

Saudi vice authorities told their power has limits

By Agence France Presse (AFP)

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RIYADH: The Saudi Interior Ministry has told the kingdom's controversial religious police force not to overstep its authority after the deaths of several people in its custody, a newspaper reported on Saturday. The ministry issued a statement reminding the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, or Muttawa, of the limits of its powers, Al-Watan daily said. The ministry instructed the commission's officers, who are charged with enforcing a strict Islamic moral code, to immediately hand over people they arrest to regular police who should detain them for questioning, it said. Last month, a member of the vice police was accused by Riyadh municipality of causing the death of a man during a raid on his home. The trial of four Muttawa officers after the death of a man in their custody in the northwestern city of Tabuk was also due to begin last month, but was adjourned to an unknown date because of incomplete legal documents. The Muttawa have also faced investigation in the Mecca region after an Asian woman fell to her death from the fourth floor of a building that was stormed by religious police in May. - **AFP**

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