

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	752
Land:	Nigeria
Kilde:	BAMF
Titel:	Briefing Notes
Udgivet:	8. april 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	17. juni 2024



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

08 April 2024

Afghanistan

Indications of increasing international acceptance of the Taliban

Media report growing indications of increasing international acceptance of the Taliban in non-Western countries. After China became the first country to accredit a Taliban diplomat in January 2024, the Russian Federation is currently reviewing the removal of the Taliban from its national terror list. According to media reports, the background to this is the attack in Moscow on 22.03.24 by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), whose influence the Russian government wants to curb in Afghanistan. ¹

Persecution situation

Media report that last week, several people in Kandahar, Khost and Faryab provinces were publicly flogged for homosexuality, extramarital affairs, and moral corruption, among other offences, and subsequently taken into custody.

On 06.04.24, the Taliban arrested two former soldiers of the Republic in Faryab province; in Mazar-e Sharif; one former soldier died on 07.04.24 under Taliban torture in custody on.

The Taliban government has closed various educational institutions in the seventh and tenth districts of Kabul because female students were being taught there beyond the 6th grade.

The Taliban have agreed to the demolition of the Khair Khana cinema in Kabul, one of the last remaining cinemas in the capital. A market, residential buildings and a mosque are to be built in its place ²

Repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan

The Taliban ministry of refugees and repatriation informed on 04.04.24 that since November 2023, Pakistan has repatriated already more than 535,000 illegally residing Afghan nationals to Afghanistan. The Pakistani government is adamant about continuing the repatriation plan to enter in its next phase following Eid al-Fitr on 10.04.24. Approximately 600,000 Pakistan-issued Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders, who have so far been considered to be legal residents, will then also have to leave the country (cf. BN of 18.03.24). According to media reports, the Pakistani government has already begun to register the people concerned throughout the country. ³

Burkina Faso

Military government extends general mobilisation

On 24.04.24, the Burkinabe military government decided to extend by a further twelve months the national order for the general mobilisation of people aged 18 and older. According to media reports, the order is necessary in view of the unstable social and security situation to continue the fight against jihadist groups. In April 2023, the head of the military government, Ibrahim Traoré, had signed a one-year decree on general mobilisation, which allows people to be recruited to fight against jihadist groups. The human rights movement Mouvement burkinabé des

droits de l'homme et des peuples (MBDHP) and several trade unions of the Confédération générale des travailleurs du Burkina (CGT-B) say that the decree had been drafted and adopted to suppress dissent. HRW had called for an immediate end to the abuse of compulsory military service and the violation of fundamental human rights (cf. BN of 13.11.23).

On 27.03.24, several civil society organisations, among them the political movement Balai Citoyen, the National Press Centre Norbert-Zongo (le Centre national de presse Norbert-Zongo) and the Kebayina Association of Women of Burkina Faso, called on the Burkinabe military government under Traoré to comply with all provisions of the constitution and to arrange for the release of those unlawfully arrested or arbitrarily detained.⁴

Tapoa region: deadly attack on village

On 31.03.24, armed actors attacked the village of Tawori in the eastern Tapoa region and killed more than 70 people. Media report that the violent actors were around 300 members of the al-Qaeda group Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM). In addition to civilians, several members of the military and the paramilitary group Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP) were among those killed.⁵

Colombia

Current figures on human and environmental rights activists killed

A report published by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) in March 2024 says that at least 126 human and environmental rights activists were killed in Latin America in 2023, among them 70 in Colombia. Most affected by these offences were the south-western departments of Cauca, Putumayo, Nariño and Valle del Cauca where numerous non-state armed groups are active. These regions are also home to the country's largest coca-growing areas.⁶

Guinea

Violent dispersal of protesters affected by the fuel depot explosion

Local media report that security forces responded with tear gas and arrests to a demonstration on 28.03.24, i.e. 100 days after the devastating explosion of a fuel storage tank in Conakry on 17./18.12.23 whose cause has not yet been determined. The protesters, led by women who were apparently representing around 150 households affected by the explosion, had erected barricades in the central district of Kaloum. They complained that they had received no support from the government, despite numerous donations to the state from home and abroad. In particular, no accommodation had been provided, they said, which is why some were sleeping in the open. The director of the Guinean disaster management authority, however, stated that food aid had been distributed to over 2,100 identified affected households.⁷

Haiti

Key developments in March 2024: security crisis; political and humanitarian situation

The local human rights organisation Réseau National de Défense de Droits Humains (RNDDH) reports that more than 4,600 prisoners escaped during and after the attacks on prisons on 02.03. and 03.03.2024 (cf. BN of 04.03.24). Subsequently, armed gangs carried out attacks on the international airport and arson attacks on police stations while interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry was staying abroad in Kenya. Former police officer Chérizier, alias Barbecue, who is now the leader of the G9 gang network, has called for Henry's immediate resignation, threatening a further escalation of violence by a comprehensive alliance of several gangs under the name Viv Ansanm. Experts say that at the same time, the gangs also see an international security mission led by Kenya as a threat to their power. Henry was last in Kenya for negotiations in this regard. On 08.04.24, armed gangs also intensified their attacks on the political centre and public buildings; they attempted to capture the National Palace, which is the seat of the head of state, and set fire to the ministry of the interior, among other locations. This led to armed clashes with state security forces. The intensified gang offensive and further deterioration in the security situation have

recently prompted several countries and the EU to withdraw at least some of their diplomatic staff. On 11.03.24, Henry announced his resignation while staying in Puerto Rico.

The President of the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, has recently had security measures tightened and rejected the establishment of refugee camps on Dominican territory.

According to UN figures, the total number of internally displaced persons amounts to more than 362,000 people, half of whom are children. 160,000 people are affected in the capital region of Port-au-Prince alone. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has stated that more than 1,550 people have been killed and more than 800 injured as of 22.03.24. Gang members continue to use various forms of sexual violence, the number of unreported cases remains high, as does the impunity for such offences. So far in 2024, almost 60 cases of lynching by so-called self-defence brigades have already been recorded.

In addition, the situation is worsening with regard to food and medical supplies. Armed gangs have repeatedly blocked transport routes, aid shipments and an important harbour. Recently, there have also been reports of arson attacks on aid supplies and an increase in thefts. Hospitals in Port-au-Prince have apparently been repeatedly attacked and many have been closed as a result. Numerous international organisations have also had to suspend their activities on the ground due to the security situation. A report in the Guardian on 17.03.24 said that at the time, only one public hospital in the capital was still open. UNICEF speaks of only four out of ten operational hospitals in Port-au-Prince as of 25.03.24. Public and private facilities or mobile clinics need staff, medical supplies, petrol for generators, oxygen, and blood donations. The United Nations Integrated Office for Haiti (BINUH) has also recently warned that several hundred pregnant women in Port-au-Prince might suffer fatal birth complications due to the inaccessibility of healthcare facilities as a result of violent gang clashes, and that hundreds of people affected by sexual violence may soon no longer be able to receive care.

Already on 12.03.24, the WFP Country Director drew attention to the serious food crisis in Haiti and warned that 1.4 million of Haiti's 11.6 million inhabitants were at risk of famine. According to UN figures, almost half of the population needs humanitarian aid, but there are considerable funding difficulties. There are plans to set up an airlift.

According to UN OCHA, there were also cases of cholera in several regions of the country in mid-March 2024.

In addition, armed gangs attacked private banks and the central bank on 18.03.24. The latter attack was ended by security forces. On the same day, attacks were reported in previously rather peaceful neighbourhoods in the capital's suburb of Pétionville. A school in Port-au-Prince was almost completely burnt down by gangs on 25.03.24.⁸

Iran

Sistan and Balochistan province: clashes and attacks on Revolutionary Guards bases

According to media reports, armed attacks were carried out in the night to 04.04.24 on several Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) posts in the cities of Rask and Sarbaz and on a coastguard station in Chahbahar. Iranian news agencies reported exchanges of fire in the street in which several attackers and security forces were killed. At times, armed individuals apparently also took civilians hostage. Security forces brought the situation under control. Media reports of 06.04.24 say that another attack took place in the Korin district of the provincial capital Zahedan, where two police officers were killed and another individual was injured in an armed clash near a checkpoint.

The Sunni group Jaish al Adl (Army of Justice) was named as responsible for the attacks. It is considered to be a separatist organization fighting for the independence of the south-eastern province. The group had already claimed responsibility for armed attacks on police stations in the province in December 2023 and January 2024 (cf. BN of 18.12.23 and 15.01.24).

Citing information from Iranian authorities, foreign media reported on 26.03.24 that two people were killed in an exchange of fire in the province. In the city of Khash, police forces clashed with armed individuals, presumably Baloch separatists. Apparently, one police officer and one child were killed in the incident. The information cannot be independently verified.⁹

Report on death sentence against 64-year-old prisoner

Foreign media reported on 31.03.24 that a 64-year-old man was sentenced to death by public execution on charges of insulting the Prophet. Among other things, the man's posts on social media were cited as the reasons for the judgement. The accused had been arrested in October 2022 during protests and initially been charged with

propaganda against the system, insulting the revolutionary leader and conspiracy against national security, among other offences. In March 2023, he was sentenced to a total prison term of 18 years, which was reduced to eight years and six months during court proceedings. It is not clear from the reports whether this sentence was commuted again or whether an additional death sentence was imposed. All information available is based on the report of a human rights organisation, which cannot be independently verified.

According to Amnesty International, the number of death sentences carried out in 2023 reached its highest level in eight years with 853 executions. Over half of these were due to convictions in connection with drug offences.¹⁰

Announcement of pardons for the Islamic Eid celebrations

Media report that a total of four imprisoned environmental activists are to be pardoned on the occasion of the celebrations marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan on 10.04.24. This was announced on 07.04.24 by the lawyer of those affected. The defendants have been in custody for almost six years. In 2018, they had been accused of committing espionage and treason under the pretext of environmental protection. However, the allegations were never proven.

On the occasion of the Eid celebrations, more than 2,000 other prisoners are to be pardoned and 29 death sentences are to be commuted to prison terms. Human rights organisations regard such pardons as a gesture of appeasement by the Iranian government towards the population.¹¹

Iraq

Türkiye-PKK conflict

According to the Kurdish anti-terrorism directorate, a high-ranking PKK commander was killed in a drone attack on 02.04.24 in Sinjar (Shingal), and two PKK fighters were injured. Türkiye has not yet commented on the incident.

¹²

Human trafficking

At a conference on the topic of human trafficking, views were exchanged among academic experts and staff of NGOs and law enforcement agencies. One important aspect emphasised by all participants was the need of recognising and dealing with victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual abuse. They are often treated as perpetrators under the anti-prostitution law and not as victims of human trafficking. Iraq is both a source and destination country for human trafficking. In the latest US government report on human trafficking for 2023, Iraq was downgraded to a higher observation category compared to the previous year and is now in the second-lowest second of a total of three tiers. The reason for the reassessment was that the Iraqi state's efforts to recognise and curb human trafficking were considered to be inadequate. The lack protection of victims was also criticised.¹³

Lebanon

Situation on the Lebanese-Israeli border

Hezbollah and the Israeli army continue to fire at each other. Recently, there has been a trend towards a higher number of casualties and a greater intensity of strikes.

The actions of Hezbollah and its allied militias continue to be strongly criticized within Lebanese politics. Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah recently confirmed on 06.04.24 that Hezbollah would remain militarily active at a comparable level as long as fighting continued in Gaza. In contrast, other Lebanese politicians, such as those from the Christian-dominated Free Patriotic Movement and Lebanese Forces parties, have now made clear demands for a ceasefire regardless of the situation in Gaza.

On 07.04.24, a representative of the Lebanese Forces was abducted in Byblos by unidentified individuals. Protests by supporters of the Lebanese Forces led to road blockades in the night of 08.04.24.

On 07.04.24, the Israeli army confirmed that it was now in a "new phase" of preparations for a possible war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, in which a transition from defensive to offensive measures was conceivable.

In total, at least 354 people, 68 of them civilians, have been reported dead on the Lebanese side, and ten soldiers and eight civilians on the Israeli side.¹⁴

Libya

Attack on the Prime Minister's house in Tripoli

Media report that on 31.03.24, grenade attack was launched at a house in a western district of the capital belonging to Abdulhamid Dbeibahs, Prime Minister of the Tripoli-based national unity government. No one was injured in the attack and the house was only slightly damaged. It is not yet known who is believed to have carried out the attack.¹⁵

Activist arrested for critical post on social media

On 02.04.24, local media reported that an activist was arrested in Benghazi by members of the security authorities. According to a local human rights organization, he was arrested and taken to an unknown location for his critical posts on social media regarding the conditions in the eastern Libyan cities.¹⁶

Mali

Several conflict incidents with civilian casualties

Citing eyewitnesses, Amnesty International reports two drone attacks by the army in the village of Amarakad (Gao region), leaving at least 13 people dead, among them seven children, on 17.03.24. More than a dozen people were also injured. Citing a source from the security sector, a media report adds that the victims were in fact civilians. The drone attacks were reportedly controlled from a great distance. It was therefore a targeting error. On 16.03.24, ten gendarmes were killed in an attack on a barracks in Danderesso (Sikasso region). The group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

A media report, which also cites local sources, said that on 23.03.24, a total of 14 people, including around ten children, were killed in a drone attack on a Koranic school in the commune of Mondoro (Douentza district in Mopti region). There are further, unconfirmed reports of civilians killed in military strikes in northern Mali.

On 30.03.24, at least 18 civilians were reportedly killed in several villages in Diankabou municipality (Koro district in Mopti region) when a joint operation was carried out by the military, mercenaries from the Wagner group and traditional hunters known as Dozos. The operation in Diankabou presumably served to search for terrorists, but also to confiscate livestock, which is apparently the subject of legal disputes over unclear ownership. Local residents consulted by the press medium said that those killed, among them children, were arbitrarily executed.¹⁷

Call for elections to be held

In two separate declarations, more than 80 political parties and the Network of Human Rights Defenders in Mali (RDDH), an association of around 50 organisations, have called for presidential elections to be held. The elections should have taken place in February 2024 (cf. BN of 26.06.23), meaning that the ruling transitional phase under the military junta should have come to an end on 26.03.24. In September 2023, however, the junta had announced that it would have to postpone the elections for technical reasons. Media reports of 01.04.24 say that the junta has not yet commented on its intentions after the deadline of 26.03.24 passed.¹⁸

Morocco

Death threats against women activists

Media report that following the announcement of a revision of the existing family and criminal law, prominent Moroccan women's rights activists and female journalists as well as their families have been threatened with rape and murder. Six months ago, King Mohammad VI had set up a commission to adapt the family and criminal law, which was considered outdated. The deadline for drawing up proposals has now expired.

On 28.03.24, a list of 22 women's rights and female LGBTIQ activists was published on Instagram, threatening those affected with imminent murder. Similar threats were also made on other platforms. Those affected have contacted the relevant authorities and filed a complaint.¹⁹

Nigeria

Borno State: Dozens of suspected Boko Haram members released

The Nigerian army has informed that on 28.03.24, around 230 suspected members of the Islamist group Boko Haram were released in north-eastern Borno State. The reason given for the release was that the detainees had been recruited against their will and that no incriminating evidence was found following an investigation. According to media reports, there are doubts that the detainees are innocent. Apparently, concerns have been expressed that the release could lead to further destabilization in the region. Already on 14.02.24, the Borno State government had released around 500 suspected Boko Haram members from the Giwa barracks detention centre in the city of Maiduguri (cf. BN of 19.02.24).²⁰

Taraba State: Military prevents kidnappings

On 02.04.24, troops of the Nigerian army have reportedly killed five violent actors and prevented the kidnapping of several Christian believers in a church community in the Wukari Local Government Area (LGA) in eastern Taraba State. They also apparently seized a stockpile of weapons. On 04.04.24, the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) stated that in various operations across the country between January and March 2024, the military killed over 2,300 violent actors designated as terrorists, arrested the same number of people and freed over 1,200 kidnapped people. The DHQ regularly publishes success stories of this kind (cf. BN of 04.12.23, 15.01. and 04.03.24).²¹

Imo State: Armed forces report destruction of another separatist camp

Security forces have recently reported the destruction of separatist camps in south-east Nigeria on several occasions (cf. BN of 11.03. and 18.03.24). Most recently, an official army report dated 31.03.24 attracted particular attention, stating that on 28.03. and 29.03.24, troops of the Joint Task Force South-East Operation UDO KA (OPUK) cleared and destroyed another such camp in Imo State. Members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) group, which favour the secession of south-eastern Nigeria, and members of its militant wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), were injured and fled in the course of the operation. In addition, several bodies were exhumed on the campgrounds, which the security forces believe to be abduction victims murdered by separatist forces.²²

Pakistan

Arrest after "honour killing" in Punjab

According to police reports from 31.03.24, a man was arrested in Punjab province after committing a filmed "honour killing". The footage allegedly shows the 22-year-old victim being killed by her brother in the presence of her father. In large parts of Pakistani society, there is a strict "code of honour" holding women accountable to their male relatives when making decisions about education, career, and marriage.²³

Attacks and assaults in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad

On 25.03.24, an attack was carried out on a naval base in Turbat (Balochistan province) in which at least one soldier was killed. The authorities informed on 26.03.24 that all of the attackers were killed by security forces. The separatist Baloch Liberation Army has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 31.03.24, two soldiers were killed and four more people injured in another attack claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army on workers of an oil company accompanied by security forces.

On 26.03.24, at least five Chinese workers and their Pakistani driver were killed in a suicide attack on a bus in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, TTP) have denied involvement. In addition to the TTP attacks, also the separatist Baloch Liberation Army has carried out attacks against Chinese citizens living in Pakistan.

On 05.04.24, three policemen were killed in two separate attacks on security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In Lakki Marwat district, unidentified individuals shot at a police vehicle and killed two security personnel. In South Waziristan, unknown attackers shot dead the security escort of a polio vaccination team.

On 04.04.24, an Afghan journalist was injured by three armed attackers in Islamabad.²⁴

AI: Appeal to stop the repatriation of Afghan women and girls

The Pakistani government is planning to return hundreds of thousands more Afghan refugees in April 2024 if they do not leave voluntarily. Since October 2023, over 500,000 Afghan nationals without valid residence documents have already been expelled or returned. Amnesty International (AI) has called on the Pakistani government to stop the repatriation of Afghan women and girls to neighbouring Afghanistan. On 27.03.24, AI's South Asia office stated on social media that the forced return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan would be putting women and girls at unique risk, as it would seriously curtail their rights to education, work, and freedom of movement, and in many cases expose them to imminent risk of physical violence.²⁵

Pakistan / India

Operations abroad of the Indian secret service

The British Guardian has reported that, in the frame of its national security strategy, the Indian secret service has carried out targeted operations abroad since 2019 as. Around 20 targeted killings have apparently been carried out in Pakistan alone since 2020. According to Pakistani investigators, these operations are carried out by sleeper cells of the Indian intelligence agency, which operate mainly from the UAE. The sources available to the Guardian also suggest that in connection with this strategy, the high-ranking Sikh members of the separatist Khalistan movement killed in the process had been targeted both in Pakistan and in the West.²⁶

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: current developments; humanitarian situation

According to the Hamas-led health authorities based in the Gaza Strip, a total of 28 children have died of malnutrition and dehydration by 01.04.24. In northern Gaza, OXFAM estimates that the average individual has had no more than 245 calories a day since January. The entire population of the Gaza Strip is affected by high levels of acute food insecurity. According to figures from UN OCHA, around 83 percent of lorries carrying food deliveries were denied access or obstructed in March 2024.

It is estimated that around 55.9 percent of the buildings in the Gaza Strip have been damaged or destroyed. Only ten out of 36 hospitals are still functional, and around 70 percent of the population, corresponding to around 1.7 million people, are internally displaced within the Gaza Strip. Following new fighting between the Israeli army and armed Palestinians in and around Shifa Hospital (cf. BN of 25.03.24), the WHO stated that the hospital was no longer operational. According to Israeli military sources, more than 200 armed persons were killed in the offensive. Unverifiable reports say that hospital patients were also killed.

On 01.04.24, seven humanitarian aid workers from the organisation World Central Kitchen, six of them foreign nationals, were killed by Israeli airstrikes on three of their vehicles. The Israeli military has stated that the attack was the result of a misidentification of an armed individual and, in addition, did not fulfil the requirements for an airstrike. Hence, a colonel and a major were dismissed from the ranks of the military and three other high-ranking military members were reprimanded a few days later. Criticism was directed at the Israeli military's operational regulations and at missing transparency and investigations into other cases that did not result in foreign casualties. Following the incident, World Central Kitchen and several other organisations suspended their aid programmes in the Gaza Strip.

In recent developments, the Israeli government has announced that the northern Erez border crossing from Israel into the Gaza Strip would be opened for humanitarian aid. In addition, the Israeli port of Ashdod would be opened for aid deliveries; also, another land border crossing into the Gaza Strip would be opened for the import of aid supplies from Jordan. It has remained unclear when these measures would actually begin.

On 07.04.24, the military also announced to withdraw its troops from the city of Khan Younis in the south of the Gaza Strip. This would result in the smallest number of Israeli troops present since the ground offensive began last year. The withdrawal is reportedly part of the preparations for an offensive in the city of Rafah. Evacuations there are set to begin next week and might last for several months.²⁷

West Bank: several dead in armed clashes

Almost daily military raids in the West Bank are leading to increasing numbers of arrests of Palestinians and to fighting between Israeli troops and armed individuals and groups in the West Bank.

Media report that on 27.03.24, three Palestinians were killed during a military raid in Jenin, two of them by a drone attack. Another Palestinian was killed on 05.04.24 in Tulkarem during a military raid after he had allegedly thrown explosive devices at Israeli military personnel. The day before, one Palestinian was killed while trying to escape from arrest by the Israeli border police. Since 07.10.23, a total of 456 Palestinians have apparently been killed and 4,750 others wounded in the West Bank.²⁸

Israel: Protesters demand ceasefire agreement and resignation of the government

On 31.03.24, the largest demonstrations since 07.10.23 were staged in Jerusalem. Several tens of thousands of participants demanded both a ceasefire agreement with Hamas, aiming at the release of the hostages still in the Gaza Strip, as well as early elections. Rallies were also held in Tel Aviv and continued over the following days.

As of 07.04.24, around 90,000 people have still not returned to their homes near the Gaza Strip border, six months after they fled their homes following the Hamas attacks and the start of the war in the Gaza Strip on 07.10.23.²⁹

Republic of Moldova

Suspected drone attack on military base in Transnistria

Pro-Russian separatists in the breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria have claimed that a military base was hit by a drone in the district of Rybnitsa, six kilometres from the Ukrainian border. No major damage was reported. The region's state security ministry stated on 05.04.24 that the target was a radar station. The Russian foreign ministry is calling for an investigation and speaks of a "provocation aimed at exacerbating the already tense situation around Transnistria". The Moldovan government has already announced an investigation into the alleged attack.³⁰

Russian Federation

Journalist faces six years in prison

After years of reporting for Russia's last independent news agency SotaVision on the late regime critic Alexei Navalny, prominent journalist Antonina Favorskaya was arrested at the end of March 2024. The Basmanny District Court in Moscow ordered a two-month pre-trial detention for her, according to the information service of the Moscow courts. Favorskaya had been involved with Navalny's anti-corruption foundation, which had been banned some time ago by the Russian government as an "extremist organisation". Both SotaVision and the Navalny team see the real reason for the arrest as silencing the critical journalist. She faces up to six years in prison.

Since the beginning of the war of aggression against Ukraine on 24.02.22, the Russian leadership has been taking increasingly repressive action against critical voices and opposition activities. The organisation Reporters Without Borders has stated that six journalists were arrested in March 2024 alone.³¹

Senegal

Faye wins presidential election

On 29.03.24, the Senegalese constitutional council confirmed the victory of opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye in the presidential elections held on 24.03.24. The national electoral commission informed on 27.03.24 that Faye received more than 54 percent of the votes, while Amadou Ba, candidate of the ruling coalition, only secured around 35 percent. Ba conceded defeat. At 61 percent, voter turnout was lower than in the last presidential elections in 2019. The other 17 candidates received less than 3 percent of the vote. On 02.04.24, Faye took the oath of office for a five-year term, replacing President Macky Sall who had been in office since 2012. Faye appointed as Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko, the prominent opposition leader and chairman of the Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF) party. Sonko, who is regarded as Faye's political mentor, had been excluded from the presidential elections as he had been sentenced to a suspended prison sentence of one year and two months for defamation and public insult, among other things (cf. BN of 03.04.23). Faye had stood as

a replacement candidate for Sonko. Both were released from prison only ten days before the election as part of an amnesty granted by President Sall following political unrest triggered by the postponement of the election (cf. BN of 25.03.24). Faye had been charged with several criminal offences and was remanded in custody because he had criticised politically motivated prosecution and instrumentalization of the judiciary against PASTEF party chairman Sonko in an online post (cf. BN of 17.04.23 and 05.02.24). According to media reports, Faye's goals as president include the fight against poverty, injustice and corruption, the renegotiation of gas, oil, fishing and defence agreements and the abolition of the CFA franc currency. Faye, self-proclaimed candidate for system change, and representative of left-wing Pan-Africanism, is said to have raised hopes for change in Senegal, particularly among the young electorate.

On 05.04.24, three days after Faye's inauguration, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko appointed the new government, consisting of 25 ministers and five state secretaries. Media report that four members of the new government are women.³²

Somalia

Several attacks

On 04.04.24, two staff members of an aid organisation, one Somali and one Turkish national, were reportedly killed in a bomb attack when several members of staff were on their way to distribute relief supplies to a camp for internally displaced people in Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 29.03.24, six Kenyan nationals were reportedly killed in the town of Dhobley on the border with Kenya. The background is still unclear; al-Shabaab is suspected to be behind the attack.³³

Expulsion of the Ethiopian ambassador

The Somali government has ordered the expulsion of Ethiopian ambassador Mukhtar Mohamed Warre and the closure of the Ethiopian consulates in Somaliland and Puntland along with the diplomatic staff. The Somali ambassador to Ethiopia was also summoned to Somalia for talks. The decision was made three months after Ethiopia had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland, which was intended to give Ethiopia access to the sea via Somaliland in return for Ethiopia recognising Somaliland as an independent country. The Somali government sees this as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the beginning of April 2024, the Ethiopian foreign minister also held trade talks with a delegation from the semi-autonomous Puntland without prior consultation with the Somali government. Somaliland and Puntland have rejected the expulsion orders.³⁴

Puntland

In a public statement, the Puntland government announced that it no longer recognises Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as the legitimate head of government. This was in response to efforts by the Somali government to amend the country's federal constitution, which Puntland considers illegitimate. The changes affect the power-sharing system and give more control to the president. Puntland insists on the 2012 version of the constitution.³⁵

Syria

Northeast: Numerous dead in air strikes

Syrian state media reported that on 26.03.24, airstrikes on targets in the governorate of Deir ez-Zor left one civilian and seven military personnel dead and 19 military personnel and 13 other civilians wounded. The WHO stated that one of its staff was killed in an airstrike on his home in Deir ez-Zor on 26.03.24. Iranian media reported that one of those killed was a member of the Revolutionary Guard. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that 15 people were killed, among them a member of the Revolutionary Guard and a Syrian engineer. Following corresponding Syrian and Iranian media reports, the USA denied having carried out airstrikes in the region. Two regional intelligence sources not named by Reuters apparently reported Israeli airstrikes on targets in Deir ez-Zor, Albukamal and al-Mayadin.³⁶

Northwest: Dozens killed by Israeli airstrikes; car bomb in Azaz

On 29.03.24, the Israeli military appears to have carried out numerous airstrikes on targets in the south-east of Aleppo governorate, killing several civilians and military personnel. Three sources unnamed by Reuters reported at least 33 Syrians and six Hezbollah fighters killed. SOHR reported 44 dead, the majority of them Syrian military personnel as well as seven Hezbollah fighters and one militia member. The Syrian defence ministry stated that at the same time, drone attacks were launched by "terrorist organisations" against civilians in Aleppo and its surroundings from Idlib governorate and western Aleppo.

Local sources report that the explosion of a car bomb in the town of Azaz, near the Turkish border, killed seven people and wounded 30 others. SOHR reported eight dead and 23 injured. Initially, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁷

Northwest: Bombing kills Qahtani who was recently released from prison

On 04.04.24, former al-Qaeda member Abu Maria al-Qahtani was reportedly killed in a suicide attack in his home in the village of Sarmada in north-west Syria. Other sources, however, reported a remotely detonated explosion. In addition to al-Qahtani, other people were also apparently wounded in the incident.

Al-Qahtani was one of the founders of the al-Nusra Front, which has been in control of large areas in the north-west since breaking away from al-Qaeda under the name of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Al-Qahtani was released from prison only last month after protests by the population. The HTS leadership accused him of having collaborated with banned groups (cf. BN of 18.03.24).³⁸

Damascus: Israeli airstrikes on Iranian representation

The Syrian defence ministry has informed that two civilians were wounded in Israeli airstrikes on targets in the foothills of the capital Damascus on 31.03.24.

In another airstrike suspected to be carried out by Israeli forces on a building adjacent to the Iranian embassy in Damascus, seven military advisors were killed on 01.04.24. The building on the embassy grounds was completely destroyed. The Iranian leadership has vowed revenge.³⁹

Türkiye

Results of the local elections held on 31.03.24

Türkiye's main opposition party, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP), has won local elections in the three largest cities of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. In the run-up to the elections, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had expressed the hope that his Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) would regain control of the cities. Ekrem İmamoğlu, who had won the election in Istanbul for the first time in 2019, secured his second victory as mayor for the secular CHP with 51.1 percent of the vote. In the capital Ankara, Mansur Yavaş, the CHP mayor in office since 2019, gained 60.4 percent of the vote. The AKP candidate, Turgut Altınok, attained 31.7 percent.

According to the official results, the CHP won 35 out of 81 municipalities, including 14 out of 30 urban areas in the country. The CHP also won control of Türkiye's fourth largest city, Bursa, as well as Adıyaman, which was hit hard by last year's double earthquake in the south-eastern part of the country. Nationwide, the CHP secured 37.8 percent of the vote. The AKP won 24 of 81 municipalities and received 35.5 percent of the vote. In the last local elections on 31 March 2019, the AKP had secured 44.3 percent of the vote. The pro-Kurdish Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi (DEM) won ten of the 81 municipalities, most of them in the south-east of the country.

After the election, objections to the results were raised in some municipalities. For example, the supreme electoral council ordered a recount of the votes in Kütahya after the nationalist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP) filed an objection. After the recount, the supreme electoral council confirmed the victory of the CHP candidate in Kütahya and at the same time ordered new elections in several districts of the country. While the results of the recount were confirmed, the supreme election council announced the decision to repeat the elections in several districts in central Türkiye, among them Pınarbaşı in Kayseri and Ürgüp in Nevşehir, both of which were won by the CHP. In the southeastern city of Şanlıurfa, the elections in the Hilvan district, which were won by the DEM, will be repeated due to objections by the AKP.

Meanwhile, the decision to repeat the elections in the north-eastern city of Ardahan, which was taken after an objection lodged by the AKP, was revoked by the provincial board of the election council. This development

followed the controversy surrounding the cancellation of Abdullah Zeydan's mayoral mandate in the eastern city of Van. Zeydan, a DEM politician, had been temporarily replaced by an AKP candidate following a court judgement over a previous imprisonment, which led to demonstrations in several cities. On 03.04.24, the highest electoral authority informed that that Zeydan's mayoral mandate was reinstated, and finally declared Abdullah Zeydan the new mayor of Van.

President Erdoğan conceded defeat and admitted that the election had not gone as he had hoped. This election has been the first nationwide defeat for the AKP since Erdoğan came to power 21 years ago.⁴⁰

Uganda

Court upholds anti-LGBTIQ law

After activists, members of the government and lawyers filed a lawsuit against the Anti-Homosexuality Act, the law that had been passed in May 2023 has now been upheld by the constitutional court. As a result, offences of "aggravated homosexuality" still carry the death penalty, and "participation in homosexual acts" carries a life sentence. Human rights organisations are concerned about an increase in attacks on homosexual and transgender people since the introduction of the law, adding that the law also hinders access to health services, particularly to HIV services.⁴¹

Ukraine

Attacks on civilian and critical infrastructure

There were once again several Russian attacks in various Ukrainian regions, targeting in particular the Kharkiv region. Media report that at least 23 people were killed there. The institute for emergency surgery in Kharkiv was also hit. According to official information, two people died in Russian attacks in the Lviv region on 31.03.24. Also, Russian shelling of several villages in the Donetsk region resulted in at least eight deaths. In the Sumy and Zaporizhzhya regions, one and ten fatalities respectively were confirmed following Russian attacks. The Russian side has apparently repeatedly used double attacks in order to hit first responders and rescue workers with the second strikes. In addition, local authorities in the Luhansk region reported an assassination attempt on 01.04.24 in which a deputy head of a state education authority appointed by Moscow fell victim. Moscow-appointed official staff have informed that two people died in Ukrainian attacks in the occupied areas of Kherson and Donetsk.

In addition, large parts of Ukraine's energy infrastructure were again severely damaged. Major power outages were recorded following Russian attacks on hydroelectric and thermal power plants on 25.03.24 in the Mykolaiv and Odessa regions and on 29.03.24 in the Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya and Kirovohrad regions. The Dniester power plant on the river of the same name was also targeted. Ukraine's largest private energy company DTEK stated that five of its six power plants were damaged or destroyed, leading to the loss of 80 percent of its power generation capacity. Repair works might take up to 18 months. DTEK covers around a quarter of Ukraine's total energy needs. Despite the considerable damage, the head of Ukraine's national grid company Ukrenergo Volodymyr Kudrytskyj does not expect the country's energy supply to collapse completely; however, he advocates decentralisation of the power grid in the future. Furthermore, the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant reported repeated drone attacks on its site on 05. and 07.04.24. The Ukrainian secret service denied the attacks and spoke of Russian copycat offences. IAEA chief Rafael Grossi sees an increased risk of a reactor accident.⁴²

War events and development of the Ukrainian defence industry

Naval spokesman Dmytro Pletentchuk has stated that on 26.03.24, the Ukrainian navy damaged three Russian landing ships and a reconnaissance ship with missile fire. The harbour facilities in Sevastopol were also hit. Since 24.02.22, Ukraine has apparently sunk or disabled a third of the Russian warships in the Black Sea. According to Pletentchuk, the aim is the complete absence of military vessels of the so-called Russian Federation in the Azov and Black Sea regions. According to the British defence ministry, the Russian side has formed a "Dnipro River Flotilla" in occupied Kherson. In view of the imminent delivery of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine in the coming months, Russian President Vladimir Putin has pointed out in a speech to military pilots that these can carry nuclear weapons which must be considered in military planning.

On 03.04.24, the new mobilisation law came into force, reducing the conscription age from 27 to 25 years in light of the tense personnel situation in the Ukrainian combat units. The head of the Ukrainian military intelligence service HUR Kyrylo Budanov describes the situation on the front as "difficult but under control" and expects a Russian spring offensive at the end of May 2024.

The Ukrainian government is increasing defence spending and plans to allocate USD 1.4 billion on domestic weapons development in 2024. A significant portion is purchased by private defence companies that are springing up across the country, particularly ammunition and drone companies. In view of the labour shortage, employees in the arms industry have been exempted from military service.⁴³

Personnel changes in the state apparatus and secret service activities regarding Ukrainian collaborators

President Zelenskyi has made a new appointment to the position of secretary of the Ukrainian security and defence council. The head of the foreign intelligence service Oleksandr Lytvynenko will take over from Oleksiy Danilov, who will be Ukraine's ambassador to the Republic of Moldova.

According to information provided by the Ukrainian secret service SBU, two individuals from the Kyiv and Kharkiv regions have been arrested on suspicion of planning on behalf of Russia to blow up a railway line in the Poltava region. The explosive device that was already planted was intended to disrupt the supply of weapons to the front. In addition, the SBU said it had arrested two suspected Russian agents in Kyiv and Odessa while they were spying for the Russian side on potential military targets, among them a thermal power plant. The Ukrainian public prosecutor's office has informed that a life sentence was handed down to an Ukrainian citizen recruited by the Russian secret service, who in June 2023 had assisted in a Russian missile attack on a pizzeria in Kramatorsk in eastern Ukraine that had left 13 people dead. In a TV interview, SBU head Vasyl Malyuk hinted at the liquidation of Ukrainians who collaborate with Russia and are co-responsible for war crimes committed in Ukraine.⁴⁴

Venezuela

Registration of presidential candidates; Vente Venezuela party members seek asylum in embassy

Although the supreme electoral council (CNE) had agreed to extend the registration deadline for presidential candidates by twelve hours, the largest opposition alliance Plataforma Unitaria Democrática (PUD) failed to register Corina Yoris as alternative candidate for the banned María Corina Machado (cf. BN of 25.03.24), because it was unable to access the registration platform. Instead, the PUD nominated the diplomat and political scientist Edmundo González Urrutia (MUD) as a placeholder at short notice via the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD), which had been authorised to register candidates in advance. 16 parties had not been authorised in advance by the CNE to register candidates. However, within a set period before the election, the Venezuelan electoral legislation (Ley Orgánica de Procesos Electorales, LOPRE, Art. 63 and 64) theoretically allows changes to the nominated candidates or their replacement by individuals who fulfil the necessary legal requirements. Now, a total of 13 candidates, including President Nicolás Maduro, are registered for the presidential elections to be held on 28.07.24. These candidacies will be examined by a committee of selected members of the CNE (Junta Nacional Electoral). In addition to Urrutia, the so-called unity candidate, the prominent opposition politician and current governor of the federal state of Zulia, Manuel Rosales (Un Nuevo Tiempo) has also registered. He had been heavily criticised by various other opposition parties for his own candidacy. He justified his move with the long blockade of Yoris' candidacy and the fear that, ultimately, there would be no opposition candidate on the ballot paper. Rosales also offered to make his place available for a joint opposition candidature. Numerous governments have criticised the Venezuelan government for blocking Yoris' candidacy. There are also fears among political experts that in the run-up to the elections, the opposition might fragment again, which would presumably favour Maduro's re-election. Five members of the Vente Venezuela party known by name against whom arrest warrants have been issued for conspiracy, among them Magalli Meda, as well as a sixth unnamed individual, have requested protection at the Argentinian embassy. Argentinian President Javier Milei has called on the Venezuelan government to respect the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.⁴⁵

YouTuber briefly arrested for terrorism

On 31.03.24, prominent YouTuber and travel blogger Óscar Alejandro Pérez Martínez was arrested at Maiquetía airport shortly before entering a domestic flight. According to the public prosecutor's office, he is charged with a

terrorism offence for a statement he made in a video about an important financial building in Chacaíto. The NGO Espacio Público has stated that between 2020 and 2023, over 35 people were arrested for statements or comments made on social networks or messenger services. Pérez Martínez was released on 01.04.24, but it is not yet known under what conditions.⁴⁶

Yemen

US-led air strikes against Houthis

Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi has stated that by 04.04.24, the US-led coalition has carried out 424 airstrikes on Yemeni territory, killing a total of 37 people and injuring another 30. Al-Houthi did not provide any information on whether and how many civilians were among the victims.

The number of air strikes differs depending on the definition. According to ACLED, the US-led military operation carried out around 80 airstrikes in Yemen between 12.01.24 and 29.03.24. In ACLED's counting method, an air strike may include several attacks in quick succession and comprise various targets in one location. According to the Yemen Data Project (YDP), which records air strikes on Yemeni territory, there were 148 air strikes by the US-led coalition between 12.01.24 and 31.03.24. The YDP counts all attacks on a location within a period of approximately one hour as one airstrike. According to both YDP and ACLED, one civilian was killed and ten others were injured in the attacks. YDP recorded no attacks on civilian facilities in March 2024.⁴⁷

Zimbabwe

President Mnangagwa declares a state of disaster

A prolonged period of drought is causing major agricultural damage in Zimbabwe. Neighbouring Zambia and Malawi are also affected by the drought and have also declared a state of emergency. The El Niño weather phenomenon has caused a prolonged period of drought in the region, which is destroying harvests. Due to the loss of yields, millions of people are dependent on food aid. Press reports say that in recent years, Zimbabwe has relied more and more on aid organisations to stave off hunger caused by extreme weather conditions such as heatwaves and flooding.⁴⁸

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Imprint

Published by

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge,
90461 Nürnberg

ISSN

2943-0690

Valid as of

CW 15/2024

Printed by

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge

Design

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge

Reference source

Publikationsstelle Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge
www.bamf.de/publikationen

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