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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Taliban government affairs

On 24.10.21 the Taliban government reportedly announced a job scheme for unemployed people, who are to receive wheat by way of remuneration. 40,000 men are allegedly taking part in the scheme in Kabul alone. According to a report on 23.10.21, former government politicians (incl. Atta Mohammed Noor, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Abdul Rashid Dostum) have established a “High Council of National Resistance of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan” under the leadership of Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf. They have threatened to take up arms, if the Taliban fails to integrate them into the new government structure. On 21.10.21 the Taliban’s ministry of agriculture announced its intention to re-introduce the Islamic zakat tax to finance its operations. On 19.10.21 the Taliban government approved polio vaccinations in the country for the first time. Women are also to be allowed to work in these campaigns. On the same day the Taliban stationed the special military unit “Mansouri” in Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province in order to clamp down on criminal gangs there.

Violence against civilians / hostilities with ISKP

On 23.10.21 Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) claimed responsibility for blowing up an electricity pylon to the north of Kabul. This reportedly left the capital temporarily without power. On 22.10.21 Human Rights Watch reported that the Taliban is forcing Hazaras and supporters of the former regime out of their homes and subsequently allocating these to their own members in various provinces of the country. The Taliban denied this a day later. On 21.10.21 it was reported that the population in Kabul is complaining about an increase in attacks and looting by robbers claiming to be Taliban. On 20.10.21 it was reported that the Taliban captured 250 ISKP fighters last month. These consisted for the most part of escaped prisoners. On 18.10.21 robbers pretending to be Taliban were apprehended by the Taliban in Kabul. Despite the general amnesty, it was reported on 18.10.21 that the Taliban were demanding financial compensation, winter clothes and food from supporters of the former regime in a number of areas of Ghor province. On 20.10.21 two civilians were injured by a hand grenade in Kabul. On 18.10.21 it was reported that crime is on the increase nationwide. Approximately 300 people have allegedly been admitted to hospital in Herat with bullet or knife wounds (95 % of whom were men) in the past 40 days. The public display of people executed by the Taliban in the region has reportedly failed to act as a deterrent.

Media representatives, creative artists, teachers, sportswomen

On 25.10.21 it was reported that Taliban had beaten up two journalists in Torkham, Nangarhar province, and destroyed their equipment. On 18.10.21, journalists in the country had complained about an inadequate flow of information from the Taliban, stating that the individual ministries did not yet have any press officers. On 21.10.21 musicians in Kabul expressed concern about their future, as they had been without any income for two months. The Taliban have banned them from practising their profession for the time being, stating that further information would be forthcoming. Teachers in the city of Herat staged a demonstration on 20.10.21 because they had not received any pay for four months and their families were starving in some instances. 18,000 teachers, including

10,000 women, are reportedly affected. They are allegedly having to sell items of furniture from their homes at flea markets to get by. The Taliban announced that one month's pay would be transferred. On 21.10.21 a number of journalists were reportedly beaten by the Taliban and prevented from reporting at a demonstration by women for "Work, bread and education" in Kabul. On the same day, 57 sportswomen from the Afghan football and basketball league were flown out to Qatar because they can no longer practice their sport under the Taliban. On 22.10.21 it was reported that female journalists in Balkh province were giving up their work and many were attempting to leave the country. The Sarhad radio station in Ghor province stopped broadcasting on 17.10.21.

Humanitarian and economic situation

On 22.10.21 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) set up a trust fund to prevent economic collapse in Afghanistan. Germany is reportedly making EUR 50 million available for this purpose. It was reported on 19.10.21 that the deteriorating economic situation was causing the prices of commodities to rise and the value of the afghani in relation to the dollar to drop. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) fears that the country's gross domestic product (GDP) could drop by some 30 % in the near future. It was reported on the same day that the health system is deteriorating rapidly in the western provinces. At the regional hospital in Herat, only approx. 30 % of the required medication and medical equipment are available. On 20.10.21 it was reported that five children had died of malnutrition, cold or lack of medical care at camps for internally displaced people in the past week. On 19.10.21 Kazakhstan sent relief supplies comprising 4,000 tonnes of flour for the starving population in Balkh province. On 15.10.21 it was reported that 100 companies had been closed in Herat province as a result of the economic crisis. Business have reportedly been making substantially losses and many people are unemployed. It was reported on 22.10.21 that 80 % of the population in Farah province is living in poverty and suffering from hunger. The situation is set to deteriorate still further as winter approaches. On 22.10.21 Pakistan pledged humanitarian aid for Afghanistan to the sum of approx. US\$ 28 million.

Bangladesh

Attacks on Hindu minority: Protests against violence

According to media reports, several hundred people staged a peaceful demonstration in the capital, Dhaka, on 18.10.21 against the recent religiously motivated violence and attacks on Hindu homes and religious sites (cf. BN of 18.10.21). Some 8,000 people reportedly took part in a demonstration for harmony between the religious groups which was organised by by governing Awarmi League party (AL) in Dhaka on 19.10.21. The violent attacks and clashes with the security forces in the days prior to the demonstration reported claimed at least six lives and led to the destruction of at least 20 houses belonging to Hindus as well as a number of temples and religious sites. According to information from the police, 450 people had been arrested and 71 charged with offences up to 20.10.21. It has been reported that the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) organised sit-down strikes, rallies, demonstrations and hunger strikes in various regions of the country on 23.10.21. Its demands included a call for investigations into the violence to be pursued apace, on both a legal and political level. The well-known human rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) publishes annual reports on human rights violations in the country. Some 2,679 attacks on the Hindu community reportedly occurred between January 2013 and September 2021, including vandalism and setting fire to houses and shops, attacks on Hindu temples, statues and places of worship. Eleven members of the Hindu community are reported to have been killed in the stated period and more than 860 injured.

Hindus make up around 10 % of the population in Bangladesh. While the principle of secularism is emphasized in the constitution, Islam is accorded the role of the country's official religion.

Bangladesh / Myanmar

Fatal attacks at refugee camp

According to various sources, at least seven people were killed and many injured in an attack on a madrasa (religious school) in Balukhali refugee camp in Bangladesh on 22.10.21. The circumstances of the incident remain unclear. Tensions have been rising in the refugee camps since the chairman of the Myanmar Arakan Rohingya Society for

Peace and Human Rights (ARSPH), Mohib Ullah, was murdered at the end of September 2021 (cf. BN of 04.10.21). Various armed groups are reportedly active in the camps, including the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). The UNHCR called on the Bangladeshi government to improve security at the refugee camps, pointing out that around 80 % of the Rohingya who have fled to Bangladesh are women and children.

Burkina Faso

Military: Fighters killed

The military reported on 18.10.21 that around 20 fighters had been killed in Yagha (Sahel region) and two fighters had been killed in the vicinity of Mangodara (Cascades region) in operations between 13.10. and 15.10.21, without specifying the groups to which the fighters belonged.

Cabo Verde

Opposition politician wins presidential elections

Former prime minister José Maria Neves of the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV) won the presidential elections on 17.10.21, taking 51.7 % of the vote. He beat the candidate of the governing Movement for Democracy party (MpD), Carlos Veiga, who claimed around 42 % of the vote and subsequently recognised his defeat. In all, seven candidates ran for the presidency. The incumbent president, Jorge Carlos Fonseca of the MpD, was prohibited by the constitution from running again after his second five-year tenure. The West African island state is considered a model of democracy. It is a parliamentary republic. The new president faces the task of leading the country out of a severe recession resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, together with prime minister Ulisses Correia e Silva (MpD), who will hold executive power.

Central African Republic

President declares unilateral ceasefire

President Faustin-Archange Touadéra declared a ceasefire on 15.10.21 which was to apply nationwide from midnight for the army and its allies. He added that all but two armed groups had also declared ceasefires for their part. He said the aim of the measure was to strengthen the “dialogue républicain” (Republican Dialogue; cf. BN of 11.10.21).

According to a report in the media, the rebel alliance Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC), which was founded at the end of 2020 to prevent the parliamentary and presidential elections (cf. BN of 11.01.21), stated on 18.10.21 that it had “taken note” of the ceasefire declaration. At the same time, it claimed that pro-government forces had already broken the ceasefire in Bambari and in Benzambé, the birthplace of its leader and ex-president François Bozizé. Local sources are said to have confirmed that Russian paramilitary forces looted the town of Benzambé. A presidential press officer stated that the president had received assurances from the CPC that hostilities would discontinued. He added that those who did not lay down their weapons would be pursued as enemies of the republic.

According to other media reports, the Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) and Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique (UPC) have failed to provide any such assurances. The latter announced its withdrawal from the CPC in April 2021 (cf. BN of 12.04.21). Experts and members of the opposition are dubious as to whether the ceasefire will last, considering that the planned Republican Dialogue is to exclude representatives of the armed groups.

China

Hong Kong: Seven activists sentenced to custodial sentences of several months

A court in Hong Kong has sentenced the activists Figo Chan, “Long Hair” Leung Kwok-hung and Eddie Chu, the former leader of the Democratic Party (DP), Wu Chi-wai, former district councillor Chui Chi-kin and the members

of the League of Social Democrats (LSD), Tsang Kin-shing and Tang Sai-lai, to prison terms of up to twelve months. At the time of their sentencing, Chan, Leung and Chu were already serving custodial sentences from earlier convictions. Their total sentences were thus extended to 21, 23 and eight months respectively.

Colombia

Boss of “Clan del Golfo” crime syndicate arrested

Dairo Antonio Úsuga, known as Otoniel, was arrested in the north-west of Antioquia province in a large-scale operation involving 500 members of a special unit and 22 helicopters on 23.10.21. Otoniel is the boss of the drug trafficking organisation “Clan del Golfo”, to which around 1,200 armed individuals belong, for the most part former members of extreme right-wing paramilitary groups. The clan is one of the most powerful drug organisations in Colombia. In addition to cocaine smuggling, it is also involved in illegal mining and protection rackets and is responsible for numerous murders and for driving people from their lands. Otoniel had been on the wanted list of a special unit of the security forces for almost ten years, and the USA had offered five million US dollars for information as to his whereabouts. At a press conference, president Duque spoke of the most severe blow ever to drug trafficking and compared the arrest to the operation which led to the killing of drug baron Pablo Escobar in 1993.

DR Congo

Opposition demonstration

It has been reported in the media that a demonstration attended by several thousand people took place in the capital, Kinshasa, on 16.10.21. The demonstration was held in protest against the de-politicisation of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and the controversial appointment of Denis Kadima as its chair. He is said to be involved in corruption and to be particularly close to president Félix Tshisekedi. The demonstration stemmed once again from an initiative by the opposition LAMUKA platform headed by Adolphe Muzito and former presidential candidate Martin Fayulu. The demonstration went off without any major incidents, in contrast to the protest marches which took place in various parts of the country in mid-September 2021. The latter were broken up by force in some instances, and led to dozens of arrests and numerous cases of injury among both the demonstrators and the police (cf. BN of 20.09.21). While there is no knowledge of any state intervention against people participating in the approved demonstration, the Reuters news agency has cited eye witnesses who claim that supporters of the ruling party Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS) had attempted to stop the demonstration by use of force. The police used tear gas to hold back those attempting to disrupt the demonstration. According to a press statement from Fayulu on 20.10.21, unidentified attackers fatally wounded a member of his party, Engagement pour la Citoyenneté et le Développement (ECiDé), on 16.10.21 and also looted the party's central office on the same day.

CENI is the target of criticism over its role in the controversial presidential elections at the end of 2018. While the official election result put Tshisekedi ahead of Fayulu, informal election results from civilian election monitors showed Fayulu to be the clear winner of the presidential election.

South Kivu: Security situation, plight of the Banyamulenge

Recent months have witnessed repeated reports by supranational and non-government bodies concerning a worsening of the security situation in South Kivu province (cf. BN of 16.08.21 and 26.07.21), first and foremost in the Fizi, Uvira and Mwenga territories. The UN Secretary-General's deputy special representative in the DR Congo, Khassim Diagne, stated on 15.10.21 that there were plans for joint operations by the Congolese army and the multinational troops of the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in South Kivu province. According to press reports in recent weeks, diverse Mai-Mai groups have carried out attacks on various villages, sometimes in concerted operations. A number of people have reportedly been killed and dozens injured, kidnappings have taken place, entire villages have been burnt down and cattle have been stolen. The attacks have triggered waves of internal displacement. Conditions are extremely bad for those seeking sanctuary in refugee accommodation or with host families. According to UN radio station Okapi, senator Moïse Nyarugabo stated on

19.10.21 that thousands of people had been killed and 500 villages burnt to the ground in the period from 2017 to 2021. The senator referred to the attacks on and massacres of members of the Banyamulenge minority (various tribes which have immigrated to DR Congo from central and eastern Africa, including Tutsi) in South Kivu as “ethnic cleansing”. He accused the authorities and the military of complicity. The news portal La Prospérité reported on 29.09.21 that victims had initiated (criminal) lawsuits against a number of members of the army and political figures. These reportedly stand accused of complicity in the massacres of the Banyamulenge and/or inciting hate against them. The most recent attacks in October 2021 had displaced thousands of Banyamulenge, who were subsequently exposed to further attacks after fleeing the scenes of the initial attacks. Ethnically motivated hate speech and incitement to violence, particularly against members of the Banyamulenge, continue to be widespread (cf. BN of 11.10.21). Citing the mayor of Baraka, the largest town in Fizi territory, Okapi reports that the Banyamulenge who have fled there are subject to harassment and threats from the local population. Influxes of people seeking refuge are adding to the existing multi-ethnic group of almost 7,000 internally displaced people in Baraka and the surrounding area.

CNDH denounces continuing bad human rights situation

Citing a report presented by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) on 19.10.21, Radio France Internationale reports that the human rights situation in the country remains bad. In 2020 there were further reports of arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, torture, poor prison conditions, various cases of collective punishment and the existence of secret prisons. The CNDH also denounces violations of political and socio-economic rights. Most of the complaints referred to the CNDH concern the situation of prison inmates. The head of the CNDH states that the commission is notoriously underfunded.

Ecuador

State of emergency imposed in response to escalation of violence

In response to a wave of violent crime and civil unrest, president Lasso imposed a state of emergency on the entire country for 60 days on 18.10.21. He said that this measure was necessary in the face of a marked rise in the number of murders and high levels of crime. Twelve people were killed in the city of Guayaquil on 17.10.21 alone. Guayaquil is an epicentre of violence, accounting for 27 % of all homicides so far in 2021. At 1,855, the total number of homicides to date in 2021 is already markedly higher than the total for the whole of last year. According to the report, the majority of these crimes are linked to drug trafficking.

In a television address, president Lasso said that under the state of emergency the armed forces and the police are to jointly carry out increased checks for weapons, inspections, drug squad operations and 24-hour patrols to combat crime and drug trafficking.

Egypt

98 female lawyers sworn in for State Council

For the first time ever, 98 female judges were sworn in for the State Council (highest administrative court) on 19.10.21. Applications by female legal practitioners for the State Council had previously always been rejected. At the beginning of 2021, president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi called for women to be appointed to positions on the State Council and at the public prosecution department in future.

Ethiopia

Ethiopian army launches air strikes against TPLF positions in Tigray

The Ethiopian army reportedly flew two air strikes in Mek'ele on 18.10.21. Shortly after initially having denied the attacks, the army subsequently confirmed that it had targeted communications masts and equipment of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which had been destroyed in the attacks. Three people were allegedly killed and a number were injured, in some instances seriously. The TPLF accuses the government under Abiy of specifically

carrying out the attacks in the vicinity of a cement factory and in the city centre, close to the Planet Hotel, on a market day, thereby wilfully disregarding the risk of civilian casualties.

There were renewed air strikes in Mek'ele and Agbe on 20.10., 21.10. and 22.10.21. According to a government spokesperson, production plants for TPLF weapons were attacked in Mek'ele. It has been reported in the media that 17 people were injured, three severely. A military training centre and an artillery depot were reportedly destroyed in Agbe. This was disputed by the TPLF. No information on any fatalities has emerged to date.

According to information from the government, military targets of the TPLF were attacked in Mai Tseberi and Adwa (Tigray) on 24.10.21. The TPLF has stated that, while attacks did take place, no casualties were known and no TPLF targets had been hit. The UN reports difficult conditions for the supply of relief aid to the region.

Gambia

Food insecurity

Food insecurity is continuing to grow. In May 2021 the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) outlined a potential worsening of food insecurity in Gambia (cf. BN of 30.08. and 31.03.21). According to the latest analysis by the UN's "Food Security Analysis Unit", 600,000 people, corresponding to around 30 % of the population, are affected by food insecurity. The unit reports that the poor harvest in the period from June to August 2021 hit 114,000 people particularly severely. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with extreme seasonal weather events, including storm tides and storms, are impacting particularly severely on families' food security.

Guatemala

Army veterans storm parliament: at least ten people injured

Ten members of the national civilian police were injured by machetes and at least five vehicles in the car park were set on fire when former members of the military forced their way into the Guatemalan parliament on 19.10.21. This act of violence was linked to the demonstrations which have been taking place for several weeks now to demand that a law be passed granting veterans compensation for their work during the civil war in Guatemala between 1960 and 1996. Following the dispatch of riot police, the situation in Guatemala City was brought under control again and the trapped MPs and staff were evacuated from the building.

India

Kashmir: Civilian killed

A 19 year-old civilian is believed to have been shot dead by security forces in the part of Kashmir under Indian administration on 24.10.21. According to media reports, this was the twelfth civilian to be killed either by rebels or security forces this month.

Iran

Legal proceedings / summonses / prison conditions

The administration of Evin prison has summoned the mother of the political prisoner Soheil Arabi to begin her 18-month custodial sentence for spreading propaganda against the system. A further charge concerned conspiracy against the state through contact with the People's Mujahedin Organization (Mujahedin-e-Khalq). The woman was arrested on 20.07.19, held in custody for two and a half months and subsequently released on bail. In the summer of 2020 she was sentenced to six years in prison. This sentence was reduced on appeal to one and a half years. Soheil Arabi was arrested back in 2013 and subsequently sentenced to death for insulting the prophet and offending sacred principles. The verdict was commuted on appeal to a prison sentence of seven and a half years. The mother repeatedly drew attention to her son's case in public and was one of the signatories to a petition calling for the revolutionary leader to abdicate.

According to reports in foreign media, the revolutionary court in Tehran has increased an original prison sentence of five years for a well-known professor for human rights to seven years at an appeal hearing. He was charged with collaborating with the enemy state America. His attendance of a further education course in the Czech Republic was cited as the reason for pressing the charge. The professor, a lecturer at the renowned Beheshti University, described the charge as baseless. He was arrested in the spring of 2020, following which the security services searched his office at the university. The judgement in the appeal hearing at the 15th branch of the revolutionary court of Tehran was delivered by presiding judge Abolqasem Salavati. Judge Salavati is particularly feared. He is on sanctions lists of the EU and the USA.

A prominent imprisoned lawyer and human rights activist has reported through his lawyer on prison conditions in institutions of the Revolutionary Guards secret service. He claims to have been injected with unknown medicines. He also reports of beatings and torture with electric shocks. The prisoner allegedly incurred such severe neurological injuries from this maltreatment that he bit off his tongue in a night-time trembling episode. He was subsequently moved to a psychiatric hospital. The man was put on trial in 2018 for insulting the revolutionary leader and was sentenced to two years in prison. Execution of the sentence was suspended up to his arrest by the security forces in the summer of 2020.

Charges brought against three Kurdish activists

According to the Kurdistan human rights network, three Kurdish activists have been charged with armed insurrection against the Islamic Republic. The three men were arrested by the security forces in the course of a major wave of arrests targeting Kurdish activists at the beginning of 2021 (cf. BN of 18.01.21, 25.01.21 and 15.02.21). While criminal proceedings have since been initiated at the revolutionary court of Mahabad, the court has been slow to take any concrete steps and has not heard the case. The families of the three prisoners claim that they confessed under torture. Art. 287 of the Islamic penal code (IPC) stipulates the death sentence for insurrection and/or rebellion (Persian: baghi), where weapons are proven to have been used in the actions concerned.

Sexual harassment of female journalists

Citing human rights organisations, foreign media report an increase in cases of sexual harassment of female Iranian journalists in Iran and abroad. A report by Article 19 and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) additionally warns of growing pressure on female journalists as a whole. Women who have actively reported on the situation in Iran in various foreign media were interviewed for the purposes of the report. Those surveyed claimed that they had been subjected to sexual harassment, also online, culminating in death threats. According to a CPJ spokesperson, reporting on controversial issues, even from abroad, can pose a serious threat.

Introduction of university degrees in sharia-compliant behaviour

It was reported in the media on 21.10.21 that an academic bachelor and master degree course is being planned on the subject of Islamic rules of conduct, such as clothing regulations and the requirement for chastity among women. A corresponding memorandum of understanding between the staff for Amr be maaruf va nahi az monkar (English: “enjoining good and forbidding wrong”), the free Islamic universities and the Binesh-e motahar institute has been the subject of widespread discussion in the social media. According to a government spokesperson, the future graduates are to be deployed on councils competent for this specific area within the administration and as university lecturers. There will be no guarantee of such appointments, however. Critics of the plan fear a broadening of the police state in Iran.

Iraq

The election on 10.10.21 and its results

The electoral commission will reach a final decision on 25.10.21 concerning the last complaints against the election. It is already apparent that most of the more than 1,000 complaints have been rejected, for the most part because they were too vague or unsubstantiated. Manual recounts have been ordered in a number of districts, however. An official final result is thus still pending.

According to the provisional results, which are unlikely to alter to any substantial degree, the Fatah coalition - the political wing of the Shiite militias - has suffered particularly heavy losses, with its number of seats down from 48

to 15. Its supporters, along with those of a number of allied parties, have demonstrated repeatedly against the election result.

Lebanon

Aftermath of the fighting in Tayouneh

Armed clashes occurred in the Tayouneh district of Beirut on 14.10.21 between supporters of Hezbollah and the Amal movement on one side and the army and as yet unknown opponents on the other (cf. BN of 18.10.21). It remains a matter of dispute precisely how the events unfolded and what role various political forces played.

On 21.10.21 the judge presiding over the inquest and the chief public prosecutor's office decided to summon the leader of the Lebanese Forces (LF), Samir Geagea, before a military tribunal. The LF first and foremost represents Christians, who make up the majority of the population in Tayouneh. In the days after the fighting, Hezbollah and Amal threatened the LF on numerous occasions and blamed it for the escalation, while representatives of various other parties and the LF accused Hezbollah and Amal of having advanced into the Christian district deliberately in order to provoke an escalation, in an attempt to divert attention from their own responsibility both for the explosion in the port of Beirut in 2020 and for the country's desolate situation. The specific date is not yet known. Geagea first of all publicly rejected the summons, stressing that he would only appear in court if Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, were also summoned.

The whole course of events is without parallel in Lebanon after the civil war. Never before has such a high-ranking politician and former warlord been summoned before a Lebanese military court.

The possibility of summoning other high-ranking politicians is also under discussion.

Morocco

510 pardons issued to mark Eid Al Mawlid

King Mohammed VI has issued 510 pardons to mark this year's Eid Al Mawlid festival. 336 prisoners had their prison terms reduced, seven prisoners had their remaining prison terms waived, two prisoners serving life terms had their sentences commuted to limited terms and various prison sentences and fines were repealed.

Mexico

Organised crime: Infiltration of the police, recruitment of minors on the internet

According to information from the local government, all male and female police officers based in Juventino Rosas in the federal state of Guanajuato have been dismissed on account of alleged links to the Cártel Santa Rosa de Lima. On the same day, the state secretary responsible for public security and civil protection, Ricardo Mejía Berdeja, reported the rescue of three kidnapped boys aged between eleven and 14 in the federal state of Oaxaca. They had been contacted through an online video game by individuals presumed to be from the world of organised crime. In this connection, he warned that criminals were stepping up efforts to recruit minors via social media and online video games.

Montenegro

Ex-secret service boss arrested for wiretapping the public prosecutor's office

According to a recent report in the media, on 21.10.21 the police arrested the former head of the National Security Agency (ANB), Dejan Perunicic, on suspicion of abuse of office. Special prosecutor Milivoje Katnic stated in a press release that an illegal bugging device had been found in his office. He said there was a suspicion that the device had been installed by order of the ANB. Perunicic was appointed head of the secret service by the previous government in 2015. Following the change of government at the end of 2020, he was dismissed by the new government in connection with accusations of illegal wiretapping operations against former opposition leaders and journalists. According to the press release, the ANB has long been accused of having links to criminal networks and of still

being under the political influence of the Democratic Socialist Party (DPS) which was formerly in power. Two high-ranking police officials have reportedly also been arrested and a former high-ranking secret service officer as well as the deputy police commander have been questioned regarding alleged links to organised crime.

Myanmar

New amnesty, clashes in Mon, Sagaing and Chin

Under pressure from the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the junta has ordered the release of more than 5,600 political prisoners who had been detained following the military coup on 01.02.21. The releases began on 18.10.21 and included prisoners from the Insein prison in Yangon (Rangoon) and prisons in Mandalay, Lashio, Meiktila and Myeik. According to UN special rapporteur Tom Andrews, this step is not to be interpreted as a change of heart by the military leadership. He further pointed out that many prisoners had suffered from torture, sexual attacks, COVID-19 infections and unhygienic conditions, and that some had not survived their time in prison. At least 110 amnestied prisoners are believed to have been taken back into custody before leaving prison or shortly after being released. According to information from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), the number of political prisoners currently still stands at over 7,000. Arrest warrants have been issued for a further 1,955 and 65 people have been sentenced to death, including two minors.

Meanwhile, fighting between the Myanmar army (Tatmadaw) and the People's Defence Forces (PDF) has continued. On 19.10.21 an association of local PDFs carried out a bomb attack on an office of the district government in Thanbyuzayat (federal state of Mon). A military convoy was hit by land mines in Htigyaing (Sagaing region) on 19.10.21. A number of soldiers reportedly died of their injuries. Those who survived the incident unscathed reportedly opened fire on houses, a monastery and a community centre. On the same day, the Chinland Defence Force (CDF) attacked buildings of the military administration and the local fire brigade in Mindat (federal state of Chin). Two Tatmadaw soldiers were reportedly killed and several injured.

Nicaragua

Further members of COSEP's leadership arrested

According to police information, two more members of the largest national employers' association were arrested on 21.10.21 on charges of money laundering and compromising Nicaragua's sovereignty. The individuals concerned are the president of the Superior Council for Private Enterprise (COSEP), Michael Edwin Healy Lacayo, and vice-president Álvaro Javier Vargas Duarte. The former COSEP president, José Adán Aguerri, was arrested back in June 2021 (cf. BN of 14.06.21).

Nigeria

Attack on market claims over 40 lives

According to reports in the media, another attack resulting in a high civilian death toll has taken place in the north-west of the country.

Armed attackers reportedly opened fire on people visiting a market in the town of Goronyo in the federal state of Sokoto on 17.10. and 18.10.21. At least 43 people are believed to have been killed. There have already been a number of fatal attacks on markets in Sokoto in October 2021 (cf. BN of 11.10.21).

IPOB leader Kanu on trial

According to reports in the media, the trial of the leader of the independence movement Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu, began at the federal court of justice in Abuja on 21.10.21. Kanu is apparently charged with terrorism and treason. He has pleaded not guilty. This was the first time that the public had set eyes on the IPOB leader since his arrest in June 2021. Kanu, a British national, was abducted in a third country and brought to Nigeria in as yet unexplained circumstances (cf. BN of 05.07.21). According to media reports, the IPOB is demanding that the Nigerian government release their leader by 04.11.21. Otherwise, IPOB is threatening to organise a one-week lockdown in the South-East region.

First anniversary of End SARS protests

According to media reports, a memorial car procession was held on 20.10.21 to remember those killed and injured in the End SARS protests at the Lekki toll gate one year previously. Although the organisers had agreed with the authorities that the participants would not leave their vehicles, a number of people failed to adhere to this agreement, prompting the police to deploy tear gas. On 20.10.20 the nationwide End SARS protests, which had been ongoing for several days, escalated when people in uniform opened fire on the protesters who had gathered at the Lekki toll gate (cf. BN of 26.10.20). It remains unclear how many people were injured and killed.

Hundreds of prisoners freed once again

According to reports in the media, armed individuals freed several hundred inmates of the Abonlogo penal institution in the federal state of Oyo in the south-west of the country on 22.10.21. The attackers used dynamite to blow up the institution's walls. Two security personnel and one inmate reportedly died. Of the 800 people who escaped, over 250 have allegedly been recaptured. 575 people are still on the run, however. 2021 has already witnessed similar incidents when hundreds of prison inmates were freed by the use of force in Owerri, in the south-east of the country (cf. BN of 12.04.21) and in the central federal state of Kogi (cf. BN of 20.09.21).

Camps for internally displaced people to be closed by end of the year

Following a meeting with president Muhammadu Buhari, the governor of the north-eastern federal state of Borno, Babgana Zulum, announced on 22.10.21 that the camps for internally displaced people in Borno's capital, Maiduguri, would be closed by 31.12.21. He said that this was possible on account of the improved security situation. The people in the camps have fled violence from the jihadist Boko Haram group and its splinter group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

Military strikes against bandits and Islamists

It has been reported in the media that the government of the north-western federal state of Kaduna announced on 20.10.21 that around 50 so-called bandits had been killed by security forces. According to information from the Nigerian army, 24 Islamist insurgents were killed in two attacks on 19.10.21.

Pakistan

TLP protests escalate

At least two police officers and two supporters of the banned Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) were killed in Lahore in Punjab province on 22.10.21 following an escalation of the protests which have been ongoing for two weeks now. Thousands of TLP sympathisers set off on a 350 km march towards the capital, Islamabad, calling for the government to release their leader, Saad Rizvi, who was arrested in 2020. Police and members of the paramilitary prevented them from leaving the city, shut down the mobile telephone system in parts of Lahore and blocked major traffic routes to Islamabad with ship containers. The government banned the TLP after the group had staged violent protests in November 2020. According to information in the media, on 24.10.21 the government indicated that it would review the charges against Rizvi and held out the prospect that they might be dropped. The protests were subsequently suspended for three days.

Attacks by the TTP in the north-west

At least five Pakistani security personnel were killed in two attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the north-west of the country on 20.10.21. At least four security personnel died in the Bajaur region close to the border with Afghanistan when their vehicle was blown up by a roadside bomb. Before the military offensives by the Pakistani military in the 2010s, Bajaur, which borders on the Afghan province of Kunar, was a stronghold of Islamist fighters linked to Al Qaeda. Also on 20.10.21, armed TTP members attacked a Pakistani army checkpoint in the same region, killing one soldier.

One week previously, the TTP claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on a local political leader in a district near Bajaur.

On 24.10.21 members of the TTP killed a police officer who had accompanied a polio vaccination team in the north-western city of Dera Ismail Khan.

Attack on security forces in Balochistan

On 18.10.21 one police officer was killed and a dozen security personnel were injured in an explosion at a protest outside the University of Balochistan in Quetta. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Baloch Student Organisation (BSO) had joined in a demonstration that was being held due to the death of two children. The provincial government faces accusations that the children were killed on 10.10.21 by shots fired by the paramilitary Frontier Corps, which it denies.

Pakistan / Afghanistan

Bilateral talks

The Pakistani foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, accompanied by the head of the Pakistani secret service, met with Taliban leaders in the Afghan capital, Kabul, on 21.10.21 and pledged to increase its humanitarian aid and step up joint trade. Efforts are also to be undertaken to resume air services between the two countries. Prospects of a relaxation of border restrictions and the permanent opening of the border crossing points for commercial traffic were also aired. The customs-free import of fruit and vegetables is to be made possible and Afghan business travellers are to be issued with visas to enter Pakistan. A Taliban delegation is expected in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, for further talks in the coming days.

Palestinian territories / Israel

West Bank: Residence status for Palestinian residents

The Israeli authorities, which administrate civil matters in the West Bank, announced on 19.10.21 that 4,000 legal residence titles are to be issued for Palestinians in the West Bank in a one-off initiative. Such a title can only be obtained by persons who are included in the Palestinian population register, which is maintained by the Israeli authorities.

Registration was restricted in 2000 to children aged under 16 with a least one parent who holds a valid title. As a result, it is estimated that tens of thousands of Palestinians are resident in the West Bank without any legal status. These include people who have been living and working in the West Bank for years and former residents of Gaza who have moved to the West Bank and are continually at risk of being deported to the Gaza Strip on account of the numerous checkpoints.

These permits form part of a package of measures which was launched by the Israeli government in August 2021 in order to bolster popular support for the Palestinian government under president Abbas in the face of a Hamas movement growing in political strength.

Gaza Strip: Israeli authorities approve work permits for residents

On 20.10.21 the Israeli authorities announced the one-off issue of a further 3,000 work permits enabling residents of the Gaza Strip to work in Israel. This takes the total number to 10,000. 5,000 permits were also announced back in August 2021. The permits are only to remain valid as long as the situation between the Gaza Strip and Israel remains peaceful.

Israel classifies six Palestinian human rights organisations as terrorist organisations

On 22.10.21 the Israeli authorities classified six Palestinian human rights organisations as terrorist groups. The organisations concerned are al-Haq, Addameer, Defence for Children International-Palestine, the Bisan Research and Development Center, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees and the Union of Agricultural Work Committees. The Israeli authorities accuse the organisations of having clandestine links to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is classified as a terrorist organisation in numerous countries. A number of Israeli and international human rights groups denounced the classification, which bans the organisations.

The Israeli minister for public security, who is a member of the Israeli security cabinet, criticised the fact that the matter had not been discussed in the security cabinet. He also noted that the defence minister had yet to present any evidence of links between the Popular Front and the organisations concerned.

Republic of Moldova

Istanbul Convention ratified

On 14.10.21 the parliament ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) with the majority held by the ruling pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity. President Sandu officially promulgated the corresponding ratifying act on 20.10.21. Domestic violence is widespread in the Republic of Moldova. UN studies show that around two thirds of all women are victims of some form of violence at least once in their lives.

Russian Federation

Participant in pro-Navalny protests receives custodial sentence

On 20.10.21 a district court in Moscow sentenced a demonstrator to three years and three months in a penal colony for criminal damage motivated by hooliganism (Art. 167 (2) of the Russian penal code). Sergei Vasilenko was found guilty of having set the tyres of a national guard vehicle on fire in the course of the nationwide protests for the release of opposition politician Alexei Navalny in January 2021 (cf. BN of 01.02.21). According to reports in the press, the fire was quickly extinguished and the competent authorities had assumed a technical defect to be the cause.

It has been reported in the media that a large number of the 10,000 people arrested in connection with the protests have since received fines or have been taken into “administrative detention” for several days. According to the human rights organisation “OVD-Info”, criminal proceedings have also been instituted in over 150 cases, for the most part on charges of violence against civil servants. A number of individuals have reportedly since received custodial or suspended sentences.

Senegal

COVID-19 pandemic

The health ministry has announced that 20.10.21 marked the first time since the beginning of the pandemic that no new COVID-19 cases were recorded in Senegal. Senegal experienced its worst wave of coronavirus in July 2021, when more than 1,000 new cases were registered daily. The health ministry has recorded 73,875 infections and 1,873 deaths since the onset of the pandemic.

Somalia

Operations against Al-Shabaab

According to official information, a gun battle occurred between the Somali National Army (SNA) and Al-Shabaab fighters near the strategically important town of Wajid in the region of Bakool (South West State) on 20.10.21. Four Al-Shabaab fighters were killed and several injured. Two SNA soldiers also incurred injuries. The objective of the SNA operation was to free seven men who had delivered food using donkey carts and had been punished by Al-Shabaab.

The SNA stated that its special Danab unit carried out a security operation against Al-Shabaab in several villages of the Lower Juba region together with Jubaland’s regional security forces on 23.10.21. Three Al-Shabaab fighters were reportedly killed.

Dozens killed in fighting between Somali army and Ahlu Sunnah Waljama’a

According to the local population and government employees, at least 30 people were killed and more than 100 injured in intensified fighting between the SNA and Ahlu Sunnah Waljama’a (ASWJ) in the previously ASWJ-controlled city of Guriel (Galmudug) on 23.10. and 24.10.21. Both sides suffered fatalities. 100,000 people have fled the fighting. Neither the SNA nor ASWJ presently have full control over the city. The ASWJ is a paramilitary group of moderate Sufis which rejects radical Salafism and which has supported the SNA in fighting Al-Shabaab in the past. Tensions between the government and ASWJ are rising, however. At the beginning of 2021 the SNA launched

a pre-emptive attack on the ASWJ, in response to which the ASWJ captured the city of Guriel. Analysts fear that the conflict is being exploited by Al-Shabaab. This fear was reinforced when Al-Shabaab fighters fired mortars at Gamudig airport on 23.10.21.

AMISOM admits to killing seven civilians

The committee of enquiry convened by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has determined that the persons killed by AMISOM in an exchange of fire between AMISOM and Al-Shabaab in Golweyn (Lower Shabelle) on 10.08.21 were civilians and that AMISOM's behaviour was in breach of its own rules of engagement. AMISOM will hold the soldiers involved to account and the Ugandan government, which was responsible for providing the troops, will contact the surviving dependants to discuss how it can atone for the deaths.

South Sudan

Increased targeting of journalists and civil-society actors

In a statement on 20.10.21, the UN Human Rights Commission warned that civil- society actors and journalists are facing increasing levels of intimidation and threats in South Sudan. The report alleges that the National Security Service (NSS) has been sending out credible death threats. This practice is reportedly prompting important actors from civil society who are also involved in the constitutional and transitional process to leave the country out of fear for their lives. At the same time, new actors are deterred from taking up an involvement. According to the report, the government has also blocked bank accounts belonging to civil-society actors and NGOs. The Human Rights Commission also links these measures to the formation of a new coalition in the realm of civil society, which was intending to meet for the first time at the end of August 2021. This meeting was prevented by arrests, searches, an increased police presence in Juba and intermittent shutdown of the internet, however.

Sudan

Demonstrations in various towns and cities

Demonstrations occurred in a number of towns and cities on 21.10.21, including the capital, Khartoum. Advocates of a civilian-led transitional government encountered demonstrators who favour a military-led government. Disturbances broke out, in the course of which demonstrators in Omdurman set tyres on fire and elsewhere a police car was allegedly set alight. Security forces intervened with force, using tear gas among other things to separate the two camps. According to the Sudanese medical committee, almost 40 people were injured as a result. The use of weapons reportedly resulted in four casualties. There have also been reports of two police officers having been shot dead. As the demonstrations had been announced in advance, extensive security measures had been undertaken. In larger cities such as Khartoum, key traffic spots and roads were cordoned off in advance by the police and other security personnel. In expectation of a precarious security situation, the schools in North and South Darfur were closed for 21.10.21. Emirates Airlines announced that it would be temporarily suspending its Dubai – Khartoum services on security grounds on 21.10. and 22.10.21.

Reports of renewed coup attempt

According to the latest reports in the media, prime minister Abdallah Hamdok was placed under house arrest at his home by as yet unidentified military units on 25.10.21. According to information provided by family members to an international press agency, the prime minister's media advisor, four members of the cabinet and a civilian member of the Sovereignty Council were also detained. Internet access was reportedly interrupted. No further details are available as yet. This represents the second attempted coup within the briefest of periods. A coup attempt was staged by members of the military as recently as 21.09.21 (cf. BN of 27.09.21).

Syria

Death sentences executed

The Syrian justice ministry announced via a statement on Facebook on 21.10.21 that the government had executed 24 people and sentenced eleven others to life imprisonment with hard labour. They were accused of playing an instrumental role in the forest fires of last year, in which large expanses of land were burned, extensive damage to property occurred and several people died. The convicted individuals, whose names and the circumstances of whose executions have not been revealed, were charged not with arson, but with terrorism. Nine other persons, including five minors, received prison sentences of ten years and over.

Referring to the case, an employee of an international human rights organisation commented that the fires in north-western and central Syria primarily affected government supporters who are very loyal to president Assad. However, when it emerged that the fires could not be fought effectively and only small amounts of compensation could be paid out, the government in Damascus was faced with a wave of outrage.

Due to the lack of transparency in the Syrian penal system, death penalties cannot be recorded to the extent which is possible for countries such as China, Iran or Egypt. Consequently, Syria maintains a low profile in this respect in the rankings of international human rights organisations, although the actual figures may be presumed to be high.

Damascus: 14 killed in attack on military bus

A bus exploded in eastern Damascus on 20.10.21. According to information from the military, two bombs which had been attached to the vehicle were ignited. 14 people died, marking one of the highest death tolls for an attack within the city boundaries for some years.

A group calling itself the Qasioun Brigades has claimed responsibility for the attack. Qasioun is the name of the mountain in Damascus on which both the presidential palace and a number of Syrian military establishments are located. Mount Qasioun also plays a role in Islamic and Christian religious traditions.

Idlib: Artillery fire kills ten

According to reports from first-aiders, at least ten people died in the town of Ariha on 20.10.21 when a marketplace and areas of streets near to a number of schools were hit by artillery fire from Syrian government troops. UNICEF has confirmed that four children and a teacher were among those killed. Some 20 people were injured.

Suspected Al Qaeda supporter killed in US drone attack

An army spokesperson from U.S. Central Command announced on 23.10.21 that Abdul Hamid al-Matar had been killed the day before by a drone attack in north-western Syria. He said that the jihadist militia was using the region as a base for operations in Syria, Iraq and other countries.

Turkey

European Commission progress report 2021

On 19.10.21 the European Commission published its latest progress report on Turkey. According to the report, Turkey has failed to respond adequately to serious concerns of the EU regarding the continuing erosion of the rule of law, fundamental rights and the independence of the judiciary. The report identifies severe shortcomings among the democratic institutions in Turkey. It recommends that negative trends need to be reversed and effective control mechanisms should be established in the political system.

Verdict on the Gezi Park protests

On 21.10.21 the constitutional court rejected a petition from participants in the Gezi Park protests asserting that the demonstrators' right of assembly had been violated. The constitutional court found that the petitioners had not exhausted all other legal options before addressing their petition to the constitutional court. The constitutional court further found that no adequate evidence of any violation of demonstrators' rights had been presented. The petitioners had asserted that the courts had violated their right to demonstrate by accusing them of carrying out criminal activities for a terrorist organisation.

Arrests of suspected members of the Gülen movement

The police carried out operations against the Gülen movement in 15 provinces from 18.10. to 22.10.21, after Turkish authorities had ordered the arrest of 249 persons. The accused include 29 former diplomats, as well as other civil servants from the administration, the military and the police. They are accused of using the ByLock app. In the course of an investigation launched by the chief public prosecutor's office in İzmir, arrests warrants were issued on 20.10.21 for 39 women, including a teacher and three midwives, on the basis of suspected links to the Gülen movement. 32 of these women were detained during raids in five provinces. The arrests warrants were issued on the basis of accusations by a secret witness. The women are accused of having organised activities among female supporters of the movement.

Uganda

Bomb attack in Kampala

A bomb attack on a restaurant in a Kampala suburb on 23.10.21 killed one person and injured several others, some seriously. According to government information, this was a terrorist attack. No further details are known as yet.

Transgender woman officially recognised for the first time

Human rights activist Cleopatra Kambugu has been officially recognised as a Ugandan national. Transgender people had not previously been recognised, as a result of which they experienced problems obtaining identity documents and claiming social and state services. According to the NGO Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), six transgender persons were arrested in 2021 on the basis of "identity theft". In the government's view, they were not wearing clothes appropriate to their gender. Human rights organisations hope for a more liberal approach towards LGBTIQ people in future.

Venezuela

Increase in threats and hostility towards relatives of media representatives

In the course of the 77th General Assembly of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), the editor-in-chief of the national newspaper El Nacional reported on the increasing targeting of relatives of media representatives who are in exile. By way of example, he referred to the case of Roberto Deniz from Armando.info, who had often reported on the dealings and relations between Alex Saab and president Maduro in the past. On 14.10.21 an arrest warrant was issued against the journalist, who is resident abroad, on charges of incitement to hate. In this connection, a raid was carried out on his parents' home on the following day, during which his relatives were intimidated. He also noted that independent reporting had shifted more strongly to the digital sphere, even though conditions also remain difficult here as a result of website shutdowns and poor internet access.

Yemen

Fighting in Marib claims at least 264 lives

The Saudi-led anti-Houthi coalition announced on 24.10.21 that it had killed at least 264 Houthi rebel fighters in the previous 72 hours. This was the second week in succession in which the coalition had substantially stepped up its air strikes in the region around Marib. In February 2021 the Houthis launched an offensive to capture Marib. Marib is rich in oil and gas deposits and the last town under the control of the government in northern Yemen.

UNICEF: 10,000 children killed or injured since the start of the civil war

UNICEF announced on 19.10.21 that at least 10,000 children had been killed or maimed since hostilities broke out in Yemen in March 2015. UNICEF only releases verified figures - the actual figure may be assumed to be many times higher. Children are not only at threat from the hostilities, but also represent one of the most vulnerable groups with regard to the humanitarian emergency in Yemen.

Coalition intercepts Houthi drones

The anti-Houthi coalition repelled several drone and rocket attacks against Saudi territory between 17.10. and 23.10.21. The coalition also destroyed four boats loaded with explosives off the coast of Hodeida. The Houthi rebels are attacking targets in Saudi Arabia in response to the coalition's air strikes.

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