



Syria Closes Border With Lebanon

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BEIRUT (AP) -- Syrian authorities on Wednesday closed a border crossing with northeastern Lebanon without giving a reason, Lebanese security officials said.

The closure of the Qaa-Jousseh crossing left only one land border crossing between the two countries open -- the main Beirut-Damascus link at Masnaa in the eastern Bekaa Valley.

Syrian authorities closed two other crossing with northern Lebanon after the May 20 outbreak of fighting in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared where Lebanon troops are battling Fatah Islam militants.

At the time, the Syrians said the two crossings were closed for safety reasons.

Since the Syrian troop withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 under international pressure, Syria has used the flow of goods and people across the border as a pressure tactic against Lebanon, Lebanese opponents of Damascus have said.

In late 2005, slow processing of trucks carrying goods led to long lines on the crossings, prompting calls from the United States and other countries on Syria to end it.

Wednesday's closure came as an Arab League delegation was in Beirut meeting with Lebanese leaders, dispatched here after Lebanon's anti-Syrian parliamentary majority demanded the Arabs act to end Syrian interference in Lebanese affairs and alleged smuggling of weapons and militants into this country. Syria denies the accusations.

The Arab team was sent to Lebanon after a foreign ministers' meeting in Cairo last week following the assassination of a pro-government Lebanese lawmaker which his supporters blamed on Syria.

Lebanese security officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to give media statements, said drivers coming from Syria earlier in the day have been told by Syrian officials that the crossing would be closed.

The closure also was reported by the official Lebanese news agency. It said vehicle and passenger traffic in both directions was closed by the Syrians and that no reason was given.

Damascus, which did not officially confirm the move, has in the past threatened to close its land border with Lebanon if an international force is deployed along the boundary to prevent the illegal transfer of weapons to Lebanon, as was envisaged in a U.N. Security Council resolution that ended the Hezbollah-Israel war last year.

A full closure of Lebanon's border with Syria would sever Beirut's land links with the Arab world and could severely hurt its economy.

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