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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation: attacks and fighting in Balkh province

On 11.03.23, a bomb went off at an award ceremony held for journalists at a Shia cultural centre in the city of Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh province), killing at least three persons and wounding another 10. The Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility for the attack. On 09.03.23, the Taliban governor was killed in a suicide attack carried out by the ISKP, also in Balkh province. Before his transfer, the governor had led the fight against the ISKP in its stronghold, Nangarhar province. A gunfire exchange also took place between unknown gunmen and the Taliban in Mazar-e Sharif on 07.03.2013. A total of eight people were killed, and two others were injured.

Protests on International Women's Day

On 07.03.23, the EU sanctioned the Taliban-appointed Minister of Higher Education and the Minister for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in response to the exclusion of women from higher education and from public life. On the same day, public protests by women against the Taliban were held in Kabul. Also on 08.03.23, protests for women's rights took place in several cities. In Firozkoh, capital of Ghor province, the protest was broken up by the Taliban, and at least one woman and her father were arrested.

Persecution events and government leadership

On 13.03.23, the Taliban Minister of Higher Education, Mohammad Nadim, while speaking at a graduation ceremony for Taliban judges in Kandahar city, declared that anyone who takes a stand against the Islamic Emirate (through words, texts or deeds) is a rebel and must be executed.

On 13.03.23, a young woman in Parwan province shot herself on her wedding day because she was being forced to marry against her will. On 10.03.23, a bride was shot dead by the Taliban at a checkpoint in Nangarhar province because she had been playing loud music in the car with the groom. In Taloqan, capital of Takhar province, nine people were arrested on 07.03.23 for failure to attend morning prayers at the mosque. Also in Ghazni province, several people were beaten by the Taliban on 07.03.23 for not attending a prayer service. Ten youths were beaten and arrested by the Taliban in a village in Helmand province on 06.03.23 for meeting up to play music. On the same day, five men and a girl were publicly flogged in Parwan province for allegedly committing offences such as "running away from home" and gambling. A bodyguard of the former government was arrested by the Taliban in Charikar, capital of Parwan province, on 06.03.2023.

Humanitarian situation: Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2023

By 2023, 28.3 million people (two-thirds of Afghanistan's population) will be in urgent need of humanitarian assistance in order to survive, according to HRP. The report has identified that 33 out of 34 provinces and 27 out of 34 major cities/provincial capitals are in extreme need. This means USD 4.6 billion in aid will be required in 2023.

Last year, only about 59% of the USD 4.4 billion needed was collected, and there are fears that this trend may continue.

Bangladesh

Escalation of violence against Ahmadiyya community

On 03.03.23, clashes broke out in Panchagarh between security forces and orthodox Muslims who disrupted a religious gathering (Jalsa Salana) organised by the Ahmadiyya Community. Two people died in the clashes, including one Ahmadi man.

On 04.03.23, false reports began circulating on social media about the two people killed, claiming that Ahmadis had killed two Muslims. In response, young men armed themselves with sticks and sharp weapons, blocked roads, carried out arson attacks and looted shops and houses belonging to the Ahmadiyya community. According to the police, the perpetrators were professional and had planned their attacks well. Thousands of charges for violent attacks, vandalism, looting and resistance against law enforcement officers were filed and 130 people were arrested.

On 05.03.23, the acting Secretary General of the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami movement in Bangladesh called on the government to officially declare Ahmadis "non-Muslims".

The international human rights organisation "Article 19" subsequently expressed concern, saying the recent attacks carried out against religious minorities are an expression of the growing religious intolerance in the country.

Belarus

Intensification of criminal prosecution; leading opposition figures handed prison sentences

President Alexander Lukashenko enacted amendments to the Criminal Code on 09.03.23 to combat "crimes of extremist (terrorist) and anti-state orientation". Accordingly, the death penalty can be imposed and executed against state and army employees if they are found guilty of high treason. In addition, discrediting the Belarusian armed forces now carries a prison sentence.

The opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who lives in exile, was sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison by a court in the capital Minsk on 06.03.23 for treason and conspiracy to take power unconstitutionally, among other charges. Four other leading opposition members were also handed lengthy prison sentences. Pavel Latushka, who is also living in exile, was sentenced to 18 years in prison in absentia; Maryya Maroz, Volha Kavalkova and Siarhei Dylevski were each sentenced to 12 years in prison. All five defendants were found guilty of, among other things, conspiracy to seize power and leading an extremist group.

Benin

Army repels attack on military base

In the early hours of 28.02.23, unidentified gunmen attacked the Gouandé military base in the north-western department of Atakora near the border with the neighbouring countries of Togo and Burkina Faso. According to media reports, the attack was repelled by military personnel. There has been no official statement from the authorities about casualties or ongoing operations by the army following the attack. Night-time traffic restrictions are in place in parts of northern Benin for security-related reasons (cf. BN of 20.02.23). In recent times, frequent acts of violence have been carried out against security forces and military installations in northern Benin, as well as in the north of neighbouring Togo (cf. BN of 02.05.22, 16.05.22, 01.08.22 and 28.11.22).

Burkina Faso

Civilians killed in spate of attacks

According to media reports, at least 12 civilians were killed in an attack carried out by suspected jihadists in the village of Aorema in the north of the country on 02.03.23.