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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

09 October 2023

Afghanistan

Earthquake and humanitarian situation

According to information from the Taliban, at least 2,400 died as a result of an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.3 on the Richter scale and several aftershocks on 07.10.23. The epicentre was situated 35 km to the north-west of the city of Herat. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported 1,023 dead and many more injured. A number of villages were completely destroyed.

Many people reportedly have no reserves for the winter, making the humanitarian situation even more precarious. In addition, more than 100,000 Afghans have been deported from Iran since July 2023. The Afghan embassy in Pakistan reported on 03.10.23 that 1,000 Afghans had been arrested in Pakistan in the previous two weeks, although many of these were registered as refugees in Pakistan. Pakistan's interior minister, Sarfraz Bugti, announced on 03.10.23 that more than one million Afghan refugees would be deported from Pakistan in November 2023 if they had failed to leave the country by then. He accused the refugees of supporting terrorism and smuggling drugs. Iran has also announced further deportations.

A rise in the number of COVID cases in Kabul was reported on 28.09.23. Eight people allegedly died of COVID in the space of one week at the Afghan Japan Hospital.

Security situation

Six children died in explosions of old munitions and land mines in the two northern provinces of Faryab and Jowzjan between 25.09. and 02.10.23. In all, 640 children were killed in such explosions between January 2022 and June 2023.

An exchange of fire between the Taliban and Pakistani border soldiers occurred at the Spin Boldak/Chaman border crossing point on 04.10.23. An elderly man and a 12 year-old boy were reportedly killed.

According to information from the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) and the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), attacks on Taliban bases in Parwan and Kabul provinces took place on 27.09., 28.09. and 05.10.23. In response, the Taliban arrested 20 local residents near Kabul on 05.10.23.

Persecution

According to investigations by the Etilaat Roz newspaper, which is published by journalists in exile, 61 people were killed and 129 arrested in August and September 2023. Many of those concerned were former members of the security forces, but in the majority of cases the precise circumstances are unclear. Arrests of former members of the security forces were also reported on 03.10. and 06.10.23.

On 27.09.23 the Taliban closed down the Nasim radio station in Daykundi province. The station's director and two journalists were arrested. On the same day, the Taliban arrested Julia Parsi, a women's rights activist and founder of a library for women, together with her child in Kabul. Conflicts between Pashtunian nomads and the local population were reported from Bamyan province on 26.09., 03.10. and 04.10.23. The Taliban reportedly broke up the clashes by use of force.

Algeria

Arrests following criticism of the government

According to a press report on 04.10.23, three high-ranking members of the banned Islamic Salvation Front party (Front Islamique du Salut – FIS) were arrested after voicing criticism of the government. They criticised the government for a political stalemate and restrictions of liberties which were giving rise to growing poverty and hopelessness.

A New Zealand activist with Algerian roots was reportedly also arrested for making critical remarks about human rights violations.

Armenia / Azerbaijan

Armenian population flees Nagorno-Karabakh

In the wake of Azerbaijan's military offensive, 100,514 Armenians have officially left their native Nagorno-Karabakh, representing virtually the entire population of the region. It appears that the estimated total of 120,000 people living in Nagorno-Karabakh was too high, as many Armenians had already fled to the Republic of Armenia during the six-week war in the autumn of 2020 and not all of these had since returned. Three years later, Azerbaijan launched a major military offensive in the region on 19.09.23. The pro-Armenian fighters located there announced their capitulation just one day later (cf. BN of 25.09.23). On 21.09.23 it was announced that the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, whose population was made up almost entirely of Armenians, would be dissolved on 01.01.24. Under international law, Nagorno-Karabakh forms part of Azerbaijan.

Tense situation in Armenia

Most of the Armenians who fled Nagorno-Karabakh in the mass exodus arrived in the Armenian border town of Goris. The refugees generally also hold Armenian nationality or can now apply for it at short notice without any problems. It has been reported that many refugees intend to attempt to find accommodation in the capital, Yerevan, first of all. Armenia with its population of around three million is in a serious internal and external political crisis, which is being exacerbated by the refugees and the fraught economic situation. UN Secretary-General Guterres has since announced the establishment of a UN mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, although observers note that this has come too late and can no longer make any difference to the expulsion of the Armenian population in contravention of international law. Armenia is urgently in need of support from the international community. Experts are of the view that the more than five million euros pledged by the EU and the 11.5 million euros promised by the USA are not sufficient. There are also serious concerns in Armenia that Azerbaijan could question Armenia's territorial integrity as its next objective, with the aim of establishing a land route or corridor through the south of Armenia to the Azerbaijan exclave of Nakhchivan.

Arrests after Azerbaijan establishes control of Nagorno-Karabakh

After establishing full control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region in the course of the military operation which began on 19.09.23, it has been reported in the media that the Azerbaijan government is now taking action against representatives of the former authorities in the "Republic of Artsakh" (see above), which is not internationally recognised and which is to be dissolved on 01.01.24. On 27.09.23, Ruben Vardanyan was arrested while attempting to leave the country for Armenia and is believed to have been taken to Baku. From November 2022 until February 2023, Vardanyan was "state minister", i.e. prime minister of the "Republic of Artsakh". His dismissal in February 2023 is thought to have taken place in response to coercion from the Azerbaijan government, which used its ability to block the Lachin corridor – the sole remaining supply route for the areas of Nagorno-Karabakh which were still under Armenian control (cf. BN of 16.01.23) – as a means of exerting pressure.

According to further reports, Arayik Harutyunyan – the former president, who stepped down on 31.08.23 – was arrested in Stepanakert/Khankendi on 03.10.23, along with his predecessors in office, Arkadi Ghukasyan (1997–2007) and Bako Sahakyan (2007–2020), as well as the former speaker of parliament, Davit Ishkhanyan. They were reportedly also taken to Baku. Prior to these arrests, it has also been reported that the former deputy defence minister, Davit Manukyan, the former defence minister, Levon Mnatsakanyan, and the former foreign minister, David Babayan, were arrested. The arrested individuals have allegedly been accused of terrorism, financing

terrorism, establishing armed groups and groups for which no provisions are made in the law. On 05.10.23, charges were brought against Harutyunyan at least, who is also under suspicion of pursuing a war of aggression and deploying mercenaries.

Meanwhile, other leading representatives of the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities have been allowed to leave the region for Armenia via the official checkpoint, including the current state minister, Artur Harutyunyan. The Azerbaijan government is reported to have stated its intention to grant fighters from Nagorno-Karabakh amnesty as a general rule, but to arrest those who have committed war crimes. Further reports citing Armenian media state that after 19.09.23 the Azerbaijan authorities drew up a list of representatives of the “Republic of Artsakh” whose extradition they are demanding.

Burkina Faso

News channel “Jeune Afrique” banned

On 25.09.23 the military government banned all media of the news broadcaster Jeune Afrique, claiming that the Burkina Faso army had been discredited in two articles. The published articles allegedly reported tensions and dissatisfaction within the armed forces. Observers see the ban as a further attack on freedom of the press in Burkina Faso. The government has stated that it will continue to clamp down on media representatives who go against the interests of the state. Jeune Afrique is a French-language pan-African medium based in France, comprising a news website and a monthly printed edition.

The military government has attacked foreign and Burkinan media in various instances in recent months. At the end of March 2023 it placed a ban on French broadcaster France 24. This decision was reportedly prompted by the broadcast of an interview with the leader of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) at the beginning of March 2023. In so doing, the broadcaster was accused of acting as a “communications agency” for the terrorist group. On 01.04. and 02.04.23 the government expelled the correspondents of the French daily newspapers Libération and Le Monde respectively from the country. This measure was justified by accusations of spying, infiltration and payment of large sums of money for false testimonies by witnesses (cf. BN of 03.04.23).

Coup attempt thwarted

On 27.09.23 the military government announced on state television that the secret service and security services had foiled an attempted coup on 26.09.23. Four officers and other individuals suspected of being responsible for the attempted coup are believed to have been arrested. According to reports in the media, after rumours of a coup began to circulate thousands of supporters of the head of the military government, Ibrahim Traoré, took to the streets in Ouagadougou on 26.09.23 to demonstrate their allegiance. Traoré was appointed as president of the country on 05.10.22 (cf. BN of 10.10.22).

Cameroon

Anglophone North-West region Separatists kill civilians

It has been reported in the media that armed separatists abducted two men from their home in the anglophone North-West region on 04.10.23 and publicly executed them. They accused the two men of spying for the Cameroon government. The video showing the killings which have been circulated in social media was allegedly recorded at the market square in Guzang, a village in the North-West region. AI is calling on the Cameroon authorities to carry out a non-partisan inquiry in order to identify those responsible and bring them to justice.

Colombia

Ceasefire agreed with breakaway guerilla faction

In connection with the commencement of peace talks with a dissident group of the former FARC guerilla organisation, the government has agreed a ceasefire with the group concerned. It has been reported in the media that initial talks between negotiators representing the government and the major FARC dissident group Estado Mayor Central (EMC) took place in the municipality of Tibú, close to the Venezuelan border, on 08.10.23. According

to a joint declaration by delegates from both sides, offensive action is to cease as of 09.10.23 and an official ceasefire decree is to be enacted on 16.10.23. The negotiations are being overseen by the UN, the Organization of American States, the Catholic church, the EU, Norway, Switzerland, Ireland and Venezuela. The Estado Mayor Central (EMC) broke away from FARC following the peace agreement between Colombia and FARC in 2016. The EMC is accused of involvement in drug trafficking, illegal mining and protection rackets. Observers of the situation in Colombia note that while the security situation has improved since the peace agreement concluded with FARC in 2016, a number of regions in the country nevertheless remain at least partly under the control of illegal groups. The government is currently involved in peace talks with the guerilla organisation Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (cf. BN of 07.08.23). President Gustavo Petro has also invited other armed groups to engage in talks.

DR Congo

Death sentence in trial following anti-UN demonstration

According to reports in the media, on 02.10.23 the military tribunal at the trial in Goma passed guilty verdicts on the six accused members of the Congolese military guilty. The principal defendant, a colonel and former commander of the republican guard in Goma, was sentenced to death for murder, wilful destruction and inciting soldiers to carry out acts in breach of their duties. He is alleged to have given the order to open fire on the demonstrators. Three other defendants received ten-year prison terms. Two members of the military were acquitted of their charges.

Although the death penalty continues to be handed down in Congo, it has not been executed for 20 years. Death sentences are systematically commuted into life imprisonment.

The defendants had been on trial since 05.09.23, after having been arrested in connection with the killing of a number of civilians at a demonstration in the city of Goma (cf. BN of 11.09.23). The military used force to break up the demonstration against the UN peace mission on 30.08.23, killing 57 civilians according to the most recent official information (cf. BN of 04.09.23).

Egypt

Date for presidential elections brought forward, el-Sisi to run again

Following the announcement by the authorities that the forthcoming presidential elections are to take place on 10.12. to 12.12.23 rather than the originally planned date in the spring of 2024, the incumbent president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, announced on 02.10.23 that he intends to run for a third term in office. According to official information, el-Sisi won the previous presidential elections in 2014 and 2018 with more than 90 % of the vote. International observers claim that these elections were neither free nor fair, however, pointing out that 2018 in particular witnessed intimidation and arrests of other candidates by the security services. While further individuals can apply to run in the forthcoming elections up until 14.10.23, the authorities have reportedly already attempted to prevent opposition candidates, such as Ahmed al-Tantawi, from contesting the elections by subjecting them to intimidation and arresting their supporters.

Protest against current government at rally staged to support el-Sisi's candidature

On 02.10.23, a rally in the town of Mersa Matruh on the north coast of Egypt in support of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's intention to run for the presidency once again reportedly turned into a demonstration against the current government and the prevailing poor living conditions. The demonstrators burned posters of el-Sisi and called for the government to be brought down. In the wake of the protests, numerous people are said to have been arrested by the security services on 03.10.23.

Gabon

After the military coup: National assembly and senate appointed

Almost six weeks after the military coup in Gabon on 30.08.23 (cf. BN of 04.09.23), military ruler Brice Oligui Nguema has appointed a new national assembly and a new senate. According to reports in the media, the names

of the 98 members of the national assembly and the 70 senators were read out on state television on the evening of 07.10.23. The national assembly is thus comprised of members of the opposition and the governing party of deposed president Ali Bongo, while the senate is made up of persons from civil society, such as trade unions and other organisations. Raymond Ndong Sima, a critic of Bongo, was appointed as prime minister back in September 2023. By his own account, Nguema, who was commander of Gabon's presidential guard prior to the coup and has since been the de facto ruler in Gabon, is keen to introduce greater democracy in the oil-rich country in the long term. Gabon was ruled autocratically by Bongo and his father before him for over 50 years. Directly before the coup, Bongo had been elected for a third term in office, according to the official results (cf. BN of 04.09.23). Critics are of the view that decades of corruption and kleptocracy are the reason why a large share of the population is living in poverty.

India

Independent online medium raided

On 03.10.23 the authorities carried out raids on the premises of the independent and anti-government online medium "NewsClick" and arrested its editor-in-chief and a further member of staff because the media company had allegedly received funding from China. The government has recently tightened its financial and counter-terrorism legislation and applied it to persons critical of the government, under the pretext of combating terrorism and money laundering. In addition to independent media, it is also no rare occurrence for non-profit organisations to be hindered in their work.

Iran

16 year-old girl in hospital after suspected dispute with morality police

According to reports in the media, a 16 year-old girl was admitted to hospital on 01.10.23 following an as yet unexplained incident in Tehran's subway. Nothing is known about her state of health at present. Officially published video recordings show a number of people pulling an inert person out of a subway car. A Norway-based Kurdish human rights organisation has reported in this connection that an Iranian Kurdish woman was injured in a confrontation with members of the morality police at Tehran's Shohada subway station, probably as a result of blows to the head, and is now in a coma. The young woman is allegedly now being treated in hospital under strict security conditions. It has also been reported that the girl's mother has been arrested. The information on these incidents cannot be independently verified. International human rights organisations' accounts of events are denied in Iranian state media. According to information from the authorities, the girl injured her head when she lost her balance as a result of circulatory problems. However, eye witnesses have allegedly reported that the girl was beaten in connection with Islamic clothing regulations.

Reports of attacks on demonstrators in Sistan and Baluchestan province

It has been reported in the media that demonstrations occurred once again in a number of towns and cities in Sistan and Baluchestan province following Friday prayers on 29.09.23. Pictures on social networks showed demonstrators setting fires alight on the streets in the city of Zahedan. According to one news medium which reports on events in the province, security forces opened fire and deployed tear gas against demonstrators. A number of people were reportedly arrested. The incidents cannot be confirmed by any further reports. The local public prosecutor has apparently stated that a normal atmosphere prevailed and no shots were fired.

Demonstrations after Friday prayers have been a regular occurrence in Zahedan and other towns and cities in the province since October 2022, following brutality against demonstrators by the law enforcement forces on 30.09.22 which left large numbers of demonstrators dead or injured (so-called Bloody Friday) (cf. BN of 10.10.22).

Iraq

Kurdistan Region: Plans to close refugee camps for internally displaced people

On 25.10.23 a spokesman of the Iraqi migration ministry announced that the Iraqi government was elaborating a plan together with the UN with the aim of closing the refugee camp for internally displaced Iraqis in the Kurdistan Region (KRI). The plans provide for a return of those concerned to their native regions. There are currently 15 refugee camps in the KRI, accommodating around 650,000 people, including a large number of Yazidis who fled IS from 2014 onwards. Large areas of their native region of Sinjar were destroyed by IS and have yet to be fully rebuilt, in addition to which the security situation in the region is volatile.

Conflict between PKK and Türkiye

In the wake of a suicide attack on the Turkish interior ministry in Ankara on 01.10.23, Türkiye carried out air raids on PKK positions in northern Iraq. According to information from the Turkish side, around 20 PKK targets were destroyed, including depots and hideouts.

On 07.10.23 three people were injured in a drone attack on Makhmour refugee camp. Türkiye is suspected of being behind the attack. Türkiye has yet to comment on the incident, but has already attacked the camp on repeated occasions in the past. Many of the camp's residents are Turkish Kurds, among whom the PKK is believed to recruit members on a substantial scale.

Lebanon

Hostilities at border between Lebanon and Israel

By its own account, Hezbollah fired a number of guided missiles and artillery munitions at Israeli positions in the Shebaa Farms territory on 08.10.23. Israel responded with artillery fire into southern Lebanon, injuring a number of people according to the Lebanese army. The Shebaa Farms territory is an uninhabited strip of land to which both Lebanon and Israel lay claim and which has been occupied by Israel since 1967. The most recent cross-border exchange of fire between Israel and Hezbollah occurred at the end of September 2023 (cf. BN of 25.09.23). According to Hezbollah, the latest attacks are linked to the fighting between Hamas and Israel.

Liberia

UN Human Rights Office concerned at violence ahead of elections

According to reports in the media on 04.10.23, the UN Human Rights Office is concerned at news of violent clashes between supporters of the opposition Unity Party (UP) and the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) in the north-west region of Lofa ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections on 10.10.23. At least two people are said to have been killed and around 20 injured. Violence has reportedly also broken out in the districts of Nimba, Montserrado and Grand Cape Mount. The UN Human Rights Office is also concerned at the use of hateful language and at numerous attacks on media representatives by various political actors in connection with the forthcoming elections. The UN Human Rights Office states that the government must ensure that media representatives can go about their work freely and safely and that all political actors refrain from any incitement to violence. Under the auspices of the UN and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in April 2023 all rival parties in Liberia signed up to an obligation to refrain from violence in the run-up to the elections and to take recourse to the judiciary where necessary.

Libya

Arrests in the wake of protests after flooding in Derna; local officials arrested

After hundreds of protesters demonstrated against the local authorities in the city of Derna in eastern Libya on 18.09.23 (cf. BN of 25.09.23), the security services reportedly arrested some 20 people, blocked telecommunications and the internet and expelled numerous media representatives from the city.

On 25.09. and 28.09.23 the public prosecutor's office announced that twelve officials had been arrested on charges including failure of leadership and negligence in connection with the management of water resources and reservoirs. Meanwhile, the local authorities have announced the establishment of a reconstruction fund for the region, which has been particularly severely affected by the floods. More than 43,000 people have had to leave their homes in Derna and other towns and cities in eastern Libya, such as Susa, Bayda and Al Makhaila. According to UNICEF, more than 16,000 children are among the refugees. In addition, large parts of the local infrastructure have been severely damaged or destroyed. As access to clean drinking water is highly restricted in many places, international organisations are warning of the risk of diseases such as hepatitis A, typhus and cholera spreading.

Maldives

Results of the presidential election

In the run-off for the presidency on 30.09.23, the opposition candidate and mayor of the capital, Malé, Mohamed Muizzu (People's National Congress) took 54 % of the vote, defeating incumbent president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (Maldivian Democratic Party). Muizzu's reportedly owes his abrupt rise first and foremost to the fact that the last but one president, Abdulla Yameen, (Progressive Party of Maldives) is currently serving an eleven-year prison sentence for money laundering and was thus not entitled to run for office. Muizzu is known as an ally of Yameen who espoused Chinese loans during his presidency. In the election campaign, the opposition criticised the previous government for its closeness to India and an alleged Indian military presence in the Maldives. In addition, Solih failed to clamp down on corruption as robustly as had been promised.

Mauritius

Decriminalisation of same-sex relationships

The supreme court of Mauritius has strengthened the rights of LGBTIQ people in the country by annulling a law dating from the colonial era which made homosexual intercourse a punishable offence.

Niger

Soldiers killed in a number of attacks

On 02.10.23 the most severe attack on the Nigerien military since the coup at the end of July 2023 occurred to the north-west of Tabatol (Tahoua region). At least 29 soldiers were killed and others injured in the attack. According to information from the defence ministry, more than 100 terrorists were involved in the attack and the weapons they used included improvised explosive devices (IEDs). No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack to date. The military junta imposed a three-day period of national mourning on 03.10.23.

On 29.09.23 armed jihadists reportedly attacked a military unit in the town of Kandadji in the south-west of Niger (Tillabéri region), killing seven soldiers and injuring at least seven others. More than a hundred fighters were allegedly killed in a counter-offensive.

Relations with France

Relations with France have been deteriorating ever since the coup at the end of July 2023. The military junta ended cooperation with France in the areas of defence and security back in August 2023. On 25.09.23 French president Emmanuel Macron announced that the almost 1,500 French soldiers would be withdrawn from Niger by the end of 2023. Around 400 soldiers who are stationed in Ouallam at the border with Mali will leave Niger in October 2023. The French ambassador also left the country in September 2023.

Nigeria

Zamfara State: Kidnapped female students freed

According to the university authorities, on 25.09.23 security forces freed a total of around 16 female students who had been abducted from student hostels of the Federal University Gusau (FUG) in the north-west of Zamfara State by armed actors on 22.09.23 (cf. BN of 25.09.23). Members of the army, the air force and the police led an operation to rescue the remaining kidnap victims. This was the first mass abduction of female students since president Bola Ahmed Tinubu entered office in May 2023. Numerous armed civil defence militias have been established in Zamfara State with the aim of taking action against the armed actors. Kidnappings to extort ransom money are no rare occurrence in the north of Nigeria (cf. BN of 17.07.23, 31.07.23, 07.08.23 and 28.08.23). According to reports in the media, armed men abducted five female students from a university in the north-western state of Katsina a few days later, on 04.10.23. One suspect has been taken into custody.

Zamfara State: Killings and abductions

On 24.09.23 armed men killed around 14 people and injured at least 60 in two municipalities in the north-western state of Zamfara. According to a report in the media, the armed actors are presumed to be members of an Islamist group. Violent actors referred to as terrorists attacked a number of vehicles on a road leading from Magami to Gusau in Zamfara State on 07.10.23, killing ten people. According to a report in the media, several persons were abducted and vehicles were set on fire. Members of the local civil defence militia are said to be among the dead.

Edo State: Human trafficker sentenced to twelve years in prison

A court in Benin City, capital of Edo State in the south-east of Nigeria, sentenced human trafficker Felicia Osaigbovo, alias Mama Masha, to twelve years in prison on 03.10.23. According to reports in the media, the 62 year-old must also pay a fine of NGN 24 million (approx. EUR 30,000 as per 09.10.23). At the end of the trial, which began at the end of July 2021, the court considered it proven that the convicted woman was guilty of recruiting twelve young Nigerian girls and transferring them abroad for the purpose of sexual exploitation as a member of a human trafficking syndicate in 2015. The director-general of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) said she was pleased at the verdict and stressed NAPTIP's role in the proceedings. She thanked various parties involved, including the Belgian police authorities, the British National Crime Agency, which was involved as part of the Joint Border Task Force initiative and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), for their efforts to achieve justice for victims of human trafficking. She added that the conviction demonstrated the determination of NAPTIP and other institutions to resolutely combat human trafficking. Announcements by NAPTIP regularly state the number of victims of human trafficking freed in rescue operations and the number of people convicted of human trafficking (cf. BN of 04.10.21, 25.04.22, 25.07.22 and 07.08.23).

Imo State: IPOB members killed during clearance of separatist camps

It has been reported in the media that troops of the Joint Task Force South-East cleared four camps of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) - an independence movement which has been banned since 2017 - and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), in an operation with the code name UDO KA II which was carried out in Okigwe Local Government Area (LGA) on 01.10.23. Two suspected IPOB members were reportedly killed and four injured in the operation. A spokesman for the Joint Task Force stated that numerous explosive devices were found on the routes to the separatists' camps. He said that items seized when clearing the camps included cash, cement, four motorbikes, one e-bike and solar collectors. He added that it was assumed that atrocities had occurred in the camps. It is not rare for such announcements of successful operations to be propagated (cf. BN of 31.07.23 and 21.08.23).

Pakistan

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.

Palestinian territories / Israel

Israel declares war after Hamas attack / Course of developments

The Israeli government formally declared the country to be at war on 08.10.23. A national state of emergency had already been declared on 07.10.23. Fighting continues between the Israeli military and Hamas fighters in towns in the south of Israel. The Israeli military has been carrying out strikes in the Gaza Strip since 07.10.23 in retaliation for the attacks by Hamas. According to information from the military, more than 800 targets in the Gaza Strip have been hit to date, in addition to which a large part of the city of Beit Hanoun in the north-east has been almost completely destroyed. The bombardment of the Gaza Strip has since intensified, with civilian locations also being hit and civilians killed. The UN has reported that by the evening of 08.10.23 159 dwellings in the Gaza Strip had been destroyed by Israeli air raids and 1,210 seriously damaged. The number of displaced people in the Gaza Strip had risen by tens of thousands, to 123,000. UNRWA has reported that a school accommodating more than 225 people was directly hit. More than 1,100 people have been killed and several thousand injured to date in the Palestinian territories and Israel.

The Israeli military stated that it had restored the majority of the border with the Gaza Strip to Israeli control, killed hundreds of fighters and captured dozens. An Israeli military spokesman further stated that Israel had positioned 100,000 reservists in the vicinity of the Gaza Strip.

Hamas carried out a coordinated major attack on Israel on 07.10.23. In the attack, Hamas fighters fired thousands of rockets at Israel and advanced on Israel by land, sea and air. Fighters deliberately killed civilians and captured people in towns, along motorways and at a techno music festival. By its own account, the Zaka rescue service recovered some 260 bodies at the festival site. According to Hamas, more than 130 people were captured during the attack and taken to the Gaza Strip with the aim of exchanging them for thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israel. Members of the military, civilians and children are among the prisoners. The Israeli military estimates that 1,000 Hamas fighters advanced into Israeli territory. Hamas referred to the suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation and the blockade of the Gaza Strip in justification for their attack. According to information from rescue services, at least 700 people have been killed in Israel, including 44 soldiers. The health ministry in Gaza stated that 413 had been killed in the Gaza Strip, including 78 children and 41 women. Around 2,000 people have been injured on both sides.

Senegal

President Sall dismisses government and appoints Amadou Ba

Senegal's president Macky Sall dismissed his government on 06.10.23, only a few months ahead of the presidential elections, which are planned for 25.02.24. According to an announcement by the presidential office, only prime minister Amadou Ba remains and has been appointed head of the new government. Ba is also Sall's designated successor as the governing coalition's presidential candidate. The composition of the government is to be announced in due course. No reasons have been stated for Sall's decision. One report in the media suggests that it is a strategy designed to improve Ba's prospects of victory in the presidential elections. President Macky Sall announced on 03.06.23 that he would not be running for a contentious third term in office in the presidential elections (cf. BN of 10.07.23).

Supreme court dismisses legal action by Sonko

According to reports in the media, the two-month campaign to acquire sponsors ahead of the presidential elections in February began on 27.09.23. The candidates' aim is to secure the support of at least 0.6 per cent of the electorate or to obtain sufficient sponsors among elected representatives. On 29.09.23 the supporters of opposition politician Ousmane Sonko were denied the opportunity to collect forms from the electoral authority for the purpose of securing sponsors for their Sonko as their candidate. Ousmane Sonko's lawyers brought an action against this decision before the supreme court in Senegal, but their petition was rejected. The right to submit a request to participate in an election is enshrined as a fundamental right in the Senegalese constitution. Sonko's lawyers claim that denying the opportunity to collect donations from citizens constitutes a breach of this right, as it is not possible to run as a candidate without sponsors. The supreme court recognised this fundamental right, but granted the interior ministry the right to refrain from issuing the sponsorship form to Ousmane Sonko due to the fact that he had been removed from the electoral lists (cf. BN of 21.08.23). Although Sonko was denied access to the forms for sponsors, five of his close staff were able to collect forms for securing sponsors in their names on 29.09.23.

Serbia / Kosovo

Attack on police officers in North Kosovo: Suspected ringleader charged

After publicly assuming sole responsibility for the attack on police officers by an armed group in Banjska, northern Kosovo on 24.09.23 (cf. BN of 25.09.23), Kosovo-Serbian politician and businessman Milan Radoičić was arrested in Serbia on 03.10.23. The public prosecutor's office in Belgrade has charged him with unlawfully producing, possessing, carrying and dealing in firearms and explosives and committing serious criminal offences against general security. Radoičić was conditionally released from custody on 04.10.23. He was required to surrender his passport, is not permitted to leave Serbia accuses and must report to the police on a regular basis. The Kosovar authorities have arrested three other suspects who are accused of involvement in the attack. The government in Priština sees the Serbian president, Aleksandar Vučić, as the actual person responsible for the attack, although Vučić denies this.

Somalia

Civilian casualties in a number of bomb attacks

According to official information, at least six people, including civilians, were killed and more than 15 injured in a car bomb attack on a busy meat market in Buloburde on 28.09.23. The attacker was shot at by members of the security forces before detonating the explosives near to a police checkpoint.

Several hours earlier, an attempted car bomb attack was thwarted in Dhuusamarreeb (Galguduud region). Several members of the security forces were injured and two attackers were killed.

At least seven people, including civilians, were killed and a number of people were injured in a suicide attack at a tea shop near to the presidential palace in Mogadishu on 29.09.23. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the three attacks.

Sri Lanka

Judge flees the country after receiving threats

It has been reported in local media that the Tamil district judge of the northern district of Mullaithivu, T. Saravanarajah, resigned from his posts and fled abroad on 23.09.23. He had previously received threats which are presumed to be linked to verdicts which caused resentment among leading nationalist Sinhalese monks and MPs. In recent months, Saravanarajah had passed judgement in several high-profile cases, including court rulings relating to the halting of construction of a Buddhist temple at a contentious archaeological site in Kurunthumalai (district of Mullaithivu) at which a shrine of the Hindu minority is also located.

Sudan

Fighting continues

It was reported in the media on 04.10.23 that a bomb attack on a residential area in the capital, Khartoum, had killed ten people and injured eleven. According to information from the local resistance committee, residential buildings, a mosque and a medical centre were hit. The attack is being attributed to the paramilitary militia Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

According to further reports, on 04.10.23 the Sudanese army (SAF) prevented a large-scale attack by the RSF on the headquarters of the 16th infantry division in Nyala, South Darfur. The RSF has been attempting to capture this strategically important city for some time, in order to bring the South Darfur region under its control. According to information from the SAF, the RSF mustered fighters from Central, West and North Darfur for this attack. During the attack, the SAF flew repeated air raids against RSF positions in various districts of Nyala.

Humanitarian situation

Citing an article from the end of September 2023 in the Conflict and Health journal, reports in the media describe the further worsening situation in Sudan's health system. It emerges that only a third of the hospitals in the conflict regions are operational. The health system is being increasingly paralysed as a result of the fighting, forced militarisation, continual power failures and the shortage of medical supplies and personnel. The situation is being exacerbated by an exodus of medical personnel. This is disrupting key health services, such as midwifery, emergency services or dialysis.

According to reports in the media, the fighting is leading to a noticeable deterioration in the situation for women. On 02.10.23, an employee of the accident and emergency department at a healthcare facility for women was reportedly shot dead by members of the RSF when soldiers looted the victim's family home and raped other female persons. On 28.09.23 a female employee in the accident and emergency department of a hospital in the region of the capital was reportedly raped by members of the RSF as she was attempting to attend to people with injuries. In Gezira State, a female doctor was reportedly abused by members of the RSF while on her way home from work. According to the reports, female volunteers wishing to provide humanitarian aid are being systematically suppressed and controlled in regions under SAF control. In Blue Nile, an initiative to increase awareness among women has reportedly been banned for breaching the law on voluntary work. In Gedaref State, a woman has reportedly been arrested for attempting to organise an educational seminar on the cholera epidemic in the affected regions. The reports point out that these assaults and abuses contravene both international humanitarian law and UN Security Council resolution no. 1296, which obliges all parties to ensure the protection and safety of humanitarian aid workers.

Sudan / South Sudan

Humanitarian situation

According to information from the WFP, 90 % of the families fleeing from Sudan to South Sudan are affected by moderate or severe food insecurity. WFP data from the border region shows that 20 % of the children living there are under five years of age and more than a quarter of the pregnant and breast-feeding women living there are malnourished. The Country Director for South Sudan has stated that the WFP is not even able to provide life-saving

measures for those most urgently in need of such support. For the border region alone, the WFP lacks funding to the amount of more than US\$ 120 million in order to provide on-site support in the coming months. According to the Country Director, an additional US\$ 536 million will be required to provide support over the next six months for the people who have fled into the country's interior.

Syria

Homs: Many killed and injured in drone attack on military academy

Many people, including children, civilians and military personnel, were killed in a drone attack on a well attended graduation ceremony at a military academy in the city of Homs on 05.10.23. It has been reported that at least 89 people were killed and 277 injured. While no party to the ongoing conflict has claimed responsibility for the attack, the Syrian military has attributed it to attackers "supported by known international troops".

North-west Syria: Many killed and injured in attacks on a number of villages and towns

In the wake of the drone attack in Homs on 05.10.23 (see above), government troops shelled villages and towns controlled by the Islamist Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham organisation in Idlib Governorate in north-west Syria for several days. The Syria Civil Defence organisation, which is also known as the White Helmets, reports that at least ten civilians were injured in Al-Nayrab and Sarmin. At least three people were reportedly killed and 15 injured in the town of Daret Azeh. Seven civilians were killed and ten injured in Idlib Governorate on 07.10.23 alone.

The White Helmets further report that a few hours prior to the drone attack in Homs five civilians were killed and nine injured in shelling by government troops in the village of Kafr Noran in the west of Aleppo Governorate.

North-east Syria: Clashes between SDF and Arab militias

There are reports in the media of renewed fighting in the town of Diban between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Arab militiamen (cf. BN of 11.09.23). The SDF have imposed a curfew on numerous towns and villages in Deir ez-Zor Governorate, including Diban. According to the SDF, the armed Arab troops advanced into the town from the government-controlled areas under the cover of artillery fire. A number of SDF members are reported to have been killed in the clashes.

North Syria: Many injured and killed in Turkish drone attacks

According to information from local authorities, six members of the security forces and five civilians were killed on 05.10.23 in Turkish drone attacks on oil production plants, transformer substations and a dam in Al-Hasakah Governorate. According to the Turkish defence ministry, 30 targets were bombarded on the following day in the areas around Tell Rifaat, Jazira and Derik, destroying caves, bunkers, hideouts and storage facilities. The ministry alleges that the positions had been used by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). The Turkish government described them as legitimate targets, because the PKK had killed many people in an attack in Ankara a few days previously. The SDF, whose alliance includes YPG, denied any involvement in the attack. A total of 15 people are said to have been killed in the night-time attacks on 05.10. and 06.10.23. According to the Kurdish-led authorities, this death toll included eight civilians. Many people were injured.

On 07.10.23 the Turkish defence ministry further announced that a total of 58 Kurdish militiamen had been killed in night-time attacks in Syria. Six other Kurdish targets were also bombarded during the night of 07.10.23, in the course of which a number of militiamen were also killed. No specific number of fatalities was stated.

Türkiye

Court of cassation upholds verdict in case concerning the Gezi Park protests

On 28.09.23 the court of cassation of Türkiye (Yargıtay) upheld the sentences for Sman Kavala and four other defendants in the case concerning the Gezi Park protests. The sentences for three other defendants were revoked. Osmal Kavala was sentenced to life imprisonment. Four other defendants were sentenced to 18-year prison terms for "supporting an attempted overthrow of the government".

Kavala has been in custody for more than five years and denies the charges brought against him and 15 other individuals in connection with the Gezi Park protests. Kavala was acquitted of all charges in February 2020, only for

a court of appeal to subsequently revoke the acquittals. Kavala was additionally charged with being involved in the attempted coup in 2016 and was remanded in custody on spying charges in 2017.

Suicide attack in Ankara

At least one person was killed and two injured in a bomb attack outside the Turkish interior ministry building in Ankara on 01.10.23. According to the interior ministry, prior to the attack two suspected PKK members killed an uninvolved man in the city of Kayseri and stole his vehicle.

At the scene of the crime in Ankara, investigators found four different types of guns, three hand grenades, a rocket launcher and C4 explosives.

The PKK has since issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack. The suicide attack took place only a few hours before the Turkish parliament was due to reopen after its three-month summer recess.

Tunisia

Further opposition figures arrested

It has been reported in the media that Abir Moussi, leader of the socialist Free Destourian Party (Parti Destourien Libre - PDL), which is one of the largest opposition parties, was arrested on 03.10.23 and only released after 48 hours. According to the official explanation, the arrest took place in order to prevent Moussi from pursuing his alleged aim of causing chaos. More than 20 leading political figures have been detained at least temporarily since the spring after voicing criticism of Tunisian president Kaïs Saïed.

Uganda

Opposition figures arrested

Opposition figure Robert Kyagulanyi (alias Bobi Wine, National Unity Platform) was arrested by members of the security forces when returning to Uganda from a visit abroad on 05.10.23. He was subsequently taken to his home and placed under house arrest. Prior to this incident, a planned march by Kyagulanyi's supporters was reportedly prevented by the police and 40 of his supporters were arrested. The police denies any house arrest, stating that Kyagulanyi was merely accompanied to his place of residence. At least 14 media representatives who reported on the opposition leader's return to the country were briefly taken into custody and a number of these journalists were insulted by members of the security forces.

Ukraine

Civilian war victims

Recurrent Russian shelling of riverside areas on the right bank of the Dnieper in the Kherson region has led to various reports of injured and killed civilians. Three people died in an attack on the regional capital of the same name in the night of 28.09.23. According to information from the governor of the Zaporizhzhia region, five people were injured in two Russian rocket attacks on the village of Matviivka on 30.09.23.

On 05.10.23 a Russian rocket attack hit a wake in the village of Hrosa (Kharkiv oblast, around 30 km west of Kupiansk). According to Ukrainian reports, 52 people died in the attack. Ukrainian reports also claim that a Russian rocket attack on a residential building in the city of Kharkiv on 06.10.23 killed two people and injured more than 20.

The regional governor appointed by the Russian occupying forces has reported that a car exploded in Nova Kakhovka (occupied part of Kherson oblast) on 07.10.23, killing an official of the local branch of Russia's ruling United Russia party. According to a report in the media, no-one has claimed responsibility for the explosion as yet. After a rocket attack took place on 08.10.23 on Kostiantynivka (Donetsk oblast), which is situated close to the front, injuring four people and damaging 29 residential buildings, the incumbent governor called on the remaining population to evacuate the city.

According to the Ukrainian air force's press spokesman, Russia is expected to launch a large number of attacks on the energy infrastructure using Iranian drones in the coming winter, on a scale far greater than was witnessed last winter.

Further course of the war

The Russian Federation has repeatedly carried out massive attacks on the infrastructure for storing and exporting grain. The relevant facilities in the Odessa region were a particular focus of such attacks, though by no means the sole targets. Again and again, the attacks led to civilian casualties.

According to information from Ukraine and the British ministry of defence, some mercenaries of the Russian Wagner Group have returned from Belarus to the Donetsk region and are presumably being deployed again around the embattled city of Bakhmut. The Wagner Group withdrew from Ukraine prior to the failed revolt (cf. BN of 26.06.23) and was subsequently admitted into Belarus (cf. BN of 05.06.23, 26.06.23 and 03.07.23). There are reports of indications that the Russian government has taken over control of the Wagner Group.

Fighting is said to be continuing around the village of Klishchiivka, south of Bakhmut, which was reported to have been recaptured on 17.09.23 (cf. BN of 18.09.23). Klishchiivka is important for the control of a railway line leading to Bakhmut.

Territories occupied and annexed by Russia

According to reports in the media, the Russian Federation observed the anniversary of the annexation of the (occupied parts of) the Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions as "Reunification Day" on 29./30.09.23. The deputy head of the Russian security council, Dmitry Medvedev, noted in this connection that there would be further new regions in Russia, without mentioning Ukraine explicitly. According to a report in the media, the autumn conscription campaign, which is set to begin on 01.10.23, will for the first time also include the young men in the occupied territories. Another report in the media states that these conscripts are not to be deployed in Ukraine, without specifying whether this rules out deployment in the annexed territories themselves.

Vietnam

Prison term for a further environmental activist

On 28.09.23 an environmental activist and director of a non-profit organisation was once again sentenced to three years in prison and a fine equivalent to around EUR 3,900 for tax evasion. Human rights organisations are criticising the verdict as politically motivated and the court hearing, which lasted only three hours, as a show trial.

Since 2021, four other leading environmental activists have been arrested, charged with similar offences and sentenced to prison terms of up to five years. In addition, a director of an independent think-tank on energy policy was arrested in mid-September 2023.

Yemen

Houthi: Restrictions on freedom of movement for NGO personnel

On 30.09.23 the director of Mwatana, a Yemeni NGO based in Sanaa, was detained and questioned together with four of his staff at Sanaa airport before being forbidden from leaving the country for Amman, Jordan. No explanation was provided by the Houthi authorities. Mwatana is accusing the Houthi government of arbitrarily restricting the freedom of movement.

Airline suspends Sanaa-Amman service

The state airline, Yemenia/Yemen Airways, announced on 01.10.23 that it was discontinuing the service between Sanaa and Amman, Jordan. The airline stated that it was taking this action because the Houthi authorities were withholding around US\$ 80 million. The Sanaa-Amman service was the only direct air link abroad from the Houthi-controlled territories. It was introduced in 2022 as part of the ceasefire agreement, most recently operating several commercial flights a week to Amman.

