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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Attacks on civilians / displaced people / infrastructure

Media report that on 27.06.21, a total of 13 civilians were injured in a bomb attack on a bus in Parwan province. On 23.06.21, five civilians were killed, and 20 others injured by a bomb blast in the Maiwand district of Kandahar province. No one has claimed responsibility for the attacks. On 26.06.21, a total of 225 civilians were reportedly injured and 29 killed in fighting last week in Kandahar province. On 21.06.21 it was reported that the Chinese government had asked their citizens to leave Afghanistan because of the deteriorating security situation. On 22.06.21, a radio editor in Ghazni was reportedly attacked and injured by unknown individuals. On the same day, it was reported that Tajikistan was preparing for a wave of refugees from Afghanistan and was looking for suitable places for refugee camps. Russia has apparently promised Tajikistan assistance in securing the border. On 22.06.21, the city of Kunduz was attacked by the Taliban from various directions; many of the city's citizens were fleeing the area. On the same day, it was reported that the highways in the country were becoming increasingly unsafe as the Taliban had set up checkpoints in many parts. According to reports of 25.06.21, thousands of local personnel who had worked for the US would be evacuated to the US in August 2021.

Battles for districts and provincial capitals

As of 28.06.21, the Taliban were in control of 156 districts, the government of 82, and 160 districts were contested, the LongWarJournal (LWJ) reported. Various northern provincial capitals such as Kunduz, Taloqan, Charikar and Maimana were now under siege and attack. On 22.06.21, the northern towns of Masar-i Sharif in Balkh and Pul-e Khumri in Baghlan were reportedly also under Taliban siege and attack. Faryab province was about to fall to the Taliban. On 24.06.21, Police District 2 of Pul-e Khumri city was attacked, and on 22.06.21, the border crossing with Tajikistan in Kunduz province, Shir Khan Bandar, was captured by the Taliban. Meanwhile, the strategically important district of Doshi in Baghlan province and six other districts have reportedly been recaptured by the Afghan army. The US military estimates that the Taliban are now in control of 81 districts. On 22.06.21, the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Deborah Lyons, addressed the UN Security Council on the current situation. She said the Taliban's gains in territory were significant, with 60 districts having fallen to them since the beginning of May 2021. Contrary to their assurances of peace, the Taliban were stepping up their attacks and were still in contact with al-Qaida, she stated.

Citizens form militias against the Taliban

Reports of 21.06.21 say that in several provinces, especially in the north (Takhar, Balkh, Baghlan, Parwan and Badghis), citizens have armed themselves to support the Afghan army in defending their region against the Taliban takeover. On the same day, several members of the Afghan parliament also spoke out in favour of establishing citizen militias led by former mujahideen to deal with the escalating situation, saying that the Afghan government and the army alone were not considered capable to handle it. On 27.06.21, former vice-president General Dostum

announced plans to return to Afghanistan from Turkey to defend his home province of Jawzjan in agreement with the government. On 22.06.21, a citizens' militia was also formed in the Arghandab district of Kandahar province, and hundreds of citizens were helping the Afghan army to defend the city of Mazar-i Sharif in Balkh province. On 23.06.21, citizens took up arms in Jawzjan, Kabul, Laghman, Nangarhar and Herat provinces. On 24.06.21, it was reported that citizens armed themselves in Samangan and Kapisa provinces, and on 27.06.21, citizens resorted to arms in Ghor, Kunduz and Paktia provinces. Meanwhile, Afghan President Ghani and the chairman of the high council for national reconciliation Dr Abdullah Abdullah travelled to the US for talks with the US President on 25.06.21. On the same day it was stated that that 650 US troops will remain in the country after the withdrawal.

Algeria

Resignation of the government - consultations for new government started

On 24.06.21, Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad announced his resignation and that of his cabinet. President Tebboune accepted the request in accordance with Art. 113 of the constitution. The resignation took place the day after the announcement of the official results of the parliamentary elections held on 12.06.21 (cf. BN of 14.06. and 21.06.21).

Tebboune then invited representatives of the parties to negotiate a new government. Talks have already taken place with the secretary general of the victorious National Liberation Front (FLN) party and the independents.

Numerous arrests

Media report that on 25.06.21, at least 273 participants were detained in the context of the Hirak rallies. In addition, several activists were reportedly placed under judicial control on 24.06.21.

Angola

Constitutional reform adopted

On 22.06.21, the Angolan parliament adopted the first reform of the constitution which has been in force since 2010. More than 40 articles were amended or added to the constitution, which now comprises 249 articles (previously 244). Among other things, the reform aims to remove ambiguities regarding parliamentary control of the executive, regulate participation in elections by nationals living abroad and changes the status of the central bank (BNA). President João Lourenço had started the surprising initiative for the changes only in spring 2021. The reform received the necessary two-thirds majority in parliament, despite the abstention of the two opposition parties União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) and Convergência Ampla de Salvação de Angola-Coligação Eleitoral (CASA-CE).

Armenia

OSCE rates parliamentary elections as democratic, fair, and free

The international observers of the OSCE have classified the early parliamentary election in Armenia held on 20.06.21 as democratic, fair, and free. Norwegian observer Kari Henriksen of the OSCE stated that the election campaign had been characterised by a strong polarisation of the protagonists. However, voters had been offered a wide range of options, fundamental freedoms had been respected and candidates had been able to campaign freely, she said. The party of incumbent Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had won the elections with about 54 percent of the vote. According to the preliminary election results, only the party alliances of ex-president Robert Kocharyan with around 21 percent and that of former president Serzh Sargsyan and former head of the secret service Artur Vanetsyan with 5.2 percent of the vote will be able to enter parliament.

Bangladesh

COVID-19 pandemic: lockdown due to rising infection numbers

Due to increasing numbers of infections, a partial lockdown came into effect on 28.06.21, which is to change into a strict nationwide lockdown for a period of 14 days from 01.07.21. Already since 21.06.21, the capital Dhaka has been largely isolated from the rest of the country due to restrictions in surrounding districts to stop the spread of the virus. On 27.06.21, a total of 119 deaths were reported within 24 hours, the highest death toll so far since the onset of the pandemic. So far, more than 888,400 people have been infected in the country and over 14,170 have died from the disease. Only about 2.6 percent of the population are considered fully vaccinated (as of 28.06.21).

Belarus

Arrested opposition activist transferred to house arrest

Media report that on 25.06.21, Belarusian opposition activist Roman Protasevich and his partner, Russian citizen Sofya Sapega, were transferred from pre-trial detention to house arrest. Both had been arrested at Minsk airport on 23.05.21 during the forced diversion of a plane on its scheduled journey from Athens to Vilnius (cf. BN of 31.05.21). Protasevich is accused, among other things, of organising mass riots, which is punishable under Belarusian criminal law with a prison sentence of at least five to 15 years. In a statement, Amnesty International has called the transfer of the couple a 'cynical ploy' by the Belarusian authorities.

Burkina Faso

Attack leaves eleven dead

Eleven police officers were killed on 21.06.21 in an attack by unknown individuals on a police task force travelling between Barsalogho and Foubé (Centre-Nord region).

Obstruction of health care

In a report published on 22.06.21, the NGO Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) cites 17 incidents of violence against health workers and obstruction of health care in Burkina Faso in 2020. Twenty-five health workers were killed, and six hospitals were attacked. In 2019, there had been 27 such incidents, the report says. The perpetrators of the violence were the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) and the latter's affiliate Katiba Macina, as well as other unnamed groups. The Sahel, Centre-Nord and Est regions were the mainly affected areas of conflict.

Children and young people involved in attack

According to investigation results published by the government on 23.06.21, mostly children and youths between the ages of 12 and 14 were involved in the attack perpetrated between 04.06.21 and 05.06.21 in Solhan (cf. BN of 07.06.21).

Burundi

Several killed in ambush in Muramvya province

Media report that at least 15 people were killed in an ambush on 26.06.21 when armed individuals blocked a road and opened fire on oncoming vehicles. In addition, two buses were set on fire and the passengers burnt to death. At least four arrests were made in this context. A similar incident had occurred in Muramvya province in May 2021.

China

Hong Kong: Pro-democracy newspaper shut down, more arrests

On 27.06.21, Fung Wai-kong was arrested; he is the seventh journalist of the pro-democracy Hong Kong newspaper Apple Daily to be detained. He too is accused of endangering national security. Police arrested Fung at the airport, where he was apparently planning to travel to the UK. Fung's detention follows the arrests of editorial writer Yeung Ching-kee on 23.06.21 and five other senior staff members of the newspaper on 17.06.21 (cf. BN of 21.06.21). The founder of the newspaper Jimmy Lai is currently serving a 20-month prison sentence (cf. BN of 31.05.21). As the authorities also froze Apple Daily's assets, the newspaper's parent company announced on 23.06.21 that it would stop publishing the print edition on 26.06.21 and also close the online edition.

Colombia

Attack on President Duque's helicopter

On 26.06.21, the helicopter of Colombian President Iván Duque was shot at while approaching the city of Cúcuta on the border with Venezuela. Apart from the president, both the ministers of defence and interior, as well as the governor of the province were on board. The Colombian police has informed that a total of six shots were fired from a distance of one kilometre from the airport. Two rifles, as well as five magazines and 20 cartridge cases were later found there. The national police have offered a reward of up to three billion pesos (approx. 667,000 EUR, as of 28.06.21) for information leading to the capture of those behind the attack. The ELN guerrilla group and FARC dissidents as well as numerous drug gangs are active in the border region. The region is one of the most important coca cultivation areas in the country.

DR Congo

Displacement after attacks in southern Ituri

On 07.06.21, ten people were reportedly killed by a group equipped with machetes and firearms in an attack on Boga town (Ituri). The local hospital was also burnt down, but staff and patients managed to escape. The hospital with 60 beds had only been completed in September 2020 after three years of construction. A representative of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said that the hospital was the only functioning health facility in the area and was responsible for the care of 80,000 people.

In the following days, at least nine dead bodies were found after attacks on farmers around the nearby village of Tshabi (border of Ituri and North Kivu). The perpetrators of these events are not known. The rebel militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) is active in the area. According to an MSF representative, there are also strong ethnic tensions in the area, and both conflicts are overlapping.

A representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has estimated that about 30,000 people have been displaced in the course of the attacks. In an appeal dated 24.06.21, UNICEF drew particular attention to the suffering of the children affected, many of whom were eyewitnesses to brutal violence and separated from their parents. The humanitarian situation is tense for the displaced, whether they live in camps or with host families. Every day, children die of malnutrition, anaemia, or malaria in a camp near Tshabi, UNICEF stated.

Bomb explosion in church

On 27.06.21, two women were injured when an improvised explosive device exploded in a Catholic church in Beni (North Kivu); also, property was damaged. The church was intended to host the confirmation of young people with a correspondingly large attendance. According to a media report, the attack marked the first time a Catholic church building has been targeted in the region. In Beni, the Catholic Church is the strongest religious community, the report said.

Already the day before, an improvised explosive device placed under a truck exploded next to a petrol station on the outskirts of Beni, but did not cause any significant damage. Beni's mayor, Colonel Muteba, said that the fragments of the explosive devices were similar to those in the church. Still on 27.06.21, another explosion occurred when a suspected suicide bomber blew himself up at a busy intersection in Beni. No other people were injured.

According to a media report of 15.06.21, an expert report warned the UN Security Council about the proliferation of improvised explosive devices in the DR Congo. The Security Council was urged to mandate the UN stabilisation mission MONUSCO to further develop its capabilities in the fight against improvised explosive devices.

Ethiopia

Heavy air attack in Tigray

Several media have cited eyewitness accounts that on 22.06.21, the Ethiopian air force launched a massive airstrike on the market of Togoga village in the Tigray region. Togoga is located about 30 km from the city of Mekele. The attack is one of the worst in the ongoing conflict between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), with at least 60 people killed and dozens injured. Survivors of the attack also reported that only civilians were present at the Togoga marketplace and that there were no military targets. According to further reports, aid workers were prevented by people in Ethiopian uniforms from reaching the scene and helping the injured. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian military has confirmed that an airstrike had been carried out, but denied all reports of civilian casualties. Rather, it was a precise air strike against enemy combatants, the military stated.

Deadly attack on MSF in Tigray

On 25.06.21, media reported a fatal attack on three staff members of the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). According to MSF, contact with the three people had broken off in the afternoon of the previous day. On 25.06.21, the vehicle was found, with and the three victims some metres away from the vehicle. They were an emergency coordinator from Spain, an aid coordinator, and a driver from Ethiopia. Based on initial indications, the Ethiopian military reportedly considered the TPLF to be responsible. Media report that at least twelve aid workers have been killed since the outbreak of fighting in Tigray.

India

Kashmir: Drone attack on military base

On 27.06.21, a drone attack was launched on the Indian air force base in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. According to the military, an explosion caused damage to the roof of a building. A second explosion occurred in an open area inside the compound. Reuters reported two people injured. This is the first drone attack of its kind on Indian territory.

On 24.06.21, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met regional leaders for the first time after the August 2019 lifting of the autonomous status and called for greater political stability in Kashmir.

Iran

Protests and arrests after disputed local election in Yasuj

Iranian media abroad report protests and riots on 18.06.21 in the course of the local elections in the city of Yasuj (Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad province, south-western Iran). More than 100 people were arrested. The detainees apparently belonged to different political factions and ethnic groups close to two competing candidates for a seat in the city council. The representative of the local municipality and members of the election staff were also arrested. The supporters of the two camps clashed after protests over the vote-counting process and the election results. There have been accusations of electoral fraud in the votes cast electronically, the reports say.

AI demands release of a member of the Arab minority

In a statement dated 24.06.21, Amnesty International (AI) calls on the Iranian authorities to reveal the whereabouts of a member of the Ahvazi Arab minority and to release him. The 58-year-old man had been detained on 20.05.21 because of his brother, who is politically active abroad, and his son. On the day following his brief detention, he was summoned to the office of the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Service in Ahvaz (Khuzestan province), where he was arrested and taken to an unidentified location, AI reports. Since then, he has been able to make several brief telephone calls to family members in Ahvaz, but without giving any information about his whereabouts.

Prominent political prisoner on hunger strike for 100 days

Former filmmaker and journalist Mohammad Nurizad has been on hunger strike for 100 days now. He is also reportedly refusing to take medication. Nurizad had been arrested in June 2019 after he and 14 activists had signed a petition demanding the resignation of Revolutionary Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. In February 2020 he was sentenced to 15 years in prison on various charges.

Iraq

Return

Media reported on 21.06.21 that 200 families from al-Jada camp have so far returned to their homes in Mosul and Salah-ad-Din. The camp is one of the two remaining refugee camps under the control of the central government, after almost all camps outside KR-I were closed last year. Those who have returned are mostly families with suspected connections to ISIS who have passed extensive security checks.

Supply crisis

On 27.06.21, a social media campaign was started by the Sadr Movement calling for the resignation of energy minister Majid Hantoush. He is held politically responsible for the extensive power outages, widespread corruption in the energy sector and the uneven distribution of electricity generation and supply security in Iraq. The ongoing insecurity of supply is one of the drivers of the numerous nationwide protests. Recent media reports include the minister's plans to build nuclear power plants and, on 24.06.21, his signing of a contract to develop solar power generation with the UAE. However, experts stress the urgency of maintaining and renewing the energy grid and existing plants and the task of fighting corruption in this sector.

Court of appeal upholds sentences for journalists and activists

The KR-I supreme court of appeal in Erbil has upheld the conviction of several journalists and activists who had been sentenced in February 2021 to six years imprisonment for endangering national security. Several human rights groups have sharply criticised the verdict. Now, only a presidential pardon is conceivable for the detainees, as their legal remedies have been exhausted.

Combat operations

On 24.06.21, there were several firefights between ISIS supporters and Iraqi security forces in Daquq county, Kirkuk province. The Iraqi federal police reported five casualties, no information was given on ISIS casualties.

On 27.06.21, four drones attacked a village north of Erbil, causing only material damage.

Death sentences in Baghdad

On 24.06.21, a total of 13 ISIS members who had confessed to their crimes were sentenced to death for preparing and carrying out terrorist attacks during the month of Ramadan in 2019.

Lebanon

Economic crisis and protests

The crash of the Lebanese lira (LBP) is continuing. On 27.06.21, the black market exchange rate for one dollar was 17,600 LBP at times. The official exchange rate for certain basic import goods is still 1:1,500. In addition, the second exchange rate of 1:3,900 is valid for other effectively subsidised goods as well as for exchange offices. On 24.06.21, petrol was transferred from the 1:1,500 category to the 1:3,900 category. Lebanon has recently experienced massive fuel supply problems.

Across the country, many shops have closed now, as Lebanon's highly import-oriented economy relies on the presence of foreign currency for many everyday goods, and profit margins are quickly eroded as the national currency continues to deteriorate.

Again, protests have taken place in all major cities against the economic situation. From 26.06.21 to 27.06.21, protesters and security forces clashed heavily in Tripoli, leaving about 20 people injured.

There is still no solution to the political crisis in sight. The Diab government has remained in office on a caretaker basis since its resignation following the explosion in Beirut in August 2020.

Libya

Second Libya conference

On 23.06.21, the second Libya conference took place in Berlin, attended by the Prime Minister of the transitional government (GNU), Abdul Hamid Dbaiba, who has been in office since March 2021, together with representatives of 17 other states including Turkey, Russia, Egypt, the UN, the EU, the Arab League, and the African Union. Without setting a precise timetable, they agreed on the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops, the disarmament and demobilisation of the militias and the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2021, among other issues. However, the necessary constitutional basis needs to be clarified for the elections.

Mali

New attacks on soldiers

On 25.06.21, an attack on a patrol of the UN mission MINUSMA was launched about 180 km north of Gao. A suicide bomber detonated a car bomb, injuring 13 soldiers, twelve of whom are from Germany. The German army has been deployed in Mali since 2013; there has never been an attack like this before. With 250 soldiers killed so far, the UN mission MINUSMA is currently considered the most dangerous UN mission.

On 21.06.21, six French soldiers and four civilians were injured in an attack in central Mali. The soldiers were on a reconnaissance mission near the town of Gossi when a car bomb exploded.

Myanmar

Fighting in Kayin, Mandalay, Kachin and Sagaing, hundreds of thousands on the run

On 21.06.21, members of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) reportedly killed eight Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) soldiers in Hpa-an, Kayin State.

On 22.06.21, fighting broke out between the Tatmadaw and the Mandalay People's Defence Force (Mandalay PDF) in Chanmyatharzi Township, Mandalay. Military sources say that eight members of the PDF died in the clashes; according to local media, four of the victims were civilians. The PDF itself has reported two casualties and claimed to have killed two Tatmadaw soldiers, while other sources put the number at three. On the same day, unidentified individuals shot dead a police officer in Chanmyatharzi.

On 23.06.21, civilian resistance groups attacked Tatmadaw troops and claimed to have killed about 30 Junta forces in Kani and Yinmabin townships (Sagaing region); thousands of people fled the area. The military set fires and searched not only houses but also surrounding forests for resisters.

On 23.06.21, members of the resistance group Zero Guerilla Force killed two police officers in Nagzon Township (Mandalay Region).

On 24.06.21, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Tatmadaw clashed after the KIA attacked a Tatmadaw checkpoint near Myitkyina (Kachin State).

On 25.06.21, a total of 15 Junta forces and one civilian combatant were reportedly killed in two firefights between the Mingin People's Defence Force and the Tatmadaw in Mingin Township (Sagaing).

According to UN estimates, fighting between the military and ethnic armed groups has displaced 230,000 people since 01.02.21, among them 177,000 people in Kayin State and over 20,000 in Chin State. Several thousand people have had to flee fighting in Shan and Kachin states.

The number of people killed by police and military violence has risen to 883. A total of 6,380 people have been arrested for political reasons, 5,183 of them are currently in detention, 1,966 arrest warrants are outstanding.

Nicaragua

More government opponents arrested in run-up to presidential elections

Between 02.06.21 and 28.06.21, a total of 21 people were arrested in the course of operation 'Danto 21', among them five opposition presidential candidates as well as numerous leading figures critical of the regime in politics, business, society, and the media (cf. BN of 07.06.21 and 14.06.21). Most recently, the politician Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Barrios was arrested on 25.06.21, and the two journalists Miguel Mendoza and Miguel Mora on 20.06.21. Miguel Mora was also a presidential candidate. Three other well-known independent media workers have left the country for fear of arrest, among them Carlos Fernando Chamorro, the brother of Cristiana Chamorro, who is under house arrest. Local media report that many of the detainees are being held in Evaristo Vázquez (known as 'El Nuevo Chipote'), where they are denied contact with their lawyers and relatives. After most members of the Organisation of American States (OAS) had condemned the arbitrary arrests and repressive measures of the regime on 16.06.21 and demanded the release of political prisoners, Mexico and Argentina recalled their ambassadors out of concern about the current political situation on 21.06.21. While President Ortega defended the arrests as lawful according to the current legal system in a public appearance on 23.06.21, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) also demanded the immediate release of Juan Sebastián Chamorro and other detainees in a resolution on 24.06.21.

Nigeria

Military operations against Boko Haram/ISWAP and bandits

The armed forces have informed that on 20.06.21, more than 20 members of the radical Islamist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) were killed in an offensive launched in conjunction with the air force in Lamborn Forest in north-eastern Borno state. Media report that attacks by Boko Haram on an army base in Borno State were repelled on the same day. An army spokesperson stated that several heavy weapons were recovered during the offensive.

On 26.06.21, supreme army commander Major General Faruk Yahaya ordered the destruction of all Boko Haram and ISWAP retreat areas in the north-east of the country. Yahaya also stressed the importance of traditional institutions in tackling terrorist insurgencies. Meanwhile, media report that a video has emerged showing Boko Haram and ISWAP fighters uniting and pledging allegiance to leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurashi. In recent times, the two radical Islamist groups have fought each other repeatedly; in one of the fights, long-time Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau was apparently killed a few weeks ago (cf. BN of 21.06.21).

According to media reports, a large number of bandits were killed in two skirmishes in the areas of Talata Marafa and Bungudu communities in northwestern Zamfara state. There have been repeated attacks and kidnappings in the northwest recently (cf. BN of 21.06.21).

ECOWAS court bans sanctions for Twitter users

On 22.06.21, the court of justice of the West African Economic Community ECOWAS ordered the Nigerian government not to prosecute people for using the short message service Twitter. Media reports say that the NGO Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) had filed a lawsuit together with 176 Nigerian nationals to challenge the Twitter ban imposed in early June 2021 (cf. BN of 07.06.21). The plaintiffs see the action as a restriction of freedom of expression, information, and the press in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, President Muhammadu Buhari has reportedly set up a team to enter into negotiations with Twitter. The members of the group apparently include information minister Lai Mohammed.

North Macedonia

New ID papers secure further implementation of the Prespa Agreement

According to a recent media report of 25.06.21, interior minister Oliver Spasovski has confirmed that North Macedonia will start issuing new passports and identity cards on 01.07.21. The new documents will for the first time bear the country's new constitutional name 'Republic of North Macedonia'. This step, the minister said, brings North Macedonia and Greece closer to the full implementation of the historic Prespa Agreement signed in June

2018 and in effect since 12.02.19, in which both countries had agreed to the name change. The resolution of the name dispute had been a prerequisite for Greece's agreement to the Euro-Atlantic integration and North Macedonia's NATO accession, which took place in February 2019. The process of exchanging ID papers would be gradual for citizens, who would receive their new documents when the old ones expire, the interior minister added.

Second pride parade

After last year's pride parade of the LGBTQI community did not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the second parade in the country's history was held on 26.06.21, with thousands of people participating in the capital Skopje. A recent media report says that this year's event was organised by the national network against homophobia and transphobia and, like the first pride parade in 2019, was again supported by high-ranking government and city representatives, ambassadors, and activists, as well as organisations from abroad.

Pakistan

Suspected attack on Lashkar-e-Taiba

On 23.06.21, at least three people were killed, and another dozen injured in an explosion near the home of the founder of the radical Islamist Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which is classified as a terrorist organisation, in Lahore, Punjab province. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

LeT is blamed, among other things, for the attacks in Mumbai, India, in 2008, which had claimed the lives of more than 160 people. In Pakistan, LeT also appears in public with its charitable wing Jamaat-du-Dawa (JuD), whose leader is in prison for terrorist financing.

Ahmadiyya mosque in Faisalabad desecrated

A press release by the Ahmadiyya Community informs that on 17.06.21, one of their community houses in Faisalabad (Punjab) was desecrated after sunset by the local administration, accompanied by the police. The Islamic creed, the names of Allah and Quran verses were removed; the minarets were demolished. In addition, inscriptions from four Ahmadi houses were removed. Security forces guarded the work and ensured that no one had access to the area during the operation and that no photographs or videos were taken, the press release stated.

Border fence with Afghanistan almost completed

On 20.06.21 it was reported that the border fence built by Pakistan between Afghanistan and Pakistan would be completed by 30.06.21. Reports of 26.06.21 say that 90 percent of the fencing have already been completed. Meanwhile, the Pakistani President and also the interior minister have affirmed that Pakistan also wanted peace for Afghanistan and that the Taliban were not able to gain a military victory. If no peace treaty was reached, there was the risk of a civil war that might spread to Pakistan, they stated. That was the main reason for the erection of the fence; also, the fence was intended to keep out more refugees. Pakistan would not be willing to station US troops in the country, the President said. If the Taliban were to take over the government, this would be accepted, and no military action would be taken.

Russian Federation

COVID-19 pandemic: new massive outbreaks in Russian metropolises

The COVID-19 pandemic is spreading rapidly, with the delta variant becoming dominant. Moscow and St. Petersburg are particularly affected by the virus. In St. Petersburg, more than 1,300 infections were registered within one day on 26.06.21. On 27.06.21, more than 107 deaths were reported, which is a new high for one day. For Moscow, the authorities reported a total of 6,700 newly infected persons on 26.06.21 and a peak of 144 deaths in one day. Mandatory vaccination has already been imposed for certain professions in Moscow and other cities. However, there was also protest against this move. Across Russia, the number of new infections has risen to over 20,500. Almost 600 deaths were registered nationwide in one day. Western experts, however, doubt that the deaths from the coronavirus are correctly recorded.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab fighters executed in Puntland

Official reports say that on 27.06.21, a total of 18 al-Shabaab fighters were executed in Galkayo in the Mudug region of Puntland, two others in Garowe and one in Qardho. They had previously been sentenced to death by the court for having killed over 300 government officials, media workers and civilians since 2008. The executions were carried out by firing squads.

Attacks

On 26.06.21, at least one soldier was killed and three others injured in roadside explosions near the village of Bali Dhidin in the Bari region of Puntland. The attack targeted Puntland security minister Abdisamad Galan. The minister survived the attack, to which al-Shabaab claimed responsibility.

On 27.06.21, al-Shabaab fighters detonated several explosive devices near a military base in the town of Wisil in Galmudug state. This was followed by clashes with security forces. According to official figures, at least 30 people were killed in the incident, among them 17 soldiers, 41 al-Shabaab fighters and 13 civilians. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sri Lanka

President pardons suspected LTTE members imprisoned for terrorism

On 24.06.21, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa pardoned 94 prisoners, among them 16 Tamils with suspected links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who were imprisoned for terrorism. Some of them had been in jail for over a decade under the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The UN and human rights organisations have long called for the abolition of the PTA, which allows detention without charge, among other things. On 10.06.21, the European Parliament had passed a resolution criticising the application of the PTA, calling for its abolition and expressing concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. Among those pardoned is former MP Duminda Silva, who had been sentenced to death for the murder of a political rival. The pardon of the politician, who was a political ally of Rajapaksa, has triggered criticism not only from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR). On 25.06.21, around 150 people sentenced to death went on hunger strike in prisons in protest against the pardon. The death penalty is still imposed in Sri Lanka, but no executions have been carried out since 1976.

Syria

Idlib: Ten dead in fighting between government troops and rebels

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is close to the opposition, has informed that on 21.06.21, government forces fired dozens of artillery shells at the villages of Ihsim and Barah in the south of Idlib governorate, killing at least nine people and injuring several others. According to an activist on the ground, a commander of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which controls the area, was also killed in the incident.

Meanwhile, the state news agency SANA has reported rebel artillery shelling on the village of Joreen, which is under the control of the Syrian army, killing a civilian and injuring her father.

US air strikes along Syrian-Iraqi border

In the night of 28.06.21, US fighter-bombers targeted three buildings which, according to the Pentagon, were used by the Iranian-sponsored militia groups Kataib Hezbollah and Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada to carry out attacks on US army units in Iraq. Apparently, the two targets on the Syrian side of the border served as weapons depot and coordination centre. The timing of the attack was chosen to avoid civilian casualties. The last confirmed airstrike by the USA on targets in Syria had been carried out on 25.02.21, also targeting the two militia groups (cf. BN of 01.03.21).

Low wheat yields exacerbate food shortages

A report published on 23.06.21 by the REACH Initiative warns of impending food shortages after low annual rainfall in Syria. Experts from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimate that Syria will have to import at least 1.5 million tonnes of wheat this year to ensure a sufficient supply of bread for the population. Russia, one of the world's largest wheat exporters, has announced to sell one million tonnes of wheat to the Syrian government to meet its target of four million tonnes for annual domestic needs.

About 70 percent of the Syrian wheat production is located in areas outside government control, most of it in the northeastern part of the country which is controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The wheat grown there, however, is not sold to Damascus in order to ensure their own self-sufficiency. But even there, the water level of the Euphrates has dropped by five metres in the current season; hence, only about half of last year's yields were obtained.

In March 2021, the World Food Programme had informed that 12.4 million Syrians were affected by food shortages or hunger, which is twice as many as in 2018.

Turkey

Ban proceedings against HDP party

On 21.06.21, the constitutional court approved the opening of prohibition proceedings against the HDP party. The decision was taken after the chief public prosecutor's office had submitted a second version of the application on 06.06.21, as the first one had been rejected by the constitutional court due to formal irregularities (cf. BN of 14.06.21)

Human rights violations

On 24.06.21, the human rights organisation Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı (TİHV) published its annual report on the human rights situation in Turkey. According to the report, 404 people were tortured and ten abducted during the last year. The right to life was violated in 3,291 cases, including 68 cases involving children and 101 cases involving refugees.

Arrests of suspected Gülen supporters

On 24.06.21, a total of 58 people accused of having links to the Gülen movement were arrested in 24 provinces in western Turkey. Apparently, they used the messenger app 'ByLock', an encrypted smartphone app suspected of being used by Gülen members. Among those arrested are active-duty soldiers.

Uzbekistan

Registration of newly founded opposition party denied again

As had been the case in the first procedure (cf. BN of 31.05.21), the justice ministry rejected the re-application for registration as a political party of Haqiqat va Taraqqiyot party a few months before the presidential election. In a press release published on 21.06.21 the ministry stated that the group had submitted only about 9,900 signatures instead of the required 20,000, and that in about 2,300 cases the signatories had subsequently cancelled their signatures. Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty reports in this context that the Uzbek authorities have visited universities all over the country and urged students not to join any of the newly founded parties. In some cases, students were explicitly instructed to spread 'negative information' about opposition parties on social media.

Vietnam

Government adopts rules of conduct for social media

State and other media report that on 17.06.21, the Vietnamese government adopted a national code of conduct for social media, intended to promote positive content about the country. At the same time, the code of conduct prohibits content that violates applicable laws and state interests. The guidelines cover state organisations, social media companies and all their users. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), which has been in power since 1976,

is increasingly cracking down on critical voices on the internet. Vietnam is ranked 175 out of 180 in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Ranking 2021.

Yemen

Fighting in Aden

On 23.06.21, two fighters were killed in the port city of Aden in a clash between armed brigades; 15 people were injured, among them several civilians.

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