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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Attacks on civilians / internally displaced persons

Reports of 13.07.21 said that 5,000 families in Kandahar province and 20,000 families in Bamian province were displaced by fighting. In the north of the country 5,600 families had been displaced, the reports said. Four civilians were killed and five others injured in a bomb explosion in down-town Kabul. In the areas captured by the Taliban in the north, women are only allowed to go out on the streets wearing full-face veils and accompanied by men, according to a report of 14.07.21.

Fighting / border crossings / provincial capitals

According to the Long War Journal (LWJ), the Taliban controlled 222 districts, the government 73 and 112 were contested on 19.07.21. The LWJ also reported on 15.07.21 that almost half of the provincial capitals (16 out of 34) were threatened by the Taliban. 18 of the provinces are at risk of coming fully under Taliban control, it was said. According to a report of 18.07.21, there was fighting in about 20 provinces and about 1,000 Taliban had been killed in the last few days. On the same day, the Pakistani army deployed more troops on the border with Afghanistan. On 14.07.21, it was reported that the Taliban were firing rockets at the Salma Dam in Herat province. On the same day, reports said that citizen militias led by former warlord Ismail Khan joined the Afghan army in Herat province in its fight against the Taliban. It is said that staff of the Russian consulate in Mazar-e Sharif has been temporarily evacuated to Uzbekistan on 13.07.21. On 14.07.21, the Taliban had captured the strategically important border crossing of Spin Boldak in Kandahar province. The Afghan army is trying to retake the crossing, thereby also causing tensions with the Pakistani army. The Taliban continue to hold the border crossings of Torghundi, Islam Qala and Shir Khan Bandar (cf. BN of 26.06.21 and 12.07.21). On 15.07.21, the US reported plans to airlift their local Afghan staff out of the country in the last week of July. In Badghis province, tribal elders had negotiated a ceasefire with the Taliban on 15.07.21, reports say. On 17.07.21, delegations of the Taliban and the Afghan government met again in Doha for several days of talks. On 18.07.21, the Taliban leader Akhunzada stated that the Taliban sought a political solution for the country, despite their territorial gains.

Humanitarian situation / COVID 19 pandemic / Authorities

On 12.07.21, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that fighting, the COVID-19 pandemic and a drought in Afghanistan are causing a humanitarian crisis. Half of the population is in need of humanitarian aid. Due to COVID-19, all schools, universities, conference venues, wedding halls and swimming pools are closed until 23.07.21. 72 people died on 13.07.21 due to COVID-19, bringing the total to 5,921. On 15.07.21, 260 government buildings in 116 districts were reported to be inoperable due to the fighting and 13 million Afghans were unable to access government services. 4,000 government employees had been evacuated from the districts.

Afghanistan/Pakistan

Taliban capture Afghan-Pakistan border crossing

On 15.07.21, Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban. The capture of the border crossing at Spin Boldak in Kandahar province, for example, had been accomplished with the help of Pakistani air support, he said. Pakistan had also provided air support to the Taliban in other areas.

On 16.07.21 Pakistan replied that the military air operations had served to secure Pakistani territory. After the Taliban captured the border crossing on 14.07.21, the border on the Pakistani side in Chaman was closed. Certain individuals were allowed to enter the country.

Albania

Prison sentence for former police officer

On 15.07.21, a court in the capital Tirana sentenced a former police officer to ten years imprisonment for shooting a 25-year-old man during the night curfew imposed to contain the pandemic in December 2020. The court held that an offence of killing beyond necessary self-defence had been proven. At the end of 2020 the case triggered public protests against police violence in Albania and led to the resignation of then Interior Minister Sandër Lleshaj (cf. BN of 14.12.20).

Belarus

Ongoing house searches and arrests

After the crackdown on the opposition newspaper Nasha Niwa and other journalists (cf. BN of 12.07.21), Belarusian security forces, in the course of further house searches in the capital Minsk and other cities on 14.07.21, arrested several members of human rights groups - including the groups Vyazna and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. In a joint statement on 15.07.21, they announced that a total of 11 human rights activists had been detained, including Vyazna leader Ales Bialiatski. Five of them were released from detention on 17.07.21, according to Vyazna. Amnesty International (ai) described the events as unprecedented and called on the international community to act in a statement.

Illegal migration at the Lithuanian-Belarusian EU external border

In the wake of a sharp increase in illegal border crossings from Belarus over the past few weeks, the Lithuanian government began building a fence along the common border on 09.07.21. In addition, according to a decision of the Lithuanian parliament on 14.07.21, persons who entered the country illegally are to be detained for at least six months after their arrival and their rights to appeal are to be restricted. The Lithuanian government repeatedly accused Belarus of deliberately supporting illegal migration to the EU with flights from Baghdad and Istanbul to Minsk. In response to the EU's economic sanctions against Belarus introduced in June 2021, Belarusian ruler Alexander Lukashenko had announced that he would no longer prevent illegal migration to the EU via Belarusian territory. According to the Lithuanian border police, 2,096 illegal entrants via Belarus had already been apprehended this year until 18.07.21.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Intelligence chief arrested

According to media reports on 14.07.21, Osman Mehmedagić, the director general of the intelligence agency OSA (Obavještajno-sigurnosna agencija), has been arrested on suspicion of abuse of office, falsification of documents and money laundering. Since October 2020, Mehmedagić had already been on trial on charges of using public funds to obtain a surveillance video of the BH Pošta postal company to identify the anonymous sender of a report critical of him. However, the competent court acquitted the head of the secret service of these charges in February 2021. Accusations have been made in several of the country's media outlets that the renewed prosecution was politically motivated and initiated by the Serbian and Croatian politicians Milorad Dodik (Chairman of the Presidency Body)

and Dragan Čović (Chairman of the largest Bosnian-Croatian party). Neither politician has yet commented on the allegations. On 15.07.21 protesters rallied against Mehmedagić's arrest in Sarajevo and Mostar demanding the resignation of prosecutor Gordana Tadić.

Burkina Faso

Casualties in attack on village

Unknown persons killed ten people, including seven members of the vigilante group Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP), in an attack on the village of Niha-Mossi (Centre-Nord region) on 11.07.21.

Burundi

Opposition party deplores abductions

On 15.07.21, the media reported on a statement by the opposition party CNL (Congrès National pour la Liberté) denouncing the abduction of members. According to the report, on 09.07.21, several people, including members of the CNL, had been abducted in front of witnesses. Some local leaders of the party had also been abducted, the statement said. Among them Elie Ngomirakiza, the regional leader of the CNL in Mutimbuzi commune, north-east of Bujumbura. Citing eyewitnesses, the CNL said that members of the army abducted Elie Ngomirakiza in bright daylight and took him away in a military vehicle. The CNL reportedly has no leads on the whereabouts of the abducted members. Enquiries to various authorities had been unsuccessful. According to the CNL, at least 30 of its activists have been arrested in the past three weeks. Seven are still reported missing. The government has rejected the CNL's accusations as unfounded.

Cameroon

Transgender persons released from prison

Two transgender persons convicted in May 2021 for "attempted homosexuality" (cf. BN of 17.05.21), were released from prison on 16.07.21 after five months detention. They were released on bail, pending the outcome of their appeal proceedings which are expected to start in September 2021.

Two policemen killed

On the morning of 14.07.21, two police officers were reportedly killed and another injured at a checkpoint in Babadjou (Western Region), a town on the border with the Anglophone North West Region. Unidentified attackers, dressed in army uniforms, reportedly drove to the checkpoint on motorbikes and opened fire. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Cuba

Thousands arrested after anti-government protests

On 11.07.21, thousands of people took to the streets in several cities in Cuba to protest against the government. According to independent journalists, more than 5,000 people have been arrested. As the online portal 14ymedio reports, among them were more than 120 activists and media professionals. The security forces used violence in some cases, and state media reported one death at a rally. Meanwhile, the Cuban government made first concessions to the demonstrators. In a televised speech Prime Minister Manuel Marrero announced that travellers would be allowed to import food, medicine, and sanitary products duty-free into Cuba in the future, and that electricity generation would be improved and medicine production expanded. The authorities also lifted the temporary blockade of the internet, but access to Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp remained blocked. The biggest protests in decades were triggered by shortages of medicines and food as well as an economic crisis exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. Cuba's economy is suffering, in particular from the slump in tourism as well as US sanctions.

DR Congo

Crisis provinces North Kivu and Ituri: ADF militia, security situation

UNHCR pointed out on 16.07.21 that despite the state of siege in force in North Kivu since the beginning of May 2021, recent activities by the Islamic militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Beni territory had triggered a new wave of internal displacement of nearly 20,000 people. UNHCR is concerned about the continuing poor security and humanitarian situation in the troubled North Kivu province, from where an estimated two million people have fled in the past two years.

According to recent press reports, the ADF militia is responsible for several deaths, dozens of injuries, looting and burning of houses in and around the city of Beni - the first militia attack in the city of over a million inhabitants in two years. According to media reports, the increasingly frequent attacks in Beni territory in the past week which caused several civilian deaths, are also attributable to the ADF, such as in the town of Kalunguta on 14.07.21 and in the village of Mayimya on 16.07.21. Press reports of June and July 2021 indicate that the ADF militia's ongoing attacks in the North Kivu region had caused the uprooting of some villages. According to the Congolese Armed Forces' interim assessment as of 09.07.21, a total of 45 suspected ADF fighters have been killed and about 100 suspected ADF collaborators arrested since the declaration of a state of siege in North Kivu as part of Operation Sokola-1. According to media reports, also three ADF networks were dismantled in Beni on 19.07.21 and a dozen ADF collaborators were taken into custody. Attacks in Irumi area (Walese Vonkutu chiefdom) in Ituri, another state of emergency region affected by ongoing militia violence, in recent weeks, have also been attributed to the ADF militia, such as the most recent attack on 12.07.21 causing an estimated eighteen civilian casualties. In July 2021, the national deputy Gratien de Saint Nicolas Iracan told the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) information radio station that the situation in four of the five territories of Ituri province had not improved since the state of siege was declared. Rather, there had even been an increase in the number of deaths and of forcibly displaced persons since then. On 18.07.21 Radio Okapi reported that civil society elements are complaining of the progressive deterioration of the security situation in Ituri with reference to the declared state of siege.

Egypt

Prominent activists and media professionals released from prison

On 18.07.21, the security authorities released several detainees, including Esraa Abdelfattah, Mahienour el-Masry, Moataz Wednan, Gamal al-Gamal, Abdel Nasser Ismail and Mostafa al-Asar as well as media workers from pre-trial detention; however, the charges against them are upheld. They had been imprisoned for months including on charges of membership in a terrorist organisation and for spreading fake news. The authorities did not comment on the reason for the release.

Ethiopia

Ongoing fighting in Tigray

Despite the Ethiopian government's declaration of a ceasefire in the regional state of Tigray on 28.06.21, no end to the fighting is in sight. The fighting affects the western and southern parts of the region. Until now, these regions were under the control of the armed forces of the neighbouring regional state of Amhara, which support the government in the conflict with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). According to a TDF spokesperson, the TDF, the military arm of the TPLF, launched an offensive on 11.07.21 and in the process "completely routed" the Amhara militias from the southern district of Raya and recaptured the region's largest town, Alamata. An independent verification of the reports is difficult, as all lines of communication in Tigray are still cut off.

According to the TDF, military successes have also been achieved in western Tigray. However, informed observers expect considerable resistance from the Amharic units. Accordingly, a spokesperson for the Amhara regional government has already announced a counter-offensive and the mobilisation of its militias. On 14.07.21, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy also threatened to resume fighting. He declared that the hopes associated with the ceasefire

had not been fulfilled, that "the TPLF [...] poses great danger to the sovereignty of the country" and that he were determined to "curb this threat." Most recently, local media reported that militias from Ethiopia's Oromia, Sidama and Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) regions would also be deployed to support Ethiopian forces. Observers fear an escalation of the fighting.

State action against ethnic Tigrays

According to media reports, government action against ethnic Tigrays has resumed, especially in Addis Ababa. Hundreds have reportedly been detained for allegedly supporting the TPLF in recent weeks. The local authorities also ordered the closure of numerous shops, bars and restaurants run by Tigrays. Officials denied targeting Tigrays, but admitted that it could not be ruled out that some innocent people might also be arrested. This was justified by the "large network that the TPLF maintains in Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia".

The Gambia

Former minister sentenced to death

On 14.07.21, the Banjul High Court convicted former Minister of Local Government and Lands under former President Yahya Jammeh, Yankuba Touray, of murdering former Finance Minister Ousman Koro Ceesay in 1995. The defendant was sentenced to death - in this case by hanging - in accordance with Article 188 of the Criminal Code of 1965, as amended in 2005. This makes Yankuba Touray the first high-ranking member of the previous government to be held criminally accountable. His lawyer announced that he would appeal the judgment. Despite the fact that the Barrow government enacted a de facto moratorium on executions in February 2018 and ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights abolishing the death penalty in June 2019, Gambian criminal courts continue to pass death sentences, citing the current legal situation (cf. BN of 01.02.21).

Guinea

Four opposition politicians temporarily set free

Ibrahima Chérif Bah, Abdoulaye Bah, Cellou Baldé, and Ousmane Gaoual Diallo, leading politicians of the opposition party Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG), were provisionally released from detention on 17.07.21, after having been held since November 2020 (most recently cf. BN of 12.07.21). Due to various health problems, all four of them had been treated in hospital for several weeks and were now allowed to return to their homes. A ban on leaving Conakry without permission from the authorities was imposed as an essential condition. Opposition member Etienne Soropogui remains in custody. According to an opposition lawyer, around 350 people arrested during the protests triggered by the presidential election of 18.10.20 are still in prison.

Opposition alliance signs charter; arrests

On 14.07.21, representatives of a coalition of around 20 parties that had supported the UFDG candidate Cellou Dalein Diallo in the presidential election, signed a joint charter intended to lead to a firm political alliance. At the same time, the Alliance nationale pour l'alternance et la démocratie (ANAD, also Anad) appointed Cellou Dalein Diallo as its chairperson for one year. A few hours later, Thierno Yaya Diallo, leader of the Guinée Moderne party, and Bogola Haba, ANAD's communications officer, were arrested. The former was released in the same night; Haba remained in custody. He is accused of inciting civil disobedience, violence and subversion.

India

Bill for two-child policy in Uttar Pradesh

On the occasion of World Population Day on 11.07.21, a bill was introduced in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh (population over 230 million), to provide incentives for a two-child policy. Families with two children are to benefit from tax breaks and single children are to receive free medical treatment. Conversely, the law provides for discrimination against parents with more than two children, who are to be excluded from government positions,

for example. A similar bill was introduced in the north-eastern state of Assam. Critics of the bill see it as discrimination against families with many children who are often poor. Similar incentives already exist in other states such as Maharashtra, where people with more than two children cannot be elected for municipal offices.

Regional elections will be held in Uttar Pradesh in 2022. Politicians of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regularly argue that Muslims have more children and are aiming to change the demography of India permanently. Currently, 80 % of the population are Hindus and about 13 % are Muslims. After India's independence in 1947, the proportion of Muslims was less than 10 %. At 20 % the proportion of the Muslim population in Uttar Pradesh is above average (2012 figures).

Iran

Deaths during environmental protests in Khuzestan

Against the backdrop of the current water crisis and temperatures exceeding 50 °C, the protests that began on 15.07.21 in the south-western province of Khuzestan have now spread to 17 cities. In the weeks before, there had already been massive strikes by workers all over the country, especially in the oil industry, as well as protests by the population against power cuts and water shortages (cf. BN of 12.07.21). According to reports in Iranian media abroad, the new protests against poor water management and failed environmental policies were concentrated in the cities of Ahvaz, Mahshahr, Khorramshahr, Susangerd, Shush, Dezful and Hovaizeh. During these protests, two people were reportedly killed by security forces' gunfire in Ahvaz and Susangerd. Meanwhile, special counter-insurgency units had been deployed to Khuzestan, reports said. Already on 16.07.21, the protesters had blocked numerous road links with burning car tyres, including the major road linking Ahvaz and Shush. The demonstrators are protesting against the diversion of the Karun River from its source in the Zagros Mountains to the most drought-affected central provinces of Isfahan and Kerman, the construction of dams on the Karkhe River, the discharge of industrial waste water into the rivers and the resettlement policy in the province. Faced with the worst drought in the region for decades, hundreds of villages in Khuzestan have run out of drinking water and have to be supplied by tank lorries.

Activist sentenced to three and a half years in prison

Iranian media abroad reported on 15.07.21 that Manuchehr Bakhtiari had been sentenced to three and a half years in prison by a revolutionary court. According to the reports, the activist provided this information in his first phone call to his family since his arrest at the end of April 2021. He was also sentenced to two and a half years' exile to an as yet undisclosed location and a two-year ban on leaving the country, it is said. Since his arrest, he has been denied any telephone calls to his family (cf. BN of 12.07.21) and access to his lawyer, he said. Manuchehr Bakhtiari has been demanding justice for the victims of the security forces after his son was killed in the November 2019 riots. He is also involved in the campaign "No to the Islamic Republic" (in Persian: Na be Jomhuri-ye Eslami).

Kurdish lawyer and activist starts to serve prison sentence

According to media reports, Kurdish lawyer and secretary of the Kurdistan National Unity Party, Farhad Mohammadi, was summoned to start his ten-month prison sentence in Sanandaj prison (Kurdistan province) on 14.07.21. The lawyer and environmental activist had been arrested by security officials in January 2019 and was temporarily released on bail after spending six months in prison. Initially, the reasons for his arrest were not known, according to a report by the Kurdish news agency Kurdpa.

In the first trial, he was charged with various "actions against national security". In June 2020, the original prison sentence of four years was reduced to ten months by a court of appeal.

Arrests of models at the opening of a fashion shop

During the opening of a fashion boutique in the city of Mahabad (Kurdistan province), four models and the owner of the shop were arrested, according to Iranian media abroad. As reasons for the arrest the prosecutor of Mahabad cited the violation of "moral customs, unlawful advertising and the presence of women in violation of Sharia regulations."

Iraq

Calls to boycott elections

On 15.07.21, Muqtada as-Sadr, the unofficial leader of the largest parliamentary bloc and leader of Iraq's largest militia, the Saraya as-Salam, announced that he would not participate in the upcoming elections and would deny his support to both the current and the incoming governments. At the same time, he officially dissolved his party. The implications of this move are unclear, especially as many of his supporters may run without an official party. Similarly, on 16.07.21, the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Babylon, Cardinal Louis Raphael I Sako, expressed his view that Christians should not participate in the elections. For one, because of the security situation and secondly, because he expects the elections to be fraudulent.

Fire at a hospital in Nasiriya

On 12.07.21, a fire broke out at a hospital in Nasiriya in a wing set up for COVID-19 patients. So far, more than 90 people have been confirmed dead, most of them patients, but also several hospital staff. The fire caused protests, especially as corruption and mismanagement are blamed for the disaster. Several suspects have been arrested, but at this time it is not assumed that arson was the cause.

Attack on Baghdad's electricity supply

On 13.07.21, Iraqi security forces prevented an IS attack on one of Baghdad's main supply routes. If the attack had been successful, considerable parts of the city would have been left without electricity. For several weeks, IS has stepped up its attacks against Iraq's power supply, which is generally considered to be dilapidated, with a focus on the import routes in Diyala province and Baghdad's power supply.

Arrest in the Hashemi murder case

Iraqi Prime Minister Kadhimi announced the arrest of the main suspect in the Hashemi murder case on 16.07.20. The prominent expert on extremism had been assassinated in front of his house in Baghdad on 06.07.20 by previously unknown killers. He was an expert on the Shiite militias in Iraq and their vocal critic, and the arrest of his killers is one of the core demands of the protests. There were renewed protest marches in Baghdad and other cities demanding, among other things, the investigation and arrest of the killers of dozens of other activists in connection with the protests that have taken place since 2019.

Jordan

State Security Court rules after coup allegations

On 12.07.21, a Jordanian state security court sentenced the two former office holders, Bassem Awadallah and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, to 15 years in prison on charges of sedition for their alleged involvement in a conspiracy by foreign forces with the king's half-brother Prince Hamzah (cf. BN of 12.04.21).

A US lawyer for Bassem Awadallah criticised the lack of due process and claimed that his client had been beaten and psychologically abused in detention. Their lawyers said they would appeal the ruling. Confidants of the royal family anonymously told the media that Prince Hamzah and his family were being held in isolation in a palace. The royal family did not officially comment.

Kyrgyzstan

New law on NGOs enters into force

According to media reports, President Japarov signed the amended "Law on Non-Commercial Organisations" already on 26.06.21. In addition to the previous reporting obligations, the new version requires detailed information on the origin of NGOs' funds and their use, and also provides for the publication of the data on the website of the national tax authority. In case of non-compliance, the respective NGO is threatened with closure. While, according to the official explanatory memorandum, the new regulations are intended solely to ensure transparency in the work of NGOs, the organisations concerned fear being stigmatised as "stooges of the West" because of the dona-

tions they often receive from abroad. They also see the stricter requirements as retaliation for the successful exposure of various corruption scandals within the political elite. International human rights organisations also warn of increasing pressure on NGOs as a result of the amendment.

Lebanon

No new government cabinet

After almost nine months, Saad Hariri returned the mandate to form a government on 15.07.21. According to him, President Michel Aoun had declined to accept his cabinet proposals because he had wanted to appoint ministers from his own camp. President Michel Aoun, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Saad Hariri did not actually want to discuss any cabinet appointments and had already planned to resign. After Hariri's resignation, the value of the Lebanese pound has fell to a record low. President Michel Aoun plans to consult with the different parliamentary groups as soon as possible to appoint a new prime minister. Saad Hariri, one of the country's main Sunni leaders, has told al-Jadeed TV that he does not intend to support a successor. This may complicate the formation of a government, as the prime minister must be appointed from among the Sunni.

Riots and protests

After the resignation of Saad Hariri, roadblocks went up in Beirut, tyres and bins were set on fire. On 16.07.21, riots broke out in several cities across the country, resulting in dozens of casualties in the northern city of Tripoli. Five soldiers were attacked by a hand grenade. Pharmacies have once again closed in protest, saying the government is unable to provide them with a list of pharmaceuticals that will continue to be subsidised. Staff at two public hospitals are also on strike as the government has failed to respond to warnings of impending closures for financial reasons.

Protests by relatives of the victims of the port explosion

On 13.07.21, demonstrations took place in front of the house of the Minister of Interior, Mohamed Fehmi. The protesters demanded an end to the obstruction of the investigation against those responsible for the explosion in the port of Beirut on 04.08.20. The police responded with tear gas to the protest and there was also a scuffle with the police.

COVID-19 pandemic

Doctors in Lebanon warn of another wave of COVID-19 infections, with 577 new cases tallied on 16.07.21. Experts are worried that the rising number of infections will further strain the health system. The health system is already greatly weakened by the consequences of the country's severe economic crisis. Shortages of medicines, staff and power cuts are now commonplace in hospitals. In some cases, there is no electricity to connect oxygen equipment.

Liberia

War crimes trial in Switzerland

On 18.06.21, the Swiss Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona handed down its verdict in the trial of Alieu Kosiah. The Liberian warlord must serve twenty years in prison. He was the former commander of the armed group United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO). Kosiah is the first Liberian to be tried and convicted for war crimes committed during the first Liberian civil war from 1989 to 1996.

Madagascar

Famine in the south of the country

Since May 2021, the humanitarian situation in the country's south has been deteriorating. Approximately 14,000 people are directly affected by famine, and another million are at risk. Aid organisations are warning of a serious situation in the long-term, as the upcoming harvest is expected to be 70 % below the five-year average. The main

reasons for the current situation are climate conditions, limited access to seeds, rising food prices and constraints caused by COVID-19.

Montenegro

Implementation of the "Same-Sex Civil Partnerships" Act falters

On 12.07.21 the media reported that the implementation of the new law on same-sex civil partnerships which came into force in 2020, requires the amendment of more than 30 other laws and legal procedures related to the new law. Bojana Jokic, the head of the LGBTI NGO "Forum Progress" told the media platform BIRN (= Balkan Investigative Reporting Network) that homosexual couples in Montenegro are aware of the complexity that the harmonisation of legislation poses for the legislature, but after many years of waiting for legal equality for same-sex partnerships, it is now time for the government to meet its obligations. In July 2020, Montenegro had become the only former Yugoslav republic that is not a member of the EU to adopt an equality law for homosexual couples.

Morocco

COVID-19 pandemic

Since the end of June, the number of infections in Morocco has been rising again. Thus, 2,200 new infections were reported in 24 hours on 14.07.21, 2,571 on 15.07.21, 2,791 on 16.07.21, 2,853 on 17.07.21 and 2,144 on 18.07.21. As a preventive measure, the Ministry of Tradition and Islamic Affairs has banned collective prayers in mosques and public places for the Eid Al Adha festival on 21.07.21.

Mozambique

Deployment of international forces to Cabo Delgado

As part of the pacification of Cabo Delgado, Rwanda deployed 1,000 troops. They shall fight terrorism and secure the region, it was said. Rwanda is not a member of the SADC, which also announced the deployment of troops. Meanwhile, the EU has also formally confirmed the establishment of a military training mission (cf. BN of 10.05.21). Up to 300 European forces are to be sent by the end of the year for a period of two years. So far, Portugal has provided 60 soldiers for training purposes. The security situation in Cabo Delgado remains tense. In addition, there is a lack of basic supplies in the region, thus food shortages are to be expected for about two million people.

Myanmar

COVID-19 pandemic: situation remains tense

With 7,083 new infections within one day on 13.07.21 and 233 deaths within 24 hours on 17.07.21, the Ministry of Health reported new record figures. Aid workers believe that these figures are only the tip of the iceberg and that 600 people died of COVID-19 in Yangon (Rangoon) on 13.07.21 alone. The positive test rate rose to 37.9%, the hospitals that are still operational are overloaded as are the crematoria and there is an acute shortage of oxygen. Within one month, the total number of officially reported deaths doubled to 5,000, while 229,521 infections were registered.

More fighting in Kayah, bodies found in Sagaing

On 12.07.21, fighting between the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) and the Karenni Army (KA) resumed near Loikaw (Kayah State). Previously, the Tatmadaw had negotiated an informal ceasefire agreement with the Karenni Nationalities Defence Forces (KNDF), a coalition of armed groups from Kayah, but some armed units had rejected it. In Sagaing, locals from the Kani community discovered 15 bodies in a forest, some of them severely mutilated. As Kani has recently been the target of Tatmadaw raids, it is assumed that the dead are victims of torture by the military.

Other cases of deadly violence against the civilian population were reported in Sinbaungwe Township (Magway Region) and Taunggyi (Shan State). In several places in Mandalay, insurgents carried out attacks, some of them fatal, on administrative staff and employees of electricity companies.

The Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) clashed in Hpakant (Kachin State) on 15.07.21.

Nepal

Government crisis

On 12.07.21, the Supreme Court removed the head of government Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli and reinstated the dissolved parliament. Opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba had to assume Sharma Oli's official functions on 13.07.21 because, according to the court, he has a majority in parliament. Sher Bahadur Deuba, leader of the social-liberal Nepali Congress (NC) and four-time head of government between 1995 and 2018, must win a vote of confidence within a month to become the new head of government as well, however, the number of mandates held by NC are insufficient. On 18.07.21, Sher Bahadur Deuba won the vote in parliament with 165 votes (83 against). Parliament had been dissolved for the last time in December 2020, Sharma Oli, leader of the Nepali Communist Party United Marxist-Leninists (CPN-UML) was then reappointed prime minister because no party had a majority in parliament.

Nigeria

Fighting and kidnappings in the north-west

A spokesperson for the Nigerian Air Force informed media representatives that the Nigerian Air Force killed a total of 125 so-called bandits in their hideouts in the forests of Sububu, Jajai and Dammaka in several air-strikes on 12.07.21.

On 16.07.21, 42 people were killed, seven injured and 338 houses burnt down in attacks on a total of twelve villages in Zangon Kataf community in Kaduna State, according to media reports. It was said that Fulani militias attacked farmers belonging to the Atyap ethnic group.

On 16.07.21 and 17.07.21, bandits led by a man named "Turji" attacked several villages in the Shinkafi Local Government Area of Zamfara State and abducted about 150 residents, according to media reports. The leader's father was picked up by security agents in Kano a fortnight ago, it was reported.

Also, on 16.07.21, armed assailants allegedly killed the chief of Lamba village in Katsina State and abducted 20 farmers.

On 17.07.21, 13 members of a mobile police unit were killed in Bagudu Local Government Area, according to the Zamfara State Government.

Amotekun commander killed in attack in the south-west

On 16.07.21, a total of four people were killed in an attack in the village of Igangan in the south-western state of Oyo, according to media reports, including a leader of the controversial security network Amotekun. According to press reports, the attackers were wearing camouflage clothing, which is why residents initially mistook them for security forces. It is still unclear who exactly is behind the attack.

The Amotekun Security Network was established in January 2020 by the six states of the "South-West" geo-political zone to protect the lives and property of the people.

Already on 05.06.21 Igangan had suffered an armed attack that left at least eleven dead.

Introduction of the death penalty by hanging in Niger State

The governor of the north-western state of Niger, Abubakar Sani-Bello, signed a law on 16.07.21 that introduces the death penalty by public hanging for kidnappers, cattle rustlers and their informants. According to the governor, a 2016 law was amended to provide that informants as well as persons who instigate or assist kidnappers and/or cattle rustlers, may be sentenced to death. This measure had become necessary due to security challenges threatening peaceful coexistence in the state, he said.

As in other north-western states, also Niger State has been targeted by several kidnappings recently (cf. most recently BN of 31.05.21).

General of the Nigerian Army killed

On the evening of 14.07.21, Hassan Ahmed, Major General of the Nigerian Army, was killed in the capital Abuja. According to media reports, the attackers opened fire on the vehicle with the victim, his sister and a driver inside. The general was on his way back from Lokoja, the capital of Kogi State, without an escort and with a private license plate. The attackers kidnapped the sister and the driver feigned death, the reports said. According to media reports, Hassan Ahmed had recently been appointed director of the army headquarters in the capital.

North Macedonia

Turkey repeats demands for the extradition of 20 Gülen movement followers from North Macedonia

According to a recent media report, Turkish Ambassador Hasan Mehmet Sekizkok again called for the extradition of supporters of the Gülen movement at a press conference on the fifth anniversary of the failed coup attempt of 2016 in Skopje on 14.07.21. On 15.07.21, the North Macedonian Ministry of Justice published a statement saying that it was cooperating with the Turkish authorities on the matter, but would act in accordance with domestic legislation and international standards and agreements. According to the report, Turkey has in the past also repeatedly demanded the closure of companies and educational institutions with contacts to this group of persons in North Macedonia. The report also said that with respect to the extradition requests, North Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev had already stated in April 2019 that as a candidate country for EU membership North Macedonia must fully respect all international rules. Since then, North Macedonia has not granted any Turkish extradition requests stating that the decisions are up to the courts.

Pakistan

Situation of Christian women

The aid agency Aid to the Church in Need draws attention to the difficult life of the Christian minority in Pakistan. Christian women and girls in particular are increasingly affected by abductions, forced marriages and sexual abuse, the agency said. The relief agency supports young Christian women with an aid programme that provides them with prospects for the future through financial and spiritual assistance.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Israel

West Bank: Gunfire in Jenin

On 12.07.21, fire was exchanged between Palestinians and the Israeli military after the military arrested five Palestinians in Jenin, accusing them of terrorist activities. Six Palestinians were wounded in the shoot-out in which explosive devices as well as firearms were used against the military.

West Bank: Demolition of a Palestinian Bedouin village

On 07.07.21, Israeli military demolished the Bedouin village of Khirbet Humsa in the West Bank for being located in a military zone. Since 2012, the village has already been demolished several times by the military, most recently in March 2021 and November 2020. The residents of the village were supposed to be relocated to other communities. Eleven families were affected by the demolitions.

East Jerusalem: Clash at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound

On 17.07.21, Israeli military and Palestinians clashed on the grounds of the al-Aqsa Mosque. The clashes were triggered by the planned visit of Jewish worshippers on the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'av, which commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples that allegedly stood on this site. The site was closed to Muslim worshippers for several hours. The Waqf Authority, which manages the Islamic holy sites, including the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, said Jewish visitors had prayed on the site, although this is prohibited to maintain the status quo. There are no reports of any casualties.

Republic of the Congo

Release of political activists

According to a media report, six political activists who had been detained for several months on charges of endangering domestic security were provisionally released from prison on 14.07.21 following a court order. The released defendants included Dr. Alexandre Ibacka Dzabana, a leading Congolese human rights activist, who sought medical treatment immediately after his release, as well as Chris Dongui of the civil movement "Ras le bol" (cf. BN of 19.04.21). The Congolese Observatory of Human Rights called on the government to release all prisoners of conscience, including Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and André Okombi Salissa, who have been unlawfully detained for more than five years for opposing the government.

Republic of Moldova

Pro-European party wins early parliamentary election

The Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won the early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova on 11.07.21 with an absolute majority of votes and mandates and can thus form a government by itself. After the counting of all votes, PAS, which supports the pro-European course of President Maia Sandu, won 63 of the 101 parliamentary seats with about 53% of the votes cast. It thus clearly distanced itself from the Russia-oriented electoral bloc of communists and socialists (BECS) around the two former state presidents Vladimir Voronin and Igor Dodon, which received around 27 % of the votes. Dodon admitted defeat in the elections on 12.07.21 and announced that he would join the opposition. The joint election observation mission of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, described the election as constitutional, despite continuing problems in dealing with election complaints. On the EU side, the election result was seen as a sign of democracy and the rule of law. After the former government resigned when the new President Sandu took office in December 2020, the Republic of Moldova has been governed by a transitional government.

Russian Federation

Komanda 29 lawyers' association ceases work

The Russian lawyers' group Komanda 29, which specialises in the defence of charges of high treason and espionage, announced its self-dissolution on 18.07.21 on the short message service Telegram. The lawyers in the group would, however, continue to represent their respective clients independently of each other, the announcement said. According to media reports, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office accused the group of maintaining links to a Czech NGO classified as an "undesirable organisation" in Russia, and the authorities blocked the group's website. According to representatives of the group, the accusations are unfounded, but the risk of criminal prosecution of members and supporters should be avoided. As recently as April 2021, the founder of the group, Ivan Pavlov, had been arrested for allegedly passing on information in an ongoing investigation; the verdict is still pending.

In Russia, specifically in the context of political proceedings, legal counsels themselves are repeatedly targeted by the prosecution authorities.

Somalia

Agent of the National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA) missing

NISA cybersecurity agent Ikran Tahil Farah has been missing since 26.06.21, according to her family. Video footage shows that she was picked up from her residence, which is only accessible with a special permit, by a car in the evening. According to several sources, she worked closely with the former governor of Benadir, Abdirahman Yarisow, and had secret information about his death. He was killed by a female al-Shabaab suicide bomber in his office in 2019. Her family is demanding information from NISA about Farah's whereabouts.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Fawzia Adam announces presidential candidacy

Fawzia Adam officially announced her presidential candidacy as the only female candidate on 13.07.21. The election will take place on 10.10.21 (cf. BN of 05.07.21). Adam held the offices of Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Somalia between 2012 and 2014. She is currently the Member of Parliament for Somaliland in the Federal Parliament. Adam is only the second woman to run for this office in Somalia's history, after Asha Ahmed Abdalla, who stood for election in 2004.

Somalia rejects modification of AMISOM's role

In a statement on 17.07.21, the Somali government clearly rejected a recent African Union (AU) report proposing modifications after the mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) runs out in December 2021. The report recommends that AMISOM, which is primarily military, be transformed into a multidimensional mission to support humanitarian and political reconstruction, including security.

South Africa

Violent unrest after imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma

On 08.07.21, former President Jacob Zuma started to serve his 15-month prison sentence for contempt of court. He had refused to testify before a commission of enquiry into allegations of corruption against him. The verdict in the corruption trial is still pending. The protests against the prison sentence escalated to violent clashes within a few days, especially in the provinces of Gauteng, including the cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria, as well as in KwaZulu-Natal, Zuma's home. Buildings and cars were set on fire, infrastructure was destroyed and there was massive looting. The security forces, which were supported by 30,000 army personnel, used tear gas and rubber bullets. According to official figures, at least 200 people have died in the riots and many have been injured. More than 2,500 people have been arrested for looting and vandalism. The riots affected the supply of food, medicine, oxygen and petrol. The economic damage is estimated at several billion Rand. At the same time, civil resistance is forming in some other provinces to prevent the spreading of the looting, in particular.

South Sudan

UN condemns attack on aid workers in Warrap State

According to media reports on 14.07.21, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in charge of South Sudan called for an immediate end to attacks against humanitarian organisations as well as their looting, which prevented them from complying with their mission.

Fighting reportedly broke out between youth groups in Marial Lou, Tonj North and Warrap State on 08.07.21 over the theft of cattle and continued into the following day. As a result, 14 people were killed and 29 injured. In addition, the hospital in Marial Lou was looted. In total, more than 5,000 people were displaced and their houses, huts, schools and churches destroyed. Furthermore a World Food Programme (WFP) camp was looted. Fighting, looting and attacks on aid workers have increased since March 2021, the reports said.

Other groups join the peace agreement

Media reported that the South Sudanese government reached an agreement with the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA) to participate in the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAM-VM). The CTSAM-VM is a multinational body that monitors compliance with the South Sudan Peace Agreement signed in 2018. The SSOMA is an association of groups or organisations that initially did not sign the 2018 peace agreement - including the South Sudan United Front and the Real Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement. According to the reports, SSOMA had already started relevant talks to participate in the CTSAM-VM in November 2019. It is also reported that the National Salvation Front continues to refuse to participate in talks on a peace agreement.

Sudan

Ongoing violence in Port Sudan

Media reported repeated acts of violence in the coastal city of Port Sudan. According to the report, at least four people were killed by an explosion at the al-Amir Club sports facility on 11.07.21, and three others were wounded by firearms and knives. The attackers are unknown. Another attempt to attack a hotel in the city failed. There had already been violent clashes on 06.07.21, allegedly between opposing gangs, which left three people dead and 14 wounded. The report went on to say that in recent weeks protests were staged and roads blocked repeatedly as a result of the deteriorating security situation in Port Sudan.

Criticism of Islamic jurisprudence

Media reported about a man sentenced already on 23.06.21 whose right hand and left foot are to be amputated according to Sudanese criminal law and Islamic law. This was the punishment for a conviction of the theft of 38,000 Sudanese pounds (approx. 48 USD) and a mobile phone. Several women's and human rights groups have now spoken out against the sentence. In a statement of 14.07.21, which was leaked to the media, the groups called the sentence a "despicable punishment" and demanded to stay the execution of the sentence immediately. The groups also called for a reform of the criminal justice system, the abolition of "inhuman and degrading punishments" and the official signing of human rights treaties such as the Convention against Torture. Likewise, the statement had stressed that the Sudanese people continued to be "dominated" by the system through laws introduced in 1983 and the use of corporal punishment. The use of Islamic punishments had been introduced by former President Jaafar Nimeiri in September 1983. In the following government of former President al-Bashir, Islamic jurisprudence became even stricter.

Syria

Idlib: At least nine dead after attack by government troops

The Syrian Civil Defence Organisation, also known as the White Helmets, reported guided missiles hitting Ibleen, a town in the south of Idlib governorate, on 15.07.21, killing three people. In eastern Idlib, near the town of Foa, a missile also struck on the same day, killing at least six people, the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. UNICEF confirmed that three minors were also killed in the attacks.

Drone attack on militia convoy in eastern Syria

According to Syrian state media, a lorry belonging to the Iraqi militia group Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada was destroyed by a US military drone after crossing the Iraqi-Syrian border on 18.07.21. Reportedly the lorry was carrying food. According to two militiamen, the attacking drone fired a warning shot beforehand, so that the driver of the vehicle was able reach safety in time and no one was injured.

Contrary to the account in the Syrian state media, the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said it was a shipment of weapons and ammunition. The US military has not yet commented on the incident.

President Assad sworn in for a fourth term

On 17.07.21, Bashar al-Assad took his oath for what is now his fourth term as Syrian head of state. In a speech on this occasion, he vowed to overcome the effects of Western sanctions and to retake the territory currently still under rebel control. He said that for him the fact that a large amount of funds from Syria are frozen in Lebanese banks was an even greater obstacle than the Western sanctions. These funds are said to amount to 40 to 60 billion USD. Lebanese banks had blocked access to these funds at the end of 2019 in the wake of Lebanon's economic crisis. In his speech, Assad called on the Syrians who had fled abroad to return "after being deceived by the illusion that there had been a rebellion against his rule".

After the ceremony, the old and new president received the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the highest representative of the People's Republic, visiting Syria for many years.

Thailand

Protest in Bangkok

According to media reports on 18.07.21, several hundred protesters ignored an assembly ban and gathered in Bangkok for a protest march demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and protesting against the government's management of the COVID crisis. The demonstration was reportedly led by the student group Free Youth, which already managed to mobilise thousands for protests last year. Police reportedly used tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets against the protesters after some of them tried to dismantle barriers obstructing the way to the Prime Minister's office. There is no reliable information on casualties so far. Shortly after 6 pm, the Free Youth Movement declared the protest march over.

The demonstration took place against the backdrop of the highest number of daily COVID infections ever of over 11,300 and the announcement of new restrictions. The total number of infected people in the country is over 403,000 and more than 3,000 deaths have been recorded (as of 19.07.21).

Togo

Domestic policy dialogue ended

On 13.07.21, the Concertation Nationale des Acteurs Politiques (CNAP) domestic political dialogue between government and opposition parties ended. The talks had begun in January 2021 between the 17 political parties and produced more than 50 proposals for the general conditions to govern the next regional elections. The four parties of the alliance Dynamique Mgr Kpodzro, which supports the opposition member Agbéyomé Kodjo, had refused to participate in the CNAP talks (cf. BN of 08.02.21). Two other opposition parties, Comité d'Action pour le Renouveau (CAR) and Alliance Nationale pour le Changement (ANC), left the talks in February 2021 or just one day before they ended, due to differences of opinion with the government camp.

Turkey

Arrest of suspected Gülen supporters

According to media reports, between 12.07.21 and 17.07.21, at least 256 people, most of them military personnel, were arrested in 47 provinces on charges of having links to the Gülen movement.

Attack on HDP office

On 14.07.21, a perpetrator, who has since been arrested, attacked a local HDP office in the city of Marmaris. According to media reports, he fired at the office with a shotgun. There were no fatalities or injuries, but the building suffered property damage.

Bogazici University Protests

On 15.07.21, Melih Bulu, the controversial rector of Istanbul Bogazici University was removed from office. The decision followed months of protests against Bulu's initial appointment, also by presidential decree. Traditionally the university's faculty elects the Bogazici rectors.

The police had violently dispersed many protests by students and faculty against Erdogan's decision to appoint Bulu as rector and arrested a large number of protesters. The police crackdown had triggered criticism at home and abroad.

HDP deputy regains parliamentary status

On 16.07.21, the Turkish parliament restored the parliamentary status of HDP MP Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu. The Constitutional Court had previously ruled that his rights had been violated by his imprisonment on terrorism charges (cf. BN of 12.07.21). According to media reports, the decision came four months after his status had been revoked due to the politically motivated charges.

Law on security measures extended

On 18.07.21, the Turkish parliament approved an extension of the security measures imposed after the 2016 coup attempt. The law was initially extended for another year. Among other things, the security measures include provisions on the duration of arrests, thus suspects can be detained for up to twelve days without being brought before a judge. Also, the dismissal of officers is still possible.

Ukraine

Resignation of Interior Minister Avakov

Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov unexpectedly announced his resignation on 13.07.21, which was accepted by parliament on 15.07.21. Avakov was the only minister to serve continuously in the Ukrainian government cabinet since the political upheaval in the wake of the Euromaidan protests in 2014 and was considered an influential personality. During his more than seven years in office as interior minister, Avakov had been accused, among other things, of insufficiently implementing a police reform begun in 2015, and of not having contributed decisively enough to solving the murders of journalist Pavel Sheremet in 2016 and anti-corruption activist Kateryna Handsyuk in 2018. Moreover, according to media reports, calls for Avakov's resignation have become more vocal in recent years after cases of police violence came to light.

Venezuela

Arrests of opposition politicians of the Voluntad Popular party

On 12.07.21, the former Vice-President of the National Assembly and opposition politician Freddy Guevara (Voluntad Popular, VP) was arrested by officials of the Venezuelan secret service (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional (Sebin)) in Caracas. After being considered missing for two days, he was brought before a court on 15.07.21. The prosecution accuses him of organising terrorist acts and charges him with the offences of attacking the constitutional order and high treason. On 14.07.21, the public prosecutor's office also issued arrest warrants for other members of the VP party, namely Gilber Caro, Hasler Iglesias, Luis Somaza, and Emilio Graterón. The latter was granted protection from political persecution by the Chilean embassy in Venezuela on 16.07.21. In addition, Jairo Pérez was arrested on 14.07.21 and Oraima Guillén and Jesús Superlano were arrested on 15.07.21. All arrests and arrest warrants are related to the violence and clashes between the Koki gang and state security forces in the La Cota 905 neighbourhood (cf. BN of 12.07.21). According to government statements, these opposition politicians are partly responsible for promoting the violence as they allegedly supported the gang and were involved in the planning of the clashes. In this context, President Nicolás Maduro also submitted a formal extradition request to Spain for the opposition politician Leopoldo López (VP) on 15.05.21. In addition, on 14.07.21, the leader of the opposition, Juan Guaidó, was threatened by masked persons in his house.

Yemen

Dispute over implementation of the Riyadh agreement

Tensions between the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council over the implementation of the Riyadh Accord have intensified. Both sides accuse each other of violating the agreement by appointing civilian and military officials. Pro-government circles in Saudi Arabia have also openly accused the United Arab Emirates, which support the Southern Transitional Council, of failing to fully implement the agreement.

Food prices continue to rise

Inflation in the Yemeni government-controlled areas of the country continues to rise driving food prices up even further. Large parts of the population are already dependent on humanitarian aid.

Hundreds killed in fighting in Bayda

At least 320 soldiers from both warring parties were killed in fighting in the central province of Bayda last week. Both the Houthi rebels and the anti-Houthi coalition claimed territorial gains for their respective side. It is currently

impossible to independently assess these claims. Since the beginning of the month, troops of the anti-Houthi coalition have been trying to drive the Houthi rebels out of Bayda.

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