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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Governance

In the three years since the Taliban takeover all appointees to the cabinet were exclusively Taliban. Media are reporting that Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada has issued 75 decrees during this period dealing with the appointment or reappointment of over 370 Taliban officials. Of these, only 18 were new appointments, while the rest were merely transfers of Taliban office holders from one post to another ("reshuffling").

During Akhundzada's visit to the northern provinces of Badghis and Balkh, some local Taliban officials were transferred to new posts.

The Taliban have arrested Abdul Hamid Khorasani, a controversial Tajik Taliban commander from the province of Panjshir, for "negligence and careless statements" and placed him under house arrest. He had previously labelled the Iranian government as infidels and polytheists.

On 21.08.24, the United Arab Emirates became the second country after the People's Republic of China (cf. BN of 08.04.24) to officially accredit a Taliban ambassador to the country.

After the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) strongly criticised the Taliban's new virtue law, the Taliban officially declared the organisation an "enemy party". They will no longer co-operate with them due to the "false propaganda of UNAMA".¹

Persecution situation

According to media reports from 02.09.24, the Taliban have ordered the forced resettlement of dozens of families in the Nawur district of Ghazni province in favour of Kuchi nomads. The displaced people's agricultural and grazing land was handed over to the Kuchis. The district is mainly inhabited by ethnic Hazara. A few days earlier, around 600 Tajik families in the Dowlat Yar district of Ghor province were expelled from their land by the Taliban because they had allegedly acquired it illegally. They were not allowed to take any personal belongings or agricultural produce with them; the properties were handed over to ethnic Pashtuns. A month earlier, the Taliban reportedly ordered ethnic Hazara from the village of Kandir in the Gizab district of Uruzgan province to pay AFN 30 million (approx. EUR 38,417, as of 02.09.24) to Kuchi nomads as compensation for the land they allegedly occupied. As only half of the sum could be raised, the Taliban ordered the affected people to pay the remaining sum within two months to avoid forced resettlement.

According to media reports from 02.09.24, the Taliban secret service in Khost province has banned the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement's (PTM) trademark – the red Pashteen hat. Shop owners in the province have also been banned from selling the hat. Young people were reportedly beaten up by Taliban for wearing the hat. A young member of the PTM was arrested and tortured by the Taliban for promoting the PTM on social media.

Employees of the Taliban's local Ministry of Virtue in Ghazni province have disrupted the wedding celebrations of local residents and fined them for allegedly playing music. Wedding parlours are inspected and monitored on a daily basis. The Taliban's new "virtue law", prohibits playing and listening to music (cf. BN of 26.08.24). According to its 2023 annual report, the Taliban's Ministry of Virtue destroyed over 21,000 musical instruments across the

country last year. Media reports say that employees of the regional Ministry of Virtue in Khost province are to explain the rules of the new virtue law to children in grades one to four in schools, according to which they should grow beards as adults, wear white hats and support the Taliban.

In the period from 27.08. to 29.08.24, the Taliban flogged several people in the provinces of Ghazni, Helmand and Khost for various offences (including robbery, running away from home). According to a Taliban press release, 11,000 people (including 1,000 women and 800 children) are being held in their prisons across the country. A further 12,000 people in custody are awaiting sentencing by the courts.

On 28.08.24, the Taliban opened fire on motorists protesting due to rising costs in Herat province. This was confirmed by the press office of the Taliban governor in Herat.²

Belarus

Politically motivated imprisonment and criminal proceedings

The Belarusian human rights centre Vyazna, most of whose members are in exile, stated that more than 50,000 people have been imprisoned for political reasons since the outbreak of mass protests in Belarus following the 2020 presidential elections. According to Vyazna's calculations, at least 5,472 people have been convicted in politically motivated criminal proceedings.³

Proposal for an amendment to the Criminal Code

President Lukashenko proposed an amendment to the Belarusian Criminal Code. It shall penalise violence and threats against current and former presidents. The bill published on the state website on 12.08.24 provides for up to eight years in prison for such an offence. The current version of the penal code contains articles that allow for sentences of up to several years for threats against civil servants or for insulting or defamation of a president.⁴

Arrested in Belarus after deportation from Sweden

According to media reports from 28.08.24, a Belarusian citizen was arrested at the Lithuanian-Belarusian border the week before. The Swedish authorities rejected his and his mother's asylum applications and deported both to Belarus on 21.08.24. The media report also said that his current whereabouts are unknown. However, his mother was allowed to continue her journey to Minsk. After the father's arrest in 2022 mother and son fled to Sweden, as an investigation had been initiated against them in Belarus for their participation in the 2020 mass protests. The father later died in a Belarusian jail.⁵

Benin

Arrested for criticising the president

Unknown actors arrested the Beninese activist Steve Amoussou, known under the pseudonym "Frère Hounvi", in a suburb of Lomé in Togo on 12.08.24. On 20.08.24, he was taken to Benin's capital Cotonou and charged with inciting rebellion, initiating and publishing false news and harassment by electronic means and taken into custody. According to media reports, Frère Hounvi, who has been living in Togo for several years, sharply criticised Benin's President Patrice Talon on social media. He describes himself as an opposition activist but is not an official member of any political party. On 18.08.24, members of the opposition parties held a joint press conference to demand the activist's immediate release. One day later, MPs and several prominent activists appeared before the Criminal Court for Economic Offences and Terrorism (Cour de répression des infractions économiques et du terrorisme, CRIET) in support of Frère Hounvi.⁶

Cameroon

Kidnapped social media activist: Allegation of torture

A lawyers' collective found the social media activist Ramon Cotta, who had been kidnapped in Gabon (cf. BN of 19.08.24) in a security cell of the military court in Yaoundé on 20.08.24. Cotta, whose real name is Steve Akam or, according to further information, Yves Kibouy Bershu, is said to have been subjected to torture, according to media

reports citing HRW, which in turn is in contact with the lawyers' collective. Akam's state of health is said to be critical. He has symptoms of paralysis on one side of his body and severe visual impairments. He is accused of terrorism, sedition, financing terrorism, arms trafficking and insulting the head of state and members of the government.⁷

Colombia

Indigenous peoples demand protection from violence by FARC dissidents

Since 20.08.24, more than 4,000 representatives of indigenous peoples protested peacefully in Parque El Nacimiento in Bogotá, demanding a solution to the surge of violence in the department of Cauca. Represented by the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC), the protesters have requested a personal meeting with President Gustavo Petro in order to have a resolution signed that provides for a solution to end the violence committed by non-state actors in Cauca and the participation of the CRIC in the peace process. Petro has not yet agreed to this. Following a conference with the CRIC, Interior Minister Juan Fernando Cristo announced his intention to travel to Cauca to talk to the authorities and citizens. He also praised the protesters' willingness to engage in dialogue, in contrast to the Autoridades Indígenas del Sur Occidente (AISO), whose protest blockades on the Pan-American motorway recently resulted in the death of one person. State forces and the FARC dissident group Estado Mayor Central (EMC) regularly clash in Cauca. The Asociación de Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (North Cauca Indigenous Association) accuses the EMC of a wave of violence, particularly against social leaders, the so-called Líderes Sociales. Most recently, yet another representative of the Indigenous Guard (Guardia Indígena) was killed on 18.08.24. The agreed ceasefire between the government and the EMC was suspended in March 2024 after the EMC injured two people and killed a mayor during an attack on an indigenous community (cf. BN of 18.03.24).⁸

Cuba

Nationwide power cuts

Since 22.08.24, parts of the country have been experiencing power shortages and blackouts lasting up to 14 hours. The provinces of Matanzas and Pinar del Rio were worst affected and their circuits had to be disconnected from the power grid. The state electricity monopoly Unión Eléctrica de Cuba (UNE) stated that six thermoelectric power plants were taken off the grid due to faults. The outdated and poorly maintained power grid has been responsible for an increasing number of power outages since 2021, sometimes even daily. In addition to power outages and shortages of food, medicine and fuel, the country also suffers from high inflation. Foreign currency is lacking, although it is needed to import spare parts or fuel for the infrastructure. According to a study, 90% of all Cubans will be living in extreme poverty by 2024 (cf. BN of 05.08.24). The precarious economic situation has already triggered several protests this year.⁹

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Ceasefire fails due to further fighting

The ceasefire between the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) and the rebel group Mouvement 23 Mars (M23) in the east of the country has broken down after fighting intensified again near key areas between Lake Edward and Lake Kivu. The M23 rebels and Congolese forces blamed each other for an exchange of fire on 25.08.24. M23 stated that they had taken up arms after their airspace in Lubero and Rutshuru had been violated by the FARDC. The FARDC countered that no aeroplanes had been able to fly in North Kivu due to the bad weather. Despite the ceasefire agreed in July 2024, M23 had made significant territorial gains, including the strategically important town of Kirumba.

Following mediation by Angola, the DR Congo and Rwanda agreed a ceasefire in the conflict between the Rwandan-backed rebel group Mouvement 23 Mars (M23) and the Congolese security forces on 30.07.24 which was to come into force on 04.08.24. Experts were rather sceptical about the ceasefire's stability, especially as the public communiqué had not explicitly named M23 and two consecutive humanitarian ceasefires of two weeks each had been partially ignored (cf. BN of 05.08.24).¹⁰

Guinea

Situation of minors in detention

Minors continue to be held in detention, including pre-trial detention, sometimes for years. This is what a report published on the website of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on 28.08.24 says. In June 2024, 218 minors - including ten girls - were imprisoned across the country, only 21 of whom had been convicted. In September 2023, 274 minors had been in detention. However, especially the number of convicted minors has decreased, at that time there were 63. Prison conditions remain poor. In addition to the general deficits, such as overcrowding and malnutrition, failure to separate convicted criminals from persons in other forms of detention, there is also no separation of minors from adults.¹¹

Iran

Man dies in police custody after physical abuse

According to media reports on 30.08.24, a 36-year-old man died in police custody in Lahijan (Gilan province).

The man had been involved in a street brawl on 24.08.24 and was subsequently arrested. After his arrest, he allegedly got into verbal and physical altercations with police officers.

An investigation into the events ordered by President Pezeshkian has so far revealed that the man was physically abused by police officers. However, the exact cause of the 36-year-old's death is still under investigation. Five police officers who are alleged to have been involved in the physical abuse of the man have been provisionally arrested and suspended from duty, just as the local police commander.¹²

Actress and director charged with headscarf offences

According to media reports from 28.08. and 29.08.24, the Tehran public prosecutor's office has brought charges against a film director and an actress for violating Muslim dress codes.

The two prominent women had attended a public film screening without the mandatory headscarf. Photographs of both women without their headscarves were subsequently shared on social media channels, including a cinema portal.¹³

Father commits alleged honour killing of daughter

According to various media reports, a 17- or 18-year-old woman was shot dead by her father in the province of Ilam on 26.08.24. The Kurdish human rights organisation Hengaw describes the killing as an honour crime. The organisation says that the 56-year-old father refused to tolerate his daughter's relationship with a male teenager due to family differences. The suspect was arrested a few hours after the offence. This information cannot be independently verified.

Citing data from the pro-reform newspaper Shargh News, it was reported that at least 165 women in Iran were killed by male family members in 2023, 41 of these women were living in the capital Tehran. According to the Persian-language edition of BBC News, however, there are no precise statistics on murders committed for honour-related reasons within the family.¹⁴

Iraq

Fight against IS

According to the US Central Command, 15 IS fighters were killed, arms and logistical equipment were seized during a joint operation with the Iraqi military in Anbar province on 29.08.24.

Seven US soldiers were injured in the operation, but no civilians were harmed. Such joint operations of Iraqi security forces and international combat units are a regular feature of the fight against I, they contributed to containing IS capabilities in Iraq considerably, however, IS has not yet been completely eliminated. At a meeting with American representatives on 01.09.24 Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia al-Sudani stated that IS no longer posed a threat to Iraq's security.

Relations between the Iraqi government and US troops in the country have deteriorated in recent months, because the troops have repeatedly attacked Iraqi positions in response to drone attacks by Shiite militias. The Iraqi government subsequently declared its intention to end the presence of US troops in the country in the near future.¹⁵

Kosovo

Closure of Serbian self-governing organisations

Following the closure of Serbian post offices and the government's ban on the Serbian dinar as a means of payment in northern Kosovo (cf. BN of 12.08.24) on 30.08.24 the police closed five local self-governing institutions of the Serbian population in the region. The government in Pristina justified this step saying that these so-called parallel structures violated the constitution and the laws of the country. Seven such institutions had already been closed at the beginning of 2024. Representatives of the EU and the US government expressed their concern about the government's actions, as they are exacerbating tensions in the region.¹⁶

Lebanon

Ongoing disputes between Israel and Lebanon

According to an international news agency, on 28.08.24 an Israeli drone attacked a car at a Syrian checkpoint on the Lebanese border killing three Palestinian fighters and a member of Hezbollah.

Among the victims was Faris Qasim. He is said to have been an important figure in the operations department of the Iranian-backed militant group Islamic Jihad, which is responsible for operational plans in Syria and Lebanon. He is also said to have played a central role in the recruitment of Palestinians for Hezbollah.¹⁷

Libya

Production at several oil fields temporarily halted

According to media reports, several oil fields were closed between 28.08 and 30.08.24 by the actors controlling the east and large parts of the south. The speaker of the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk, eastern Libya, had already announced on 22.08.24 that this measure in case the head of the central bank, al-Siddiq al-Kabir, was dismissed (cf. BN of 26.08.24). The media reported that the new interim head of the central bank, Abdel Fattah Abdel Ghaffar, appointed by the Presidential Council, and his new board of directors took up office on 25.08.24, which was rejected by the HoR. Al-Kabir and other former senior bank employees left the country for fear of possible attacks by armed groups.¹⁸

Nigeria

Acute food insecurity

Citing a study by several international organisations, the Nigerian government announced on 27.08.24 that more than 31.8 million Nigerians are currently affected by acute food insecurity due to security challenges, the removal of fuel subsidies and the rise in food prices. According to media reports, women and children are particularly affected. The results of the Cadre Harmonisé 2024 report by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) indicate a sharp rise in the number of people affected. According to the WFP, around 18.6 million Nigerians were still at risk of acute food insecurity between October and December 2023. Attacks by members of armed groups and other difficulties had forced sedentary farmers to abandon their fields, which had contributed to higher food prices and rising inflation. Nigeria is facing the worst cost of living crisis in a generation.¹⁹

Deadly military operations

The Defence Headquarters (DHQ) informed on 29.08.24 that members of the Nigerian military killed around 1,170 members of armed groups designated as terrorists across the country and arrested around 1,100 suspects since the

beginning of August 2024. According to media reports, they also freed around 720 kidnapped people and seized a large amount of arms and ammunition. The dead included leaders of the armed groups. In the north-east, members of the Hadin Kai military operation are said to have killed around 300 members of violent groups in August 2024, arrested around 260 and freed over 200 abductees. More than 30 members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) group, which champions the secession of south-eastern Nigeria, and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), were also killed. In addition, a total of around 2,700 members of the Islamist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) had surrendered. Troops from Operation Safe Haven, Operation Whirl Stroke, Operation Hadarin Daji, Operation UDO KA and Operation Whirl Punch were deployed throughout the country. The people killed are labelled as terrorists in official DHQ announcements. The DHQ spreads success stories of this kind fairly regularly (cf. BN of 08.04., 03.06. and 17.06.24).²⁰

Pakistan

Ban on passport issuance after applying for asylum abroad lifted

The government's decision of 05.06.24, announced by circular notification, that no passports may be issued to Pakistani nationals after they applied for asylum abroad was revoked with immediate effect at a high-level ministerial meeting at the end of July 2024, according to various media reports. "It was decided to revoke this decision with immediate effect and withdraw the circular dated 05.06.24," reads an official statement.²¹

Several armed attacks in Balochistan; strengthening of the BLA

On 26.08.24, more than 70 people were killed in several coordinated attacks, according to repeatedly updated media reports. Suspected Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militants damaged a railway bridge, attacked police and military posts and vehicles on a major highway. In the most serious incident, a group of armed militants killed 23 bus passengers in Musakhail district by blocking the road, forcing the passengers to leave the bus and shooting the victims after checking their identity documents. Before leaving the scene, they set fire to several vehicles. In a statement to AFP news agency, the BLA claimed that it had launched an operation "on major highways across Balochistan" and emphasised that it was exclusively targeting security forces. The Pakistani army's public relations department announced on 26.08.24 that ten soldiers, four policemen and a total of 21 militants had been killed; there has been no independent confirmation of these figures to date.

According to recent estimates, the BLA has developed into a well-organised and powerful fighting unit in recent years. It is suspected that the BLA has provided itself with weapons and military equipment following the withdrawal of US and international troops from Afghanistan in 2021. Tactically, the non-religiously motivated BLA has adopted attack techniques from jihadist groups, including suicide attacks, attacks with homemade explosive devices and coordinated attacks with multiple attackers. The Majeed Brigade, which also carries out suicide attacks, is suspected of being behind complex attacks. In 2022, a woman executed a suicide attack for the BLA for the first time.

The province of Balochistan has long been a centre of unrest. Ethnic Baloch separatist groups stage attacks, primarily on security forces. They demand independence from the central government in Islamabad and accuse it of exploiting natural resources. In response, security forces sometimes take harsh action against members of the Baloch ethnic group.²²

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: current developments; humanitarian situation

The Hamas-led Ministry of Health stated on 29.08.24 that more than 40,602 Palestinians had been killed and 93,588 others wounded in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war. The ministry does not officially distinguish between combatants and civilians. The figures cannot be independently verified.

According to the Israeli military on 30.08.24, a total of 339 military personnel were killed and 2,263 others wounded since the start of the ground offensives.

The war continues. After the first case of polio was detected in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli military agreed to humanitarian pauses to allow time for a vaccination campaign of several days. Children in central Gaza are to be

vaccinated first, before other areas in northern and southern Gaza are made accessible by interruptions of the fighting for several hours. The first vaccinations were made on 01.09.24 and the campaign is scheduled to continue until 09.09.24.

The WFP temporarily suspended its work on 28.08.24 after one of the organisation's aid vehicles came under fire as it approached an Israeli checkpoint. According to the WFP, the mission was coordinated with the relevant authorities and the vehicle was clearly recognisable as an aid organisation vehicle.

The Israeli military announced that the military operations in Khan Younis and Deir al-Balah, as part of which evacuation orders were issued in August 2024, had ended and residents could return to their homes in the respective areas.²³

West Bank: Dead and wounded in armed clashes and attacks

Late in the evening of 27.08.24, the Israeli military began a large-scale military operation in several villages in the north of the West Bank.

After initially focussing on Tulkarem and al-Far'a refugee camps near Tubas, the military later concentrated on Jenin, particularly the refugee camp there. The operation targeted locations that are considered hotspots of armed groups and came after attacks by Palestinian fighters from the West Bank increased. Residents of Jenin stated that they had no access to water and electricity. According to Israeli reports, 26 armed persons had been killed by 31.08.24. Various armed groups confirmed that at least 13 of these fatalities had been members. At least one high-ranking member of the so-called Palestinian Jihad in Palestine (PIJ) was among the dead. One Israeli soldier is said to have been killed in the fighting in Jenin and three other military personnel were wounded.

On 01.09.24, three members of the Israeli border police were killed when members of the Palestinian militia Khalil al-Rahman Brigade opened fire on their vehicle. The attacker initially escaped but was captured and killed several hours later at his home near Hebron.

On the evening of 30.08.24, three Israelis were wounded in two attacks south of Jerusalem. Two attackers are believed to have been killed. In both cases, the suspected attackers had loaded their cars with explosives; a bomb detonated only in one case.²⁴

Panama

Deportation of migrants

On 29.08.24, 30 migrants from Ecuador were returned to their home country on a US-financed flight. According to the Panamanian Migration Service, they had bypassed a migration checkpoint through the Darién Gap, a jungle area that stretches across Colombia and Panama. The repatriation was part of an agreement between Panama and the US. Under the agreement the US pledged to provide USD 6 million for equipment, transport and logistics to deport foreign nationals who are not entitled to residence in Panama. The bi-lateral agreement intends to reduce irregular border crossings and the influx of migrants into the US. On 20.08.24, 29 migrants with criminal records were repatriated from Colombia by plane, financed by the US.

Panama's president, José Mulino, in office since 01.07.24, announced return flights also for Indian migrants in September 2024 and for Chinese nationals at an unspecified date.²⁵

Sudan

Humanitarian situation

In addition to the effects of the ongoing fighting in Sudan, the humanitarian situation of the population is deteriorating drastically due to climatic effects. Above-average rainfall is causing flooding in western, southern and eastern Sudan.

In the southern part of the Red Sea state, the Khor Baraka River repeatedly burst its banks on 01.09.24, flooding large parts of the town of Toker and parts of the town of Agig to the south. As the region relies on agriculture and is struggling with bottlenecks in the drinking water supply, the Famine Early Warning Network has classified both towns as the second-highest level (Phase 4 - Emergency).

In North Darfur, the camp for internally displaced persons Abu Shouk, located near El-Fasher, was hit by floods, destroying more than 3,000 shelters. In addition, all general kitchens in the camp have been out of order for over a month due to a lack of food and financial support.

The Northern State is suffering from numerous floods caused by heavy rainfall on 27.08.24, which destroyed houses and roads. The media report nine fatalities.²⁶

Syria

North-west: High unemployment

According to a statement issued by the organisation Syria Response Coordinators on 12.08.24, unemployment in north-western Syria is said to have risen to over 88%. This is caused by a lack of employment opportunities, a lack of work experience and poor training, among other things.²⁷

Detention of returning Syrians

On 28.08.24, the Syrian Interior Minister stated that refugees returning to Syria would not be detained.

According to the opposition-affiliated news platform Enab Baladi, this contradicts numerous reports by human rights organisations that have documented such cases. For example, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) published in June 2024 that the organisation had recorded a total of 4,714 cases of detentions of returning refugees and internally displaced persons by Syrian government forces between the beginning of 2014 and June 2024. In 2,312 of these cases, the people concerned are still in detention. The whereabouts of 1,521 detainees are unknown. Already in the past, numerous human rights organisations and media have reported the fate of Syrians who have returned or their relatives, among them the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in February 2024.

According to a report by the opposition-affiliated news platform Syria TV, a Syrian man who was allegedly deported from Türkiye in September 2023 and detained by government forces while trying to reach his family in the south of the country, died while in custody. After he had already been in prison for several months, the family was blackmailed for money by a government official. About a month later, on 06.08.24, the body was handed over to the family.²⁸

Disappearance of two Jordanians

The Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on 28.08.24 that two Jordanian nationals were missing in Syria. The two men were delivering goods from Amman to Damascus but did not return. According to the family of one of the victims, the men had been abducted. A search operation by a local group near the village of Dael in the Dar'a governorate was unsuccessful so far.²⁹

North-west: Journalist arrested

According to reports from 27.08.24, a local journalist who also works for international news agencies was arrested by the Turkish-backed authorities in north-western Syria. The Turkish-backed local military police are said to have arrested him and his wife in the village of al-Bab. His wife, who is also a journalist, was released after one to two hours. No official arrest warrant was presented and the charges against the journalist remained unclear.³⁰

Tajikistan

Wave of arrests for alleged coup plot

When the prominent member of parliament Saidjafar Usmonzoda was arrested on 14.06.24, several people were arrested along with him, all of them were accused of having jointly planned to overthrow the government.

According to media reports, Usmonzoda was first expelled from the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, a system opposition party (cf. BN of 09.03.20), for "unsatisfactory performance" as a party member on 31.05.24 and later on 14.06.24 he was stripped of his immunity.

Usmonzoda is described as the ringleader of the alleged coup plan. According to reports, his arrest was followed by the arrests of former Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi, journalist Ahmadshoh Komilzoda, former politician Akbarshoh Iskandarov, who acted as interim head of state twice, three commanders during the civil war (1992 -

1997) and non-system opposition politicians, including the vice-chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan, Shokirjon Hakimov.

The public prosecutor's office also accused Usmonzoda of cooperating with the National Alliance, an alliance of opposition groups in exile. He had spoken to one of its members, Sharofiddin Gadoev (cf. BN of 25.02. and 11.03.19), the public prosecutor's office alleged. No further details are available, as the investigation is classified as confidential.

A commentator from an international think tank believes that the alleged coup plan is a figment of the regime's imagination, partly due to the heterogeneity of those arrested. In addition, the opposition in exile has few resources and virtually no influence at home. It is likely that the arrests are intended to prepare the transfer of the office of president from Emomali Rahmon to his son Rustam Emomali, currently the second person in the state by protocol as president of the upper house of parliament. Anyone who might jeopardise the smooth completion of this transfer would be targeted, the commentator said. The recent arrests may have served as a warning to more powerful actors to whom Usmonzoda has connections. President Rahmon's current term of office will continue until 2027 (cf. BN of 02.11.20).³¹

Türkiye

Minors charged with insulting the president

According to media reports, the Istanbul public prosecutor's office on 18.08.24 brought charges against a 16-year-old girl for allegedly insulting President Erdoğan.

According to press reports, the minor had already been taken into custody on 12.05.24 after one of the president's bodyguards had accused her of insulting his convoy as it drove past a pedestrian crossing. In her statement, the teenager explained that she had not known that this vehicle had been part of the president's convoy. She denied any intention to insult the president or any other official.

After her one-day detention in May 2024, an Istanbul criminal court released the young woman under judicial supervision and ordered her to report to a police station once a week and banned her from leaving the country.

Throughout 2023, 972 minors were investigated under Articles 299 and 301 of the Turkish Penal Code relating to insulting the president and other public officials. According to official data from the Ministry of Justice, a total of 6,879 people were charged with allegedly insulting President Erdoğan or his government in 2023. Of these, 1,602 were convicted, 1,982 received suspended sentences and 1,774 were acquitted.³²

Ukraine

Civilian victims

Media report the killing of at least seven people by massive Russian drone and missile attacks on several regions in Ukraine on 26.08.24. The governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region said that at least two people died in a Russian missile strike in the city of Kryvyi Rih. At the same time, local authorities reported one death each in Zaporizhzhya and Lutsk (Volyn region). According to the governor, another Russian missile attack on Kryvyi Rih on 27.08.24 killed four civilians in a hotel. On 28.08.24, President Zelensky informed that a Russian bomb attack on the city of Kupiansk (Kharkiv region) resulted in an unspecified number of casualties. According to the regional governor, a total of six people were killed by Russian attacks in the Donetsk region on 28.08.24. The governor of the Donetsk region reported that at least one person died in Kostyantynivka on 29.08.24 as a result of Russian shelling. In the city of Sumy, two people were killed in a Russian attack according to information from the public prosecutor's office on 30.08.24, while the governor responsible for the city of Kharkiv reported at least seven fatalities from a Russian bomb attack. Another Russian bomb attack in the Kharkiv region on 31.08.24 claimed two lives, according to the regional governor. On the same day, according to military reports, five people died in Chasiv Yar (Donetsk region) in Russian shelling. According to media reports from 02.09.24, three more people were killed in the city of Kurakhove (Donetsk region) by Russian shelling.³³

War effort

According to the military, 102 out of 127 missiles and 99 out of 109 drones were intercepted during the Russian wave of attacks on a total of 15 Ukrainian regions on 26.08.24. Nevertheless, according to President Zelensky, the energy sector suffered "major damage". This was the heaviest air attack since February 2022.

When commenting on the situation on the eastern front, the Ukrainian commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrskiy said that fierce fighting was already taking place ten kilometres from the city of Pokrovsk. According to the governor, further evacuations have been ordered in the Donetsk region due to the continued advance of Russian troops. The zone for forced evacuations has been extended to a total of 27 localities in the frontline area around Kostyantynivka and Selydove.

According to the Ukrainian border guard, no troop movements have been detected in Belarus to date. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry had previously reported major movements of troops and equipment near the border with Ukraine (cf. BN of 26.08.24).

One day after the crash of an F-16 fighter jet recently delivered by the US, President Zelensky dismissed the commander of the Ukrainian air force, Mykola Oleshchuk, on 30.08.24 without giving reasons and replaced him temporarily with Anatoly Kryvonoshko. It cannot yet be ruled out that the plane was downed because it was accidentally shot by the air force's own air defence. The incident is under investigation.³⁴

Energy infrastructure

Following the Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, particularly on 26.08.24, but also in the days thereafter, the Ukrainian authorities are endeavouring to assess and repair the damage. According to state utility Ukrenerho, power cuts in the country have been extended to relieve the pressure on the grid. The capital and eleven other areas in eastern and central Ukraine are affected. The previous plans for staggered shutdowns had been temporarily suspended, which meant, for example, that some neighbourhoods in Kyiv only had a twelve-hour power supply throughout the day, the utility said. Many shops, banks and restaurants maintain emergency operations with diesel generators.

According to the Russian Ministry of Defence, the attacks targeted gas compressor stations and substations that supplied power to Ukraine's military-industrial complex. Following the attacks, US President Biden said that the US would "provide Ukraine with energy equipment to repair its systems and strengthen the resilience of Ukraine's energy grid".

The air strikes also caused damage to a hydroelectric power plant in the Kyiv region. According to the authorities there is, however, no threat to the dam on the Dnipro River. The situation is therefore not comparable to the destruction of the Kakhovka dam in 2023. In addition, the Ukrainian government announced the temporary shutdown of four reactor units at the Rivne nuclear power plant, also as a result of the Russian air strikes.³⁵

Venezuela

Current developments: González summoned again; further arrests; cabinet reshuffle

On 26.08.24, Juan Carlos Delpino, one of two main 'rectors' of the Supreme Electoral Council (CNE) who is not considered to be close to the government, spoke out for the first time and pointed out significant irregularities in the presidential election process. He himself had seen no evidence that Maduro had won the presidential elections, he said. Delpino has been in hiding since then for fear of reprisals.

Furthermore, the opposition's presidential unity candidate, González Urrutia, has been summoned by the Attorney General's Office again for 30.08.24 to testify regarding investigations into such allegations as falsification of public documents, usurpation of office and incitement to disobedience. This summons is also related to the publication of itemised polling station results by the opposition on the specially created website Resultados con VZLA. Should he also fail to appear at this third summons, an arrest warrant may be issued against him for risk of absconding and obstruction of the investigation.

The arrests of opposition figures and people critical of the government continue. On 27.08.24, Maria Corina Machado's lawyer, Perkins Rocha, was arrested. Other opposition party members from Convergencia and Acción Democrática as well as a student leader and the well-known journalist Carmela Longo were arrested last week. The latter had recently resigned from the pro-government newspaper Últimas Noticias. She was later released under conditions but faces terrorism charges.

In addition, there was a comprehensive cabinet reshuffle on 27.08.24, in which Diosdado Cabello, vice president of the ruling party Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) and presumed hardliner, took over as head of the Ministry of the Interior, Justice and Peace. In this context, NGOs fear that the repression of peaceful protests will intensify.³⁶

Yemen

Floods in several parts of the country; cholera

The UNHCR announced on 30.08.24 that 97 people were killed and more than 56,000 households damaged or destroyed by heavy rainfall in several parts of the country in August 2024. According to the IOM, around 9,000 families were (again) displaced. According to the UN, a total of around 268,000 people were affected by the flooding. The provinces of al-Mahwit, Marib and Hodeida were hit worst most recently. The ongoing flooding is also exacerbating indirect risks, such as landmines and unexploded ordnance being released and the spread of diseases such as cholera.

During the last major cholera epidemic between 2016 and 2022, a total of around 2.5 million people in Yemen were infected with the disease, which could barely be contained due to the collapse in healthcare provision.³⁷

Group 62 – Asylum and Migration Information Centre

Briefing Notes

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