

■ 10-year reign ends early yesterday after battle with lung infection

■ Former Crown Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz installed as new king

■ UAE leaders send their messages of condolence to family and nation

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia laid to rest as country mourns



Saudi Arabia's King Salman, centre, and relatives pray with other mourners during the funeral of King Abdullah at the Imam Turki bin Abdullah Mosque in Riyadh yesterday. AP Photo

King Salman to hold the course

Justin Vela
Gulf Correspondent

ABU DHABI// Saudi Arabia's new king promised to continue the policies of his predecessors as his half brother, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, was laid to rest yesterday.

King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, 79, assumed the throne promising to "continue adhering to the correct policies which Saudi Arabia has followed since its establishment".

"The Arab and the Islamic nations are in dire need for solidarity and cohesion," the new king said in a televised speech.

King Abdullah died in the early hours yesterday, aged 90, after being admitted to a Riyadh hospital on December 31. He had pneumonia diagnosed.

King Abdullah was widely regarded as a pragmatic reformer who sought to develop Saudi Arabia's economy while steering the kingdom through a series of crises and conflicts in the region.

His funeral at Riyadh's Imam Turki bin Abdullah Mosque was attended by regional leaders including some from the UAE.

Present were Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah; Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, Ruler of

Ajman; and Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah.

Also there were Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Crown Prince and Deputy Ruler of Sharjah; Sheikh Ammar bin Humaid Al Nuaimi, Crown Prince of Ajman; and Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak, Minister of Culture, Youth and Community Development.

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif and Qatar's emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani also attended.

King Abdullah was buried in

an unmarked grave, as per tradition, at El Ud cemetery in Riyadh.

TV footage showed his body, wrapped in a white shroud, being carried on a stretcher through crowds of mourners to the mosque where prayers were held.

King Salman appointed his half brother Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, 69, as Crown Prince.

Interior minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, 55, became Deputy Crown Prince, moving the line of succession to the third generation. All of Saudi's rulers have been sons of the founder, King Abdulaziz ibn Saud.

King Salman, who was named

Crown Prince in 2012 but also served as defence minister since 2011, named his son, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to replace him as head of the ministry.

King Abdullah's death prompted tributes from leaders in the region and worldwide.

"We mourn the death of one of the most notable leaders of the Arab nation and Muslim nation, who generously gave a lot to his people and his nation, and sincerely defended the causes of the Arab nation and the Muslim nation," said President Sheikh Khalifa, state news agency Wam reported.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, sent condolences to King Salman.

He also tweeted: "May Allah the Almighty grant us patience and fortitude on the death of King Abdullah. My heartfelt condolences to the Saudi and Arab peoples and to the Islamic nations."

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, said Islamic and Arab nations "lost a superb leader who stood as an advocate for Arab causes and rights, and helped to spread peace, tolerance, justice and benevolence".

Abdullah, continued on 5 →

King knew value of faith, unity and discussion

Elizabeth Dickinson

In early February 2007, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah took the leaders of warring Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah to the holiest site in Islam and told them to make peace.

The venue was the King's palace in Mecca, overlooking the Kaaba. Khaled Meshal of Hamas entered the Holy Mosque together, draped in pilgrims' robes, to touch the black stone.

Within days, they walked away with an agreement.

This was classic King Abdullah, a man who, in his nearly 10 years as monarch and two decades as leader of Saudi Arabia, gained a reputation for patience, dialogue and unwavering religious faith.

His leadership was a powerful blend of the soft power of symbolism, the hard power of generous state coffers, and the pragmatism of honest discussion. King Abdullah died yesterday

having seamlessly woven together the many parts that are Saudi Arabia, at home and in the region.

"Saudi Arabia sees itself as the leader of the Arab world, the Islamic world and the energy world," said Simon Henderson of the Washington Institute.

"Although to the outside world the energy predominates, to the Saudis generally and King Abdullah in particular, it was the Arab and Islamic leadership that was most crucial."

King Abdullah was popular, even at the most trying of times for the kingdom and the region. Much of his charm had to do with the very fact of who he was.

The son of a Bedouin woman from the Shammar tribe and the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz ibn Saud, King Abdullah was the personification of the very marriage that had wed together the state of Saudi Arabia.

Obituary, continued on 5 →

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