



By: TA | AP Brief

# Saudi Arabia lifts 5-year ban on Lebanese imports



Saudi Arabia announced Wednesday the end of a ban it imposed on Lebanese imports five years ago, marking a major step in attempts to rebuild relations between Lebanon and Gulf countries.

The kingdom slapped a **ban on Lebanese fruits** and vegetables in 2021, saying they were being used to smuggle drugs.

In one notable case, Saudi Arabia announced it had seized over 5 million pills of the amphetamine drug Captagon hidden in a shipment of pomegranates coming from Lebanon.

Months later, the wealthy Gulf country **extended the ban** to all Lebanese products after Lebanon's then- Information Minister George Kordahi publicly criticized Saudi Arabia's war against Iran-backed rebels in Yemen.

At the root of the diplomatic crisis was Saudi Arabia's regional rivalry with Iran and its displeasure with the influence of the Iran-backed **militant group Hezbollah** in Lebanon.

## Positive steps

The ban came at a time when Lebanon's economy was already reeling from a major financial crisis and the collapse of its currency.

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry said in a statement Wednesday that the reversal of the ban at the order of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman came as a result of "positive steps taken by the Lebanese state."

It did not specify what those steps were, but over the past year, the Lebanese government has announced plans to disarm all non-state groups, including Hezbollah.

Before the outbreak of the latest Israel-Hezbollah war, the Lebanese army had made progress on implementing the plan in southern Lebanon.

## Lebanese President Joseph Aoun thanked bin Salman for the decision

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun in a statement thanked bin Salman for the decision, which he said "will contribute tangibly to reviving the national economy and providing support to broad segments of Lebanese producers and exporters."

The current government of Lebanon, which came to power last year with promises of reform, has sought to rebuild ties with the Gulf countries.

Before the outbreak of the latest war, Lebanese officials were courting **Gulf tourists** to return to the country in hopes of reviving the economy, and some Gulf countries had lifted travel bans preventing their citizens from visiting Lebanon.