



Pressure for social reform sweeps Middle East

1. SAUDI ARABIA: *King Abdullah* says women will be allowed to vote and run as candidates for first time, but not until 2015 municipal elections. Women will also be permitted to join ***Shura Council***, influential consultative assembly

Seen as move to head off criticism and victory for liberal opinion in country where women are forbidden to drive and need permission of male relative to work or travel abroad

2. YEMEN: *President Ali Abdullah Saleh* says he is committed to handing over power and called for early elections in first speech since returning from Saudi Arabia, where he was treated for severe burns after June assassination attempt

His failure to step down immediately fuelled anger on streets, where protests against his 33-year rule have raged since January

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3. BAHRAIN: Under international pressure in wake of crackdown on February protests, ***King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa*** has proposed reforms including increased scrutiny of government ministers

Sep 24 by-elections – called after main Shia opposition party vacated seats in protest at treatment of demonstrators during February unrest – are marred by scuffles and low turnout