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Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Pakistan – July to December 2023

31 December 2023

03 July 2023

Military trials against civilians; dismissals of high-ranking army officers

On 26.06.23, a military spokesperson in Rawalpindi announced that military trials were pending against at least 102 persons in connection with the mass protests (cf. BN of 15.05.23). It was not disclosed how many of the accused are civilians. Human rights organisations expressed criticism (cf. BN 05.06.23). In addition, the dismissal of three unnamed high-ranking army officers was announced.

PICSS data on the security situation for the first half of 2023

The Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) has noted an increase in security-related incidents in the first half of 2023 compared to the first half of 2022. Between January and June 2023, 271 terrorist attacks and suicide bombings killed 389 people and injured 656. Security forces killed at least 236 people suspected of terrorism. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was most affected with 174 reported terrorist incidents in which 266 people were killed and 463 injured; followed by Balochistan with 75 attacks in which 100 people were killed and 163 injured. Sindh province saw a slight decline with 13 terrorist incidents resulting in 19 deaths and at least as many injured. Punjab province experienced an increase with eight reported attacks killing six and injuring ten. For the first half of 2022, PICSS had recorded 151 attacks across the country, killing 293 people and injuring 487.

Attacks and military operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan

Last week, military operations in the north-west of the country in North Waziristan, Tank and Dera Ismail Khan killed three suspected terrorists each, and a Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militant was killed by security forces in Lakki Marwat.

On 02.07.23, an attack on a checkpoint in Balochistan province killed at least four security personnel and one of the attackers. On 02.07.23, two security forces were killed in a military operation in the southwest of Balochistan province.

17 July 2023

Numerous dead in two attacks in Balochistan province

On 13.07.23 media reported that up to twelve Pakistani Army soldiers were killed in two separate attacks in the Zhob and Sui areas of Balochistan. Reportedly, seven suspected insurgents who attacked the security forces were also killed. Also civilians were reportedly killed or injured in the attacks. A new group calling itself Tehreek Jihad Pakistan (TJP) claimed responsibility for the attack on the garrison in Zhob.

IMF approves rescue package to stabilise the economy

According to a media report on 12.07.23, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed to a USD 3 billion bailout package long sought by the Pakistani government. Pakistan is living an economic crisis and is in urgent need of financial support. A difficult external economic situation, devastating floods and policy missteps have led to high budget and balance of payments deficits and rising inflation.

24 July 2023

Pakistan calls for decisive action against TTP by Afghan Taliban

Media reports of 23.07.23 cite accusations by the Pakistani government against the Afghan Taliban, alleging the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) are still being offered refuge and protection in Afghanistan, from where they then coordinate attacks in Pakistan. During a three-day visit to Kabul, Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghan Affairs, Asif Ali Khan Durrani, sent a strong message to the Taliban, calling for decisive action against the TTP. Earlier, Pakistani Defence Minister Asif and Pakistani generals had expressed similar criticism. The Afghan Taliban rejected the accusations. They are said to have advised Pakistan to engage peacefully with the TTP and not to fight them.

31 July 2023

Police report on militant attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The annual report of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Police documents 665 security-related incidents, including 15 suicide attacks, committed by suspected militant groups in the province during the reporting period from 18.06.22 to 18.06.23. In addition, the report lists 382 exchanges of fire, 107 grenade explosions, 145 explosive blasts, 15 rocket attacks and two vehicle-borne explosive attacks.

According to the provincial police's list of terrorist-related incidents, most of them took place in North Waziristan tribal district, Dera Ismail Khan and Peshawar districts, and Bajaur and South Waziristan tribal districts.

Suicide attack on JUI-F meeting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 30.07.23, a suicide bomber killed at least 44 people and injured around 200 others at a political gathering of the conservative Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) party in the tribal district of Bajaur, according to official reports. According to media reports, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Suicide attack on mosque in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 25.07.23, a suicide attack targeted at a mosque in the town of Jamrud in Khyber district. The building collapsed as a result. The police informed that one of the town's senior police officers lost his life. According to media reports, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa experienced a resurgence of militant incidents after years of decline, since the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) unilaterally ended its ceasefire with the government in November 2022.

07 August 2023

IS claims responsibility for suicide attack on JUI-F meeting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The suicide attack on a meeting of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) party in the tribal district of Bajaur on 31.07.23 was claimed by the Islamic State (IS) (see BN 31.07.23). The death toll had risen to over 60 by the weekend. More than 120 people were injured. This is one of the most serious attacks in the region. The regional IS offshoot is based in the neighbouring Afghan province of Nangarhar and is a rival of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Bajaur used to be a stronghold of the Pakistani Taliban until the Pakistani army's military offensives in the second half of the 2010s.

Prime Minister Sharif announces dissolution of the National Assembly

According to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's announcement, Pakistan's National Assembly is to be dissolved three days before the end of the five-year legislative term on 09.08.23. If the parliament is dissolved before the end of the legislative term as announced, new elections will have to be held 90 days thereafter. In this case, it is expected

that nationwide parliamentary elections will be held in November 2023 under a caretaker government. They are to be combined with a census, which, according to the Minister of Justice, will delay the election results by several months. On 05.08.23, opposition leader and ex-premier Imran Khan was sentenced to three years imprisonment for corruption and initially sent to a maximum security prison. He is also barred from political office for five years.

14 August 2023

National Assembly dissolved; formation of an interim government

On 09.08.23, President Arif Alvi dissolved the National Assembly as expected (cf. BN of 07.08.23). Senator Anwar ul-Haq Kakar of the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) is to become prime minister of the interim government until the new national elections, which are expected to take place in November 2023.

Ahmadiyya community reports attacks on community centres

In a press release dated 30.07.23, the Ahmadiyya Community reported attacks on several of its community centres in Pakistan. From January to July 2023, eleven incidents took place involving the destruction of minarets, arson attacks and gunfire.

Attacks in Balochistan

On 07.08.23, the vehicle of a regional politician was hit by a roadside bomb in Kech district of Balochistan province. The Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) member and six other occupants of the vehicle were killed. No one claimed responsibility for the attack. Besides radical Islamic groups, also armed Baloch separatists are active in the province. On 13.08.23, security forces killed two members of the separatist Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) after they had attacked vehicles of Chinese engineers in the southern port city of Gwadar; no one was injured.

Attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 07.08.23, the car of a couple was hit by the apparently unplanned premature explosion of a vehicle suspected to be loaded with explosives for a suicide attack, killing the car's occupants in the North Waziristan tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

21 August 2023

Escalation of violence against Christian minority in Punjab

On 16.08.23, one of the most serious attacks on the Christian minority occurred in Jaranwala in the Faisalabad district of Punjab province. Videos on social media showed hundreds of people armed with batons storming and setting fire to the Salvation Army Church and the Saint Paul Catholic Church. As the violence escalated, three more churches were destroyed. Videos posted on social media showed police officers standing amid a crowd of onlookers while the attackers vandalised the churches. Houses, shops and cemeteries belonging to the Christian community were also attacked. The violence was triggered by allegedly torn Koran pages with blasphemous content. The local police filed criminal charges of blasphemy against two Christians. A Punjab government spokesperson was critical, calling the incidents an orchestrated conspiracy to incite Muslim attackers. Security has been beefed up for churches, more than 100 people have been arrested and thousands of additional police and paramilitary troops have been deployed to contain the violence amid the political and economic crisis currently prevailing in Pakistan. According to media reports on 20.08.23, more than 80 buildings were destroyed and the two Christians denounced for blasphemy were arrested.

Attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 20.08.23, at least eleven workers were killed in the North Waziristan tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province when an explosive device placed under their truck detonated. They were on their way to an army post under construction. No one claimed responsibility for the attack.

28 August 2023

Fighting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 22.08.23, six Pakistani soldiers and four members of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in a firefight in the North Waziristan tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

04 September 2023

Suicide attack on military convoy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 28.08.23, at least nine soldiers were killed and five others injured in a suicide attack on a military convoy in Bannu district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. No one claimed responsibility for the attack directly afterwards.

11 September 2023

Security situation

According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), the number of security-related incidents in August 2023 was the highest in any one month since November 2014. PICSS documented 99 attacks nationwide, which could be verified by independent sources. Most of the attacks continued to occur in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, particularly in the tribal districts on the border with Afghanistan, as well as in Balochistan province. In the attacks verified by PICSS, 112 civilians and security forces were killed and 87 others injured. Security forces accounted for half of all fatalities and 63% of those injured. On the other hand, in August 2023, security forces killed at least 24 suspected militants and arrested 69 others in nationwide battles described as anti-terror operations by the government. PICSS had documented 54 attacks in July 2023.

Fighting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 06.09.23, the main Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Torkham was closed after an exchange of fire between Afghan Taliban and Pakistani forces, according to security sources. On 07.09.23, the Prime Minister of the interim government, Anwaarul Haq Kakar, informed that this was followed by raids to curb cross-border smuggling.

On 06.09.23, four Pakistani soldiers and twelve armed fighters of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in fighting near the Pakistan-Afghan border. According to the Pakistani military, the TTP members, equipped with state-of-the-art weapons, had attacked two military checkpoints in Chitral district. The attacks had been coordinated from the Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nuristan, the military said.

On 09.09.23, seven suspected militants were killed and six seriously wounded during an anti-terror operation in Chitral district, according to a military press release.

Six football players abducted in Balochistan

On 09.09.23, six football players went missing in Dera Bugti district of Balochistan province. They were on their way from Dera Bugti to Sibi when armed men stopped their vehicle and abducted them at gunpoint. According to information published by the Ministry of Interior on 10.09.23, the perpetrators were allegedly members of the Balochistan Republican Army.

18 September 2023

Political development

After the dissolution of the National Assembly of Pakistan on 09.08.23, it remains to be seen whether the caretaker government will accept the postponement of the elections proposed by the Election Commission of Pakistan or push for new elections within the deadline of 90 days after the dissolution of parliament.

Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party remains in prison on a charge of leaking state secrets. He was initially sentenced to three years in prison for corruption but the penalty was later suspended. Politically motivated protests by PTI supporters decreased significantly due to the crackdown on the PTI leadership. However, amidst the tense economic situation, protests are proliferating as electricity bills and petrol prices rise and inflation soars.

Afghan-Pakistan border crossing Torkham re-opened

On 15.09.23, the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Torkham, which had been temporarily closed after a fire, was reopened (cf. BN of 11.09.23). Previously the Pakistani Taliban had given security guarantees to the Pakistani government.

09 October 2023

Suicide attacks in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

At least 59 people died in an explosion close to a mosque in Mastung, Balochistan province on 29.09.23. A suicide attacker blew himself up in a crowd which had assembled for a procession to mark the birthday of the prophet Mohammed. Pakistan suspects the Indian secret service of being involved.

Later on the same day, at least five people were killed in another suicide attack near to a mosque in Hangu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. One of the attackers blew himself up at the entrance; the second attacker managed to gain entry and blow himself up inside the mosque. The number of victims was limited because the visitors began to take flight after the first explosion.

Two regional offshoots of IS, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), commonly target public ceremonies and civilians. ISPP has a strong presence in Mastung and has carried out a number of attacks there, for the most part targeting civilians, irrespective of their religions. While the Afghan Taliban has repressed ISKP activities in their own territory, a marked upward trend in ISKP and ISPP activities is to be observed in Pakistan.

According to information from the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS), more than 300 attacks have already occurred in 2023 to date in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Pakistani government claims that militant fighters are using Afghan territory as a safe retreat from which to launch attacks against Pakistan. Afghanistan's Taliban government has repeatedly denied such claims.

Deportation of refugees without documented residence status imminent?

In an announcement on 03.10.23, the Pakistani government called on all refugees without a documented residence status, including 1.73 million Afghan nationals, to leave the country by 01.11.23 or face deportation. A Taliban government spokesman described this step as unacceptable in a statement on 04.10.23. Pakistan's transitional government estimates the total number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan at 4.4 million.

30 October 2023

Deportation centres for refugees without documented residence status

According to information from the relevant authorities, deportation centres are to be set up for the purpose of implementing the planned removal of all migrants who do not hold a documented residence status, including 1.7 million refugees from Afghanistan. Three such centres are under construction in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces respectively. As of 01.11.23, refugees without a documented residence status in Pakistan are to be detained and taken to these centres for the purpose of deportation.

Hostilities in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

According to information released by the authorities on 14.10.23, six building workers have been shot dead and two injured in Turbat, Balochistan province. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

According to information from the military on 15.10.23, six suspected Islamist fighters were killed and eight injured in the course of an operation in Mir Ali in the tribal district of North Waziristan, which belongs to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. One soldier was killed. Weapons and munitions were seized.

06 November 2023

Obligation to leave the country enters into force for refugees without documented residence status

Up until 31.10.23, tens of thousands of Afghan refugees without documented residence status made their way on trucks and buses to the two main border crossing points to Afghanistan in order to return voluntarily and avoid forced deportation (cf. BN of 09.10. and 23.10.23).

According to information from the interior minister, 64 Afghan nationals without rights of residence in Pakistan were the first to be expelled from the country, on 01.11.23. On 02.11.23 more than 100 people were arrested in Karachi and 425 Afghans were arrested in Quetta. According to information from the government, on 03.11.23 further centres were set up to expedite the return of thousands of Afghan nationals without rights of residence. The number of facilities at the north-western border crossing point in Torkham, which the majority of people are using to leave Pakistan, has been increased three-fold. According to official figures, 19,744 people crossed the border here on 02.11.23. The total number of people crossing the border at Torkham between 17.09. and 02.11.23 stood at 147,949. More than 50,000 left the country via the Chaman border crossing in south-western Pakistan up to 02.11.23. On 05.11.23 the Pakistani government announced that a further 15,000 Afghan refugees had returned to their native country in the previous 24 hours.

The UN estimates the number of Afghans who had previously been living in Pakistan without a right of residence at two million, rather than 1.7 as previously assumed. At least 600,000 of these fled to Pakistan after the Taliban came to power in 2021. The Pakistani government's official figures put the total number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan at 4.4 million.

Attacks on security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Five people were killed and more than 20 injured in a bomb attack on security forces in the city of Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on 03.11.23. A police officer was killed when shots were fired at a police station in Dera Ismail Khan on 31.10.23. On the same day, two soldiers died in an explosion in the tribal district of South Waziristan.

Attack on air force base in Punjab repelled

On 04.11.23 armed fighters attacked an air force base in the central Pakistan district of Mianwali in Punjab province. By its own account, the military repelled the attack, killing nine of the attackers. The newly founded militant organisation Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

13 November 2023

Measures to expel Afghan refugees without documented residence status

The nationwide arrests and expulsions of Afghan nationals who are in the country without a right of residence is continuing. On 09.11.23 a minister of Balochistan province stated that the expulsions would be extended to also include Afghan refugees who are legally resident in the country as soon as the return of Afghans without a documented residence status was completed. No date for such a measure was announced. According to reports by relevant agencies, an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 Afghans have left Pakistan so far. The prime minister of the interim government, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, stated on 08.11.23 that the expulsion of Afghan refugees without documented residence status was a response to the Afghan Taliban's refusal to support Pakistan in its fight against Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistan holds the TTP responsible for the increase in attacks.

20 November 2023

Criticism of deportation of refugees without documented residence status

On 17.11.23 the UNHCR stated in social media that most of the returning Afghans would not be able to find work or accommodation and criticised Pakistan for carrying out the expulsion campaign shortly before winter. On 18.11.23 the Pakistani Joint Action Committee for Refugees organised a demonstration in Karachi against the deportation of refugees without documented residence status. The demonstrators carried banners warning of the even more severe hardship facing women and minorities after deportation to Afghanistan. According to reports in the media on 13.11.23, the Pakistani government has opened three additional border crossings in Balochistan province.

Military operation in North Waziristan

According to information from the military, four armed fighters, including one high-ranking target, were killed in a military operation on 18.11.23 in the Khaisoor area of the tribal district of North Waziristan, which belongs to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

04 December 2023

“Honour killing” in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

An 18 year-old woman was shot dead in the district of Kolai-Palas/Kohistan on 24.11.23. It is believed that her father was the perpetrator. The motive for the murder was provided by photographs of the victim with a woman and two men which had appeared in social media. It remains unclear whether the killing took place on the basis of a resolution by a traditional tribal council (jirga), which passes judgement according to sharia law and without reference to national legislation.

Women and girls continue to be killed in Pakistan every year, in most cases by relatives claiming that the family's honour is at stake. Despite strict laws and growing outrage among the enlightened Pakistani public, such “honour killings” continue to take place above all in the regions of the country where conservative traditions are upheld.

Attacks and hostilities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

According to information from the military, an Afghan national carried out a suicide attack on a convoy on 26.11.23, killing two civilians and injuring three civilians and three soldiers.

Unknown actors carried out an attack targeting security forces at a market in Bannu on 26.11.23, killing one civilian and injuring 21 people, including a dozen Pakistani soldiers.

On 23.11.23 unknown attackers killed an employee of the forestry authority in North Waziristan.

On 22.11.23 two soldiers were killed in a landmine explosion and one police officer was killed in an attack on a checkpoint. Three civilians were killed and four injured in a bomb explosion in South Waziristan on 22.11.23. No-one has claimed responsibility for these attacks. Prior to these attacks, two soldiers were killed in an armed attack in South Waziristan. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan has claimed responsibility for this attack. Eight allegedly armed fighters were killed in a subsequent military operation in South Waziristan on 27.11.23.

Three allegedly armed fighters and one soldier died in a military operation in North Waziristan on 21.11.23. Prior to this, four fighters, including a high-ranking target of the military, died in an operation on 18.11.23 (cf. BN of 20.11.23).

On 16.11.23 security forces killed eleven allegedly armed fighters in operations in Peshawar and Tank.

Bus comes under fire in Gilgit-Baltistan

On 02.12.23 unknown armed attackers fired at a bus carrying passengers in Gilgit-Baltistan. The bus was being accompanied by a military escort, due to recent tensions between Sunnis and Shiites in the region. Nine people were killed, including two soldiers. More than two dozen people were injured, including a Sunni cleric.

11 December 2023

Petition against expulsion of certain groups of people

A petition filed by human rights organisations with the aim of stopping the expulsion of Afghans born in Pakistan and particularly vulnerable groups of people is pending before Pakistan's supreme court. According to the IOM, since 01.10.23 more than 370,000 Afghan nationals have left Pakistan following the announcement by Pakistan's interim government that it intended to expel refugees without documented residence status under the “Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan”. Implementation of this plan, which first and foremost concerns Afghans, has been in progress since 01.11.23 and includes forced repatriation. According to information from the Taliban government in Afghanistan, more than 400,000 people have returned to their native country from Pakistan.

Founder of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement missing

Manzoor Pashteen, a critic of the military and founder of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement, which champions the rights of the Pashtunian population living at the border with Afghanistan, was arrested by the police on 04.12.23 while on his way from the border city of Chaman to the city of Turbat in Balochistan province after attending a demonstration for free border traffic with neighbouring Afghanistan. According to reports in the media, it is suspected that he was subsequently abducted by the Pakistani secret service.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Political leaders targeted by militant groups

A report by the ministry of the interior and tribal affairs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province reveals that political leaders, who are often entrepreneurs, are being threatened by militant groups and forced to pay protection money. The most seriously affected political figures are members of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazl), the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Awami National Party. According to the report, members of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, the party of former premier Imran Khan, who is currently being held in prison, are also affected. The perpetrators are Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and associated groups. The level of threat is particularly high in areas in the direct vicinity of the border with Afghanistan.

Bomb explosion near a school in Peshawar; security situation

At least seven people, including four children, were injured, some seriously, in a bomb explosion near a school in Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 05.12.23. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

According to data from the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), a total of 63 attacks by armed groups took place in November 2023, claiming at least 83 lives. PICSS data reveals that at least 599 such attacks occurred from January to the end of November 2023, killing around 900 people. The number of attacks has risen by 81 % in comparison to the corresponding period in 2022.

The number of security-related incidents has been on the rise since the TTP unilaterally declared the truce with the government to be over in November 2022. An intensification of violence by militant groups cannot be ruled out against the backdrop of the parliamentary elections which are provisionally scheduled for 08.02.24.

18 December 2023

Departure deadline extended for resettlement of Afghan nationals

On 13.12.23 the Pakistani authorities extended by two months the departure deadline for tens of thousands of Afghans who are to be resettled in a third country. Those concerned can now remain in Pakistan until 29.02.24. Around 20,000 Afghan nationals are seeking resettlement in the USA, for example. According to the latest information from the UNHCR, more than 450,000 people have returned to neighbouring Afghanistan since the intention to expel people without documented residence status was announced at the beginning of October 2023.

Two attacks on security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 12.12.23 a suicide commando which is believed to have comprised six people drove a truck loaded with explosives into a military base in Daraban in the district of Dera Ismail Khan, killing at least 23 soldiers. Tehreek-e Jihad Pakistan, a group with close links to the Pakistani Taliban, has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Another attack on a police station in the Tank district to the north-west of Dera Ismail Khan took place on 15.12.23. At least two members of the security forces and two attackers were killed; a third attacker blew himself up. Other reports in the media refer to five attackers. It has not been possible to verify the authenticity of a letter from a group by the name of Ansarul Jihad or Ansar-ul-Islam claiming responsibility for the attack which subsequently emerged.