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Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

10 December 2018

Afghanistan

Parliamentary election in Kabul province declared null and void

On 06.12.18 the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) declared all votes cast in Kabul province null and void. This amounts to around one million votes, representing roughly one quarter of all votes cast throughout the country in the elections at the end of October. The IECC stated that its decision was in response to large-scale ballot rigging, among other factors. In accordance with the country's electoral law, a rerun of the election would now have to be carried out within seven days. All observers regard this as virtually impossible. The electoral commission will presumably combine the ballot with the presidential election which is scheduled for the end of April. It remains as yet unclear what consequences the IECC's decision will have for provinces whose results have not yet been announced.

High number of returnees from Iran

According to IOM and OCHA, almost 768,000 Afghans had returned on impulse or been deported from Iran and Pakistan as at 01.12.18 (undocumented returns). The majority of the returnees - around 723,600 - came from Iran. The underlying reason is the deteriorating political and economic situation in Iran, and in particular the decline of the currency. This has led to a strong drop in the demand for workers in the informal economy, in which Afghans are primarily employed. As Afghans generally send part of their income to Afghanistan, the discontinuation of this transfer is having a negative impact on the domestic economy. This is already evident in the drought-affected provinces of Herat, Badghis and Ghor.

Military operations

There are reports of military and police operations in the following provinces: Helmand, Uruzgan, Nimroz, Zabul (South Afghanistan), Sar-i-Pul, Faryab, Jowzjan (North Afghanistan), Ghazni, Paktika (South-East Afghanistan), Kabul, Logar, Kapisa (Central Afghanistan), Farah, Ghor and Herat (West Afghanistan). According to UN information, the security situation is gradually improving in the Malistan and Jaghuri districts of Ghazni province (cf. BN of 19.11.18). The first internally displaced persons have reportedly already returned.

TV journalist abducted

Unknown kidnappers abducted the director of a private TV station in Jalalabad (Nangarhar, East Afghanistan) on 05.12.18.

Armenia

Prime minister Pashinyan wins parliamentary election

On the basis of the provisional results, the incumbent prime minister and former opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan won an absolute majority with his My Step electoral alliance in the parliamentary election on 09.12.18, taking around 70 % of the vote. Pashinyan said in Yerevan that the so-called Velvet Revolution was not yet over. He promised further reforms. The My Step coalition's large majority provides it with a broad scope of parliamentary options in its future governing role. In the new national assembly there will be only two other parties in addition to My Step: Prosperous Armenia, led by the oligarch Gagik Tsarukyan, and the liberal party Bright Armenia. The Republican Party - the erstwhile state party -, which stood for abuse of

power and corruption, failed to gain a seat in parliament. The turnout stood at just under 49 %. Overall, the election was fair, peaceful and free of any major irregularities.

Cameroon

Charges against anti-Biya activists dropped

The BBC reported on 05.12.18 that a court in Douala had dropped the charges against 52 opposition activists who had protested in October against the re-election of president Paul Biya. The charges were dropped at the instruction of the minister of justice. The activists had been in custody since October 2018 on charges of insurrection and staging illegal demonstrations.

China

Self-immolation

On 08.12.18 a Tibetan set fire to himself in the Ngaba district (Chinese: Aba, Sichuan province) in protest at Chinese hegemony. No information about his condition has been forthcoming to date. This is the 155th case of self-immolation in China since 2009.

Activist convicted

On 07.12.18 a court in Guangdong province sentenced the songwriter, author and activist Xu Lin to three years in prison on charges including criminal mischief. He has published songs about the Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo, for example, who died in prison in 2017.

Xinjiang: Hundreds of Kirghiz in camps

Citing local officials, Radio Free Asia reported on 04.12.18 that more than 300 of a total of 1,500 Kirghizian inhabitants of a village in the Akto (Chinese: Aketao) district of the autonomous prefecture of Kizilsu Kirghiz (Kerzileisu Keerkezi) had been taken to re-education camps.

Around 190,000 Kirghiz live in Xinjiang. It is reported that in addition to Uyghurs members of other Muslim minorities are also being held in the camps.

DR Congo

ADF kills civilians in Beni region

According to information from the mayor of the city of Beni (eastern Congo, North Kivu province), suspected fighters of the Islamist rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) killed twelve civilians in Mangolikene near Beni on 06.12.18. On the night of 06.12.18 they killed five civilians in the village of Paidia (near Beni).

Ebola spreading

According to information from the Congolese health ministry on 06.12.18, the Ebola epidemic which broke out in the eastern Congolese province of North Kivu at the beginning of August 2018 has spread to the city of Butembo, which has a population of around one million, in the past three weeks; 25 people have died to date. In the second-largest Ebola outbreak worldwide, 489 people had fallen ill in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri as at 07.12.18 (441 confirmed cases and 48 suspected cases of Ebola). 280 people have died of Ebola (including 232 confirmed cases and 48 suspected cases). The city of Beni (North Kivu province), which has a population of around 800,000, and its surrounding area have been affected particularly severely by the Ebola outbreak.

Egypt

Campaign against hepatitis C

In October 2018 the government launched an extensive campaign to identify and treat the hepatitis C virus which is scheduled to run until April 2019. 4.4 % of the population are allegedly suffering from hepatitis C and some 40,000 Egyptians die from the disease. The campaign, which is unparalleled in scope, is being funded primarily by the World Bank. It provides free initial treatment for the entire adult population (some 50 million people).

India

People killed in protests over dead cows

On 03.12.18 a police officer in Bulandshahr district (federal state of Uttar Pradesh, around 80 km from New Delhi) was killed by around 400 devout Hindus after animal carcasses, including cows, had been found. The angry crowd assembled outside the police station in the village of Chingrawathi to protest at the local police's ineptitude and the killing of cows, which are considered sacred in Hinduism. One protester also died in the disturbances.

Demonstration for construction of Hindu temple

On 09.12.18 over 200,000 people demonstrated at Ramlila Maidan (Ram Leela Ground) in new Delhi for the construction of the Ram Janmabhumi temple in Ayodhya (Faizabad district, federal state of Uttar Pradesh) on the spot where the Babri mosque dating from the 16th century stood until it was destroyed in 1992. The demonstration was organised by the Hindu nationalist Vishva Hindu Parishad party (VHP), which is close to the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Iran

Suicide attack in south-east Iran

Two people have been killed and at least 28 injured in a suicide attack in Chahbahar (south-east Iran). Chahbahar is situated in Sistan-ve Belujistan province, where various separatist Sunni groups operating out of Pakistan are active. The province has been the target of attacks on numerous occasions in the past. The religiously ultra-conservative website Raja News has reported that the Sunni extremist group Ansar al-Furqan has claimed responsibility.

Women protest against domestic violence

Dozens of women's rights activists staged a protest in Teheran to draw attention to the problem of domestic violence. The protesters claimed that two out of every three married women are victims of domestic violence. No official figures are available on the matter. For some years now, women's rights activists have been calling for women to have the right to divorce – to this day, it is the reserve of men – and for more protection against domestic violence by making it a criminal offence.

Prison sentence for female journalist critical of the regime

The Revolutionary Court in Teheran has sentenced the journalist Hengameh Shahidi to 12 years and nine months in prison. No details of the charges brought against her were released, as the trial was classified as a security matter. Shahidi had previously been arrested on numerous occasions. She has been writing for reformist newspapers for many years and in the 2009 presidential elections she was advisor on women's rights to the opposition Green Movement's leader, Mehdi Karroubi.

Wave of strikes continues

The wave of strikes goes on. The discontent over misgovernment, corruption and state repression appears to run through all occupations. The staff at Imam Khomeini hospital in Karaj continued their protest, for example. The demonstrators are demanding their salaries, which have not been paid for a year. Ghasem

Taheri, representative of the Islamic hospital employees' association, estimates the number of demonstrators at over 250.

Revolutionary leader Khamenei pardons prisoners

The Tasim news agency has reported that revolutionary leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has pardoned 1,086 prisoners or reduced their sentences by reference to Art. 110 of the constitution. The prisoners had been convicted on various charges. The pardons were granted to mark the birthdays of the prophet Mohammed and imam Jafar Sadis, the Shiites' 6th imam.

Iraq

Northern Iraq: DPK nominates presidential candidate

On 03.12.18 the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) nominated Nechviran Barzani as its presidential candidate for the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan. Masrur Barzani (son of long-serving president Massud Barsani) has been designated to succeed him as prime minister.

Political stalemate in Baghdad

According to media reports, on 04.12.18 MPs broke up a parliamentary session which was intended to lead to the formation of a government in the wake of the elections in May 2018. Various posts, including roles at the interior and defence ministries, remained unfilled. The stalemate results from a rift between the two main Shiite blocks headed by Moqtada Sadr and militia leader Hadi Al Amiri.

Heavy rainfall

Torrential rain has damaged and destroyed infrastructure and homes across large parts of the country (cf. BN of 26.11.18). Internally displaced people in the provinces of Salah ad-Din and Nineveh (Mosul, Nimrud, Sinjar mountains) have been particularly severely affected. Local media report that around 80 families have been evacuated from the village of Zanazel (Nineveh province). The Joint Crisis Coordination Centre of the Kurdish interior ministry reported on 07.12.18 that around 700 internally displaced persons in the Dibaga 2 camp in Erbil province were reliant on emergency aid.

Kazakhstan

Opposition activist arrested

The leader of the unapproved Alash People's Social Democratic Party, Syrym Abdirakhmanov, has been arrested in Astana on charges of spreading misinformation, insulting officials and obstruction of justice. On 01.12.18 a court in Astana ordered that he be remanded in custody for two months. The Alash People's Social Democratic Party is positioned as a moderate party which champions reforms and fights corruption, bureaucracy and injustice in Kazakhstan. President Nursultan Nazarbaev has been systematically pursuing representatives of the opposition for decades.

Kosovo/Serbia

New conflict over Kosovar army

On 14.12.18 Kosovo intends to hold a vote on establishing its own army. It is planned to transform the 2,500-strong Kosovo Security Force (KSF), which has been deployed to date to protect civil institutions and as an emergency response force, into a 5,000-strong national army equipped with heavy weaponry. For Serbia, the impending vote is a provocation. It considers the establishment of a national army to be unconstitutional and sees it as a threat. Serbian prime minister Ana Brnabic is refusing to rule out intervention in Kosovo. NATO is seriously concerned. The applicable UN Security Council resolution no. 1244 from 1999 prohibits Kosovo from deploying an army of its own.

This marks a worsening of the crisis between the two countries. Kosovo only recently introduced new customs duties for goods from Serbia (cf. BN of 26.11.18).

Niger

Attack on GIZ vehicle

According to information from the German dpa news agency, unknown assailants attacked a car belonging to the German development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on 09.12.18. Two armed attackers shot dead the Nigerian driver and stole the vehicle. The Nigerian co-driver was injured. The incident occurred in Aderbissinat (in the centre of the country, some 150 kilometres south of Agadez). Agadez is a key location for migrants coming from western Africa with the aim of reaching the Mediterranean via Libya or Algeria.

Rwanda

Opposition activist acquitted

The supreme court in the capital, Kigali, acquitted opposition politician Diane Rwigara on 06.12.18. The public prosecutor's office had called for her to be sentenced to 22 years in prison for calling for the government to be overthrown and for forging voting papers. Rwigara was prevented from running in the presidential elections of August 2017 after the electoral commission accused her of having forged some of the sponsors' signatures required for her candidacy. She had been regarded as the opposition candidate with the best prospects of success. Rwigara, who described the charges as being politically motivated, is seen as one of president Paul Kagame's sharpest critics. She was arrested in September 2017 and released on bail in October 2018. Her mother, Adeline, who was charged with her, was also acquitted.

Serbia

Protest to denounce violence against opposition figures

Thousands of people demonstrated against president Vucic's government and violence against government critics and media in Belgrade on 07.12.18. Several opposition parties belonging to the Alliance for Serbia had called for the protest after one of its members was brutally beaten up. The opposition alliance suspects thugs acting at Vucic's behest of being behind the attack. The government denies the accusations.

The alliance claims that the latest attack is no isolated incident, pointing to several instances of opposition candidates and voters being intimidated during the local government elections in December 2017. According to the alliance, election rallies were disrupted by hired thugs who moved around in black cars without registration plates. In February 2018 an information event staged by two small opposition parties in a Belgrade suburb was allegedly attacked. The alliance further claims that opposition politicians were threatened in the city of Novi Sad in northern Serbia in September 2018.

Somalia

Attacks

In attacks by Al Shabaab in Mogadishu, an employee of the telecommunications ministry was killed (02.12.18), several AMISOM soldiers were killed (05.12.18) and a journalist was injured (04.12.18). Seven Somali soldiers, including a general, died in an Al Shabaab attack on a military convoy in Dhanaane (Lower Shabelle region) on 06.12.18.

Hostilities

On 03.12.18 four Al Shabaab members were killed in violent clashes in Adale (Middle Shabelle region) between Al Shabaab fighters and a local militia which had resisted the extremists' demands for tax payments.

Supporters of rival candidates for the presidential elections in the Southwest federal fired several shells at each other in Baidoa (Bay region). The security forces arrested numerous people on 06.12.18.

On 06.12.18 Al Shabaab fighters attacked a military base of the federal state of Jubbaland in Beled Hawo (Gedo region); at least five soldiers died.

An air raid by the US near Basra (Middle Juba region) left four Al Shabaab fighters dead on 08.12.18.

Togo

People killed in protests

Violent clashes between demonstrators and security forces occurred in the capital, Lomé, and other towns on 08.12.18. The government had banned demonstrations planned by the C14 opposition alliance in the period between 08.12. and 18.12.18. Security forces moved in on opposition supporters who assembled in defiance of the ban. At least two people were killed in Lomé alone.

Tunisia

Teachers' protests

It has been reported in the media that thousands of teachers have protested against low wages in several cities. Some have staged a boycott on supervising examinations. November 2018 also witnessed a strike by public-sector employees.

Ukraine

Blockade of the Kerch Strait partially lifted

The Ukrainian transport minister, Volodymyr Omelyan, stated on 04.12.18 that Russia's blockage of the Kerch Strait had been partially lifted. The ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk on the northern coast of the Sea of Azov are again accessible by sea. The Ukraine described this as a climb-down by Russia, citing the clear international reaction and the attention of foreign media. Russia had claimed that the tailback of ships waiting to enter the Sea of Azov was due to bad weather.

Uzbekistan

Raid on Baptist community

According to the Christian human rights organisation Forum 18, a raid took place in a Baptist community in Tashkent on 25.11.18. The security services confiscated literature and DVDs. Fourteen members of the community were interrogated. There has been no official explanation for the raid. According to several members of the Baptist community, the local police chief has warned arrested Baptists that such raids will only cease when the community is officially registered. The Baptist community declines registration, fearing the state would then bring its influence to bear.

Yemen

Peace talks

On 06.12.18 the Houthi rebels and the Yemeni government held peace talks chaired by the UN in Sweden. This is the first time in two years that the two sides have met for talks. Items on the agenda include access to the international airport in Sanaa and administrative control of the port of Hodeida. The two sides have agreed to an exchange of prisoners, the scale of which could extend to between 2,500 and 6,000 prisoners, according to different sources. The talks are expected to continue until 14.12.18 at least.

IS attacks

Islamic State in Yemen (IS-Y) has reported that it killed a member of Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) on 02.12.18 and a soldier who belonged to the Houthi rebels in the Al Bayda administrative district on 05.12.18. Since October 2018, 60 % of IS-Y attacks have reportedly targeted AQAP and 40 % the Houthi rebels. The Yemen military has not been targeted to date.

Migration to Yemen

The number of migrants coming to Yemen this year is expected to total 150,000. This is 50 % more than in 2017. 92 % are understood to originate from Ethiopia, the remainder from Somalia. Yemen generally serves as a transit country en route to the Gulf states. Many migrants are unable to continue their journeys on account of the situation in Yemen, however.

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