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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

11 November 2024

Afghanistan

Security situation

It has been reported in the media that the National Resistance Front (NRF) has killed a total of six Taliban fighters in two attacks in Herat province on 06.11. and 09.11.24 respectively. By its own account, the NRF additionally killed five Taliban in an attack in Kabul's Kote Sangi district on 07.11.24. The Taliban killed two of their own members in Ghor province on 07.11.24 for allegedly having cooperated with Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP).¹

Governance and persecution

In accordance with a new decree issued by Taliban leader Akhundzada, the defence and interior ministries and the general directorate for secret services (headed by Mullah Yaqoob, Sirajuddin Haqqani and Abdul Haq Wasiq respectively) have had their powers to issue weapons, munitions and military equipment removed. Henceforth, only the emir himself is authorised to make decisions on the allocation of military equipment.

The emir has issued a directive for the secret service in Kunar province instructing it to identify and prohibit foreign sources of funding for seminars by the "Ahl-e-Hadith" group. Members of this group who are employed in the civil service are to be discharged.

The Taliban-controlled education ministry announced on 11.11.24 that registrations had begun for the university entrance examination (Kankor) for 2024. Female pupils were prohibited from registering for the third time in succession.

It was reported in the media on 04.11.24 that the Taliban had arrested two Shiite clerics in Herat province and taken them to an unknown location.

In the city of Jalalabad (Nangarhar province), the Taliban have searched houses close to important government buildings (including the police headquarters and the seat of the provincial governor). Similar searches have also been carried out in Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Panjshir and other provinces. Also in Nangarhar, the Taliban's local ministry of vice and virtue has expelled students from the local university for failing to wear beards or turbans.

The Taliban secret service has arrested a former agent of the Afghan secret service in the city of Kabul. Nationwide, the Taliban had 46 people flogged in total in the past week up to 06.11.24.²

Belarus

2025 presidential election

On 23.10.24, 26.01.25 was set as the date for the 2025 presidential election in Belarus. This will be the first presidential election since the events of 2020, when in the aftermath of the election mass protests occurred in which the opposition decried manipulation in the election. President Lukashenko deployed the security forces to crush the protests and clamped down heavily on demonstrators and dissidents, ordering the arrests of thousands of people and driving most of the leading opposition politicians out of the country. The Russian ambassador in

Minsk, Boris Gryzlov, has already pledged Russian support in repelling any attempts to "destabilise" the forthcoming presidential election. The political climate in Belarus remains tense. According to information in the media, human rights defenders have reported arrests throughout the country since it was announced that the presidential election was to be held on 26.01.25, with various trials currently in progress.³

Arrests and convictions

According to information from Viasna, a Belarus human rights group operating in exile, former police captain turned blogger Andrey Parotnikau was put on trial in camera before a court in Minsk on 16.10.24. If found guilty, he faces up to 15 years in prison for treason, plotting to seize power and supporting extremist activities. Parotnikau, who ran a security blog, was arrested in Moscow in March 2023 and extradited to Minsk.

On 22.10.24 Viasna reported that the journalist Ihar Ilyash had been arrested. Prior to his arrest, the political commentator had spoken on Dozhd, a Russian TV station operating in exile, about the growing pressure on Belarus to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ilyash's journalist wife, who reported on the mass protests in 2020, is already serving a prison sentence for treason.

A father and son from Ukraine have each been sentenced to 20 years in prison for preparing terrorist attacks. The convicted men said on state TV that they had acted on instructions from the Ukrainian secret service, SBU. Observers assume that such confessions broadcast on TV are made under duress.

According to information released by Viasna on 01.11.24, a 22 year-old Russian who had held a Belarusian residence permit since 2018 died in a Belarusian penal camp on 11.10.24. Viasna reports that he was arrested during the mass protests in 2020 and sentenced to twelve years in prison for spying and "promoting extremist activities". He is reportedly the seventh political prisoner to die since the protests were crushed. In this latest case, the cause of death was not disclosed.

On 05.11.24 Viasna reported that on 30.10.24 the municipal court in Minsk passed the first sentence for "denying the genocide committed against the Belarusian people" under a law adopted in January 2022. On this charge and the charge of "insulting" the Belarusian president, the defendant was sentenced to three years in a penal colony. The report notes that the authoritarian regime frequently uses charges of genocide denial to target opposition figures. The law relates to events on Belarusian territory during the Second World War.⁴

Political prisoners pardoned

It was reported in the media on 07.11.24 that president Lukashenko had pardoned 31 people convicted under the "extremism" law. 17 of those released are reportedly chronically ill, three are disabled and 27 have children. A news agency reports that their convictions will not be removed from police records, however, and that the interior ministry will "place them under surveillance to ensure that they behave in a law-abiding manner." In all, Lukashenko has pardoned 115 political prisoners in 2024. According to the Viasna human rights group, there are still 1,287 political prisoners in the country.⁵

Cuba

Arrests after demonstrations sparked by nationwide blackouts

The Cuban chief public prosecutor's office announced on 10.11.24 that it had arrested a number of people for "disorderly conduct", following isolated protests prompted by power failures lasting several days which have occurred in recent weeks. In the capital, Havana, in Mayabeque province and in the city of Ciego de Avila, criminal proceedings have reportedly been initiated for bodily harm, breach of the peace and criminal damage, and a number of people have been detained "as a preventive measure." According to the human rights organisation Justicia 11J, more than ten people have been arrested in the township of Guanabacoa in the east of Havana after taking part in peaceful protests. Hurricane Rafael made landfall in Cuba on 06.11.24 as a category 3 storm with wind speeds of up to 185 km/h, causing a nationwide blackout. According to information from the authorities, the power supply was restored in parts of the country by 09.11.24. In addition, a force 5.8 earthquake hit the south-east of Cuba on 10.11.24, followed by a severe aftershock of force 6.8.

Power failures have been a regular, sometimes daily occurrence since 2021, due to the outdated and poorly maintained power grid (cf. BN of 02.09.24). Most recently, nationwide blackouts lasting several days occurred in October, after the island's largest coal-fired power station was unexpectedly shut down (cf. BN of 21.10.24).⁶

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Revision of the constitution announced

At a public rally in Kisangani in the north-east of the country on 23.10.24, president Félix Tshisekedi announced that he intended to revise the constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2025 and to put together a commission comprising various strata of society for this purpose. Tshisekedi averred that the constitution had "weak points" and was "not geared to the country's realities." He observed that a number of articles in the constitution required amendment, including those which limit the head of state's tenure.

Members of Tshisekedi's governing party, Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS), launched the debate on amendment of the constitution back at the beginning of October 2024. The opposition criticised the proposal, warning that it was a plan by Tshisekedi to remain in power. The president retorted that it was ultimately for the people to decide on a change to the president's term in office. In December 2023 Tshisekedi was re-elected for a second and - under the current constitution - final term in office (cf. BN of 08.01.24).

Former president Joseph Kabila's coalition Commun pour le Congo (FCC) spoke out against the planned change to the constitution and published a declaration on 27.10.24 calling on the people to mobilise and obstruct the proposed amendments. According to FCC, the planned reform represents "a threat to peace, unity and the country's stability."

In 2015, the then president Joseph Kabila's camp also attempted to amend the same constitution, but was forced to abandon its efforts under pressure from the church, the people on the street and the opposition.

The current constitution dating from 2006 is the third constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be adopted by a referendum and was last revised in 2011.⁷

Ethiopia

Attacks in Oromia and Amhara

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported on 07.11.24 that it intended to investigate the killing of dozens of people in Oromia. 48 people are said to have been killed and others abducted in an attack by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in the North Shewa district. A district official is believed to be among the dead. It is unclear whether the other fatalities were civilians. The OLA, a break-away faction from the Oromo Liberation Front, has been responsible for increasing numbers of attacks in the region since 2018 (cf. BN of 21.10.24).

50 people, including women and children, were reportedly killed in a number of drone attacks on Achefer woreda (North Gojam Zone, Amhara) on 05.11.24. The attacks targeted a busy area with markets, schools and healthcare facilities. Local residents have reported that the territory is under the control of government forces. The latter have yet to comment on the incidents. The drone attacks are being linked to the current fighting against Fano militias in Amhara.⁸

Guinea

Numerous parties dissolved or suspended

Against the backdrop of the end to the political transition phase which was actually planned for 31.12.24 (cf. BN of 24.10.22, 27.03.23 and 25.03.24) and the drafting of a constitution, the ruling military junta has carried out a general investigation of the political parties. As reported in the media, the ministry for territorial administration published the final report on this investigation on 28.10.24. A total of 211 parties were reportedly registered, 53 of which are said to have been dissolved, 54 suspended for three months and 67 placed under surveillance for the same duration. The remaining 37 parties have yet to be investigated.

The report apparently accuses the parties of failing to adhere to the applicable rules and regulations, in particular with regard to the documentation of their funding. Measures to safeguard democracy within the parties are also considered to be lacking. In their defence, the parties reportedly cited the restrictions on their work during the COVID-19 pandemic and under the transitional authorities.

The former governing party, Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée (RPG), and the largest opposition party, Union des forces démocratiques de Guinée (UPDG), are both among the parties under surveillance. A local news portal has published the lists of dissolved and suspended parties.⁹

India

Jammu and Kashmir Hostilities and attacks

It was reported in the media on 10.11.24 that security forces had been involved in two separate exchanges of fire: in Kishtwar district in the southern region of Jammu and in Baramulla district to the north of the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. The hostilities took place only a few days after rebels had killed two members of a government-led militia, the so-called Village Defence Group, in Kishtwar on 07.11.24. The armed group Kashmir Tigers has claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement in the social media. In the previous week, an attacker threw a hand grenade at a busy market in the capital, Srinagar, injuring 12 people.¹⁰

Iran

Attack on Revolutionary Guard Corps in Sistan and Balochistan

According to reports in the media, six members of the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were killed and others were injured when their convoy was attacked in Sistan and Balochistan province on 07.11.24. The convoy was travelling from the city of Sarbaz to the district of Rask when it was attacked near to the city of Firuzabad.

No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, Iranian state media are placing the blame on the militant Sunni group Jaish al Adl, which is a separatist organisation. Four of the organisation's members are said to have died in the attack. The group most recently attacked security forces, also in Sistan and Balochistan province, on 26.10.24 (cf. BN of 28.10.24).¹¹

Followers of Baha'í faith arrested

It has been reported in the press that three followers of the Baha'í religious faith were arrested by members of the security forces in the city of Tiran on 02.11.24 and taken to an unknown location. According to reports in the media, the three Baha'ís had travelled to Tiran to take part in a religious Baha'í festival, where they were arrested together with eight other Baha'ís by members of the security forces. While the eight other participants were subsequently released, the whereabouts of the three Baha'í in question remain unknown.

The Iranian authorities do not recognise the Baha'í faith as a legitimate religion. The annual report of the NGO Human Rights Activists in Iran for 2023 notes that Baha'ís are subjected to violation of their religious rights and that they account for 82 % of all reports relating to actions against religious minorities. According to a report published on 05.11.24 by the NGO Center for Human Rights in Iran, at least 70 Baha'ís are currently in custody or serving prison sentences and a total of 93 Baha'ís have gone on trial or been imprisoned in 2024.¹²

Niger

Citizenship of members of the toppled government revoked

On 05.11.24 Niger's head of state, general Abdourahamane Tiani, temporarily revoked the citizenship of seven people linked to the military coup in July 2023, who face various charges. According to reports in the media, the seven include ministers of the toppled government, a former high-ranking member of the Nigerien army and members of groups who after the coup called for the reinstatement of ousted president Mohamed Bazoum. The charges brought against them include "supporting terrorist activities" and "cooperation with a foreign authority." Tiani reportedly temporarily revoked the citizenship of nine members of the toppled government on similar grounds back in mid-October 2024. Former president Bazoum is said to have been held prisoner since the coup on 26.07.23.¹³

Nigeria

Violent incidents in the south-east

Unknown gunmen have continued to perpetrate acts of violence in Nigeria's south-eastern states in the period from the middle of October to the beginning of November 2024, reportedly using explosive devices in some instances. A major stir was caused by two attacks on civilians in Anambra State in which at least 22 people in all died on 20.10. and 25.10.24, according to reports in the media. An inmate reportedly died in an attempt to free prisoners in Abia State on 28.10.24. On the same day in the same state, unknown gunmen shot dead three civilians in what is presumed to have been an attempted kidnapping. On 05.11.24, two people are said to have been killed and many injured in a bomb explosion on a market in Imo State. Acts of violence in the region are commonly blamed on members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a group seeking the secession of south-east Nigeria, and its armed wing, Eastern Security Network (ESN). The group and its armed wing deny such allegations (cf. BN of 30.09.24). Other armed groups are also active in the region, including violent so-called cultists, according to media reports.¹⁴

North-east: No evidence of mass abortions programme

The Nigeria Human Rights Commission appointed by the government has found no evidence to support the accusation raised in 2022 that the Nigerian military had operated a clandestine abortion programme over a period of some ten years in the north-east of the country, in order to terminate pregnancies of former prisoners of Boko Haram (cf. BN of 19.12.22). According to a news agency announcement on 08.11.24, in the course of its investigation the Nigeria Human Rights Commission interviewed a total of 199 witnesses over an 18-month period, including members of the military, former members of Boko Haram, women freed from captivity and members of local and foreign aid organisations.¹⁵

Pakistan

BLA carries out bomb attack at railway station in Quetta

At least two dozen people, including a dozen security personnel, were killed and more than 60 people were injured in a suicide attack on a railway platform in Quetta, Balochistan province on 09.11.24. The separatist Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack, which it says targeted the security personnel waiting on the platform.

The incident took place one week after a bomb exploded near a girls' school in the Mastung district of Balochistan, killing nine people, including five children (cf. BN of 04.11.24).¹⁶

Republic of Moldova

Incumbent wins presidential election, investigations into Russian interference and Moscow's reaction

The incumbent, Maia Sandu, won the run-off for the presidency on 03.11.24, claiming 55.3 % of the vote, while her challenger, former prosecutor general Alexandr Stoianoglo, amassed a 44.7 % share (cf. BN of 04.11.24). In an initial response, Stoianoglo addressed the voters, saying "I call on you to remain calm, irrespective of the indicated numbers. Every vote deserves respect, and democracy is above all about facing up to the result as grown-ups." According to reports in the media, analysts are warning of a continuation of Russian interference. On 06.11.24 the Kremlin protested at the "hostile and discriminatory" treatment of Russian election monitors by the Moldovan authorities. According to international election monitors, the election was carried out "efficiently and professionally", although the ballot was overshadowed by accusations of Russian interference and election fraud. Without furnishing any evidence, Moscow is claiming that the election was unfair and refuses to recognise Sandu as the legitimate president. The police is investigating suspected wholesale attempts to interfere with the course of the election.¹⁷

Sudan

Security situation and refugee movements

Dozens of civilians have reportedly been killed in air strikes carried out by the Sudanese army on the city of Nyala (South Darfur region). The number of casualties and the exact time of the attacks are unclear.

After several weeks of occupation by the paramilitary Rapid Support Services (RSF), 91 civilians are reported to have been killed in the town of Al-Hilaliya (Gezira region). The population of almost 100,000 lacks even the most basic provisions, particularly in the medical area. 79 people are said to have died after consuming food distributed by the RSF; 12 others have allegedly been shot dead. Ten civilians are believed to have been killed by RSF members in Barborab (Gezira region) on 04.11.24. HRW has condemned the RSF's actions against civilians in the region. The organisation accuses the RSF of having killed, injured and arrested many civilians and of having committed acts of sexual violence against civilians. The occupation of parts of Gezira took place after RSF commander Abu Aqla Keikel defected to the Sudanese army (cf. BN of 04.11.24) and has been ongoing since 20.10.24. In this period, 30 towns and villages are said to have been attacked, hundreds of people killed and 130,000 driven from their homes.

While the majority of those who have fled their homes all over the country are internally displaced, some are also fleeing to neighbouring countries. At present, approx. 1.2 million people have sought refuge in Egypt and 680,000 refugees are staying in Chad. Both host countries have spoken of problems providing the refugees with food, healthcare and accommodation.¹⁸

Türkiye

48 femicides in October 2024

In its monthly report on violent crimes against women, the We Will Stop Femicide Platform, a Turkish women's rights organisation, stated on 05.11.24 that a total of 48 women had been killed by men in Türkiye in October 2024. Of the 48 murdered women, the report reveals that 24 were killed by their husbands or boyfriends, three by their former spouses, six by acquaintances and 11 by relatives. In addition, ten women were reportedly killed for wishing to make decisions about their own lives. This category concerns situations such as requests for divorce, rejecting reconciliation with their life partners or rejecting a proposal for marriage or a romantic relationship.

The murders sparked demonstrations, in particular in a number of towns and cities on 05.10.24, at which protesters demanded an end to violence against women and called on the government to take measures against such violence. According to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform, at least 295 women were killed in the first nine months of 2024 and at least 1,499 women were killed from 2020 to September 2024. In addition, according to information from the ministry for labour, social and family affairs, between January 2013 and July 2024 more than 1.4 million women claimed to have been exposed to domestic violence and to have sought help from state centres for the prevention of violence (ŞÖNİM).¹⁹

Ban on showing film "Queer"

It has been reported in the media that the global streaming provider and film distributor MUBI has cancelled a film festival which was planned to take place in Istanbul from 07.11. to 10.11.24 in protest at the local authorities' ban on showing the film "Queer". The film is about a homosexual relationship between two men.

According to reports in the press, the government of the municipal district of Kadıköy banned the film from being shown because it included provocative content and thus posed a threat to social peace. MUBI declared that the ban represented a restriction of artistic freedom and freedom of expression.²⁰

Ukraine

Civilian casualties

According to information from the competent governor, Russian air strikes on the city of Zaporizhzhia on 05.11. and 07.11.24 claimed six and four lives respectively. Interior minister Ihor Klymenko has stated that in the latter attack a hospital was also hit. According to information from the competent governor, two people were killed in a Russian attack in the Donetsk region on 07.11.24. It was reported in the media on 07.11.24 that Russian shelling

had killed one person in Kherson and one person in Jampil (Sumy region). According to information from the authorities, Russian drone attacks on Odessa killed one person on 08.11. and another on 09.11.24. According to information from the regional governor, Russian attacks on 11.11.24 killed one person in Zaporizhzhia and at least five people in Mykolaiv in southern Ukraine.²¹

Course of the war

It was reported in the media on 05.11.24 that the Ukrainian air force had announced that 48 out of 79 Russian drones aimed at the regions of Odessa, Kyiv, Sumy, Poltava, Zhytomyr, Cherkasy, Chernihiv and Khmelnytskyi had been shot down by the Ukrainian air defences. Blackouts were reported after a Russian attack in the Zhytomyr region. The authorities have reported that people were injured in an eight-hour drone attack on Kyiv. Both warring parties are increasingly using drones, with the Russian side also deploying so-called kamikaze drones. In the face of further Russian air strikes, it has been reported in the media that the Ukrainian military and the DTEK energy utility announced on 11.11.24 that the power supply was shut down as a preventive measure in parts of Kyiv and in the Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions. The Ukrainian general staff have reported renewed heavy fighting in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Pokrovsk and Kurakhove.

According to Russian news agencies, the secretary of the Russian security council, Sergei Shoigu, has called on the West to quickly show a willingness to negotiate over the future of Ukraine and to recognise the realities of the current situation, in order to prevent the "annihilation" of the civilian population in Ukraine. In a statement on 08.11.24, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) came to the following assessment: "Freezing the Russian war in Ukraine along the current front lines would result in enormous advantages for Russia, while for Ukraine and the West it would increase the risks and costs of deterring or even frustrating a future Russian attempt to achieve Putin's aims by force." Meanwhile, according to reports in the media a high-ranking advisor to US president-elect Donald Trump has stated that the priority for the new US government with regard to Ukraine should be on establishing peace and not on the return of lost territories, including Crimea. The advisor added that president Zelenskyy would be requested to offer a "realistic vision for peace".²²

Judicial verdicts

The Ukrainian public prosecutor's office stated on 04.11.24 that a woman had been sentenced in Sloviansk (Donetsk region) to 15 years in prison for treason. She was found guilty of having supported the Russian side by passing information about the deployment of Ukrainian troops to the Russian armed forces in March/April 2024. The statement further revealed that thousands of legal proceedings relating to possible cases of collaboration with the Russian Federation have been initiated since 24.02.22.

Citing a source in the law enforcement authorities, the Russian news agency Tass reported on 08.11.24 that a military court in Rostov-on-Don had sentenced to Russian soldiers to life imprisonment for the massacre of a family of nine in their home in the city of Volnovakha in Russian-occupied Ukraine.²³

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