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Briefing Notes

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Afghanistan

Attacks on civilians / internally displaced people

On 05.06.21 it was reported that eleven civilians, including women and children, were killed by a bomb blast in Badghis province. On 01.06.21 it was reported that approximately 300 civilians were killed in the country in May 2021. On 31.05.21 reports said that in the last three weeks the Taliban had unsuccessfully carried out over 700 attacks on districts 10 and 3 of Lashkargah city in Helmand province; apparently, they were supported by al-Qaida fighters. About 4,500 families were displaced by the fighting, the reports said. On 01.06.21, the Afghan parliament discussed the deteriorating security situation, especially the fact that the Taliban were now increasingly carrying out attacks in larger cities (e.g. Herat) and provincial capitals. On 30.05.21, six employees of a railway company were apparently killed by a bomb explosion in Herat province.

Government military bases surrender to the Taliban

The New York Times reported on 27.05.21 that since 01.05.21, when the international troops started their withdrawal, a total of 26 outposts and military bases of the Afghan army had surrendered to the Taliban in four provinces (Laghman, Baghlan, Wardak and Ghazni), among the surrenders were four district centres. Apparently, the soldiers had to hand over weapons and ammunition to the Taliban.

COVID-19 pandemic: highest number of new daily infections / vaccine runs out

On 01.06.21 it was reported that there were 1,566 new infections and 30 deaths due to COVID-19 in Afghanistan on 31.05.21. This is the highest number recorded since the beginning of the pandemic. Most of the infections were registered in the capital Kabul, followed by Kandahar and Balkh. On 29.05.21, the Afghan government had ordered the closure of all academic institutions in the country for 14 days due to the rising numbers. On 31.05.21, it was reported that the Afghan government was running out of vaccines. So far, about one million vaccine doses have been delivered for a population of about 37 million people, the reports said.

Argentina

COVID-19 pandemic: forced admissions to isolation centres in Formosa province

Due to the current spread of the second corona wave with high case numbers, President Alberto Fernández imposed a new nine-day lockdown with night-time curfews starting on 22.05.21. As early as March 2021, Human Rights Watch (HRW) had criticised the restrictive corona measures in northern Formosa province. Since the onset of the pandemic, more than 24,000 people have been placed under forced quarantine by the security forces in so-called isolation centres. There was no separation between those who tested positive and those who were in contact with those who had a positive test. Former internees have described low hygiene standards, overcrowding, and

poor access to medical care. In addition, authorities had tried to prevent free media coverage of the isolation centres and had arrested demonstrators against the measures, HRW reported. Meanwhile, the human rights commissioner of the central government in Buenos Aires has ordered the closure of some centres. New guidelines from the government of Formosa now allow domestic quarantine under certain conditions, but the poorer sections of the population are often unable to meet these standards and hence continue to be sent to the isolation centres.

Burkina Faso

Dozens killed in attacks on several towns

In the night of 04.06.21 to 05.06.21, unidentified individuals killed about 160 people in an attack on the town of Solhan (Sahel region). Initially, no one took responsibility for the attack, which has been the most serious since violence had started in the country in 2015, mainly attributed to Islamist groups (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims - GSIM, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara - ISGS). President Roch Kaboré announced a three-day state mourning on 05.06.21.

Shortly before, on 04.06.21, at least 14 people were killed in an attack on the village of Tadaryat (Sahel region).

COVID-19 pandemic: start of vaccinations

On 30.05.21, the country received the first 115,200 vaccine doses. The vaccination campaign started on 02.06.21, prioritizing health workers, people with known illnesses and people planning to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. According to data from Johns Hopkins University, 13,452 infections and 167 deaths have been recorded so far.

Central African Republic / Chad

Six Chadian soldiers killed

On 30.05.21, Central African units and Russian mercenaries attacked the town of Sourou in Chad. One soldier from the Chadian military border post there was reportedly killed, and several others injured. Five other soldiers were apparently executed in the Central African Republic (CAR). Chad immediately accused CAR of war crimes and announced a response. Fearing further attacks, the inhabitants of villages near the border in CAR have apparently abandoned their homes. It was only later that the CAR government stated that the incident occurred when their units were pursuing a rebel group of the Coalition des Patriotes pour le Changement (CPC) into Chadian territory. According to a media report, the CPC denied this account. On 02.06.21, Chad and CAR agreed to set up an independent commission to investigate the incident.

The border between Chad and CAR is approximately 1,000 kilometres long and is considered difficult to control. Relations between the two countries are problematic. Chad had played a leading role in the stabilisation attempts in the CAR after 2013 but withdrew as early as 2014 amid accusations of siding with the Muslim Séléka rebels.

China

Government announces introduction of 'three-child policy'

In a meeting chaired by state and party leader Xi Jinping on 31.05.21, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) decided to introduce a 'three-child policy'. After the new policy comes into force, married couples will be allowed to have three children. The move is a reaction to the continuing decline in the birth rate despite the 'two-child policy' introduced in 2016. It is to be accompanied by supportive measures, among them a reduction of housing and education costs as well as educational and counselling measures on the concepts of marriage and family. There was no information on details on the measures or on a timetable for the implementation of the new family planning policy.

Hong Kong: several arrests after commemoration ceremony

Democracy activist Chow Hang Tung was arrested on 04.06.21 for inciting an unauthorised assembly. One day later, she was released from custody on payment of bail. Chow had helped organise a candlelight memorial service for the victims of the Tian'anmen Square massacre in Beijing in 1989. The annual memorial event in Hong Kong's

Victoria Park had been banned for the second time in a row in 2021 by the authorities, citing again the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason. In the run-up to this year's event, the authorities also announced prison sentences of up to five years for participants. In addition to Chow, security forces arrested at least five other people on 04.06.21.

Blogger sentenced to prison for comments about army members

On 31.05.21, a Nanjing court sentenced well-known blogger Qiu Ziming to eight months in prison. Qiu had criticised the actions of a commander of the People's Liberation Army (VBA) in the border conflict with India and doubted the official number of VBA soldiers killed in a clash in June 2020 (cf. BN of 01.03.21). His conviction was based on an amendment to the Penal Code that came into force on 01.03.21, which provides for up to three years' imprisonment for denigrating heroes and martyrs.

COVID-19 pandemic: largest outbreak in months reported in southern China

In the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, more than 100 new infections have been reported since 21.05.21, 94 of them in the provincial capital Guangzhou (as of 06.06.21). Local authorities have identified a restaurant visitor infected with the delta variant of the coronavirus as the starting point of the outbreak. Compulsory mass testing is currently being carried out in four suburbs of Guangzhou, and a lockdown has been imposed on 38 zones of the city. Travel restrictions are also in place for the entire province of Guangdong.

Colombia / Venezuela

Eight members of the Venezuelan armed forces gone free

The Venezuelan defence ministry has informed that eight military personnel taken hostage by FARC dissidents in the state of Apure in the border region between Colombia and Venezuela were liberated on 02.06.21. International media, on the other hand, report a release by the Colombian ex-guerrillas after the withdrawal of the Venezuelan forces. The soldiers had been held as 'prisoners of war' following an operation in the village of La Capilla on 23.04.21. At the time, eight other members of the army had been killed in the fighting (cf. BN of 03.05.21). The security situation in the border region remains tense and the conflict continues.

DR Congo

Extension of state of siege; militia violence

The state of emergency declared by President Félix Tshisekedi in the form of a state of siege on 03.05.21 for the violence-hit eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri has been extended for another 15 days after approval by the (bicameral) parliament according to Art. 144 and Art. 145 of the Congolese constitution. Thus, the Congolese armed forces and police continue to have controversial executive (special) powers of intervention in the two regions.

On 02.06.21, AFP news agency reported that at least 70 people were killed between 31.05.21 and 02.06.21 in Ituri province alone. International and national media as well as UNHCR say that 31.05.21 saw the worst attacks in years in Ituri province. At least 57 people were killed, several injured and at least 25 abducted in the attacks on villages and IDP camps near the towns of Boga and Tchabi near the Ugandan border. UNHCR estimates that another 6,000 people have been internally displaced. Local media report that more than 70 houses, huts and shops have been set on fire. According to media reports, the rebel militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) operating in the area is blamed for the attacks. However, the area is also marked by severe ethnic tensions, especially between the ethnic groups of the Nyali and the Congolese Hutus of Rwandan origin, the Banyabwisha. According to local reports, the fact that one of the IDP camps attacked was inhabited by Nyali, while the IDP camp nearby, inhabited by Banyabwisha, was not attacked, has cast doubt on the ADF's responsibility for the attacks. On 03.06.21, at least eleven miners were killed in a deadly attack by the militia Patriotic Force and Integrationist of Congo (FPIC) in the gold-rich territory of Djugu. David McLachlan-Karr, UN Humanitarian Coordinator, and UNHCR spokesperson Babar Balloch estimate that 1.6 million people (out of some five million internally displaced persons) are displaced in Ituri province alone. Meanwhile, the military governor of Ituri, General Johnny Luboya N'kashama, informed on 05.06.21 that several villages in the Irumi area of Ituri province were liberated from the rebel militias. He asked the displaced residents to return to their former homes where the armed forces would ensure security and order.

While local media reported the killing of a civilian and a soldier in an ambush by the ADF on 04.06.21 in North Kivu (Ruwenzori sector of Beni region), the military reported that suspected collaborators of the ADF rebel militia, including Mai-Mai militia members, had been arrested in Beni region of North Kivu province. Since the declaration of a state of siege in North Kivu, 73 suspected collaborators of the ADF rebel militia have been arrested and 30 members of the militia killed, military sources say. According to the latest estimate by the American monitoring group Kivu Security Tracker (KST) published on 28.06.21, at least 1,228 civilians have been killed in Beni region alone since November 2019 following the launch of the armed forces' fight against the ADF rebel group. Radio Okapi reported on 04.06.21 that fighters of the Mai-Mai de l'Union des patriotes pour la libération du Congo (UPLC) were forcing into labour the local population in the Bapere sector of the Lubero territory of North Kivu province, which had triggered a further wave of escapes in the province. In addition, at least 300 fighters of armed militias have laid down their arms in various areas of South Kivu province, the radio station informed.

Gambia

Assault on journalists

On 03.06.21, the Gambian news portal The Chronicle informs that the Gambia Press Union (GPU) criticised a violent attack on journalist Modou E. Njie of the independent private broadcaster Kerr Fatou by a photographer of the Gambian President's Office on 02.06.21. The journalist had planned to report on a personal application for an election card by President Adama Barrow. After filing a criminal complaint for assault, an investigation was initiated against the photographer. The GPU has stated that this was the second attack on a Kerr Fatou media worker by an individual operating in the President's entourage. The GPU called on the government to guarantee the freedom and independence of the press and media in the country and admonished that the president's remarks on biased and unflattering reporting was likely to incite his supporters and militants against the media. The GPU has repeatedly highlighted violence against media workers since the change of government, without perpetrators being held criminally accountable, the union says.

Ghana

LGBTQI activists

In the case of 21 LGBTQI activists arrested on 20.05.21 (cf. BN of 31.05.21), the Ho District Court (Volta Region) announced on 04.06.21 to decide on 08.06.21 on a bail application for those arrested. On 04.06.21 several special rapporteurs, independent experts and working groups of the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council condemned the arrest of the activists in a joint statement and called for their release.

India

Fighting between Indian security forces and Naxalites

Reports of 21.05.21 say that 13 supporters of India's Naxalite Maoists were killed by the Indian Army in a skirmish in Gadchiroli District/Maharashtra. Fighting between government forces and the Maoist rebels appears to have increased in the last two weeks of May 2021, affecting the provinces of Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic

Media reports say that on 04.06.21, a five-day travel ban between the provinces came into force. Infringements are punishable by fines of up to IRR 1 million (approx. EUR 35, as of 07.06.21), depending on the classification of the province of origin in question as a risk area. Currently, the southern province of Hormuzgan is considered a priority region with numerous proven cases of the Covid delta variant.

Clashes in Kurdish region cause deaths and injuries

According to Iranian foreign media, fighting has broken out between two Kurdish tribes in the Sar-e Pol-e Zahab region bordering Iraq (Kermanshah province). Three people were killed, and many others injured. The clashes between the Qolkhani and the Jaf were triggered by a land dispute. The two tribes have been enemies for a long time. Different religious affiliations also play a role. The Qolkhani adhere to the Ahl-e Haqq religion, whereas the Jaf are Sunni Muslims. The fighting broke out on 01.06.21 in the village of Kuyik when shepherds of the Qolkhani wanted to water their flocks on the land of the Jaf.

2020 downed airliner: growing pressure on victims' families

In its recent report, Human Rights Watch (HRW) informs of continued pressure by Iranian state authorities on relatives of victims of the downed Ukrainian passenger plane in January 2020. Victims' families report arbitrary arrests, interrogations and torture. Also, the authorities refused to hand over personal belongings of the victims and tried to prohibit commemorative events. In addition, the security authorities tried to prevent interviews of the victims' families with foreign media through threats and intimidation.

Iraq

ISIS activities

On 03.05.21, a gas pipeline exploded near Baghdad. According to the Iraqi military, there were injuries but no deaths. ISIS has claimed responsibility for this explosion and stated that three people were killed and over 20 injured. ISIS also reports to have carried out 20 attacks between 27.05.21 and 02.06.21, killing or injuring a total of 25 people.

On 02.06.21, several ISIS insurgents were killed in a joint military operation between Peshmerga and French forces in the Diyala and Tuz Khurmatu regions. The Vice-President of the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KR-I) Jaafar Sheikh Mustafa has stated that ISIS militants have been driven out of large areas of the region. On 06.06.21, ISIS hideouts were raided in the disputed areas.

Turkish air strike and PKK attack

On 05.06.21, three people were killed in a Turkish drone attack near a refugee camp in Machmur. The attack was carried out as part of the Turkish offensive against the PKK in northern Iraq. President Erdoğan stated that a senior PKK leader, Selman Bozgir, was killed in the attack. After the attack, several dozen people gathered in the Sulaimaniyya region to protest against the Turkish offensive.

On 05.06.21, the PKK allegedly killed five Peshmerga in Dohuk province, which the PKK denies.

Fire in the refugee camp

On 04.06.21, a fire in the Sharia refugee camp in Dohuk province destroyed 370 tents. The reason for the fire is not known. The Sharia refugee camp is mainly inhabited by Yazidis who had to flee Shingal because of ISIS attacks.

Jordan

Examination of coup allegations before State Security Court

On 01.06.21, the state news agency Petra reported that a state security court has taken over the cases of two former officials regarding their involvement in an alleged coup attempt against the government (cf. BN of 12.04.21). The two concerned, Bassem Awadallah and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, are still in custody. Detailed information on the whereabouts and well-being of Prince Hamzah, who has been accused of similar charges, is not known. According to the royal family, he has been under some form of house arrest since then.

Libya

Explosion at checkpoint in Sabha claims lives

At least two people were killed in an explosion at a checkpoint in the southern city of Sabha on 06.06.21, media report. A vehicle loaded with an explosive device drove into the police checkpoint and triggered the explosion. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack on the same day.

Mali

Reactions to military coup

After the second military coup within nine months, the African Union (AU) has suspended Mali's membership for the time being. A few days earlier, the West African Economic Community ECOWAS had already temporarily excluded Mali. France has meanwhile announced to stop all joint military operations jointly with Malian armed forces until further notice. The Barkhane military operation will be continued independently, and the Takuba training mission will be suspended. There are no plans to withdraw the German Bundeswehr troops stationed in Mali as part of the MINUSMA stabilisation mission and the EUTM training mission.

On 24.05.21, Colonel Assimi Goïta had both the previous interim president and the head of government arrested and was subsequently declared the new interim president by the constitutional court (cf. BN of 31.05.21).

New interim Prime Minister appointed

Interim President Assimi Goïta has appointed Choguel Kokalla Maïger to the post of interim Prime Minister. According to media reports, Maïger is one of the leaders of the opposition movement Le Mouvement du 5 Juin - Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques (M5-RFP). M5-RFP had been a driving force behind the widespread protests against the government of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta in August 2020 (cf. BN of 24.08.20). Maïger's appointment is intended to defuse criticism of the military takeover and demands for a return to a civilian transitional government. The inaugurations are scheduled for 07.06.21.

Montenegro

Demands for compensation scheme for victims of human trafficking

In its most recent report, the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) called on the Montenegrin authorities on 02.06.21 to introduce the right to compensation for victims of trafficking. In a press release, the Executive Secretary of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, Petya Nestorova, pointed out that so far, in none of 39 court procedures, compensation was granted to the victims who had demonstrably suffered exploitation and material, moral or even physical damage. According to the GRETA report, the victims are mostly members of the Roma minority or seasonal labour migrants from neighbouring Balkan countries. The report welcomes the setting up of a multidisciplinary identification team for potential victims of trafficking and the resulting increase in detection rates. However, the actual number of victims of trafficking and labour exploitation in Montenegro is significantly higher than the number of cases identified so far, which is why proactive investigative work by the authorities to identify potential victims as well as prosecution must be further improved, the GRETA report says.

Myanmar

Continuing protests, strikes and deadly clashes between the military and protesters

Since 31.05.21, media have reported mostly deadly clashes between the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) and ethnic armies and People's Defence Forces in Chin, Shan, Kayah and Kayin states and Ayeyarwady region. In Hlaysia village (Ayeyarwady), junta forces reportedly killed 20 civilians on 05.06.21 after local residents armed with farming and hunting tools tried to resist the arrest and mistreatment of a community member.

On 04.06.21, an infantry battalion in Putao (Kachin State) abducted 17 civilians to use them as human shields against potential attacks by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) on an 80 km drive through the state.

The nationwide reopening of schools on 01.06.21 following the COVID-19-related one-year closure did not proceed according to schedule, as half of the country's approximately 400,000 teachers remain on strike. In addition, the teachers' association estimates that only 10 % of the approximately nine million students have registered for the new school year. An exception is Rakhine State, where 94 percent of students have returned to class.

In addition to ongoing strikes and daily protests, opponents of the junta have continued their attacks on representatives and suspected sources of the military regime. On 31.05.21, only one nurse survived an attack on six people suspected of betraying the protest movement in Gangaw (Magwe region). Another nurse and four teachers and administrators were killed. Other deadly attacks were reported in Yangon (Rangoon), Sagaing and Mandalay regions and Kachin state. At least nine local officials appointed by the junta were killed in the attacks.

The number of civilians killed by junta security forces has risen to 849, the human rights organisation Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) notes. The number of political prisoners currently stands at 4,674 with 1,936 arrest warrants currently outstanding.

COVID-19 pandemic: outbreaks in Chin and Sagaing

As a result of a coronavirus outbreak near the Indian border (cf. BN of 31.05.21), the health ministry has imposed curfews on five townships (Tanzang, Hakha, Tedim, Falam, Thantlang) in Chin State. Tanzang is most affected, with between 20 and over 50 new infections reported daily (as of 05.06.21). Since 31.05.21, six people have died of COVID-19 there. The local health department has reported that hospitals lack respirators and medication. Another outbreak was reported in Kale township in neighbouring Sagaing region, where curfews have also been in place since 02.06.21 when 34 new infections were registered within 24 hours. On 04.06.21, six infected people died there. Myanmar media speak of a third COVID-19 wave. Across the country, a total of 500 new infections were reported within a week (as of 04.06.21).

Nicaragua

Exclusion of presidential candidate Chamorro from the November 2021 elections

After the Sandinista-ruled interior ministry had opened investigations, the Nicaraguan Public Prosecutor's Office officially accused on 01.06.21 the opposition presidential candidate Cristiana Chamorro of abusive management, money laundering and 'ideological falsehood' and requested her exclusion from the presidential elections scheduled for 07.11.21. On 02.06.21, the court in Managua granted the request and ordered that Chamorro be put under house arrest and that her house be searched. Although Chamorro has not yet been officially convicted, she is to be barred from holding public office because due to the charges she does not possess full civil and political rights, the prosecutor's office stated. According to a poll, Chamorro was the most promising opposition candidate, having announced her candidacy for the Alianza Ciudadanos por la Libertad alliance on 01.06.21. Human rights organisations and several foreign governments have condemned the government's increasing undermining of free and fair elections and criticised as politically motivated Chamorro's impeachment and disqualification.

Opposition candidate Cruz arrested; other opposition politicians placed under house arrest

Media report that on 05.06.21, another opposition candidate, Arturo Cruz, was arrested. He is accused of violating the 'Law for the defense of the rights of the people to independence, sovereignty and self-determination for peace', which had come into force in December 2020. This legislation makes it a punishable offence to call for sanctions against the government or to commit 'terrorist acts' and can thus prevent a candidate from standing in the elections. Furthermore, the candidate Félix Maradiaga has been summoned by the attorney general's office for 07.06.21 for reasons unknown so far. Like the two candidates Juan Sebastián Chamorro and Medardo Mairena, Maradiaga has been placed under house arrest and police surveillance.

Already on 18.05.21 and 19.05.21, the supreme electoral authority had barred the opposition parties Partido Restauración Democrática (PRD) and Partido Conservador (PC) from participating in the elections by depriving them of their legal status as parties.

Nigeria

Government suspends Twitter

The Nigerian government has temporarily blocked access to the short message service Twitter. Since 05.06.21, Twitter is no longer accessible for most people in the West African country, media reports say. The blocking had been implemented by Nigerian telecommunication providers under instructions from the government; however, access appears to be still possible through the use of VPN connections. The government has announced criminal sanctions for using VPN connections.

After another office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had been set on fire in Imo State on 30.05.21, President Muhammadu Buhari sharply criticised attacks on state institutions in the southeast of the country in a short message on Twitter, announcing retaliatory measures against the secessionist group Eastern Security Network (ESN) in response to several attacks on state institutions. Following complaints, Twitter had deleted the message, saying it incited violence. In addition, Buhari's Twitter account was suspended for twelve hours.

Buhari has however stated that the suspension of Twitter was not only a reaction to the removal of his tweet and the temporary blocking of his account. Twitter, he said, was responsible for spreading misinformation, some of which had violent consequences.

The suspension has met with strong criticism at home and abroad. The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) has announced to institute a lawsuit if the suspension was not lifted. On 05.06.21, the foreign missions of the European Union, the USA, Canada and Great Britain criticised the measure as an interference in freedom of expression.

50 Boko Haram fighters killed

Media report that on 02.06.21, soldiers of the Nigerian army killed 50 radical Islamist fighters in a gunfight. Apparently, the fighting took place in the town of Damboa in northeastern Borno State. The Islamists attacked the town in several waves with armoured pickup trucks mounted with anti-aircraft guns, the reports say. However, the army apparently managed to repel the attacks with support from the air force. While international media cite statements by the military that the dead were members of the radical Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram, Nigerian media report that fighters from the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) group were killed. ISWAP had split off from Boko Haram in 2016 (cf. BN of 31.05.21).

Pakistan

Attacks in Balochistan

On 01.06.21, it was reported that two separate attacks on military bases in the cities of Turbat and Quetta in Balochistan province left a total of eight people dead and 15 others injured, among them both Pakistan Army soldiers and attackers. The incident occurred ahead of an announced visit to the region by President Imran Khan. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), which is fighting for an independent Balochistan, has claimed responsibility for the attack in Turbat.

Freedom of the press, attacks on journalists

On 03.06.21, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on the Pakistani government to investigate the recent attacks on journalists in the country and bring those responsible to justice. On 25.05.21, a journalist was attacked, threatened and beaten up by unidentified individuals at his home in Islamabad for reporting negatively on the Pakistani military. On 31.05.21, the radio programme of another prominent journalist was cancelled because he had spoken critically about the military during a protest on 28.05.21 against this attack. In April 2021, another prominent journalist had been gunned down by an unidentified individual. Last year had seen 148 attacks on journalists in Pakistan. In this context, the social media analysis platform Graphika published a report on 03.06.21 showing how an event agency for the Pakistani military had created fake profiles on Facebook and Instagram reporting positively about the Pakistani army. On the same day, Facebook removed these pages.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Israel: new head of state and new government

On 02.06.21 Isaac Herzog, former opposition leader and leader of the Labour Party, was elected as the new President of Israel. The office includes primarily representative tasks.

On 02.06.21, opposition leader Yair Lapid and his main coalition partner Naftali Bennett announced the formation of a new government. The agreement provides for a coalition of eight parties across the political spectrum, including the Islamist United Arab List party, which would represent the first participation of an Arab party in government in Israel's history. According to the agreement, the office of prime minister would be shared. For the first two years Naftali Bennett, leader of the right-wing Jamina party alliance and former ally of Benjamin Netanyahu, would hold the prime minister's post. He sees himself as politically to the right of Netanyahu and rejects the two-state solution, while he wants to push ahead with settlement construction in the West Bank. Yair Lapid, leader of the liberal party Yesh Atid, would take office for the following two years. The fragile alliance is a new attempt after four failed government formations in the past two years. The agreement to form a government now needs to be approved by the Knesset. If approved, it would end Netanyahu's twelve-year rule.

East Jerusalem: female journalist and activists arrested

On 05.06.21, a female journalist from the Doha-based news channel Al-Jazeera was temporarily arrested in Sheikh Jarrah while covering protests in support of Palestinian families facing forced expulsion.

On 06.06.21, two well-known activists were detained for a few hours on charges of participating in public disturbances.

Peru

COVID-19 case numbers significantly higher than originally reported

After a review of the deaths caused by COVID-19, Prime Minister Violeta Bermúdez informed on 31.05.21 that the absolute number of cases (180,764) is 2.6 times higher than the figures originally published by the government. Data from Johns Hopkins University show that the death rates are now around 500 per 100,000 inhabitants and that Peru is one of the most affected countries by COVID-19 in Latin America, with the highest mortality rate in the world.

At the end of May 2021, the government declared a new state of emergency with a harsh lockdown because of the second wave, which has started in December 2020. There is still a shortage of intensive care beds in the country, oxygen tanks often need to be purchased privately by relatives, sometimes at high prices, and the vaccination campaign is progressing only slowly. Indigenous people are particularly vulnerable, often having only poor or hardly any access to adequate health care in case of a corona infection.

Russian Federation

Opposition politician Pivovarov arrested during planned departure for Poland

On 31.05.21, Russian opposition politician Andrei Pivovarov was arrested while attempting to leave the country for Poland on board of a plane. Police officers had stopped the aircraft which was already preparing for takeoff in St. Petersburg. The responsible investigating authority stated on 01.06.21 that Pivovarov was accused of participating in an 'undesirable organisation' in Russia. He faces up to six years imprisonment. Until recently, Pivovarov had led the anti-government organisation Open Russia. In May 2021, the organisation, which is supported by exiled opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was declared an 'undesirable organisation' and thus effectively banned. Under pressure from the state, Pivovarov then announced the organisation's dissolution on 27.05.21. He has described his arrest as 'complete lawlessness'.

On 01.06.21, also opposition member Dmitry Gudkov was arrested and released after 48 hours in custody. He left Moscow for Kiev on 06.06.21, fearing that he would be arrested again and that criminal proceedings would subsequently be staged against him.

Background

Opposition activists have long complained that the government is cracking down on dissent. Dozens of opposition members are in prison. The aim is to prevent by all means situations like those in neighbouring Belarus last year, with mass demonstrations against the government. In addition, the ruling party United Russia wants to defend its absolute majority in the Duma in the parliamentary elections scheduled for September 2021.

Somalia

Elections in Somaliland

On 31.05.21, parliamentary and council elections were held in the autonomous region of Somaliland, for which more than one million voters were registered and international observers were invited. Disagreement between the three major parties over the composition of the electoral commission had delayed the parliamentary elections for eleven years. The last election had taken place in 2005. On 06.06.21, the electoral commission published the final results and informed that the two opposition parties Somaliland National Party (Waddani) and Justice and Welfare Party (UCID) had jointly won the majority of parliamentary seats. In a joint statement, both parties announced the formation of a governing coalition. Waddani and UCID also jointly won the majority of seats in the local elections.

Civilian casualties in Gedo airstrikes

On 03.06.21, at least two civilians were killed, and seven others injured in airstrikes by the Kenyan military against al-Shabaab militias on several villages in El Adde and Hisa-u-gur in Gedo region. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) announced on 05.06.21 that it would conduct a full investigation into the airstrikes. The Somali government has condemned the continuous Kenyan airstrikes with civilian casualties.

Sudan

UNITAMS mission extended by one year

On 03.06.21, the UN Security Council extended by one year the mandate of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan (UNITAMS). The mission's tasks include accompanying the political transition, supporting the peace process and the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement, as well as monitoring peacebuilding and protecting civilians, especially in the Two Areas (South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions). In addition, the staff of UNITAMS is planned to be increased in the near future.

In a publication of 01.06.21, the World Food Programme (WFP), together with the Sudanese agriculture and forest ministry and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), appealed for increased investment in Sudanese agriculture and humanitarian aid. The WFP cites an analysis from May 2021, showing that in the upcoming dry season from June to September 2021, a record number of people (more than 20 percent of Sudan's population) will be affected by acute food insecurity. The major factors causing food insecurity in Sudan are floods, recurrent droughts, economic decline and associated inflation, and displacement of people due to conflicts.

Syria

Manbij: deadly clashes with security forces

In the northern Syrian town of Manbij, protesters from the predominantly Arab town clashed with security forces of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on 01.06.21. Eyewitnesses have reported that members of Arab tribes were protesting against SDF rule. When they approached the security forces, the latter used live ammunition and killed at least eight people. Several others were injured.

The incident is the most serious unrest since the capture of Manbij by the SDF five years ago. Apparently, the driving force behind the Arabs' discontent are compulsory conscription and perceived discrimination in access to leadership positions in the administration. The thousands of Arab men imprisoned for allegedly supporting ISIS are also straining relations between the population and the SDF.

According to the SDF leadership, Turkey and agents of the Syrian central government are the string pullers behind the protests.

Tajikistan

Prison sentence against former opposition politician

On 01.06.21, a court in the city of Khujand handed down a sentence of five years in prison against former opposition politician Mirzo Hojimuhammad, also known as Mirzoqul Hojimatov. The court found him guilty of membership in a banned extremist organisation. Hojimuhammad was a member of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, which had been banned in 2015 following its classification as an extremist and terrorist group. Human rights organisations have assessed the ban as a politically motivated crackdown on both the previously influential opposition party and its officials and supporters, many of whom have been sentenced to prison terms.

Turkey

Suspected Gülen supporters arrested

On 02.06.21, a total of 22 people accused of having links to the Gülen movement were arrested during several raids in north-western Erdine and other provinces. Among those arrested are military personnel, civil servants, lawyers, and academics. The search is on for further suspects.

Selaheddin Gülen, a nephew of Fethullah Gülen, was arrested by the Turkish secret service in Kenya and brought to Turkey on 05.06.21. He is accused of being a leading member of the Gülen movement and is apparently also wanted in Turkey for child abuse.

New investigations in the Kutlu Adali murder case

On 01.06.21, the Istanbul Public Prosecutor's Office informed that it had opened investigations into the murder of Turkish Cypriot journalist Kutlu Adali, who had been shot dead in July 1996. The investigation was launched after mafia boss Sedat Peker, who has escaped abroad, stated in a Youtube video that he had been ordered to carry out the murder by former Turkish minister Mehmet Ağar. Peker's brother, Atilla Peker, who is apparently involved in the case, was arrested a few hours after the video was published; he was set free on conditional release following his testimony. The European Court of Human Rights had ruled in 2005 that Turkey had not launched a sufficient investigation into the murder case.

Verdict against alleged members of the Gülen movement

On 03.06.21, a court in Mugla province, in southwestern Turkey, sentenced 36 soldiers on robbery charges. The defendants had already been given life sentences for their involvement in the coup attempt in 2016. Apparently, the soldiers had entered a hotel in Mugla where Erdoğan was staying on 15.07.16 and stolen weapons and personal belongings from police officers. Two policemen were killed in the incident.

Fighting the PKK

On 03.06.21, the interior ministry informed that at least three suspected PKK members were killed or arrested by Turkish security forces in the anti-terrorist operation Eren-11 in the south-eastern province of Bitlis.

Uganda

Subpoena of two media professionals

As part of a BBC Africa Eye publication that re-evaluated the November 2020 killings of at least 50 people (cf. BN of 30.11.20) through witness accounts and video footage, the editor as well as the business manager of a Ugandan newspaper that reported on the publication have been summoned for alleged publication of false news, libel and incitement. The report covers the so-called November killings, in which security forces had killed and injured dozens of people protesting mainly in Kampala as part of an arrest of opposition leader Kyagulanyi (aka Bobi Wine). According to the report, uninvolved civilians had also been killed. The government has admitted to the killing of individuals classified as terrorists and bystanders by stray bullets.

Arrests

Media have reported thousands of arrests for violation of COVID-19 regulations. Most recently, police spokespersons have reported 1,100 arrests in the night of 06.06.21 in the greater Kampala area. The arrests were made over violations of the curfew or other preventive measures (social distancing, hand washing, mandatory masks). Those affected are facing fines, penalties, or charges against them. In view of a second wave of infections, the government is currently intensifying the enforcement of protective measures. A new strict lockdown was imposed on 06.06.21. Currently, the country has 51,676 confirmed cases, 374 of which are deaths (as of 07.06.21). Uganda had started a vaccination campaign in March 2021.

Vietnam

Facebook user sentenced to prison term

Media report that on 02.06.21 a Facebook user was sentenced to seven years in prison in southern Hau Giang province. The sentence was handed down under Article 117 of the Criminal Code for disseminating anti-state information. The defendant was accused of defaming current and former leaders of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) on his Facebook page.

Yemen

Vaccinations begin in Houthi-controlled areas

According to news reports, 10,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses arrived in the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa on 31.05.21. They are now being distributed by WHO, with priority given to health workers. Initially, the Houthis reportedly refused to accept the vaccines (cf. BN of 31.05.21), due to a disagreement with WHO over the distribution of the vaccines.

On 01.06.21, Human Rights Watch (HRW) criticised the Houthis for suppressing information about the pandemic and undermining international efforts to provide vaccines in areas under their control. Houthi officials had spread misinformation and conspiracy theories about the virus and vaccines, and data on infected people and deaths had been withheld since May 2020, HRW said. Health workers were intimidated and threatened to prevent them from speaking to the media and international organisations, the HRW report says.

Explosion in Marib

A ballistic missile fired by the Houthis hit a petrol station in the city of Marib on 05.06.21 and reportedly killed 17 civilians, among them children. A drone subsequently destroyed two ambulances that arrived at the scene after the attack.