, feuds and fights was also forced to scuttle the states mandating the monopoly of any selected sect and accept a pluralist path. State regimentation has become even more impossible in our fast-sprawling global village.

[Russia to hold conference on counter-terrorism this year](https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2021/russia-to-hold-conference-on-counter-terrorism-this-year)

Reforming punishments promises to be yet another Saudi embrace to the ambient perceptions and policies about human dignity and the failure of severe punishments. Even Dickens ridiculed ‘the practice of public hanging by portraying how pockets were picked in the very crowds gathered to see the pickpockets being hanged for their crime. Scientists have similarly found that many crimes are also linked to the intricate genetic make-up that also modulates many other social and political inclinations and inspirations like being a liberal, revolutionary or reactionary. The denizens with the desired mindset and faculties thus may be designed.

Saudi Arabia and Iran, in a strange way, also happen to be analogous to Spain and France fuelling the three-hundred-year apocalypse of sectarian wars and vendetta in Europe. Yet both are now partners in the EU. A Saudi-Iran entente could similarly reshape the region.

The real prognosis of these policies is yet to unfold, but even their start certainly seems to spur a new realistic Muslim mindset.