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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

4 March 2024

Afghanistan

Public executions and corporal punishment

On 26.02.24, the public execution that had been announced took place at a stadium in Shibirghan in the northern province of Jawzjan (cf. BN of 26.02.24). This is the fifth public execution to take place since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. According to an anonymous witness, the man sentenced to death for murder was shot by the victim's brother. The two men convicted of murder in the southeastern city of Ghazni on 22.02.24 were also shot dead by relatives of the victims in front of thousands of spectators.

In a statement issued by the Taliban Supreme Court on 29.02.24, it was announced that eight people had been flogged in accordance with a ruling handed down by the Taliban military court. They had been sentenced to five months' imprisonment and 20 lashes for "adultery and dishonour". On 03.03.24, the Taliban Supreme Court announced the administration of a public whipping of a man in Sar-e Pul province on charges of "immorality".¹

Persecution in Kabul and Panjshir province

According to a media report issued on 29.02.24, two civilians were arrested and physically mistreated by the Taliban in the Anabah district of Panjshir province last week. The rationale behind the detention remains unclear, although sources assert that both individuals are civilians unaffiliated with any particular group or organisation.

Recently, the Taliban have increasingly arrested former government soldiers and civilians in both Panjshir and Kabul. In line with this development, it was reported that another four people from villages in Rokha district were arrested last week and taken to Kabul.

According to a media report issued on 29.02.24, the Taliban military court has sentenced a university professor to one year in prison. Sources suggest that the professor's activism on social media where he advocated for girls' education rights and criticized the Taliban's actions, particularly regarding women's rights, was the reason behind his imprisonment. He hails from Piyawesht in the Rokha district of Panjshir province.²

Bangladesh

Dozens killed in high-rise fire in Dhaka

At least 46 people died and 22 were injured, some seriously, in a major fire that tore through a multi-storey building which houses a shopping mall in the capital Dhaka on 29.02.24. The blaze which started at a restaurant, quickly spread through the six-storey building and many people were trapped by the flames. According to reports, there were serious safety deficiencies in the building and gas cylinders stored in the stairwell are said to have fuelled the spread of the fire.

In Bangladesh, major fires of this kind occur frequently, with adequate safety measures being neglected and building regulations not being observed.³

Burkina Faso

Civilians killed in several attacks

According to various media reports, several attacks were carried out on villages in the north of the country on 25.02.24 in which over 170 civilians, including women and children, were killed. According to a regional prosecutor, unidentified gunmen are said to have attacked the villages of Komsilga, Nodin and Soroe, which are located in Yatenga province. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.⁴

Dozens killed in mosque attack

Suspected members of a jihadist group attacked a mosque in the village of Natiaboani, near the capital of the Est region, Fada N'Gourma, in eastern Burkina Faso on 25.02.24, killing dozens of people. According to media reports, the majority of the people killed, including a religious dignitary, were Muslim men who had gathered for prayer. Members of the Burkinabe army and the paramilitary group Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP)) were also attacked.

More than a third of Burkina Faso is currently under the control of armed groups. On the same day, suspected members of a jihadist group killed at least 15 people attending a mass at a Catholic church in the village of Essakane in the north of the country (cf. BN of 26.02.24).⁵

Chad

Opposition leader Yaya Dillo killed

On 28.02.24, the president of the Socialist Party Without Borders (Parti socialiste sans frontières (PSF)), Yaya Dillo, was killed by security forces at his party's headquarters in N'Djamena. There had reportedly been an exchange of fire with security forces, but the exact circumstances of his death are unclear. Internet services were temporarily blocked after the incident, making it difficult to exchange information. Representatives of human rights organisations expressed concern about the treatment of the opposition and called on the government to carry out an independent investigation. Dillo, who had already been subjected to attacks in the past, was reportedly preparing to run in the upcoming presidential election in May 2024. Prior to the attack, a high-ranking PSF member was reported to have been arrested for planning an attack on the President of the Supreme Court. The government also stated that PSF members had attacked the internal security agency. According to Dillo, the incident was staged and there had been no confrontation with the security agency.

Since the establishment in 2021 of the transitional government, led by Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno (Patriotic Salvation Movement) (Mouvement Patriotique du Salu.), there have been repeated attacks on members of the opposition and restrictions on press freedom. The elections, which were initially scheduled for 2022, were postponed by Déby by two years, leading to massive protests among the civilian population that were sometimes violently suppressed. On 02.03.24, Déby officially announced that he would run in the upcoming presidential election.⁶

Colombia

Announcement of resumption of airstrikes against camps of armed groups; Clan del Golfo

According to President Gustavo Petro and his Defence Minister Ivan Velasquez, the aerial bombing campaigns of camps run by illegal armed groups will be resumed if it can be ensured that no minors will be affected. Corresponding airstrikes had been suspended since the beginning of the Petro government in order to avoid civilian casualties. Petro had also recently threatened to take tougher action against this group following the killing of four military officers in Antioquia (cf. BN of 19.02.24) by the Clan del Golfo, which had recently let various negotiation offers made by the government as part of the Total Peace (Paz Total) campaign pass by. On 02.03.24, more than 150 members of the Clan del Golfo and Tren de Aragua were arrested for extortion offences and kidnappings, among other things, during security operations carried out in various cities in the country, including Bogotá. The Clan del Golfo, which has an increased presence in the north and northwest of the country, is said to currently

consist of around 6,000 members and, in addition to drug trafficking, is also active in illegal mining, extortion of protection money and smuggling activities through the Darien Gap, among other things.⁷

Eight Colombian cities amongst the 50 most dangerous cities in the world outside of war zones

Eight Colombian cities feature on this year's list of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world with more than 300,000 inhabitants. This list is published annually by the Mexican organisation Citizens' Council for Public Safety and Criminal Justice (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal AC (CCSPJP)). Buenaventura and Cali in Valle del Cauca and Sincelejo in Sucre are even among the top 30. In this survey, CCSPJP compares the number of homicides in cities per 100,000 inhabitants. In the Colombian port city of Buenaventura in particular, that has a homicide rate of 51 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, crime remains high and, according to media reports published last year, this is largely attributable to disputes between the Los Shottas and Los Espartanos gangs vying for criminal supremacy. Although both gangs had agreed to ceasefires with state security forces at talks held with the government as part of the Comprehensive Peace Initiative (Paz Total), the clashes that erupted between the gangs resulted in the highest murder rate in the country. Sincelejo is on the list for the first time; the number of homicides there rose by more than 70 percent between 2022 and 2023, which is partly due to clashes that erupted between the Clan del Golfo and the dissident group Los Norteños. Cali remains one of the most dangerous cities in the country, strategically located between coca-growing areas and one of the most important transport routes. The list also includes Santa Marta, Cartagena de Indias, Cúcuta, Palmira and Barranquilla.⁸

Egypt

Intimidation of NGOs for reporting on Sinai

Local and international human rights organisations report that the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights and its director have been subjected to a smear campaign and threats by pro-government figures and groups on television, in newspapers and on social media since mid-February 2024.

The reason for the smear campaign is the information published by the NGO on 14.02.24 regarding activities the Egyptian authorities have engaged in along the border with the Gaza Strip near the Palestinian city of Rafah. According to the NGO's report, the authorities are pressing full steam ahead with the construction of a separate fortified zone on the border with the Gaza Strip for the purpose of receiving refugees from Gaza in case of a collective displacement.

According to a statement issued by the state information service, no arrangements are being made to accommodate Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip. Instead, the area is reportedly being used as a logistics centre for the delivery of aid to Gaza.⁹

Eritrea

UN Human Rights Council accuses Eritrea of repression

The United Nations Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, stated on 28.02.24 that the Eritrean government is oppressing its population. Due to indefinite military service, Eritreans continue to be subjected to severe abuse, including forced labour and sexual violence. Babiker referred to reports of people who have been conscripted in the past 20 years and who have been deprived of their civil, social and economic rights. Their families are also affected and face severe and collective punishment.

At the same time, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that the human rights situation in Eritrea remains dire. Reference was made to "credible reports" of torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. There have been detentions or enforced disappearances of "thousands of religious leaders, activists, journalists and those evading mandatory and indefinite military service".

Eritrea has rejected the accusations as unfounded, claiming "Our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights lies at the heart of our nationhood, a nationhood that was realized after a long drawn armed struggle for the human rights of the Eritrean people." In 2012, the UN Human Rights Council created the mandate for the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, which has been renewed every year since then.

Although the UN has been publishing regular reports since 2015, they are not uncontroversial. It is, for instance, criticised that these reports are mostly based on accounts given by Eritrean asylum seekers, who frequently have an interest in portraying the situation in their home country as grimly as possible. In addition, for the most part, the sources are not subject to any critical examination. Eritrea accuses the panel of one-sidedness, is refusing to co-operate and is denying entry to Eritrea.¹⁰

Ethiopia

Human Rights Commission: many killed and injured in western Ethiopia

According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), at least 138 people have been killed and 113 injured in clashes that have erupted in the regional state of Gambella since May 2023. The *woreda* (districts) of Itang, Gambella and Gog as well as the regional capital Gambella City are affected. The report also states that the Gambella regional government has undertaken peace talks with local communities and deployed additional security forces to stabilise the situation.

For many years, Gambella was one of the most peaceful regions in Ethiopia. Recently, however, there has been an increase in armed conflicts at communal level, most of which have an ethnic background, for instance, involving conflict over grazing and water resources (cf. BN of 24.07.23). However, South Sudanese refugees too have repeatedly become the victims of violence.¹¹

Clashes continue in Amhara

Armed clashes continue to erupt between the Amharic Fano militia and state security forces in the regional state of Amhara. On 01.03.24, violence broke out again in the regional capital of Bahir Dar for the first time since the conflict began in June 2023. Although the government has said on several occasions that the violence in Amhara is under control, EHRC has reported repeated outbreaks of violence in the region (cf. BN of 19.02.24).¹²

The Gambia

Increase in food insecurity

A news outlet has reported, citing a national survey on food security, that in 2023, around 730,000 Gambians and hence 29 percent of the population faced food insecurity – an increase of two percent year-on-year (27 percent). According to the survey report, 43,000 people face severe food insecurity. Yet regional disparities exist. Food insecurity is higher in rural areas, with over half of the population (52 percent) categorised as food insecure, in contrast to urban areas where the rate is 21 percent. Among the Local Government Areas, Kuntaur has a 61 percent prevalence of food insecurity, Basse has a 41 percent prevalence of food insecurity, Janjanbureh has a 44 percent rate, Brikama has a prevalence of food insecurity of 25 percent, Kanifing has a prevalence of 18 percent and Banjul has a rate of 27 percent. However, even in the Local Government Areas of Brikama, Kanifing and Banjul, which have a lower prevalence of food insecurity, the latter has increased by between four percent and up to 11 percent year-on-year. The media report does not provide any information on the Mansakonko and Kerewan Local Government Areas. The primary driver of food insecurity has reportedly been the increased cost of living. The survey finds that 38 percent of households spend more than 75 percent of their budget on food. The survey was conducted with the participation of the WHO.¹³

Ghana

Parliament adopts anti-LGBTIQ law

According to media reports, the Ghanaian parliament passed the "Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill" on 28.02.24. The draft of this anti-LGBTIQ law, which was submitted to parliament on 02.08.21, not only tightens the penalties for same-sex sexual activity, but also criminalises the deliberate promotion, encouragement or support of LGBTIQ activities.

After the bill was approved in parliament, it is now set to be forwarded to President Nana Akufo-Addo for his assent and will become law if he approves it. Akufo-Addo has so far kept a low profile in the debate on the bill but has openly spoken out against same-sex marriage in the past.

The proposed law is widely supported by Ghanaian society and is backed by a coalition of Christian, Muslim and traditional leaders. International governments and organisations continue to express concerns. They say the law not only restricts the rights of the LGBTIQ community but will also have repercussions for society as a whole. Amnesty International has already recorded an increase in violence against LGBTIQ people in Ghana since 2021 and especially in the 2023 reporting period (cf. BN of 29.01.24).¹⁴

Guinea

Three-day general strike; media trade unionist released

On 26.02.24, an alliance of trade unions under the National Confederation of Trade Unions of Guinea (Confédération Nationale de Travailleurs de Guinée (CNTG)) carried out its threat to call for an indefinite general strike if Sékou Jamal Pendessa, General Secretary of the Guinean Union of Press Professionals (Syndicat des professionnels de la presse de Guinée (SPPG)), was convicted (cf. BN of 26.02.24). According to reports, the call received support from political parties and civil society groups. Everyday life in Conakry came to a virtual standstill during the strike; banks, schools, numerous markets and shops as well as petrol stations remained closed, and authorities and hospitals also reduced their activities. On the other hand, violent clashes erupted between protestors and security forces, who are said to have used tear gas and live ammunition. Two people were killed on 26.02.24. Strikes were also held in the important mining sector and therefore in other parts of the country too.

After Pendessa was released on 28.02.24 despite the guilty verdict against him, he announced the same evening that he would end the strike and be available for negotiations with the authorities on other issues. The unions are demanding a reduction in basic food prices, an end to restrictions on freedom of the press and an improvement in the living conditions of state employees.¹⁵

New prime minister appointed

Following the surprising dissolution of the entire government (cf. BN of 26.02.24), Mamadou Oury Bah was sworn in as the new Prime Minister on 27.02.24, according to media reports. Bah Oury, as he is also known, founded the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG)) party in 1991, which he was expelled from a few years ago. The party is still important today. Most recently, his support for the ruling military junta has earned him criticism. At the end of the tenure (1984-2008) of long-term president Lansana Condé, Bah had served as Minister for Reconciliation. Under President Alpha Condé, who was overthrown in 2021, Bah spent several years in exile in France after he was implicated in a 2011 attack on President Condé's home but returned home after the president pardoned him.¹⁶

Haiti

Current situation: jailbreaks, humanitarian situation, internal displacement, political developments

While acting Prime Minister Ariel Henry was in Kenya to sign an agreement to circumvent a recent court ruling (cf. BN of 19.02.24) and secure the deployment of a Kenyan police force to lead a multinational security mission, the violence in Haiti escalated further. On 29.02.24, gang leader Jimmy Chérizier called for an armed uprising. Gun battles intensified, shops had to close, international flights were disrupted and attacks were carried out on police stations in which at least four police officers were killed. In the early hours of 03.03.24, a previously unknown number of inmates also escaped during an attack carried out by armed gangs on the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince. Inmates are also said to have escaped from another prison. In this context, a state of emergency was declared on 03.03.24, initially for 72 hours. According to IOM figures, almost 15,000 people were displaced from various accommodation facilities for internally displaced persons between 29.02.24 and 02.03.24 as a result of the latest outbreak of violence. According to UN figures, 5.5 million people in the country, which corresponds to almost half the population, are currently in need of humanitarian aid.

According to a judicial investigation report published on 19.02.24, the judge in charge of the investigation into the murder of former President Jovenel Moïse in 2021 has brought charges against numerous suspects, including the former prime minister and the ex-chief of the national police as well as the widow of the deceased.¹⁷

Indonesia

Preliminary results of the presidential election: Prabowo Subianto becomes next president

According to the first counts in the presidential election held on 14.02.24, the incumbent Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto was elected President after garnering over 58 percent of the votes, and his running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka was elected Vice President. The official result is to be announced at the end of March. The swearing-in ceremony is scheduled for October 2024.

The former army general Prabowo is considered to be a representative of the political elite and is the ex-son-in-law of the authoritarian President Suharto, who was overthrown in May 1998. Prabowo is accused of serious human rights violations during military operations in East Timor, Papua and during pro-democracy protests in 1998, during the period of the Suharto dictatorship. In 2014 and 2019, Prabowo lost the presidential elections against the incumbent and popular President Joko Widodo (Jokowi). In the current election campaign, the latter again supported Prabowo by placing his eldest son Gibran Rakabuming alongside him as a candidate for the vice presidency. Widodo was not allowed to run again after his second term of office expired. The 36-year-old Gibran is currently mayor of the city of Surakarta and was only able to stand for election in October 2023 due to a controversial decision by the Indonesian Constitutional Court. Under electoral rules, he should have been ineligible because all candidates for the presidency and vice presidency must be at least 40 years old. Allegations of influence peddling by the incumbent president have overshadowed the election campaign.

During the election campaign, the Prabowo/Gibran duo focused primarily on social media in order to appeal to the large number of young voters. According to observers, the election results express the population's desire for continuity and a policy focused on economic development. The Indonesian archipelago consists of over 17,000 islands and, with a population of around 265 million, it is the country with the fourth largest population and the third largest democracy in the world. More than 204.8 million people are currently eligible to vote.¹⁸

Iraq

Repatriations from Syrian Al Hol camp

As part of the efforts to repatriate the victims of ISIS as well as to repatriate and resocialise Iraqi inmates of the Al Hol camp for Syrian prisoners and displaced persons, which still houses around 54,000 inmates seven years after ISIS lost its territorial base, a Yazidi woman from Al Hol who was kidnapped ten years ago was successfully reunited with her family in Iraq on 03.03.24. The woman had been held in slavery since 2014 and was located, removed and taken to the Al Hol IDP camp in a joint operation carried out by the all-female Women's Protection Unit of the Syrian Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Iraqi intelligence service.

On 03.03.24, the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement announced that a further 150 families comprising around 600 members are to be repatriated to Iraq. So far, 7,556 people have been repatriated from Al Hol to Iraq, but only 1,230 of them have been able to return to their homes.¹⁹

Lebanon

Situation along the border between Lebanon and Israel

Hezbollah and Israeli armed forces continue to trade fire.

On 29.02.24, caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati spoke to the press about the future development of the conflict. He stated that, in his opinion, Hezbollah would adhere to a ceasefire if one was agreed for Gaza. Furthermore, such a ceasefire would probably lead to third party-led negotiations on the land border between Lebanon and Israel. From the Israeli side, the withdrawal of Hezbollah behind the Litani River is seen as an essential prerequisite for a ceasefire on the border.

Since the fighting began, a total of 285 people have been killed in Lebanon, 44 of them civilians. In Israel, 10 soldiers and six civilians have been killed so far.²⁰

Libya

Sufi sheik abducted

According to NGO sources, the sheikh of a Sufi order was abducted from his home south of Benghazi on 04.02.24 by armed groups known for their Salafist ideology.

He had already faced previous threats by persons who feel a connection with the Salafist ideology, which is said to have led to the confiscation of his madrassa and forced him to move the facility to his private property.²¹

Two killed and several injured following fighting in Zawiya

According to media reports, violent clashes broke out on 02.03.24 between two armed groups, both of which support the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU), in the middle of residential neighbourhoods in the western Libyan city of Zawiya.

A dispute between armed members of the two militias escalated when other fighters from the groups intervened using various types of weapons, resulting in the death of two militiamen and the injury of a further six militiamen. However, no civilians were harmed.

Due to the fighting, the coastal road between Zawiya and the capital Tripoli was closed for a short time.²²

Myanmar

Security situation

According to various reports, 30 to 40 civilians were killed and at least 10 others were injured in intense battles fought between troops of the military junta and the Kachin Independence Army in Mongmit (Shan State) in January and February 2024. Between 6,000 and 10,000 people fled the northern Shan State town of Mongmit. According to the Pa-O National Liberation Army, a further 40 civilians were killed in fighting against the junta in the townships of Hsihseng, Loilen und Hopong (Shan State) between 21.01.24 and 24.02.24. Six civilians were killed in airstrikes carried out by the junta on villages in Mansi township (Kachin State) on 17.02.24, and over a dozen others were wounded.

A total of 23 persons were wounded by landmines in January 2024 in northern Shan State, with one person succumbing to their injuries. Five civilians, including one child, were killed in attacks carried out by junta troops on several villages in Tabayin and Salingyi townships (Sagaing Region) between 18.01.24 and 20.01.24. During a military operation carried out in Pale, Kanbalu and Khin-U (Sagaing) on 31.01.24 and 01.02.24, junta troops killed six civilians, injured 10 others and arrested 15. On 13.02.24, four civilians were killed and seven others were injured during shelling of a village in Monywa (Sagaing). In Kale (Sagaing), seven civilians were killed in artillery shelling by the junta between 21.02.24 and 26.02.24. Thirteen children were injured in a drone crash. On 05.02.24, junta soldiers in Shadaw (Kayah state) took three women and three children hostage as they fled and then killed them. On the same day, four children were killed in a military airstrike carried out on a primary school in Demoso (Kayah). Ten more children were injured.

In Buthidaung (Rakhine State), junta troops shelled a village inhabited mainly by Rohingya between 25.01.24 and 28.01.24, killing 12 civilians and injuring 32 others. On 25.02.24, junta forces burned the village of Lone Gyi (Magway region), which belongs to the community of Sidoktaya, to the ground during clashes with local resistance forces. On 27.02.24, junta troops injured 14 civilians in airstrikes carried out on Minbya (Rakhine). Minbya, just like the townships of Pauktaw, Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw, Myay Pon, Taung Pyo and Paletwa, has been under the control of the Arakan Army (AA) since Operation 1027 was carried out (cf. BN of 27.11.23). On 29.02.24, a junta heavy artillery grenade exploded at a market in Sittwe (Rakhine state), killing at least 12 people and injuring approximately 80 others. Since the Arakan Army broke the ceasefire with the military junta on 13.11.23, the number of displaced persons in Rakhine has increased fivefold, to around 330,000 by 13.02.24. According to the Arakan Army, at least 111 civilians have been killed and 357 injured in the same period. Almost 300 people have been arrested by the junta authorities.²³

Compulsory military service

In view of the territorial losses suffered, particularly in the states of Shan, Chin and Rakhine, the military junta announced on 10.02.24 that it would enforce a previously inactive law on compulsory military service from April 2024 and then conscript 5,000 people per month for at least two and up to five years. Around 7.7 million women aged 18 to 27 and around 6.3 million men aged 18 to 35 will be affected by the announcement. Those who fail to comply with the draft face up to five years' imprisonment. Tens of thousands of young people are now trying to leave the country, some of them illegally, with most of them heading to Thailand, which is currently planning to set up a humanitarian corridor. Two women suffocated in a stampede in front of a passport office in Mandalay in the early hours of 20.02.24. The military has already begun forced conscription in many places. On 20.02.24, for example, junta troops arrested over 100 ethnic Rakhine youths who were travelling by bus from Yangon to Rakhine to avoid conscription. More than 100 people from a Muslim IDP camp in Kyaukphyu township, Rakhine state, were forcibly taken into a battalion by junta forces and given military training. Forty family members of Muslim camp residents who escaped being conscripted into military training were arrested and beaten.²⁴

Nigeria

Nasarawa State: more than a dozen killed in attack on community

On 25.02.24, unknown persons killed the village head and other people in an attack on the village of Katakpa in the Toto Local Government Area (LGA) of Nasarawa State. Media reports vary on the total number of people killed. The total number of fatalities reported varies between 13 and 29. There are consistent reports that several people were killed in an attack carried out on the same village back in early January 2024. Survivors of the attacks are calling for the presence of security forces in the region and the provision of aid and shelter. Attacks by armed actors against communities have repeatedly occurred in the region in the recent past, for example in Benue and Plateau states (cf. BN of 08.01.24, 29.01.24 and 05.02.24).²⁵

Deadly military operations

According to information provided by the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) on 28.02.24, in various operations carried out in February 2024, Nigerian armed forces killed 974 people who they consider to be either terrorists or other dangerous violent actors, such as members of armed gangs or separatist groups. The DHQ also stated that during the same period, the military rescued 466 kidnap victims and arrested 621 people labelled as terrorists or bandits. It added that the various military operations had also succeeded in recovering numerous weapons of all kinds and other equipment. During the same period, a total of 1,157 people belonging to the Islamist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) had surrendered to the armed forces. The DHQ has already reported success stories of this kind with a certain regularity in the past (cf. BN of 16.10.23, 04.12.23 and 15.01.24). This time, it was emphasised that one focus was the fight against oil theft through the destruction of illegal refinery sites in the Niger Delta.

The DHQ stated that a major air force operation against the threat posed by Islamist groups was conducted on 19.02.24. It said that the ISWAP commanders Abacha, Babangida and Bakura and other persons belonging to ISWAP were killed in the airstrike carried out in the far northeast of Nigeria in Marte LGA in Borno State.²⁶

Protests over rising cost of living

According to media reports, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) organised protests in several major cities on 27.02.24, demanding more measures from the government to mitigate the ongoing economic crisis. The reports said that the continuing high inflation, among other things, was causing exasperation. They stated that one of several factors driving up prices was the abolition of fuel subsidies in 2023 (cf. BN of 29.01.24), adding that a litre of petrol currently cost more than three times as much as it did nine months ago. The price of imported products had reportedly also risen sharply due to the depreciation of the Nigerian naira against the US dollar.²⁷

Pakistan

Reactions following the parliamentary elections

On 29.02.24, the newly elected lower house of Pakistan's National Assembly convened for its first session, during which the newly elected members of parliament were sworn in. The parliamentary elections were overshadowed by allegations of rigging (cf. BN of 19.02.24). As expected, former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was re-elected head of government by the parliamentary majority on 03.03.24.

On 22.02.24, Pakistan's media regulatory authority blocked the social media platform X. The government had already cut off mobile phone and internet services in many parts of the country during election day on 08.02.24.

On 23.02.24, the religious fundamentalist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan organised a demonstration in Karachi (Sindh province) against the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Qazi Faez Isa.

On 24.02.24, dozens of protesters in Karachi, who had gathered outside the Sindh Provincial Assembly, were arrested. Several parties, including the Grand Democratic Alliance, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl, Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and Muhajir Qaumi Movement, had called for the protests. The provincial government of Sindh then imposed a ban on gatherings.

On 28.02.24, several parties, including members of the Hazara Democratic Party, the Pashtunkhwa National Awami Party, the National Democratic Movement and the Awami National Party, demonstrated in Quetta, Balochistan province, against the outcome of the national parliamentary elections.²⁸

Continuous heavy rain claims dozens of lives

Since 29.02.24, at least 29 deaths have been reported in various regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on the border with Afghanistan as a result of continuous heavy rainfall. Houses have collapsed and landslides have blocked roads. According to a statement issued by the Provincial Disaster Management Authority on 03.03.24, many of the people killed were women and children. Gilgit-Baltistan and parts of Balochistan province were also affected by landslides as a result of persistent heavy rainfall.²⁹

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: current developments; humanitarian situation

On 01.03.24, the Hamas-led Ministry of Health stated that more than 30,228 people had been killed in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war. More than 71,377 other people are said to have been wounded. The ministry does not officially distinguish between combatants and civilians. The fighting is continuing, particularly in the north and in central Gaza.

On 29.02.24, more than 115 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 others were wounded after a convoy carrying relief aid reached the north of the Gaza Strip and several thousand people tried to reach the trucks. According to eyewitness reports, the Israeli military opened fire on the crowd surrounding the lorries carrying aid. According to Israeli statements, the majority of the deaths were, however, caused by the outbreak of mass panic. According to these statements, warning shots were fired after part of the crowd moved threateningly towards the military personnel who had been deployed to escort the aid deliveries. The director of al-Awda Hospital, on the other hand, said that 142 of the 176 injured brought to the hospital had gunshot wounds, while the remaining 34 had injuries that could be consistent with a stampede, according to media reports. He was reportedly unable to comment on the fatal injuries of those killed as they had been taken to another hospital. The director of Kamal Adwan Hospital also attributed most of the injuries to gunshot wounds and added that many of the dead had gunshot wounds to the head, neck and chest, without giving exact figures.

According to UN figures released on 27.02.24, a quarter of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip is at severe risk of famine, which is increasingly leading to the looting of aid supplies. At the same time, according to UNRWA, there are still far too few aid supplies being transported to the Gaza Strip. Instead of the target of 500 trucks a day, only an average of 97 a day are reported to have entered Gaza in February.

On 02.03.24, the US military, in coordination with the Jordanian Air Force, began air-dropping humanitarian aid over the Gaza Strip in order to deliver relief supplies to the starving population in the Gaza Strip. However, it was emphasised that, due to the limited scope of this aid, it can only supplement deliveries on the ground and not replace them.

The European Commission has declared its willingness to make further payments to UNRWA after the refugee relief organisation declared its readiness to conduct an independent investigation that will again examine the allegations that UNRWA employees were involved in the Hamas attack on Israel on 07.10.23.³⁰

West Bank: two Israelis and two Palestinians killed; resignation of Prime Minister

According to media reports, an attacker from the Qalandiya refugee camp killed two Israeli citizens, including a child, on 29.02.24 when he opened fire at a petrol station near the Israeli settlement of Eli near Nablus. The attacker was shot and killed by an armed settler at the scene. The attacker is said to have been a member of Fatah and an officer in the Palestinian Authority security forces.

According to the Palestinian health authorities, one Palestinian was killed and another wounded by the Israeli military near Hebron. The two were reportedly searching for herbs. On the same day, UN OCHA reported that two brothers were shot dead when they and a third brother allegedly tried to enter Israel through an opening in the border barrier.

According to UNRWA reports, over 200 operations were carried out by the Israeli military in the West Bank between 22.02.24 and 28.02.24, during which at least 174 Palestinians are said to have been detained.

Since 07.10.23, UN OCHA has recorded 603 attacks by Israeli settlers against the Palestinian population in the West Bank. These have been aimed directly against the population, against their property or both.

On 26.02.24, the Palestinian Authority's Prime Minister, Mohammed Shtayyeh, announced his resignation in the West Bank. He said he would stay on as caretaker until President Mahmoud Abbas appointed his successor.³¹

Republic of Moldova

Transnistria: genocide accusation and request for protection from Moscow

The authorities of the breakaway "Transnistrian Moldavian Republic" (PMR) appealed to the Russian Federation for protection on 28.02.24. They said the request for protection was justified on the grounds of increasing economic pressure from the government and even the threat of genocide. Media reports further state that an official Russian response said that the protection of the interests of the Transnistrian population, Russian compatriots, was a priority. The actual background to this is new import and export duties that the Moldovan central government has been imposing on the breakaway part of the country since 01.01.24. The economic interests of the Transnistrian elites have also been affected by the border closures since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Before that happened, Transnistria was considered to be a hub for smuggling.

Around 1,500 Russian military personnel have been stationed in Transnistria as peacekeepers since the conflict over secession from the Republic of Moldova was frozen. According to observers, there is no likelihood of the conflict thawing, even if the Russian and Transnistrian troops together could outmatch the Moldovan troops. Instead, the view is that the PMR authorities and Moscow are seeking to undermine the pro-European Moldovan government and its course. There are repeated reports of attempts by the Russian Federation to destabilise the country by influencing the media and supporting forces in the country that are not interested in EU rapprochement.³²

Russian Federation

Prison sentence for human rights activist Oleg Orlov

On 27.02.24, a court in Moscow sentenced Oleg Orlov to two years and six months in prison for discrediting the army. The 70-year-old Orlov is one of Russia's best-known civil rights activists and co-chairman of the human rights foundation Memorial, which was banned by the Russian Supreme Court on 28.12.21 and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022.

The criminal proceedings against Orlov were initiated in March 2023 for his article "They wanted fascism. They got it". The text, in which the civil rights activist condemns the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and speaks of the "mass murder of people", was first published in the French online newspaper Mediapart. Orlov then posted it in Russian on his Facebook profile. The trial against Orlov began in early June 2023, and in October 2023, Orlov was sentenced to a fine of 150,000 roubles – the equivalent of around EUR 1,500 – in this case, which in today's Russia was almost tantamount to an acquittal. However, the public prosecutor's office appealed against the ruling

and demanded that the civil rights activist be sentenced to three years in prison. In December 2023, the case was returned for a preliminary hearing, and the investigation was resumed. This time, the investigating committee found an aggravating circumstance and claimed that Orlov had published the article out of hostility "against traditional Russian spiritual, moral and patriotic values" and out of hatred towards the Russian military. In early February 2024, the Ministry of Justice declared Orlov a "foreign agent" for his criticism of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the dissemination of alleged false information about the political leadership in Moscow, before he was eventually sentenced to two and a half years in prison at the end of February 2024.³³

Navalny buried in Moscow – arrests in numerous cities

On 01.03.24, thousands of people gathered in Moscow for the church funeral service and burial at the Borisovskoye cemetery of Kremlin opponent Alexei Navalny, who died in a prison camp. Many chanted "Putin is a murderer" and condemned Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The circumstances of Navalny's death have not yet been clarified. Despite a massive deployment of security forces, no arrests were made in Moscow in connection with Navalny's funeral, and numerous mourners were also able to linger unhindered at the grave and lay flowers on the weekend of 02.03.24/03.03.24.

On the day of Navalny's funeral, mourning events were held across the country and quite a number of arrests were made. The civil rights portal OVD-Info reported on 02.03.24 that the number of arrests totalled more than 100, spread across 20 cities, including around 20 people in Novosibirsk alone. In most cases, the people concerned were released after a short time.³⁴

Senegal

Proposal for election date on 02.06.24; general amnesty for protest participants and further releases

On 28.02.24, President Macky Sall announced that he would submit the proposal of the national dialogue, which was very largely boycotted by the opposition and civil society forces, to hold the presidential election on 02.06.24 to the Constitutional Council for consideration. It remains to be seen whether Sall will remain in office until the inauguration of his successor, as proposed by the national dialogue (cf. BN of 12.02.24). On 29.02.24, Sall reaffirmed his intention to resign from office on 02.04.24, as scheduled (cf. BN of 26.02.24). The broad civil society association Aar Sunu Election Platform (Aar Sunu Élection (ASE)), the heterogeneous opposition movement Movement-Rally of Patriotic Forces (Mouvement des forces vives du Sénégal (F24)), 16 of the 19 presidential candidates and others jointly demanded an election date before the end of Sall's regular term of office on 29.02.24. On 02.03.24, several hundred protesters again demonstrated in Dakar at the call of opposition and civil society forces in support of the holding of elections before 02.04.24. It was reported that the demonstration, which had been authorised by the authorities, had initially proceeded peacefully. During the course of the demonstration, however, clashes had broken out between the supporters of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and opposition presidential candidate Khalifa Sall, which had reportedly led to their dispersal. According to a media report, the police used tear gas to disperse the crowds.

Furthermore, on 26.02.24, President Sall announced a draft amnesty law for all protesters who have been arrested since 2021. This was justified on the grounds of strengthening national cohesion and pacifying the political arena. The bill, which is the subject of controversy among various circles, was approved by the Council of Ministers as early as 28.02.24 and is to be introduced into the parliamentary legislative process.

Senegalese media recently reported on further releases of protesters, including a mayor belonging to Sonko's banned opposition party. Since 15.02.24, hundreds of people arrested during protests have already been released from custody, which has been seen as a sign of easing tensions after weeks of political crisis following the postponement of the elections, which resulted in several deaths (cf. BN of 19.02.24).³⁵

Somalia

Puntland: imposition of the death penalty

On 29.02.24, a military court in Bosasso sentenced six Moroccan nationals to death, while an Ethiopian and a Somali national were each given a 10-year prison sentence. They are accused of being members of the terrorist group

Islamic State in Somalia (ISS). The convicts stated that they were "induced" to join the group. ISS is particularly active in the Golis Mountains, and the training centre is reportedly located in the Cal-Miskaat Mountains.³⁶

Sudan

Ongoing fighting

Attacks by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on villages around the town of Habila (South Kordofan) caused more than 40,000 people to flee on 01.03.24. According to media reports, dozens of people were killed and 15 young women were abducted by RSF units. Habila was captured by the RSF on 04.01.24, before an alliance of armed residents and units of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North led by Abdelaziz El Hilu (SPLM-N El Hilu) recaptured the town on 09.02.24. This was followed by numerous deaths, looting and sexual assaults by RSF units on neighbouring villages.

In the region around the city of Wad Madani (Gezira), there have also been repeated attacks and looting of villages by the RSF. Local resistance committees have reported 53 such attacks since the capture of Wad Madani by the RSF on 09.12.23. The RSF is also accused of human rights violations. As a result of military operations by the Sudanese army (SAF) in this region, fierce battles have raged with RSF units since 01.03.24. It has been reported that the army tried unsuccessfully to advance against the RSF positions in Wad Madani.

Further fighting and bombardments by the SAF took place in the towns of Giteina (White Nile) and El-Fasher (North Darfur), among others. Following the RSF's success in bringing four of the five Darfur regions largely under its control, North Darfur is still being fought over.³⁷

Humanitarian situation

According to media reports, on 01.03.24, the Sudanese Foreign Minister rejected a request from the WFP to provide humanitarian aid across the border from Chad. The Foreign Minister justified his refusal by stating that weapons had been delivered to the RSF via Chad (cf. BN of 26.02.24) and that the border must therefore remain closed for security reasons.

Citing UNHCR data, several media sources report that the fighting in Sudan has claimed the lives of at least 14,600 people since it broke out on 15.04.23. According to the data, more than 26,000 people have been injured. However, it is assumed that the number of unreported cases is much higher.³⁸

Syria

North: HRW report accuses Türkiye of potential war crimes

In a report released on 29.02.24, HRW accuses Türkiye of responsibility for serious abuses and potential war crimes against the population in the areas controlled by Turkish troops and affiliated armed militias in northern Syria. In its report, HRW documented numerous human rights violations, including abductions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary and unlawful arrests, sexual violence and torture in the areas under Turkish occupation, primarily through interviews with those affected. These violations were carried out by local actors, such as the groups of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) militia coalition, the military police of the so-called Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and Turkish troops. The report said that forced dispossession, looting and the failure of accountability measures to curb abuses and provide compensation to victims had also been recorded. HRW describes Türkiye as an occupying power and accuses it of failing to fulfil its obligations under international law as the de facto government in these areas.

A senior Turkish Foreign Ministry official rejected the accusations, saying that they did not reflect the reality on the ground.³⁹

Northeast: at least three killed in Turkish airstrike

According to media reports, on 28.02.24, three members of the Assyrian Christian militia Sutoro were killed and two others were injured in the village of al-Malikiyah in a Turkish drone attack carried out in northeast Syria. An official of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), in whose territory al-Malikiyah is located, reported that militia vehicles were the target of the attacks. He said that after the first airstrikes, another vehicle that had arrived at the scene to retrieve the victims was also shot at from the air.

According to the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), one civilian was killed in addition to the three militia members.

According to Turkish state media, a high-ranking member of the Kurdish Women's Defence Units (YPJ), who was accused by the state of planning attacks on Turkish troops, was killed during a military operation carried out by the Turkish secret service on 27.02.24.⁴⁰

Damascus/Tartus: Israeli airstrikes

According to Syrian state media, several suspected Israeli airstrikes were carried out on targets in the suburbs of the capital Damascus on the night of 28.02.24, most of which were intercepted by the air defence system. According to the media report, only material damage was reported. The SOHR, on the other hand, reported casualties.

According to the Iranian news agency IRNA, a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard who worked as a military advisor to the Syrian government was killed in further Israeli airstrikes carried out on 01.03.24. The attack is said to have been carried out on a building in the western governorate of Tartus. Other Iranian media also reported the killing of two Hezbollah members.⁴¹

South: one killed during protests in Suweida

Syrian security forces opened fire on protesters in Suweida, the capital of the governorate of the same name in southern Syria, killing one protester and wounding another. The protests, which have been ongoing since August 2023 (cf. BN of 21.08.23), were directed against the deteriorating economic situation in the country and included chants calling for the overthrow of the Syrian government. According to media reports, demonstrators attempted to storm the Baath Party office building.

Further unrest is said to have broken out in the city the following night.⁴²

Türkiye

Violence against women: eight murders in two days

According to media reports, seven women aged between 32 and 49 were killed by their partners or ex-partners across Turkey on 27.02.24. Another woman was allegedly killed by her father on 28.02.24. The eight women were killed in Izmir, Adıyaman, Istanbul, Denizli, Erzurum, Bursa and Sakarya. Three of the perpetrators subsequently took their own lives, two were arrested and one perpetrator, who was wounded while being detained, succumbed to his injuries. Two other perpetrators are on the run.

In 2023, the NGO "We Will Stop Femicide Platform" (Kadın Cinayetleri Durduracağız Platformu (KCDP)) recorded 315 murders of women, 65 percent of whom were killed in their own homes. A further 248 deaths, which were labelled as suicides by the Turkish authorities, are considered suspicious by KCDP. KCDP attributes the women's deaths to the actions of third parties and points to an increase in window-falling incidents among the deceased women.

In the Turkish Criminal Code, Law 6284 provides for the protection of women from violence in general and domestic violence in particular. However, women's rights organisations note that women who rely on this law are sometimes denied protection by the police. According to KCDP, it can happen that the police do not take reports of domestic violence seriously and women are often sent home afterwards. KCDP has called for a protest and held a rally in Istanbul's Kadıköy district on 03.03.24 in the run-up to this year's International Women's Day. Against the backdrop of Türkiye's withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the so-called Istanbul Convention, in 2021, KCDP stated that the only year in which the number of femicides had decreased was 2011. This was the year in which Türkiye adopted the Istanbul Convention, which is binding under international law.⁴³

Ukraine

Development of the war; statement on Russian war aims

According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) think tank's own information and observations, which were picked up by media outlets, the Russian Federation made further advances to the west in the Donetsk region prior to 25.02.24 following the capture of Avdiivka (cf. BN of 19.02.24).

According to reports, the Russian side is continuing to carry out attacks on locations where the Ukrainian military wants to establish its new defence line. However, according to a report published in the New York Times, the Ukrainian fortifications there are rudimentary, which, in conjunction with the lack of weapons and ammunition, facilitates further Russian territorial gains.

It is highly likely that the Russian defence industry will be able to deliver a material advantage over Ukraine throughout 2024, the British Ministry of Defence is quoted as saying in the media. Ukraine has recently reported more frequent successes in shooting down Russian military aircraft, which, according to ISW, can also be attributed to the fact that the Russian military is currently accepting such losses to support its further advance following the capture of Avdiivka. In general, according to ISW, the Russian Federation currently has the initiative on the battlefield, which allows it to freely choose the time and place of offensives.

In an interview with the Russian news agency Tass which was published on 22.02.24, the Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, named the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, as a war target. He said this was to be achieved in a subsequent phase of the conflict at the latest. Odessa should also be won. He said the Ukrainian government must fall. Perhaps the Lviv region could remain a Ukrainian state.⁴⁴

Situation for schoolchildren; civilian war victims

According to various sources, the number of damaged or even destroyed schools across the country is around 3,500 and 3,800, respectively, which corresponds to around one in seven schools. According to the sources, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education estimates the repair costs at just under USD 14 billion. Further reports, citing UNICEF, say that the war is preventing half of the children from attending school continuously. Many reportedly have to spend their days in shelters.

In the Sumy region, according to local reports, a couple died as a result of a Russian airstrike carried out in the early hours of 26.02.24. In the same region, two police officers, part of a team assessing damage caused by earlier Russian attacks, were killed on 27.02.24 when, according to Ukrainian reports, the team was targeted. Along the frontlines, Russian artillery fire in the Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions killed a total of three people on 02.03.24. According to the latest information, 12 people, including several children, died in a Russian drone attack carried out on a residential building in Odessa on 02.03.24. President Volodymyr Zelensky responded by once again calling on Western partners to provide more air defence to protect the population. Five people were injured by Russian shelling of the towns of Myrnohrad and Pokrovsk (Donetsk Oblast) on 03.03.24. Also on 03.03.24, one person was reportedly killed and three were wounded in the Kherson region as a result of Russian attacks.⁴⁵

Blockade of the Polish-Ukrainian border crossings

According to media reports, Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk stated that a temporary border closure could not be ruled out and that trade with Ukraine would also be suspended in that case. He added that he was in contact with Ukraine about this. Oleksandr Kubrakov, the Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister, replied that he would not negotiate this, however. He said that a stable border was a question of survival for Ukraine.

The background to this are ongoing protests by Polish farmers against EU regulations, but also against imports from Ukraine. According to information provided by the Ukrainian border guard on 03.03.24, all six Polish-Ukrainian border crossings are currently blocked for lorries. Small numbers of lorries are reportedly able to enter Ukraine, while the opposite direction remains completely blocked, at least at the largest border crossing.⁴⁶

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