



Reforms in Saudi Arabia

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Why in News

Recently, **Saudi Arabia** has **abolished flogging** (whipping or lashing) as a form of punishment and the **death sentence for minors**.

The Islamic kingdom has **no codified system of law**. The individual judges **interpret Islamic law** (Sharia) and come up with their own sentences.

Key Points

- **Abolition of Flogging as Punishment:**
 - Before abolition, flogging was **mandatory as a form of corporal punishment** and could extend to hundreds of lashes.
 - Courts ordered it for **murder, breach of peace, homosexuality, consumption or possession of alcohol, adultery and insulting Islam**, among others.
- **Abolition of Death Sentence for Minors:**
 - It ensures that **no-one who committed crimes as minors** could **receive the death sentence for those crimes**. Instead, the individual will receive a **prison sentence of no longer than 10 years in a juvenile detention facility**.
 - However, there is a **possibility of exception** for people who carry out **terrorism-related crimes as minors**.
 - The practise of capital punishment for crimes committed by people under the age of 18 was in **contradiction** to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- However, the country **still practices public executions** and other forms of **corporal punishment** such as amputation for theft. It has been **criticised** for them as well.
 - Human rights organization **Amnesty International** lists Saudi Arabia as **one of the world's most prolific executioners, after Iran and China**. In its latest report, it said the kingdom had executed 184 people in 2019.
 - The country has also been **widely criticized for the continued repression of dissidents and political activists**.
 - The **Specialised Criminal Court (SCC)** jurisdiction was expanded from the trials of **alleged violent extremists** to include **political dissidents, religious minorities and human rights activists**.
 - SSC was created in 2008 to prosecute detainees held after the 2003 terrorist attack claimed by **al-Qaeda**.
- **Reforms Taken**
 - Saudi Arabia's **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman** has overseen a series of **social and economic reforms** known as '**Saudi Vision 2030**'.
 - These are aimed at **modernising the country, reducing its dependence on oil, expanding its economy, developing the public service sector and bringing it in line with international human rights norms**.

Other Earlier Reforms

- In **2018**, Saudi Arabia **lifted the ban on women drivers**.
 - Before the ban was lifted, the law made it **compulsory for every woman to have a male guardian and seek their consent** for almost everything.
 - Prior to the change in the law, **Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world** that did not allow women to drive.
- In **2019**, the country **reformed the laws relating to women**.
 - **Women over the age of 21** would be able to **receive passports and travel abroad without permission from a male guardian**.
 - Apart from that, women can also be **able to register the marriage, divorce or the birth of children and obtain family documents**.
 - They can now **also be the legal guardian of their children**, a position hitherto reserved for men.



Source: IE