

Saudi Arabia rules out mediation in Canada spat

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said on Wednesday there was no room for mediation in the kingdom's deepening diplomatic dispute with Canada, and that Ottawa knew what it needed to do to "fix its big mistake".

"There is nothing to mediate. A mistake has been made and a mistake should be corrected," Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir told a news conference in Riyadh.

In an indication that the quarrel may worsen, Mr Jubeir said that the kingdom was still "considering additional measures" against Canada, but did not elaborate.

Saudi Arabia on Sunday froze new trade with Canada and expelled the Canadian ambassador in retaliation for Ottawa's call to free arrested Saudi civil society activists.

It also ended state-backed educational and medical programmes in Canada, making plans to relocate tens of thousands of Saudi students and patients to other countries.

Responding to a question about the reason for the activists' arrests, Mr Jubeir said that charges against them would be made public once their cases reached the courts, repeating earlier allegations that they had been in touch with foreign entities.

"The matter is not about human rights; it is a matter of national security," he said.

Canadian investments in Saudi Arabia were still ongoing and would not be affected by the dispute, he said.

Reports say Canada plans to seek help from the United Arab Emirates and Britain to defuse the row.

The Financial Times reported the Saudi central bank and state pension funds had instructed their overseas asset managers to dispose of their Canadian equities, bonds and cash holdings “no matter the cost”, citing unidentified sources.

A Canadian departmental spokesperson said Global Affairs Canada continues to seek clarity from the Saudi Arabian government on various issues.

A source at a Saudi bank said it was contacted by the central bank on Wednesday afternoon asking for information about all their Canadian exposure investments in Canada and foreign exchange positions.