

## **Saudi religious police quizzed over man's death**

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Five members of the religious police have been arrested in Saudi Arabia and accused of being responsible for the death of a man in their custody, police said on Sunday.

A statement said a probe was under way into Friday's death of the unidentified man in one of the offices of the Muttawa, the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, in the northwestern city of Tabuk.

The religious police, who enforce a strict Islamic moral code, were questioning the man for allegedly associating with a woman who was not a relative, it said.

Saudi press reports also said on Sunday an investigation had been launched in the eastern Mecca region into how an Asian woman fell from the fourth floor of a building that was stormed by religious police last week.

Last month Al-Watan newspaper also reported that police in the capital Riyadh were probing the alleged beating to death of a man by the religious police.

He was being held on charges of "promoting alcohol," which is forbidden in the conservative Muslim kingdom.

The paper reported in April that attacks against the 5,000-strong religious police were increasing, attributing differing views over the role of the Muttawa to changes in Saudi society since the force was founded decades ago.

The interior ministry issued a decree in May last year aimed at reining in the Muttawa by requiring them not to interrogate detained suspects, as they had previously done, but to hand them over to the regular police instead.