

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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From: OpsNewsTicker@state.gov <OpsNewsTicker@state.gov>
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Subject: Three Saudi Shi'ites released after rare protest (Reuters)

AWWAMIYA, Saudi Arabia, Feb 20 (Reuters) - Three Shi'ites held in prison for over a year were freed in Saudi Arabia's oil-producing Eastern province, a Shi'ite preacher and a local journalist said on Sunday, days after a rare protest demanding their release.

Shi'ites staged a small protest on Thursday in the town of Awwamiya, near the Shi'ite centre of Qatif on the Gulf coast, to demand the release of the three, who had been held without charges.

"They were released today," preacher Khoder Awwami told Reuters on the sidelines of a ceremony in a small mosque where the three were welcomed.

"I am so happy," said Muneer al-Jasas, a blogger and one of the released men.

Officials could not be immediately reached for comment.

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