



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security and persecution situation

The German domestic intelligence agency (Verfassungsschutz) has warned that the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) is gaining strength, which increases the risk of terrorist attacks beyond Afghanistan. The Taliban have claimed to have killed two ISKP members in the province of Nimruz on 09.04.23.

On 11.04.23, the Taliban killed at least six people, including two commanders, in fighting with the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) of Parwan province, Salang district. The Taliban forcibly prevented people from attending their funerals. Around 100 people were reportedly arrested in the district. House searches were carried out in Kabul, Parwan, Kapisa and Panjshir provinces.

There were numerous other arrests and killings by the Taliban: On 04.04.23 a university professor was arrested for criticising the education policy. On 05.04.23, a 16-year-old died after being tortured by the Taliban. On the same day, three journalists were arrested in Baghlan province and released on 07.04.23 under conditions. On 09.04.23, a former intelligence officer committed suicide after being tortured by the Taliban. Also on 09.04.23, a teacher, writer and critic of the Taliban was arrested in Faryab province. He was released three days later. On 10.04.23, a man died after his vehicle was shot at for not stopping at a checkpoint. On the same day, the Taliban killed a farmer when they destroyed his opium field in Nangarhar province. According to their own information, the Taliban arrested seven members of the National Resistance Front (NRF) in Kapisa province on 10.04.23. On 13.04.23, a female doctor was shot dead on the road between Kunduz and Takhar. On 14.04.23, a Talib reportedly shot dead his neighbour in Badakhshan province. On the same day, the Taliban reportedly shot dead a man who was burning the Koran in a family dispute in Baghdis province.

Economic and humanitarian situation

On 05.04.23, the Taliban extended the existing ban on Afghan women working for NGOs to the UN agencies. Following the announcement of the ban, the UN agencies in Afghanistan ordered all staff not to go to work. If the UN stop their activities in Afghanistan, it will result in a humanitarian disaster, as millions of people are dependent on aid.

At least twelve children have died in a measles outbreak in Zabul province.

Government leadership

The Taliban have raised the fees for issuing identity documents: The cost of ID cards with digital features (e-tazkiras) has increased from 100 to 500 AFN; and non-digital ID cards now cost 200 AFN instead of 10 AFN (100 AFN is equivalent to EUR 1.05 as of 17.04.23). There are reports of long waiting times for ID card applications.

Algeria

Situation for media workers aggravated

According to media reports, journalists are under increasing pressure. On 13.04.23, a new law was passed which, according to Communications Minister Mohamed Bouslimani, will more closely regulate and control the scope of activities in order to protect the press from deviations. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has said that this will further restrict both freedom of the press and freedom of expression. For example, it will be forbidden to receive funding or material support from foreign institutions, and sources must be disclosed at the request of the judiciary.

Bangladesh

Members of the Christian Bawm ethnic community killed

In a press release dated 12.04.23, a local organisation draws attention to human rights violations in the southeastern province of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Separatist and religious extremist groups are active along the Bandarban district's eastern border with India and Myanmar. In the area, the paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has been conducting special operations with the military to dismantle training camps and hideouts. On 06.04.23, eight men were apparently killed in an exchange of fire between the separatist Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) and the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) at Rowangchari in Bandarban district. Those killed are said to have belonged to the Bawm (or: Bom) Christian community and were members of the KNF, the press release stated. The KNF, in turn, claims that the victims were villagers who were caught between the fronts. The KNF, which was founded in 2017 and is also called the Bom Party, is active in Rangamati and Bandarban districts. It is made up of young female and male members of the Bawm community and is said to have close links with like-minded groups in the Indian states of Mizoram and Manipur, as well as in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

Burkina Faso

Dead in attack on military

In the north, an attack on a military unit near the town of Ouahigouya (Kouilga region) was reported on 15.04.23, killing at least six soldiers and 34 members of a volunteer army. Another 33 people were apparently injured. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

Security situation: General mobilisation launched

Due to the deteriorating security situation and the increasing loss of control over parts of the country, the military government launched a general mobilisation on 13.04.23. Little is known about the details so far. However, they are said to include the possibility of declaring a state of emergency in the affected areas. According to media reports, around 40 percent of the country's territory is controlled by jihadist groups.

Civilians killed in attack

According to media reports, an almost simultaneous attack took place in the north-east of the country on 07.04.23, targeting the villages of Kourakou and Tondobi near the border with Niger. At least 44 civilians were killed and many more injured. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

China

Long prison sentences for human rights lawyers

On 10.04.23, a court in Shandong province sentenced two prominent human rights lawyers and activists, Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiaxi, to 14 and 12 years imprisonment for subversion of state power. Xu and Ding had been arrested in early 2020 and late 2019, respectively, for organising a discussion event on the future of the human rights movement in China, involvement in a now-banned legal aid centre, and membership of the New Citizens Movement (Xin Gongming Yundong), a group co-founded by Xu in 2012. Xu had already served prison sentences

for his activism from 2014 to 2018, and Ding from 2013 to 2016. Both had campaigned for the rights of the children of migrant workers and for the establishment of a constitutional democracy, among other things.

Colombia

Membership of armed non-state groups

According to a Reuters report on 13.04.23, based on two reports from the security authorities, more than 17,600 people currently belong to the country's four largest armed non-state groups and 23 other gangs. The reported figures are thus higher than previous official estimates. However, the figures show that a large proportion of the members of these groups do not usually carry weapons themselves, but are part of support networks providing information, supplies etc. The ELN guerrillas are currently the largest organisation with more than 5,800 members, but only about half of them are armed fighters. A third round of negotiations between ELN and the government is due to take place soon in Cuba. The Clan del Golfo paramilitary group is reported to have just over 4,000 members, of whom more than 1,600 are armed. The ceasefire with this group is currently suspended. Large FARC dissident groups such as the Estado Mayor Central (around 3,500 members) and Segunda Marquetalia (1,670 members) are also listed in the reports. Estado Mayor Central declared on 16.04.23 that it was ready for peace negotiations with the government due to begin in May. In addition, there appear to be 23 urban gangs with a total of around 2,500 members active in larger cities, particularly in the port city of Buenaventura.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Sentences for killing of Italian ambassador

In the case of Italian ambassador Luca Attanasio, who had been killed together with his Italian bodyguard and a Congolese driver of the WFP on 22.02.21, a military court in Kinshasa handed down its verdict on 07.04.23. In an apparent kidnap attempt, a convoy of two vehicles belonging to the ambassador and the WFP was ambushed 25 km north of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu, before the Congolese army and rangers of the Virunga National Park were able to intervene. The ambassador was fatally injured in the incident. According to media reports at the time, it was unclear whether the ambassador or the WFP was the target of the attempted kidnapping on a route that was considered relatively safe at the time. Also, the identity of the perpetrators was unclear; at the time, the Ministry of the Interior suspected the Hutu militia Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), which according to a UN report had most recently been supported by the army in its fight against the Tutsi rebel group M23 (cf. BN of 02.01.23). Now, five people arrested in January 2022 and one absconder were sentenced to life imprisonment. Reportedly, they had not belonged to any armed group, but had merely formed their own criminal gang. The trial thus disappointed hopes to shed light on the background. The prosecution had demanded the death penalty; the defendants pleaded not guilty and said their confessions to the police had been forced under torture. The defence announced to appeal the verdict.

Deployment of EAC task forces; withdrawal of M23

After various member states of the East African Community (EAC) had recently deployed further contingents for the EAC intervention force in the DR Congo (cf. BN of 04.07.22, 22.08.22, 06.12.22 and 23.01.23), the EAC mediator, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, expressed optimism in a communiqué of 03.04.23, as was reported by the media. Contrary to previous agreements, the withdrawal of the rebel group M23 was not completed on 30.03.23; however, M23 are now expected to hand over the last town under their control to EAC forces on 15.04.23. Kenyatta expressed openness to M23's participation in the Congolese government's negotiations with other rebel groups, which had started in Nairobi in April 2022. President Félix Tshisekedi again rejected negotiations with M23 on 13.04.23. In response, an M23 spokesman described his stance as "sabotage of the peace process".

New press law in force

On 04.04.23, a new press law came into force, replacing the 1996 legislation, which was considered repressive. According to a media report, the new law strengthens the right to freedom of information. In the case of press offences, the emphasis will now be on the duty to correct or on the right of reply rather than on criminal consequences. The press law will soon be complemented by a government decree on the status of journalists.

Ecuador

Security situation: multiple killings, violence in prisons, civilians allowed to possess weapons

On 12.04.23, nine fishermen and fish sellers were killed and four others injured by around 30 armed men in the port of Esmeraldas province. The authorities stated that the attack was carried out by members of the Los Tiguerones drug gang in an attempt to extend their control over the port, a hotspot for drug trafficking which has so far been dominated by a rival group. A total of 128 homicides have reportedly been committed in Esmeraldas province so far in 2023. On 13.04.23, Security Secretary Ordóñez resigned from office; previously, he had been criticised for repeated security incidents and high crime rates in the country. According to the prison administration SNAI, twelve people were killed in clashes between prison inmates at La Penitenciaría prison in Guayaquil on 14.04.23. A recent presidential decree allows all citizens to own and carry a weapon for self-protection under certain conditions (including a minimum age of 25 years and a psychological evaluation).

Egypt

LGBTIQ dating app warns users about fake accounts

A US dating app for LGBTIQ people has warned its users in Egypt to be careful about sharing personal information and arranging meetings. The company said the warning was due to an increase in attempts by Egyptian security authorities to arrest LGBTIQ people using hacked or falsified profiles.

According to reports from local human rights organisations and activists, Egyptian security authorities have been systematically arresting LGBTIQ people through the use of social networks and dating apps over the past decade; however, the number of people affected has remained largely the same over this period.

Although homosexuality is not explicitly banned in Egypt, those involved are often charged with fornication, shameless behaviour in public or violating religious teachings.

Arrest of female influencers

As media reports indicate, the authorities continue to crack down on female social media influencers. In early April 2023, another woman was arrested for posting pictures and videos from her daily life, on the grounds that it violates morality and morals and contributes to the undermining of family values. Various sources report that since 2020, more than a dozen female influencers have been arrested under a 2018 cybercrime law specifically targeting online content. Human Rights Watch has stated that Egyptian authorities are using the law to target women on social media and restrict their freedom of expression.

The Gambia

NHRC: Complaints about human rights violations by security forces

The Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Immanuel D. Joof, has informed that less than a quarter (21.15 percent) of all complaints received in 2022 alleging human rights violations were against the national security forces such as the police, the army, and the narcotics and immigration authorities. Several Gambian media outlets, citing the NHRC's 2022 Activity Report published on 12.04.23, reported that of the 104 complaints received, 87 cases were successfully investigated and resolved. The media reports do not elaborate on what is meant by 'resolved', in particular whether those responsible for human rights violations within the security apparatus have been held criminally accountable.

Attacks on Christian minority by non-state actors

An attack on a church in Bakau by non-state actors as well as clashes between Muslim and Christian religious groups in Tallinding during the Christian Easter holidays resulted in injuries and the arrest of suspected perpetrators, according to media reports. Police stated on 12.04.23 that criminal investigations have been launched. On 13.04.23, President Barrow and his government condemned the incidents, pointing to the government's strong religious tolerance and the traditional peaceful coexistence of different religious communities in the country. The Gambia was not an Islamic state, but a pluralist secular democracy where the right to freedom of religion and belief is guaranteed, the president said.

Guinea

Prison sentences for protests

Following protests in late March 2023 over repeated power cuts in the country's second largest city of Kankan, 15 of a total of 23 defendants were sentenced on 13.04.23 to prison terms of between four and 18 months. The remaining eight were acquitted, according to a media report citing a lawyer for the defendants. The lawyer said that the judiciary wanted to make an example in the face of protests against the frequent power cuts across the country.

India

Uttar Pradesh: Former Muslim lawmaker shot dead

On 15.04.23, a former Muslim member of the Indian parliament and his brother were shot dead in Prayagraj in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The two victims, convicted of kidnapping, were in police custody at the time of the crime and were being taken to a hospital for medical examination. Three assailants, apparently posing as journalists, fired several shots and shouted Hindu nationalist slogans, which are also used in anti-Muslim campaigns. The incident was seen on live television coverage.

Iran

Announcement of measures to enforce the hijab requirement

According to media reports of 10.04.23, the Iranian leadership has announced increased measures to ensure compliance with the Islamic dress code for women (hijab requirement). The police chief apparently stated that video surveillance of public places and streets will be used to identify unveiled women. These would then be warned via text message and informed of possible penalties. Repeated offenders would be referred to the judicial authorities, the police chief added. Encouraging women to refrain from veiling will also be punishable. In addition, businesses and shops will be warned by the authorities in the event of non-compliance. However, press reports suggest that announcements such as the use of video technology for identification might be merely a deterrent manoeuvre by the Iranian leadership. According to these reports, it is questionable whether the necessary technology is available and operational in the country at all. The Iranian leadership is apparently committed to implementing the use of this technology, at least in the future. In a speech on 04.04.23, the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, Khamenei, said that the question of veiling was a legal-religious provision of the Islamic Sharia rather than a state directive. Violations can therefore still be punished.

Apparently, unveiled women will also be denied access to teaching at educational institutions. At several universities in the country, female students have reportedly already been banned from attending classes. Student sit-ins against such disciplinary measures were reportedly held at several universities in Tehran on 16.04.23.

Death penalty: Increase in number of death sentences carried out in 2022

Human rights organisations report that at least 580 people are estimated to have been executed in 2022. This represents an increase of around 75 percent compared to the previous year (2021: around 333 executions). About half of the death sentences were for murder or drug offences.

Approximately 3 percent of those sentenced were convicted on broad charges such as enmity against God or depravity on earth. However, there are no official figures on executions. Human rights organisations say that the increase in the number of death sentences carried out indicates that the death penalty is being used as a means of pressure and repression to deal with social problems in the country.

More cases of poisoning in girls' schools

Since schools in Iran reopened on 03.04.23 after the New Year holidays, there have been several more cases of poisoning in girls' schools in Ardabil, Pardis, Karaj, Daulat Abad, Isfahan, Shahin Shahr, Tabriz, Maragheh, Ajabshir, Naqadeh, Piranshahr, Urmia, Oshnavieh, Bandar Ganaveh, Haftkel, Kohenjan Sarvestan, Qom, Sanandaj, Sazez, Diwandara, Kermanshah and other places. Suspects have been arrested, but the results of the investigations are not yet known. Apparently, several dozen girls have been hospitalised, complaining of respiratory problems, nausea and fatigue. However, no deaths have been reported. The perpetrators, the targets and the goals of the attacks are

still unclear (so far, all descriptions point to a gaseous substance, although it is not clear whether different substances were used). Statements by various officials have ranged from suspicions of a systematic campaign to close schools to girls to accusations that the allegedly few incidents were staged by the girls themselves in order to get time off school.

Sentences and arrests

According to media reports on 14.04.23, a well-known female writer and activist from Tehran has again been sentenced to several years in prison. She had previously been imprisoned several times, most recently for writing a yet unpublished book on the death penalty. She had been re-arrested in October 2022. A human rights organisation reports that the new charges include propaganda against the system following the publication of articles on virtual channels. Accordingly, she would face seven years in prison, a two-year ban on leaving the country and a two-year ban on staying in Tehran.

Media reported on 12.04.23 that a prominent lawyer and activist, who had already been arrested and convicted in 2017, has been sentenced to a further three years' imprisonment and a fine of 15 million tomans (approx. 270 EUR, as of 14.04.23). He is accused of distributing an audio message from Arak prison (Markazi province) expressing support for the nationwide protests which have been going on since October 2022.

It was also reported that a well-known female journalist and women's rights activist was again detained by security forces in Sanandaj (Kordestan province) on 10.04.23. The exact reasons for her arrest are not known. She had previously been arrested by security forces on 21.10.22 and released from the local prison on 30.10.22 after paying bail.

On 05.04.23, security forces reportedly arrested a spokesman for the Iranian Teachers' Union in Tehran and searched his home. No reason was given for the arrest. Meanwhile, union protests are continuing in several cities. Teachers and retired teachers are among those taking part in local strikes and rallies to demand higher salaries.

Iraq

Drone attack on SDF commander

On 07.04.23, a military convoy including the Commander General of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) Mazloum Abdi and members of the US military was attacked by a drone strike in the immediate vicinity of Sulaimaniyya airport. No personal injuries were reported. The Iraqi government blamed Türkiye, which has denied the allegations. On 03.04.23, Türkiye had cancelled all flights to and from Sulaymaniyah due to PKK activity there. Türkiye considers the SDF to be linked to the PKK.

Drone attack in Sulaymaniyyah

On 16.04.23, at least two people were killed in a drone strike on three villages in Penjwen district (Sulaymaniyya province) near the Iranian border. Türkiye regularly carries out air strikes against PKK positions in northern Iraq; Ankara has not yet commented on the latest drone attack.

Ministry of Justice: Massive overcrowding in Iraqi prisons

In a statement on 14.04.23, a spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Justice acknowledged massive overcrowding in Iraq's 28 federal prisons. These prisons have a capacity to hold around 25,000 detainees, but there are currently around 60,000 prisoners. Some prisons are operating at 300 percent capacity. One reason given for the situation was the increase in drug-related arrests; another 8,000 detainees are being held on terrorism charges.

Lebanon

Conflict with Israel

On 06.04.23, probably in the context of the current events around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Israel was attacked by 34 rockets from Lebanon, which were largely intercepted, causing a total of three injuries and material damage. The following day, the Israeli Air Force launched retaliatory strikes aimed exclusively against Hamas and Islamic Jihad infrastructure, not against Lebanese groups and in particular Hezbollah. Lebanese politicians have condemned both the attack and the use of Lebanese territory for attacks. In the days that followed, the Lebanese army secured

several improvised rocket launching sites in the area. Israel believes that the attacks could not have taken place without the consent of Hezbollah, which controls the area in question.

On the afternoon of 14.04.23, a border incident occurred when some 50 to 60 Hezbollah supporters demonstrated at the border fence with Israel, throwing stones at Israeli border guards, who in turn responded with smoke and stun grenades. The demonstrators were then dispersed by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and Lebanese units.

Economic situation

On 13.04.23, the Interim Minister of Energy informed at a press conference that the plan to restore electricity had been at least partially successful. Instead of the targeted eight to ten hours per day, the power grid was again able to supply at least four to five hours of electricity (reports from the population, however, suggest that this figure is too high, but it is still an improvement compared to the situation since 2021, when large parts of Lebanon received no electricity at all or only one hour per day). Household electricity bills have now become one of the biggest problems in Lebanon.

Montenegro

Jakov Milatovic wins presidential elections

Media reports say that the 36-year-old political newcomer and economist Jakov Milatovic was elected as the new President of Montenegro with around 59 percent of the vote in the run-off presidential elections held on 02.04.23. The previous office holder Milo Djukanovic suffered a clear defeat with around 41 percent of the vote and resigned as head of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) on 05.04.23. According to media reports, this marked the end of the decades-long 'Djukanovic era'. The new president Milatovic, who is considered to be pro-European and is deputy chairman of the liberal-conservative movement EUROPE NOW (which had only been founded in the spring of 2022) had briefly held the post of economy minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Krivokapic who was ousted in early 2022. On the day of his election victory, he reportedly promised to bring the country into the European Union within five years.

Government crisis: call for early parliamentary elections

According to earlier media reports, Milo Djukanovic, who has resigned from the presidency, dissolved parliament in accordance with the constitution on 16.03.23, referring to the government crisis that had been unresolved for months (cf. BN of 09.01.23 and 06.03.23). After several unsuccessful attempts in recent months to form a government under Prime Minister Dritan Abazović, who is currently only acting Prime Minister, both the USA and the EU had recommended that the country hold new elections soon, the reports said.

Myanmar

More than 200 killed in fighting in several parts of the country

On 11.04.23, at least 171 people, among them 38 children, were killed by a military airstrike on Pazigyí village in Kanbalu Municipality (Sagaing Region). The attack targeted a celebration of the opening of an administrative office of the underground National Unity Government (NUG). Many people from surrounding villages had come to the event where donations were being distributed to the needy. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun justified the attack with the assassination of the former village head of Pazigyí by resistance forces in March 2023.

On 10.04 and 30.03.23, air strikes on a school in Falan Township and a village in Thantlang Township (Chin State) killed nine civilians each. Further military airstrikes were reported from Demoso Township (Kayah State), Shwegu Township (Kachin State) and Kalay Township (Sagaing) on 30.03.23 and from Htigyaing Township (Sagaing) on 31.03.23. Four civilians were killed in Htigyaing, and shelling continued for several days in Kalay, displacing a total of 27,000 people.

As of 05.04.23, over 5,000 people fled to Thailand from Myawaddy Township (Kayin State) following repeated clashes between the military and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).

On 25.03.23 junta troops killed seven civilians and abducted 40 others as human shields in an arson attack on Sone Kone village in Sagaing Municipality of Budalin. A total of 19 people were killed between 13.03 and 04.04.23 in

fighting and military raids in Sagaing Region's Sagaing, Madaya, Pale, Wetlet and Salingyi, and also in Kawkaik (Kayin). There were no reports of civilian casualties in fighting between the military and local resistance groups in Yesagyo (Magway Region) and Shwebo (Sagaing) on 04.04.23 and in Tamu (Sagaing) on 23.03.23.

Nicaragua

Arrests during Holy Week, Easter processions banned

According to the organisation Monitoro Azul y Blanco, a total of 21 people were arrested between 01.04 and 09.04.23, among them a student leader, political activists, a journalist and members of the Catholic Church. Most of these arrests during the Holy Week took place in the departments of Masaya and Managua, and 18 of those arrested remain in detention. In addition, a priest from Panama, who had called for the release of convicted Bishop Álvarez, was seized and expelled to Honduras. Traditional Catholic Easter processions were banned and attempts to hold them were stopped by police. Insiders are fearing a further increase in repression around the fifth anniversary of the 2018 protests, for example to prevent commemorations.

Nigeria

Benue, Kaduna, Zamfara states: Several people kidnapped

Media report that on 02.04.23 armed individuals attacked the Pentecostal Church in Akenawe, Benue State, during a night vigil. One person was killed and several others were abducted.

In Kaduna State, at least eight to ten students and an unknown number of other people were attacked and abducted on their way home from school on 03.04.23. This is the first case of kidnapping in Kaduna since a long period of calm. On 12.04.23, another incident occurred in a different region of the state when eight people were reportedly killed and four injured in an attack by gunmen on a community in the Zangon Kataf local government area.

On 08.04.23, unidentified gunmen abducted at least 80 people in Zamfara State. The victims were reportedly engaged in collecting firewood. Media reports say that there are many women and teenagers among the kidnap victims whose release was demanded on 12.04.23 by the West African Economic Community ECOWAS. The police said that ECOWAS is cooperating with the military and local security authorities to free the abductees.

Inauguration of the President despite challenge to results

A challenge filed on 21.03.23 to the results of the February 2023 presidential election (cf. BN of 06.03.23) is to be rejected by the competent electoral court, according to the will of the Nigerian electoral commission INEC. The second and third placed candidates of the election, Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi, as well as others are rejecting the election results and demand that they be annulled. The winner is accused of widespread vote-rigging. Observer groups have criticised the election process as falling short of standards.

Despite the criticism raised and calls for the results to be annulled, the Minister of Information has announced that the inauguration of the newly elected president will take place as planned on 29.05.23.

Pakistan

HRCP: Human rights situation in Balochistan

As a result of a fact-finding mission conducted in October 2022, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has found significant human rights deficits in the backward province of Balochistan. Interviews conducted in Gwadar, Turbat, Panjgur and Quetta with a wide range of civil society members revealed not only governance failures and restrictions on press freedom were of concern, but also, and more importantly, the disappearance of people of Baloch ethnicity and the province's economic exclusion of the province from the rest of the country. Participants in the talks described Balochistan as a kind of colony of the state. The significant presence of paramilitary checkpoints appears to have created a climate of fear, especially in Makran. The resource-rich province benefits little from the revenues of large development projects in the midst of an already severe economic downturn and is otherwise economically isolated.

Situation of the Christian minority

Several Christian human rights organisations point out that Christians as well as Hindus and members of the Baloch ethnic group are regularly victims of targeted killings. In Pakistan, Islam is instrumentalised for national cohesion and used by members of the Muslim faith to justify, for example, attacks on churches and forced conversions. Christian girls are particularly vulnerable, also with regard to forced marriages. If they refuse, they are subjected to violence, acid attacks, kidnapping and sexual abuse. In extreme cases, targeted killings are carried out. A recent report covering the period from 2019 to 2022 documents more than one hundred cases of abduction, sexual abuse and forced conversion of underage Christian girls, mainly from the provinces of Punjab and Sindh. Due to the discriminatory attitude of the police and judiciary towards minorities, prosecutions are rare. Furthermore, Christians have one of the lowest literacy rates in Pakistan. In addition, many Christian girls are forced to drop out of school early because of the risk of abduction, harassment and forced conversion. Religious minorities are also disproportionately exposed to accusations of blasphemy.

Government plans nationwide anti-terror operations

The Pakistani government has announced the launch of nationwide counter-terrorism operations against the country's various armed groups. The last time the government had launched a similar offensive was in 2014. Militants of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have resumed attacks on security forces since unilaterally ending the ceasefire with the Pakistani government in November 2022.

The Centre for Research and Security Studies has documented a total of 358 deaths and 496 injuries in 219 terrorist attacks and anti-terrorist operations between January and March 2023. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had the highest number of fatalities (245), followed by 64 in Balochistan.

Security incidents in Balochistan

On 07.04.23, military sources reported that the intelligence agency had arrested the alleged founder and leader of the Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA) during an operation against armed separatists in Balochistan province. On 09.04.23, armed assailants attacked policemen in Quetta. Two security personnel and one of the attackers were killed and another policeman was injured. On 10.04.23, two bomb attacks on police vehicles in Quetta killed at least four people, among them two civilians, and injured more than 20 people. The separatist Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) has claimed responsibility for one of the attacks.

New election date for dissolved provincial assembly in Punjab

The Supreme Court declared the Election Commission's decision to postpone elections in two provinces unconstitutional and ordered the government on 04.04.23 to hold early elections for the dissolved Punjab Provincial Assembly on 14.05.23.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

West Bank: Teachers on strike; tensions rise with several dead and wounded

Teachers in the West Bank have been on strike since 05.02.23 demanding from the Palestinian Authority (PA) a pay rise and an independent, democratically elected union. The latest strike was triggered in January 2023 when the teachers did not receive the 15 percent pay rise along with back pay which had already been promised in May 2022. Last March, the Ministry of Education published a list of teachers who were threatened with dismissal if they continued their strike. The strikers remained opposed to offers by the cash-strapped PA to compensate teachers over an unspecified period of time.

On 01.04.23, a Palestinian assailant drove his car into a group of Israeli military personnel south of Bethlehem, injuring one soldier lightly, one moderately and another one seriously. On 05.04.23, an Israeli soldier was shot dead during clashes with Palestinians near the city of Hebron. The shooter initially managed to escape.

On 09.04.23, Israeli military personnel shot dead a Palestinian man when opening fire on a group of stone throwers near the village of Azzun. On 10.04.23, another Palestinian minor was shot dead.

The Lion's Den armed group, which operates mainly in Nablus, stated on 08.04.23 that it killed a spy who had revealed to the Israeli authorities information about the group and its locations. The killing could not be confirmed at first.

Three British women were shot dead in an attack on 10.04.23 near a settlement in the West Bank. The Israeli government called in additional reserve forces from 09.04.23 to assist the Israeli border police.

Increased attacks on Christian believers and their property

According to media reports, recent weeks have seen an increase in attacks and vandalism against Christian property in Jerusalem and Israel. These include graffiti inciting violence against Christian believers, damage to cemeteries and restaurants, and a physical attack on Christian priests in southern Israel. Spokespersons for the Christian denominations have criticised the inadequate response of the security forces.

East Jerusalem: Palestinian killed; riots at Al-Aqsa Mosque compound

On 31.03.23 a Palestinian man was killed who, according to the military, attacked two border police officers with their own weapon. However, witnesses said that he was unarmed and did not pose a threat. The family of the victim denounced that no video footage was made available, despite the fact that there is extensive surveillance camera coverage in this part of East Jerusalem and that members of the border police are equipped with body cameras. These statements were confirmed by former high-ranking police members.

On 05.04.23, Israeli security forces used stun grenades to storm the Al-Aqsa Mosque where, according to the military, Palestinian youths had barricaded themselves and set off fireworks. The youths were dispersed from the mosque with batons. The square in front of the mosque was cleared with stun grenades and rubber bullets. More than 50 people were reportedly injured, among them a member of the military. Over 400 Palestinians were arrested. In the evenings of the following days, people continued to barricade themselves in the mosque in order to pray there at night. Muslim worshippers are only allowed to do this during the last ten days of Ramadan, when visits by Jewish worshippers are suspended. They were removed by force by the Israeli military. At least six other people were injured.

Israel: Rocket fire from Syria, Lebanon and Gaza; one dead, several injured in attacks in Israel

On 02.04.23, the Israeli military stated to have shot down a drone from Syria that had entered Israeli airspace following Israeli airstrikes against targets in Syria. The drone was reportedly an Iranian model. On 08.04. and 09.04.23, more rockets were launched from Syria, to which the Israeli military responded with artillery fire and further air strikes.

Between 05.04. and 07.04.23 militias from Gaza fired rockets into Israel after security forces entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque (see above). The Israeli military responded with air strikes on Hamas positions in Gaza.

On 06.04.23, some three dozen rockets from Lebanon injured two people in Israel and damaged buildings. The following day, the Israeli military fired several rockets at Hamas targets in southern Lebanon.

On 04.04.23, a Palestinian man attacked and wounded two Israelis with a knife close to a military base near Tel Aviv.

On 07.04.23, a Palestinian assailant drove his car into a group of passers-by in Tel Aviv. An Italian tourist was killed and five other foreigners were lightly to moderately injured. The driver of the car was shot dead by Israeli security forces.

Republic of Moldova

Long prison sentence for prominent politician

On 13.04.23 Ilan Șor, who lives abroad and is the leader of the Șor party named after him, was sentenced to 15 years in prison by an appeals court in Chișinău. He had already been sentenced at first instance in 2017 to 7.5 years' imprisonment for charges including fraud and money laundering; an appeal subsequently lodged has since been postponed several times. Șor left the Republic of Moldova in 2019 but was able to win another mandate in the 2021 parliamentary elections. With alleged links to the Russian Federation, Șor and his party are considered the main organisers of the protests against the incumbent pro-Western government in the Republic of Moldova, which have been ongoing since autumn 2022 (cf. BN of 21.11.22 and 13.03.23). In November 2022, the government applied to the Moldovan Constitutional Court to initiate proceedings to ban the Șor party on grounds of unconstitutionality. According to media reports, Șor is currently staying in Israel. The head of Moldova's anti-corruption prosecutor's office said in a statement that the court ruling would help the case for Șor's extradition.

Republic of the Congo

New opposition alliance

Media report about the formation of a new opposition alliance (Alliance pour l'alternance démocratique en 2026 - 2AD2026), officially founded on 13.04.23, bringing together the extra-parliamentary parties Rassemblement pour la démocratie et le développement (RDD) of former President Jacques Joachim Yhomby Opango, who had ruled from 1977 to 1979, the Mouvement républicain (MR) and the Parti du peuple (PAPE). Destin Gavet, leader of the recently admitted opposition party MR (cf. BN of 12.12.22), was appointed chairman of the alliance for a period of six months. The aim of the opposition alliance is to bring about a democratic transfer of power in the presidential elections scheduled for 2026. President Denis Sassou Nguesso, who has ruled almost continuously since 1979, might run for another (fifth) term following a controversial constitutional amendment in 2015.

Russian Federation

Putin signs law to tighten military conscription

On 11.04.23, the State Duma passed in its third reading major amendments to the Federal Law on Conscription and Military Service, which were also approved almost unanimously by the Federation Council one day later. President Putin signed the amendments into law on 14.04.23. In the future, conscription notices will no longer have to be delivered in person but can be sent electronically to conscripts. From the moment of the electronic delivery, online registered conscripts are now forbidden to leave the national territory, and the FSB border guards are directly informed. This prohibition is recorded by the competent military commissar in the entry in the military register and can be lifted only after the conscript has appeared before the designated military commissariat. The conscripts thus summoned have a period of 20 days after the notification to do so. If they do not comply with the order to appear within this period, they may face further legal restrictions by the military commissioner: Those who fail to appear are then prohibited from establishing a business, acquiring, inheriting or selling real estate, driving or registering a motor vehicle in their name, and obtaining credit from a bank, a credit company or a private individual. In addition, the authorities of the subjects of the Federation may decide on further measures such as the suspension of state support benefits.

The reform of the conscription for military service applies both to conscripts and to persons who are called up for military service for other reasons (e.g. admission to the reserves). While appeals can still be lodged against the decisions of the military commissariats, they will no longer have a suspensive effect. The only exception is a rejected application for alternative civilian service. In this case, the suspensive effect of the appeal will be maintained.

Senegal

Another PASTEF leader arrested

According to consistent media reports, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Secretary General of the opposition party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF) and 'right-hand man' of Ousmane Sonko, was arrested on 14.04.23 and taken into police custody. Faye was charged with spreading false news for a post on social media, insulting the judiciary, the prosecutor, and a statutory body. He had criticised the conduct of some members of the judiciary and prosecution on 12.04.23. According to Faye, the conduct of a hasty appeal procedure against PASTEF party leader Sonko for defamation and other offences indicates that the judiciary is being politically politicised to make Sonko ineligible for the 2024 presidential elections. Sonko's conviction by the court of first instance on 30.03.23 to two months' imprisonment on probation for defamation of the current Minister of Tourism did not result in the loss of his eligibility under the current electoral law (cf. BN of 03.04.23). Sonko's appeal hearing will take place on 17.04.23.

Criminal proceedings and convictions for violations of the right to demonstrate

According to media reports, the Thiès Regional Court sentenced several members of PASTEF on 05.04.23 to two months' imprisonment without parole for disturbing public order, inciting violence and inciting rebellion. Among those sentenced was Alioune Badara Mboup, PASTEF regional coordinator in Tivaouane and a leading member of

the Front for a Popular Anti-Imperialist Revolution and Pan African - France Dégage (FRAPP) movement. Among other things, FRAPP has criticised a politically motivated, selective justice system and considers the convicted to be political prisoners. According to FRAPP, they were arrested on 15.03.23 for taking part in a demonstration in Tivaouane, which was pre-announced, authorised and accompanied by a police contingent. However, media reports indicated that the demonstrators had protested beyond the time limit set by the prefect because the police had sealed off the house of their party leader Ousmane Sonko (cf. BN of 20.03.23). During the protests, demonstrators set fire to tyres, clashed with security forces and committed acts of vandalism.

According to recent reports, several PASTEF members are currently facing criminal charges for various violations of the right to demonstrate.

Sierra Leone

Group attack on journalist

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has called on Sierra Leone's authorities to start investigations and bring to justice those responsible for a collective attack on journalist Alie Melvin Tokowa by supporters of a politician from the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). On 28.03.23, a group of several people prevented the director of the radio station FOP 89.7 FM Moyamba from carrying out his journalistic work, collectively assaulted him and seriously injured him. Tokowa had been trying to film a political argument between two SLPP politicians at a party meeting. In response to a request, the national police spokesman told CPJ that investigations were underway but did not provide further details.

According to Angela Quintal, CPJ's Africa programme coordinator, media professionals in Sierra Leone are too often attacked in connection with their journalistic work without those responsible being held criminally accountable.

Somalia

Attack on African Union Transitional Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)

On 03.04.23, an ATMIS convoy was hit by an explosion near the headquarters in Mogadishu where a landmine was placed on the side of the road. At least three civilians were reportedly killed. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Floods

In early April 2023, flash floods killed at least 21 people and displaced around 100,000 more, OCHA has stated. Livestock was killed and farmland destroyed. Bardhere district in Jubaland is the worst affected district.

UN: more than 1,200 victims of Al-Shabaab attacks last year

A report published by the UN on 05.04.23 says that in 2022, more than 1,200 people were killed or injured by Al-Shabaab attacks, mainly by landmines and improvised explosive devices.

Recapture of a strategically important village in Galmudug

According to military reports, the Danab Special Forces have recaptured one of the most strategic villages in Galmudug, the village of Ali Afrah, from al-Shabaab. The village is located near the recently liberated town of Galcad (Galgadud region). Apparently, Al-Shabaab fighters escaped before the government forces arrived, leaving them to face no resistance.

UN Secretary-General appeals for support

During his multi-day visit to Somalia, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appealed to the international community, asking for more donations to provide the country with the resources it needs to fight Al-Shabaab, stabilise the liberated areas and provide much-needed humanitarian aid. The UN estimates that 2.6 billion USD will be required to support Somalia through 2023. The current funding level is around 15 percent.

Sudan

Heavy fighting between army and RSF after postponed formation of transitional government

Disputes about the integration of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into the regular armed forces and the unresolved issue of control over the supervision of the army's reorganisation forced the delay of the formation of a civilian-led transitional government as of 11.04.23, which had been decided in December 2022 (cf. BN of 06.12.22).

In the course of the ongoing disputes, RSF units began a nationwide mobilisation and deployment of soldiers. On 15.04.23, heavy fighting broke out between the army and the RSF in Khartoum, including in densely populated residential areas. Fighting, including artillery fire and air strikes on RSF bases, was also reported from the Darfur region in the west and the eastern border state of Kassala. Tanks have been spotted. The RSF claims to have captured the presidential palace, Khartoum airport and other strategic locations. The army denies this. There is no independent information on the situation. According to the Sudanese Doctors' Union, at least 97 civilians have been killed and hundreds injured so far. The WHO reports shortages of blood, transfusion equipment, intravenous fluids and other essential supplies in several hospitals in Khartoum. At the suggestion of the UN, the army and RSF agreed to a three-hour humanitarian ceasefire to allow the safe passage of humanitarian cases, including the evacuations of the wounded. However, heavy shelling continued to be heard in central Khartoum. After three UN World Food Programme (WFP) staff were killed in clashes while distributing aid in North Darfur on 15.04.2023, the WFP announced a temporary suspension of all operations in the country. The UN warns that the already precarious humanitarian situation is deteriorating. On 16.04.23, internet access was briefly disrupted and electricity was partially cut off in Khartoum. Neighbouring Egypt and Chad have closed their borders with Sudan.

New demonstrations by teachers

Teachers across the country went on strike for several days on 10.04.23 over late and partly non-payment of salaries in January and February 2023. Already in March 2022, teachers had been striking in parts of the country to demand regular payments and a salary increase. After talks with the Ministry of Finance failed to reach an agreement by December 2022, the country's teachers went on strike again. As a result, more than 16,000 schools across the country were forced to close from 08.01. to 28.01.23. Through the mediation of a special committee, the finance ministry promised to pay salaries, even retroactively, by 12.02.23. The demanded wage increase was not decided. When the promised wage payments again failed to materialise, the teachers initially refrained from further strikes as a sign of goodwill.

Syria

Hama: At least 26 dead in attack on truffle gatherers

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a group of truffle gatherers was attacked on the eastern outskirts of the city of Hama in Hama governorate on 16.04.23. Among the 26 victims were reportedly members of the military protecting the group, as well as civilians. The state news agency SANA said that the attackers were members of IS.

In recent months, truffle gatherers in the region have repeatedly been targeted by attacks, resulting in many deaths (cf. BN of 27.03.23).

Togo

Parliament extends state of emergency for another twelve months

On 06.04.23, the Togolese parliament decided to extend by another twelve months the state of security emergency in the Savanes region, which had originally been imposed on 13.06.22 (cf. BN of 20.06.22 and 12.09.22). In the north of the country, militant groups have been carrying out deadly attacks since November 2021 and particularly since May 2022, increasingly against Togolese military personnel (cf. BN of 15.11.21, 16.05.22, 23.05.22, 30.05.22, 20.06.22, 18.07.22, 06.12.22 and 20.02.23). According to one media report, neither the government nor the army have commented on the security situation in the north since August 2022.

Türkiye

Charges against 17 media workers

On 12.04.23, the 4th Heavy Penal Court in the south-eastern city of Diyarbakır brought charges against 17 Kurdish media workers for membership of the PKK. The defendants had been arrested in June 2022, with 15 of them remanded in pre-trial detention without charge since then. If found guilty under Türkiye's anti-terror laws, the defendants face up to 15 years in prison. The defendants are expected back in court on 11.07.23.

Parole for Yunis Karataş

On 14.04.23, the Constitutional Court ruled in the case of Yunis Karataş, who had been convicted for his involvement in a deadly arson attack on an Alevi event at the Madımak Hotel in Sivas on 02.07.93. A mob had set fire to the hotel, killing 37 people, mostly Alevi artists and academics, who were attending a conference there. Yunis Karataş had originally been sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to an aggravated life imprisonment following the abolition of the death penalty in Türkiye. He was found guilty of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and starting the fire. In a recent ruling on the question of whether Karataş was eligible for parole, the Constitutional Court argued that the distinction between a terrorist offence and a terrorist perpetrator was essential, citing the fact that Karataş was not found to have been a member of any terrorist organisation.

According to Articles 107 and 108 of the Law on Execution of Sentences and Security Measures (Law No. 5275), life prisoners may apply for parole after serving their minimum sentence. If offenses against the security of the state, crimes against the constitutional order and its functioning, and crimes against national defence, as defined by the Turkish Penal Code, are committed by an individual who acts in the name of a terrorist organization, that person is not eligible for parole according to Law No. 5275.

The court stated that an organisation can only be classified as a terrorist organisation if there is a hierarchy and continuity. In the case of the convicted Karataş, this would not apply. The court also noted that the legal definition of terrorism had changed since the attack and that the changes had a positive effect on the convict. It was decided to release him on parole.

Ukraine

Numerous civilian deaths after missile strike

According to the military administration of Donetsk Oblast, 15 civilians were killed and another 24 injured when a rocket hit a multi-storey residential building in the city of Slovyansk on 14.04.23. Search and rescue operations were completed by the evening of 16.04.23, the regional authorities said. According to Ukrainian sources, Russian missiles had damaged several residential buildings and other civilian infrastructure in Slovyansk on 14.04.23. Meanwhile, the Donetsk Oblast remains the focus of heavy fighting, particularly in and around the contested towns of Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Marinka, according to the Ukrainian General Staff.

New media law in force

The new media law signed by President Zelensky at the end of December 2022 came into force on 31.03.23 (cf. BN of 02.01.23). Critics of the law fear stricter state regulation of the media sector through new powers for the National Television and Radio Council of Ukraine, while the Ukrainian government describes the introduction of the law as a necessary legal alignment with European standards in the context of EU accession negotiations.

Yemen

Peace negotiations

On 09.04.23 peace negotiations began in Sanaa between the Houthis and representatives of Saudi Arabia, mediated by Oman. The objectives of the negotiations include the renewal of the ceasefire which had expired in October 2022, the lifting of the Saudi air and sea blockade and an end to the occupation of Taizz by Houthi forces. Although the negotiations ended on 14.04.23 without concrete results, progress was reportedly made.

Prisoner exchange

Between 14.04 and 16.04.23 a prisoner exchange, agreed for in March 2023, took place between the warring parties. In total, more than 800 prisoners were returned between Saudi Arabia, the Houthis and the internationally recognised government of Yemen under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), including four journalists sentenced to death by the Houthis.

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