



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

22 May 2023

Afghanistan

Security situation

Two children were killed in a drone attack on a village in Khost province on 16.05.23. No official explanation was given for the attack, but media reports suggest that it was a Pakistani campaign against the Tehrek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Persecution situation

The exile media Hasht-e Subh has documented numerous cases of rape, torture, and shootings by the Taliban through interviews with health workers and women released from women's prisons in the three northern provinces of Jowzjan, Faryab and Samangan.

On 15.05.23, a former Ministry of Interior employee and media activist was arrested at Kabul airport. On 16.05.23, the director of a hospital in Mazar-e Sharif was arrested by the Taliban. Media reports indicate that his father was a prominent officer. On the same day, the Taliban arrested the former mayor of the provincial capital of Samangan, Aybak. In Parwan province, an elderly man was arrested by the Taliban on 17.05.23. His son had got into a fight with a Taliban fighter and then escaped. On the same day, the Taliban shot dead a former soldier in front of his family in Takhar province. On 18.05.23, in Panjshir province, the Taliban handed over the dead body of a man they had arrested the day before to his family. The background to the arrest is unclear. On the same day, the headmaster of a school in Parwan province was arrested after criticising the Taliban's education policy.

Humanitarian situation

New cash shipments to fund UN humanitarian aid have begun to arrive in Kabul again. After the UN agencies resumed their work, although the Taliban have not lifted the ban on Afghan women working for UN agencies, Human Rights Watch criticizes the opaque and inconsistent way in which the UN agencies are managing the current arrangement. There have also been new media reports of people complaining that the Taliban control humanitarian aid and that it is not reaching those in need. On 17.05.23, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported a significant increase in the number of malnourished children in Helmand province. In Kapisa province, heavy rains have destroyed part of the harvest, up to 70 percent in some districts.

Bangladesh

Amendments to the Digital Security Act

The government last week held out the prospect of revising the controversial Digital Security Act (DSA) by September 2023 to ensure that abuse of the law is minimised. Criticism has emerged because of arrests, particularly of media workers and opposition figures, being made recurring to the law.

Left-wing extremist groups lay down arms

On 21.05.23, left-wing extremist groups in the districts of Sirajganj, Pabna, Bogura, Meherpur, Kushtia, Rajbari and Tangail laid down their arms and declared the abandonment of their extremist activities. The Rapid Action Battalion organised and coordinated the laying down of arms in Sirajganj. A total of 315 members of Purba Bangla Communist Party ML (Red Flag), Purba Bangla Sarbahara Party (MBRM) and Purba Bangla Sarbahara Party (Janajudha) gave up their extremist activities and handed over 216 weapons.

Benin

Military repels attack

On 12.05.23, unidentified gunmen attacked security forces in the Koualou-Kourou area in the extreme northwest of Benin. Media report that one of the attackers was killed when the military repelled the attack. Following the incident, military personnel found weapons suspected to belong to the unknown group. Koualou-Kourou is located on the border between Benin and Burkina Faso. It was only in early May 2023 that a total of 20 civilians were killed by unknown assailants in the towns of Kaobagou and Guimbagou, also in north-western Benin (cf. BN of 08.05.23).

Burkina Faso

Attacks on civilians

At least 20 people were reportedly killed and others injured in an attack on three villages in Yatenga province (Northern Region) on 18.05.23. Apparently, a group of armed assailants is responsible for the attack on the villages. On 15.05. and 17.05.23, suspected jihadists attacked two villages some 400 km south in the Centre-Est region near the borders with Ghana and Togo. More than 20 civilians, among them women and children, were reportedly killed. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Colombia

Government and ELN resume negotiations

On 02.05.23, the third round of peace talks between the guerrilla group ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) and the Colombian government began in Cuba. According to media reports, the three key issues for this round are community participation, a bilateral ceasefire, and humanitarian measures. Previous negotiations had taken place in Venezuela at the end of 2022 and in Mexico in February/March 2023 (cf. BN of 20.03.23). Since the government's peace agreement with the larger FARC rebel group in 2016, the ELN is the largest guerrilla organisation still active in Colombia. In January 2019, it had carried out a deadly bomb attack on a police academy in Bogotá. As a result, the government of then President Iván Duque broke off the ongoing peace talks with the ELN (cf. BN of 21.01.19).

Cuba

LGBTIQ demonstration

On 13.05.23, around 200 Cubans protested against trans- and homophobia in Havana. Media report that the participants also celebrated the introduction of marriage for all in 2022 (cf. BN of 10.10.22). To the sound of traditional rhythms, they carried a large rainbow flag and signs with messages such as 'socialism yes, homophobia no' through the Vedado neighbourhood. The demonstration, part of which was designed as a parade, was led by Mariela Castro Espín. The daughter of former President Raúl Castro, she is the director of the National Centre for Sexual Education (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual, CENESEX) and has been campaigning for the rights of the LGBTIQ community for over 30 years. Citing official statistics, media report that 745 same-sex couples have married in Cuba since the introduction of marriage for all.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Violent clashes during opposition march in Kinshasa

Media report unanimously that on 20.05.23, security forces cracked down on an opposition march in Kinshasa, leading to violent clashes with the security forces. There were injuries on both sides and several demonstrators were arrested. The opposition march was directed against the electoral process, which was perceived as chaotic and marred by allegations of manipulation, the general security situation, and the high cost of living in the country. Opposition leaders such as Moïse Katumbi, Martin Fayulu, Matata Ponyo Mapon and Delly Sesanga as well as the civic movement Lutte pour le changement (LUCHA) had called for the protest.

The governor of Kinshasa had reportedly authorized the registered demonstration on 18.05.23, but under certain conditions. These included requirements regarding the route of the demonstration, which were, however, rejected by the organisation. The police accused the demonstrators of erecting barricades, attacking the police, and disregarding the ordered demonstration route.

The Congolese Minister for Human Rights, Albert-Fabrice Puela, criticised the disproportionate use of force by the police against the demonstrators, some of whom were minors. He called for an investigation into the police violence so that those responsible can be identified and held accountable. According to the authorities, three police officers have already been arrested for mistreating an underage protester. Meanwhile, the Kinshasa provincial authorities have announced legal action against the organisers of the demonstration. The opposition has announced further demonstrations in the coming weeks.

Egypt

Women detained because of family ties to alleged IS members

According to a report by a local and international human rights organisation, the Egyptian authorities have arbitrarily detained women and underage girls in the north of the Sinai Peninsula because of their family ties to alleged IS members. During their detention, which lasted several months or even years, the women were tortured in order to extract information about their relatives or to put pressure on them. Some of the women and girls had reportedly been themselves subjected to abuse, including rape and forced marriage, by IS-affiliated groups. When they fled or sought help from the authorities, some of them were arrested, the report said.

Ethiopia

Oromo rebels accuse Ethiopian forces of attacks after peace talks

The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) has accused the Ethiopian government of launching a military offensive against them on 17.05.23. Only shortly before, initial peace talks between the conflict parties ended without an agreement, but both sides declared their intention to continue the negotiations. Unconfirmed reports say that the main point of disagreement was the OLA's demand for a referendum on the possible autonomy of the regional state of Oromia (cf. BN of 08.05.23).

According to local media, the new fighting is the most intense in recent months, with the The East Welega, West Welega and Horo Gudru Welega zones particularly affected. Eyewitnesses report that local civilians have been forced to join the security forces or to supply the troops with food.

The Gambia

Another death sentence; AI annual report 2023 on the death penalty

A man accused of murder was found guilty and sentenced to death ex lege by the High Court in Banjul on 15.05.23. Courts continue to hand down death sentences based on the law. The Gambia has had a de facto moratorium on executions since February 2018. In its annual report on the death penalty published on 15.05.23, Amnesty International (AI) stated that a total of nine new death sentences were handed down in The Gambia in 2022.

Citizens' protest peaceful and without incident

Media report that a protest march against the increase in electricity and water prices, accompanied by a large police contingent, proceeded peacefully and without intervention by the security forces. The civic movement Team Gom Sa Bopa has already announced further action if the National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC) does not meet their demands for price reductions.

Ghana

Main opposition party elects presidential candidate

On 13.05.23, the country's main opposition party National Democratic Congress (NDC) held its presidential and parliamentary primaries for the 2024 elections. According to media reports, former President John Mahama won the election with 98.9 percent of the votes cast. He will be seeking the presidency for the fourth time next year, following his first term in office (2012-2017) and bids in 2016 and 2020.

During the NDC primaries, eight people were arrested for various electoral offences and disturbing the peace, the Ghana police service informed. Five of the suspects have since been granted bail.

Guinea

Freedom of the media and information: accusations of censorship

Media associations complained on 18.05.23 of internet shutdowns or difficult access to information websites and of a raid on the premises of the news site Afric Vision the day before. During the raid, the transmitters of two radio stations belonging to the same media group were confiscated. Media reports further stated that access to news websites and social networks has been difficult since 17.05.23. The associations accused the ruling junta and the relevant regulatory authority, Autorité de régulation des postes et télécommunications (ARPT), of censorship.

The authorities have denied the allegations. Government spokesman and telecommunications minister Ousmane Gaoual Diallo explained the internet problems as a 'blackout that is happening everywhere'. He demanded that Afric Vision substantiate the allegation of a raid. In his response, however, Diallo also made it clear that the government was able indeed to shut down the internet and that any media outlet would be closed without hesitation if, for example, it incited hatred between sections of the population, the spokesman added. In both cases, the government would do so openly, he said.

New protests, threats by minister

The internet problems started on the first of two days for which the opposition had called for demonstrations, as it had done the week before. According to reports, there was little response to the call in Conakry this time. The junta had ensured a strong military presence to support the gendarmerie. On 16.05.23, the territorial administration minister Mory Condé accused the demonstrators of terrorising and using lethal methods against security forces, speaking of an 'urban guerrilla war'. On television, he read out provisions of the anti-terror law, which provides for life imprisonment for various crimes.

The opposition alliance Forces Vives de Guinée (FVG) stated that seven demonstrators were killed the week before (cf. BN of 15.05.23). The public prosecutor's office has since confirmed the deaths of one youth and two young men.

India

Manipur: Escalation of ethnic conflict

In early May, violence between the Hindu Meitei ethnic group and the Christian Kuki and Naga tribes erupted in the north-eastern state of Manipur, leaving at least 60 people dead and more than 250 others injured. More than 1,700 buildings, including churches and Hindu temples, were burnt down and around 35,000 people were displaced. The clashes began after the Manipur High Court ordered the state government to consider including the Hindu Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list (cf. BN of 08.05.23).

Karnataka: Election defeat for the BJP

The Congress Party won the regional elections in the southern Indian state of Karnataka with 136 out of 224 seats in the regional parliament, beating the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Karnataka, home to the technology hub of Bengaluru, is the only state in the richer south where the BJP, which is generally stronger in the north of the country, has ruled so far.

Iran

Executions

On 19.05.23, three men were executed for their alleged involvement in the killing of a police officer and two Basij members. There were protests from relatives that the confessions had been extracted under torture. A report by a human rights organization in contact with the families says that at least two brothers and a sister of one of the executed men were also arrested in the context of the protests; their fate is currently unknown.

On 20.05.23, the execution of a man for human trafficking and promoting prostitution was published.

On 21.05.23, the hanging of three more men was announced. They had allegedly been caught with 39 kg of heroin. The possession of more than 30 grams of heroin is punishable by death in Iran.

Fighting on the border with Pakistan

On 21.05.23, an Iranian terrorist group attacked the Saravan border post in the Sistan-Beluchistan region of Iran. Five Iranian border guards were killed; there were no known casualties on the other side. Separatist groups, as well as armed drug smugglers and Sunni jihadists are active in the region, which borders Afghanistan and Pakistan, and there have been repeated clashes with Iranian security forces.

Iraq

Dohuk: Air raid

On 17.05.23, a suspected Turkish fighter jet bombed several targets in Dohuk governorate, targeting in particular the mountains around the villages of Sheladze and Deralok.

Türkiye has intensified attacks on PKK positions in northern Iraq in recent months but has not commented on the latest incident.

Kirkuk: Air strike on IS positions

On 15.05.23, the Iraqi military said it had carried out an air strike against IS positions southwest of Kirkuk city. Several IS fighters were killed in the raid.

Although the IS has lost considerable influence in Iraq in recent years, it is still present in the so-called disputed areas (claimed by both Baghdad and Erbil) due to the security vacuum there.

Makhmur: Refugee camp surrounded

On 20.05.23, the refugee camp in Makhmur was surrounded by the Iraqi military, leading to protests by the camp residents. Stones were reportedly thrown at Iraqi soldiers, injuring four of them.

The in Makhmur camp had been established in 1998 for Kurdish refugees from Türkiye, and both the residents and the camp administration are suspected of having links to the PKK. Türkiye accuses the PKK of recruiting the camp's residents and has raided the camp several times. Makhmur is located in the so-called disputed areas. The Iraqi government announced last year that it wanted to gain control over the refugee camp.

UN Security Council: Women's rights in Iraq

Khanim Latif, founder of a women's NGO, spoke at the UN Security Council on 18.05.23 about the situation of women in Iraq. She said that gender-based violence increased by 125 percent between 2020 and 2021, and that women's rights activists in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KR-I) were being targeted.

Violence against women in Iraq, including the KR-I, is a common problem, with many assaults going unreported and unprosecuted. Outside the KR-I, there is no law protecting against domestic violence, and the motive of honour is recognised as a mitigating factor in court.

Jordan / United Arab Emirates

Deportation to the UAE by Jordanian authorities

On 17.05.23 the Emirati state media informed that Khalaf Abd al-Rahman Humaid al-Rumaithi, an Emirati national who also holds Turkish citizenship, has been deported to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) by the Jordanian authorities. Along with 68 others, among them many members of the legal profession, human rights activists, and academics, al-Rumaithi had been convicted in absentia in 2013 for forming a group with the alleged aim of overthrowing the ruling political system. The al-Islah party had been banned in the UAE in 2014 for its links to the 'terrorist Muslim Brotherhood'. Media report that in early May 2023, 51 of those convicted at the time were still in detention in the UAE, despite having served their sentences. Human Rights Watch has condemned the action of the Jordanian authorities, expressing concern that al-Rumaithi may face an unfair trial after deportation and is at risk of torture in detention.

Al-Rumaithi had been the subject of an arrest warrant and was detained at the airport in Jordan on 07.05.23 as part of a security cooperation through the Council of Arab Interior Ministers. Although Jordan has pledged not to extradite political refugees under Article 28 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights, and the Council's agreements reiterate the same commitment, certain offences are excluded, among them assaults on kings and presidents. According to Emirati state media, al-Rumaithi will now be retried on the same charges under the Emirati legal system. He had been sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2013.

Lebanon

Economic situation

The continuing poor economic situation has led to strong emigration pressures. The Sûreté Générale, which is responsible for issuing passports, officially asked the population on 17.05.23 to postpone passport applications if possible. At present, around 5,000 applications for passports are being received daily, while the maximum capacity currently allows only around 3,000 passports to be issued or renewed each day.

Alleged drop in crime

The official crime statistics in Lebanon for the first four months of the year appear to show a surprising drop in crime. Compared to last year, for example, the numbers for car thefts (from 439 to 415), murder (from 61 to 49) and pickpocketing (from 200 to 183) have all fallen. Despite the small size of the country, the figures appear to lack plausibility. Observers believe that crimes have not been regularly reported or recorded for a long time because police officers and other civil servants are rarely on duty as the economic situation and lack of salary adjustments force them to work elsewhere.

Women's protests in Sidon

A viral incident of a woman in a bikini being massively harassed by a group of men on the beach in Sidon because of her swimwear has caused considerable controversy on social media. As a result, a demonstration of mostly women took place in the beach of Sidon on 21.05.23 to show solidarity with the harassed woman. The issue has been very controversially in public, and there has also been a lot of support for the men who felt offended by the woman's clothing. Sidon is considered a relatively socially conservative city in Lebanon.

Libya

Bashagha removed as Prime Minister of the Government of National Stability

Media report that on 16.05.23, a part of the House of Representatives (HoR) based in Tobruk, eastern Libya, voted to remove Fathi Bashagha as Prime Minister of the Government of National Stability (GNS). The parliamentary speaker said that Bashagha was under investigation and accused of failing to achieve the government's goals, and Finance Minister Osama Hamad would take over Bashagha's duties for the time being.

In February 2022, the HoR had elected Bashagha as the new prime minister and asked him to form a new government. From the HoR's perspective, the mandate of Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbaiba, who heads the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU), had ended in December 2021 with the failure of the

presidential and parliamentary elections. When Bashagha took office, he asked Dbaiba and his government to hand over power, but Dbaiba refused to do so. Bashagha's attempt to enter Tripoli with his supporting militias and to take over the reins of government from the capital-based GNU led to violent clashes with GNU-supporting militias in May and August 2022.

Morocco

New rules for online journalism announced

According to press reports of 16.05.23, new regulations for online media and news reporting are being developed. Electronic media and news outlets are sometimes operated without a licence, and now the legal framework needs to be defined to ensure that online services meet the same requirements as other media, the reports say. For example, digital media services do not have the necessary infrastructure or do not pay social security contributions for their employees. The law on journalism and publishing dates from 2016.

Nicaragua

New wave of repression: detentions, house arrests, exile, lawyers' licences suspended

The civil society alliance Monitoreo Azul y Blanco (MAB) has stated that between 12.05. and 14.05.23, at least 18 alleged opposition members were arrested in different regions of the country. Like at least 39 others arrested during the month, they were not imprisoned but, after a fast-track procedure with no safeguards, were placed under house arrest and required to report daily to police stations. Their homes were searched and some of their personal belongings confiscated. Reportedly, some of them have already left for Costa Rica for fear of being sent to prison. Several relatives of exiled opposition members were also threatened by the police. In total, MAB reports 181 repressive and politically motivated acts between 01.05. and 16.05.23, including arrests, intimidation, and prosecutions. Various experts believe that this action represents a new wave of repressive strategy by the Nicaraguan government, aiming not only to completely prevent any opposition activities and statements in the country, but also to push the relevant people into exile. According to the exiled sociologist Douglas Castro, such calculated exile reduces the political costs compared to actual imprisonment. In addition, at least 26 lawyers and notaries have had their licences suspended.

Nigeria

Plateau State: Inter-communal violence claims over 100 lives

More than 100 civilians were killed in several days of violence by non-state actors in the central Nigerian state of Plateau during the week of 15.05.23. Media reports, citing official sources as of 19.05.23, say that hundreds of houses were destroyed and thousands of people displaced in the violence in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA). Apparently, the parties to the conflict are nomadic herders and farming villagers. The escalation of violence may be due to simmering conflicts over land, grazing and water rights in large parts of Nigeria, but also, or at the same time, ethnic rivalries. The fact that the non-settlers involved are usually Muslims and the settlers often Christians adds to the volatility of the situation. Also in the central state of Benue, around 50 people were killed in similar incidents in early March 2023 and early April 2023 (cf. BN of 13.03.23 and 24.04.23).

Southeast: US diplomatic mission staff killed and abducted

On 16.05.23, unidentified assailants attacked a convoy of vehicles carrying staff of a US diplomatic foreign mission and other people in Ogbaru Local Government Area (LGA). Media report that seven people travelling in the convoy were killed in the incident; two others were kidnapped but regained freedom unharmed on 19.05.23. All the victims were Nigerian nationals. The identity of the attackers and their possible affiliation to a gang or other armed group is unclear. Government agencies and other authorities regularly blame the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), an independence movement banned since 2017, or members of its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), for acts of violence in the region. However, these regularly deny such allegations. Observers of the security situation in the region point out that violent groups without any direct link to independence efforts are also active in the

region. However, media reports say that attacks on security forces and state institutions like police stations have increased since the forming of the ESN in December 2020. Violence incidents in the southeast have recently been recorded particularly in the states of Imo (cf. BN of 19.12.22 and 23.01.23) and Anambra (cf. BN of 06.02.23 and 20.02.23).

Pakistan

Protesters threatened with conviction under military law

On 16.05.23, after a meeting of the National Security Committee chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, it was announced that participants in the nationwide mass protests who attacked civilian government and military installations would be tried under the Army Act (cf. BN of 15.05.23). In principle, the Army Act is used to try military personnel for offences under their own legal rules. In certain cases, the Act also applies to civilians. Trials under this law take place before a military court. Amnesty International has described this as an intimidation tactic. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) also alleges arbitrary arrests of PTI supporters. On 19.05.23, former Prime Minister Imran Khan himself took to social media to criticise the government's action against the PTI and its supporters. Earlier, search warrants had been issued for his residence in Lahore to arrest people suspected of being there. Khan, however, denied their presence.

Federal Shariat Court restricts transgender self-determination laws

On 19.05.23, the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) ruled that certain sections of the internationally progressive Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018 violate Sharia law. According to the ruling, transgender people will no longer be allowed to choose whether to officially register as male, female or a so-called third gender. According to a spokesperson, the transgender community will appeal the FSC's decision to the Supreme Court.

Violent tribal clashes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 15.05.23, a decades old tribal rivalry escalated in the Darra Adam Khel area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan. At least 16 people were killed and around a dozen others injured in violent clashes between two tribes over the ownership of a coal mine.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

West Bank: Three killed in military operation

The Palestinian Ministry of Health has stated that on 22.05.23, three Palestinians were shot dead by the Israeli military during an escalation of violence in a military operation in the Balata refugee camp near the city of Nablus. According to the armed wing of Fatah, the three were members of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. Six other people were reportedly wounded, one of them was in critical condition. The Israeli military said it had received intelligence about a depot of weapons and explosives that was destroyed during the operation. At the site, explosive devices and stones were thrown at military personnel who responded with firearms, the military said.

Russian Federation

House searches in connection with the Ponomarev case

On 18.05.23, police forces searched the homes of local opposition politicians and a journalist in at least four regions, including the cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Veliky Novgorod. According to law enforcement authorities, those involved are suspected of having links to the pro-Ukrainian former State Duma deputy, Ilya Ponomarev, and of attending meetings of the 'Congress of People's Deputies'. The Congress is a body of former deputies founded by Ponomarev in exile, which says it is preparing for a democratic change after a possible removal of President Putin. According to media reports, several of those involved were subsequently briefly detained and questioned by the Investigative Committee, the main federal investigative body, about Ponomarev. Among them were mathematics professor and left-wing politician Mikhail Lobanov and other government critics who had no contact with Ponomarev, presumably to intimidate them for their own opposition activism.

This is the fourth wave of such large-scale searches of this kind since a criminal case was opened against Ponomarev in absentia in August 2022 for spreading alleged false information about the Russian armed forces.

Senegal

Rape trial against Sonko; new unrest and violence, several deaths

The rape trial of the opposition leader and mayor of the city of Ziguinchor, Ousmane Sonko, scheduled for 16.05.23 in Dakar was adjourned in his absence until 23.05.23. Sonko's lawyers justified his absence by saying that there were no guarantees of his safety and that he did not receive a court summons for his trial. Sonko, who categorically denies all charges against him, stated that he had been the victim of police violence and an attempted assassination on his way to a court hearing on 16.03.23 (cf. BN of 27.03.23). He also criticised a political conspiracy and the instrumentalization of the judiciary to prevent his candidacy in the 2024 presidential elections (cf. BN of 23.01.23). He recently called for civil disobedience and resistance in the streets. A criminal conviction, recently upheld by an appeal court, already threatens Sonko's presidential candidacy if the verdict becomes final (cf. BN of 15.05.23). Sonko's arrest on rape charges in March 2021 had led to the worst domestic unrest in years, in which at least 12 to 15 people died and several hundred were injured, depending on the source.

Press reports say that around the court date of 16.05.23, fresh protests and riots erupted in the Ziguinchor region, Dakar and elsewhere, with associated violence, vandalism, extensive damage to property and other disruptions to daily life. In Ziguinchor and Dakar, at least two civilians were killed in clashes with the security forces on 15.05.23 and 16.05.23. A police officer was also killed when he was run over by an armoured vehicle in Ziguinchor. Several people were injured on both sides, some seriously, and arrests were made, including members of Sonko's party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF), and people close to the party, among them two media workers.

On 14.05.23, the unrest reportedly began after hundreds of Sonko's supporters gathered in front of his home in Ziguinchor and set up roadblocks to protect him from an alleged arrest, although rumours of Sonko's arrest were not confirmed. Security forces used tear gas to disperse the crowd. According to a media report on 21.05.23, Sonko's supporters are still present at his residence. School activities have been suspended until 25.05.23 as a precautionary measure.

Somalia

Two EU staff expelled

According to a statement by the Somali Foreign Ministry, Somalia expelled two staff members of the European Union Capability Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia) in mid-May 2023. They are accused of secretly photographing detainees during a visit to the Somali maritime police detention centre at Mogadishu airport. They are also accused of interfering in the internal affairs of the country.

Apparently, the expulsions are linked to the arrest of 36 fishermen, mostly from Iran, who are accused of illegal fishing in Somali waters.

Executions

The prosecution has informed that on 18.05.23, a firing squad in Southwest State executed two men in a public square in Baidoa, the capital of the Bay Region. They had been sentenced to death for murder by the competent regional court in early April 2023.

Election dispute in Puntland: Fighting and arrests of politicians

On 16.05.23, nine days before the local elections in Puntland, clashes were reported between two factions of the security forces in the outskirts of the capital Garowe. According to Puntland's public prosecutor, four politicians were responsible for attacks on vehicles transporting ballot boxes to different districts. Arrest warrants have been issued for them. At least three soldiers were reportedly killed and others injured in the clashes. Criticism of an illegal extension of Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni's term, which expires in January 2024, is currently causing tension in Puntland.

Sudan

Talks in Saudi Arabia

Media report that a seven-day ceasefire was agreed on the evening of 20.05.23, starting at 21:45 local time on 22.05.23. Unlike previous ceasefires, the agreement was signed by both parties, the Sudanese Army (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). In addition, a monitoring mechanism, supported by the US, Saudi Arabia, and the international community, has been set up to help ensure compliance with the agreed ceasefire. The exact nature of this monitoring has not been disclosed. In addition to the ceasefire, the new truce agreement provides for the distribution of aid, the restoration of basic services and the withdrawal of armed soldiers and fighters from hospitals and other public facilities.

Fighting continues

According to media reports, the ceasefire agreement, which came into effect at 21:45 local time on 22.05.23, was preceded by repeated and sometimes intense fighting. Apparently, a military airfield (Wadi Saeedna Airbase) near the capital was the site of the most intense fighting. The airbase, which is used for both evacuation flights and for air strikes against RSF positions, has been contested for several days. Since 21.05.23, however, fighting has intensified. The capital itself, the neighbouring towns of Omdurman and Bahri, and parts of the Darfur region have also seen further fighting and air strikes in recent days.

Türkiye

Presidential and parliamentary election results

In the first round of voting on 14.05.23, President Erdogan won 49.5 percent of the vote, falling short of the majority needed to avoid a run-off. Kilicdaroglu, the candidate of a six-party opposition alliance, secured 44.9 percent. The ultra-nationalist candidate Sinan Ogan received 5.2 percent of the vote and was thus eliminated. The run-off will take place on 28.05.23.

In the parliamentary elections, the AKP won 268 seats out of a total of 600, and the alliance it led, the 'People's Alliance', secured 322 seats and thus a majority in parliament. The largest opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), won 169 seats, and its alliance, the 'National Alliance', had 212 MPs. The pro-Kurdish HDP, which contested under the banner of the Green Left Party (YSP) due to a court ban, won 61 seats. Support for the AKP dropped by seven percentage points compared to its 2018 election results (42.6 percent).

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted that the elections were characterised by a high turnout, were well organised and offered voters political alternatives, but the incumbent president and the ruling parties enjoyed an unfair advantage. Ongoing restrictions on the fundamental rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression hindered the participation of some opposition politicians and parties, as well as civil society and independent media. The joint monitoring mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe found that the legal framework did not provide a sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections, saying that the government should not be favoured again in the media.

Tunisia

Demonstrations against deteriorating press freedom

On 18.05.23, journalists demonstrated against what they saw as the government's repressive policy of using the judiciary to intimidate and pressure the media and media workers. Two journalists who had reported critically on the attack on the synagogue on the island of Djerba (cf. BN of 15.05.23) were denounced by a police union. The journalists also protested against the five-year prison sentence handed down to a journalist from the private radio station Mosaïque FM for revealing information about the security services. A police officer accused in the same case of leaking information to the journalist was sentenced to ten years in prison in an appeal procedure.

The Tunisian journalists' union (Syndicat National des Journalistes Tunisiens, SNJT) has announced further demonstrations.

Ukraine

Developments in the fighting around Bakhmut

There are increasing signs that Russian forces have made decisive progress in their conquest of Bakhmut. Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of the Wagner Group which is involved in heavy fighting with mercenaries on the Russian side, reported on 20.05.23 that the town was completely taken by Russian forces. Sergei Tsherevatyj, the spokesman for the eastern group of the Ukrainian armed forces, contradicted this account, saying that the battle for Bakhmut was still ongoing. However, he reiterated that the Ukrainian armed forces might withdraw in the near future, as local conditions make it strategically unwise to hold on to the territory currently under their control. Prigozhin also stated that the Wagner group would hand over their positions to the units of the regular Russian army on 25.05.23.

Venezuela

Violent crimes in border areas between 2019 and 2022

Data from the NGO FundaRedes on violence in the border areas indicate that between 2019 and 2022, nearly 4,400 people were murdered or became victims of extrajudicial killings by non-state armed groups or state security forces in the states of Amazonas, Bolívar, Falcón, Apure, Zulia and Táchira. In addition, more than 940 people disappeared and at least 35 people were arbitrarily detained, among them the director of FundaRedes, Javier Tarazona, in 2021.

Zimbabwe

More than 4,000 prisoners released

Press reports say that on 18.05.22, more than 4,000 prisoners were released as part of an amnesty by President Emmerson Mnangagwa some months ahead of crucial parliamentary elections. Exactly 4,270 people were released, according to the country's prison service. The Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) said in a statement that the amnesty had reduced overcrowding in the country's more than 50 prisons capable of holding about 17,000 inmates. Before the amnesty, they had held more than 22,000 prisoners. The amnesty was granted for various reasons and sentences, including those who had served at least three-quarters of their sentence or one-tenth if they were at least 60 years old. Excluded from the amnesty are violent criminals and those imprisoned for robbery, high treason and public order and security offences. Those released will be allowed to vote in the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for August 2023. The Zimbabwean president's right to grant pardons at his discretion is enshrined in the country's constitution. However, according to recent media reports, there is confusion among the population as to how and why offenders are being released.