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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

31 July 2023

Afghanistan

Security situation: Taliban fighting with resistance groups

The National Resistance Front (NRF) informed that it killed six Taliban fighters in Nuristan, Laghman, Nangarhar and Kapisa provinces on 25.07. and 28.07.23.

Persecution situation

The Taliban reportedly killed a former government employee in Kunduz province and a former police commander in Laghman province on 23.07.23. On 24.07.23, a man was reportedly killed by the Taliban for failing to convince his brother, who is wanted by the Taliban, to return to Afghanistan. According to a report on 26.07.23, the director of a local radio station was arrested in Maymana, Faryab province. On 30.07.23, several government employees were detained by the Taliban in Herat for not wearing beards. On 29.07.23, a Taliban member shot and killed a man during an argument in Parwan province.

The Taliban have ordered the Shia community to refrain from hoisting religious flags and banners, setting up the usual refreshment stalls, travelling in convoys and reciting lament poems on public transport during the Islamic New Year month of Muharram. The Shia observe Muharram as a month of mourning because on the tenth day, Ashura, the third Imam for them, Hussein, fell in the battle of Karbala. On Ashura (27.07./28.07.23), the Taliban cut telecommunications and internet connections in several cities. On 28.07.23, the Taliban broke up a gathering in Ghazni using water cannons, beatings and gunshots. At least two people (four, according to other reports) died and many others were injured.

Governance

On 26.07.23, the Taliban closed down all of the approximately 12,000 beauty salons (cf. BN of 10.07.23), leaving some 60,000 women unemployed nationwide.

According to a report of 26.07.23, a high-ranking Talib announced that ties are Christian symbols (crosses) and should therefore not be worn in Afghanistan.

Humanitarian situation

According to reports of 24.07.23, the UN World Food Programme must exclude eight million Afghans affected by hunger from humanitarian support due to a lack of funds.

Nearly 50 people have died in severe flooding in several provinces, according to a report on 25.07.23.

Bangladesh

Violent protest by BNP supporters in Dhaka

On 29.07.23, supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) protested violently in the capital Dhaka to press their demand for the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (Awami League) which should be followed by new nationwide elections under a neutral caretaker government (cf. BN 19.06.23). The protesters set buses on fire, exploded petrol bombs, blocked roads and pelted security forces with stones. The security forces responded by using tear gas and rubber bullets.

Burkina Faso

Civilians killed in attacks

At least ten civilians have been killed by suspected jihadists in two attacks. On 17.07.23, suspected jihadists reportedly killed at least six civilians and injured four in an attack in Nouna, the capital of Kossi province. In recent months, the city of Nouna, located in the west of the country, has become a refuge for thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing jihadist attacks. In Tondoura, near the border with Côte d'Ivoire, at least four people were killed in an attack on the same day.

Colombia

Indigenous people killed

On 23.07.23, unknown killers assassinated Tiberio Chepe Zeti, a leader, traditional doctor and elder of the relatively numerous Nasa indigenous people (alternative name: Paéz) numbering about 245,000 persons, in southwestern Colombia. According to media reports, the violence occurred in the town of El Llanito, which belongs to the municipality of Florida in the department of Valle del Cauca. Various violent groups are active in the region. Since the beginning of 2023, almost 100 civil society leaders "Líderes Sociales" have been killed throughout the country, the media reported. In 2022, a total of 215 killings of Líderes Sociales had been counted (cf. BN of 30.01.23). Citing information from the Guardia Indígena organisation, the killing of another indigenous person was reported in the village of Altaquer, which belongs to the municipality of Ricaurte, in the southwestern department of Nariño. In this act of violence, which also took place on 23.07.23, five unknown assailants reportedly attacked people with firearms and stabbing weapons.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia pushes for access to Red Sea ports - if need be by force

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has announced that the Ethiopian government is looking at all options to secure a port belonging to the country. At a meeting with investors in Addis Ababa on 27.07.23, Abiy referred to the exorbitant and unsustainable costs associated with dependence on the ports of neighbouring countries. He said negotiations are already underway with Eritrea, Djibouti and Somaliland. In the case of Eritrea, the government has proposed to transfer 30% of Ethiopian Airlines' shares to the Eritrean government in exchange for port access. Abiy went on to say that he is striving to secure Ethiopia's own port by peaceful means, but also threatened violence if this were to fail.

Ethiopia has been a landlocked country since Eritrea's independence in 1993. The lack of its own port is seen as the biggest obstacle to the country's economic development. Currently, goods are imported and exported via the ports of Djibouti and Somaliland. However, the use of these ports is expensive and they are often congested.

Ghana

Three important human rights laws passed

According to a parliamentary committee report, the Ghanaian parliament passed three fundamental laws on 25.07.23 which, after the president's approval, will represent a significant step forward in terms of human rights protection. The Criminal Offences Amendment Act provides for the abolition of the death penalty. The Armed Forces Amendment Act will therefore replace the death penalty with life imprisonment.

This makes Ghana the 29th country on the African continent to abolish the death penalty. Until now, capital punishment was mandatory for crimes such as murder. According to the Ghana Prison Service, 176 people were on death row at the end of 2022. However, no execution has been carried out in Ghana since 1993.

The Criminal Offences Amendment Act also prohibits accusations of witchcraft. It outlaws practising as a witch doctor or witchfinder and accusing, designating or labelling another person as a witch and similar things related thereto. According to the MP who introduced the bill, depending on the community in which the accusation is made, an accusation of being a witch can be accompanied by serious human rights violations and can sometimes amount to a de facto death sentence.

Iran

Changes in the bill on the Islamic dress code

According to media reports on 28.07.23, the parliamentary legal committee amended the law reform on hijab and chastity rules before parliament.

Accordingly, the extended bill provides for a tightening of the earlier options for punishments, ranging from interim arrests to fines and imprisonment. Other penalties may include bans on leaving the country, confiscation of passports and deprivation of civil rights, such as occupational bans. In the case of repeated violations, fines of toman 50 million (about EUR 930, as of 31.07.23) and prison sentences of between five and ten years are possible. In exceptional cases, up to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of toman 100 million (about EUR 1,860) will be possible. In contrast to the original draft law, not only the police force, which was responsible for investigating and enforcing the dress code originally, but also other security agencies will be tasked with this in future, including intelligence organisations and the Basij volunteer militia.

The reports say that the revised bill also stresses the more extensive implementation of gender segregation, including in universities, offices, parks and hospitals. It also provides for programmes that would require cultural institutions to actively promote and advertise the headscarf requirement. In addition, the creation and strengthening of intelligent systems to identify violations in public spaces, for example with the help of cameras, but also corresponding monitoring of the internet are planned.

The bill will be voted on in parliament in the coming months. It is not yet foreseeable, when the bill will finally enter into force.

Protester with criminal record sentenced to two years in prison

According to media reports, a participant in a protest from Rasht (Gilan province) who had a criminal record was sentenced to two years in prison. The charges against him included setting fire to an ambulance during a protest and leading local protests. The man had been arrested several times before, temporarily detained and released on bail each time, the reports said.

Sentencing of women labour activists to imprisonment

According to media reports on 27.07.23, a well-known trade union activist was sentenced to four years in prison and additional social restrictions in Tehran. Referring to information provided by her legal counsel, the woman was accused of committing offences against the security of the country. In addition to the prison sentence, she was banned from leaving the country for two years and banned from membership in parties, groups and organisations, as well as from engaging in media activities on the internet and in the press. The activist had been arrested on the eve of International Labour Day (01.05.23) at the home of a teacher activist friend and released on bail after a brief detention.

According to media reports, an activist and translator of the Tehran Bus Workers' Union started her five-year sentence in the local Evin prison on 26.07.23. This was announced by the convict's brother on social media. The activist had been arrested in May 2022 along with her husband and was temporarily released in August 2022 after putting up bail. She was sentenced to prison on charges of endangering national security and propaganda against the system.

Arrest of twelve persons for trading inappropriate clothing

Foreign media, citing a Tehran police spokesperson, reported that twelve people had been arrested on charges of selling inappropriate clothing and distributing it online. The reports said that related thereto, four production sites in the Tehran bazaar were sealed and corresponding goods were confiscated. The confiscated clothing contained motifs promoting the consumption of alcohol and other drugs as well as Satanism.

Iraq

Sulaymaniyah: Four people killed in drone attack

A drone attack on a vehicle in Rangina (Sulaymaniyah province) on 28.07.23 killed all four occupants. The attack is attributed to Türkiye, as the Turkish military regularly targets PKK positions in the region.

Attack on power supply

On 29.07.23 a widespread power blackout affected southern and central Iraq. The blackout was caused by an accidental fire in a power plant in Basra on the one hand, and explosives attacks on several electricity pylons in the province of Salah al-Din on the other.

The perpetrators have not yet been identified, however, IS is still active in Salah al-Din and regularly attacks infrastructure and the electricity grid there.

Man kills both wives

On 29.07.23, a man from Soran (Erbil province) killed his two wives in their homes and then surrendered to the police.

Domestic violence against women is a daily occurrence in Iraq (including the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan) and often ends fatally. The man's family stated that he had been suffering from psychological problems for years.

Dohuk: Fire in refugee camp

A fire on 28.07.23 in Dawdia refugee camp (Dohuk province, Amedi district) destroyed 17 housing units, no personal injuries were reported.

The camp is mainly inhabited by Yazidis who fled their home region of Sinjar (Kurdish Shingal) in 2014 to escape IS. The unstable security and supply situation makes a return to Sinjar difficult, no large-scale reconstruction has taken place so far, either. Fires regularly occur in Kurdish refugee camps, partly due to the dense crowding of tents.

Israel

Israel: First law to restructure the judicial system passed

On 24.07.23, the Israeli parliament passed a controversial law which is supposed to be the first building block of Prime Minister Netanyahu's large-scale judicial reform (cf. BN of 17.07.23).

The new law includes the undermining of the so-called principle of reasonableness, which previously allowed the Supreme Court to overturn government decisions that it considered unreasonable. Numerous petitions against the law have been submitted to the Supreme Court, which it will now consider.

Demonstrations by civilians against the law and the intended changes to the justice system continued, while thousands of doctors from the Israeli Medical Society temporarily stopped work as a sign of protest. Police broke up protests, sometimes using water cannons and batons. At least 40 people were arrested and at least ten police officers were attacked and wounded. Other unions and associations announced the possibility of strikes.

Jordan

Adaptation of the cybercrimes law

The Jordanian parliament introduced a new cybercrimes law on 27.07.23. Media professionals and human rights activists criticised the law's broad definitions of criminal offences considering it as a further threat to freedom of expression. According to human rights organisations, freedom of expression has already been continuously curtailed in recent years and political opposition has been largely suppressed. The new law would endanger the right to anonymity of internet users and increase government control on internet platforms, the organisations say. Jordan's prime minister refuted the criticism, citing increased online crime, hate speech on the internet and the spread of misinformation as reasons for the necessity of the law. The law allows courts to order websites, social media platforms or public account operators to delete content that meets the law's broad criteria, as well as to surrender relevant information, including personal data.

Kuwait

Five death sentences carried out

Kuwaiti authorities announced on 27.07.23 that they had carried out five death sentences by hanging. Three of the five executed persons had been convicted of murder, they included one Egyptian and one Kuwaiti national. Another person was from Sri Lanka and had been convicted of drug smuggling. One of those executed was also a Bidoon, who are descendants of the nomadic population of Kuwait and are considered stateless by the government. He was convicted for his involvement in a bomb attack on a Shia mosque in 2015 for which IS claimed responsibility. 27 people lost their lives at the time and 220 were wounded. Media reported that at his trial he was accused of driving the Saudi bomber to the mosque in Kuwait City.

The last time seven death sentences were carried out in Kuwait was in November 2022, while no executions had previously been carried out since 2017.

Lebanon

Clashes in Ain al-Hilwa

On the night of 30.07.23, Fatah and an armed Islamist group clashed in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilwa near the southern Lebanese town of Sayyida/Sidon. According to reports, assault rifles, grenades and mortar shells were used in the fighting, which continued until Sunday evening. Official reports say that five Fatah members and one member of the Islamist group died and others were injured.

The Lebanese military has no access to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. These are under self-administration and regularly experience escalating violence.

Liberia

Attack on mine

Unidentified armed persons attacked the Tokadeh mines owned by the Arcelor Mittal Liberia (AML) mining company in Yekepa, Nimba State on 28.07.23. The attackers looted and caused damage including to mining facilities, according to media reports. Reportedly, one staff member was injured. Locals and employees had protested against the mining company in the past over wage arrears and other issues. AML's locomotives have also been repeatedly attacked by violent actors.

Mali

Sanctions imposed on politicians

On 24.07.23, the US government announced that it will impose sanctions against several senior politicians in Mali. The reason given was their support of mercenaries of the Russian Wagner Group. The number of civilian deaths in

Mali has increased by 278% since the mercenaries arrived at the end of 2021. According to the US government, many of the deaths are the result of joint operations between Malian forces and members of the Wagner Group. The sanctions include freezing the assets of Defence Minister Sadio Camara and two military officials. They are accused of facilitating the rise of the Russian mercenary group in Mali.

Mauritania

Blasphemy charge against student; tightened blasphemy laws

According to media reports, a high school graduate was arrested and charged with blasphemy in the northwestern city of Atar on 18.07.23. The public prosecutor's office in Nouakchott charged her with insulting and denigrating the prophet in an examination paper and with using social media to spread blasphemous content. The reports say that the accused has been held in pre-trial detention in the women's prison in Nouakchott since 28.07.23. If convicted, she faces the death penalty. The family of the accused has reportedly publicly apologised and explained that the girl was suffering from mental problems.

The report goes on to say that at the beginning of June 2023, a teacher who had been correcting the exam papers, had published this specific paper in anonymised form on social media. Ulema, imams and others then organised protests to demand the disclosure of the author's identity as well as criminal prosecution, reports say. According to one media outlet, the accused belongs to the Mauritanian Haratin population group, the descendants of sub-Saharan slaves.

In Mauritania, blasphemy is punishable by death, in less serious cases by imprisonment of up to two years and a fine. The country has tightened its blasphemy laws in recent years. If convicted of blasphemy, a confession of remorse no longer averts the death penalty. Death sentences are imposed without the possibility of appeal. The death penalty for blasphemy has not been executed since 1987.

Morocco

King issues 2,052 pardons

On the occasion of his 24th Jubilee of the Throne on 30.07.23, King Mohammed VI issued 2,052 pardons.

1,769 of the persons pardoned are currently imprisoned. 632 times the term of imprisonment was reduced, 133 times the remaining term of imprisonment was remitted, three times a life sentence was commuted to a fixed term and for one woman the death sentence was commuted to a life sentence.

Furthermore, 80 custodial or residual sentences were suspended, 180 fines were cancelled, 14 custodial sentences were remitted while retaining the fine, nine times both the custodial sentence (once the remainder thereof) and the fine were remitted.

Myanmar

Security situation

Media reported that soldiers of the ruling military junta killed at least 48 civilians, including six children, and injured at least 37 others in fighting, raids and air strikes in the regions or states of Sagaing, Kayah, Mandalay, Chin, Bago, Tanintharyi and Shan in July 2023. More than 13,000 people fled from Sagaing alone as government soldiers burnt hundreds of houses this month again. Another 20 injured person and one fatality were reported after bomb blasts in Yangon, Mandalay, Sagaing and Shan. In Bago, four children were killed by a landmine on 25.07.23. There were no reports of civilian casualties from Kachin, where armed clashes between the Myanmar military and the Kachin Independence Army continued from 01.07. to 13.07.23. Since the military junta extended the state of emergency on 01.02.23, Burma News International has documented at least 383 civilians killed in fighting. As of 15.07.23, UNOCHA counted around 1.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) nationwide, of whom 1.6 million fled the violence following the military coup on 01.02.21. 70,000 civilian buildings were destroyed.

Niger

Military coup

According to media reports, officers of the presidential guard removed the democratically elected head of state Mohamed Bazoum from office on 26.07.23 and detained him in the presidential palace. A nationwide night curfew was imposed, all borders and the international airport were closed. The officers cited the deteriorating security situation and the precarious economic and social situation in the country as the reasons for the coup. On 27.07.23, the military announced that it would side with the coup plotters. Public protests were banned by the Ministry of the Interior with immediate effect.

On 28.07.23, General Abdourahmane Tchiani, also known as Omar Tchiani, declared himself the new Head of State of Niger. He had previously been General of the Army and Chief of the Presidential Guard in Niger since 2011. The coup plotters suspended the constitution and dissolved all constitutional institutions.

After a special meeting in Nigeria's capital Abuja on 30.07.23, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) announced that sanctions would be imposed on the self-declared rulers. Trade and economic relations will be suspended, Niger's assets in the central banks of ECOWAS members will be frozen and financial and travel sanctions will be imposed on the coup plotters. ECOWAS called on the coup plotters to immediately release detained President Mohamed Bazoum, as well as to return power to legitimate institutions within a week. The African Union (AU) gave the coup plotters two weeks.

Meanwhile, thousands of people gathered in the capital Niamey to show their support for the coup plotters. Russian flags were also seen. At the same time, protests took place in front of the French embassy in Niger. On 30.07.23, demonstrators tried to force access to the embassy building.

Nigeria

Bauchi State: Fatalities and abductions

Armed men ambushed and killed at least nine people, including people from the Kaja community and residents of Tamba village in Ningi Local Government Area (LGA) in Bauchi State on 21.07. and 25.07.23. This follows from concurring media reports. An unknown group also allegedly abducted at least two other people. A member of the local vigilante group was reportedly killed while trying to fight off the attackers. Several individuals stated that the attack was an act of revenge by actors described as bandits after two kidnappers were killed by security forces in the area.

Adamawa State: Arrests after prevented attack on opposition candidate

Security forces in Adamawa State arrested three suspected Boko Haram fighters in Yola, the regional capital, on 23.07.23. According to media reports, they had plotted a deadly attack on the presidential candidate of the opposition party PDP, Atiku Abubakar. The arrests came amid ongoing court battles over the outcome of Nigeria's February 2023 presidential election (see BN 06.03.23). The PDP party claims that the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party only won by electoral fraud and that the attack was financed by the ruling party because of the ongoing election scrutiny. The APC party denies the allegations.

Southeast: Military destroys separatist camps

Army personnel destroyed several camps operated by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) independence movement, which has been banned since 2017, and its armed wing Eastern Security Network (ESN) in Anambra State on 23.07.23. Media, citing official military sources, reported that one person associated with IPOB was killed. The troops also arrested several people and confiscated weapons and vehicles. The military operations, which include Anambra West Local Government Area (LGA), were part of a resumed offensive against suspected IPOB members in the South-South and South-East geo-political zones. An army spokesperson highlighted the military's collaboration with the local vigilante group, Anambra Vigilante Group (AVG), in the operations targeting the camps. Nigerian government agencies and other authorities regularly blame members of the pro-secessionist groups IPOB and ESN for violence in the country's southeast. These groups, however, regularly deny such accusations. Observers of the security situation in the region point out that also other violent groups are active there which have no direct relation to independence efforts. According to media reports, it is a fact that attacks on security forces and state

institutions, such as police stations, increased since the ESN was founded in December 2020. In the southeast, the states of Imo and Anambra have been particularly affected by violence recently (see BN of 22.05.23).

Pakistan

Police report on militant attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The annual report of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Police documents 665 security-related incidents, including 15 suicide attacks, committed by suspected militant groups in the province during the reporting period from 18.06.22 to 18.06.23. In addition, the report lists 382 exchanges of fire, 107 grenade explosions, 145 explosive blasts, 15 rocket attacks and two vehicle-borne explosive attacks.

According to the provincial police's list of terrorist-related incidents, most of them took place in North Waziristan tribal district, Dera Ismail Khan and Peshawar districts, and Bajaur and South Waziristan tribal districts.

Suicide attack on JUI-F meeting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 30.07.23, a suicide bomber killed at least 44 people and injured around 200 others at a political gathering of the conservative Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) party in the tribal district of Bajaur, according to official reports. According to media reports, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Suicide attack on mosque in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 25.07.23, a suicide attack targeted at a mosque in the town of Jamrud in Khyber district. The building collapsed as a result. The police informed that one of the town's senior police officers lost his life. According to media reports, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa experienced a resurgence of militant incidents after years of decline, since the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) unilaterally ended its ceasefire with the government in November 2022.

Palestinian Territories / Israel

West Bank: Several dead and injured in military operations

On 25.07.23, the Israeli military shot dead three armed Palestinians near the town of Nablus. According to the military, the men had opened fire on Israeli soldiers from their car. The Islamist group Hamas announced that three of its members had been killed.

On 26.07.23, a Palestinian was shot dead when armed clashes broke out between Israeli military personnel and armed Palestinians during a raid. The military informed that fire had been opened at the Israeli troops and stones and paint had been thrown at them. Two other people were injured by gunfire. Among them was a woman whose car was accidentally caught in the gunfire, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

According to Palestinian health authorities, a 14-year-old Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli military personnel near the village of Qalqilya on 27.07.23. The military stated that the soldiers had fired warning shots in the air after being pelted with stones and firebombs by Palestinians. The incident will be investigated, the military said.

Gaza Strip: Protests against Hamas government

On 30.07.23, several thousand Palestinians briefly protested against the difficult living conditions and chronic energy shortages in the Gaza Strip.

The protests took place in various localities in the Gaza Strip, including Gaza City and Khan Younis. In one case, a flag of Gaza's ruling Hamas was burnt before police broke up the protests. In breaking up the protests, police in some places reportedly destroyed mobile phones used to document the protests and arrested several people. There also was a brief confrontation of supporters and critics of Hamas who threw stones at each other.

Russian Federation

Legislative changes to the compulsory military service age and the age limit for reservists

On 25.07.23, the deputies of the Russian lower house of parliament (Duma) voted to increase the age limit for conscription to military service. As of 01.01.24, citizens between the ages of 18 and 30 can be called up for military service - in time for the call-up wave in spring 2024. This extends the time window for call-up by three years and, according to the official announcement, is intended to secure the country's defence capability. The new law is estimated to increase the number of men available for military service by two to three million. Up to now, only men between the ages of 18 and 27 had been obliged to complete one year of military service in Russia. Each spring and autumn, conscripts are called up and in the past years, on average, around 130,000 men were required to do their military service every six months. Already on 14.04.23, a change in the law came into effect providing that conscription notices must no longer be handed over in person but can also be delivered electronically in future. All registered conscripts are now forbidden to leave the national territory from the moment of delivery, of which the border guards of the domestic intelligence service FSB are directly notified (cf. BN of 17.04.23).

One day before the Duma's decision, on 24.07.23, President Putin signed a law on the new age limit for reservists. According to this law, the maximum age limit for all ranks and categories will generally be raised by five years. In future, soldiers can be called up for reserve service up to the age of 55. Officers will serve until the age of 65. For generals, the age limit is now 70.

Senegal

Another arrest warrant against a civil society leader

Against protests from human rights NGOs, a court in Dakar, at the request of the public prosecutor's office, issued another arrest warrant for the accused leader of the protest movement "Y'en a marre" (YEAM) and vice-coordinator of the opposition movement "Mouvement des forces vives du Sénégal" (F24), Aliou Sané (cf. BN of 24.07.23). YEAM and F24 criticised the decision. YEAM condemned this as a state measure with the clear purpose of suppressing and silencing critical voices that have spoken out strongly against a third term for President Sall. The Jammi Rewmi platform, a coalition of several civil society groups, expressed concern about the Sané case and the wave of arrests of opposition members and sympathisers.

AI country director demands release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience

Like the opposition movement F24 before him, the director of Amnesty International (ai) in Senegal, Seydi Gassama, called for the release of hundreds of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. Recently, the founder of the think tank AfrikaJom told HRW that there had never been so many political prisoners in Senegal since the 1960s.

Opposition leader Sonko re-arrested and charged; tense situation again

According to media reports, opposition leader Ousmane Sonko was arrested for theft and calling for an uprising and taken into police custody on 29.07.23. Only a few days before, Sonko's de facto house arrest, which had been in place since the end of May 2023, had been lifted. Sonko is accused of spreading subversive messages on social media and forcibly snatching a mobile phone from a policewoman outside his house in Dakar. Sonko's defence was that he had been shadowed and filmed without permission and had unsuccessfully asked the policewoman to delete the footage. The Dakar prosecutor's office announced on 30.07.23 that Sonko, who was already facing imprisonment, would have to stand trial in another criminal case - some two months after a verdict against Sonko provoked the deadliest unrest in the country for years (cf. BN of 12.06. and 05.06.23). The arrest and charges are not related to the previous criminal conviction, the prosecutor's office said. His arrest had already been imminent and the scuffle with the security forces had only accelerated things. The prosecution accused Sonko of seven counts, mainly of incitement to riot, criminal association with terrorist intent, endangering the security of the state, conspiracy against public authority and an offence against public order, including fomenting serious political unrest. The period of the offence was narrowed down to March 2021 to June 2023.

In protest, Sonko began a hunger strike on 30.07.23 and repeatedly called on the people to resist. On the same day, police forces prevented Sonko's party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF) from holding a press conference at the party headquarters.

Press reports describe the situation as tense but stable. A large police force was deployed both in Dakar and in the southern Senegalese city of Ziguinchor, where Sonko is mayor. Both arrest and arraignment led to sporadic protests in parts of Dakar and Ziguinchor, including clashes with security forces and minor rioting. Parts of the house of Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY), the spokesperson for the ruling coalition, were set on fire.

Judicial supervision for additional journalists from Walf TV

According to a media report, the journalist Cheikh Bara Ndiaye was placed under judicial supervision on 24.07.23. He had been banned from leaving the country, ordered to report to the police and forbidden to comment on the content of the criminal proceedings, the report said. Ndiaye works as a columnist for Walf TV, a private channel that has already been suspended twice for its coverage of protests (cf. BN v. 05.06. and 13.02.23) in 2023. Ndiaye was arrested on 03.06.23 for comments on the recent verdict against opposition leader Sonko and the subsequent events of early June 2023 (cf. BN of 05.06.23). Reportedly, he had been charged with incitement to riot and other offences against public security and had since been held in pre-trial detention. Reportedly, Ndiaye had temporarily gone on hunger strike to protest the charges.

Somalia

Attack on military base in Mogadishu

At least 30 soldiers, including recent recruits, were killed in a suicide attack on the Jaalle Siyaad military academy in the Hodon district of Mogadishu on 24.07.23, according to official figures. More than 73 others were injured. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack. Several military officers were arrested after the attack for allegedly helping the suicide bomber to gain access to the compound.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) suspends work in Las Anod

On 24.07.23, MSF announced the suspension of all services at Las Anod General Hospital in Sool Region due to the increasingly unstable security situation created by the violent clashes occurring since early 2023 (cf. BN of 06.03. and 24.04.23). Repeated security incidents are affecting the provision of medical care. The hospital was last attacked on 08.07.23 (cf. BN of 17.07.23).

Sudan

Ongoing struggles

Fighting continues in the country, especially in and around Khartoum and in the Darfur region. Much of the armed conflict is taking place in densely populated neighbourhoods. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are reportedly occupying homes and using them as bases. At least 16 civilians were killed in air strikes and artillery fire on homes in Omdurman on 25.07.23; at least five more civilians, including four children, were killed in southern Khartoum on 29.07.23.

Across the country, at least 3,900 people have died since the outbreak of fighting in mid-April 2023, and more than 3.3 million people have been displaced.

After a two-day conference in Cairo, the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the largest civilian coalition, called for an end to the violent clashes on 25.07.23 and stressed the need for a political process.

Humanitarian situation

WHO warned of a disastrous humanitarian crisis on 25.07.23. More than 67% of hospitals in the country are out of service and humanitarian workers are wilfully targeted. WHO also reiterated the call for an urgent response to the spread of malaria, cholera and other waterborne diseases, especially in remote areas. According to UN figures, more than half of the population is in need of assistance and protection.

Syria

Damascus: IS attacks Shia shrine

On 28.07.23, at least six people were killed and dozens more wounded by a bomb planted on a motorbike at a Shia shrine in the south of the capital Damascus.

The same shrine had already been attacked a few days earlier and two people were wounded. Numerous Shia believers are currently visiting the pilgrimage site on the occasion of Ashura, the religious day of mourning. IS claimed responsibility for both attacks.

Northeast: Four members of the SDF killed in Turkish air strike

According to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), four of their members were killed by Turkish air strikes on 28.07.23.

According to the report, Turkish combat drones flew attacks on the Syrian village of Khirbet Khwei near the city of Amudah. The village is located near the border between Türkiye and the SDF-controlled areas in northeastern Syria.

Türkiye

Decree on the compulsory return of Syrian refugees from Istanbul

On 29.07.23, the Turkish Migration Authority published a decree stating that Syrian nationals currently residing in Istanbul who have been granted temporary protection in Türkiye after their registration in other Turkish provinces, must return to those areas by 24.09.23. The decree also says that Syrian nationals who register with the migration authority before this date will receive a travel permit allowing them to return to the respective Turkish provinces. Syrians who fled the provinces where they are registered because of the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria on 06.02.23 and have received a travel permit allowing them to stay in Istanbul, are exempt from this decision. According to media reports, the Turkish authorities' decree came amid an ongoing wave of deportations targeting Syrian refugees, accompanied by increasing xenophobia and racism against Syrian nationals. There are more than 3.7 million Syrian refugees living in Türkiye, most of whom have not been granted refugee status but temporary protection. Their freedom of movement in Türkiye is thereby restricted and the authorities may deport them to Syria at any time. Istanbul is home to over 500,000 Syrian refugees, more than in any other Turkish city.

Police violence against protesters

Between 17.07. and 20.07.23, police in Istanbul arrested more than 190 people in relation to a planned event commemorating the Suroç attack. 33 people had died in this IS attack on 20.07.15. According to HRW, on 17.07.23, police arbitrarily surrounded, mistreated and arrested a group of about 45 people who were distributing leaflets in Istanbul's Kadıköy district ahead of the event. On 20.07.23, according to witness reports, the police used excessive force against participants during the demonstration, arresting another 154 people and taking them to a police station in the Vatan district. Of those temporarily arrested, 121 were released after being held in police buses for up to 10 hours. According to HRW, police used tear gas, cornered participants on the street during the protest and used excessive force to prevent them from leaving. At the police station, police officers allegedly denied legal representatives access to their clients for hours and verbally and physically abused lawyers. At the request of the Istanbul Court's Terrorism and Organised Crime Prosecution Department, the 2nd Criminal Court ruled that six of those arrested should be remanded in custody on suspicion of violating the Law on Assembly and Demonstration (Law No. 2911) and resisting arrest, and that three others should be released on conditions including reporting requirements and bans on leaving the country. The rest of those arrested were released.

Ukraine

Development of the war effort

According to media reports, on 24.07.23, the mayor of Reni, a town on the Danube in the border triangle with Romania and the Republic of Moldova, informed that three grain silos had been destroyed in his town. The region of Khmelnytsky (Western Ukraine) was targeted by four modern and fast-firing Kinzhal missiles on 27.07.23 during the day. On 28./29.07.23, the Russian side shelled several towns in the Dnipropetrovsk region, including the

regional capital Dnipro, where at least nine people were injured when a high-rise building was hit. The Kharkiv region was the target of Russian shelling in the night of 28.07.23, when five people were injured in a village, on 29.07.23 and in the night of 31.07.23 several places were shelled, including the city of Kharkiv itself. On 30.07.23, two civilians were reported dead after a Russian missile attack on the town of Sumy (oblast of the same name). An educational institution was hit. 20 people were injured.

Fighting continued to be reported in the Donetsk region, including south of Bakhmut, during the Ukrainians' recapture of the village of Staromaiorske and in Zaporizhzhya, here south of Orichiv. According to Ukrainian reports, a child was killed and four others were injured in a Russian cluster bomb attack on Kostiantynivka in the Donetsk region; a total of seven people were injured.

On 24.07.23, experts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced the discovery of mines in the buffer zone between the inner and outer barriers of the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant. According to an advisor to President Zelensky, Ukraine still needs more equipment in view of the current Russian tactics of overloading air defence systems by massive drone attacks and simultaneously attacking cities with ballistic missiles. While Kiev is relatively well protected against such attacks, Odesa, for example, is less so, he said. Following previous reports all drones were shot down during an attack on Kiev in the night of 25.07.23.

Zelensky expects renewed attacks by the Russian Federation on energy infrastructure in the upcoming autumn and winter of 2023; thus, the country must prepare for this, he said. He described it as an inevitable process that the war would increasingly reach Russian territory, including symbolic centres and military bases. Earlier, he had declared that the "deoccupation" of the Crimean Peninsula was under preparation. The Russian side, meanwhile, repeatedly reported intercepted Ukrainian drone attacks in Crimea and that an ammunition depot had been hit.

Venezuela

LGBTIQ rights: 33 people arbitrarily arrested and charged

According to media reports on 23.07.23, at a private spa popular with the LGBTIQ community, the Avalon Man Club, situated in Valencia, Carabobo state, 30 guests, as well as the owner and two employees, were arrested in a police raid without a search warrant. The police also published photos of the men. The guests were accused of lewd behaviour or association to commit a crime, the owner and employees were accused of making excessive noise. On 26.07.23, all the accused were released on various conditions or, in some cases, on bail pending their trials.

On 28.07.23, demonstrators, including numerous LGBTIQ rights activists and NGO members, demanded that the proceedings against all persons be stopped and that action be taken against the police forces who made the arbitrary arrests in front of the Attorney General's Office in Caracas. Many criticised the arrests as homophobically motivated and the subsequent discourse by the police and some media outlets as stigmatising and discriminatory.

Monitor Salud report: Assaults and threats against health workers in the first six months of 2023

According to a report by the NGO Monitor Salud of 28.07.23, in the first half of 2023 134 threats and physical attacks, as well as eight forced dismissals of employees in 55 public health facilities were recorded, all of whom had previously criticised the poor situation in health facilities or their working conditions. Most of these incidents occurred in various health facilities in the west of the country. The NGO also reported that 49 trade union leaders in the health sector had been forced into retirement. According to the report, Monitor Salud also observed other cases of forced retirement between August 2022 and July 2023, which it criticised as a way of suppressing critical voices. The report said that this is mainly affecting the patients in a situation of staff shortages due to emigration or job changes because of low wages.

Yemen

Gender segregation at university

Gender segregation has reportedly been introduced in the Faculty of Communication at Sanaa University, with courses for women and men held on different days of the week.

The decision was made in agreement between Houthi leadership and the university, allegedly to avoid cases of sexual harassment and to comply with Islamic moral standards. Meanwhile, a report about the alleged negative

effects of mixed courses appeared in media loyal to the Houthis on 26.07.23. The Houthis continue to restrict women's rights in the areas under their control, including by restrictive dress codes and a ban on women travelling without a male relative.

Zimbabwe

Supreme Court excludes opposition candidates from August elections

According to media reports, the Zimbabwean Supreme Court has barred twelve parliamentary candidates of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), the country's largest opposition party, from standing in the presidential and parliamentary elections on 23.08.23.

The reason for the court order allegedly is that the party missed the deadline to file its nomination papers in time. According to press reports, the CCC announced that it would challenge the ruling intending to obtain a stay of the judgement. Thus, the candidates would still be able to participate in the election. Observers said that Zimbabwe was heading for another disputed election because of inconsistencies in the nomination of candidates, incomplete electoral lists and restrictions limiting the opposition's campaigning.

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