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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

By its own account, the National Resistance Front killed one Talib in an attack in Kabul on 25.11.24.¹

Persecution

The Taliban reportedly arrested a woman in Kapisa province on 22.11.24 after she had been raped by five members of her husband's family. Only one of the perpetrators is said to have been arrested by the Taliban.

It was reported on 25.11. and 30.11.24 that the Taliban had arrested one former soldier respectively in Bamiyan province and in Kabul. In Panjshir province they reportedly arrested a former soldier on 30.11.24 who had shortly before been deported from Iran, together with two other people. A man who was arrested in Herat province on 29.11.24 died as a result of the effects of torture on the same day. The background to his arrest is unclear.

A report from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on 26.11.24 puts the number of journalists indiscriminately arrested by the Taliban since 15.08.21 at 256. Torture and mistreatment is said to have occurred in at least 130 cases.

It was reported on 27.11.24 that the Taliban had arrested five of their own members for attending a marriage at which music was played. On the same day, eight people were arrested in Laghman province for playing music at a wedding.

There are recent reports of floggings by the Taliban, including the case of a man in Parwan province who was sentenced to 80 lashes for allegedly having falsely accused another man of adultery.²

Economic and humanitarian situation

In a recent statement, the WFP warns of a further worsening of food insecurity. It reports that three out of four families are forced to enter into debt in order to buy food. The WFP itself does not have sufficient financial resources to support all families in need. Women who have begged report of arrests and rape by the Taliban. Three children are reported to have died on 29.11.24 in a cold spell with heavy snowfall in Badakhshan province.

According to a report published by the UN on 27.11.24, opium production has increased by 30 % in 2024 compared to 2023. It nevertheless remains 93 % below the volume before the Taliban's ban on growing opium came into force in 2022. Growing opium is around 60 times more profitable than cultivating other crops. Overall, according to the figures published by the Taliban the economy was weaker in the past six months than in the same period last year.³

Burundi

Government releases 4,000 prisoners

According to recent reports in the media, 4,000 prisoners were released on 27.11.24 due to prison overcrowding. The Burundian president, Evariste Ndayishimiye, announced the mass amnesty back at the beginning of November

2024. In total, almost 5,500 prisoners are to be released from the country's prisons, which are said to be filled to three times capacity. Anschaire Nikoyagize, president of local human rights group Iteka, has criticised the fact that 4,000 to 5,000 inmates who have been imprisoned on political grounds have not been included in the amnesty, however. The government released 5,255 prisoners back in 2021, announcing a programme to reduce prison overcrowding at the same time. The human rights situation in Burundi remains critical. There are frequent reports of state repression against media representatives, human rights activists and opposition figures.⁴

Chad

End of military cooperation with France

Only hours after a visit by the new French foreign minister, Jean-Noël Barrot, on 28.11.24 the government surprisingly declared the end of the agreement with France on military cooperation. Chad's foreign minister, Abderaman Koulamallah, stated in a communiqué that Chad intended to exercise its authority entirely on its own. He noted that the end of the military cooperation would enable the country to redefine its strategic partnerships. In a television address on 01.12.24, president Mahamat Idriss Déby added that the agreement was of no further value in the light of the currently prevailing challenges. He said that the move did not amount to a rejection of France, however, stating that the stationing of any other foreign troops in the country was out of the question. The termination of the agreement sparked speculation that Déby may be aiming to expand his existing relations with the Russian Federation in the field of security. Among other possible motives, reasons relating to Chad's internal politics are also being put forward. Parliamentary elections are planned for 29.12.24.

A plan to restructure France's military presence in Africa reportedly already provided for a reduction in French military personnel in Chad to around 300. Around 1,000 French soldiers are currently stationed in the country, together with combat aircraft. These must now all be withdrawn. After France had been forced by the respective juntas to end its involvements in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, Chad was seen as a key partner for the west in the fight against Islamist groups in the Sahel region. The country had previously demanded the withdrawal of US units ahead of the presidential election on 06.05.24 (cf. BN of 13.05.24).⁵

Eritrea

Keren and Geleb regions declare themselves free of FGM

According to recent reports in the press, the Keren and Geleb regions in the administrative district of Anseba declared themselves officially free of female genital mutilation (FGM) on 23.11. and 25.11.24 respectively. During a ceremony held in the city of Keren, the chairman of the Committee for Ensuring the Rights of Children and Women and the Eradication of Harmful Practices drew attention once again to the negative health and psychological effects of FGM on women. The two administrators of the Keren and Geleb regions alluded to the successful public relations work against FGM. The regions of Asmat, Habero, Halhal, Adi-Tekelezan and Elaberet had previously declared themselves free of FGM as a result of measures carried out by the minister of labour, social welfare and health and the National Union of Eritrean Women.⁶

Georgia

Security forces crack down hard on demonstrators in Tbilisi

In renewed protests, violent clashes have taken place between police and demonstrators outside the parliament building in the capital, Tbilisi. On the evening of 30.11.24, thousands of people set up barricades, smashed windows and ignited fireworks. Masked police officers in riot gear deployed rubber bullets, tear gas and water canons against the demonstrators, injuring many people, including media representatives and opposition politicians. Violent clashes had already occurred in Tbilisi on the previous day. No information has emerged to date regarding the number of protesters injured. The interior ministry has stated that 107 people were arrested for "disobeying lawful police orders and minor hooliganism". Other sources allege that at least 200 people were arrested. At least 32 police officers were reportedly injured in action. The interior ministry has stated that it will continue to take action against violent demonstrators.

Meanwhile, the investigating authorities have launched an inquiry into abuse of office on grounds of violence against demonstrators and media representatives. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has confirmed the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the police, which it says constitutes a serious breach of the freedom of assembly. In the early morning of 01.12.24, the protesters were forced away from the parliament building by security personnel, who had set up road blocks near to the State University.

The pro-European protests began in Tbilisi and other towns and cities on the evening of 28.11.24 and are still ongoing. The protests are directed in particular at prime minister Irakli Kobachidse's announcement that EU accession negotiations for the country are to be postponed until 2028. Numerous civil servants, in particular from the ministries of foreign affairs and defence, as well as judges, have published joint notes of protest. A number of Georgian ambassadors have handed in their resignations. More than a hundred schools and universities remained closed on 29.11.24 as a sign of protest.⁷

Contentious plan for renewed presidential election

The internal conflict between the pro-European president, Salome Zourabichvili, and the pro-Russian government is intensifying. Zourabichvili has declared she will remain in office until the manipulated parliamentary election is repeated. Her tenure officially ends on 31.12.24. Following its election victory on 26.10.24, which was overshadowed by accusations of fraud (cf. BN of 28.10. and 04.11.24), the governing Georgian Dream party set 14.12.24 as the date for the presidential election. For the first time, rather than being elected directly by the people, the new head of state is to be chosen by an elective assembly comprising MPs, local and regional representatives. Following an amendment to the constitution a number of years ago, the most important position of power in Georgia is that of prime minister and no longer the office of president.⁸

Ghana

Election preparations: Fact-checking collective to combat misinformation

Ahead of the impending presidential and parliamentary elections on 07.12.24, the three fact-checking organisations Fact-Check Ghana, GhanaFact und Dubawa Ghana have formed a joint collective. The declared aim of the newly founded Ghana Fact-Checking Coalition (GFC) is to take more effective action against the propagation of misinformation and to ensure the integrity of the elections. The GFC brings together more than 50 fact checkers spread all over Ghana, who also train media representatives in particular in remote areas and impart an awareness of misinformation issues. Partnerships additionally exist with around 100 media organisations which translate fact-checked news into local languages. Traditional media remain the main source of information for most Ghanaians. The existing coalition of domestic election monitors (CODEC) has also announced that it intends to cooperate with the GFC. The organisations state that the propagation of misinformation is on the increase and poses a substantial threat to democratic processes and their stabilisation.⁹

India

Air pollution in New Delhi

For weeks now, a toxic smog with levels of over 1,700 on the air quality scale - 17 times over the safe limit - has been prevalent in the capital, New Delhi, exposing the population to harmful particles which can cause serious respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. A medical state of emergency has been declared and schools have been closed. Visibility on the roads has dropped to 50 metres. The crisis is exacerbating social inequality for millions of people, and above all for the poorest. Nationwide, some two million people die every year as a result of the effects of air pollution.¹⁰

Iran

Prison sentences for activists

It has been reported in the media that a number of activists have been sentenced to prison terms in separate cases.

Citing information from the well-known student activist Leila Hosseinzadeh, it was reported on 25.11.24 that she had been sentenced to a prison term for failing to wear a headscarf when she appeared to defend her thesis. No information has emerged regarding the length of the sentence. The student was previously detained in 2022 and subsequently released on bail after four months. Since 2017, she has been arrested and convicted many times on account of her activities in student groups.

According to a report in the media on 26.11.24, a women's rights activist who is already serving a two-year prison term has been sentenced to an additional prison term of over seven years in the city of Damghan (Semnan province). Her lawyer has stated that the woman was sentenced to a total of seven years and seven months in prison and banned from practising her profession for two years on charges which included forming a group in social media. The activist apparently translated feminist-oriented texts and published these in the online group. According to her lawyer, she has already served time in prison on numerous occasions in the past.

Citing information posted by a man in social media, it was reported on 28.11.24 that the man concerned had been sentenced to a prison term of three years and six months. The sentence was passed at first instance and is appealable. According to his own account, the man had endeavoured to help other demonstrators during protests in Qazvin province in 2022. He alleges that he was hit by a rubber bullet fired by the security forces, and has since been blind in one eye. The information cannot be independently verified.¹¹

Man arrested apparently for converting to Christianity

A human rights organisation reported on 28.11.24 that a man who had converted to Christianity was arrested by members of the security forces in Nowshahr (Mazandaran province) on 17.11.24. It is suspected that his arrest is linked to his religious convictions. In addition, his home was searched and his wife and daughter were questioned. The man is said to be one of twelve Christian converts against whom criminal proceedings are pending before the revolutionary court in Nowshahr. The arrested man's home was reportedly also searched during the Christmas period last year, in the course of which a number of personal items were confiscated. The report cannot be independently verified.¹²

Iraq

Conflict between Türkiye and PKK

The Turkish defence ministry announced on 27.11.24 that the Turkish army had "neutralised" eight members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) during a military operation close to the Turkish border in northern Iraq.

In this context, the term "neutralised" denotes that people have died or been taken prisoner.¹³

Lebanon

Ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel

A ceasefire agreement entered into force at 4 a.m. local time on 27.11.24, officially ending the phase of open warfare. The agreement provides for a 60-day transition period and grants Israel comprehensive rights of intervention.

Under the agreement, Hezbollah must withdraw behind the Litani river and is not allowed to possess any weapons or any infrastructure usable for military purposes south of the river. Observers describe the ceasefire as fragile. It has already been broken several times, with Hezbollah and Israel accusing each other of being responsible for such breaches.

While Hezbollah has officially claimed the ceasefire to be a victory, despite the disadvantageous conditions to which it is subjected under the agreement, substantial numbers of people are already returning to their homes. The Lebanese army has moved considerable forces to the south. Under the terms of the ceasefire agreement, it is to station around 10,000 men in the region.

At the end of the fighting, which began on 08.10.23, the Lebanese health ministry announced the final casualty count from the conflict on the Lebanese side on 28.11.24. The official figures are 3,961 dead and 16,520 injured. Experts suspect that many killed Hezbollah fighters are not included in these figures, however. It is said that

Hezbollah actually estimates its own losses at around 4,000 fighters. For its part, Israel estimates that it has killed around 3,000 Hezbollah fighters.

On the Israeli side, 45 civilians and 76 soldiers have died.

Since the beginning of the ceasefire, substantial numbers of Lebanese who had fled their homes have been returning from other parts of the country and also from Syria. In the days after 27.11.24, thousands of people are reported to have crossed the border from Syria to Lebanon every day.¹⁴

Mali

Prime minister replaced after criticising junta

Choguel Kokalla Maïga, prime minister since Assimi Goïta assumed power on 24.05.21 (cf. BN of 31.05. and 07.06.21), was relieved of his duties on 20.11.24. Reportedly, the civilian Choguel Maïga complained at an official function about being excluded from key decisions, in particular with regard to the timetable for the return to a civilian system of government. Elections to end the transition phase with the military junta at the head of the state have been postponed several times (cf. BN of 08.04. and 27.05.24). The question now arises as to how the junta will deal with Choguel Maïga, who apparently intends to remain politically active.

A member of the military was reportedly appointed as the new prime minister on 21.11.24, in the guise of general Abdoulaye Maïga. This is seen as further consolidating the military's sphere of control. It is reported that general Maïga previously headed the ministry for territorial administration and that he is also to retain this post, whose remit includes the organisation of elections. Despite the appointment of a new prime minister, there have been no changes among the key ministerial posts.¹⁵

Mali / Burkina Faso

TV station has licence revoked for criticising Burkina Faso

According to a report in the media, the Malian high authority for communication (HAC) has withdrawn the broadcasting licence of private news channel Joliba TV News with effect from 26.11.24, in response to a complaint by the Burkinabe Superior Council for Communication (CSC). The ban was sparked by an appearance by Issa Kaou N'Djim in which he accused the Burkinabe junta of having orchestrated the most recent alleged attempted coup. N'Djim was arrested in Bamako on 13.11.24 (cf. BN article on Burkina Faso of 18.11.24). His court hearing is said to be scheduled for 23.12.24.

Shortly after the ban on Joliba TV, on 28.11.24 Burkina Faso and the CSC duly subpoenaed the Burkinabe daily newspaper L'Observateur Paalga in connection with a controversial article on the promotion of generals in Mali.¹⁶

Myanmar

Security situation

Two inmates died on 28.10.24 in an air strike by the military junta on a prison in Ho Hko (Shan state) which is controlled by resistance forces.

On 31.10.24 a drone launched by the junta killed two civilians and injured eight in the village of Phuk Khe (Shan). In an attack on the same day on the village of Mon Hla (Sagaing), one third of whose population is Catholic, junta troops destroyed a number of religious buildings.

On 05.11.24 the armed resistance group Naypyidaw People's Defense Force claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on the airport of the capital, Naypyidaw, from which military leader Min Aung Hlaing embarked on the same day on his first visit to China since the military coup in February 2021. State media reported that further attempted attacks in the Naypyidaw region had been prevented.

Almost 10,000 people have fled their homes in the face of fighting between the Bama National Revolution Army and the military junta over the town of Pale (Sagaing). A number of civilians are reported to have been killed in air strikes by the military.

Junta troops killed nine civilians and injured 13 in Mogok (Mandalay region) on 11.11.24.

On 12.11.24 the junta killed eleven civilians and injured ten in air strikes on the town of Nawngkhio (Shan), which is occupied by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army.

Nine civilians, including a number of children, died in a junta air strike on a church and a refugee camp in Konlaw (Kachin state) on 15.11.24.

According to information from resistance forces, more than 30 civilians died in air strikes by the military on Kutkai (Shan) between 12.11. and 19.11.24. 46 civilians are said to have been injured. For its part, the military has stated that it is unavoidable that civilian targets will be hit in the fight against the rebels.

According to ISP-Myanmar and Radio Free Asia, 466 people died in massacres (attacks killing at least ten people) throughout Myanmar between 01.01. and 25.10.24. A total of 379 victims of mass killings was documented for the entire year in 2023.¹⁷

Clashes along the Ann-Padan road and in Madaya

Clashes are a regular occurrence in the mountain regions along the Ann-Padan road at the border between Rakhine state and the Magwe region, as local resistance groups attempt to prevent the junta from bringing reinforcements and supplies into the town of Ann, which is under attack from the Arakan Army (AA). The AA has captured a number of the regime's battalion headquarters and bases in the township of Ann in Rakhine state with the aim of gaining control of the town of Ann, in which the military junta's western military command is located. According to information from local resistance groups, the Ann-Padan highway is crucially important to the military as a means of transporting more troops and supplies to Ann. The local defence group Chin Defense Force (Asho) has stated that on 25.11.24 it ambushed junta soldiers who were carrying out security operations on a stretch of the Ann-Padan road in Ngape township, in the Magwe region. Four junta soldiers were killed and many injured in the ambush. A firefight also occurred on the Add-Padan road in Ngape township on 28.11.24 when another resistance group, the People's Revolution Alliance (Magway), ambushed 40 members of the junta to the east of the village of Gokkyi. The group claims to have killed nine soldiers and injured ten in the ambush. At the beginning of November 2024, the AA claimed that it was on the brink of capturing four more towns in Rakhine state, including Ann. The ethnic army stated that it had captured eight of the junta's battalion headquarters, a military hospital and an arms depot during the fighting over the town of Ann. Only two of the remaining ten junta positions in Ann house combat troops, while the remainder serve as bases for auxiliary units. The junta is reportedly using helicopters to transport reinforcements and supplies to the remaining bases in the town of Ann, which is surrounded by AA troops.

The military junta in Myanmar has regained control of western Madaya township in the Mandalay region. Since 17.11.24 more than 200 junta soldiers and the allied Pyu Saw Htee militia have been attacking villages along the Irrawaddy river and dropping bombs. The junta now controls the majority of western Madaya. The junta troops are stationed in more than three villages along the river, from where they carry out raids, artillery and incendiary attacks on other villages. Thousands of villagers have left their homes. According to information from the defence ministry of the civilian National Unity Government, opposition groups ambushed over 70 junta soldiers in the west of Madaya on 17.11.24, killing twelve soldiers and seizing weapons. The junta has stepped up its air raids and artillery attacks and sent reinforcements in the aftermath of the ambush. Troops of combat support units were also involved in the attacks. The east of Madaya is controlled by the Mandalay People's Defence Force, which announced on 25.11.24 that it intends to restrict traffic on the Madaya-Singu-Thabeikkyin road.¹⁸

Flood disaster after typhoon Yagi

Two months after typhoon Yagi caused serious flooding and landslides in Myanmar (cf. BN of 16.09.24), over 30,000 people in 54 villages and 16 refugee camps in Kayah and Shan states were still waiting for relief aid at the beginning of November 2024. Typhoon victims from townships in Mandalay, Bago and Ayeyarwady have also stated that they have yet to receive any financial support (as per 07.11.24). Roads remain blocked, leading to price rises, and mud and sludge cannot be cleared away from homes. The typhoon left almost 2,000 families homeless. According to inconsistent information from state media and ministries, 5,000 or over 780,000 hectares of rice-growing land and 2.3 million hectares of farmland have been destroyed and 176,000 farm animals killed. UNICEF has reported that farming has been "severely impacted" in 84 of Myanmar's 330 townships. This is expected to lead to a further worsening of the food insecurity caused by the civil war. Official figures put the nationwide death toll at 436, with 66 people still missing.¹⁹

Nigeria

Niger State: Violent incidents claim more than 50 lives

A number of violent incidents have claimed the lives of at least 57 people within a short period in Niger State, central Nigeria. It has been reported in the media that 200 armed actors attacked a convoy carrying 80 security personnel who were tasked with protecting the electricity supply grid in Shiroro Local Government Area (LGA) on 19.11.24. 50 of the attackers were allegedly killed and at least seven of the security personnel are said to be missing. According to information from the authorities, the attackers were men belonging to the Boko Haram Islamist group, which is active above all in the north-east of Nigeria (cf. BN of 08.01.24 and 16.09.24). In the course of 2024, LGA Shiroro has witnessed various violent attacks by actors whose identity has remained unknown (cf. BN of 29.04. and 26.08.24).

According to reports in the media, unknown armed actors killed seven farmers in LGA Mariga in the same state on 21.11.24, including a member of a local vigilante group. The police claim that all seven victims were vigilantes and that the lethal incident actually occurred on 16.11.24. It has also been reported in the media that a herder attacked a number of farmers with a machete following a dispute in LGA Wushishi on 23.11.24. The man is said to have been arrested. Niger State is the largest state in Nigeria in terms of surface area. It is situated in the west of the so-called Middle Belt zone which runs between the states allocated to Northern and Southern Nigeria respectively.²⁰

Pakistan

Mass demonstration by PTI in Islamabad broken up

After breaking up the mass demonstration by the opposition party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the Pakistani authorities have arrested around 1,000 supporters of imprisoned former prime minister Imran Khan. The demonstrators marched from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to Islamabad and ignored the ban on public gatherings which was in force. According to various reports in the press, at least six people died, including two protesters, in ensuing clashes with security forces. Security forces broke up the protest in a large-scale night-time operation on 26.11.24. The PTI temporarily suspended the demonstrations and accused the government of using excessive force and live ammunition. Former prime minister Khan, who has been in custody for over a year and faces 150 lawsuits, remains a popular figure. In connection with the mass demonstration, he and his wife have additionally been charged with terrorism. The government's tough action is meeting with strong criticism in the light of the prevailing political tensions. After the unrest had abated, schools and roads were reopened.²¹

Arrest of a journalist sparks criticism

A number of human rights organisations have demanded the release of journalist Matiullah Jan, who was arrested by the Pakistani authorities on charges of terrorism on 27.11.24. Jan had reported on the protests by PTI supporters. In a statement released on 28.11.24, Amnesty International condemned Jan's "arbitrary" arrest, describing it as an "attack on the right to freedom of expression and the freedom of the media."²²

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Continuing sectarian clashes in Kurram

Despite the efforts to secure peace negotiations, the sectarian clashes in the district of Kurram in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have continued (cf. BN of 25.11.24). Last weekend alone, at least 14 people were killed and 27 injured. The death toll has since risen to at least 130, with at least 186 people injured.²³

Palestinian territories

Gaza Strip: Current developments; humanitarian situation

According to information released by the Hamas-run health ministry on 27.11.24, at least 44,249 Palestinians have been killed and 104,764 injured in the Gaza Strip since the war began on 07.10.23. The ministry does not officially differentiate between combatants and civilians. According to information released by the Israeli military on 27.11.24, a total of 378 members of the Israeli military have been killed and 2,456 injured since the ground offensives began. Meanwhile, the war continues.

Five people died, including an employee of the NGO World Central Kitchen, in an Israeli air strike on a car in the Gaza Strip on 30.11.24. According to information from the Israeli side, the target was one of the employees, who was allegedly actively involved in the massacre at the Nir Oz kibbutz on 07.10.23.

On 30.11.24 Hamas released a propaganda video showing Edan Alexander, who was last seen alive in November 2023. As he mentioned events from November 2024 in the video, it is assumed that he is currently still alive.

On 01.12.24 UNRWA announced that no further relief supplies would be delivered via the Israeli border crossing at Kerem Shalom for the time being, explaining that this move results from the collapse of order in Gaza. Attacks and looting have occurred on numerous occasions. UNRWA is blaming this state of affairs on Israel. According to information from the Israeli side, UNRWA's deliveries account for around 10 % of the total humanitarian aid for Gaza.²⁴

South Africa

Thousands imprisoned for gender-specific violence

According to recent reports in the press, some 4,000 people were imprisoned for gender-based violent crimes in South Africa between April and September 2024. 556 people have been sentenced to life imprisonment. The statistics show that the South African Police Service (SAPS) has carried out 16,668 raids on suspects nationwide, with the support of special units. 29,150 offenders have been arrested. 480 defendants have received prison terms of 20 years and over, 998 have been handed down custodial sentences of between 10 and 19 years and 1,792 have been imprisoned for terms ranging between one and nine years.²⁵

Syria

Rebel offensive: Aleppo captured; SDF also on the back foot

On 27.11.24 various rebel groups from north-west Syria under the leadership of the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group (HTS) and accompanied by Türkiye-backed militias began to advance into territories under government control and to capture large areas of land.

According to information from members of the Turkish military, the rebels had initially planned a limited offensive to stop attacks from government-held territories and to enable people who had fled their homes to return. The low level of resistance offered by pro-government forces surprised many observers. By 30.11.24, the rebels had already taken control of most of Aleppo, the country's most populous city. This gain for the rebels was accompanied by the first air strikes on Aleppo to be carried out by the Syrian air force since 2016 in its fight against the rebels. The Russian defence ministry has announced that it also carried out air strikes against rebels in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.

The offensive in the north-west of Syria was accompanied by apparently spontaneous armed clashes in other parts of the country. According to the UN, in addition to Aleppo and Idlib, such clashes also took place in Hama, Dar'a, Rif Dimashq and Suweida governorates. By the end of 30.11.24, the rebels had taken control of at least four towns in Hama governorate. Forces loyal to the government have so far managed to defend Hama, capital of the governorate of the same name, however. On the same day, the Syrian army released a statement announcing that it was preparing for a counter-offensive.

Many residents reportedly fled their homes after Aleppo was taken over by the Islamist rebels. According to the Kurdish-led administration in north-east Syria, some 3,000 people have already fled east, for example. HTS representatives have announced in statements that the people, including religious or ethnic minorities in particular, have no need to fear their rule. The HTS called on the remaining units of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the eastern part of Aleppo to withdraw their weapons and personnel to the north-east. On 02.12.24 the SDF duly announced that they would set up a corridor to north-east Syria, running from east Aleppo and the city of Tal Rifaat situated further to the north. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, some 200,000 Kurds live in the region.²⁶

Türkiye

Suspected PKK supporters arrested

Following the arrest of over 400 people on suspicion of links to the Gülen movement on 19.11.24 (cf. BN of 25.11.24), a further 231 people were arrested in 30 provinces on 27.11.24. They are accused of having funded or having spread propaganda for the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is classified as a terrorist organisation. Among those detained are twelve journalists and writers, including the 74 year-old poet and writer Hicri İzgören. Various journalists' associations called for a protest rally, which took place on the same day in Diyarbakır, in the predominantly Kurdish south-east of the country.²⁷

Ukraine

Civilian casualties

President Zelenskyy has stated that two civilians were killed by Russian artillery fire in the city of Sumy on 26.11.24. The competent regional governor announced on 28.11.24 that two people had been killed by a Russian drone attack in the Kharkiv region. According to information by the local authorities, four people were killed by Ukrainian shelling in the Russian-occupied city of Nova Kakhovka (Kherson region) on 26.11.24. The Ukrainian public prosecutor's office for the Kherson region has launched investigations into Russian shelling, however. According to information from the Ukrainian authorities, at least six people died as a result of Russian attacks in the Kherson region on 29./30.11. and 01.12.24. President Zelenskyy has stated that a Russian missile attack in the Dnipropetrovsk region on 30.11.24 killed at least four people. According to information from the authorities, a Russian drone attack on 02.12.24 killed one person in the city of Ternopil.²⁸

Course of the war

An analysis by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) concludes that the Russian forces are advancing in Ukraine more quickly than at any time since the begin of the full-scale invasion in 2022. According to information from a high-ranking government official, the outgoing US government is calling for the size of the Ukrainian armed forces to be increased quickly by lowering the minimum age for mobilisation to 18. The commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, Oleksandr Syrskiy, has announced that reserve troops have been redeployed to the particularly endangered sections of the front in Pokrovsk and Kurakhove (Donetsk region), in the face of the Russian advance. In addition, president Zelenskyy has replaced the commander of the ground forces, Oleksandr Pavliuk, with Mykhailo Drapatyi. By Zelenskyy's own account, this move is intended to boost the army's fighting capabilities. The Russian offensive in the Kharkiv region was successfully repelled under Drapatyi.

The Ukrainian military reported the heaviest Russian drone attack to date on the night of 25./26.11.24, comprising a total of 188 drones. 76 drones were reportedly shot down in 17 regions. The detection of 95 drones is said to have been aborted, presumably on account of electronic counter-measures. Five drones are reported to have flown in the direction of Belarus. According to reports in the media on 28.11.24, president Putin has threatened that he will not rule out deploying the new medium-range missile "Oreshnik" against decision-making centres in Kyiv.

The public prosecutor's office of the Donetsk region stated on 26.11.24 that Russian armed forces had again shot five soldiers dead immediately after they were taken prisoner in the Pokrovsk area (Donetsk region). The Ukrainian human rights commissioner, Dmytro Lubinets, is said to have contacted the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in connection with these accusations. The public prosecutor's office in Kyiv reported on 28.11.24 that a further five Ukrainian soldiers had been shot dead after being taken prisoner on 24.11.24.²⁹

Energy infrastructure

Energy minister German Galushchenko stated on 28.11.24 that massive Russian air strikes had targeted the energy structure throughout Ukraine, causing damage in 14 regions. This necessitated power cuts which left hundreds of thousands of people without electricity. President Zelenskyy is accusing the Russian side of using cluster munition. In view of the massive attacks, the German government is providing a further EUR 65 million for repair of the energy infrastructure.³⁰

Venezuela

New law stipulates high fines for endorsing sanctions

A new law (Ley Orgánica Libertador Simón Bolívar contra el Bloqueo Imperialista y por la Defensa de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela), which has been promulgated in the official gazette (N° 6.859 Extraordinario) after being endorsed by president Maduro on 29.11.24, stipulates prison sentences of 25 to 30 years and substantial fines for anyone who calls for, welcomes or supports unilateral sanctions, armed or violent actions or cyber attacks against Venezuela. The law additionally enables bans on holding public office for up to 60 years and confiscation of the property of anyone convicted of such offences. Art. 18 further allows defendants to be tried in absentia. On the assumption that an accused person who refuses to attend preliminary proceedings or hearings does not wish to exercise their right to be heard, in such cases the trial is to be carried out with the defendant's counsel or, in case of default, with a directly appointed counsel. Art. 23 additionally provides for a register to be drawn up of domestic and foreign natural persons and legal entities against whom/which there is a well-founded suspicion that they could commit such offences. The law also stipulates substantial fines for media, and even closure, according to the type of media concerned. In the past, leading opposition figures in particular have called for or welcomed economic sanctions as a means of exerting pressure in negotiations - a practice most recently applied once again by opposition politician Machado (Vente Venezuela).³¹

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