



Dissent & diplomacy

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Highlights

- Saudi Arabia's furious response to Canada's criticism of the arrest of rights activists in the Kingdom once again calls into question Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's professed commitment to reform which he had promised to bring progressive economic and political change.
- But when Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland called for the release of Samar Badawi, a Saudi women's rights activist who was detained last week, and her brother Raif Badawi, Riyadh took a series of unilateral steps.
- Terming Ms. Freeland's appeal as interference in its domestic affairs, it expelled the Canadian Ambassador, called back its envoy from Ottawa, froze trade with Canada and said it would transfer out some 12,000 Saudi citizens studying in Canadian universities. Ms. Badawi has long campaigned against Saudi Arabia's guardianship laws that require all Saudi women to have a male guardian.
- Riyadh is yet to give reasons for the arrest.
- On overseas visits, Prince Mohammed has dwelt on his plan to improve women's rights and strengthen the economy.
- He is also obliquely critical of the guardianship laws, saying they did not exist in Saudi Arabia before 1979 — the year of the Iranian revolution and the siege of the Grand Mosque at Mecca. But despite this rhetoric on rights, the palace has shown little tolerance of political criticism at home.

Since May, many women's rights activists have been detained. Taking vengeful action against those who stand by rights activists will neither help Saudi Arabia's image nor attract investment into the country though it is second largest export destination in West Asia.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

