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Briefing Notes

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Afghanistan

Government affairs

The Taliban has reportedly been issuing passports again in almost all provinces since 05.12.21. At a meeting in Doha, the Taliban requested support from the EU in operating airports and pledged once again to allow people who wish to leave the country to do so, to refrain from exacting revenge on former government employees and to observe human rights. The air force has flown its first manoeuvre under the Taliban, using the toppled government's American MI-17 and MD helicopters. It was announced on 01.12.21 that Saudi Arabia and India intend to reopen their embassies in Afghanistan.

Economic and humanitarian situation

It was reported on 01.12.21 that the Taliban have begun collecting ushr, a 10 % tax on agricultural products under Islamic law. It has also been reported that farmers in Kapisa province are protesting against this tax in view of the general shortage of food. According to the head of the agricultural authority in Herat, the saffron harvest is up to 50 % less than in 2020, due to the drought. 90 % of Afghan saffron comes from Herat province. While, according to Afghanistan's national association of saffron workers, the international prices for saffron are up to three times as high as in 2020, the export of saffron has been stopped since the Taliban came to power. On 02.12.21 the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reportedly paid US\$ 16 million in cash to the Afghan central bank for humanitarian purposes. On the same day, the World Bank approved US\$ 280 million in humanitarian aid. On 01.12.21, Save the Children reported that at least 780,000 children are homeless and 8.6 million children are without protection from the cold. The lack of protection against the cold of winter comes on top of the threat of famine facing five million children. A second delivery of humanitarian relief supplies from Russia (totalling 36 tonnes and including wheat, sugar and tea) reportedly arrived in Afghanistan on 01.12.21. On 03.12.21 it was reported the Pakistan is allowing the transfer of Indian relief supplies (wheat, medicine) to Afghanistan. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) announced on 04.12.21 that refugees from Afghanistan currently represent the largest group of asylum applicants in the EU. On 30.11.21 the UNHCR reportedly paid approx. US\$ 265 in aid money to each of 1,000 needy families in Kabul.

Violence against civilians

A report published by Human Rights Watch on 30.11.21 accuses the Taliban of having killed more than 100 former members of the military, police and secret service in four provinces alone (Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Kunduz), despite having announced an amnesty. Family members were allegedly also threatened and mistreated in corresponding raids. In response to this report, on 05.12.21 20 countries called on the Taliban to implement their amnesty as announced and to investigate the killings. Members of the Hazara Shiite minority who have fled from their home towns and villages to Kabul report of having been violently driven out of their homes in Daikundu and Uruzgan provinces. Taliban spokesmen deny these accusations. There are also reports of members of the Uzbek

and Turkmen minorities being driven out of their villages in the northern province of Jowzjan and of the Taliban arbitrarily searching smartphones for music and private photographs and videos. Violence has reportedly been used against people with files which are considered “un-Islamic” on their smartphones. Taliban spokesmen have stated that they have not ordered any such practice. Residents of the city of Firuzkuh in Ghor province report of public address calls by the Taliban stating that men are no longer allowed to shave their beards and that all shops must close during prayer times and men must gather for prayers.

Albania

Zaharia prison closed

On 29.11.21 the government closed the Zaharia prison for mentally ill inmates in the city of Krujë. The remaining 319 inmates were temporarily transferred to another prison in the city of Lezhë and are subsequently to be accommodated at a special establishment under the administration of the health ministry. The Zaharia prison had been criticised for many years by human rights organisations and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on account of the prevailing conditions of imprisonment, calling on the government to close the institution.

Bangladesh

Violence in connection with local elections

According to reports in the media, at least eight more people were killed and a number of people were injured during the third phase of the local elections on 28.11.21. Since April 2021 at least 80 people are believed to have been killed and numerous people injured in connection with the elections (cf. BN of 08.11.21).

Benin

Clashes claim lives

Unknown assailants attacked a military position in Porga (department of Atacora) near to the border with Burkina Faso from 01.12. to 02.12.21. Two members of the security forces and one attacker were killed; several members of the security forces were injured.

One attacker was killed in an exchange of fire between a patrol of the security forces and unknown attackers in Banikoara, in the neighbouring department of Alibori, on 30.11.21.

According to official information, these incidents represent the first attacks by extremists on the Beninese armed forces.

Burkina Faso

Military operation with regional involvement

Armed forces from Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo carried out a joint operation against extremists in the border region with Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo between 21.11. and 27.11.21. The government reported on 30.11.21 that 300 suspects had been arrested in the course of the operation, which went by the name of Goundalgou 4 Zone 2 (or, according to other sources, Koudanlgou IV). Around 30 extremists of unspecified allegiance were reportedly killed on the border with Côte d’Ivoire and five extremist bases destroyed. Firearms, 144 motorcycles and other vehicles were allegedly seized, together with substantial quantities of ammunition, explosives and narcotics. 5,728 members of the security forces reportedly took part in the operation. Three similar operations took place in 2018 and 2019.

Extremists take control of village

According to reports in the media, suspected fighters of the extremist Support Group for Islam and Muslims (JNIM) have taken control of the village of Nadiagou (Est region) at the border with Togo and Benin. They apparently

entered the village wearing security forces uniforms at the end of November 2021. Some residents fled from the village.

Attack claims lives

Four civilians died when a mine exploded in the village of Lallin (Centre-Est region) on 01.12.21. The incident prompted villagers to flee to neighbouring villages.

Arrests

Mamadou Drabo, executive secretary of the Save Burkina Faso movement (SBF), was arrested on 29.11.21 together with other individuals involved in organising the demonstrations of 27.11.21 (cf. BN of 29.11.21). They are accused of attacking the security of the state and destroying public property. The SBF and other civil society actors called for demonstrations on 27.11.21. Violent incidents occurred on this day when security forces took action against the banned event in Quagadougou.

Cameroon

Attack on LGBTIQ person

On 20.11.21 Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported a brutal attack on an intersexual person. A violent mob attacked, threatened and humiliated the victim in the capital, Jaunde, on 15.11.21. The attack, which lasted several hours, was filmed by the perpetrators and corresponding videos were later circulated in social media. HRW criticised the fact that the Cameroonian authorities initially failed to make any public statement on the incident, alleging that this ran the risk of signalling tolerance for such acts and highlighted the government's failure to protect members of the LGBTIQ community in the country. An appeal issued by the human rights organisation Cameroonian Foundation for AIDS (CAMFAID), which supports the rights of LGBTIQ people, calling for the attack of 15.11.21 to be investigated and those responsible to be brought to justice, has remained unanswered. The Cameroonian government responded one week after the publication of HRW's report, stating that LGBTIQ people are increasingly subject to violence and brutality.

HRW already reported a rising number of attacks on LGBTIQ people in Cameroon back in April 2021 (cf. BN of 03.05.21).

Central African Republic

Simultaneous attacks in north-west claim many lives

Around 33 people, including two soldiers, were killed in two simultaneous attacks on 29.11.21 in the villages of Bayengou and Kaïta (Ouham-Pendé prefecture). The attacks were reported by media citing the local subprefect (Bocaranga subprefect). 8,000 people reportedly fled to Cameroon in the face of the attacks. The army has positions in both villages. The attack is being blamed on the group Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R), which has also been held responsible for similar attacks in the recent past (cf. BN of 20.09.21 and 22.11.21). A local news page, Corbeau News Centrafrique, has published an announcement described as a communiqué from 3R in which the group denies responsibility and accuses Russian soldiers of having perpetrated the attacks. Radio France International (RFI) quotes the subprefect as stating that the allied Russians are necessary within the national army for the sake of the population's security. According to RFI, the incident involves the highest number of casualties since president Touadéra called a unilateral ceasefire on 15.10.21 (cf. BN of 25.10.21).

Parts of the army allegedly under the command of Russian mercenaries

Corbeau News Centrafrique recently reported at least two incidents with markedly higher death tolls. While it appears that the reports are not being taken up in international media, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project database (ACLED) is using the page as a source of information. The situation is difficult to assess from outside, as accusations of disinformation are repeatedly voiced from various quarters in connection with events in the Central African Republic.

Such accusations are also to be found in a current internal report by the European External Action Service (EEAS) which is cited in the media. The accusations are aimed here at the Russian Federation and Russian mercenaries. The

report alleges that a major part of the Central African Republic's army is under the direct command or supervision of Russian mercenaries, including units which have been trained under the EU Training Mission (EUTM). The Russian presence and Russian influence allegedly also extends to other government institutions. Russian mercenaries are frequently accused of serious human rights violations (cf. BN of 29.11.21).

Chad

Almost 300 political dissidents and insurgents pardoned

At least 296 individuals living in exile or held in prison have been granted amnesty in accordance with a resolution by the transitional government of 29.11.21. The pardoned individuals were convicted between 2005 and 2019 of terrorist actions or offences and the expression of opinions which threatened the integrity of the state. For numerous rebel groups, the general amnesty was one of several preconditions for their participation in the National Dialogue initiated by the country's president and chairman of the Transitional Military Council (CMT), Mahamat Idriss Déby (cf. BN of 08.11.21). The spokesman for the rebel group Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad (FACT) voiced criticism that members of FACT who were arrested after fighting with the Chadian army in April and May 2021 had not been included in the amnesty, however.

China

Concern about tennis player Peng Shuai's disappearance from the public eye

Due to serious doubts that Chinese professional tennis player Peng Shuai is "free, safe and not subject to censorship, coercion and intimidation", the head of the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), Steve Simon, called on 02.12.21 for an investigation into Peng's allegations that she was abused by former vice-premier Zhang Gaoli. Simon said that all tournaments in China would be suspended until the case was resolved. Inside China there is no reporting on the case and discussion of the matter is prevented by censorship. As the sole organisation in contact with Peng, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has also expressed concern, but without mentioning the allegations against Zhang Gaoli. Zhang was one of the leading planners of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Peking.

Colombia

Two FARC dissident groups added to US list of foreign terrorist organisations

As previously announced (cf. BN of 29.11.21), the US State Department removed the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) from its list of foreign terrorist organisations on 30.11.21. Among other consequences, this means that in future the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will be able to provide financial support for the promotion of peace and reintegration projects for former FARC fighters who have handed in their weapons. At the same time, US Secretary of State Blinken also announced that two FARC dissident groups, La Segunda Marquetalia and FARC-EP (FARC-Ejército del Pueblo) have been listed as foreign terrorist organisations and their leaders as international terrorists.

DR Congo

North Kivu, Ituri: Conflicts, security situation, Ugandan military intervention

It has been reported in the press that concerted military operations by the Congolese army (FARDC) and the Ugandan armed forces (UPDF) against the radical Islamist rebel group Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF) began on 30.11.21. The operations are to be restricted to the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, which have been under a state of siege since May 2021. The case for joint military operations was made in a report by the defence and security committee of the Congolese national assembly, which criticised the modest success of the controversial state of siege and the transgressions which have occurred in these circumstances to date, including serious human rights violations by the Congolese armed forces (cf. BN of 08.11.21). Uganda accuses the ADF, which was forced out of Ugandan territory at the beginning of the 21st century and has since operated in DR Congo, of having carried out

attacks in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, in November and October 2021. As previously in 2017, prior to starting the ground offensive the UPDF launched air and artillery strikes against ADF positions from Ugandan territory. The presence of some 1,700 Ugandan soldiers in DR Congo is reportedly causing concern among the local population, giving rise to opposition in civil society and arousing memories of the UPDF's violent actions during the Congolese civil war from 1998 to 2003. In 2005 the International Court of Justice in The Hague (ICJ) found Uganda guilty of breaching DR Congo's sphere of sovereignty and of serious human rights crimes. The ICJ required Uganda to pay reparations to DR Congo, which remain outstanding. Civil society actors and observer organisations fear that the civilian population's problematic security situation could now be further exacerbated. On 04.12.21 the UPDF denied reports that civilians had been killed and civilians' homes bombed in the air and artillery strikes against a number of ADF bases. On the same day UN bodies, NGOs and independent sources told The East African that they had no knowledge of any civilian casualties at present. Analyses of the situation indicate that the entry of Ugandan troops into the country could further jeopardise DR Congo's stability and heighten cross-border tensions in the Great Lakes region, in particular between DR Congo and Rwanda and between Uganda and Rwanda, who have twice fought one another on Congolese soil. Recent weeks have witnessed speculation on Rwanda again bringing a destabilising influence to bear in DR Congo. Press reporting in November 2021 indicates that at least three attacks by rebels occurred in the Rutshuru territory of North Kivu province in November 2021. The attacks have been attributed to the Mouvement du 23-Mars (M23) rebel group, which was officially dissolved in 2013, had previously controlled a number of areas in North Kivu and was allegedly previously supported by Rwanda.

Ituri: CODECO attacks on camps for displaced people lead to substantial internal displacement

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UNHCR, the province of Ituri, which is subject to substantial militia violence and is under a state of siege, witnessed attacks on four different crowded camps for internally displaced people. The attacks are being blamed on the militia Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO). These attacks alone have internally displaced several tens of thousands of people and claimed at least 123 lives. The UN bodies state that the displaced people are exposed to extremely tough conditions in their places of refuge. According to OCHA, several humanitarian organisations have stopped providing humanitarian supplies and aid in recent weeks on account of the bad security situation and serious security incidents. Following the cessation of activities by the NGO Médecins sans frontières (MSF) in certain areas of conflict-ridden Djugu Territory, around 470,000 vulnerable people reportedly have no access to medical care. OCHA assesses the health and humanitarian situation in Djugu Territory as alarming. According to MSF, the poor security situation rules out the resumption of humanitarian activities.

Maniema: High prevalence of gender-specific violence

Citing an official national report, UN radio station Okapi reports that over 6,400 gender-specific acts of violence were documented in the reporting year of 2020 in the eastern Congolese province of Maniema alone. A climate of impunity is said to prevail in the province. Laws which are enacted against gender-specific violence are not effectively enforced as a rule. Gender-specific and sexualised violence is widespread in all parts of DR Congo (cf. BN of 06.09.21).

El Salvador

IACHR verdict in case of Manuela v. El Salvador

On 30.11.21 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) declared El Salvador to be responsible for the death of a woman in prison who had been sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment for abortion in 2008 on account of a miscarriage. A complete ban on abortion has been in place in the country since 1998. According to NGOs, more than 180 women have been convicted of murder on this legal basis in connection with obstetric emergencies in the past 20 years. The woman concerned allegedly also lacked the regular treatment for cancer which she required in prison. The IACHR required El Salvador to pay compensation to the woman's children and called on the country to revise its strict anti-abortion laws.

Ethiopia

Military announces successes in the fight against the TDF

According to information from the government, the Ethiopian army has recaptured various towns and regions in the regional states of Amhara and Afar which were most recently under the control of the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF). The TDF claims that it has carried out a “strategic retreat”. While no independent confirmation is available, observers consider an advance by the Ethiopian military to be possible, pointing in this connection to the increased use of drones.

Gabon

Prisoners go on hunger strike

According to NGO SOS Prisonniers, 102 female inmates at the central prison in Libreville went on hunger strike on 01.12.21. They are protesting against difficult prison conditions, including overcrowding, poor food and sexual assaults by prison staff.

Gambia

Incumbent Barrow wins presidential election

The incumbent, Adama Barrow, won an absolute majority and was confirmed in office (taking around 53 % of the vote, with turnout at around 87 %) in the presidential elections which went off largely peacefully on 04.12.21. Opposition candidate Ousainou Darboe from the United Democratic Party (UDP) came second, claiming around 28 % of the vote. Darboe and two other opposition candidates – Mama Kandeh from the Gambia Democratic Congress party (GDC) and the independent candidate Essa Faal, former chief lawyer of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) – complained of irregularities in the election before the final result was declared. The opposition is examining options for legal action, including challenging the election.

Guinea

Ex-president Condé under house arrest

Citing an announcement by the self-proclaimed National Committee of Reconciliation and Development (CNRD), various media sources have reported that former president Alpha Condé, who was removed from office in a coup on 05.09.21 (cf. BN of 06.09.21), has been transferred to his wife’s house. The CNRD had previously been holding him at an unknown location. The conditions in which he is being held reportedly remain virtually unchanged, however: His cook and doctor are available to him, he is not allowed to leave the house and he is not permitted access to a telephone.

Guinea-Bissau

Study on violence against women

According to reports in the media, a study presented to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November) reveals widespread violence against women in the country. The report states that this violence pervades different ethnicities and religious affiliations, regions and levels of education, but without revealing any direct correlations with these factors. The representative study is based on interviews with more than 1,000 women aged between 18 and 59. It concludes that around 67 % of Guinean women have experienced at least one of four forms of violence. Among women in steady partnerships the figure stood at 63 %. Of these, 44 % had suffered psychological violence, one quarter economic violence, 38 % physical violence and 22 % sexual violence. Outside of partnerships, physical violence very commonly originates from members of the family, in particular fathers. 60 % of respondents additionally stated that they were victims of female genital mutilation, which has been prohibited since 2011.

Half of respondents consider domestic violence acceptable. Only 21 out of a total of 687 women who have experienced violence informed the police, and only in one case was the aggressor arrested. In addition, almost half of respondents stated that they had been married when aged under 18.

India

Nagaland: Civilians killed

More than a dozen civilians were shot dead by Indian soldiers in the eastern federal state of Nagaland, which borders on Myanmar, on 04.12. and 05.12.21. The incident began when security forces in Mon district opened fire on a truck carrying miners whom they suspected were rebels, killing at least six people. Seven more people were shot dead in clashes with security forces following subsequent protests. Police reinforcements moved in to de-escalate the situation. The mobile internet and the text messaging service were briefly shut down in the district. The situation remained tense for some time.

The armed rebellion in Nagaland had become relatively quiet in recent years, as separatist groups were involved in negotiations with the Indian government.

Iran

Death and prison sentences for participants in November disturbances

Iranian human rights organisations and foreign media report one death sentence and one prison sentence for two participants in the protests of November 2019. The two brothers were arrested in connection with the disturbances in Mahshahr (Khuzestan province) and subsequently charged with the murder of a member of one of the special units belonging to the Iranian law enforcement agencies, moharebeh ('war against God and the divine order') and the disturbance of public order. The elder of the two brothers was sentenced to death, while the younger brother received a life prison term. Contrary to the statutory provisions, the family has so far only been informed of the sentences verbally by way of the prison administration. The defendants' lawyers were refused access to the records of the case. The verdicts are based in part on a confession by the two defendants which was recorded by the state radio and television station and subsequently broadcast. It is suspected that the confession was enforced under torture.

Man arrested for reports on protests

According to reports by Iranian human rights organisations, a young man was arrested in the south Iranian city of Behbahan (Khuzestan) in connection with a summons to appear before the fourth branch for hearings of the local general court and revolutionary court and subsequently placed in prison. The grounds stated for the summons were "publications on the persons arrested during the unrest on 26 Tir 1400 (16.07.20)". On the stated date, large numbers of people had protested in the town against the poor economic situation and against the death sentences pronounced on the participants in the protests of November 2019. Although the summons stated that the accused was to appear for the hearing on the said date with his lawyer, the latter was excluded from the hearing and prevented from performing his duties as legal counsel.

Denouncement of censorship and repression of writers

It has been reported in the media that the Iranian Writers' Association released a statement condemning the oppression, imprisonment and murder of individuals involved in writing and journalism on 04.12.21 (13.09.1400 according to the Iranian calendar) – the Day of Struggle Against Censorship in Iran. The Writers' Association established the annual Day of Struggle Against Censorship in 2008, in memory of two writers who were murdered by secret service agents in December 1998. The report states that the author and initiator of the memorial day has been in prison together with two other involved writers since 2020.

According to press reports, the present statement is a response to the Iranian government's pressure on free reporting and represents a stand against the censorship of free media, confiscations, arrests and restrictions on internet use, which are increasingly jeopardising the freedom of speech. In the report, the association also warns of abductions of Iranian media representatives abroad.

Student activist sentenced to five-year prison term

Foreign media report that division 36 of the court of appeal in Tehran sentenced a student activist to five years' imprisonment on 05.12.21. The student's lawyer stated that the convicted woman had been charged in connection with the organisation of a student rally outside Sharif Technical University in remembrance of a student and imprisoned Gonabadi Dervishes.

The activist was reportedly briefly detained in 2017 in connection with student protests in Tehran and was sentenced to six years' imprisonment and banned from leaving the country. According to her lawyer, this sentence was initially reduced on appeal to 30 months and the conviction was eventually revoked in its entirety.

Iraq

Operations against IS

Violent attacks by IS continue, both on the civilian population and against the armed forces. On 02.12.21 IS carried out a series of attacks on the villages of Liheban and Khidirjija in the Makhmour district of Ninive province, which forms part of disputed territories. At least ten members of the Peshmerga were killed and a number were injured, some seriously. A family home was subsequently attacked and three brothers were killed, the youngest of whom was eleven.

On 05.12.21 IS attacked Peshmerga checkpoints near the village of Qara Salim in the neighbouring province of Kirkuk, killing at least four members of the Peshmerga (as per 06.12.21). The full extent of the attack is still being assessed. A meeting of high-ranking members of the security forces in Baghdad on 04.12.21 yielded expressions of willingness for Kurdish and central Iraqi forces to engage in closer cooperation and an appeal to the anti-IS coalition to lend considerably more support. Attempts to establish joint Kurdish-central Iraqi brigades have so far failed, leaving a substantial security vacuum across a broad strip between territories under Kurdish and central Iraqi control.

Protests against election

Iraq's electoral commission announced the final result of the election on 30.12.21. The final result differed only minimally from the provisional result, with no shifts of relevance to the political majorities in the country. Criticism of the electoral commission continues in particular from the now markedly diminished Fatih Alliance – the political arm of the Iran-backed militias – which claims that the commission is incompetent, ballot machines were manipulated and the election result does not represent the will of the people. There have been no notable demonstrations against the election result, however.

Latin America

Increase in food insecurity and prevalence of hunger

According to a report published on 30.11.21 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) to provide a regional overview of food and nutrition security, the number of people suffering from hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in 2020 was 30 % up on the level in 2019. The total of 59 million people affected by hunger, representing around 9 % of the total LAC population, represents the highest level for 15 years. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this trend. The countries most severely affected by malnutrition and a prevalence of hunger were Haiti (46.7 %), Venezuela (27.4 %; by comparison: 2009-2011: <2.5 %) and Nicaragua (19.3 %). Overall, more than 267 million people were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020, corresponding to four out of ten people in LAC and indicating that 9 % more people than in the previous year lacked access to food in adequate quantity or quality. Women were commonly more severely affected than men.

Lebanon

Economic situation

The economic situation in Lebanon remains strained. The Lebanese pound rallied slightly after controversial minister Kordahi resigned on 03.12.21, raising hopes that the trade sanctions imposed by Saudi Arabia and a number

of Gulf states on account of his comments on the war in Yemen would be lifted. A replacement for the ex-minister has yet to be nominated.

Several large refuse disposal companies discontinued their services in Beirut and Mount Lebanon on 02.12.21, claiming that their contracts with the development ministry had not been fulfilled. Lebanon has repeatedly had to contend with refuse disposal crises, most recently in 2015 and 2016. In the current situation fears are increasing of a worsening of the health crisis.

Libya

Appeal by Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi granted

The central electoral commission's exclusion of Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, son of former ruler Muammar al-Gaddafi, from running in the presidential elections scheduled for 24.12.21 led to an appeal by Saif al-Islam (cf. BN of 29.11.21). A court in the southern Libyan city of Sabha granted his appeal against the electoral commission's decision and reinstated Saif al-Islam as a presidential candidate.

Mali

Attack kills at least 31 civilians

On 03.12.21 an attack took place in the Mopti region on a bus which was travelling from the village of Songho to a local market in Bandiagara, some 10 km away. At least 31 people, including women and children, were reportedly killed and many injured. Unknown armed attackers shot at the bus and set fire to the vehicle. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack to date.

Mexico

Zacatecas: Cartel violence and drugs war

Following a week which claimed 17 lives, on 24.11.21 president López Obrador (AMLO) announced the deployment of military reinforcements to the federal state of Zacatecas, where various cartels are fighting for dominance of the drug trade. Several armed clashes nevertheless occurred on 26.11. and 27.11.21 in Valparaíso, Zacatecas, between the drug cartels Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) and Cartel de Sinaloa (CDS), resulting in more than twelve deaths on 26.11.21 and a further 30 on 27.11.21, according to reports in the media. Cartel violence has increased sharply in recent months. At least 440 people have been killed in the past three months and 57 dead bodies were hung from various bridges in the federal state as public warnings. In the first ten months of the year, the death toll in connection with cartel violence and the drugs war totalled 948 – almost 350 more than over the same period last year. Since the beginning of 2021, nine municipalities have been without any police officers. Clashes between rival cartels are not limited to northern and central Mexico: as recently as October 2021, two tourists were killed in a shoot-out between drug gangs in Tulum, in the tourist state of Quintana Roo.

Montenegro

Opposition tables motion for vote of no confidence against the government

According to a recent report in the media, the opposition has brought forward a motion signed by all 40 opposition MPs for a vote of no confidence to be held against the government of Zdravko Krivokapic, which was elected to office in December 2020. A date has apparently yet to be set for the vote of no confidence. In a joint statement setting out the grounds for their initiative, the opposition parties assert that the government has brought the country into a state of political and institutional paralysis, making it unable to act in connection with upcoming reform projects such as driving forward the ongoing EU accession process. The leader of the largest bloc in the governing alliance, Andrija Mandić of the pro-Serbian Democratic Front (DF) has reportedly called on all the other alliances of parties making up the government's majority to negotiate on a government reshuffle and reach a corresponding agreement. According to reports in the media, the co-governing DF has been calling on prime

minister Krivokapic to undertake such a government reshuffle for some months now, in order to introduce some personalities from political parties into the cabinet, which to date is comprised solely of independent experts.

Myanmar

Violence in Sagaing, Chin, Kachin and Mandalay

On 27.11.21 some 5,000 people fled from nine villages in the township of Depayin (Sagaing region) in the face of air strikes and shelling by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw). Seven people were killed. On 28.11.21 members of the Depayin People's Defence Force (PDF) carried out a guerilla attack on a military convoy in which a number of soldiers were reportedly killed. Further attacks and clashes ensued on 29.11.21. On the same day, Tatmadaw soldiers burned down eleven houses in raids on the villages of Inboke and Ingyinpin.

According to reports in the media on 29.11.21, members of the Chinland Defence Force (CDF) killed two Tatmadaw soldiers in an attack on an administration building near Matupi (Chin State) on 26.11.21.

Clashes occurred between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Hpakant and Mohnyin (Kachin State) on 01.12.21. According to reports in the local media, some 30 Tatmadaw soldiers died in the hostilities.

On 01.12. and 02.12.21 the guerilla group Generation Z Power (GZP) in Mandalay claimed responsibility for the murder of two members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which has close links to the military. The GZP claims that the murder victims were military informers. The GZP has also claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on 30.11.21. The attack targeted soldiers guarding the office of a telecommunications company in Mandalay.

According to information from the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), November 2021 witnessed 126 clashes between the MNDAA and the Tatmadaw in northern Shan State, marking a sharp increase in violence compared to the previous month. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun has confirmed this assessment.

First verdict in trial of Aung San Suu Kyi, protesters killed in Yangon

On 06.12.21 a court in Naypyidaw announced its first verdict in the junta's trial of the ousted de facto head of government, Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi has been sentenced to four years in prison for incitement to insurrection and breaches of COVID-19 requirements. Further proceedings based on charges including breaches of foreign trade law, corruption and ballot rigging are still in progress. The announcement of the verdict was preceded by renewed protests against the military coup in various parts of the country. Security forces drove a car at speed into a demonstration procession in Yangon on 05.12.21 and subsequently opened fire, killing at least five people and injuring dozens. The civilian death toll resulting from police and military violence in connection with protests against the coup totalled at least 1,303 as per 04.12.21.

Authorities tighten travel restrictions for Rohingya

According to reports in the media, the authorities in Buthidang (Rakhine State) tightened travel restrictions for resident Rohingya on 25.11.21. In addition to a letter of recommendation from the village administration, they now require a permit from an immigration authority, known as "Form no. 4", in order to leave their own townships. According to Rohingya affected by the new rules, the permit is only valid for seven days and bribery is essential if it is to be issued on the same day.

Niger

Attack on military base in border region claims many lives

According to reports in the media citing information from the army, at least 79 armed attackers and 29 members of the security forces were killed in an attack on a military base in the south-western region of Tillabéri on 04.12.21. Another press article states that according to information from the defence ministry at least twelve soldiers and "dozens of terrorists" died. The attack was reportedly perpetrated by suspected jihadists, who approached the Fianto base in large numbers on motorcycles. The army camp is a base of the so-called G5-Sahel alliance, which was established by Niger together with Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania in 2017 to jointly confront insurgents in the Sahel region. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack to date. Various armed groups are

active in the Tillabéri region near the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali, in particular Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is linked to Al Qaeda. There has recently been an increase in reports of attacks involving high death tolls in the border region (cf. BN of 22.11.21).

Nigeria

Over 250 prison inmates freed

Heavily armed attackers stormed a prison in the city of Jos in Plateau State on 28.11.21 and helped more than 250 prisoners to escape. This emerges from media reports citing official information from 29.11.21. Nine inmates, one guard and one attacker were reportedly killed in the attack. Some of the escapees are allegedly now back in custody. Recent months have witnessed a number of attacks to free prisoners. The attack on a prison in Oyo State on 22.10.21, which also resulted in the escape of hundreds of prisoners, caused a major stir (cf. BN of 25.10.21).

Latest kidnappings in the north

According to reports in the media, unknown persons abducted at least five employees of the employment ministry in the northern federal state of Borno on the road between Damboa and Chibok on 01.12.21. The kidnappers are thought to be linked to the jihadist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). The abduction took place not far from the Sambisa Forest, which is known to be an important retreat for the jihadists. 15 more people were reportedly abducted on the same road only hours after this incident.

Prior to this abduction, on 29.11.21 armed attackers kidnapped the village head of Fankama in the north-western federal state of Katsina, together with his wife and an unspecified number of other people. In Kaduna State, which is also situated in the north-west of the country, so-called bandits reportedly killed two people and abducted 50 people on 03.12.21. According to reports in the media on the same day, the security situation in Nigeria prompted a total of 11,500 people to leave the country in November 2021 and head for the neighbouring country of Niger to the north.

Pakistan

Mob storms police station

On 28.11.21 an incensed crowd attacked a police station in Charsadda (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) near Peshawar in the north-west of the country. Hundreds of people demanded that a man arrested for blasphemy who had allegedly burned pages of the Koran and was being held at the station be handed over. After the police refused to release the man the police station was stormed. Police vehicles and six checkpoints in the surrounding area were set on fire. According to police information, two dozen people were arrested for incitement to violence. Reinforcements were sent in from the nearby districts of Mardan and Nowshera. The situation remained tense for some time.

Man lynched for blasphemy

On 03.12.21 a manager of a clothing factory in Sialkot (Punjab) who was accused of blasphemy was abducted by a mob, tortured and burned to death in public. The victim, who came from Sri Lanka, had allegedly thrown away pages of the Koran. Even baseless allegations can result in people accused of blasphemy being shot dead, burned alive or beaten to death. On 04.12.21 prime minister Imran Khan announced on social media that the case would be investigated and criminal prosecution would ensue. According to information from the Pakistani authorities, more than 100 people were temporarily detained in the wake of the lynching and a dozen people suspected of perpetrating offences were arrested.

Palestinian territories / Israel

Relief agency faces funding crisis

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) announced on 20.11.21 that its staff of 28,000 would receive their pay for November late, due to a serious funding crisis. UNRWA said it was unclear when the payments would be possible.

The announcement of the delay in payments triggered a strike on 29.11.21, which was quickly ended following the initiation of a mediation process, however.

UNRWA operates refugee camps, educational and health facilities and also provides financial support for Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian territories as well as in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. More than five million people are registered with the agency and thus eligible for benefits. UNRWA runs 711 schools and its medical facilities record more than 8.4 million visits by patients annually. A donors' conference in Brussels only secured sufficient funds to cover 48 % of the budget for 2022 and 2023.

Attacker killed near Damascus Gate

On 04.12.21 a Palestinian from the West Bank attacked and injured an Israeli with a knife near the Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem. The Israeli military responded by opening fire and wounding the man. Videos filmed by passers-by provoked strong criticism, as they appear to show a member of the police shooting the attacker while he is lying on the ground. He died of his injuries at the scene.

Human rights organisations criticise investigations into deaths

On 02.12.21 two human rights organisations published a report criticising the investigations by the Israeli military which were supposed to clarify the fatal shootings at the border with Gaza in recent years.

In 2018 and 2019 more than 215 Palestinians were killed by shots fired by the military in the course of regular demonstrations in the Gaza Strip at the border with Israel. According to the report, most of those killed were unarmed and 47 were minors. Of 143 cases presented to the military prosecutor's office, 95 were reportedly closed without any further consequences. Only the death of a 14-year-old boy led to a prosecution. The prosecution ended with a mutual agreement whereby the defendant was obliged to perform one month of community service for "abuse of authority culminating in risk to life or health". Rulings are still outstanding in the remaining 47 cases.

Somalia

NISA operation against Al-Shabaab in Mogadishu

Twelve Al-Shabaab fighters were killed in a raid by the National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA) in Mogadishu on 01.12.21. Three people were able to escape. It is suspected that the individuals targeted by the authorities were behind the attacks of recent weeks (cf. BN of 29.11.21).

Exchange of fire between Al-Shabaab and AU troops claims civilian lives

Three children belonging to the same family died in an exchange of fire between Al-Shabaab fighters and the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). According to various sources, Al-Shabaab fighters fired mortar shells at the military base of the armed forces in the Howlwadaag district of the region in which the capital, Benadir, is situated, provoking a battle between the two parties. The mortar shells hit the family, killing the children and injuring other individuals. While Al-Shabaab has already claimed responsibility for the attack, there has been no official statement from the authorities or the national military to date.

Sudan

Protests and criticism continue

30.11.21 witnessed further demonstrations against the military coup and the agreement between prime minister (PM) Hamdok and general El-Burhan. There have been reports in the media of tens of thousands of demonstrators. The protests took place in Khartoum as well as the cities of Port Sudan, Kassala, Nyala and Atbara. The agreement between PM Hamdok and general El-Burhan remains a controversial issue and the subject of widespread debate. In the light of the criticism of the agreement, general Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (also known as "Hemeti") has told media representatives that Hamdok was fully aware of the military's line of action and the planned coup. He claims that the plan had Hamdok's approval and support. Taking up this statement, the resistance committee which is currently organising the protests stated on 29.11.21 that it made no distinction between PM Hamdok, general El-Burhan, general Hemeti and the other members of the military. It considers them all to form part of the coup and insists that they must be duly held to account. Contrary to the criticism of PM Hamdok and his actions, the UN

Secretary-General and the chairman of the African Union Commission called on the Sudanese people to accept the agreement between PM Hamdok and general El-Burhan, arguing that it would allow the successful completion of the transition through to the staging of general elections. General El-Burhan met the UN's special envoy for Sudan on 02.12.21 and called on the UN to support the transitional government. In an interview on 04.12.21 general El-Burhan additionally stated that the military would withdraw from politics after the elections which are planned for 2023.

Syria

Deir ez-Zor: Attack on oil industry workers

The state news agency, SANA, has reported an alleged attack on a bus carrying workers on their way to an oil field. The bus reportedly hit an explosive device en route to Kharata, an oil field in the governorate of Deir ez-Zor. Ten people died and one person was injured.

The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has reported that the explosion was triggered by a booby trap.

Al-Hol: Truck runs into refugee tent, three killed

A spokesperson for the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) has reported that a delivery vehicle carrying drinking water ran into a tent at Al-Hol refugee camp, which accommodates female IS supporters and their children, on 30.11.21. Three Iraqi women were killed and two of their children were injured. The authorities assume that this was an accident. The Al-Hol camp still accommodates some 50,000 people, around 20,000 of whom are minors.

Further drugs seizure indicates vast shadow economy

On 30.11.21 the Syrian authorities reported the seizure of 525 kg of amphetamines which were intended to be smuggled to Saudi Arabia. According to the authorities, the drugs were found in a van in Rif Dimashq. The tablets are generally marketed under the name Captagon.

US authorities have been reporting a sharp rise in the smuggling of amphetamines from Syria and Lebanon for some time now. Captagon to a value of over three billion US\$ has reportedly been seized since February 2020. The market value of these confiscated goods alone surpasses the total value of goods exported from Syria (US\$ 1.85 billion in 2017) many times over.

It is unclear to what extent Syria serves merely as a transit country for amphetamines from Lebanon or whether Syria is now involved on a large scale in the production and sale of the drug, which is also known as Fenetyllin.

First international basketball in two decades

The Syrian national team played against a foreign team in its own stadium for the first time on 29.11.21. In the qualification rounds for the 2019 world championship, the Syrian team had to play its home games in Lebanon on security grounds. The national team is currently playing in the qualification games for the 2022 FIBA Asia Cup.

Turkey

ECHR verdict on arrests due to suspected membership of Gülen movement

It has been reported in the media that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) delivered a ruling on 23.11.21 concerning 427 Turkish judges and public prosecutors, including members of the court of cassation and the state council, who were dismissed from the civil service and arrested on suspicion of belonging to the Gülen movement following the failed coup attempt of 2016. The ECHR has reportedly found their imprisonment to be arbitrary and thus unlawful, and has consequently ordered Turkey to pay compensation to the sum of EUR 5,000 per person. The legal proceedings were concerned in particular with the question of whether it is permissible for judges and public prosecutors to be remanded in custody. Turkish law does not permit this for members of the judiciary unless they are caught directly in the act of committing an offence. The Turkish government cited the latter provision. The ECHR rejected this reasoning as erroneous, as membership of an organisation cannot constitute an "in flagranti"

act. No further accusations have been examined by the ECHR. The Turkish government can appeal against the verdict to the Grand Chamber of the ECHR.

Legal proceedings instituted against Turkey

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg announced on 03.12.21 that the Council of Europe had instituted legal proceedings against Turkey for breach of contract in connection with the Kavala case. The ECHR ordered the release of the Turkish cultural patron Osman Kavala back in 2019, categorising his imprisonment as politically motivated. Turkey has yet to comply with the ruling. A Turkish court ruled most recently on 26.11.21 that Osman Kavala must remain in prison and extended his period of more than four years in custody without conviction. He is accused of participating in a coup attempt in connection with the Gezi protests in 2013 and of political and military espionage in connection with the attempted coup in 2016. The Council of Europe of Europe has initially called on Turkey to state its position on the case by 19.01.22.

Alleged planned attack on rally by Erdoğan foiled

According to information from the Turkish police, an alleged assassination attempt on president Erdoğan was prevented on 04.12.21 when an explosive device was discovered under the private car of a police officer who was to be responsible for security at a rally by Erdoğan. According to reports in the Turkish media, the explosive device was found in the predominantly Kurdish city of Nusaybin in the south-eastern province of Mardin. The police officer was to drive 200 km north-west to Siirt, where Erdoğan later took part in a rally. The improvised explosive device was made safe by a bomb disposal team. Investigations are ongoing.

Venezuela

New elections in Barinas, premature departure by EU election monitors

On 29.11.21 the Supreme Court, which is loyal to the government, ordered a rerun of the elections in Barinas State on 09.01.22 and the disqualification of opposition candidate Freddy Superlano due to administrative penal proceedings which are in progress against him. According to information from the supreme electoral council, Superlano was 0.4 % ahead of PSUV candidate Argenis Chávez – Hugo's brother – at this point in time, with 37.6 % of the vote at the end of counting. It is unclear whether Superlano will be allowed to run again in January 2022. The incumbent governor Chávez has withdrawn his candidacy for January 2022. On 03.12.21 the EU election monitors announced that they would be leaving Venezuela prematurely, as their visas had not been extended and they had been requested to leave the country. They are thus leaving the country on 05.12.21 – one week earlier than planned. On 28.11.21 president Maduro described the observers as a “delegation of spies” whose sole purpose was to sound out Venezuela's economy, society and politics on the ground.

Yemen

Anti-Houthi coalition steps up attacks on Houthis

According to information from the Saudi-led coalition, it has broadened its air strikes against Houthi rebels, hitting military facilities in the capital, Sanaa, and targets on the front lines in Hodeida, Marib and Al Jawf. The coalition claims to have killed some 455 Houthi fighters in its intensified campaign since 29.11.21. Houthi media channels report that air strikes have also been carried out in the governorates of Saada, Taizz and Sanaa.

Call for new UN commission of inquiry on Yemen

A joint declaration by more than 60 relief and human rights organisations calls for the UN to re-convene a committee to investigate violations of international law in Yemen. Between 2017 and 2021 this task was performed by the expert group on Yemen, whose mandate the UN Human Rights Council failed to extend in October 2021. An article published in the British newspaper The Guardian on 01.12.21 accuses Saudi Arabia of having approached a number of members with voting rights ahead of the vote and having threatened them with various measures, including visa restrictions, should they vote for an extension of the mandate.

