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Briefing Notes

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Afghanistan

Formation of government, situation of women, media workers, employees of the former government

The Taliban are starting to form a government, only two ministers have been appointed so far. Moreover, talks are also to take place with leading politicians of the old system. No uniform nationwide approach by the Taliban is currently discernible. In their first press conference on 17.08.21, the Taliban announced a general amnesty for all officials of the republic and called on women to participate in the government. However, according to a UN-commissioned report by the Norwegian Center for Global Analyses of 18.08.21, they are going from house to house in Kabul and other cities, looking specifically for individuals who had collaborated with Western states or held key positions in the Afghan military, police and investigative agencies. Reportedly also family members of these individuals were taken into custody. The black-red-green flag was raised at a protest by supporters of the republic in Jalalabad on 18.08.21 and the Taliban shot dead three civilians and injured others, according to Reuters. On 17.08.21, it was reported that journalists and human rights activists were hiding from the Taliban throughout the country. It was said that in Kabul, the RTA and Afghan National Radio stations suspended their programming and sent staff home. Reportedly, a female presenter at the RTA station in Kabul was banned from working by the Taliban, on 18.08.21. In the western province of Herat, Taliban leaders reportedly decided that female and male students would no longer be allowed to study together. Thus, female lecturers are only allowed to teach women. In Ghazni province, south of Kabul, women have been banned from continuing to work at local radio stations and the broadcasting of music programmes was prohibited.

Taliban troops on their way to Panjshir; resistance against the Taliban

On 22.08.21, the Taliban declared that their fighters were on their way to Panjshir province, north-west of Kabul. This is the only province not yet under Taliban control. The Afghan security forces and militias there, led by Ahmad Massoud, are ready to negotiate, the Taliban said. In the northern province of Baghlan, anti-Taliban forces are said to have retaken three districts.

Situation in Kabul

According to press reports, ministries, passport offices and banks remain closed.

The situation at the airport remains tense, with occasional exchanges of fire with unknown assailants involving both American and German soldiers. According to NATO, at least 20 people have been killed in riots in recent days. The Taliban allegedly control access to the airport. They are said to have transferred responsibility for security in Kabul to the Haqqani network. The Haqqani network is said to have good relations with al-Qaeda and is blamed for numerous attacks in recent years, especially in Kabul.

Bangladesh

Clashes between police and BNP supporters

On 17.08.21, clashes between police and supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led to several injuries in the capital Dhaka. Leaders and supporters of the party had reportedly gathered to lay wreaths at the grave of party founder Ziaur Rahman. Information on the number of participants varied from 50 to over 100 people. Police reportedly tried to prevent them from gathering, citing the hygiene rules in force. Police and BNP blamed the ensuing escalation on each other.

Burkina Faso

Dozens killed in attack

Suspected jihadists attacked a convoy of security forces and civilians on 18.08.21 on the road between the village of Gorgadji and the town of Arbinda (Sahel region). According to government and military sources on 19.08.21, 59 civilians, six members of the Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP) vigilante group, 15 military police officers and 58 (other sources said 80) attackers were killed. The security forces escorted civilians who had fled after earlier attacks back to their homes.

Cameroon

Conflict between pastoralists and fishermen

At least 32 people are reported killed and 74 injured in violent clashes between Choa Arab pastoralists and fishermen/farmers from the Mousgoum (or Musgum) ethnic group in the country's far north. According to media reports, the conflict started on 10.08.21 in Missiska village in Logone Birni district with a dispute between two persons and subsequently spread. According to the authorities, the conflict sent 11,000 people fleeing across the nearby border into Chad, 85% of whom are women and children.

Chad

Troop withdrawal in the Sahel

On behalf of the Transitional Military Council, General Azem Bermandoa Agouna announced on 21.08.21 that about 600 soldiers will be withdrawn from the tri-border area of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. According to a military source, the 600 soldiers will be sent to Chad's northern border with Libya and Sudan to disarm any returning rebels. Mahamat Idriss Déby, interim head of government since his father's death in April, plans to hold talks with the rebels at the end of the year.

Central African Republic

MSF continues activities

Contrary to a media report of 24.07.21 (cf. BN of 26.07.21), the aid organisation Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) is still active in the country. MSF confirmed this in a press release of 20.08.21, saying that the organisation is involved in 13 regular projects. In addition, a mobile emergency team and several emergency projects have been operating since the conflicts in the country intensified in December 2020. However, in its press release MSF draws attention to the fact that the violence has severely affected the ability of aid agencies to provide treatment. In particular, the rural population is much less likely to make their way to a treatment centre in the nearest larger town out of fear, it said. MSF was periodically forced to suspend some activities in or around the towns of Kabo, Batangafo, Bambari and Bria. In turn, demand for treatment in the larger towns has increased, because this is where much of the rural population fled from fighting and fear of attack.

China

Amendment of the three-child policy

Married couples in China are now allowed to have a third child (cf. BN of 09.08.21). The corresponding law was amended on 20.08.21 during the 30th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress.

Hong Kong: Students arrested

According to media reports, four students were arrested on charges of advocating terrorism on 18.08.21. In July 2021, their student organization had adopted a, meanwhile retracted, statement commemorating the death of a man who injured a police officer with a knife before taking his own life.

Colombia

First extradition of members of the ELN guerrillas to the United States

On 19.08.21, two members of the guerrilla organization Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) were extradited to the United States for the first time. Colombian Justice Minister Wilson Ruiz announced in a statement that the two men were Henry Trigos Celón (alias Mocho Picada) and Yamit Picón Rodríguez (alias Choncha). Trigos is accused of storing and trafficking cocaine in the province of Norte de Santander on the border with Venezuela, while Picón Rodríguez allegedly served as the financial chief of the ELN's north-eastern Front and conducted business with Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel. The Colombian government additionally confirmed that two other ELN guerrilla members are on the waiting list for extradition to the United States: Franco Ruiz and José Gabriel Álvarez. The ELN has been classified as a foreign terrorist organization in the United States since 08.10.1997, and currently has about 2,500 active fighters in Colombia.

DR Congo

Ituri: conflict-induced food insecurity

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported on 19.08.21 that nearly 2.8 million people in the eastern province of Ituri, that is suffering from militia violence, are food insecure. Both the provision of humanitarian aid and access to humanitarian supplies are severely limited, also due to the poor security situation and the lack of presence of law-enforcement forces, OCHA said.

Ituri/North Kivu: Extension of the state of siege

On 18.08.21, the Congolese representative bodies approved the sixth consecutive extension of the state of siege that has been in force in the two provinces of Ituri and North Kivu since the beginning of May 2021, by a further 15 days. The Congolese armed forces and police thus continue to have extensive executive (special) powers of intervention (cf. BN of 17.05.21). The state of siege is subject to intense criticism in (local) political and civil society circles (cf. BN. of 18.08.21).

Conditions of detention

According to an article by Radio France International, which refers to a report by the NGO L'Association Congolaise pour l'Accès à la Justice, 150 prisoners died in the first half of 2021 alone, as a result of the extremely harsh conditions of detention in Makala central prison in Kinshasa. Press coverage in August and July 2021 repeatedly included reports of disastrous conditions in the country's official detention facilities and prisons, particularly in the eastern provinces. Prisoners were housed in dilapidated buildings on the verge of collapse, they were dehydrated and malnourished due to a lack of access to food and drink, and in some cases had to sleep on top of each other in their cells.

Ethiopia

HRW: Attacks on ethnic Tigrayans in Addis Ababa

In a report published on 18.08.21, Human Rights Watch (HRW) points out that since late June 2021, state security forces have repeatedly arbitrarily arrested, searched, and violently attacked ethnic Tigrayans in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. HRW also reports the closure of shops, bars and hotels run by Tigrayans.

HRW cites interviews with former detainees, lawyers, business owners, and other eyewitnesses conducted in July and August, as well as the analysis of court and police documents. In mid-July, a police representative in Addis Ababa had confirmed that more than 300 Tigrayans had been detained on suspicion of supporting the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). A request for comment from the Ethiopian Attorney General's Office went unanswered. HRW reported on the stigmatization of Tigrayans as early as December 2020.

Gambia

President of the Republic under criticism

According to an article published by the Gambian news portal "The Chronicle" on 17.08.21, various pro-democracy groups and civil society activists accused President Adama Barrow of dictatorial and undemocratic behaviour and targeted attacks on the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of assembly and political activity because of his recent statements. The press reported that at an official meeting at the State House on 15.08.21 Barrow declared to ban opposition meetings in the event of his re-election on 04.12.21. He also said that the Inspector General of Police in charge of public meetings would be presidentially instructed to prohibit the organization of political rallies. According to a media report, President Barrow backed down from his threats in the meantime. According to a statement by the government spokesperson, government restrictions on political rights and activities are not intended neither during nor after the upcoming presidential elections.

Haiti

Number of earthquake victims continues to rise; aid is slow in coming

After the earthquake on 14.08.21 (cf. BN of 16.08.21) the death toll has risen to 2,207, according to the Haitian civil protection agency, furthermore, 12,268 people are injured. Hundreds of people are still missing. The earthquake in south-western Haiti is estimated to have destroyed more than 53,000 homes, including hospitals, schools, offices and churches. The situation was further exacerbated by the heavy rainfall of tropical storm Grace. The director of the Pan American Health Organization (Paho), Carissa Etienne, said that health facilities in the earthquake zone were overstretched and that the need for medical personnel, patient transport, medicine and equipment was immense. Meanwhile, the urgently needed aid for the approximately 1.2 million people affected, is only getting off to a slow start. In addition, the country has been experiencing a profound crisis since the assassination of President Moïse, and the government is hardly in a position to send aid to the affected areas or to provide protection. Some connecting roads are buried or controlled by various gangs. For example, two surgeons were kidnapped in the capital, Port-au-Prince, where they were providing much-needed medical aid to earthquake victims who had been flown there. The kidnappings ended a cease-fire announced by Haiti's organized gangs shortly after the earthquake to allow aid deliveries.

Iraq

Turkish air strike hits Sinjar health centre

On 16. and 17.08.21, the Turkish Air Force attacked several targets of the Yezidi Resistance Units Shingal (YBS), a local offshoot of the PKK, in the Sinjar region. A medical centre was hit, killing four employees. Turkey denies the attack.

Iran

Migration to Iran: Afghan refugees

A representative of the Interior Ministry told the ISNA news agency, Iran will not permanently tolerate any new Afghan refugees on its territory in the future. At the same time, reports were denied that the authorities were setting up refugee camps for new arrivals in the east of the country, directly on the Iranian-Afghan border. Previous reports had said that three temporary reception zones would be set up along the 950-kilometre border. Measures have now been taken at the provincial level, deploying border guards to send all arrivals back home immediately and to prevent future border crossings. This is justified by the Taliban's military victory and the expected easing of tensions in the neighbouring country. A good 750,000 Afghan refugees are officially registered in Iran. According to unofficial figures, up to three million Afghans have been living in the country, some for four decades.

Arrests over criticism of Corona crisis management

According to media reports, several lawyers, a female lawyer, and civil rights activists were detained by security forces in Tehran without a summons, on 14.08.21. The reason given was that they had planned to formally complain about the government's inadequate crisis management in the COVID-19 pandemic. The female lawyer had been released after a brief detention, and five persons remained in pre-trial detention, it was said. Subsequently, on 18.08.21, more than 50 lawyers wrote a letter to Chief Justice Ezhdi demanding clarification for these arbitrary arrests and the release of the detainees.

Long prison sentences for protest participants

According to media reports, three men received prison sentences of 25 years and one day each for their participation in the November 2019 protests in their appeal proceedings. In an earlier trial, the men had been sentenced to death.

Future culture minister advocates censorship

The planned appointment of Mohammad Mehdi Ismaili as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance has sparked increased criticism and protests on social media from Iranian cultural figures and film guilds. Ismaili is considered a hardliner and advocate of tighter censorship of book publishing, film and television. In a 73-page work program, Ismaili describes artists' associations such as Iran's Cinema House and Music House as major sources of crisis. He also stresses that in the past, numerous films and Western music spread an un-Islamic lifestyle and damaged the Islamic Revolution. Mohammad Mehdi Ismaili has yet to be confirmed as minister by parliament.

Kosovo

Attacks on members of the Serbian minority

According to current press reports, several attacks on Serbs occurred in the past 30 days. On 17.08.21, for example, suspected Kosovo Albanians attacked a young man in Mitrovica, injuring him slightly. The police arrested three suspects. On 10.08.21, unknown persons attacked a shepherd in the village of Zebince and also inflicted light injuries on him. On 30.07.21, the police arrested a person suspected of breaking into the home of returnee Dragica Gašić (cf. BN of 16.08.21) in Gjakova, who had experienced hostilities three days earlier. Furthermore, on 13.07.21, unknown persons seriously injured a person in the village of Dolac. According to Serbian media, the victim was a man who had fled to Serbia after the Kosovo war and had intended to return to his old home.

Lebanon

Supply crisis: Hospitals and sewage treatment plants shut down operations

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Lebanon has warned of the impact on health care and water supplies as the poor supply situation continues. Due to the ongoing fuel shortage, many hospitals have already drastically limited

their operations. In some areas, sewage treatment plants and waterworks are also operating to a limited extent only. The situation is particularly dramatic in the north of the country, where even telephone lines have recently collapsed.

Agreement on oil imports

The Central Bank of Lebanon has made a financing commitment for the import of a total of 80 million litres of fuel. In addition, the Lebanese central bank and the interim government have agreed that the dollar exchange rate for oil imports will be brought closer to the official exchange rate, although it will remain below market value. The move had become inevitable as the central bank had announced that it could not continue to support the exchange rate used in Lebanon, which is far below market value, due to a lack of foreign exchange. The transitional government has promised to close the resulting financing gap for fuel imports itself.

Hezbollah announces oil deliveries

Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of the Shiite Hezbollah militia, announced on 19.08.21 that a tanker with fuel from Iran was on its way to Lebanon. More oil shipments from Iran are to follow. He described the tankers as "Lebanese territory" and warned Israel and the United States against interfering. Some Lebanese politicians criticized Hezbollah's actions, calling them "dangerous" because imports from Iran are subject to an embargo. Lebanon thus ran the risk of sanctions, they warned.

Morocco

Pardons

On the occasion of the commemoration of the revolution of the king and the people in the struggle against colonization, the king pardoned 371 convicts. In the process, prison sentences were remitted, shortened and four times life sentences were commuted to limited sentences.

Mexico

Journalist killed in Veracruz

On 19.08.21 the radio journalist Jacinto Romero Flores was shot dead in the municipality of Ixtaczoquitlan in the state of Veracruz. According to his employer Ori Stereo, he had already received threats in advance due to earlier reports on police violence. At least five journalists are said to have been killed in 2021.

Myanmar

Death toll rises to more than 1,000, land mines, raids in Yangon

According to the human rights organisation Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), more than 1,000 people have died as a result of police and military violence since Min Aung Hlaing led the military coup on 01.02.21. 5,787 people are currently in detention, 1,984 arrest warrants are still outstanding (as of 21.08.21).

Five police personnel were shot dead by unknown persons on a train in Yangon (Rangoon) on 14.08.21. According to a media report, several soldiers of the military in Shan State were killed by landmines planted by the People's Defence Forces (PDA) of Pekon, on 16.08.21. Further landmine explosions, which allegedly killed soldiers, were reported from Gangwa Township (Magwe Region) on 18. and 19.08.21.

On 16. and 17.08.21, clashes between the military and ethnic armies and the People's Defence Force were reported from Mandalay, Sagaing, Magwe, and Chin, Shan, Kachin, and Kayah states.

According to the human rights group Fortify Rights, two senior commanders of the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) have admitted that security forces under their control arrested and later killed 25 men near the border with Thailand in June 2021 (cf. BN of 21.06.21). The Karen National Union (KNU), a political grouping of the Karen ethnicity, that controls the KNDO, informed Fortify Rights that it would cooperate with the international judiciary in dealing with the case.

During raids on the night of 20.08.21, members of the military reportedly arrested several people and looted shops and offices in Yangon (Rangoon).

Nicaragua

Repressive acts against freedom of the press and freedom of expression

On 12.08.21, La Prensa, a newspaper critical of the government, announced that it could no longer publish a print edition for the time being, because paper was withheld by the customs authority (Dirección General de Aduanas (DGA)), thus it would only publish digitally for now. Although the printed version of the newspaper has been repeatedly suspended since 2018 due to lack of resources, La Prensa remained the only newspaper in the country to publish a print edition since 2019. On 13.08.21, the national police searched the newspaper's editorial office on customs fraud and money laundering charges, and in this context confirmed the arrest of the newspaper's managing director, Juan Lorenzo Holmann Chamorro. The Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (RELE-CIDH), Pedro Vaca, condemned the attacks on La Prensa as acts of censorship. On 16.08.21, according to the official gazette, the government also suspended the registration of six international NGOs, including three organizations from the US, Oxfam organizations from Denmark and Spain, and Sweden's Diakonia. They are accused of failures in their accountability and transparency obligations under the NGO Act. In addition, a motion to revoke the legal capacity of 15 other local NGOs on similar charges is to be voted on in Parliament on 24.08.21. This would bring the total number of NGOs deprived of their legal capacity within one month to 45 (cf. BN of 26.07.21 and 02.08.21).

Niger

Attacks in the border region of Tillabéri cause numerous deaths

On 20.08.21, 19 people were killed and two people were wounded in an attack of the village of Theim in the border region of Tillabéri, according to the Nigerien Ministry of the Interior.

Already on 16.08.21, according to media reports, an attack occurred in the village of Darey-Daye, also located in Tillabéri, that claimed at least 37 lives. According to UNICEF, 13 children aged between 15 and 17 are among the victims. Tillabéri is experiencing deadly attacks on the civilian population time and again (cf. BN of 02.08.21).

Nigeria

Boko Haram/ISWAP: defections and recruitment attempts

Over 1,000 Boko Haram members and their families have surrendered to Nigerian forces in the southern and central parts of Borno state since mid-July. This is reported by the media, also citing military sources. According to representatives of the armed forces, the main reason for the high number of Boko Haram defectors are the ongoing military offensives (cf. BN of 28.06.21) in Nigeria's north-east. The man described as the husband of Chibok abduction victim Ruth Pogu (cf. BN of 09.08.21), who was released in early August 2021, is also a suspected Boko Haram member. Ruth Pogu is said to be earmarked for a government rehabilitation and reintegration programme (cf. BN of 19.04.21).

A report of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) of 18.08.21 states that since the death of long-time leader of the Boko Haram faction Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (JAS), Abubakar Shekau, in May 2021 (cf. BN of 21.06.21), over 2,000 people have left the group. As in the case of earlier desertions (cf. BN of 03.05.21), the reasons for leaving the terrorist group are complex, one of them is the threat of military operations in the region. A new aspect is the diminished fear of massive reprisals on the part of the JAS leadership when leaving the areas previously under Shekau's control. The defectors also include former fighters of the JAS faction or persons close to it, who do not want to join the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a Boko Haram splinter group that has probably gained strength since Shekau's death. According to ISS, it appears safer for these individuals and their families to remove themselves from the region or surrender to government forces than to position themselves against JAS rival ISWAP. Observers also report better treatment of defectors by the military than in previous desertion waves, according to the ISS.

The media recently reported that the Boko Haram factions are disseminating video footage that promising a carefree life in an attempt recruit new fighters. The propaganda is intended to compensate for the recent losses of manpower

due to renegades and defections. The split of Boko Haram into two main factions, JAS and ISWAP, dates back to 2016.

Another Chibok kidnap victim set free

Within days, another victim of the Chibok mass abduction has been released. This is said in a statement issued by the Governor of the north-eastern state of Borno on 14.08.21. Hassan Adamu is one of 276 schoolgirls abducted by the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram in Chibok village on the night of 14.04.14 to 15.08.21. According to official statements, she and her two children born in captivity, have been freed by the Nigerian military. According to media reports to the contrary, she had approached the military. Another Chibok abduction victim had already contacted the military in early August 2021 (cf. BN of 09.08.21). More than 100 others are still in the hands of Boko Haram or are considered missing.

Kidnappings, releases and deadly attacks in the north-west

On 15.08.21, unidentified persons abducted 15 students and at least four staff of the agricultural college in Bakura locality of the north-western state of Zamfara. Three security personnel were killed in a firefight with the security team of the college. It is said that three of the abducted workers have been rescued soon after. Three days after the crime, a short video was leaked to a TV station in which some of the kidnapping victims ask the state government to pay a ransom of NGN 350 million (about EUR 725,000).

On the evening of 19.08.21, according to media reports, there was another kidnapping in the village of Rini in Zamfara. It is reported that at least 60 villagers were kidnapped.

In Kaduna State bordering Zamfara, several people have been killed and injured in attacks and battles, according to media reports. For instance, nine people were reportedly killed in a skirmish between two rival kidnapper groups in Giwa Local Government Area on 18.08.21. In an act of revenge in Zangon Kataf Local Government area, three herds-men were reportedly killed and others injured. On 20.08.21, one person was said to have been killed, several persons injured and over 50 persons were sent fleeing by so-called bandits in Ungwan Ayaba locality in Chikun Local Government Area. Meanwhile, according to authorities, on 22.08.21 in Kaduna State, 15 of the school children abducted on 05.07.21 from Bethel Baptist High School (cf. BN of 12.07.21) were released by the abductors after 48 days in captivity. The school principal stated that the parents had paid a ransom, but this has not been officially confirmed. According to the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Kaduna, 65 children of Bethel Baptist High School are still in the hands of the kidnappers. Kidnappings have been on the rise since December 2020, up to now eleven kidnappings near educational institutions in the northern states have been recorded (cf. BN of 16.08.21).

North Macedonia

Afghan refugees receive temporary shelter

According to a recent media report, North Macedonia (along with Albania and Kosovo) would like to comply with the US request to provide temporary refuge to several hundred Afghan civilians who tried to flee Afghanistan after the Taliban took power in the country. The report also said that the North Macedonian government had said they were about 390 Afghan civilians who had worked for humanitarian organizations, media and human rights groups within the scope of cooperation with the Western alliance, as well as their families. Accommodation was being prepared for them in North Macedonian hostels, hotels and resorts, with the costs being met by international organizations and the United States. In coordination with these partners, the reception and care of the refugees would only be for a limited period of time until they could be transferred to the United States or third countries.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Israel

Gaza Strip: Numerous people injured in clash at border facility, Israeli air strikes

The radical Islamic Hamas group called for protests in the Gaza Strip on 21.08.21 to draw attention to Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. During the protests on the northern border of the Gaza Strip, some Palestinians attempted to force their way across the border fortifications, to which the Israeli military responded with tear gas and live ammunition. According to Palestinian authorities, 41 Palestinians were wounded. Two of them, including

a thirteen-year-old, reportedly sustained critical injuries. The Israeli military said that a member of the border police had also been critically wounded.

In response to the previous day's events, the Israeli military bombed several Hamas positions on 22.08.21, which according to the military included arms production facilities and warehouses.

Gaza Strip: Israel approves Qatari financial aid to Gaza with a new distribution system

On 19.08.21, Israeli authorities announced the approval of a new system for importing financial aid from Qatar into the Gaza Strip. Prior to the eleven-day war in May 2021, monthly financial aid for needy Palestinian families was taken to the Gaza Strip in cash. The new system involves diverting the funds to the UN and redistributing them to bank accounts of eligible individuals. Israeli authorities are to monitor the payments.

Gaza Strip: Egypt closes Rafah border crossing

Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, was informed by Egyptian authorities that the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip would be closed indefinitely as of 23.08.21. According to Egyptian sources in the security apparatus, the decision is the result of the authorities' security concerns.

Russian Federation

TV channel Dozhd declared a "foreign agent"

On 20.08.21 the Russian government classified the independent television station Dozhd (Russian for "Rain") as a so-called "foreign agent". According to the Ministry of Justice in Moscow, the station was placed on a corresponding list. Organizations that are considered "foreign agents" in Russia must, among other things, disclose their funding and label all publications with a notice. Dozhd is one of the few broadcasters in Russia that up to now also reported on opposition protests and the fate of imprisoned Putin critic Navalny. Journalists critical of the government regularly have their say there as well. The TV station was founded in 2010 and had to leave the Russian cable network in 2014. Since then, it has only been broadcasting on the internet. This continues the Russian leadership's crackdown on the few remaining media critical of the government, four weeks before the scheduled parliamentary elections on 19.09.21.

Somalia

Taliban takeover in Afghanistan: Al-Shabaab jubilant, concerns about end of mandate of AMISOM

Al-Shabaab cheered the overthrow of the Afghan government by the Taliban in media close to it. Experts, including former Somali intelligence officer Abdulsalam Gulaid, warn of a similar situation when the mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) expires at the end of 2021 and international forces attempt to transfer security responsibilities to the Somali government. So far, he said, the latter has been heavily dependent on international troops. At the same time, Gulaid stressed that while al-Shabaab did not have the military power of the Taliban, he had no doubt that nothing would stop them should they decide to conquer territory. In an interview with local media, the president's national security adviser, Abdi Syed Ali, strongly rejected any comparison of the security situations or of the Somali military to Afghan forces.

Attack in Mogadishu

On 19.08.21, a suicide bombing in Mogadishu killed at least two people and injured others, according to official sources. Other sources speak of at least four fatalities. The attack occurred in a restaurant near the busy Jubba intersection. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sri Lanka

COVID-19

The number of infections and deaths associated with the Covid virus continues to rise sharply. Hospitals, mortuaries and crematoria are reaching their capacity limits and healthcare workers are increasingly affected by infections. By the end of July 2021, the delta variant already accounted for over 60%. So far, according to official figures, over 390,000 people have been infected and more than 7,000 people have died (as of 23.08.21). Recently the number of new daily infections exceeded 4,000. However, the actual figure is assumed to be much higher. On 16.08.21 President Rajapaksa replaced Health Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi, who among other things had publicly promoted the use of magic potions against the virus. A nationwide lockdown has been in place since 20.08.21, initially for ten days. Around 25 % of the population are considered to be fully vaccinated (as of 23.08.21).

Sudan

Doctors resign from committee investigating protest victims

Four forensic doctors sent a letter of resignation from a post-mortem committee set up to investigate the victims of the protests that have been ongoing since 2019. They denounced the interference of the attorney general's office in their activities. Prosecutor Mohamed Abdallah, they said, had insisted on burying 23 bodies before they had been fully identified. There was also a possibility that bodies had been replaced by missing persons in order to bury them outside legal regulations, they said.

Heavy rainfall and flooding

On 18.08.21, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said heavy rains and flooding were reported in 11 of the 18 states. More than 55,000 people had been affected and over 3,000 houses destroyed.

South Sudan

Assault

On 16.08.21, at least five civilians, including two Ugandan religious sisters, were killed in an armed robbery on Juba-Nimule Road. A week earlier, two people were killed and three others injured in attacks on the same road. It is not known who is responsible for the attacks.

Syria

SDF and Turkish army exchange fire

Five people were killed and at least 15 others injured in artillery shelling in northern Syria on 18.08.21. According to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Turkish troops and Syrian Arab militiamen supported by Turkey, fired rockets at the area around Abu Rassine. Two civilians were reportedly killed. The SDF then took Afrin under fire, where three people were killed, this is reported by the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). Turkish media put the number of dead at four.

Idlib: artillery fire by government troops causes fatalities

According to SOHR, five civilians, including five minors, were killed when the village of Balshon in the south of Idlib governorate was shelled. The north-west continues to be gripped by sporadic fighting that regularly results in civilian casualties, despite a March 2020 ceasefire agreement. The north-west, where the rebels have retreated in and around Idlib, is estimated to be home to about four million people.

Russian missile defence system intercepts 22 Israeli projectiles

According to the statement of a Russian admiral, the Syrian air defence has been able to intercept 22 out of a total of 24 Israeli missiles that were allegedly fired at targets in Syria on 20.08.21. According to the statement, Russia has equipped the Syrian military with Pantsyr-S and Buk-M2 weapon systems for air defence.

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, the Israeli Air Force has been repeatedly targeting weapons and ammunition deliveries or depots of Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed militias. During the latest attack, six fighter jets reportedly took military targets near Damascus and Homs under fire. Until now, Israel has mostly been able to operate unhindered in Lebanese-Syrian airspace.

Tajikistan

Military service reorganized

The Tajik government has set the fee for exemption from the two-year compulsory military service (cf. BN of 08.03.21). Those subject to military service can limit it to one month of basic reserve service against payment of the equivalent of EUR 1,882. This is regulated in a government resolution published on 16.08.21. Men who have not performed military service will be barred from serving as civil servants in agencies such as the prosecutor's office, courts and executive public institutions. Men between the ages of 18 and 27 are subject to compulsory service. There is no alternative civilian service.

Turkey

Fighting the PKK

During the Eren-14 military operation, eight suspected PKK members were killed by security forces in Hakkari province on 17.08.21, according to the government.

On 18.08.21, six people were arrested in Ankara, accused of being involved in PKK activities and spreading terrorist propaganda on social media. Another person is being sought.

Review of NGOs

On 20.08.21, President Erdoğan ordered the State Supervisory Council Devlet Denetleme Kurulu (DDK) to review NGOs including cooperatives, foundations and non-profit associations, as well as their partners, according to media reports. The review is being conducted under the new Anti-Terror Law on the Prevention of Financing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which came into force on 31.12.20.

Arrest of suspected coup plotters

On 18.08.21, the Fifth High Criminal Court in Ankara ordered the detention of 14 defendants, including several former generals, allegedly involved in the 1997 coup. The defendants had already been sentenced to life imprisonment in 2018. Two of the defendants had applied to the Constitutional Court to suspend the execution of the sentence, citing their advanced age and health problems, and they also claimed that evidence had been fabricated in the trial.

Uganda

Numerous NGOs suspended

The government announced the suspension of 54 NGOs, which must cease their activities with immediate effect. The alleged reason for the suspension is non-compliance with official requirements, including lack of registration or invalid work permits. The suspended NGOs include politically, religiously and economically active associations, including leading human rights organizations.

Ukraine

Blocking of opposition news site

According to a decree issued by President Zelenskyy that became known on 21.08.21, the opposition news website strana.ua has been blocked with immediate effect. The measure was justified as being related to the sanctions against the editor-in-chief, Ihor Hushva, who is in exile in Austria. According to media reports, he is accused of spreading

pro-Russian propaganda. The decision was met with criticism from the Ukrainian Association of Journalists. In February 2021, a presidential decree had already banned the operation of three Ukrainian news channels, which were also accused of spreading pro-Russian propaganda (cf. BN of 08.02.21).

Venezuela

Talks between opposition and government, release of Freddy Guevara

On 13.08.21, talks on the resumption of the dialogue between representatives of the opposition (Plataforma Unitaria de Venezuela) and the government took place in Mexico City, following mediation by Norway. The government side had abandoned the last attempt at dialogue in Barbados in 2019 after the US had tightened its sanctions. The renewed dialogue is aimed at resolving the political and economic crisis in the country, which has triggered a major wave of refugees. President Nicolás Maduro is demanding the lifting of US and EU sanctions as a condition for reaching an agreement. The opposition, on the other hand, is demanding the release of political prisoners as well as allowing a fair participation in the regional elections in November 2021. It is also seeking to ensure that humanitarian aid can enter the country without problems. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the next meeting of both parties was set for 03 to 06.09.21. On 15.08.21 the opposition politician Freddy Guevara was released from prison (cf. BN of 19.07.21), which various media reports interpreted as a first concession from the government side to the opposition within the context of the dialogue.

Vietnam

Prison sentence for member of the Provisional National Government of Vietnam

On 16.08.21, a court in Nge An province sentenced a member of the Provisional National Government of Vietnam exile organization to three years in prison for activities to overthrow the government, according to media reports. The U.S.-based organization has been classified as a terrorist organization by the Vietnamese government since 2018.

Yemen

Over 170,000 people affected by flooding

In an emergency response plan released on 16.08.21, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has indicated that nearly 25,000 households or 174,000 people have been affected by the extraordinarily heavy rains in July and August. IDPs and their improvised shelters were particularly hard hit. Among other things, the floods destroyed already scarce food and shelter, further worsening the humanitarian situation of those affected.

Special drawing rights allocated

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has announced that it will allocate special drawing rights (SDRs) of USD 665 to Yemen. These can be exchanged for hard currency in order to obtain foreign exchange. Yemen is in urgent need of foreign exchange to combat the ongoing humanitarian disaster.

Iranian military adviser killed

Saudi media have reported that air strikes by the anti-Houthi coalition in the district of Serwah (Marib governorate) killed nine fighters as well as an Iranian officer who was presumably acting as a military adviser to the Houthi rebels. The reports were denied by the Iranian foreign minister. Meanwhile, fighting in Marib between the Houthis and the anti-Houthi coalition continues.