

'Saudi women can open businesses'

Women in Saudi Arabia can now open their own businesses without the consent of a husband or male relative, as the kingdom pushes to expand the private sector.

The policy change, announced by the Saudi government last week, also marks a major step away from the strict guardianship system present in the country for decades.

Reform measures

"Women can now launch their own businesses and benefit from (governmental) e-services without having to prove consent from a guardian," the Ministry of Commerce and Investment said on its website.

Under Saudi Arabia's guardianship system, women are required to present proof of permission from a male "guardian" — normally the husband, father or brother. However, of late, the kingdom is pushing to expand women's employment under a reform plan for a post-oil era.

The public prosecutor's office this month said it would begin recruiting women investigators for the first time. The kingdom has also opened 140 positions for women at airports and border crossings, a historic first that the government said drew 1,07,000 women applicants.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been leading the drive to expand the role of women in the workforce. His father, King Salman, in September approved the end of a decades-long ban on driving, which goes into effect in June.

Prince Mohammed is widely seen as the architect behind the "Vision 2030" reform programme, which seeks to elevate the percentage of women in the workforce from 22% to nearly one-third.

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