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Syrian Alawites kidnapped in North Lebanon: officials



Unknown attackers kidnapped at least eight members of Syria's Alawite community on Monday after they crossed into Lebanon by bus, a security official said.

The assailants seized the group "shortly after their bus crossed the Syrian-Lebanese border via the Jisr Aqmar crossing into the Wadi Khaled area of north Lebanon," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"Women and children were among the group," the official added, without giving any further details.

Two years into a spiralling war in neighboring Syria, sectarian tensions have flared up in Lebanon.

Frequent sectarian clashes have raged in the flashpoint city of Tripoli in northern Lebanon, where Alawite fighters have battled armed members of the Sunni community.

Last week, a wave of tit-for-tat kidnappings hit eastern Lebanon, pitting Shiites against Sunnis.

Damascus dominated Lebanon militarily and politically for nearly 30 years until 2005, when Syrian forces withdrew from the country under international pressure.

The country's Sunni-led March 14 political movement supports Syria's rebels, while the powerful Shiite movement Hezbollah and its allies back Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, an Alawite whose faith is an offshoot of Shiite Islam.