

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	783
Land:	Nigeria
Kilde:	BAMF
Titel:	Briefing notes
Udgivet:	29. juli 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	26. august 2024



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

29 July 2024

Afghanistan

Security situation

According to their own statements, the National Resistance Front (NRF) and the Afghanistan Freedom Front killed a total of eight Taliban in the provinces of Baghlan and Kabul on 23.07. and 24.07.24.¹

Governance

At a meeting in Kabul on 25.07.24, Abdul Haq Wasiq, the head of the Taliban intelligence agency, announced that all former employees of the country's intelligence directorate - formerly known as the National Directorate of Security (NDS) - had been dismissed and replaced by Taliban. He described the former employees as "undesirable elements from the past" and claimed that they had been "purged" and replaced by "new cadres" from "Islamic society". During the time of the republic most positions in the NDS were held by ethnic Tajiks, who now make up the majority of the NRF. In addition, it is said that a comprehensive law is being drafted to regulate the affairs of the Intelligence Directorate, all provisions of said draft are based on Sharia and Hanafi jurisprudence.²

Persecution situation

The Taliban publicly flogged three people in Bamyan province. They were accused of adultery and theft. In addition to the floggings, they were sentenced to prison terms of between six months and five years.

The Taliban allegedly shot dead a civilian in Takhar province on 21.07.24 and a former soldier in Khost province on 24.07.24.

According to a report from 23.07.24, a Shiite religious scholar was killed by the Taliban in the Khas Uruzgan district of Uruzgan province on 20.07.24. Thereafter, eight people are said to have been arrested because they had informed the media about the incident. Several arbitrary killings were reported from the Hazara-majority district. On 28.07.24 it was reported that a young Hazara woman from Bamyan province had committed suicide after being released from Taliban detention. She was allegedly abused by the Taliban while in detention. The Taliban are also said to have arbitrarily arrested several people: According to media reports on 23.07.24, the producer of a social media channel was arrested by the Taliban on 14.07.24 without giving a reason. On 20.07.24, the Taliban allegedly beat and arrested a university lecturer in Kabul. He had previously been accused of co-operating with foreign media. According to a report from 24.07.24, the Taliban arrested the office manager of the former governor of Takhar province two months ago. The Taliban did not give any reasons for the arrest. On the same day, the Taliban are said to have arrested the former head of the former army commander's office responsible for combating drug cultivation in Takhar.³

Education

According to reports from 22.07.24, the Taliban have reduced the salaries of female teachers in secondary schools, who have not been allowed to work since the Taliban took power, by around 50 % to 5,000 AFN (approx. EUR 65, as of 29.07.24) per month. Female teachers interviewed pointed out that they received their salaries only irregularly.

According to research by the exile medium Amu TV, there is an increasing number of private secondary schools that are licensed by the Taliban to also teach girls, however, they teach almost exclusively religious content. On 23.07.24, the Taliban Minister for Higher Education, Neda Mohammad Nadeem, submitted a new curriculum for universities to the Taliban government's Council of Ministers for approval. Details of its content were not disclosed.⁴

Migration

Deportations from Iran and Pakistan continue. On 24.07.24, more than 2,000 people are said to have been deported from Iran and Pakistan, from 25.07. to 26.07.24 around 3,500 and on 27.07.24 5,300 people. On 24.07.24, the Torkham border crossing was closed by the Pakistani authorities for entries to Afghanistan, even for people with legal documents.⁵

Bangladesh

Number of deaths and arrests rises after student protests

In connection with nationwide protests against a quota system for the allocation of public sector jobs (cf. BN of 22.07.24), over 8,000 demonstrators and opposition members have been arrested since 18.07.24, including over 5,500 outside the capital Dhaka. The number of people killed in the crackdown on protests by security forces and pro-government groups has risen to around 200; thousands are said to have been injured. According to media reports, the army is still patrolling. The police are raiding people and searching their mobile phones for recordings of police and military violence to prevent their dissemination. Activists who had planned further actions against the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina are reporting house arrest and torture. The nationwide curfew was eased on 24.07.24 and access to the internet has been reinstated since 23.07.24, albeit with restrictions.⁶

Belarus

Proceedings and sentences against political activists

According to the public prosecutor's office in the Brest region, on 17.07.24, a woman from Brest was sentenced to six years in prison and a fine for financing extremist activities. She allegedly sent money to a regiment of Belarusian soldiers fighting on the Ukrainian side and attempted to join an armed group abroad.

According to media reports, the district court of the city of Hrodna opened the trial against a Belarusian activist on 23.07.24. She faces up to three years in prison on charges of participating in unauthorised mass rallies in 2020.

Further media reports say that an activist was sentenced to three years and four months in prison by a court in the city of Mahilyow on 20.06.24 for "defaming" the president. He is said to have posted a "false" comment about President Lukashenko on YouTube.

On 22.07.24, a trial began at the regional court in Mahilyow against an activist for supporting extremist activities. She is accused of supporting the families of political prisoners with money and food. She faces up to seven years in prison.

According to media reports, a Belarusian activist stated on 24.07.24 that the mother and the aunt of a political prisoner who had taken part in mass rallies in 2020 had been arrested on charges of involvement in the activities of an extremist group.

On 26.07.24, a Minsk city court opened criminal proceedings against five Belarusian defendants on charges of high treason, terrorism, participation in a military conflict abroad or recruitment for such activities, illegal smuggling and use of explosives and ammunition as well as forming an extremist group, according to the public prosecutor's office. They are alleged to have planned a terrorist attack with the help of Ukraine. If convicted, they face up to 20 years in prison.⁷

Death penalty against German for alleged "mercenary activity"

The German Foreign Ministry confirmed on 19.07.24 that a German citizen has been sentenced to death in Belarus. According to the Belarusian human rights group Vyazna, he was arrested in November 2023, was tried by the regional court in Minsk on 06.06.24 for "mercenary activity" for the Belarusian Kalinouski regiment fighting in Ukraine and was sentenced on 24.06.24. The charges also include terrorism on behalf of the Ukrainian secret service, the founding of an extremist group and illegal operations with firearms and explosives. The Kalinouski

regiment denies any connection to this case. Meanwhile, a video was broadcast on Belarusian state television in which the convicted man pleads guilty and asks President Lukashenko for a pardon. According to Belarusian human rights groups, such videos are often produced under duress. It is also suspected that Minsk and Moscow want to use the case to negotiate a prisoner exchange with Germany. Belarus is the only European country that still applies the death penalty. Negotiations are currently underway between Berlin and Minsk, but no further details are available.⁸

Burkina Faso / Mali

Military personnel accused of mutilating corpses

Since 16.07.24, four videos have been published on social media showing members of the Malian and Burkinabe army mutilating corpses. According to media reports, the soldiers' conversation apparently indicates cannibalistic practices. The videos allegedly show members of the Malian Forcées Armées Maliennes (FAMa), the Malian Paratroopers Command, the Burkinabe Eighth Battalion d'Intervention Rapide (BIR) and the paramilitary group Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP). The General Staff of the armed forces of Burkina Faso and Mali condemned the acts in the videos. Opposition members of the military governments and others, are calling on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the alleged crimes.⁹

Cuba

Significant population decline

Cuba is currently experiencing a drastic decline in population, mainly due to a high emigration rate and negative natural growth rates.

According to the statistics authority ONEI, Cuba's population fell from 11,181,595 to 10,055,968 between 2021 and 2023, the main factor being the emigration of around one million Cubans. This corresponds to roughly 10 % of the population. Further factors were the high number of deaths (405,512) and the low birth rate of 284,892 children. The difficult living conditions, lack of economic prospects and political repression are driving many people, especially the young and well-educated, to leave the country.

On 19.07.24, Cuba's National Assembly passed a new migration law that aims to lower the barriers for Cubans living abroad. This means that they no longer automatically lose their property and civil rights if they stay abroad for longer than two years. However, they may be banned from leaving or returning to Cuba for reasons of "public interest".¹⁰

Egypt

Two media professionals arrested

According to media reports, the authorities arrested the journalist Khaled Mamdouh after searching his house on 16.07.24, the same happened to Ashraf Omar, known for his anti-government cartoons, on 22.07.24.

The authorities detained both media professionals without disclosing any information about their whereabouts, after several days the public prosecutor's department responsible for state security launched an investigation into membership in or financing of a terrorist organisation, the dissemination of false news and the misuse of social media and ordered their pre-trial detention.¹¹

Guinea-Bissau

Judges arrested after dismissal order

Three judges of the Supreme Military Court were arrested on 24.07.24 in the building of the General Staff of the Armed Forces. This was reported by the media with reference to the National League for Human Rights (LGDH), which in turn had been informed by family members of the detainees. On 19.07.24, the three judges had handed down a ruling ordering the release of around 50 people, all of whom had been arrested in connection with the

alleged coup attempt on 01.02.22 (cf. BN of 07.02. and 14.02.22 as well as 08.01.24). However, the order had not been executed.¹²

Iran

Imprisoned social worker and activist sentenced to death

According to media reports of 24.07.24, the social worker Pahayan Azizi, who was known and imprisoned for her anti-government activities, was sentenced to death in the first instance.

Human rights organisations reported that the activist, who is of Kurdish origin, had been convicted on several charges including armed rebellion against the Iranian government and membership of opposition groups. Security forces allegedly used violence to pressure the woman to confess. The information cannot be independently verified. According to her lawyer, the convicted woman had worked as a social worker abroad for several years, including in northern Iraq and Syria. She had not taken part in any armed activities.

After returning to Iran in 2023, she was arrested by security forces. The activist had already been arrested in 2008 during a student protest rally against the execution of political prisoners at Tehran University and was released on bail after four months in prison. Azizi's lawyers announced an appeal against the death sentence, according to media reports of 25.07.24.¹³

Execution of a Kurdish prisoner on charges of murder and Salafism

According to media reports from 25.07.24, the death sentence against a Kurdish-Sunni prisoner was executed in Orumiyeh (West Azerbaijan province) after he had spent 15 years in prison.

The man was accused of being involved in the murder of a cleric in the city of Mahabad (West Azerbaijan province) in 2008. He was also accused of being a member of a Salafist group.

Death sentences have already been executed against six people in connection with the alleged murder. All of the suspects allegedly involved had denied the allegations until their respective executions.

In 2022, the human rights organisation Amnesty International pointed out that all seven defendants had been sentenced to death under unfair trial conditions. In addition, the prisoners had made allegations of torture during their detention, presumably to force confessions.

Death sentences were first imposed on the seven defendants in 2015, following an appeal these were overturned by the Supreme Court in 2016. In 2017 the accused were sentenced to death again.¹⁴

Iraq

Closure of internally displaced persons camps in Kurdistan suspended for the time being

The decision to close the remaining operational IDP camps in the Kurdistan Region (KR-I) will not be fully implemented for the time being, according to government information. The government decided to continue aid for the IDP camps including after the deadline of 30.07.24. Currently around 26,500 families are still living in the remaining IDP camps in Kurdistan.¹⁵

Around 500 people on KR-I death row

According to new data published by the Ministry of Interior on 24.07.24, 466 people in the Kurdistan Region have been sentenced to death without having their sentences commuted to life imprisonment.

Although there is a moratorium on the execution of the death penalty, it continues to be imposed. In such a case, the further course of action remains uncertain and the convicts are imprisoned indefinitely.¹⁶

Lebanon / Israel (Golan Heights)

Israel: Rocket fire from Lebanon claims at least twelve civilian lives

On 27.07.24, a rocket hit a football pitch in the predominantly Druze-inhabited town of Majal Shams in the Israeli annexed Golan Heights (still part of Syria under international law), killing at least twelve civilians between the ages of ten and 16. The casualties were members of the Druze minority, which is mainly found in Syria, Lebanon and

Israel. According to Israeli military sources, the projectile was an unguided Iranian-made Falaq-1 missile with a range of around ten kilometres and a warhead weighing around 50 kg and it had been fired from Hezbollah-controlled territory. Hezbollah and Iran deny any involvement in the incident without offering an alternative explanation for the events. The Israeli military leadership assumes that only Hezbollah has missiles of the above-mentioned type in Lebanon. In anticipation of a major Israeli backlash, Beirut airport, among other places, was temporarily closed.

It was the deadliest attack from Lebanon on Israel since Hezbollah began firing rockets in the wake of the Hamas attack on 07.10.23. At least 527 people are now reported dead on the Lebanese side, including at least 104 civilians; on the Israeli side, 22 soldiers and 24 civilians lost their lives.¹⁷

Libya

Renewed fighting in western Libyan coastal town of Zawiya

According to media reports, two armed groups clashed violently in some residential areas of the western Libyan coastal town of Zawiya, around 40 km west of Tripoli, between 23.07. and 24.07.24. During the fighting, neighbouring houses and vehicles were damaged and numerous families were trapped in their homes. The reason for the clashes is still unknown.

There had been brief armed clashes in the western Libyan coastal town in March and May 2024 (cf. BN of 04.03. and 27.05.24).¹⁸

Mali

Dead in attack in the central region

Armed assailants killed at least 25 people in an attack on the village of Dembo in the central region near the Burkina Faso border on 21.07.24, as was announced by a government official. Most of the victims were working in their fields at the time of the attack. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack in the region, which has been affected by armed conflict for years. However, the al-Qaeda associated jihadist group JNIM is under suspicion, as it often attacks civilians in the region in a similar manner, the official stated. On 01.07.24, suspected members of the JNIM group attacked the village of Djiguibombo in the centre of the country, killing at least 21 participants of from a wedding party.¹⁹

Myanmar

Security situation

On 18.07.24, the Myanmar military killed at least 15 civilians in an air strike on a market in Hsenwi (Shan State). Numerous other people were injured. On 24.07.24, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) announced that it had gained control of the city of Mogoke (Mandalay region). At least three civilians were killed and at least nine injured in the fighting. On 25.07.24, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) claimed to have captured a military headquarter in Lashio, the capital of northern Shan State. The military denied the report; the United Wa State Army and the Shan State Army-North, which had not previously been involved in the fighting, responded to the advance of the TNLA and the MNDAA by moving troops into the area around Lashio. At least eight people were killed in air strikes on the town and most of the population is said to have fled.

According to a report published on 20.07.24 by the NGO project Myanmar Witness, educational institutions were targeted by 174 attacks since the military coup on 01.02.21, most of them in the Sagaing region and in the states of Shan, Kayah and Kayah. A total of 170 civilian victims (64 dead and 106 injured) have been documented.²⁰

Military junta head Min Aung Hlaing appointed interim president

On 22.07.24, the Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, Chairman of the State Administrative Council and Prime Minister of Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing, assumed the post of interim president of the country.

The provisional President Myint Swe, who had been appointed on 01.02.21, is said to have been suspended for health reasons. The state of emergency imposed after the military coup and extended for the fifth time on 01.02.24 expires on 31.07.24. A further extension requires the approval of the president.²¹

Nigeria

Dozens of Boko Haram supporters sentenced

A special court in the Nigerian state of Niger convicted a total of 125 defendants of terrorist offences in a mass trial. According to media reports from 27.07.24, most of them are members of the Islamist group Boko Haram. Nigeria's Attorney General and Minister of Justice Lateef Fagbemi announced on 26.07.24 that 85 people had been convicted of financing terrorism and 22 others for offences under the statutes of the International Criminal Court (ICC) - including crimes against humanity or war crimes such as killing, torture or rape. The other defendants were sentenced for other terrorism offences. The mass trial took place in a military barracks and was the first of its kind since 2018.

In 2009, Boko Haram began a violent campaign in north-eastern Nigeria with the aim of establishing an Islamic theocracy. The group has since lost influence, but the Nigerian military has not yet succeeded in eliminating the threat. The violence emanating from Boko Haram in the region and military actions against Boko Haram continue to make headlines up to the present (cf. BN of 08.01., 15.01., 11.03., 29.04. and 17.06.24).²²

Mass kidnapping in the north-west

Unknown gunmen killed four people and kidnapped 150 others in an attack on a village in the north-western state of Zamfara on 14.07.24. Citing eyewitness accounts, the media reported, that the attack was led by a gang leader named Alhaji Shehu Bagiwa and that the kidnapping victims included newborn babies. Only one week earlier, 46 people kidnapped in the region were reportedly released after an alleged ransom payment of NGN 21 million (approx. EUR 12,000; as at 29.07.24). States in the north-west are relatively often affected by kidnapping offences. According to media reports, violent groups active in the region also extort money from the local population in other ways, for example by forcing village communities to pay them money until a specified deadline to gain access to their farmland.²³

South-west: Successes in the fight against crime

The Ondo State Security Network Agency, known as Amotekun, has arrested 24 persons suspected of various criminal offences and freed a kidnap victim in a short period of time in the south-western state of Ondo. This follows from media reports based on information provided by an Amotekun commander on 17.07.24. These successful operations were carried out in cooperation with other security agencies. The charges against the 24 detainees include kidnapping, armed robbery, possession of weapons, theft and damage to property.

The Amotekun organisation, which was founded in 2020 to combat crime, is active in six south-western states and has recently reported several successes (cf. BN of 03.06. and 24.06.24).²⁴

Nigeria / Cameroon

Hundreds of Nigerian Boko Haram members surrender

Between 10.07. and 17.07.24, 263 Boko Haram members and their families surrendered to the troops of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the border region of Nigeria and Cameroon. According to media reports based on official military sources, this success is linked to the ongoing Operation Lake Sanity II. As it had emerged that the people in question were Nigerians, troops from Operation Hadin Kai took over the processing, the reports said. The surrender of Boko Haram members has been reported already in the past - including more recently (cf. BN of 15.01. and 04.03.24).²⁵

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Feud between Sunni and Shiite tribes in Kurram district

At least 35 people were killed and more than 160 injured in a feud between Sunni and Shiite tribes triggered over land disputes on 24.07.24 and lasting several days in Kurram district, the authorities announced on 28.07.24. The clashes began in the Boshera region and spread to neighbouring towns and villages. Public facilities remained closed and mobile internet in the region was switched off.²⁶

Rwanda

Presidential election

On 22.07.24, the election result was confirmed by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) (cf. BN of 22.07.24). With over 99 % of the vote, Paul Kagame will start another five-year term as president. In the parliamentary elections held at the same time, the president's party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), won 68.8 % in the lower house (Chamber of Deputies of Rwanda).

At 63.8 %, the proportion of women represented in the lower house is even higher than in the previous legislature (61 %). Rwanda is considered the country with the highest number of women working in the government apparatus in the world. In addition to the seats in parliament, 13 women hold one of the 32 ministerial posts in the current government cabinet.²⁷

Russian Federation

First conviction after protests in Bashkortostan

On 18.07.24, a district court in the south-western region of Orenburg found Ilshat Ulyabayev guilty of participating in mass riots and using violence against state officials under Articles 212 and 318 of the Russian Criminal Code and sentenced him to five years' imprisonment. In January 2024, Ulyabayev had taken part in the protests in support of the Bashkir activist Fail Alsynov in the city of Baimak and slightly injured a police officer. The protest rally in Baimak, one of the largest rallies in Russia since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, had been violently dispersed by the security forces (cf. BN of 22.01.24).

Immediately after the rally, protesters, including Ulyabayev, were initially sentenced to up to 15 days' administrative detention for disobeying police orders under Art. 19.3 of the Administrative Offences Act, however, the current sentence is the first criminal conviction in the Baimak case. Observers expect the judgement to set a precedent for the remaining - estimated - 76 to 85 pending criminal proceedings. According to media reports, the accused were subjected to criminal and regulatory sanctions and at least one of them was manhandled so violently by the security forces during his arrest that he had to be hospitalised. A second suspect died in police custody under unexplained circumstances and a third person committed suicide after being questioned by the police, the media said.²⁸

Senegal

Prisoners on hunger strike

Several inmates of the Liberté 6 prison in Dakar went on hunger strike on 19.07.24 to demand a visit from the Minister of Justice and an end to abuse and violence by prison guards. According to media reports, the violence by the guards began following confrontations with the wardens on the same day. Several prisoners were transferred to Rebeuss prison. One prisoner died after being transferred.²⁹

Arrested for insulting the head of state

Senegalese security forces arrested opposition politician Amath Suzanne Camara of the Alliance pour la République (APR) party on 24.07.24 after he made critical remarks about President Bassirou Diomaye Faye on the Seneweb news channel on 23.07.24. Camara is said to have called the president a liar in an interview. According to media reports, the arrest has reignited a debate about the existing law on insulting the head of state. Including in the ranks of the ruling party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF) some consider

the current punishment of three months to five years in prison for insulting the head of state excessive. Camara's arrest for insulting the head of state is the third since President Faye took office on 02.04.24, reports said.³⁰

South Sudan

Poor management

According to media reports, a first salary payment in almost ten months has been made to public sector employees. However, so far only for one month's salary, the reduction of outstanding salary payments is being prioritised. Due to the repeated delays in salary payments, the finance minister has been replaced several times in recent months. In addition, the non-payment of salaries is provoking more strikes and protests. As a result of the ongoing war in Sudan, revenues from the oil sector have also dried up for South Sudan, therefore the government's already strained budget has come under further pressure.

On 25.07.24, angry citizens stormed the building of the Ministry of Passports, Immigration and Nationality because of the persistently long and uncertain processing times for travel and identity documents. The ministry has long been considered to be poorly organised and underfunded.³¹

Sudan

Ongoing battles

According to media reports, units of the paramilitary organisation Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have captured the town of El Souki in the state of Sennar. Sennar has been heavily contested for several weeks, especially after the RSF succeeded in capturing the regional capital Singa (cf. BN of 15.07.24).

In North Darfur, at least 25 people were killed in a drone and artillery attack by the RSF on the regional capital El Fasher. According to unconfirmed reports, also chemical weapons were used in the attack.³²

New negotiations

At the instigation of the USA, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF have been invited to Switzerland for talks on 14.08.24. The format is organised by the US and Saudi Arabia, with the African Union, the UN, Egypt and the UAE participating as observers. The aim is to bring an end to the violence throughout the country and create access for humanitarian aid. A control mechanism is also to be implemented to monitor all future agreements and their implementation.

The current plans follow the UN's most recent unsuccessful attempt in early July 2024 to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. At that time, one of the invited delegations did not turn up for the agreed talks.³³

Syria

North-east: Attack on anti-IS coalition's military base

On 25.07. and 26.07.24, several missiles were fired at the "Conoco" military base of the US-led international coalition against IS in Deir ez-Zor governorate.

According to reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the rockets were fired from areas under government control by Iranian-backed groups. This is one of the relatively few attacks that occurred during a period of calm lasting a few months, following an initial rise in attacks throughout Syria during the war in Gaza between October 2023 and January 2024. After a rocket killed three US soldiers (cf. BN of 05.02.24), the attacks initially diminished. The US military responded to the latest rocket fire with air strikes against targets of Iranian-backed militias in the region.³⁴

Reports of several people killed

Various news media unanimously reported that several people had been killed by gunfire in the southern governorate of Dar'a.

The North Press Agency published information on an incident in which two Syrians were allegedly shot dead by government forces at a checkpoint near the village of Sahem al-Golan, north-west of Dar'a city, on 28.07.24. The two people killed allegedly were former opposition members who had signed reconciliation agreements with the government in the past and were in possession of the relevant documents. No further background information on the incident was available at the time.

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), a Syrian man was shot dead in his motorbike workshop in al-Hrak on 24.07.24 by as yet unidentified armed individuals. According to SNHR, the man killed was a civilian who had never belonged to any armed group.

In addition, another Syrian was reportedly killed in the village of Hassan Kabir in the east of Aleppo governorate when a rocket hit his house. According to SNHR, it was unclear at first who fired the rocket. At the same time, armed clashes broke out near the village between factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA) militia alliance and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are in control of the area. No further details about the background were known at the time.

The SNHR also reported that a child was shot dead on 25.07.24 when he tried to flee from a joint military operation by the SDF and US troops that took place in his home village of Harir al-Hatem in Hasakah governorate.³⁵

Türkiye

Arrest of 73 suspected members of the Gülen movement

On 22.07.24, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced that the police had arrested 73 people in 16 provinces for alleged links to the Gülen movement.

Yerlikaya went on to say that those arrested included people who had been involved in the alleged infiltration of the police by the Gülen movement by stealing questions for the staff admission examination. Some people had been arrested due to evidence based on payphone recordings. The detainees were also identified as users of the messaging app ByLock, it was said.

According to media reports, the authorities are continuing to prosecute people for using ByLock, even though the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in a landmark judgement on 26.09.23 that the use of this app could not be considered evidence. The Court criticised the use of the encrypted app ByLock as arbitrary evidence and also found that the necessary guarantees for a fair trial were not met. Since January 2016, the app has no longer been available in Apple and Google's the official app stores but its use prior to the attempted coup on 15.07.16 is still being used as evidence in court proceedings concerning the Gülen movement.

According to media reports, the so-called "payphone investigations" are based on call recordings. The public prosecutor's office assumes that a member of the Gülen movement used the same payphone to call all of his contacts one after the another. If a suspected member of the movement appears in the call lists, it is assumed that the other numbers called immediately before or after this one also belong to people with Gülen connections.

According to media reports, the Turkish authorities ordered a total of 5,543 police operations relating to the Gülen movement between June 2023 and June 2024 and arrested 1,595 people with links to the Gülen movement.³⁶

Uganda

Arrest of protesters

During anti-corruption protests on 23.07. and 25.07.24, more than a hundred protesters were arrested and taken into custody in Kampala and other cities. The majority, mainly young activists, were charged with public order offences and are now due to appear in court. Human rights organisations criticised the government's crackdown on peaceful and unarmed demonstrators and see a violation of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. Protesters accused police forces of using violence during the arrests. The Ugandan police rejected the accusations.³⁷

Ukraine

Civilian victims

According to local authorities, one person was killed by Russian rocket fire in Kherson and Kharkiv on 24.07.24. The authorities informed that three people were killed by Russian shelling on 27.07.24 in the Kherson region, one person in the small town of Hlukhiv near the Russian border (Sumy region) and another person near the town of Chuhujiv (Kharkiv region).

The human rights organisation Amnesty International is calling for an investigation into the use and whereabouts of anti-personnel mines in Ukraine. The Russian armed forces have deliberately placed mines in (formerly) occupied Ukrainian territories, including in residential buildings, in order to maim and kill people.

According to the local military administration, cholera has broken out in Avdiivka, which has been under Russian occupation since February 2024. Entry and exit to the city is blocked. Russian troops in protective suits are delivering a minimum amount of food to the remaining population.³⁸

War efforts

According to the Ukrainian navy, Moscow has withdrawn all its ships from the Sea of Azov. The Ukrainian navy attributes this to successful attacks on Russian targets in the annexed Crimea and the Black Sea. According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Russian forces advanced in the vicinity of Vovchansk (Kharkiv region), Donetsk, Siversk and Torezk (Donetsk region). While Pokrovsk (Donetsk region) remains heavily contested, Russian advances were made near Kharkiv and Avdiivka (Donetsk region). The Ukrainian military leadership, however, relativised the Russian's territorial gains, stating that the gains on the front were merely tactical in nature and did not provide an operational advantage. According to the latest ISW information, Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, while the Ukrainian military intelligence service HUR sees the Russian attack priorities around the Donbass.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian parliament has extended the current period of validity of martial law and mobilisation from 12.08.24 for a further three months until the beginning of November. President Zelensky has yet to sign the extension. The eleventh extension since 24.02.22 had been decided in May 2024.³⁹

Recruitment and care of war invalids

The Ukrainian ambassador in Chişinău has called on the Moldovan government to extradite to Ukraine all Ukrainian men of military age who are fleeing conscription, illegally entering the Republic of Moldova and are not granted political asylum there. Both the Moldovan General Inspectorate for Migration and the Ministry of the Interior rejected this, stating that European standards regarding the rights of war refugees must be observed. According to media reports from 25.07.24, the Ukrainian border guard recently prevented eleven conscripted men in the Vinnytsia region and 15 in the Odessa region from fleeing to the Republic of Moldova.

In view of the tens of thousands of injured and traumatised soldiers, President Zelensky has ordered the construction of a modern rehabilitation hospital. Stabilisation centres with medical care are also required in the combat zones, he said and also instructed the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff to digitise the medical information system in order to be able to help injured soldiers and those returning home from Russian captivity more efficiently.⁴⁰

Venezuela

Presidential elections: Supreme electoral authority declares Maduro the winner

In addition to the incumbent Maduro and the opposition's unity candidate González Urrutia, eight other candidates stood for election in the presidential elections on 28.07.24. The electoral system is automated; a simple majority in the first round is enough to win the election. On the eve of the election and in the early hours of the morning, queues had already formed outside some polling stations.

While the Attorney General's Office reported generally peaceful elections without any significant incidents, according to the opposition, there were attempts at intimidation by pro-government groups (so-called colectivos) in front of some polling stations. The opposition also spoke of irregularities in connection with the counting, the access of official election witnesses to polling stations and the transmission of results.

After counting around 80% of the votes, the pro-government Supreme Electoral Council (CNE) declared the incumbent Maduro the winner of the election with over 51% of the vote shortly after midnight (local time) on 29.07.24; according to the body, voter turnout was 59%. However, no official counting results have been published to date and, according to media reports, independent verification of the results is currently not possible. Various regional elected representatives have also called for the results to be published and for transparency. While some predominantly left-wing, in some cases authoritarian governments have already congratulated Maduro on his victory, other governments have questioned the results. The opposition does not recognise the result, as it continues to assume a victory for its candidate González Urrutia based on the election protocols available to it. It remains to be seen how the highly polarised situation on the ground will develop. The new president's term of office does not begin until January 2025.

While the EU election observation mission had already been disinvited two months ago (cf. BN of 03.06.24), several Latin American ex-presidents and parliamentarians from neighbouring countries and Spain announced in the immediate run-up to the elections that they had been prevented from travelling to Venezuela to observe the elections. There have also been reports of polling stations being relocated at short notice.

Already earlier there had been reports of numerous arrests of opposition members and supporters in the context of the election campaign, most recently on 26.07. and 27.07.24, in addition the (temporary) closure of service providers (cf. BN of 15.07. and 22.07.24), the (temporary) blocking of several media portals and NGO websites became known. Furthermore, there were numerous obstacles for voter registration, especially for Venezuelan citizens living abroad (cf. BN of 15.07.24). The actual winner of the opposition primaries, Maria Corina Machado, had been barred from holding public office (cf. BN of 29.01.24).⁴¹

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Briefing Notes
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Imprint

Published by

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge,
90461 Nürnberg

ISSN

2943-0690

Valid as of

CW 31/2024

Printed by

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge

Design

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge

Reference source

Publikationsstelle Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge
www.bamf.de/publikationen

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