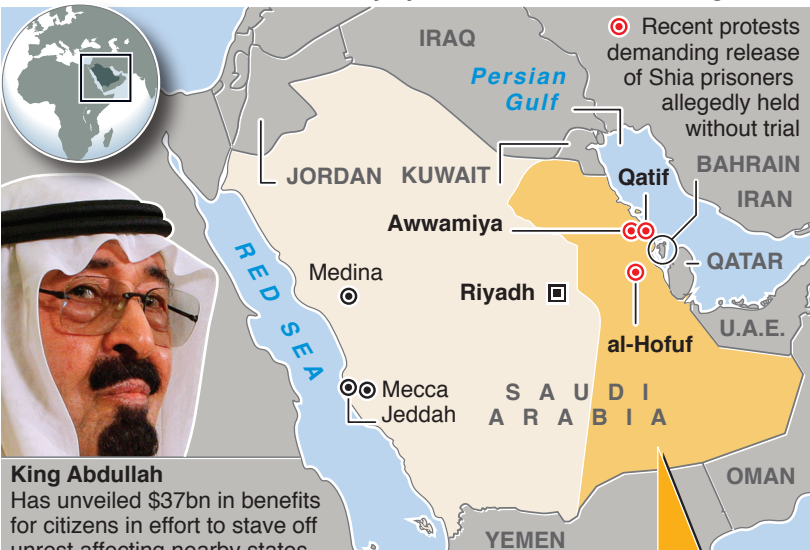


Saudi Arabia mobilises for “Day of Rage”

Thousands of troops are being readied in anticipation of mass protests on Friday to demand political reforms. All forms of protest have been banned in the world's largest oil-producing country following a series of small demonstrations, mainly by Shias in the east of the kingdom



King Abdullah

Has unveiled \$37bn in benefits for citizens in effort to stave off unrest affecting nearby states

COUNTRY FACTFILE

Population **25.4 million (2009)**
Aged 0-14 years **32.4% (2009)**

Politics: Petitions by intellectuals and rights activists urging reforms to transform absolute monarchy into constitutional kingdom

Economy

GDP **\$369 billion (2009)**
Average income (GNI) **\$17,700 (2008)**
Jobless rate **5.6% (2007)**
Oil production **10.2m bpd (2010)**
Oil reserves **260bn barrels**

Religion

Wahhabism – dominant form of Sunni Islam in Saudi Arabia – views Shias as heretics. **Shias, who make up 15% of population, complain of discrimination**

Eastern Province:

Home to most of kingdom's Shia Muslim minority, and to largest oil fields and refining facilities