

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli paragliders to enter Syria

Penetration prompts intensive search for fear the border-crosser may join IS

By REUTERS in Jerusalem

Israel said on Sunday that one of its citizens, probably a member of the Muslim Arab minority, had illegally flown to rebellion-wracked Syria by using a paraglider to cross the Golan Heights frontier.

Israeli media gave the man's age as 23 and quoted investigators as speculating that he

sought to join Islamic State or other insurgents trying to bring down Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The penetration, which took place on Saturday evening, prompted intensive searches. Witnesses on the fortified Golan reported that Israeli aircraft were circling and dropping illumination flares.

The military issued a brief

statement on Sunday saying that its investigation "indicates that the civilian that entered (Syria) is a resident of Jaljulia," a largely Muslim Arab town in central Israel.

A Syrian rebel whose group operates in the area said the paraglider had come down either in Quneitra province or western Deraa. Local rebel groups include the Southern Front alliance affiliated with the Free Syrian Army, the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front, and a group called the Yar-

mouk Martyrs Brigade, which other rebels believe is affiliated with Islamic State.

Israel's Army Radio said the man flew eastward against the prevailing wind, an indication he went deliberately and was not blown into Syria by accident.

Arabs, most of them Muslim, make up 20 percent of Israel's population. Though often sympathetic to the Palestinians, they seldom take up arms against the Jewish-majority state.

Israel is publicly neutral on Syria's 4-year-old civil war but bans travel there by its citizens. In recent years it has stepped up scrutiny of those suspected of trying to reach the country through intermediary states like Turkey.

Israel's Shin Bet security service, which is investigating the paraglider penetration, says that more than 40 Arab citizens and Palestinians from Israeli-held East Jerusalem have tried to join Islamic State in its Syrian or Iraqi fiefdoms.

SYRIA



A Sukhoi Su-24 fighter jet takes off from Hmeimim Air Base near Latakia, Syria, in this photo released by Russia's Defense Ministry on Thursday.

MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION VIA REUTERS

Russia offers air cover for anti-Assad rebels

By AGENCIES in Moscow and Damascus, Syria

Russia said on Saturday it was ready to provide air support for Western-backed moderate rebels battling both jihadists and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as Moscow presses on with its diplomatic offensive over the conflict.

Speaking after a surprise summit between Syria's embattled leader and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin this week, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that moves should be made toward presidential and parliamentary elections in the war-torn country.

Representatives of Syria's Western-backed opposition sounded incredulous, saying Russia should first stop bombing moderate rebels and that talk of elections was premature.

On the ground, Syrian troops backed by Russian airstrikes battled Islamic State fighters in a bid to restore a key supply line to Aleppo.

At least 28 IS fighters and 21 troops and pro-govern-

ment militia were killed in the battle for the road leading to the government-held part of Aleppo.

International monitors also reported Russian strikes in northern Hama province and said six people, including three children, were killed in what was believed to be a Russian strike on the village of Al-Barqun in Aleppo province.

Russia does not want to take into account the specific interests of only Assad or the opposition, only the interests of Syria as a whole, Lavrov said in an interview with Vesti v Subbotu TV host Sergei Brilev on Saturday.

"We do not want to take into account specific interests of Bashar al-Assad, nor specific interests of the opposition," Lavrov said. "We want to take into account the interests of Syria. And it is important for Syria to have a peaceful environment, to end the war as soon as possible and not let the terrorists get a chance to seize power in Damascus or in any other part of Syria," Tass news agency reported.

AFP - AP

KOREAN PENINSULA

Warning shots fired as reunions continue

By AGENCIES in Seoul

The Republic of Korea fired warning shots on Saturday at a patrol boat from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Yonhap News Agency reported on Sunday, citing military officials.

The incident happened at about 3:30 pm local time on Saturday, as a reunion continued for families separated by the Korean War (1950-53), a sign of a thaw in inter-Korean relations.

The DPRK ship violated the northern limit line, which Pyongyang has never accepted as a sea boundary because it was drawn by US-led forces after an armistice.

While clamping down on fishing boats, the DPRK military ship sailed south several hundred miles away from the NLL, according to the South Korean military authorities.

Seoul's navy vessels fired five warning shots with a 40-mm machine gun at the DPRK boat.

The DPRK ship returned across the line soon afterward without firing back, ROK Defense Ministry added.

There was no more action between the two sides, a military official was quoted as saying by Yonhap.

A spokesman for the DPRK's Committee for Peaceful Unification of Korea said on Sunday that the South Korean military provoked the DPRK ship on a "normal mission" of maritime operations.

The spokesman's remarks, carried by the DPRK's KCNA news agency, denounced the warning shots as "intentional provocative acts" to reignite tensions on the Korean Peninsula with military clashes in the West Sea waters.

The maritime skirmish came amid the ongoing family reunion event, which was agreed between the two Koreas in late August after top-level military talks to defuse tensions that had pushed the peninsula to the



Jung Kun-mok (left), from the Republic of Korea, meets his mother, Lee Bok-sun, from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, during family reunions at Mount Kumgang resort, DPRK, on Saturday.

YONHAP VIA REUTERS

brink of armed conflict.

A total of 254 elderly from the ROK from 90 families crossed the inter-Korean border into the DPRK's scenic resort of Mount Kumgang on Saturday to meet their long-lost relatives from the other side.

Coming from the DPRK to take part in the highly charged event were 188 people.


On the second day of the three-day reunion, the separated families held the first private face-to-face meeting in the morning, for the first time since

the Korean conflict abated with an armistice. Since the war, no direct exchange of letters or telephone calls have been allowed between people on the two sides.

XINHUA - AFP

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