Saudi Arabia - The Rise of Bin Salman

Why in news?

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- Crown prince ‘Mohammed Bin Salman’ has been radically reforming Saudi Arabia’s polity.
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- The latest action has been a stringent anti-corruption crackdown on high-profile citizens & Royals.
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Who is Salman?

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- **His Rise -** Salman, the son of the present King ‘Al Saud’, was appointed as Defence minister in 2015 at the young age of 30.
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- Due to his unorthodox methods, his popularity rose steadily & saw him replacing his cousin ‘Nayef’ as Crown Prince in June this year.
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- **His Work -** He piloted several economic reforms to drive the kingdom towards a sustainable post oil era.
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- Recently, he had even taken on the Salafi religious establishment and has projected himself as an ideological moderniser.
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- Notably, only this year, women were given the right to drive in Saudi.
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- **Current Issue -** Several senior government ministers, officials, billionaires and many powerful Princes were arrested recently.
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- The action was claimed to be part of an anti-corruption campaign.
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- But considering the high-profile names, it is seen as a move to consolidate Prince Salman’s power.
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How does his clout fare?

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- With the latest action, Prince Salman appears to have established himself as the most powerful Saudi Crown Prince in decades.
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- He is practically in charge of key policy decisions and is increasingly been seen as the real power centre in the kingdom.
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- He currently controls of all branches of the Saudi security services — the military, internal security and the National Guard.
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- But still, Prince Salman is said to be playing a risky game and a failure of his radical reforms could trigger an internal power struggle.
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What are the challenges?

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- **Upending tradition -** Power was traditionally distributed tactically among the different branches of the royal family to avoid dissent.
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- Also, decisions are usually forwarded to the Ulema (religious council) for approval.
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- By concentrating power in his own hands and turning against other Princes as well as some clerics, he has upset these equations.
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- **Foreign Policy Flips -** His foreign policy moves also backfired with the Yemen war spinning further out of control.
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- Syrian civil war too has effectively turned in favour of President Bashar al-Assad, who is seen as an adversary by Riyadh.
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- With the Riyadh-Tehran rivalry in West Asia hotting up again, needing urgent attention.
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- **Economics –** There has been many subsidy cuts which might generate a public backlash.

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- The reforms for restructuring the economy has been a non-starter thus far.
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Source: The Hindu

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