



SANA VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Syrian security force inspects the scene after a bomb ripped through the third floor of the state TV building in Damascus, Syria, on Monday. The bomb shattered several offices and wounded several employees, Syrian TV said.

Syrian PM defects to opposition

By AGENCIES
in Beirut and Dubai

Syrian Prime Minister Riad Hijab has defected from President Bashar al-Assad's government and joined the opposition, his spokesman said on Monday.

"I announce today my defection from the killing and terrorist regime and I announce that I have joined the ranks of the freedom and dignity revolution. I announce that I am from today a soldier in this blessed revolution," Hijab said in a statement read in his name by the spokesman on Al Jazeera television.

Syrian state TV said Hijab had been fired, but an official source in Amman said he had defected to neighboring Jordan.

The spokesman, Mohamed Atari, said Hijab was in a safe place with his extended family. His defection had been organized with the Free Syrian Army, the rebel force fighting against Assad's rule.

Jordan's information min-

ister denies that the Syrian prime minister has defected to the neighboring kingdom and another government official says the premier will be leaving Amman soon for another country.

The second official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media, said Monday the defector Riad Hijab would be heading out of the Jordanian capital to Qatar or Turkey. Earlier, the same official confirmed Hijab had defected from Syria and was in Jordan along with his family.

Hijab is to leave Jordan for Qatar within days, following the example of other high-profile defectors, his spokesman Mohammad Otri told AFP.

"Hijab will go to Doha, where international media are based. He will leave for Qatar tomorrow, the day after or after a few days," Otri told AFP in the Jordanian capital.

A member of the Syrian opposition in Jordan said Hijab will travel to Qatar "in the coming few hours".

"We are currently coordinating to facilitate the departure of Hijab to Doha in the coming few hours. Seven of his brothers will stay in Jordan," he said, saying he had helped Hijab defect.

"We understand the sensitivity of this issue for Jordan. We do not want to create problems for the kingdom, which already has tense relations with the Syrian regime," he said, on condition of anonymity.

TV station bombing

In a separate development, a bomb ripped through the third floor of the state TV building in Damascus on Monday, shattering several offices and wounding at least three employees, Syrian TV said.

The explosion was the latest in the Syrian capital, which has seen a string of suicide attacks and other bombings in the past few months as the country's civil war has escalated and the rebels grow bolder in their tactics.

The TV building, which also houses state-run radio, is located at the Umawiyyeen roundabout in central Damascus.

After Monday's blast, the TV remained on air despite what was another severe breach of a state institution and a heavily guarded area in the Syrian capital. A bomb that exploded in the state security headquarters in Damascus on July 18 killed four of Syria's top security leaders.

A pro-government private Syrian TV station, Al-Ikhabariya, broadcast images of the damage at the state TV building. The footage showed destroyed walls, overturned desks, blown-out cabinet doors, broken glass and dangling electricity cables. A few TV workers were shown tending to a wounded colleague.

Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi said the bomb blast caused heavy material damage and light injuries among the employees.

He blamed Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Israel for the attack. Syrian authorities accuse the Gulf countries and Israel of supporting the rebels fighting against Assad's troops and fueling the insurgency in Syria.

MEMORIAL

• April 2011

Two members of parliament representing the city of Daraa resign over the repression there.

• July 30, 2011

Colonel Riad al-Asaad, an army officer, says he has defected and gone to neighboring Turkey to form the Free Syrian Army.

• January

MP Imad Ghalioun announces in Egypt he has resigned to oppose the regime.

• March 8

Abdo Hussameddin, Assad's deputy oil minister, says he is defecting and joining the rebellion.

• June 22

A fighter pilot defects with his aircraft to Jordan, where he asks for and receives political asylum.

• July 6

General Manaf Tlass is reported to have defected.

• July 11

Syria's ambassador to Iraq, Nawaf Fares, becomes the first senior diplomat to defect.

• July 30

Syria's top diplomat in London, charge d'affaires Khaled al-Ayoubi, resigns.

• Aug 5

Three intelligence officers defect and seek refuge in neighboring Jordan.

• Aug 6

Prime Minister Riad Hijab defects to the opposition.

REUTERS—AFP—AP

AFP

Egypt vows crackdown on 'infidel' after border killings

By AGENCIES in Cairo

Egypt branded Islamist gunmen who killed 16 police near the Israeli border as "infidel" and promised on Monday to launch a crackdown following the massacre that strained Cairo's ties with both Israel and Palestinians.

An Egyptian official has said "jihadist elements" crossed from the Gaza Strip into Egypt before leading the assault on a border station. They then stole two armored vehicles and tried to smash their way into Israel, but were killed by Israeli fire.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said on Monday that eight assailants died in the attack, adding that he hoped the incident would serve as a "wake-up call" to Egypt, which he has long accused of losing its grip in the desert Sinai Peninsula.

The bloodshed represented an early diplomatic test for Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, an Islamist who took office at the end of June after staunch US ally Hosni Mubarak was overthrown last year in a popular uprising.

Mubarak cooperated closely with Israel on security and suppressed Islamist movements such as Morsi's Muslim Brother-

hood whose leaders often voiced hostility toward the Jewish state.

Egypt's military, which still holds many levers of power in the most populous Arab nation, called the attackers "infidels" and said it had been patient until now in the face of the instability in Sinai.

"But there is a red line and passing it is not acceptable. Egyptians will not wait for long to see a reaction to this event," it said in a statement on its Facebook page.

A demilitarized Sinai is the keystone of the historic 1979 peace deal between the two countries.

But for the past year there has been growing lawlessness in the vast desert expanse, as Bedouin bandits, jihadists and Palestinian militants from next-door Gaza fill the vacuum, tearing at already frayed relations between Egypt and Israel.

Addressing a parliamentary committee in Jerusalem, Barak praised the work of Israeli forces in blunting Sunday's attack, with the Israeli airforce swiftly swinging into action and destroying one of the vehicles as it tried to breach the border.

"Perhaps it will also be a proper wake-up call to the Egyptians

to take matters in hand on their side in a firmer way," he said.

'Swear to avenge'

"We swear in the name of God to avenge them," the Egyptian army said in its statement on Monday.

"Anyone liaising with these groups that have attacked our troops in the Sinai in recent months will pay dearly, be it inside Egypt or abroad," the Egyptian army said.

"The bodies of the five gunmen have been found by the Israeli army," an Israeli military spokesman said, but did not give details.

The Israeli military's top spokesman, Yoav Mordechai, told army radio: "We were ready because we had previous information from Shin Bet (security service) and from military intelligence services, which allowed us to thwart a bloody attack."

The armored vehicle that crossed the border "fired in every direction after entering Israeli territory before being attacked by tanks and from the air", Mordechai added.

He said the gunmen were "members of the global jihad based in Sinai, which has become a hothouse for world



SAID KHATIB / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Palestinian Hamas security officers patrol an area in the southern border town of Rafah on Monday. Five gunmen who shot dead 16 Egyptian guards near the border with Israel before crossing into the Jewish state in an armored vehicle have been killed, according to an Israeli army spokesman.

terrorism because of the weak control exercised" by Egypt.

Morsi said he had given "clear instructions" that Egypt must take "full control of the Sinai".

An interior ministry team has been sent to the site to investi-

gate the attack, the ministry said. Morsi said those who committed the "cowardly" attack and those who worked with them would pay dearly.

"Those responsible for this crime will be hunted down and

arrested," he said.

"Everybody will see that the Egyptian military and police forces can get these criminals wherever they are," he said.

REUTERS—AFP

Sri Lanka releases 37 Chinese fishermen

By ZHOU WA
zhouwa@chinadaily.com.cn

Thirty-seven Chinese fishermen detained by the Sri Lankan navy on Sunday night were not involved in illegal fishing, and the detention was a misunderstanding, Yuan Baisheng, a consul of the Chinese embassy in Sri Lanka, told China Daily on Monday.

According to the embassy, the fishermen are employed by two trawlers owned by a Sri Lankan shipping company.

The fishermen have been released, the Chinese embassy confirmed on Monday.

"The fishermen were held on board and free to move around during the 'detainment,'" said Yuan.

According to Yuan, the Sri Lankan company bought the two vessels from China, and locals might confuse the Sri Lankan vessels as Chinese ones, due to the old Chinese logo on the body of the ship.

The details about the reason the fishermen were detained need to be further confirmed, Yuan said.

Sri Lankan navy spokesman Commander Kosala Warnakulasuriya was quoted by Xinhua News Agency on Monday as saying that the Chinese were arrested for illegally fishing in Sri Lankan waters and would be handed over to police for further investigation.



The fishermen were held on board and free to move around during the 'detainment.'

YUAN BAISHENG
CONSUL OF THE CHINESE
EMBASSY IN SRI LANKA

The fishermen were aboard the two trawlers off the eastern coast of Batticaloa, he said, adding that two Sri Lankan crewmen were also arrested.

The two trawlers — one with a crew of 19 Chinese and one Sri Lankan and the other with 18 Chinese and one Sri Lankan — were escorted to Sri Lanka's Trincomalee Harbor, the Sri Lankan navy said.

The trawlers, YU 6177 and YU 6178, are registered with Sri Lanka's Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and have permission to engage in fishing beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone of Sri Lanka, the navy said on its website.

When news of the seizure emerged, the Chinese embassy immediately began coordinating with Sri Lankan authorities, it said.

According to the website of illegal-fishing.info, marine fisheries are of considerable importance in Sri Lanka. Fishing contributes 2 percent to the nation's GDP, and approximately 1 million people are sustained by the fishing industry.

In recent years, the fishing industry has emerged as an important source of foreign exchange through the export of high-value products, such as frozen tuna, as well as shrimp, lobsters, shark fins and sea cucumber.

The key markets for Sri Lankan seafood exports are the EU, China, Japan, Singapore and the US.