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Briefing Notes

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Afghanistan

Effects of the security situation on businesses

Business people from the northern province of Kunduz report that the number of companies operating at the inland port and at the border crossing point with Tajikistan has fallen from 145 to eight over the past two years. Reasons cited for this decline include the poor security situation, attacks and abductions on the road to Kunduz city and protection rackets. Business people are also critical of the security situation in the southern province of Kandahar, citing the poor energy supply as their greatest problem. Taliban regularly destroy energy lines and communications facilities here and in other provinces. Last week also once again witnessed numerous attacks, fighting, and operations by the security forces.

Burkina Faso

Attack on mosque kills at least 15

On the evening of 11.10.19, armed assailants attacked the large mosque in the town of Salmossi, which is situated at the border with Mali. They shot at least 15 people dead while they were worshipping. Four persons suffered injuries. Jihadists have been staging attacks in Burkina Faso since 2015. Terrorist attacks have recently been occurring several times a month. Observers consider the Malian terrorist militia JNIM ((Group to Support Islam and Muslims), which has close ties to Al Qaeda, to be responsible for the attacks. While attacks in the past usually targeted police stations and barracks, they have recently often been aimed at civilians. Most recently, 20 workers were killed in an attack by suspected jihadists on the Dolmande gold mine in the northern region of Soum. UNHCR spokesman Andrew Mbogori reported on 11.10.19 that more than 500 people had died in 472 attacks and military countermeasures since 2018. He added that some 486,000 people had been displaced within the country to date, including 267,000 in the past three months. A further 16,000 have reportedly fled to neighbouring countries.

China

Hong Kong: Protests

The protests in the special administrative region continued on 13.10.19. In order to make it more difficult for the police to break up the protests, a large number of smaller protests were held instead of one central demonstration. While many of the demonstrations went off peacefully, disturbances also occurred. There was rioting in various shops, restaurants and underground railway stations and in the entrance area of a branch of the Bank of China. Thousands of people also demonstrated on 12.10.19; isolated disturbances occurred here. Many demonstrators had their faces covered, despite a corresponding ban.

DR Congo

Ebola virus driven back into rural areas

Michael Ryan, executive director of the WHO emergency relief programme, announced on 10.10.19 that the Ebola epidemic in eastern Congo, while not vanquished, had been largely forced out of the towns and into rural areas. He said that the areas concerned were situated in the territories of the two provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, primarily in a triangle between the towns of Mambasa, Komanda, Beni and Mandima. In part, these were the same areas in which the epidemic broke out in August 2018, he added. He said that fighting the epidemic was made difficult above all because the areas affected by Ebola are difficult to access and because dozens of armed groups are present there.

While 130 new cases were registered daily at the height of the current Ebola outbreak in April 2019, the figure for last week was only 20. As per 06.10.19, a total of 3,205 people have reportedly become ill with Ebola since the latest outbreak (including 3,091 confirmed cases and 114 suspected cases). 2,142 people have reportedly died of Ebola, including 2,028 confirmed fatalities.

Ethiopia

Abiy Ahmed awarded Nobel Peace Prize

Ethiopia's prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has received the Nobel Peace Prize for his commitment to peace and international cooperation. The committee in Oslo referred in particular to his initiative to resolve the long and bloody border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and his efforts to mediate in other conflicts in the region. It pointed to the many challenges which remain to be overcome and ethnic conflicts which are flaring up again in the country. As such, the committee emphasized that it was awarding the prize "specifically not only in recognition of what has been achieved to date, but also as a source of encouragement for the future."

Abiy, son of a Christian Orthodox Amhara mother and a Muslim Oromo father, was elected prime minister in April 2018 and is the first representative of the Oromo - the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia - to hold this office (cf. BN of 09.04.18). In the wake of 27 years of single-party dictatorship and a three-year uprising in large parts of the country, the 43 year-old has replaced the hitherto repressive style of government in Ethiopia with a policy focused on reform. He has ended the state of emergency, released tens of thousands of political prisoners and lifted media censorship and the ban on opposition groups. He has fought corruption, opened up the economy and appointed women to leading government positions.

Abiy was a contentious figure when he took office. Apart from being a high functionary within the armed forces, he was also deputy director of the secret service - the Information Network Security Agency (INSA). As such, he was not only part of the surveillance system in Ethiopia which controls all telecommunications, but was also regarded as a leading figure of the repressive system which suppressed the media and the opposition. This made his change of tack upon coming to power all the more surprising for observers.

He also met with violent resistance to this course, however, in particular among members of the Tigray, who held the most important positions in the government, despite making up only around six per cent of the population. In June 2018, Abiy narrowly escaped an assassination attempt (cf. BN of 25.06.18). A year later, the pro-government regional president of Amhara was killed in an attempted coup, and the commander-in-chief of the Ethiopian armed forces met the same fate in Addis Abeba (cf. BN of 24.06.2019). Abiy's government responded in the style of its predecessors, shutting down the internet across the country, shooting those it believed to be behind the attacks and arresting numerous suspects (cf. BN of 01.07.19).

He won international acclaim first and foremost for his initiative to end the long-running conflict with Eritrea, however. The two countries fought a border war between 1998 and 2000 which claimed up to 100,000 lives. In 2002 a UN commission drew up the national borders between the two countries, but Ethiopia refused to accept this solution on account of a quarrel over the town of Badme. The situation remained extremely tense until Abiy declared in mid-2018 that he would accept the commission's decision. Diplomatic relations were subsequently resumed and a peace treaty was signed with Eritrea's president, Isaias Afewerki (cf. BN of 02.07.18). The initial euphoria has long since faded, however. Expected reforms

in Eritrea, in particular with regard to indefinite periods of national service, have failed to come about and the border crossing points which thousands of people were able to pass through into the neighbouring country virtually free of any checks have long since been closed again (cf. BN of 29.04.19), along with the Eritrean embassy in Addis Abeba. The Ethiopian military also continues to maintain a presence in Eritrean territory.

The situation also remains tense inside Ethiopia. The multi-ethnic country is suffering from ethnic conflicts which have intensified in recent months. According to the United Nations, almost 3.2 million people were displaced within Ethiopia's national borders in 2018 – around twice as many as in the previous year. This development comes as no great surprise, however: In the 1990s the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) divided Ethiopia up into federal states dominated by the respective ethnic groups. Article 47 (2) of the federal constitution expressly enshrines the right to autonomy - an option which has been exercised by a number of ethnic groups, such as the Sidamo in the south of the country. A decision on a corresponding referendum is to be reached in November 2019 (cf. BN of 22.07.19). Citing parallels with former Yugoslavia, observers fear that old conflicts between the ethnic groups, which were previously kept under control by the large-scale presence of the police and the military, could now give rise to bloody clashes. They fear a balkanisation of the conflict, similar to the situation when marshal Tito resorted to violence in an effort to maintain his dominion in south-eastern Europe, which collapsed at the end of the cold war. Violent clashes are already occurring between the security forces and separatists in some parts of Ethiopia (cf. BN of 07.10.19).

Critical voices see the award for Abiy as premature, pointing among other things to the parliamentary elections in 2020, which are considered to represent a measure of how far Ethiopia really is on its way to becoming a democracy. While the government has promised free and fair elections and greater liberty does prevail in the country, growing fears are being voiced that the time may not be sufficient to establish the conditions for election campaigning to be conducted on an equal footing. There is also speculation that the elections might be deferred, alluding to the fact that the census which was originally planned for the autumn of 2019 and was intended as a rehearsal for the elections has been cancelled. The government has reiterated its intention to adhere to the timetable for the parliamentary elections in 2020, however.

India

Kashmir conflict: Reactions in the USA

Following talks in Washington D.C., Masood Khan, president of Pakistan-administrated Kashmir (Azad Jammu and Kashmir, AJK), has noted a tangible shift in the US position on the Kashmir conflict. In his view, the stationing of Indian troops in the Kashmir Valley has prompted the international community to focus its attention on the decades-old conflict. US president Donald Trump discussed the matter with both the Indian and the Pakistani prime minister at the 74th UN General Assembly. From the Democrat ranks, Bernie Sanders, Elisabeth Warren and US senator Kamala Harris, who has Indian roots on her mother's side, have so far voiced their opinions to the effect that the rights of the Kashmiris must be respected and a watchful eye should be kept on the situation in the part of Kashmir under Indian administration. In addition, US congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, who is of Indian origin, has drafted a letter to Indian prime-minister Narendra Modi together with a dozen other members of the House of Representatives, calling for the restrictions in the Kashmir Valley to be lifted.

Second Indo-Chinese summit

The second Indo-Chinese summit took place in the city of Chennai in southern India on 11./12.10.19. This offered the two countries' heads of state and heads of government an opportunity to continue discussions on overarching matters of bilateral, regional and global significance and to exchange views on intensifying a development partnership. The city of Wuhan in central China hosted the first such talks in 2018.

Iran

Women in Iran granted access to football stadium

For the first time in almost 40 years, women have been granted unhindered access to a football stadium. According to media reports, between 3,500 and 4,000 Iranian women attended the World Cup qualifier against Cambodia on 10.10.19. The sports ministry had installed four separate stands for the women, with a seating capacity of around 4,000. Female police officers, female paramedics and female stadium guides were also deployed. The women's tickets were sold out in next to no time.

The ban on women entering football stadiums was imposed in 1981 in the wake of the Islamic Revolution. This prompted hundreds of female football fans all over the country to sneak into stadiums disguised as men. They were often discovered and arrested (cf. BN of 23.09.19).

FIFA and its president, Gianni Infantino, were the driving forces behind the historic breaking of this taboo. Last year, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) threatened to exclude Iran from the 2022 World Cup in neighbouring Qatar if women continued to be banned from stadiums.

Nuclear bombs are against the sharia

It has been reported in the Teheran Times that the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, stated on 09.10.19 that, although Iran could make nuclear weapons, it had not done so because this is absolutely forbidden according to the Islamic sharia and there was no reason to waste money on the production and storage of such weapons.

Iraq

Demonstrators' deaths to be investigated

A committee of inquiry is to investigate the more than 110 deaths in the wake of mass protests against corruption and misgovernment in Iraq. This was announced by Prime minister Adel Abdel Mahdi on 12.10.19. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani had called for such a committee to be set up.

Renewed protests in Baghdad

Demonstrations occurred once again in the Shiite-dominated city district of Sadr City on 07.10.19. The demonstrators demanded new jobs and criticised the deaths of several demonstrators in the preceding night. At least eight people died in the disturbances on the night of 06.10.19.

Kosovo

Election winners intent on forming coalition

The winners of the elections on 06.10.19 - the left-wing nationalist party Vetëvendosje and the conservative Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) - have both announced their interest in forming a coalition government, despite their ideological differences. Vetëvendosje's candidate for the prime minister's office, Albin Kurti, stated that there was no alternative, and that if no agreement could be reached on the matter new elections would have to be held.

Albin Kurti promises epochal change

In the early parliamentary election, voters turned away from the former militia leaders who have been in power to date. For the first time, the election was won by parties which are not led by former resistance fighters. The country is thus on the brink of a political watershed. Albin Kurti is promising radical change. The 44 year-old, who was once a political prisoner in Serbia, has been a relentless critic of the political establishment for many years. The one-time political rebel has since taken on a more moderate tone. He is greatly respected by the public, who see him as unfaltering and incorruptible. He is promising an epochal change to the rule of law, principled governance and socially acceptable living conditions. His agenda includes a declaration of war on corruption and organised crime, comprehensive judicial and educational reform and restructuring of the police. He attaches priority to resuming dialogue with the Serbs who live in Kosovo.

Pride parade goes ahead without incident

A pride parade was held for the third time on 10.10.19. There was a strong police presence to protect the event, but no incidents occurred.

The participants are calling for more tolerance and tougher action against hate crime. Legal protection for the LGBTI community has improved over the years. On 22.08.19 a court of appeal ruled that transgender persons are entitled to change their name and gender in the register of births, marriages and deaths. LGBTI people nevertheless tend to be ostracised in a society rooted in conservative traditions.

Pakistan

Prime minister on state visit to China

The Pakistani prime minister, Imran Khan, began a state visit to the Chinese capital, Peking, on 09.10.19. Following on from the 74th UN General Assembly, China and Pakistan affirmed their friendly relations and their cooperation to date. Both countries were agreed on the need to continue pushing ahead with the development of Pakistan's economy and infrastructure, stating that stabilising the security situation in Afghanistan formed part of the overall picture here. The second phase of the free trade agreement between China and Pakistan includes extensive opportunities for trade, business and investment. Possible further areas of cooperation are the railways, steel, oil, gas, industry, science and technology.

State visits to Iran and Saudi Arabia are also planned. Pakistan is keen to act as a mediator against the background of the tensions between these two countries.

Lack of equality for women

The situation for women in the country has barely improved since the Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party led by prime minister Imran Khan won the election in 2018. The PTI campaigned under the slogan "Naya Pakistan", citing the ideals of the country's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In particular, these ideals stand for equality across all social strata and different religious faiths, as well as equal rights for minorities. In the light of the incumbent government's failure to take any tangible measures for women's equality after a year in office, increasingly technology-driven calls are being made for a political agenda to improve women's social status. Almost half of all women living in Pakistan can neither read nor write. Only one fifth pursue any formal employment. A marked divide is observable here between urban and rural communities. While there are instances of women living relatively modern lives in cities and urbanised regions, there continues to be a lack of fundamental provisions for women at both political and legal level, such as protection from violence, regulations on succession or ensuring access to justice.

Russian Federation

Navalny's NGO declared foreign agent

On 09.10.19 the Russian ministry of justice officially declared the Anti-Corruption Foundation of opposition politician Alexei Navalny to be a foreign agent. The announcement was made on the authority's internet site. Under Russian law, NGOs can be declared foreign agents if they receive money from abroad, for example. A corresponding law entered into force in 2012, since when it has regularly come in for sharp criticism from western governments. Organisations which are obliged to register with the ministry of justice as foreign agents are required to disclose their financing and submit reports on their aims and their staff's names. This makes it substantially more difficult for NGOs to operate in Russia. Dozens of organisations from various areas have been forced to close in recent years as a result.

In the wake of the summer protests, the authorities accused Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation of money laundering. Members of Navalny's staff and the opposition politician's offices were recently searched in numerous cities. The accounts of Navalny's foundation and of a number of his supporters have additionally been frozen amid claims that almost 14 million euros have been procured by illegal means.

Navalny is one of the most prominent critics of Russian president Putin. His Anti-Corruption Foundation regularly publishes reports on the lifestyles and corruption of the Russian elite. While the pro-government and government media generally ignore these reports, they reach millions of people through social media. A video about the alleged property holdings of Russian prime minister Medvedev has received more than 30 million clicks on YouTube alone.

Somalia

Attacks

Four people were killed and five injured in an attack by Al-Shabaab on the road between Mogadishu and Afgooye on 08.10.19.

On 13.10.19 Al-Shabaab fired mortars at facilities of the UN and the African Union in Mogadishu. Several people were reportedly injured.

Hostilities

The Jubaland Security Forces claim to have driven Al-Shabaab out of several villages in the Abdale Birole district, south-west of Kismayo, on 07.10.19. 20 Al-Shabaab fighters were allegedly killed.

On 10.10.19 a bomb killed two soldiers belonging to the AMISOM units and two civilians at a market in the town of Jalalaqsi. Al-Shabaab is suspected of being behind the attack.

On 09.10.19 and 10.10.19 Al Shabaab carried out several attacks on Somali security forces (military and police) in and around Mogadishu and claimed to have killed a government official in the Mogadishu neighbourhood of Hodan.

Syria

Turkish military operation

Turkey's long-announced offensive against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are dominated by Kurdish militias, began on 09.10.19. The military operation Barış Pınarı Harekâtı (Peace Spring) was launched on land and in the air, with Arab Syrian militias operating alongside the Turkish military.

On 12.10.19 Arab Syrian fighters executed at least two Kurdish prisoners. A prominent Kurdish politician, Hervin Khalaf, was also shot dead in her car en route to Al-Hasakah on 12.10.19. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented a total of nine civilians murdered by Arab Syrian militias.

A number of border towns were taken without resistance after their inhabitants had left in great numbers. People also took flight in Turkish border towns after rocket attacks were launched from northern Syria and at least 17 Turkish civilians were killed.

On 13.10.19 Turkish troops reportedly had almost 70 km² of the former SDF territories under their control. According to the UN, some 130,000 people have been forced to take flight in the five days since the beginning of Operation Peace Spring.

The SDF leadership announced on 13.10.19 that it had made a pact with Assad's government in Damascus. Assad is to deploy troops to the north of the country to stop the Turkish offensive. On 14.10.19 Syrian troops arrived in Tel Tamer, just over 30 km away from Ras al-Ayn.

IS in the Kurdish territories

As war broke out in the SDF territories, on 11.10.19 five IS members managed to escape from a prison run by the Kurdish security forces. A car bomb exploded in a residential area of Qamishli on the same day. IS claimed responsibility for the attack.

There were protests by inmates at other detention camps. In a further IS attack, a car bomb was set off outside an international military station on the outskirts of Al-Hasakah.

On 13.10.19 at least 750 people escaped from a detention camp for IS supporters. The extension to the Ain-Issa detention camp had held 249 women and 700 children who had lived in IS's sphere of influence up until the organisation's defeat. Nearby shelling by the Turkish artillery reportedly made the break-out possible.

Tunisia

Ennahda wins parliamentary election

The provisional election result published on 09.10.19 shows the Muslim Ennahda party to have won the most votes. It is set to take up 52 of the 217 seats in parliament. Second place went to the Qalb Tounes party led by presidential candidate Nabil Karoui, who had been in custody since August 2019 on suspicion of money laundering and was released on 09.10.19.

According to initial media reports, the run-off for the presidency on 13.10.19 was won by law professor Kais Saied, who ran as an independent candidate and took 76.9 % of the vote. Official results are expected on 15.10.19 at the earliest.

Uganda

Law against homosexuality

The Minister for Ethics and Integrity, Simon Lokodo, announced on 10.10.19 that the government is planning to introduce a bill in the coming weeks which will stipulate the death sentence for homosexual practices. It is to be passed by the end of the year. A corresponding bill failed in 2014 on account of a procedural error. Under current law, homosexuality is punishable with life imprisonment.

According to an announcement by the government's Uganda Media Center on Twitter on 12.10.19 there is to be no new law on homosexuality as the current provisions under criminal law are sufficient.

Violence against LGBTI individuals

On 04.10.19 Brian Wasswa, an LGBTI activist belonging to the Children of the Sun Foundation (COSF), was attacked by unknown assailants at his home in the town of Jinja in the south-east of the country. He died in hospital from his injuries on 05.10.19. According to the Ugandan organisation Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), two homosexual men (in the Kayunga district and in Kampala) and one transgender woman (in the Gomba district) had previously been killed in the three months prior to this attack.