



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

New report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan

According to the report presented at the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council on 06.03.23, the human rights situation in Afghanistan has continued to deteriorate - especially for women and girls. According to the UN Special Rapporteur, the Taliban's systematic denial of the basic human rights of women and girls amounts to gender-based persecution. The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague had announced on 31.10.22 that it would authorise the Chief Prosecutor to resume investigations in Afghanistan. On 10.12.22, the Special Rapporteur had attended the ICC launch of the "Policy Papers on the Crime of Gender Persecution" (which calls for the increased application of the 20-year-old offence of "gender persecution" as a crime against humanity under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute and appealed for relevant investigations to be launched in Afghanistan. The UN Special Rapporteur further criticised the Taliban's increasing use of hudud punishments (such as floggings, executions and amputations of hands and feet), the ousting of ethnic groups other than Pashtuns from important posts, the failure to comply with the general amnesty for former members of the government, the Taliban's lack of state protection for minorities such as Hazaras who are being persecuted by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), and a worrying increase in suicides among young people due to the hopeless situation.

Persecution events

In a statement issued at the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council, Amnesty International called on member states to end the impunity of the Taliban for the human rights violations they have committed. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in exile has also said that the Taliban's human rights violations are no longer acceptable.

According to an article published by the newspaper Etilaatroz on 04.03.23, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said that despite the general amnesty, the Taliban continue to search for, detain and also kill former defence and security forces on a daily basis. On 02.03.23, according to a report issued by Hasht-e Subh, the Taliban shot dead a former member of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) following a show trial in Paktika province. On 28.02.23, a member of the ANDSF was killed by the Taliban in Kandahar province.

The press medium KabulNow (an offshoot of Etilaatroz) reported in an article published on 23.02.23 that over 98 people (an equal number of men and women) have committed suicide since the Taliban swept to power. Most of these cases occurred in Faryab province, followed by Ghor, Kandahar, Takhar, Paktia and Bamiyan. According to media reports issued on 03.03.23, another young woman hanged herself in Faryab province. On 28.02.23, it was reported in the media, a young woman shot herself in Badghis province and on the same day a young woman hanged herself in Kunduz province.

According to an article published in the Washington Post on 04.03.23, the Taliban have annulled countless divorces filed by women (which were carried out against the will of the mostly "drug-addicted" husbands). The Taliban are accusing women who subsequently married a second time of adultery.

Security situation and government leadership

According to a press release issued on 28.02.23, the National Resistance Front (NRF) carried out an attack on the Taliban headquarters in Takhar province (Dashti Qala district). There is no information available on the number of casualties. In addition to the Afghan embassy in Tehran (Iran), the Taliban have now officially taken over the Afghan embassy in Istanbul (Türkiye) (cf. BN of 27.02.23).

Bangladesh

Huge fire at Rohingya refugee camp

On 05.03.23, a fire that raced through an overcrowded refugee camp in Cox's Bazar destroyed at least 2,000 temporary shelters and left more than 10,000 people homeless. According to UNHCR, the fire also affected hospitals and educational institutions. It took several hours for emergency forces to extinguish the fire. The cause of the fire remains unclear. No casualties were immediately reported.

Belarus

Nobel Peace Prize laureate and founder of Viasna sentenced to 10 years in prison

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bjaljazki was sentenced to 10 years in prison by the courts on 03.03.23. According to the state news agency, the court found him guilty of organised smuggling and financing actions grossly violating public order. He has been in prison since July 2021. In 2022, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize; in 1996, he founded the human rights organisation Viasna. In the course of the violent suppression of the mass protests against President Alexander Lukashenko in the summer of 2020, Viasna documented numerous human rights violations by regime forces. Human rights organisations and representatives of western governments have criticised the sentence as politically motivated.

Central African Republic

Ex-president and rebel leader Bozizé taken in by Guinea-Bissau

As reported by the media, also citing a Facebook post by Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, on 02.03.23, Guinea Bissau agreed to take in the coordinator of the rebel alliance Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC) (Coalition of Patriots for Change) and former President of the Central African Republic François Bozizé (cf. BN of 11.01.21 and 22.03.21). The reason was reportedly a request by the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). Bozizé had previously been residing in Chad. Chad's President, Mahamat Idriss Déby, had been looking for another place of residence for Bozizé in view of the good relations he wished to maintain with his Central African counterpart Faustin-Archange Touadéra.

Colombia

Violent clashes and hostage-taking in the wake of farmers' protests against oil companies

On 02.03.23, violent clashes broke out between members of the state security forces and farmers in San Vicente del Caguán in the department of Caquetá during farmers' protests against an oil company. Two people, including a civilian, were killed. Afterwards, farmers and indigenous demonstrators took 88 hostages, including 79 members of the police and nine employees of the Emerald Energy oil company. The protesters also blocked access to an oil field. One of the reasons for the clash was the demonstrators' demand to improve the local infrastructure, among other things, by repairing the roads. On 03.03.23, President Gustavo Petro announced that all arrested persons had been released. The Prosecutor General's Office has launched investigations.

Egypt

Activists handed lengthy prison sentences by special court

According to media reports, on 05.03.23, four human rights activists were sentenced to prison terms of up to 15 years by a special court for their alleged actions related to terrorism. The convicted persons, who were arrested by security authorities in October and November 2018, were members of the non-governmental organisation "Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms", an organisation that documented enforced disappearances and the use of the death penalty and provided legal assistance to victims of human rights violations. Shortly after the activists were arrested, it suspended its work.

Judgments by emergency state security courts cannot be appealed to a higher court; only the president of the state has the power to overturn or commute judgments, among other things. With the end of the state of emergency in October 2021, no new cases have been opened before these special courts, but cases already pending to date will continue to be heard before the emergency state security courts.

Ethiopia

Agreement on interim government in Tigray

A conference was held in Mekelle, the capital of the Ethiopian regional state of Tigray, from 01.03.23 to 04.03.23 to form an Interim Regional Administration (IRA) for Tigray. This was an essential part of the November 2022 agreement concluded between the Ethiopian central government and the Tigray regional government, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), on the "permanent cessation of hostilities" (cf. BN of 07.11.22). General Tadesse Worede Tesfay, commander of the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) and chair of the conference, said the participants included members of the TPLF, TDF, civil society organisations and opposition parties. It was decided that the interim government will rule for between six months and one year and that within this period an election will be held under the auspices of the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). The agreement still needs to be approved by the federal government. The TPLF remains the dominant force, which has been criticised by the members of the opposition in Tigray.

Massacre by the Eritrean army in Tigray

It has been reported that Eritrean forces indiscriminately killed more than 300 civilians, including children, in several villages near the town of Adwa on 25.10.22, just days before the agreement was signed in November 2022. They were taking revenge for a previously suffered military defeat, the Washington Post claimed in an article published on 28.02.23, citing local sources and satellite images. According to the article, news of the atrocities had only leaked now, shortly after the withdrawal of the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF). The local population had remained silent up to now for fear of reprisals.

The Gambia

Conviction for human trafficking offences

According to media reports, the criminal trial of a teacher accused of human trafficking in relation to a schoolgirl, which has been underway since February 2020, ended on 27.02.23 when he was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and was fined GMD 100,000 (approx. EUR 1,543, as of 03.03.22). The victim had been abducted to Mauritania under false pretences, kept there where she was exploited as a sex slave for five months until her successful escape attempt. She became pregnant as a result of the sexual abuse. According to the judge at the sentencing, human trafficking is widespread in The Gambia. Prosecutor Rakey Duanda reiterated that the government has a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of human trafficking, especially trafficking in women and children, and affirmed the Government's continued commitment to prevention, protection, and prosecution of all cases related to trafficking in persons. In mid-2022, the National Human Rights Commission pointed out various challenges in the fight against human trafficking - since 2021, several cases of investigation and prosecution as well as some convictions have come to light (cf. BN of 18.07.22).

Georgia

Protests against planned law on "foreign agents"

Resistance is forming in Georgia against a controversial bill in parliament backed by the ruling Georgian Dream party. On 02.03.23, demonstrators disrupted a hearing before a committee in the Georgian parliament over the push for a law against "foreign agents". Temporary arrests were also made. Footage released by Georgian media also showed physical fights between opposition MPs and politicians from the ruling party. The draft law would require any organisations receiving more than 20% of their funding from overseas to register as "foreign agents" or face substantial fines. Penalties will be imposed for violations. The system is similar to a law introduced in Russia in 2012 and was tightened again at the end of 2022. In February, more than 60 media outlets and civil society groups said they would refuse to comply with the law if it was passed.

Guinea-Bissau

Review of three years of Embaló's presidency

Brief stock has been taken in media reports of the presidency of Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who took the oath of office on 27.02.20 after winning a contested election (cf. BN of 13.01.20 and 02.03.20). Embaló stated at the time that the objectives of his presidency were to restore the country's image, to fight corruption and take concrete measures for the country's development based on discipline and state authority. Although improvements to the road network in the capital Bissau, for instance, and Embaló's high visibility at international level (thanks to his chairmanship of the West African Economic Community, ECOWAS, cf. BN of 04.07.22) are acknowledged, the reports say the situation of civil liberties has deteriorated at the same time. Embaló is intolerant of dissent and political opponents. The coverage refers to reports of kidnappings of and violent attacks on critical individuals and public figures. The case of lawyer Marcelino Intupé, defence counsel in the attempted coup d'état case of 01.02.22 (cf. BN of 13.02.23), who was allegedly beaten up at his home, has also attracted the attention of the UN. Complaints have also been made about the state of healthcare and education. Teachers and healthcare workers, for instance, went on strike again on 06.03.23. Criticism has also been voiced by former Prime Minister Aristide Gomes, who is reported to have escaped arrest while attending the congress of his African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) on 18.11.22 (cf. BN of 21.11.22) and who, according to an agency report of 14.02.23, is now residing in France after a long period spent in hiding.

Honduras

Seven killed in massacre in the city of Comayagüela

On 05.03.23, seven people were killed in a massacre in the town of Comayagüela, according to the State Security Secretariat. Several armed persons entered a hotel carrying firearms and opened fire. According to the violence monitoring centre of the National Autonomous University of Honduras in Tegucigalpa, this is the eighth massacre to be carried out in 2023.

Violence resulting from land rights conflicts in the Bajo Aguán region in 2023

On 22.02.23, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras (OACNUDH) called on the government of President Xiomara Castro to implement an agreement adopted a year ago to settle a structural conflict in the Bajo Aguán region. Commissions are to clarify land rights disputes and investigate human rights violations against farmers. In this context, OACNUDH expressed concern about the increase in the number of attacks, threats and killings of members of the farmers' cooperatives involved. Most recently, according to media reports, a farmers' leader and his underage son were killed on 12.02.23.

India

Internet shutdowns

Access Now has documented that India had the highest number of internet shutdowns globally in 2022 for the fifth consecutive year. Of 187 internet shutdowns recorded in 35 countries, 84 took place in India. However, this is the first time since 2017 that the number was below 100. Of the 84 shutdowns, 49 occurred in the Indian-administered part of Kashmir, accounting for 58% of the shutdowns compared to no less than 80% in 2021. As a rule, Internet shutdowns are implemented in response to unrest and are occasionally accompanied by concurrent curfews.

Iran

Human rights organisations: 94 executions carried out since the beginning of the year

According to reports issued by US-based human rights organisations, at least 94 death sentences were carried out in January and February 2023. This represents an increase in the number of executions carried out compared to the same period last year. Amnesty International (ai) highlights the proportion of persons from ethnic minorities who have been sentenced to death. According to the report, 14 persons of Kurdish origin, 13 of Baluchi origin and at least one person of Arab origin were among those sentenced to death. However, there are no official figures available on the actual number of executions carried out. For the first half of 2022, ai expected more than 250 death sentences to be carried out. According to the latest annual report published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), at least 306 death sentences were carried out in the observation period for the year 2022, mainly for persons charged with murder or drug offences (drug trafficking).

Suspected poison attacks on educational institutions for women and girls

According to media reports issued on 02.03.23, the number of cases of girls attending girls' schools or residing in dormitories for female students hit by unexplained poisoning symptoms is on the rise. According to the report, cases of schoolgirls in at least eleven of the country's provinces displaying unexplained symptoms of poisoning have been reported. The girls had to be admitted to hospital to undergo treatment for nausea and respiratory problems. Recently, several hundred schoolgirls in the city of Ardabil (Ardabil province) and students at a technical college in Karaj (Alborz province) were affected. On 04.03.23, further cases of poisonings were reported in several provinces as well as at a student dormitory in Tehran, among other places. Similar cases had already been reported in Ghom (Ghom province) in November 2022. The background is still largely unclear. The Iranian leadership has announced measures to clarify the situation. Unconfirmed individual sources suspect that an extremist religious group close to the regime, which is insisting on a school ban for girls, might be involved. Relatives of the affected schoolgirls are blaming the Iranian leadership and suspect the poisonings are an act of revenge for the schoolgirls' participation in the recent nationwide protests.

On 04.03.23, concerned families gathered in front of education departments and chanted slogans against the Iranian authorities in several parts of Tehran and other cities, including Isfahan and Rasht. Some of these gatherings were reportedly dispersed by security forces using tear gas. On 01.03.23, a woman who was participating in a protest outside a school building in Tehran was violently assaulted by several people during a meeting of parents of some of the schoolgirls who had fallen ill. According to Iranian media, four people were arrested in connection with the incident. No details have been revealed about the identity or organisational affiliation of these persons.

Iraq

Ban on the import of alcohol

On 04.03.23, Iraq's customs authority announced that it was banning the import of all types of alcoholic beverages with immediate effect after a law to this effect was published in the government gazette at the end of 2022. The law was passed by the Iraqi parliament in 2016 but has not yet been implemented. This is likely to have an economic impact primarily on Christians and Yazidis as the majority of the shops selling alcohol are owned by Christian and Yazidi Iraqis.

Turkish airstrike in Sinjar

Three fighters of the Shingal resistance units (YBŞ, a Yazidi militia associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)) were killed in a Turkish airstrike carried out on Sinjar on 27.02.23. The Turkish army has been carrying out airstrikes against PKK positions in northern Iraq for years.

Protests against amendment of the electoral law

On 27.02.23, hundreds of Iraqis reportedly protested against the planned return to the old electoral law, which provides for only one electoral district per province. After the mass protests held between October 2019 and spring 2020, a decision was made to introduce several constituencies per province; this was one of the main demands made by the protestors to afford independent candidates a better chance. The current return to the old law was initiated by a party alliance of Shia parties close to Iran.

Lebanon

Banking

The Lebanese Banking Association has suspended the announced strike for another week (cf. BN of 27.02.23), so banks will remain open until the evening of 10.03.23. The Banking Association had called for the strike in early February 2023 due to ongoing investigations. Large parts of the Lebanese banking system are under investigation on suspicion of mismanagement, with two banks being accused of money laundering. Meanwhile, the judge in charge of the case has been called upon by high-ranking politicians to temporarily suspend her investigation, and security forces have been ordered to stop carrying out the judge's orders.

Hike in import tariffs

The Lebanese government announced on 28.02.23 that it would triple the exchange rate for import duties, raising it from LBP 15,000 to LBP 45,000 per USD. According to the official exchange rate, one USD is currently equivalent to 15,000 LBP; on the black market, one USD is traded for 87,000 LBP. The unification of the exchange rates is one of the IMF's conditions for the disbursement of financial aid in the amount of USD 3 bn.

Libya

High State Council and House of Representatives agree on constitutional amendment

According to media reports, on 02.03.23, the High State Council (HSC) in Tripoli approved a proposed constitutional amendment submitted by the House of Representatives (HoR) in February 2023. The constitutional amendment, which is intended to pave the way for national elections, defines, among other things, the new system of government and sets out the role of the president and the prime minister.

At the beginning of February 2023, the House of Representatives had approved the constitutional amendment and forwarded it to the High State Council for consultation and voting. The High State Council was supposed to vote on the constitutional amendment back on 26.02.23, but the scheduled meeting was cancelled due to its lack of a quorum. More than 50 councillors are reported to have issued a statement rejecting the constitutional amendment. The High State Council is considered to be a kind of senate and advisory body of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli. Based in Tobruk, eastern Libya, the House of Representatives supports the counter-government (Government of National Stability) (GNS) led by Fathi Bashagha and formed in March 2022. A political stalemate was reached following the cancellation of the national elections at the end of 2021, in which the High State Council and House of Representatives failed to agree on a constitutional basis for the elections and rules for casting votes. On 27.02.23, the UN Special Envoy for Libya, Abdoulaye Bathily, had presented to the UN Security Council his plan for the formation of a body composed of key Libyan political figures, security actors, tribal leaders and civil society representatives, among others, to develop a plan to hold national elections. According to Bathily, most political institutions lost their legitimacy years ago, a remark he directed at both the House of Representatives and the High State Council. Before the House of Representatives and the High State Council agreed, Bathily described the constitutional amendment as controversial within Libya. He said the amendment does not address key contentious issues such as the eligibility criteria of presidential candidates or stipulate a clear roadmap for national elections this year.

Montenegro

Election of new constitutional judges clears the way out of the country's political gridlock

According to media reports, in a vote held on 27.02.23, parliament appointed three new constitutional judges to the Constitutional Court with the necessary two-thirds majority and, by restoring the court's formal quorum, ended the constitutional gridlock that had prevailed since autumn 2022. After three (out of a total of seven) former constitutional judges retired on 20.09.22, the highest judicial body, which also has to decide on appeals in elections, no longer had a quorum due to a lack of political agreement over who was to replace them so that, among other things, it was not possible to confirm final results in the municipal elections held in October 2022. The agreement, which the EU, among others, had called for in its last progress report and which has now been reached, also paves the way for calling the upcoming presidential elections and the probable holding of early parliamentary elections to break the political deadlock in Montenegro (cf. BN of 15.11.22 and 09.01.23).

Morocco

Conviction against journalist and human rights activist Rida Benotmane upheld

On 20.02.23, the sentence against journalist and human rights activist Rida Benotmane was upheld and reduced from three years to 18 months. Benotmane was arrested on 09.09.22. He is charged with insulting a state organ, insulting public officials while on duty and transmitting and spreading false accusations. He is said to have been held in solitary confinement since his arrest.

Myanmar

Security situation

On 21.02.23 and 23.02.23, junta forces killed five civilians with artillery fire in Shwegyin Township (Bago Region). Between 22.02.23 and 24.02.23, they attacked several villages in Hpakant Township (Kachin State) and injured three civilians, shooting two of them deliberately. Junta troops killed four civilians, including one child, in the shelling of Am Laung village (Mindat Township, Chin State) on 25.02.23. Junta artillery shells fired at an IDP camp and several villages in Demoso Township, Kayah State, killed two people and injured four others on 27.02.23. On the same day, regime forces beheaded at least three people, including two children, who were believed to be members of one of the resistance groups during a ten-hour battle with several resistance groups around Kan Taw village (Myinmu Township, Sagaing Region). The junta soldiers had previously abducted the victims from a nearby village and used them as human shields. On 28.02.23, junta troops burnt Kone Ywar village (Yinmabin Township, Sagaing) to the ground, leaving a mere 30 houses out of about 700 houses standing. They also set fires during raids carried out in two villages in Wetlet Township (Sagaing). In total, five civilians were killed. Around 10,000 people from Kone Ywar and surrounding villages fled.

Nigeria

Government party candidate wins presidential election

The former governor of Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) party, was elected the next president of Nigeria after garnering about 37% of the votes in the General Elections held on 25.02.23 (cf. BN of 27.02.23). This was announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the capital Abuja on 01.03.23. The voter turnout was reportedly 27%.

Considered to be one of the most influential and wealthiest politicians in the country, the 70-year-old is due to take up his new post on 29.05.23. He beat 17 other contenders, including Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), who were also considered to have good prospects of winning the election (cf. BN of 23.01.23). According to the electoral authority INEC, Abubakar received around 29% of the votes, Obi about 25%. The latter was particularly successful in several large cities, including the economic metropolis of Lagos. The election was overshadowed by allegations of rigging and a number of technical and logistical glitches. The electoral authority was accused of irregularities in the transmission of results. Election

observers from the EU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) noted poor planning and a lack of transparency. The defeated candidates are expected to have the election results reviewed in court. However, this is not expected to delay Tinubu's inauguration.

The challenges facing Africa's most populous and economically powerful country include the deteriorating security situation in several parts of the country and an economic crisis with high inflation. Most recently, a cash reform launched shortly before the election but then stalled has affected the lives of many Nigerians. Tinubu's concrete election promises include investment in Nigeria's infrastructure, better pay for the security forces and a halving of unemployment.

IPOB activist arrested in Finland

According to media reports, Simon Ekpa, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) independence movement, which has been banned in Nigeria since 2017, was temporarily arrested at his home in Finland on 23.02.2013. He is alleged to have used social media to incite violence in Nigeria. He leads a faction within the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which is fighting for a breakaway state in south-eastern Nigeria. Mr Ekpa, a Finnish citizen of Nigerian origin, denies any links to the killings and violence in this region, saying they were carried out by the Nigerian government. According to the Nigerian state, Ekpa is an agitator and the independence movement IPOB is a terrorist organisation. IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu has been in detention in Nigeria since the summer of 2021 (cf. BN of 07.11.22).

Pakistan

Ahmadi in Punjab shot dead by religious fanatics

In a press release issued on 20.02.23, the Ahmadiyya Community reported on the murder of one of its members. On 19.02.23, in the Gujrat district of Punjab province, two religious fanatics allegedly shot dead a 75-year-old Ahmadi man who had meanwhile become a Norwegian citizen and had returned home to Pakistan for a visit, where he ran a homeopathic clinic. One of the gunmen was arrested, the other is reported to have committed suicide.

Election date for dissolved provincial parliament in Punjab

On 03.03.23, President Arif Alvi announced that elections for the dissolved Punjab Provincial Assembly would be held on 30.04.23. The decision was taken following a proposal put forward by the Election Commission to hold the elections between 30.04.23 and 07.05.23. Earlier, Alvi had unilaterally announced that the election would be held on 09.04.23. However, on 01.03.23, the Supreme Court ruled that elections to the provincial assemblies in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa must be held within 90 days of their dissolution (cf. BN of 30.01.23).

Attack on security forces in Belochistan

On 06.03.23, nine security personnel were killed and at least seven others injured in a suicide bombing carried out in the Kachhi district southeast of Quetta in Balochistan province, according to initial media reports. It is suspected that a suicide bomber on a motorbike approached the vehicle of a paramilitary unit and blew it up. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Pakistan / Afghanistan

Situation of people who have fled Afghanistan

According to human rights reports, a wave of arrests and deportations have terrified hundreds of thousands of people who have fled Afghanistan. Afghan refugees are reportedly being mistreated in Pakistani prisons, and even children are often detained without due judicial process. Footage is being circulated on social media allegedly showing Afghan refugee children being tied up with ropes by security forces in Karachi. More than 800 Afghan nationals are being held in prisons in Karachi and Sindh province alone, and more than 1,000 people without valid residence documents have been deported from there.

Since the Taliban swept to power in August 2021, around 250,000 people have fled to Pakistan. In the summer of 2022, the Pakistani government began arrests and deportations in large numbers. In January 2023, more than 600 people who had fled Afghanistan were reportedly deported and thousands more were arrested in just three days.

Following the increase in attacks by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the government has been cracking down on Afghan refugees. They are under general suspicion of having links to the TTP and other militant groups and of sheltering their fighters. Many Afghans staying in Pakistan live in constant fear for their lives and rarely leave their shelters.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Israel: mass protests over planned judicial reform

On 01.03.23, police in Tel Aviv used water cannons and stun grenades to disperse several thousand demonstrators who had called for a nationwide "day of disruption" to protest against a government bill that could severely limit the control function of the judiciary in Israel's democratic system. Government representatives have branded the protesters anarchists.

As part of the government's plan, the Knesset is expected to vote in the coming weeks on, inter alia, a law that would allow parliament to overturn Supreme Court decisions with a simple majority. The executive branch in Israel's political system is already considered to be very powerful as in the parliamentary system it usually also has a majority in parliament. In addition, parliament consists of only one chamber. The Supreme Court therefore plays an essential role in the separation of powers as it can still block legislative projects if they conflict with the Basic Laws. The Basic Laws are a constitution-like catalogue of laws. Israel, like the former colonial power Great Britain, does not have a written constitution.

The government's current plan to overhaul the political system has led to one of the largest protest movements in the country's history. At the same time, more Palestinians have died in clashes with Israeli security forces in the West Bank since the beginning of the year than at any time since 2000.

Israel: government coalition paves the way for new rules for the death penalty

On 01.03.23, the Knesset passed in a first reading a bill from the ruling coalition to reinstate the death penalty for persons guilty of causing the death of an Israeli citizen of Israel from a nationalist motive. The legislative process still provides for deliberation on the bill in a committee before it comes to a final vote in the Knesset and can actually be passed as law.

In Israel's 75-year history, the death penalty has only been imposed twice for other reasons: in 1948 against Meir Tobianski, an officer (wrongly) convicted of treason during the War of Independence, and in 1962 against Adolf Eichmann.

West Bank: Israeli American killed in attack; Palestinian killed in arrest raid

On 28.02.23, a person who held both Israeli and American citizenship was killed by armed Palestinians near the city of Jericho. Three suspects were arrested during an arrest raid carried out a day later. Another Palestinian was shot and died shortly afterwards.

Portugal

Automatic residence permit and facilitated long-term visa

According to an agency report, an ordinance entered into force in Portugal on 01.03.23 which provides nationals of the eight other member states of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP, Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa) with far-reaching facilitation in obtaining a residence permit or visa. In addition to Portugal, the CPLP includes Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe and Timor-Leste.

The beneficiaries are reportedly around 150,000 people already residing in Portugal, the majority of whom are Brazilian nationals, who had filled in electronic expressions of interest in a residence permit in 2021 and 2022. For a small fee, they will automatically be issued with a residence permit for an initial period of one year. According to a media report, however, proof of employment will be required for this. Citizens of CPLP member states can also apply at Portuguese consulates for one-year visas to seek work without having to present travel insurance, proof of means of subsistence or a return ticket, and without the need for an in-person visit.

The Portuguese Minister of Internal Administration spoke to a press agency of a protection status for one year comparable to that given to refugees from Ukraine. The beneficiaries will also have immediate access to social security, healthcare and a tax number, he said.

Senegal

Prison population; prison conditions

There are currently 10,564 people imprisoned in the 37 penitentiaries nationwide, according to a media report citing data provided by Senegal's Justice Minister Ismaila Madior Fall. The number of prisoners in custody is 6,016, including 232 minors and 307 women, and the number of prisoners held in pre-trial detention is 4,548. According to estimates by the leader of the opposition coalition Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW), Biram Soulèye Diop, half of all prison inmates are pre-trial detainees. According to Freedom House, all prisons are characterised by overcrowding and human rights NGOs have documented cases of excessive violence against and cruel treatment of prisoners by prison staff.

Crime involving women and girls; illegal abortions

The offence profile of arrested women and girls mainly includes infanticide and illegal abortions, according to the media report, which refers to a study published on 25.02.23 by the task force Le Comité de plaidoyer pour l'Accès à l'avortement médicalisé en cas de viol et d'inceste au Sénégal (The Advocacy Committee for Access to Medical Abortion in Cases of Rape and Incest in Senegal) in collaboration with the NGO Planned Parenthood Global. Women and girls are resorting to unsafe and clandestine abortions without any medical assistance because of restrictive abortion bans, putting their lives and health at risk. This can also affect their lives in other ways, for instance, leading to them drop out of school, lose their jobs and even face social exclusion. According to a person presenting the study, changes in criminal law are needed so that "women who are victims of incest and rape can terminate their pregnancies". While the aforementioned study says that 51,500 abortions were carried out in 2012, representing an abortion rate of 17 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44, a 2020 study conducted by the Maternal and Child Health Directorate under the Ministry of Health says that 30,000 abortions are carried out each year.

Sentences against PASTEF sympathisers; criminal proceedings against associates of opposition member Sonko On 28.02.23, three out of the 31 accused sympathisers of the opposition party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF) (**African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity**), who were arrested in connection with the adjournment of the defamation trial against opposition leader Ousmane Sonko in Dakar (cf. BN of 20.02.23), were sentenced to one-month suspended prison sentences, and the others were released, according to unanimous media reports. The convictions were each based on participation in an unauthorised demonstration. According to a media report, however, clashes erupted between Sonko's supporters and security forces after the police stopped Sonko's vehicle. On 28.02.23, a security guard and Sonko's driver, who were also forcibly removed from the vehicle, were also charged with "endangering the lives of others" and causing damage to property and were placed under judicial supervision. If convicted, they face prison sentences of up to three years.

Somalia

USA and neighbouring states increase military support

The USA is increasing its military assistance against al-Shabaab. It said that 61 tonnes of weapons and ammunition had arrived on 28.02.23 in support of the Somalia-led military offensive (cf. BN of 10.10.22). In a joint statement issued with Qatar, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom, it stated that it would support Somalia in managing weapons and ammunition so that the UN Security Council could lift its arms embargo against the country. The UN arms embargo was imposed in 1992 and somewhat relaxed in 2013, allowing the government to buy light weapons.

Similarly, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya said they would send soldiers in addition to the soldiers they already have serving as part of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) troops to support Somali forces against al-Shabaab.

Doctors without Borders partially suspends work in Las Anod (Somaliland)

The aid organisation **Doctors without Borders** said in a statement issued on 01.03.23 that it had to suspend almost all activities except for emergency care in Las Anod (Somaliland) due to the fighting that has been ongoing since early February 2023. The hospital in Las Anod supported by the organisation had been shelled several times, causing severe damage to the building (cf. BN of 27.02.23).

Civilian deaths after shooting in café in Mogadishu

On 04.03.23, at least five civilians were killed, and three others were wounded when unknown attackers randomly opened fire at a busy café in Daruslam Villa in Mogadishu. Some reports indicate that a grenade was initially thrown at the building. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the crime.

Sri Lanka

Economic crisis

On 01.03.23, workers went on strike in protest against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package, which imposes, among other things, tax increases and spending cuts by the government. As a result of the strike, hospitals, banks and ports remained closed.

The economic collapse of the bankrupt island nation has escalated into a hunger crisis due to increased inflation, shortages of food, medicine and fuel, and a lack of secure jobs. According to a report published on 02.03.23 by the children's rights organisation Save the Children, half of the country's families are forced to reduce the amount of food they provide for their children. In some cases, adults were skipping meals to feed their children. Nine out of 10 households said they could not guarantee sufficient food for their children.

Sudan

Renewed protests

On 28.02.23, a 16-year-old boy was shot dead by a police officer during demonstrations held in Khartoum North. Seventy-one people were injured, some seriously. The boy's death was recorded on video and posted on the internet. Representatives of the resistance committees in Khartoum also particularly condemned the police's response to the killing of the boy, saying that they justified the police officer's act as a reaction to violence on the part of the demonstrators. In addition, the resistance committees criticised the fact that the killing in question was not an isolated act, but rather an expression of the endemic problem of violence by state actors. They said that the violence of state actors was aimed at preventing a political process and pushing back the civilian population by means of violence.

The use of lethal force by the police has also met with international criticism. In an official statement, the so-called Troika (USA, UK, Norway) called for the crime to be fully investigated and the perpetrators punished. They also condemned the use of excessive force against peaceful protestors.

In the meantime, the immunity of the police officer suspected of the crime has been lifted, and investigations against him have been launched.

The protests in Khartoum continued on 01.03.23, with security forces allegedly also using tear gas and live ammunition on the second day of demonstrations.

Syria

Earthquake region: further aftershocks; aid payments and estimates of the extent of damage

After the Turkish region of Malatya was struck by another aftershock of magnitude 5.6 on 27.02.23, the UN said that approximately 6,000 people had been killed in north-western Syria (cf. BN of 27.02.23). A total of more than 10,000 aftershocks of various magnitudes have been recorded by the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) since 06.02.23, the majority of which also hit north-western Syria.

According to information provided by the UN on 28.02.23, only 42% of the USD 400 million of the UN appeal for emergency aid in north-west Syria required for the next three months has been covered so far. The World Bank has

made initial estimates of the extent of the damage and published figures showing that the earthquakes caused direct material damage of USD 5.1 billion. Indirect costs, such as the impact of the natural disaster on the economy, were not included in the estimates.

Hama: 10 killed by landmine explosions

Syrian state media reported two landmine explosions on 27.02.23 east of the town of Salamiyeh in Hama governorate. The landmines, which were allegedly planted by ISIS years ago, were triggered by civilians. Ten people were killed and at least 12 others were wounded.

Northeast Syria: human rights organisation calls for repatriation of former ISIS members to Trinidad and Tobago

On 28.02.23, an internationally recognised human rights organisation called on the government of Trinidad and Tobago to repatriate more than 90 of its nationals from Syria to their home country. The persons concerned are suspected of having been members of ISIS and are being held at camps in north-eastern Syria. Fifty-six of them are children, of whom 44 are 12 years old or younger.

The human rights organisation called for these children not to be held responsible for the decisions of their parents. It said that in interviews, several of the detainees, who are now of age, said that false promises made by their parents had persuaded them to travel with them when they were children.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the local justice system can deal with the allegations against its own nationals; a possibility that does not exist in northeast Syria.

Türkiye

Internal displacement due to the earthquakes

On 28.02.23, it was reported that the Turkish Disaster Management Authority (AFAD) had resettled 528,146 people in the three weeks following the earthquakes and that a large number of people had left the earthquake region by their own means. According to media reports, the earthquakes have led to significant internal displacement, putting a heavy strain on resources in the country's major cities. Many survivors left the 10 provinces most affected by the earthquakes and moved to neighbouring cities or to the country's largest urban centres. Estimates put the number of internally displaced people at around five million. One of the largest refugee movements took place in the southern province of Mersin. The provincial capital of the same name, with almost two million inhabitants, took in around 400,000 earthquake survivors. A further 140,000 survivors initially settled in the coastal province of Antalya, according to the governor of Antalya. There are no concrete figures for migration to Türkiye's three largest cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, but according to media reports, these cities have also taken in large numbers of survivors. In addition to the increased demand for housing from the new arrivals, there is also increased demand from people who already live in the major urban centres and have begun to move out of earthquake-prone homes into newer, safer buildings. This increased demand has led to a surge in rents.

Meanwhile, Turkish nationals are not the only people to have been displaced from the earthquake zone. According to media reports, 35,000 Syrian refugees returned to Syria in the two weeks following the earthquakes. A further 2,000 quake victims are reported to have been sent back to Syria. Of the approximately four million Syrian refugees currently residing in Türkiye, 1.7 million are in the ten provinces affected by the earthquakes.

Consequences of the earthquakes

On 02.03.23, it was reported that according to AFAD, the death toll in Türkiye's southern provinces had risen to at least 45,089. In addition, more than 108,000 people were reported injured. According to the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, 202,000 buildings have collapsed or have been damaged to such an extent that they have to be demolished. The Ministry says this corresponds to 582,000 individual apartments. Approximately 13.5 million people have been affected by the earthquakes in the region. AFAD reported on 28.02.23 that around two million people made homeless by the disaster have been housed in tents, container houses and other facilities in the region and other parts of the country. According to UNICEF estimates as of 28.02.23, three million people, including 2.5 million children, are in need of humanitarian assistance in the wake of the earthquakes in Türkiye.

Ukraine

Current development of the war

As a result of a missile strike carried out on a multi-storey residential building in the city of Zaporizhzhia on 02.03.23, at least 13 civilians were killed, according to state authorities. They said the debris removal work had been completed on the evening of 05.03.23, but five people were still considered missing. According to the regional military administration, two people were killed in artillery attacks carried out on the city of Huliaipole near the frontline in Zaporizhzhia Oblast on 04.03.23. Further civilian deaths due to the war were reported from the Kharkiv and Kherson Oblasts, as well as from the heavily contested city of Bakhmut in Donetsk Oblast, on 05.03.23. According to a statement issued by the Donetsk regional military administration, around 5,000 civilians still remain in Bakhmut despite multiple calls for evacuation. According to the U.S. think tank Institute for the Study of War, there are currently indications of a limited withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from Bakhmut. On the morning of 06.03.23, a nationwide air raid alert was declared in Ukraine; artillery and drone attacks were reported the night before from the regions of Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv, among others, as well as from the capital Kyiv.

Ukraine / Russian Federation

Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison

On 27.02.23, a court in the city of Yalta on the Crimean Peninsula annexed by Russia sentenced three Jehovah's Witnesses to prison terms of between six and six and a half years in a general-regime penal colony (the penal colony system provides for a general, a strict or a special regime in ascending order). A fourth Jehovah's Witness was given a three-year prison sentence, which was suspended. The court found the defendants guilty of organising, financing and participating in activities of an extremist association in connection with the practice of their faith (Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code).

Since the Russian Supreme Court banned the organisation of Jehovah's Witnesses on charges of extremism in April 2017, there have repeatedly been cases of criminal prosecution of **Jehovah's Witnesses**.

Venezuela

Threats following book publication

At least eight relatives of the investigative journalist Ronna Rísquez have been threatened following the publication and presentation of her book on the criminal organisation Tren de Aragua (Aragua Train) in Colombia. Tren de Aragua is a criminal group that was founded in the Venezuelan prison Tocarón and has now spread across much of Latin America. The group's organised crime activities include human trafficking, arms and drug trafficking, but also extortion and kidnapping.

Injuries and one death in armed robberies in Maracaibo

In calendar weeks 07 and 08, several robberies of shops and shopkeepers were reported in Maracaibo. On 24.02.23, masked individuals allegedly threw an explosive device, which did not detonate, at a shop. Armed persons had launched a firearms attack on a supermarket and a butcher's shop on 18.02.23, killing one person and wounding several others. The police investigation unit CICPC has launched investigations. On 28.02.23, Attorney General Tarek William Saab confirmed that three suspects had been arrested in connection with the attack on the butcher's shop and with their suspected links to extortion offences by criminal groups.

Yemen

Humanitarian aid: shortfall of more than USD 3 bn.

The sum of USD 1.2 billion was pledged for humanitarian aid in Yemen at a UN donor conference held on 27.02.23, but according to the UN, USD 4.3 billion is needed. In recent years, the target has been missed by a wide margin; this has led, among other things, to a reduction in food rations.

Due to the war that has been raging since 2014, food shortages and poor medical care, the humanitarian situation in Yemen is one of the worst in the world, according to the UN.

Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes

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