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Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

20 April 2020

Afghanistan

Hostilities, attacks and civilian casualties

In the past two weeks there have been reports in the media of fighting in Balkh, Helmand, Maidan Wardak, Jowzjan, Zabul, Logar, Samangan, Kandahar, Ghor, Farah, Badghis, Ghazni, Badakhshan, Paktiya, Takhar and Uruzgan, as well as attacks in Kabul (double bomb attack on a police vehicle in the 11th district on 12.04.20), Kandahar, Parwan (Bagram Air Base) and Nangarhar.

It was reported on 08.04.20 that the Taliban had murdered eight abducted civilians in the district of Shogarah (Balkh province). No further details are known. Six civilian workers were shot dead by suspected Taliban in Parwan (Bagram airfield) on 16.04.20.

According to information released by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) on 14.04.20, at least 83 civilians have been killed, 35 taken hostage and 119 wounded since the agreement between the USA and the Taliban was signed on 29.02.20. The AIHRC claims that the Taliban are responsible for half of the civilian casualties, while the remainder have fallen victim to other groups, such as IS Khorasan Province (ISKP).

Exchange of prisoners begins

Following protracted negotiations, the Afghan government began its step-by-step release of Taliban prisoners on 08.04.20. Criteria for release are state of health, age and remaining prison term. Those released must undertake to refrain from participating in any further fighting. To date, the government has released 361 Taliban, while the Taliban have released 60 people (as per 17.04.20). The exchange of 5,000 imprisoned Taliban for 1,000 persons held by the Taliban is a pre-condition for peace talks between the Taliban and the government.

Kabul: Motorcycles and scooters banned

The use of motorcycles and scooters has been banned in the city of Kabul since 15.04.20. This measure is intended to curb the rampant spread of crime and targeted killings by attackers on two-wheeled vehicles. An exemption is to apply for delivery services, which are particularly in demand during the lockdown imposed to combat COVID-19. Recently, there have reportedly been numerous targeted killings of government staff by Taliban on motorcycles (e.g. the murder of two of the president's bodyguards on 03.04.20). Observers doubt whether the measure will prove effective, however. There have already been similar bans in cities such as Kandahar, Jalalabad or Ghazni.

COVID-19 pandemic

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported from 30 of the 34 provinces, and a further increase is to be expected. The largest numbers of cases by far have been reported in Herat. Herat is close to the border with Iran, from where many Afghans are returning from the neighbouring country. More than 70,000 people have returned since the beginning of April 2020, and the number is growing daily. The borders with Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are open only for the movement of goods and for returning Afghan nationals. The UNHCR has temporarily suspended its support for voluntary returnees from Iran and Pakistan.

Far-reaching restrictions have applied in Kabul since 08.04.20. These were stepped up on 12.04.20 and

extended for a further three weeks on 16.04.20. All travel between Kabul and other provinces is now prohibited. All residents of Kabul and the districts in Kabul province have been instructed to stay at home and to leave their homes only in medical emergencies and to buy necessary food. The police have been ordered to control the lockdown strictly. Exemptions apply for health sector workers, emergency services, media and other essential services. The interior ministry has announced that 1,600 police officers and 400 vehicles are to be deployed to monitor compliance with the lockdown measures. There are nevertheless reports of numerous people on the streets in some parts of the city. Cases of shop owners re-opening their premises after visits from the police have been reported, for example.

Similar restrictions to those in Kabul also apply in other cities, such as Herat, Kandahar or Jalalabad.

Algeria

Surge in arrests

The weekly protests on the streets of Algeria which had been staged since February 2019 have been halted since 20.03.20 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The leaders of the so-called 'Hirak' movement have called on people to demonstrate in digital form only, via the internet and social media, due to the risk of infection. The government is exploiting the situation by stepping up its action against opposition figures and activists belonging to the Hirak movement. Various activists and journalists have been arrested and sentenced to prison terms of several months. News sites critical of the government have been inaccessible since mid-April 2020.

Bolivia

COVID-19: Government orders release of prisoners

To prevent the large-scale spread of COVID-19 in prisons, the government has ordered numerous releases of prisoners and pardons on the basis of a presidential decree issued on 09.04.20. Prisoners aged 58 or over who have not been convicted of murder or raping minors are to benefit from the decree.

According to the official explanation, in the light of the corona pandemic it is necessary to reduce the number of inmates in prisons in order to prevent the virus from spreading. The prisons are overpopulated by as much as 300% and two thirds of inmates have been remanded in custody without a regular conviction.

Military deployed to police lockdown; electronic tagging of infected persons

In the city of Santa Cruz, the military has been policing the government-imposed lockdown since 14.04.20. Anyone who fails to comply with the restrictions faces up to three years in prison. To date, 10,000 people have reportedly been arrested and almost 6,000 vehicles seized. In La Paz, electronic tagging is to be introduced to monitor compliance with the lockdown measures by infected persons and people who are suspected of being infected.

Cameroon

Boko Haram: Attacks in northern Cameroon

On 11.04.20 a suicide attacker blew himself up in the village of Achigachia (Mayo Moskota subdivision, Far North region) when he encountered members of the local citizens' militia. The attacker and two civilians were killed in the attack. Prior to this, on 05.04.20 two boys detonated their suicide vests simultaneously in the village of Amchide (Mayo Sava division, Far North region). Ten civilians died in the explosion. Fourteen were injured, some seriously. It is assumed that the attackers in both instances were members of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram.

CDPM wins parliamentary by-elections in anglophone regions

On 07.04.20 the constitutional council announced that the ruling Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement party (CDPM) had won all of the remaining 13 seats in parliament in the parliamentary by-elections which took place in the two anglophone regions South-West and North-West on 20.03.20. This leaves the CDPM with 152 of the 180 seats in the national assembly.

Chad

Counter-terrorism operation

The Chadian army has reported that it has killed around 1,000 Boko Haram fighters and taken dozens alive in the course of a ten-day counter-terrorism operation. Army spokesperson Azem Bermendoa Agouna stated that 52 soldiers had also died in the fighting with the Islamist terrorist militia in the Lake Chad region. According to Agouna, the army offensive was carried out in retaliation for Boko Haram's killing of more than 90 soldiers in an attack on a military base in Boma on 23.03.2020. On 17.04.2020, Chad's chief public prosecutor, Youssouf Tom, announced that the dead bodies of 44 prisoners had been discovered at N'Djamena prison on 16.04.2020. According to Tom, the deceased belonged to the group of 58 jihadists who had been taken prisoner during the counter-terrorism operation. An autopsy allegedly revealed that the prisoners had taken poison. Tom stated that it was unclear how they had obtained the poison, adding that 14 Boko Haram fighters had survived.

Rocket accidentally fired

The online portal The Aviationist has reported that an Su-25 ground attack aircraft of the Chadian airforce unintentionally launched an airborne rocket at the N D'Jamena base on 17.04.2020. The incident was filmed by a surveillance camera. The rocket hit an empty tank truck, but missed a French transport plane. The rocket finally exploded when it hit the house of the deputy commander of the presidential guard, general Mahamata Salaha Brahima. According to the report, two children and two adults were killed and two people were injured as a result. The causes of the accident are currently being investigated.

China

Hong Kong: Representatives of the democracy movement arrested

On 18.04.20 the police arrested 15 leading members of the democracy movement. They are accused of having organised and participated in illegal gatherings during the protests in 2019. They were released on bail. Those arrested included the former members of parliament Albert Ho, Lee Cheuk Yan and Yeung Sum, the publisher Jimmy Lai and the lawyer Martin Lee.

The protests flared up in June 2019 in response to the Hong Kong government's attempt to introduce an amendment to the law which would enable the extradition of offenders to mainland China. While the contentious bill has since been withdrawn, other demands by the protest movement remain unresolved: release of those arrested to date, an end to the practice of referring to the protests as "riots", an independent investigation into police behaviour towards demonstrators and the introduction of democratic elections. The scale of the protests has declined sharply following the democracy movement's success in the district council elections of November 2019 and in the light of the spread of coronavirus. More than 7,000 people have been arrested since June 2019.

Colombia

Prisoners to be released and placed under house arrest

A government decree has been issued which enables prisoners at particular risk from coronavirus, such as over 60 year-olds, people who are ill, pregnant women and mothers with children aged under three, to be released from prison and placed under house arrest. According to information from justice minister Margarita Cabello which emerged on 15.04.20, 4,000 inmates of overcrowded prisons could benefit from this arrangement.

There has been rioting and attempted escapes at various prisons in recent weeks. At least 23 prisoners died and dozens were injured in a prison revolt in the capital, Bogotá, on 21.03.20, for example (cf. BN of 23.03.20). In the wake of these incidents, the department of prisons declared a state of emergency, which allows it to undertake exceptional measures.

The lockdown measures which president Iván Duque has imposed for the entire country have since been extended until 27.04.20. As things stand, schools and universities are to remain closed until the end of May 2020.

Côte d'Ivoire

Arrests for non-compliance with lockdown restrictions

Several hundred people have been taken into custody in the region of the commercial capital, Abidjan, for failing to comply with the isolation measures imposed to combat coronavirus. Most of them were arrested while trying to leave Abidjan. The National Security Council decided to isolate Abidjan as of 29.03.20 as part of its efforts to effectively combat the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent it from spreading throughout the country. There have also been reports of taxis, private cars, motorcycles and bicycles being confiscated.

Ethiopia

State of emergency declared

On 08.04.20 the government resolved to declare a nationwide state of emergency for five months in accordance with Article 93 of the constitution, in order to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Non-compliance is to be punishable with up to three years' imprisonment, although no further details have been announced to date. It thus remains unclear how the state of emergency will affect daily life.

The first COVID-19 case was reported in mid-March 2020. The government has since closed national borders and schools, released thousands of prisoners and banned large gatherings of people.

Relocation of refugees

Despite the corona crisis, the government is sticking to its decision to close the Hintsats refugee camp situated in the Tigray region in the north of the country by the end of April 2020 (cf. BN of 09.03.20). The residents are to be relocated to other camps. The UN's refugee organisation (UNHCR) has criticised the decision, arguing that relocating the more than 13,000 people living at the camp will make them more vulnerable to infection with coronavirus, in addition to which the other camps are unable to provide sufficient water, sanitary facilities or healthcare.

India

COVID-19 pandemic

The imposed lockdown has been extended until 03.05.20 (cf. BN of 30.03.20). The officially reported infection figures are not reliable. The most recently reported figures put the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases at over 17,000 and the number of infected people who have died at 550. The government comments on the situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in the country through a health ministry spokesperson. The spokesperson generally fails to answer questions which are put to him. Journalists are finding it difficult to access information. Critical media are coming under pressure. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya-Janata Party (BJP) is accused of spreading fake news and specifically intimidating opponents in the social media. Following imposition of the lockdown, the government called on the supreme court to rule that media should not be allowed to report on the corona crisis without obtaining prior clearance from the government. The court declined to interfere with the freedom of expression, but instructed the media to adhere as closely as possible to the government's guidelines when reporting.

Attacks on Muslims due to COVID-19

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, government representatives accused Muslims of having caused the spread of coronavirus. There were subsequently reports of violent attacks on Muslims. Hate messages aimed at Muslims circulated on the internet. Warnings against Muslims were also to be heard coming from loudspeakers at Sikh temples in the federal state of Punjab. The commotion was sparked by claims that the Muslim Tablighi Jamaat movement was responsible for having caused one third of the initially reported COVID-19 cases in the course of its missionary work. Supporters of the movement were placed in quarantine, the community centre in Delhi was closed and legal action was brought against a preacher for endangering public health. More than 20,000 people who had been in contact with members of the community were subsequently quarantined.

Iran

OHCHR and AI report on violence against prison inmates

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva has issued a statement deploring a case of mistreatment which led to the death of an Iranian prisoner. Iran Human Rights reported that a prisoner by the name of Zeinolabedini was placed in solitary confinement following a revolt by inmates in the prison of the city of Mahabad in the north-west of the country on 28.03.20. He allegedly suffered brutal mistreatment by security officers at the prison and died as a result of his injuries. According to an AI bulletin, thousands of prison inmates have recently staged revolts because they are afraid of becoming infected with coronavirus. Prison officers and security personnel have reportedly taken tough action to quell all the disturbances, including the use of firearms.

COVID-19 pandemic leads to closures of mosques and mausoleums

The country's mosques, including the large Jamkaran mosque in the holy city of Qom, have been closed due to the risk of infection with COVID-19, and Friday prayers have been called off. For the first time in the history of Iran, two of the most important Shiite mausoleums, in Mashhad (Imam Reza shrine: named after the eighth imam of the Twelve Imams) and in Qom (Fatimah al-Masumah shrine: named after the daughter of the seventh and sister of the eighth imam of the Twelve Imams, who died in 817). These mausoleums are visited by millions of pilgrims annually from Iran and abroad.

The shrine of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Teheran is also closed. These measures have all been taken with the express approval of the entire religious elite. Friday prayers - an important institution in the Islamic republic which also provides a weekly platform for propaganda and sometimes takes the form of large outside events - have also been cancelled.

The closure of the two mausoleums in particular has sparked protests from devout Muslims who believe that visiting these mausoleums can heal the worst of illnesses.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clothing rules

Many women in Teheran are currently wearing protective masks and plastic gloves but foregoing the obligatory headscarf. This is reasonably unproblematic for them, as the religious police no longer patrol the streets on account of the restrictions on contact.

COVID-19 pandemic: HRW calls for further easing of US sanctions

The US Treasury Department is permitting the export of basic medical equipment, medication and certain foods to Iran up to a maximum value of 500,000 US dollars. The corresponding bank transactions do not require any special approvals. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has issued a press statement criticising this as inadequate to meet actual needs. HRW is calling on the USA to further ease the sanctions and to extend the list of imports exempted from the embargo.

COVID-19 pandemic: 100,000 prisoners released

President Rohani has announced on Iranian television that the government plans to extend the special leave for 100,000 prisoners until 20.05.20 in order to curb the spread of coronavirus in prisons. He said the measure is to be implemented by the judicial authority. Avoiding any direct confirmation of Rohani's announcement, the judicial authority spokesperson referred to the application of "clemency". The judiciary intends to examine the possibility of pardoning prisoners who are on parole on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Iraq

New candidate for prime minister's office

On 09.04.20 the head of the secret service, Mustafa Kadhimi, was charged with the task of forming a government. Two candidates for the office of prime minister have failed in attempts to form a government since Adel Abd al-Mahdi resigned in November 2019. Their failures are attributed to a lack of unity among the leading parties and a lack of support for the candidates. In addition, the 2018 elections changed the existing political system, as two thirds of the ministers were newly elected to parliament. Kadhimi now has 30 days to negotiate with the political blocs and choose the members of his cabinet, which then has to be ratified by parliament.

Against the backdrop of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, falling oil prices and ongoing security incidents, the political parties appear to see a compromise in Kadhimi. The pro-Iranian Fateh bloc and Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) have nevertheless accused Kadhimi of being involved in the killing of the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and the Iraqi KH leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in January 2020 (cf. BN of 13.01.2020). Demonstrators who are critical of the government have reportedly rejected Kadhimi's candidacy. Protests against the government have been taking place in Iraq since October 2019, and have continued on a smaller scale despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Extension of COVID-19 measures

Iraq's central government is extending curfews and restrictions on free movement, provisionally until 23.04. or 24.04.20.

The Kurdish regional government has announced that government authorities will remain closed until 02.05.20. The restrictions on free movement are provisionally to remain in force until midnight on 23.04.20. Anyone wishing to travel between the Kurdish towns and provinces is required to apply to the Kurdish interior ministry for a permit. On 18.04.20 Erbil witnessed protests against the strict protective measures. The protesters included mechatronics engineers. In response, the crisis management team announced that work could resume in some industrial areas in Erbil as of 21.04.20, subject to certain time restrictions.

Commercial flights have been banned throughout Iraq since 17.03.20. The ban is expected to remain in force until 24.04.20.

Calls for a law against domestic violence

On 16.04.20 four UN organisations called for the adoption of a law against domestic violence. The call was triggered by reports of sexual abuse and self-harm, including suicides, due to domestic violence during the protective measures to combat COVID-19. The case of 20 year-old Malak al-Zubaidi has caused a stir in the social media. Al-Zubaidi was allegedly tortured by her husband, isolated by her family and finally set on fire. Other reports claim that she set fire to herself as a result of threats from her husband. She died of her injuries in hospital on 18.04.20.

A bill which was tabled in Iraq's central parliament in 2015 has yet to be adopted. While violence in the family is prohibited under the Iraqi constitution, other laws permit the "disciplining" of wives. A law against domestic violence has been in force in the autonomous region of Kurdistan since 2011.

Turkish air raids on Makhmour

On 15.04.20 the Turkish air force carried out air raids on suspected positions of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in the district of Makhmour (approx. 60 kilometres south-west of Erbil). Varying reports in the media state that between two and three female civilians from the Makhmour refugee camp were killed in the attacks. According to an anonymous security source, four Peshmerga suffered minor injuries, while Turkish sources claim that four PKK fighters were also injured.

Iraq's central government criticised Turkey for violating Iraq's sovereignty once again. Turkey routinely carries out operations on the ground and in the air against the PKK in the Kurdistan-Iraq region (KR-I), as well as in areas which are disputed between the KR-I and Iraq's central government, such as Shingal/Sinjar and Makhmour.

Kosovo

Pristina under quarantine

The authorities placed the capital, Pristina, under quarantine in the week beginning on 13.04.20, on account of the steep rise in COVID-19 infections. According to media reports, drivers without special permits have been turned away by the police at the city boundaries.

Six other cities had already been placed under quarantine prior to the capital. A night-time curfew from 5 p.m. to 6 a.m. is additionally in force nationwide. Private individuals are allowed to leave their homes at certain times during the day for a maximum of 90 minutes in order to attend to important tasks. Time windows are allocated according to the individual's ID card number.

Caretaker government remains in office

The prime minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, remains in office with his government in a caretaking role. Kurti was toppled by a vote of no confidence in parliament on 25.03.20 (cf. BN of 23.03.20). Foreign minister Glauk

Konjufca has stated on television that the government will remain in office until the COVID-19 pandemic has been overcome and new elections can be held. Like Kurti, Konjufca belongs to the Vetevendosje party (Self-Determination). Justice minister Albulena Haxhiu, who also belongs to the Vetevendosje party, has stated that the statutory 15-day deadline for appointing the head of government applies only for the purposes of forming governments after elections, but not for the current situation resulting from the vote of no confidence.

Lebanon

Protests

Despite the curfew which applies from 7 p.m., protest rallies attended by several hundred people took place on 17.04.20. The protest in Tripoli escalated when the police attempted to break up the demonstration on the basis of the imposed curfew. Demonstrators threw stones at the security forces, who responded with tear gas. The protests, which have been ongoing for six months, have been sparked above all by the country's desolate economic situation and widespread corruption. The IMF has forecast that the country's economy will shrink by twelve per cent this year, and it has been unable to service its debt instruments for the first time in its history. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures are further exacerbating the already tense situation. The rules which have been imposed have brought much of business life to a standstill, leading to serious economic difficulties for many households.

Libya

Fighting continues

According to media reports, recent weeks have witnessed recurrent fighting between the armed forces of the Government of National Unity (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA). The forces loyal to the government reportedly advanced as far as Tarhuna on 18.04.2020. Situated to the south of Tripoli, the town of Tarhuna is a strategically important support base for the LNA. Two coastal towns to the west of the capital, Sabrata and Sorman, were allegedly taken by the GNA in the previous week. In the past few days there has also been fighting in Tripoli between GNA and LNA forces, in the course of which at least four civilians have reportedly died in attacks on residential areas.

Nigeria

Attacks in the north

A police spokesperson reported on 19.04.20 that at least 47 people had been killed when armed groups launched a simultaneous attack on five villages in the federal state of Katsina. It is suspected that this was an act of revenge on the villagers, who had made a stand against the demands of criminal groups.

Killings in connection with enforcement of lockdown

The state National Human Rights Commission reported on 15.04.20 that it had received and documented 105 complaints concerning human rights violations allegedly perpetrated by the security forces in 24 federal states and Abuja in enforcing the regulations imposed by the government to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. These complaints reportedly include eight incidents involving the extra-legal killings of 18 people. On 29.03.20 president Buhari imposed a 14-day lockdown beginning on 31.03.20 for the capital, Abuja, the largest city, Lagos, and the federal state of Ogun, which borders on Lagos. On 12.04.20 the measures were extended by two weeks. The governments of several federal states have also imposed curfews. As per 18.04.20, there were 541 confirmed cases of COVID-19 infections and the death toll stood at 19.

Chadian army seizes Boko Haram arms cache

On 04.04.20 the Chadian army seized a particularly large arms cache of the Boko Haram Islamist terrorist organisation in the course of a military operation which was conducted against the organisation for several hours in the Goje-Chadian area of the Sambisa forest in Nigeria (federal state of Borno). The rambling Sambisa forest is a stronghold of Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Pakistan

COVID-19 pandemic

The lockdown which was imposed in the country following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was eased on 15.04.20 and restrictions have been lifted for certain areas of the economy. Restrictions on public life remain in place, however. Schools and universities are to remain closed until the end of April 2020. National and international flights have been suspended, initially until 21.04.20. Public events also continue to be prohibited. Islamic scholars have announced that they aim to stage events to mark the beginning of the Ramadan fasting month (24.04.20 - 24.05.20). The government is pressing for such events to be avoided and is endeavouring to reach an agreement with the scholars, however. Isolated Friday prayers attended by hundreds of people took place throughout the country on 17.04.20. The officially reported infection figures are not reliable. The most recently reported figures put the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases at over 8,000 and the number of infected people who have died at 170.

Russian Federation

AI 2019 annual report

In its annual report for 2019, published on 16.04.20, Amnesty International (AI) details a further deterioration of the human rights situation in the country. Restrictive law-making and application of the law, obstructions to the assertion of human rights and violation of the same by state institutions and actors are seen as contributing to this course of development. The report notes that the freedom of opinion, freedom of association and freedom of assembly in particular have suffered increasing curtailment, both at the legislative level and in administrative practice. Torture and other maltreatment are allegedly common practice, with the perpetrators almost always going unpunished. Jehovah's Witnesses continue to be prosecuted, following the banning of the religious community's Russian organisation in 2017. The report also highlights the fact that violence against women continues to be widespread.

Riot and fire at maximum-security prison

On 09.04.20 rioting broke out among more than 1,000 inmates at a maximum-security prison in the city of Angarsk, administrative district of Irkutsk, followed by a fire. No reliable information is available regarding casualties. It was reported in the media on 11.04.20 that official representatives had stated that the situation at the prison was back under control. Human rights groups have claimed that the rioting was triggered by a prison officer's mistreatment of an inmate, while according to the official version the disturbance was sparked by an inmate attacking a prison officer. The regional prison service accused inmates of having started the fire.

Russian Federation/Belarus

Extradition of a Jehovah's Witness declined

The Belarusian authorities have declined to extradite the Jehovah's Witness Nikolai Makhlichev to the Russian Federation, where he is accused of extremism. The Russian national was arrested in Belarus at the request of Russia on 21.02.20. According to information from the community of Russian Jehovah's Witnesses, the man was freed on 07.04.20, following the official rejection of a Russian extradition request. In 2017 the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation was classified as extremist and banned in the Russian Federation.

Somalia

Air raids

The US African command (AFRICOM) flew air raids on Al-Shabaab in the Middle Juba region on 06.04., 09.04. and 10.04.20. Media close to Al-Shabaab have reported that the person killed on 10.04.20 was a civilian. This is denied by AFRICOM, however. AFRICOM stated that the bodies of murdered soldiers of the Somali National Army (SNA) had been paraded in a village to intimidate the local population directly before the air

raid.

Attacks

On 14.04.20 a landmine targeting SNA soldiers exploded in Mogadishu, injuring four civilians. No-one has officially claimed responsibility for the attack. It is known that Al-Shabaab regularly carries out attacks on SNA soldiers, however.

On 10.04.20 Al-Shabaab killed an official outside a mosque in Galkayo (Mudug region).

Four civilians were killed and two injured in another landmine explosion in the town of Awdheegle (Lower Shabelle region) on 09.04.20. No-one has claimed responsibility for this attack, either.

The IS-affiliated group in Somalia claims to have killed two police officers and injured one officer near the Bakara market in Mogadishu on 07.04.20.

Syria

North-east: First confirmed case of COVID-19 in the SDF territories

The Kurdish-dominated administration of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) confirmed the first case of death from COVID-19 on 17.04.20. Doctors had taken a sample from the patient on 27.03.20 and sent the test kit to Damascus, where all samples are examined for the virus at a centralised laboratory in cooperation with the WHO. The result was obtained after a few days, but was neither communicated to the administration in the north-east nor entered in the central government's official statistics. The patient died from the effects of the virus on 02.04.20, two weeks before the local administration learned that he had contracted COVID-19.

Tajikistan

Journalist sentenced to one year in penal colony

A court has sentenced the journalist Daler Sharifov to one year in a penal colony. After writing an article about politics in Tajikistan and religious topics, the journalist was arrested on 28.01.20 and charged with inciting ethnic, religious and racist hatred and spreading propaganda on behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood. Organisations defending human rights and the freedom of the press rejected the accusations as unfounded. The Muslim Brotherhood has been banned in the country as an extremist organisation since 2006.

Tunisia

Curfew extended

As part of the preventive measures to combat the spread of COVID-19, the curfew from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. has been extended throughout the country until 03.05.20.

On 18.04.20 the health ministry announced that the total number of cases had risen to 866 and that 37 people had died. Tunisia has carried out 15,332 laboratory tests for coronavirus since 22.03.20.

The breakout of the pandemic is having a particularly severe impact on the tourism sector, which accounts for almost 10 % of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and is an important source of foreign currency. According to an official letter to the IMF, the tourism sector could lose 1.4 billion dollars and 400,000 jobs this year.

Turkey

Prisoner releases

On 15.04.20 Turkey began releasing prisoners in response to the corona crisis. A corresponding law enabling the release of up to 90,000 prisoners had been passed by the parliament in Ankara on the previous day. The law excludes people imprisoned on terrorism charges, including critics of the government and journalists, and

prisoners serving sentences for premeditated murder, violence against women, sex crimes or drug offences (cf. BN of 06.04.20). The opposition party CHP intends to have the remissions reviewed by the constitutional court, as no political prisoners are to be released.

COVID-19 pandemic

Turkey's cities, including Ankara and Istanbul, have been largely closed off from the outside world for two weeks now. Residents require a permit to travel to other towns and cities. On 18.04.20 the government extended the travel restrictions for 31 cities and provinces by two weeks. The transport of indispensable goods is exempted. A two-day lockdown additionally applied once again in the 31 cities and provinces at the weekend.

Up to the beginning of March 2020, Turkey only registered a few hundred cases of corona. The number of infections has since soared to over 82,000 cases. The death toll now stands at over 2,000.

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, Turkey's religious authorities are of the view that believers should fast during Ramadan.

On 12.04.20 president Erdoğan rejected interior minister Süleyman Soylu's resignation. Soylu's ministry had come in for strong criticism for announcing a 48-hour lockdown at short notice on 10.04.20. The lockdown was announced only two hours before it was scheduled to enter into force, leading to panic buying, crowding and chaotic conditions in shops.

Uganda

WFP cuts food aid for refugees

The World Food Programme (WFP) is cutting its food aid for 1.4 million refugees originating for the most part from South Sudan, DR Congo and Burundi by 30 %, owing to a lack of funds. Further cuts may prove necessary. Activists are of the view that government measures to curb the COVID-19 pandemic could make it more difficult for people to pursue work to help them sustain a livelihood or to obtain food. Public and private car and bus transport have been prohibited due to COVID-19. A night-time curfew applies. Business activities which are not related to food are prohibited until 05.05.20. The borders have been closed and international air transport has been suspended for the most part. The admission of refugees has been suspended.

Ukraine

Exchange of prisoners

An exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and the separatists from Eastern Ukraine has been carried out for the first time this year. The exchanges on 16.04.2020 took place first of all in the Donetsk region and the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government, and shortly afterward in the Luhansk region. Nine Ukrainians returned home from the separatist-held Donetsk region, while the separatists released ten Ukrainians in return. The Ukrainian government confirmed that it would be releasing 19 Ukrainian nationals in all. It was initially unclear how many Ukrainians will be released by the separatists. In the last exchange of prisoners in December 2019 the two sides exchanged almost 200 prisoners. The ground for the current exchanges was prepared at the Ukraine summit in Paris at the beginning of 2019.

Russian spy uncovered

In Kiev, the Ukrainian secret service, SBU, has uncovered Valery Shaytanov, a major general belonging to the Alpha elite troop, as a spy working for the Russian secret service, FSB. Shaytanov has allegedly been working for the FSB since 2014.

Yemen

Possible ceasefire

Martin Griffiths, the UN special envoy for Yemen, announced on 16.04.20 that he expected the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels to agree a ceasefire "in the immediate future". Following the UN's call for

a global ceasefire in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Saudi Arabia declared that it was supporting the Yemeni government and would be ceasing hostilities for two weeks as of 09.04.20. Fighting between the two parties to the war has continued throughout the country despite Saudi Arabia's announcement, however.

Attack on prison in Taizz

The Yemeni government has announced that Houthi rebels bombarded the central prison in Taizz on 05.04.20. Six women were killed and dozens injured, including children who were at the prison with their mothers. Fighting between the government and Houthi rebels in Taizz was reported on 07.04.20.

Journalists sentenced to death

A Houthi court in Sanaa sentenced four journalists to death on 11.04.20. They were accused of spying for the Saudi-led coalition. Six journalists received prison sentences on similar charges, including "Spreading of fake news and rumours". Amnesty International has claimed that the charges were trumped up and that the prisoners were tortured.

Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
BN-Redaktion@bamf.bund.de