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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

By its own account, the National Resistance Front (NRF) killed three Taliban fighters in an attack in Kabul on 24.10.24. The Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) claims to have killed two Taliban in an attack in Faryab province and to have fired a number of missiles at the military area of Kabul Airport on 20.10.24. Residents in Kabul report having heard two explosions at the time. There has been no reporting as to any casualties. It has been reported in the media that a bomb attack took place at a market near to the Pamir cinema in Kabul on 23.10.24, injuring eleven people (including women and children). No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack. According to reports in the media, a further explosion occurred on the same day in police district 8 of Kabul.¹

Governance and persecution

According to reports in the media on 27.10.24, in Daikundi province the Taliban have begun instructing public-sector employees on the contents of the new morality law. The Taliban have also begun confiscating "forbidden books" in Daikundi. At libraries and book shops in Kabul, the Taliban have handed out a list of 400 banned books, with instructions not to sell or lend out the listed works. The banned books include works on Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Shiite religion or books presenting a positive view of democracy. The Taliban have reportedly extended their ban on presenting images of living beings in media to at least ten provinces of Afghanistan (including Kandahar, Helmand, Urozgan, Kunar, Khost, Takhar, Badghis, Panjshir and Laghman) (cf. BN of 21.10.24). In Nimroz province, the Taliban arrested 40 people after protests in connection with the search of a house in which only women and children lived. Six people were injured in Ghor province when the Taliban opened fire on people who were protesting against the body-searching of local women.²

Bangladesh

Casualties at protests in Dakha

Five people, including two journalists, were injured by bullets and flash grenades in a clash between security forces and hundreds of protesters calling for the resignation of president Mohammed Shahabuddin on 22.10.24. The protesters had attempted to gain access to the Bangabhaban, the president's official residence. They accuse Shahabuddin of being "an ally of the Awami League (AL) and toppled prime minister Sheikh Hasina". On 27.10.24 the spokesman of the 12-party alliance - which was established in 2022, one of its aims being to depose the AL government - and the secretary general of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party announced their intention to remove the president from office by way of a constitutional trial.³

Burkina Faso

Hundreds arrested for spying

The ministry of security announced on 17.10.24 that between 04.09. and 04.10.24 Burkinabe security forces had arrested 350 people throughout the country on spying charges. According to the ministry, hundreds of reports from the Burkinabe public had enabled individuals suspected of having conspired against the military government to be arrested. The military government had called on the public to report any suspicions after claiming that a propaganda and destabilisation operation had been launched against it. According to his own accounts, Ibrahim Traoré, the head of the military government who came to power by way of a coup, has already thwarted a number of attempted coups in which civilians and members of the military were involved (cf. BN of 09.10.23 and 22.01.24). At the beginning of October 2024, the minister of security published a list of the names of some 15 political and military figures who are suspected of aiming to take action against the military government.⁴

Djibo: Doctors Without Borders (MSF) suspends activities

On 21.10.24 the medical emergency aid organisation Doctors Without Borders (MSF) announced that it was suspending its activities in the town of Djibo in the Sahel region of northern Burkina Faso on security grounds, as the town close to the borders with Niger and Mali has been surrounded by jihadist groups since 2022. According to reports in the media, MSF health centres and facilities have frequently been targeted by violent actors in the past. Back in February 2023, MSF suspended its work throughout the country for three weeks after two Burkinabe staff were killed by armed actors. In July 2024 the organisation's water supply stations were destroyed and in September 2024 a further member of its staff was killed. In Burkina Faso there are more than two million internally displaced people, who are for the most part dependant on aid from humanitarian organisations. NGOs report that the number of internally displaced people in the town of Djibo has risen from 60,000 to over 200,000 in the space of five years.⁵

Voice of America news channel (VOA) banned

On 07.10.24 the Burkinabe media supervisory authority suspended the Voice of America news channel (VOA) for three months after it made critical comments about members of the Burkinabe military in the fight against jihadism. The media supervisory authority has reportedly also placed a temporary ban on local news channels referring to reports in the international media. After promising to clamp down on jihadist groups, since the security situation in the country has deteriorated the military government has reportedly become increasingly intolerant of critical voices.⁶

Ethiopia

Drone attacks in Amhara

At least 18 people, including a number of children, were reportedly killed in several drone attacks in Shoa, Gojjam and Gondar on 22.10., 25.10. and 26.10.24. The attacks were aimed at Fano militias in the Amhara region. They nevertheless resulted in a series of civilian casualties, with a primary school most recently being hit, according to eye-witness reports. The government has yet to comment on the latest incidents.⁷

Georgia

Governing party declares itself winner of parliamentary elections

With almost all votes counted in the parliamentary elections on 26.10.24, the electoral commission has announced that Georgian Dream - the ruling conservative nationalist party of billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili - won just under 55 % of the vote. The party duly declared itself the winner. According to the electoral commission, the four opposition blocs who overcame

the five per cent election threshold together took only around 37 % of the vote. Turnout stood at just under 60 %. The official final result has yet to be announced and is expected to be declared in the course of 28.10.24.

The pro-European opposition alliances do not recognise the provisional final result and have announced protests. They have spoken of electoral fraud and are claiming victory for themselves in the election. The numerous international election monitors also cast doubt on the official result of the parliamentary elections. The delegates

of the OSCE, the EU parliament, the Council of Europe and NATO conclude in a joint statement that eligible voters were subjected to pressure before and during polling and that irregularities occurred. A separate statement from the OSCE criticises cases of voter intimidation, pressure on public authorities, violence against observers, vote-buying and multiple voting, for example. Isolated violent disputes outside polling stations are also mentioned. The OSCE is calling for such cases to be investigated and urging further democratic reforms in the country. Georgia's pro-European president Zourabichvili has spoken of manipulation during the elections and Russian influence. On behalf of the opposition, she called for protests to take place on the evening of 28.10.24.

Georgia has been a candidate country for accession to the EU since 2023. The accession process is on hold, however, on account of contentious legislation (cf. BN of 10.06. and 23.09.24). The opposition with its traditional leanings towards the EU fears that under the leadership of the oligarch Ivanishvili, who amassed his wealth in Moscow, Georgia will ally itself more closely with neighbouring Russia and abandon its pro-European course once and for all.⁸

Ghana

President signs off Gender Equality Act

On 19.09.24 president Akufo-Addo signed off the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act 2024, which had been caught up in the legislative process since 1998. The act was passed by the Ghanaian parliament in July 2024. The act is intended to consolidate women's participation in public life by ensuring that they occupy at least 30 % to 50 % of posts, for example in government and business, by 2030. The act also makes verbal attacks, discrimination and intimidation of employees on the basis of their gender punishable offences. It remains to be seen how and whether the act will actually be implemented.⁹

Haiti

Increasing gang violence in and around Port-au-Prince

The CNN news agency has reported that two armoured vehicles belonging to the US embassy in the capital, Port-au-Prince, came under fire from the "400 Mawozo" and "Chen Mechan" criminal groups on 22.10.24. The attacks and an increase in gang activities in the area surrounding the embassy have prompted the embassy to begin the evacuation of up to 20 diplomatic staff from the capital. In addition, on 24.10.24 a helicopter deployed by the WFP was shot at as it flew over Port-au-Prince's Grand Ravine district, which is controlled by gangs. The crew of three and the 15 passengers on board remained unharmed, but the flight planned for the following day had to be cancelled. The attacks give rise to fears that domestic and commercial flights may be cancelled and the UN helicopter service may be interrupted. The helicopter service is crucial for delivering humanitarian aid in communities which are cut off by roads which are controlled by gangs. The UN migration authority estimated on 24.10.24 that more than 10,000 people had been displaced in the space of seven days because armed gangs in and around Port-au-Prince had stepped up their attacks on areas which they do not yet control. In Tabarre, to the east of the international airport, and in Solino, a strategically important district, thousands of residents fled their homes after houses were set on fire and members of Viv Ansanm, an alliance of several armed gangs, began a new wave of attacks in the capital and parts of the nearby Aribonite region.¹⁰

India

Kashmir: Security situation after regional elections

Seven workers employed on a strategic tunnel construction project were killed in the part of Kashmir under Indian administration on 20.10.24 and at least five were injured. This was one of the most lethal attacks on civilians in the disputed region this year. Security services blamed the attack near to Sonamarg on separatist rebels, who reportedly shot at the workers indiscriminately, killing two and injuring ten, five of whom later died in hospital. The tunnel project is of strategic importance as it is intended to link Kashmir with Ladakh, a region which is of crucial importance for India's military operations on the borders with Pakistan and China.

According to official information at least four people, including two soldiers, died on 25.10.24 when armed actors attacked a military vehicle in the Gulmarg area, close to the demarcation line marking the border with the part of Kashmir administrated by Pakistan.

The regional elections which ended on 08.10.24 were won by the National Conference, the largest anti-Indian party in Kashmir, which took 42 of the 90 seats in the regional parliament. The attacks reflect the continuing tensions in the region, in which anti-Indian rebels have been attacking outsiders and local officials since 2021. Kashmir remains a trouble spot to which both India and Pakistan lay claim.¹¹

Iran

Israeli air strikes on Iranian military installations

According to reports in the media, Israel carried out a number of air strikes on Iranian military facilities on the night of 25.10.24. From the Israeli point of view, the attacks were a response to Iran's missile attack on Israel on 01.10.24. According to information from the Israeli armed forces, some 20 military targets were attacked, including missile production facilities, ground-to-air missile positions and other Iranian air defence systems. Energy and nuclear plants were reportedly avoided.

Iranian media have reported limited damage to military bases, stating that the Iranian air defences had been activated in the capital, Tehran, and in Khuzestan and Ilam provinces. The Iranian side initially reported that two members of the army had been killed in the attack. The reported death toll was subsequently increased to four. According to information from the Iranian military, all those killed were soldiers.¹²

Report on killing of IRGC member by Kurdish opposition group

According to reports in the media on 24.10.24, two days previously clashes had occurred near the city of Kamyaran in Kordestan province between fighters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Kurdish opposition group Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK). At least one IRGC soldier was reportedly killed and a number of IRGC members injured. According to reports by a Kurdish human rights network, the confrontation occurred when members of PJAK were attacked by IRGC forces.

The PJAK was formed in the Qandil Mountains of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KR-I) in 2003 and is considered to be the Iranian wing of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). According to the PJAK, however, the two parties only share a similar ideology and there is no active cooperation.

The Iranian government regards PJAK, together with other Iranian-Kurdish opposition groups based in KR-I, as terrorist organisations and carries out cross-border air and ground operations in the region at irregular intervals. In 2023 Iran and Iraq signed a treaty to secure the border and to disarm the Iranian-Kurdish opposition groups (cf. BN of 09.09.24). The extent to which this treaty has been implemented to date remains unclear.¹³

Attack on police in Sistan and Baluchestan province

It was reported in the media on 26.10.24 that an armed attack had taken place on a police convoy in Gohar Kuh (Sistan and Baluchestan province). According to media close to the government, at least ten police officers were killed.

Citing an account from an online medium which represents the interests of the Baloch ethnic group in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, it has been reported that the attack evidently targeted two vehicles of the security forces and that all those on board the vehicles were killed. According to other reports, the militant Sunni group Jaish al Adl, which is considered to be a separatist organisation, has claimed responsibility for the attack.¹⁴

Iraq

Conflict between Türkiye and PKK

The Turkish defence ministry stated on 24.10.24 and 25.10.24 that the Turkish air force had attacked targets relating to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq.

According to the ministry, the air strikes were a response to an attack on a Turkish state-owned armaments company in Ankara on 23.10.24 (see article on Türkiye). The PKK claimed responsibility for the attack on 25.10.24.¹⁵

The struggle against IS

The Iraqi military stated on 24.10.24 that it had carried out an attack on members of IS in Al Anbar province with support from the international anti-IS coalition. 16 IS members were allegedly killed. On 26.10.24 the Iraqi military announced that four IS members had been killed in an air strike in Salah al-Din province.

Although territorially defeated since 2017, IS remains active in Iraq above all in the territories which are disputed between Iraq's central government and the Kurdish regional government. These territories cover Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Nineva provinces.¹⁶

Lebanon

Escalation of the armed conflict between Israel and Hamas

The Israeli armed forces continue to carry out daily attacks by air and on land against targets in Lebanon. Key focuses of the attacks continue to be southern Lebanon, the Beqaa Valley and the southern districts and suburbs of Beirut. Attacks on leading figures are becoming increasingly rarer, especially as the main popular leading figures of Hezbollah are now dead.

The Israeli military continues to issue evacuation orders on a regular basis for regions in which ground operations are underway or in which large immobile targets are located. Major differences apply here with regard to the advance warning time provided. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is still refusing to withdraw its soldiers by at least 5 km to the north and has issued a statement reminding Israel of its obligations under UN Resolution 1701 from 2006.

An air strike hit the Jousieh border crossing between Lebanon and Syria on 25.10.24, rendering it temporarily impassable. Israel justifies attacks on border crossings on the grounds that they are used to provide military support for Hezbollah from Syria. Critics point out that such attacks also make it difficult or impossible for civilian goods traffic or civilians fleeing the hostilities to cross the border.

On 27.10.24 an Israeli air strike hit the town of Haret Saida. There was no advance warning of the strike. The attack targeted Hezbollah official Hussein Fneish, who is reported to have died together with several members of his family.

Residents of Lebanon continue to flee their homes in large numbers, heading for the country's interior or Syria. The number of internally displaced people in Lebanon as a result of the hostilities is currently estimated at up to 1.3 million. As far as can be assessed at present, the overwhelming majority of these displaced people belong to the Shiite ethnic group.

At least half a million people are believed to have fled to Syria. The majority of these people are Syrian nationals. No information is available at present as to whether Palestinians are being turned back at the Syrian border.

Due to the ongoing events, it is not possible to put an exact figure on the number of casualties at present. The death toll on the Lebanese side since 08.10.23 is currently estimated at 2,672 or more, with adult men making up the overwhelming majority of casualties (approx. 80 %). No reliable figures are currently available with regard to the number of soldiers killed in the ongoing ground offensive, as both sides are largely maintaining silence about the course of events.¹⁷

Malawi

Police arrest former minister and current secretary general of UTM party

According to current reports in the media, the Malawian police arrested the former minister of gender, children, disability and social welfare, Patricia Kaliati, on 24.10.24 for attempted murder. In a statement to the press, the Malawian police spokesman was unable to provide any further details of the charges, however. According to the police, there are two other suspects who have not yet been taken into custody. Reports in the press indicate that Kaliati, who currently serves as the secretary general of the United Transformation Movement party (UTM), has been a fierce critic of the current government since the party's former vice-president died in a plane crash.¹⁸

Myanmar

Security situation

20 civilians were killed in fighting between the Myanmar military and local resistance groups (People's Defence Forces, PDF) in Madaya (Mandalay region) on 20.09. and 21.09.24.

14 civilians were killed and 25 injured in an air strike by the military junta on the coastal town of Thandwe (Rakhine State) on 26.09.24.

On 30.09.24 bombs exploded in two administrative offices of Kyimyindaing and Mingala Taungnyunt townships in Yangon. According to information from the military, eleven people were wounded. The guerilla group which has claimed responsibility for the attacks, describing them as an operation against the military junta's "illegal census", has reported three people killed and 13 injured. The census comprising 68 questions, which was launched on 01.10.24, is allegedly intended to be used for the purpose of drawing up an electoral register for parliamentary elections in 2025. Pro-democratic forces see it as an attempt to collect information on opposition figures. Furthermore, as a result of the military's territorial losses, observers assume that it will only be possible to survey households in the urban areas of the central regions Mandalay, Bago, Yangon and Ayeyarwad.

Between 04.10. and 23.10.24, junta soldiers killed at least 25 civilians in a number of villages in Budalin (Sagaing region) and impaled their mutilated bodies on stakes as a deterrent.

Thousands of people fled heavy fighting between the military and local PDFs in Pulaw (Tanintharyi region) between 14.10. and 24.10.24.¹⁹

Conscription

It is estimated that the Myanmar military has conscripted 25,000 men for training since April 2024 and sent 5,000 of these to the front. According to state media, up to 60,000 people are to be conscripted by the end of 2024, in order to support the military in pursuit of its most important aims ("preventing the disintegration of the union, maintaining national solidarity, upholding sovereignty"). In Yangon and other towns and cities controlled by the military, people who are considered fit for military service are said to be picked up from their homes or in the street for conscription, without any prior warning. Migrant workers who have been returned to Myanmar from Thailand for illegally entering the country or because their visas have expired are also victims of such press-ganging. Thai authorities are said to have deported over 1,400 Myanmar workers in August and September 2024 and since July 2024 they are reported to have detained a total of 200,000 Myanmar nationals without residence permits.²⁰

Nigeria

Economic reforms yielding success

The World Bank has established that the reforms introduced by president Tinubu in 2023 to stabilise the Nigerian economy have yielded positive results. In a press statement released on 17.10.24, the organisation observes that the reforms have led to robust growth in the service sector, stability in the oil sector and improvements on the foreign exchange market. It observes that budget consolidation is in progress and the budgetary deficit is shrinking. The World Bank expects Nigeria's economy to grow by 3.3 % in 2024 and by an annual average of 3.7 % between 2025 and 2027. Downsides of the reform include high inflation. The undertaken reform measures specifically include drastic cuts in subsidies for fuel and electricity, higher interest rates and devaluation of the Nigeria naira in relation to the US dollar. In an address on 12.06.24, Tinubu reiterated that the reforms would be continued, despite the consequential hardships for broad sections of the population (cf. BN of 24.06.24).²¹

Military reports successes

According to information released by the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) on 24.10.24, in various operations conducted in the previous week against members of criminal gangs and members of the Islamist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), the Nigerian military killed some 140 violent actors referred to as terrorists and arrested around 135 suspects nationwide. In addition, it has been reported in the media that around 76 kidnap victims were arrested and a large number of weapons and ammunition were confiscated. The DHQ issues such announcements of successful operations with a certain regularity (cf. BN of 02.09. and 14.10.24).²²

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Lethal attack on two transgender people

It was reported in the press on 22.10.24 that two transgender individuals had been killed in Mardan, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. According to the authorities, investigations are continuing. According to information from Mahi Gula, an NGO which champions the rights of LGBTIQ people, 122 transgender people have been killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province since 2009, without a single conviction in any of these cases. In Pakistan, transgender people are commonly subjected to harassment, abuse and so-called honour killings by relatives on account of perceived sexual misdemeanours.²³

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Attacks and hostilities

Ten members of the paramilitary Frontier Corps were killed and three injured in an ambush in D. I. Khan, close to the Afghan border, on 25.10.24. The Pakistani Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 14.10.24 Pakistani Taliban fighters stormed a police station in Bannu. In the ensuing exchanges of fire, four police officers and five fighters were killed.²⁴

Palestinian territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Current developments; humanitarian situation

According to information released by the Hamas-run health ministry on 22.10.24, at least 42,718 Palestinians have been killed and 100,282 injured in the Gaza Strip since the war began. The ministry does not officially differentiate between combatants and civilians. The figures cannot be independently verified. According to information released by the Israeli military on 22.10.24, a total of 356 members of the Israeli military have been killed and 2,362 injured since the series of ground offensives began.

Meanwhile, the war continues. Since 06.10.24 the Israeli military has been conducting a renewed ground offensive in the north of the Gaza Strip. It has become practically impossible to provide any humanitarian relief supplies. According to information from UN OCHA, most recently it has only been possible to coordinate 6 % of relief operations with the Israeli authorities and deliver the corresponding relief supplies. As a result, there is an acute lack of medical equipment for the three remaining hospitals which are still partially operational and a severe shortage of food deliveries for the remaining population. The planned second polio vaccination campaign for the north of the Gaza Strip, which was supposed to be made possible by local ceasefires, was deferred by the WHO on 23.10.24 on account of the confused security situation.

According to the local, Hamas-run health authorities 17 people, for the most part women and children, were killed on 24.10.24 in an air strike on a school which was being used as a shelter for Palestinians who had fled their homes. The Israeli military claims that Hamas fighters were on the hospital premises.²⁵

Israel: Several killed in suspected attack

One person was killed and 32 injured in a suspected attack close to a military base in the Israeli heartland on 27.10.24.

A truck driver reportedly drove his truck into a group of people at a bus stop near the city of Herzliya, to the north of Tel Aviv. The driver is said to have been an Israeli Arab from Qalansawe. His brother dismisses any possibility that the incident could have been a deliberate attack.²⁶

Republic of Moldova

Presidential elections and referendum

Presidential elections took place in the Republic of Moldova on 20.10.24. In the running was the pro-Western incumbent and favourite for a second term in office, Maia Sandu from the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), together with eleven other, predominantly pro-Russian candidates, including Sandu's biggest rival, the former prosecutor general Alexandr Stoianoglo from the socialist PSRM party of pro-Russian former president Igor Dodon. The turnout stood at 51.4 %, representing more than 1.56 million votes. As no candidate secured an absolute majority in the first ballot, a run-off is to take place on 03.11.24 between the two front runners, Sandu (approx.

42.5 %) and Stoianoglo (approx. 26 %). During Sandu's presidency, Stoianoglo was removed from his office as prosecutor general on corruption charges.

In addition to the presidential elections, the citizens were also called on to vote in a referendum on whether the aim of accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU was to be enshrined in the constitution. With 50.46 % of the vote, the issue was decided very narrowly in favour of adoption into the constitution, as advocated by president Sandu. On 21.10.24 the central election commission (KEK) declared that the minimum required turnout had been attained and the referendum was therefore valid. The commission will subsequently submit a report on the result to the constitutional court. The court will then reach a decision confirming or rejecting the result within ten days.²⁷

Allegations: Vote-buying, disinformation and provocation of unrest

The run-up to the election and the referendum was overshadowed by accusations of Russian interference in the ballot, in particular via illegal flows of money to pro-Russian parties, to disinformation campaigns and to voters, with the aim of securing a pro-Russian result through vote-buying (cf. BN of 14.10.24). According to official information from 17.10.24, a network of more than a hundred people was uncovered and a number of suspects were arrested who had been trained in the Russian Federation and the Western Balkans with the aim of provoking unrest in the Republic of Moldova ahead of the elections. According to information from the police, the network was funded by pro-Kremlin fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor.

On 25.10.24 the premises of Victor Petrov and Iurii Cuznețov, the deputies of Evghenia Guțul, governor of the autonomous region of Gagauzia, were also searched in connection with election corruption. In Gagauzia the referendum yielded a roughly 95 % vote against adoption into the constitution. On 14.10.24 the Council of the European Union placed Guțul and Cuznețov on a sanctions list for actions aimed at destabilising the Moldova; Petrov was already listed.

On the night of the election, president Sandu spoke of an attack by anti-democratic, criminal forces on the elections, which had conspired with a foreign power in an attempt to destabilise the country. Asserting that there was evidence that 300,000 votes had been bought, she said she intended to await the official final result and then decide on the next steps, without providing any details.²⁸

Senegal

Opposition figure arrested

On 19.10.24 Senegalese security forces arrested Bougane Gueye Dany, opposition politician and leader of the Gueum Sa Bopp movement, on his way to the town of Bakel in the east of the country. He had refused to stop at a road block when instructed to do so by the security forces. According to reports in the media, he was on his way together with two members of the Samm Sa Kaddu opposition party to support flood victims in the regions of Senegal which have been hit by flooding when he refused to give way to president Diomaye Faye's convoy. He was subsequently charged with "insubordination", "rebellion" and "insult". Gueye Dany was taken into custody at Tambacounda prison on 21.10.24. A court will decide on 30.10.24 whether he must remain in custody. The Geum Sa Bopp movement has reportedly demanded his immediate and unconditional release, criticising the inhumane prison conditions resulting, for example, from overcrowding and degrading treatment. Gueye Dany is said to be well known as a critic of both prime minister Sonko and former president Macky Sall. Dany's arrest took place some four weeks ahead of the early parliamentary elections on 17.11.24, in which he will run as a candidate of the Samm Sa Kaddu opposition party.²⁹

Syria

Damascus: Israeli air strikes

According to Syrian state media, two people were killed in an Israeli air strike on a car in the Damascene district of Al Mezzeh on 21.10.24. An Israeli military spokesman has stated that the head of Hezbollah's money transfer enterprise was among the dead.

Al Mezzeh has been the target of Israeli air raids on numerous occasions in the past (cf. BN of 14.10.24).

The Syrian defence minister has reported that one soldier was killed and seven injured in further supposedly Israeli air strikes on targets in the Damascene district of Kafr Sousa and a military location in rural Homs.³⁰

North-east: Bombardment by Turkish military

In the wake of a lethal attack by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Ankara (see article on Türkiye), on 23.10.24 and the following days the Turkish military bombed targets in Syria which it linked to the PKK and affiliated groups. According to information from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), twelve civilians were killed and 25 injured in the air strikes on 23.10.24. The most influential fighting forces within the SDF, which exercises control in the north-east, are the Kurdish People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel - YPG), which Türkiye regards as having close links to the PKK. According to the SDF, bakeries, power stations, oil installations and local checkpoints were among the targets that were hit.

According to reports in the media, targets in Al-Bab, in Aleppo governorate, were shelled from territories controlled by the SDF on 24.10.24, injuring seven civilians. Shortly before, the SDF had published a statement announcing that counter-strikes had been launched against Turkish bases and locations of Türkiye-backed militias, killing a number of military personnel.³¹

Tajikistan

Long prison sentences for opposition figures

Suhrob Zafar, leader of the opposition "Group 24" and Nasimjon Sharifov, a member of the same group, were sentenced to 30 and 20 years' imprisonment respectively on 10.10.24. The judgement was pronounced behind closed doors at a prison in Dushanbe. This emerges from a report published in the media on 17.10.24, citing undisclosed sources. No details of the trial are known. According to the sources, the two men were charged with "calling for the overthrow of constitutional order by means of the internet." The government accuses Group 24 of extremism. The two defendants disputed this, asserting that they used peaceful means to demand democratic reforms. Both Zafar and Sharifov had lived for several years in Türkiye, from where they disappeared in unexplained circumstances in February and March 2024 respectively. The public prosecutor's office only revealed on 09.08.24 that they were in Dushanbe and were under investigation.³²

Togo

Armed attack in the north of the country

Armed attackers killed eight people in the village of Malgbangou (Kpendjal prefecture in the Savannes region) close to the border with Burkina Faso on the night of 25.10.24. According to people from the village, the attackers entered a building in which displaced people from a neighbouring village were staying. These displaced people were shot dead together with the owner of the building. Both local residents and the media suspect that the attack was carried out by Jama'a Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), a jihadist group associated with Al Qaeda. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack to date, however.

This was the second time in less than two weeks that the village of Malgbangou was attacked by armed groups. Several days previously, attackers set a number of shops on fire, but there were no casualties. Residents of Kpendjal prefecture have complained in the media that not a week goes by without violent incidents. In recent months, this area has again become an epicentre of attacks by armed groups. This has prompted many villagers to leave their homes and seek safety in neighbouring villages. The number of internally displaced people is continually rising. Displaced people are forced to leave their fields, as a result of which all farming activity comes to a halt.

Lethal attacks by militant groups have been occurring throughout the Savannes region since November 2021, and since May 2022 in particular. In March 2024 the government extended by a further year the state of emergency which has been in force in the region since 2022 (cf. BN of 18.03.24).³³

Türkiye

PKK attack on state aerospace company

According to reports in the press, armed actors carried out an attack on the state aerospace company Turkish Aerospace Industries (TUSAŞ) on the outskirts of the capital, Ankara, on 23.10.24. Five people died in the attack and 22 were injured. The two attackers were killed by security personnel.

The armed wing of the PKK, the People's Defence Forces (HPG), claimed responsibility for the attack on 25.10.24. In the accompanying statement, it was asserted that the attack was not linked to the possibility of new peace negotiations between Türkiye and the PKK, which is currently being intimated in Turkish political circles together with allusions to the prospect of release for Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader and founding member of the PKK. Rather, the attack is said to be intended as a "warning against the genocidal practices and massacres in Kurdistan and the isolationist course pursued by the Turkish government." The statement also alleges that weapons manufactured by TUSAŞ, such as drones, are responsible for the deaths of people in the Kurdish territories. According to reports in the media, Türkiye has been carrying out reprisal attacks on suspected PKK positions in Syria and northern Iraq since 23.10.24³⁴.

Turkish nationals repatriated from Kenya on allegations of links to Gülen movement

Following reports in international media on 18.10.24 concerning the suspected abduction of four Turkish nationals in Kenya, on 21.10.24 the Kenyan foreign ministry stated that on the said date four Turkish nationals had been deported from Kenya to Türkiye on request from the Turkish government.

According to reports in the press, seven people in all were abducted in Nairobi on 18.10.24 due to suspected links to the Gülen movement. Three of the abducted, including a British national, were reportedly released, and according to a report in the press four of the abducted were at a police station in Ankara as per 23.10.24. According to reports in the media, the individuals concerned were abducted by the Turkish intelligence service Millî İstihbarat Teşkilâtı (MIT) on 18.10.24 and some were interrogated in Kenya before being transferred to Türkiye. The four people reported as being held in Ankara are refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which should protect them from being forcibly returned to Türkiye.

It was reported in the press on 23.10.24 that officers of the counter-terrorism unit (TEM) at the police authority in Ankara were contacting the families and lawyers of those abducted and informing them about their whereabouts. According to reports in the media, since the attempted coup of 15.07.16 the MIT is said to have carried out operations abroad to forcibly repatriate more than 100 individuals with suspected links to the Gülen movement. Among the most recent cases is that of a Turkish businessman who disappeared in Tajikistan in September 2023 and subsequently turned up in police custody in Türkiye in the following month.

A report on transnational repression which was published in 2023 by the NGO Freedom House, which champions the safeguarding of liberal democracies, Türkiye is the second most frequent perpetrator of transnational repression worldwide. The Turkish government applies various measures against its critics abroad, including spying by diaspora organisations which support the Turkish government.³⁵

Ruling by European Court of Human Rights on unfair trials

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled on 22.10.24 that Türkiye had violated the rights of ten judges and public prosecutors to a fair trial. The court found that the Turkish Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) had neglected to uphold adequate procedural safeguards, such as formal hearings, rules on the presentation of evidence and a detailed statement of the grounds for its decisions relating to the ten complainants, thus undermining the complainants' rights to a fair trial.

The case of "Şişman and others v. Türkiye" concerned ten judges and public prosecutors who were involuntarily relocated to other towns and cities or, in one instance, demoted in the same town. These relocations took place between 2014 and 2015 on the basis of a series of rulings by the HSYK. The Turkish government disputes the ECHR's jurisdiction on the grounds that the complainants did not expressly submit a request for access to a court in the course of the domestic trial. The government further maintains that the complainants were dismissed for alleged membership of the Gülen movement in the aftermath of the attempted coup on 15.07.16, and argues that this justifies the exclusion of a judicial review on grounds of national security. The ECHR rejected these arguments, emphasizing that the HSYK cannot be regarded as a court on account of the procedural irregularities in the trial.³⁶

Ukraine

Civilian casualties

According to information from the regional governor, two people died in a Russian missile attack on Zaporizhzhia on 21.10.24. According to information from the authorities, a total of five people died in the Sumy and Donetsk regions as a result of Russian drone attacks and shelling on 22.10.24. According to the competent authorities, one person has been killed in a Ukrainian drone attack in the city of Enerhodar (Zaporizhzhia region), which is occupied by the Russian side. On 24.10.24 the governor of the Kharkiv region reported one death after Russian attacks in the city of Kupiansk. On the same day, the competent governors reported that three people had died under Russian shelling near Pokrovsk and two people had been killed near to the front cities of Chasiv Yar and Kostiantynivka (Donetsk region). According to information from the mayor, one person died in a drone attack on a residential building in Kyiv on 25.10.24. The local authorities have reported that five people died under Russian shelling on the same day in the city of Dnipro. According to information from the governor, two people were killed in Russian attacks in the Kherson region on 27.10.24.³⁷

Course of the war

According to information from the Ukrainian military, Russian troops have broken through the Ukrainian defence lines and are continuing to advance on Chasiv Yar. The authorities report that evacuations have taken place to the front city of Myrnohrad (Donetsk region) and are to be carried out in Borova (Kharkiv region). Only a few dozen people are said to have remained in Pokrovsk, the main objective of the Russian advance. Ukrainian military observers report that Russian troops have advanced into the mining city of Selydove (Donetsk oblast). In view of the growing pressure on Ukrainian positions and Russian superiority in terms of soldiers and equipment, the Ukrainian general staff refer to the situation as "difficult".³⁸

Recruitment and corruption

Following the disclosure of numerous cases of corruption in connection with the issuance of certificates confirming unfitness for military service, after a security council meeting on 22.10.24 president Zelenskyy announced the resignation of the Ukrainian prosecutor general, Andriy Kostin, who assumes the political responsibility for the scandal. An investigation by the secret service (SBU) reportedly revealed that dozens of officials from public prosecutors' offices in various parts of the country had evaded military service by wrongfully applying for invalidity benefits and thus securing exemption from conscription. The SBU announced on 22.10.24 that in 2024 to date 64 members of medical commissions are suspects in criminal investigations and nine other people who have been charged and found guilty. According to Zelenskyy, beyond the public prosecutors' offices there are also "hundreds of cases of evidently unwarranted disability for service among customs and tax officials, in the pension fund system and in local administrations." After Kostin's resignation, prime minister Denys Schmyhal dismissed the leadership of the central commission for monitoring disability for service and senior officials at the health ministry. On the basis of a presidential order, the government is also to elaborate an act to dissolve the existing medical commission and to reform the system for assessing disability for service.

According to a statement issued by the State Bureau of Investigation on 24.10.24, six people, including three army recruitment officials, one of whom is the head of the recruiting commission, have been arrested in Kyiv on corruption charges in connection with the illegal evasion of military service. Millions of dollars and luxury cars have also been seized, The price for removal from the call-up list reportedly ranged between 2,000 and 15,000 US dollars. Over 1,000 men are said to have bought themselves out of military service. Manipulations of the military service register are also reported to have enabled draftees to leave the country.

According to information from the authorities, a man refused to submit to mustering after being seized by the police and taken to a recruitment centre in Poltava. His dead body, showing "obvious signs" of suicide, was subsequently found in a "technical room". An inquiry has reportedly been launched into the incident.³⁹

Venezuela

Arrest of DRC employee also in connection with alleged conspiracy

The recently arrested Colombian national and employee of the humanitarian organisation Danish Refugee Council (DRC) (cf. BN of 21.10.24), Manuel Alejandro Tique Chaves, is also accused by the interior ministry of involvement in an alleged conspiracy to bring down the government, among other charges. Relatives and the DRC continue to deny the allegations.⁴⁰

Controversial death of opposition politician Santos

According to relatives and reports from witnesses, opposition politician Edwin Santos (VP) was apprehended by state security forces on his way home in Apure State on 23.10.24. His subsequent whereabouts are unknown. Citing the opposition party Voluntad Popular (VP), individual media have reported that at one point he was questioned at the headquarters of the military secret service (DGCIM) in Guasdalito. On 26.10.24 Santos' dead body was found in El Nula-El Piñal, a road close to the border between Táchira State and Apure State. While VP is holding state security forces responsible for his death, the director of the CICPC police investigation unit is alleging that Santos was killed in a motorcycle accident. NGOs and opposition politicians have called for an independent inquiry into the case, with a number of organisations and individuals questioning the government's portrayal of events. The president of the CICPC has announced that investigations will be carried out in connection with alleged disinformation campaigns in the media aimed at framing state security forces as being behind Santos' death.

On 27.10.24, media organisations additionally called on the authorities to provide information on the whereabouts of the independent journalist Nelin Escalante, who is believed to have been apprehended by the DGCIM military secret service in Caracas on 25.10.24.⁴¹

Venezuela ranks bottom in 2024 Rule of Law Index

In the Rule of Law Index published by the World Justice Project (WJP) on 23.10.24, Venezuela ranks bottom overall in 2024 among a total of 142 assessed countries, behind Cambodia, Afghanistan, Haiti and Myanmar. The country also occupies bottom position in individual categories, including Civil Justice, Criminal Justice and Regulatory Enforcement. Based on eight categories, the index measures how people perceive the rule of law in the examined countries by reference to expert and household surveys. Factors which came in for particularly severe criticism in Venezuela include the sanctioning of public-sector employees in cases of misconduct, the judiciary's constraint of the executive and the enforcement of civil and criminal law. The criminal justice system is found to lack impartiality and efficiency and to be exposed to government influence.⁴²

Arrest of former oil minister Tellechea

Prosecutor general Saab has reported that former oil minister Pedro Tellechea was arrested on 20.10.24 and stands accused of corruption and allegedly passing information on to a company linked to the CIA, among other charges. Back in April 2024, Tellechea's predecessor and former close confidant of Maduro, Tareck El Aissami, was also arrested for corruption (cf. BN of 15.04.24). Tellechea was replaced by vice-president Delcy Rodríguez in a cabinet reshuffle following the presidential elections in August 2024 (cf. BN of 02.09.24). He resigned from his current post as minister for industry and national production on 18.10.24, stating health-related reasons.⁴³

Zambia

Amnesty for 859 prisoners

According to recent reports in the press, Zambia's president Hakainde Hichilema pardoned 859 prisoners on 24.10.24 to mark the 60th anniversary of the country's independence from British colonial rule. Interior minister Jack Mwiimbu announced that president Hichilema, as command-in-chief of the defence forces, had pardoned 840 ordinary prisoners, nine elderly people, seven women with young children and three foreign nationals. Article 97 of the Zambian constitution affords the country's president the privilege to grant pardons. It is also reported that the government is planning, in cooperation with the Zambian prison service and the judiciary, to introduce penitentiary courts so as to make it easier for inmates to gain access to justice.⁴⁴

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