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Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

27 April 2020

Afghanistan

Hostilities, attacks and civilian casualties

The media reported fighting and attacks in numerous provinces once again last week.

The repeated calls by president Ghani and others for a ceasefire to be negotiated during Ramadan were rejected by the Taliban. According to information from the Afghan National Security Council, the Taliban have carried out an average of 55 attacks daily since the signing of the peace agreement with the USA on 29.03.20. In its quarterly report for the period from 01.01.20 to 31.03.20, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported a 29 % drop in the number of civilian casualties compared to the first quarter of 2019. 1,293 civilian casualties were recorded (533 killed, 760 injured). The numbers of casualties dropped substantially in the “reduction in violence” week ahead of the peace agreement, from 22.02.20 to 28.02.20, only to rise again when fighting resumed, particularly in the north and north-east.

Exchange of prisoners

Last week, the government released a further 55 captured Taliban from prisons in nine provinces (cf. BN of 20.04.20). The Taliban are continuing to demand the release of 15 selected individuals, however. The government rejects this, stating that the prisoners concerned have been involved in terrorist activities, including five persons who have taken part in particularly severe attacks. The government also notes that one of the people responsible for the attack on the German embassy in Kabul on 31.05.17 is also among the 15.

Taliban justice

The news agency Tolo News has reported on another case of Taliban justice from Ghor province in Central Afghanistan. A young man who was attempting to flee with a girl was stopped by the girl’s relatives and handed over to the Taliban, who control the region concerned. The Taliban sentenced the man to 80 lashes. After the sentence had been carried out, he was shot dead by unknown attackers. The girl was able to take refuge in a women’s shelter. The police have reportedly arrested two suspects in connection with the murder. This is the fourth case of parallel justice in Ghor in recent months.

COVID-19 pandemic

The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 continues to rise. People have tested positive in all 34 provinces. Kabul now has the highest number of cases, followed by Herat and Kandahar. The numbers of cases are expected to soar in the coming weeks, with serious consequences for the economy.

The borders with Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan continue to be open only for the movement of goods and for returning Afghan nationals. Pakistan has closed its borders for passenger transport and is allowing the transport of relief supplies via the Torkham and Chaman border crossing points three days a week. Travel restrictions and lockdown measures continue to apply in Kabul and other cities. 20 provinces (as per 22.04.20) have imposed “measured lockdowns”. The lack of any uniform national arrangements makes work more difficult for relief organisations. In the face of the ongoing conflict (see above) and natural disasters, people are continuing to leave their home towns and villages, increasing the risk of infection with coronavirus. Humanitarian organisations fear the negative effects of the restrictions on vulnerable categories of people, in particular families who are dependent on work as day labourers and have no alternative sources of income. As fear of COVID-19 is spreading among the public, human rights organisations also see a danger of people

infected with the virus and people who have recently returned from the neighbouring countries being stigmatised and discriminated against.

According to the employment ministry, two million people have become unemployed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

An initial delivery of 5,000 tonnes of wheat from India arrived in the south-western province of Nimroz on 20.04.20. After deliveries of wheat from Kazakhstan and Pakistan failed to come about (cf. BN of 30.03.20), India undertook to deliver 75,000 tonnes of wheat.

Burkina Faso

HRW: Unarmed prisoners executed by army

In a report published on 20.04.20, Human Rights Watch (HRW) accuses the army of having executed unarmed men belonging to the Fulani ethnic group (also known as Fulbe or Fula) some hours after they were captured in the course of a counter-terrorism operation on 09.04.20. According to villagers who found the dead bodies, several of those who were killed had been blindfolded or had had their hands tied. The suspected war crime took place in Djibo, some 200 km north of the capital, Ouagadougou. The villagers assume that the security forces took action against them because a number of armed Islamists had recently been present around Djibo.

China

Hong Kong: Demonstration

Several hundred supporters of the protest movement gathered again for the first time in months at a shopping centre. They called, among other things, for the release of 15 recently detained leading activists (cf. BN of 20.04.20). The police broke up the demonstration. Gatherings of more than four people in public are banned in Hong Kong on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Colombia

COVID-19 pandemic: Return to Venezuela

It emerges from media reports that thousands of Venezuelans have returned to their native country as a result of the measures which the Colombian government has taken against the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. BN of 23.03.20). Venezuelan migrants commonly take up informal work without any social safeguards in neighbouring Colombia. The protective measures against the COVID-19 pandemic have put an end to this form of livelihood for many.

Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro, announced that the authorities were organising an orderly return at the border and applying the sanitary measures recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in order to prevent the spread of the virus. He said that a laboratory had been set up to analyse COVID-19 specimens taken from returnees, for example. He added that quarantine measures were also in place and that Venezuela was also prepared for returnees from Ecuador and Peru.

DR Congo

BDK leader arrested

On 24.04.20 the police stormed the home of the self-declared prophet and leader of the banned politico-religious Bundu dia Kongo movement (BDK), Ne Muanda Nsemi, and arrested him in Kinshasa's Sakomi district. The house had been under siege for a number of hours, following Nsemi's refusal to give himself up. According to the interior ministry, at least eight people were killed, 35 injured and 168 arrested when the house was stormed. The police have reported that eight officers were injured during the operation. Nsemi's arrest followed the killing of at least 20 BDK members since 13.04.20 in violent clashes with the police on the highway between Kinshasa and the neighbouring province of Kongo Central to the west.

Rangers and civilians killed in FDLR attack

A vehicle carrying seven civilians came under fire from 60 fighters of the Rwandan Hutu militia Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) near to the administrative headquarters of Virunga National Park in the town of Rumangabo. A transport truck with gamekeepers riding on its load platform rushed to the vehicle's defence. According to Kongo's nature conservation authority, ICCN, 13 gamekeepers and five civilians were killed in the attack. Four rangers and one civilian are being treated at the hospital in Goma, 40 kilometres away. Situated on the border between Rwanda and Uganda, Virunga National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is home to mountain gorillas, for example.

Ebola epidemic flares up again

According to information released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 23.04.20, six new confirmed cases of Ebola infections have occurred since 10.04.20 in the Beni health zone in the eastern province of North Kivu. Four of the infected people have died, one is at an Ebola treatment centre and one other person is to be taken to the centre. Prior to the discovery of the Ebola case of 10.04.20, it had been expected that 12.04.20 would mark the WHO's declaration of the end of the Ebola epidemic which had afflicted the Congolese provinces of North Kivu and Itura since 01.08.19, after the last Ebola patient was discharged from a treatment centre cured of the disease on 03.03.20.

India

COVID-19 pandemic

The nationwide lockdown which has been imposed until 03.05.20 on account of the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the poorest sections of the population most severely. Slum dwellers, day labourers and migrant workers no longer have any source of income, as everyday life has been brought to a standstill. In addition, the generally malnourished and often immunodeficient slum dwellers have virtually no means of applying protective measures such as social distancing. The officially reported infection figures are not reliable. The most recently reported figures put the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases at just under 28,000 and the number of infected people who have died at 880.

In Surat in the federal state of Gujarat in western India, the police used batons to break up protests by migrant workers against the extension of the lockdown. According to media reports, police forces have exercised extreme force against the population to ensure implementation of the protective measures. Each federal state is responsible for enforcing its own appropriate measures. The federal state of Kerala in southern India has been singled out as a positive example in this connection.

Small shops have been allowed to re-open since 25.04.20, subject to compliance with hygiene rules and the compulsory wearing of masks. Work has also resumed at handicraft businesses and farms in rural regions.

Iran

Press freedom: Iran ranks 170th worldwide

The most recent Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in 2019 places Iran in 170th position among 180 countries. This represents a drop of six places for the Islamic Republic in comparison to the previous year. In its annual report published on 19.04.20, the organisation describes revolutionary leader Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei and the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (internet surveillance) which he has set up as "enemies of press freedom" and the internet. According to RSF, Iran has been one of the most oppressive countries for journalists worldwide since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Online domain of government newspaper IRAN seized by US authorities

The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has seized the online domain of the IRAN newspaper. This was confirmed by the Iranian government's official daily newspaper on 25.04.20.

The newspaper is now no longer accessible at the address iran-newspaper.com. Other websites belonging to the same company, such as the English-language Iran-daily.com, are similarly no longer accessible. The online domain of the IRAN newspaper was registered in 1997. The state newspaper is also published by the state news agency Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

UNHCR welcomes admission of Afghan refugees

In an interview with the Iran Press news agency on 18.04.20 the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iran, Ivo Freijsen, described the country's admission of Afghan refugees over more than four decades as an "important achievement". In February 2020 UN Secretary-General Antonio Gutierrez and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, praised Iran and Pakistan for admitting millions of Afghan refugees, despite having received only minimal support from the international community. In this connection, he noted that Afghans currently make up the largest group of new arrivals above all in Europe, and that they have now surpassed the number of migrants from Syria for the first time. Iran spends eight billion US dollars on Afghan migrants annually in various areas of government.

Further case of execution of a person who was a minor at the time of committing their offence

Various human rights organisations have reported that Shayan Saeedpour, who was convicted of culpable homicide in 2016, was executed in prison in the city of Sanandaj on 21.04.20. Saeedpour killed someone in an argument when he was still a minor, aged 17. Amnesty International (AI) has stated that the convicted killer was suffering from a mental illness. This has also been reported by various human rights portals, for example. Iran signed up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, which prohibits executions of offenders who were minors at the time of committing their offences. The country reserves the right to adhere only to those parts of the convention which do not conflict with the legal situation in the republic, however. In this connection, the UN special rapporteur on human rights and extrajudicial executions stated that it had repeatedly been pointed out to Iran's government and judiciary that the subsequent execution of offenders who were minors at the time of committing their offences constitutes a breach of the convention.

Medical supply situation: Imports of medication impossible without money transfers

Government spokesperson Ali Rabiei recently stated at a press conference in Teheran that importing medication had become more difficult and that this was impacting on the government's efforts to combat COVID-19.

Iran/Saudi Arabia: AI reports on number of executions

According to AI, at least 657 people were executed in some twenty countries last year. As such, the number of documented executions worldwide in 2019 was at its lowest level for ten years. The report points out that Iran is among the countries with the most executions, however, specifying a toll of at least 251 last year, including four minors.

AI reports that the number of executions has also risen in Saudi Arabia, where the death penalty is also used as a "political weapon" against opposition figures among the Shiite minority. By way of example, the organisation cites a mass execution of 37 people, 32 of whom were Shiite men.

Iraq

Easing of protective measures to combat COVID-19

On 19.04.20 Iraq's central government announced an easing of the protective measures against COVID-19, while at the same time extending the measures - provisionally until 22.05.20. A night-time and weekend curfew is to remain in place. International and national travel (between the provinces) also continues to be prohibited. Schools, shopping centres, places of worship and event locations remain closed. Shops with minimal staffing levels are allowed to open, however. On public transport, the number of passengers is limited to four and masks are compulsory.

In the Kurdistan Region (KR-I) the protective measures against COVID-19 have been extended until 01.05.20, but local authorities are permitted to adjust the lockdown restrictions between midnight and 6 p.m. As of 24.04.20 shopping centres, shops and medical centres are able to open again, subject to compliance with stringent hygiene measures, and taxi drivers are also permitted to resume work. The hygiene measures include the compulsory wearing of masks and gloves. According to a media report, citizens who have been stranded in towns and cities under the control of Iraq's central government are now to be allowed to return to KR-I, provided that they have tested negative for coronavirus.

The national ban on commercial flights is expected to remain in force until 22.05.20.

Humanitarian organisations continue to report of difficulties in obtaining travel permits, stating that this poses a particular obstacle to free movement between the provinces (cf. BN of 06.04.20).

People injured in attack on demonstrators in Baghdad

Activists report that anti-government demonstrators were fired on by unknown third parties in plain clothes on 21.04.20. According to Iraqi security sources, the incident actually concerned a dispute between demonstrators and the owner of a shop selling air conditioning equipment. At least six people were injured in the affray. Yusra Rajab, the member of parliament representing the human rights committee, warned that attacks on demonstrators and the failure of security forces to intervene posed a threat to peace.

Mass protests against the incumbent government, corruption and misgovernment have been taking place in Baghdad and southern Iraq since October 2019. While the protests have dropped off since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, isolated instances still occur in the form of silent or virtual protests.

Payment of wages at risk due to dispute over oil revenue and falling oil prices

According to media reports, Iraq's central government has announced that pay for public-sector employees in the Kurdistan Region (KR-I) is to be suspended because the Kurdistan Region is failing to comply with its obligations as stipulated in the national budget and is selling oil independently, instead of delivering part of its output to Baghdad.

According to information from the government, Iraq's central government is also having difficulties paying its employee's wages due to the drop in income resulting from falling oil prices.

Press freedom: Iraq slips further down the rankings

Iraq has slipped down a further six places in the worldwide Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and ranks 162th among 180 countries. According to RSF, the drop is attributable to attacks on journalists and media representatives during coverage of the anti-government protests.

Kazakhstan/ Kyrgyzstan/ Uzbekistan

COVID-19 pandemic: Human rights situation

In a report on 23.04.20, Human Rights Watch (HRW) criticised the governments of these countries for violating human rights in enforcing measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In Kazakhstan, for example, it cites an incident in which journalists were arrested, ostensibly in connection with the state of emergency declared by the government, while conducting an interview with doctors. A man who published a video on Facebook about people who were waiting to be registered so as to enable them to receive welfare benefits was reportedly sentenced to ten days' imprisonment for endangering public order during the state of emergency. There, as in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, investigations have been initiated into doctors, for example, for spreading false information about the virus, the HRW report claims.

Kosovo

COVID-19 pandemic: Political quarrels

Outgoing prime minister Albin Kurti does not wish to stop Kosovar citizens protesting against the formation of a new government without new elections – despite the continuing health crisis and restrictions on movement against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. BN of 20.04.20). This emerges from media reports based on a television interview with Kurti on 23.04.20.

On the same day, president Hashim Thaci mandated the Democratic League of Kosovo party (LDK) to appoint a new prime minister. The conservative LDK is the second-strongest force in parliament after Kurti's Vetevendosje party (Self-Determination).

Kurti is currently only in office in a caretaker role. His government was toppled by a vote of no confidence in parliament on 25.03.20 (cf. BN of 30.03.20).

Lebanon

Camp Wavel placed under quarantine

Camp Wavel (Baalbek), where around 3,000 Palestinians are believed to be living, was placed under quarantine on 22.04.20. All vehicle entrances and exits were blocked. Five residents had tested positive for coronavirus. In view of the low test capacities and the crowded living conditions, it is feared that the virus is markedly more widespread in the camp than is currently known.

Montenegro

Conditions at remand prisons

According to current media reports, shortcomings at the country's remand prisons mean that inmates' health and hygiene cannot be adequately ensured.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have reportedly pointed out that an adequate water supply, clean mattresses, blankets and soap in the toilets are lacking at the remand prisons in Podgorica and Cetinje, among others. There are cases of two prisoners in a cell sharing a bed, for example. Chief public prosecutor Ivica Stankovic has thus been requested to order offenders to be placed on remand in urgent cases only, in order to avoid overcrowding and an accompanying increased risk of spreading viral infections.

Mozambique

Villagers killed by jihadists

Police spokesperson Orlando Modumane stated on 21.04.20 that Islamists had indiscriminately killed around 52 residents of the village of Xitaxi in the north of the country, (Muidumbe district, Cabo Delgado province) - allegedly because young villagers had refused to be recruited as fighters by the jihadist militia.

Niger

Disturbances ahead of Ramadan

The authorities fear an upsurge in violence as Ramadan begins, following disturbances in several towns and cities due to the measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which include a ban on collective prayer. Since 19.03.20 borders have been closed, a state of emergency and lockdown have been imposed, mosques and schools have been closed and Niamey has been sealed off from the rest of the country. The first disturbances broke out in Mirriah town centre on 23.03.2020. A week later, demonstrators took to the streets in the western region of Tahoua. According to official information, dozens of demonstrators were taken into custody in connection with the two incidents. The disturbances in Niamey have since increased in size. As Ramadan approaches, more than 300 people have been arrested in recent days, after rioters set fire to vehicles and buildings and set up barricades. At least 108 demonstrators were arrested in an initial wave of protests from 17.04. to 19.04.2020. The police stated on 22.04.2020 that a further 166 people had been detained on 20.04.2020. The government announced an easing of the lockdown on 22.04.2020, stating that the curfew now applied from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m., instead of from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Pakistan

COVID-19 pandemic

The government has extended the easing of lockdown measures in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic for certain sectors of industry until 09.05.20. People who have come into contact with individuals with confirmed cases of corona are being tracked by smartphone, using surveillance technology which was originally intended for use in combating terrorism. Amnesty International (AI) suspects that the responsible secret service could misuse this technology to trace and pursue human rights activists. The officially reported infection figures are not reliable. The most recently reported figures put the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases at over 13,000 and the number of infected people who have died at 280.

Friday prayers took place on 24.04.20, following the beginning of the Ramadan fasting month, except in Sindh province. Most of the mosques also remained closed in the provincial capital and the largest city, Karachi. The government has reached an agreement with Islamic clerics on a package of measures. These include provisions stipulating hygiene requirements which are to be observed in mosques and a ban on children and people aged over 50 attending prayers.

Russian Federation

COVID-19 pandemic: Protests in wake of protective measures

On 20.04.20 some 2,000 people gathered in Vladikavkaz at a demonstration against lockdown measures to combat the spread of coronavirus and called for the governor of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania to resign. The police dispersed the demonstrators by force and made dozens of arrests. On 21.04.20 a court in the city found 13 people guilty of participating in an unapproved demonstration, obstructing the police and organising a public event which had led to a disturbance of public order, handing down prison sentences of between three and 15 days.

Opera singer Vadim Cheldiyev had called for the demonstration on the internet. On 21.04.20 Cheldiyev, who had accused the heads of the region's authorities of exaggerating the danger posed by the virus in order to enrich themselves, was fined the equivalent of 928 euros for spreading false information about the virus.

Rwanda

COVID-19 pandemic: Abuse of powers and assaults in connection with protective measures

On 24.04.20 Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on arbitrary police arrests of dozens of people in connection with measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Measures imposed on 22.03.20, which are to apply until 30.04.20, include a curfew, the closure of schools and churches and a ban on travel between towns and districts. Security forces have allegedly raped several women in the course of enforcing the measures. Bloggers and reporters covering the incidents have apparently also been detained.

Somalia

COVID-19 pandemic: Killings in connection with enforcement of lockdown

According to information from various sources, one or two civilians were shot dead by a police officer enforcing the lockdown in Mogadishu's Bondhere district on 24.04.20. Although the officer was reportedly arrested, large-scale protests against police violence nevertheless took place in Mogadishu on 25.04.20.

Journalists harassed and arrested

Various journalists have been harassed and arrested in recent weeks. On 20.04.20, for example, reporter Mukhtar Mohamed Atosh from the Voice of America (VOA) was arrested in Baidoa by the South West State authorities. On the previous day he had reported on a 14 year-old girl who had died from her injuries after being raped. He was released on bail on 22.04.20, but the South West State authorities have filed charges against him.

On 22.04.20 the government accused Abduwahaab Nuur (Abuuja), an editor and journalist at Radio Hiigsi, of being a member of Al-Shabaab. It was also claimed that he was involved in a murder which took place in Mogadishu on 06.03.19. He was arrested by the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) without a warrant on 29.02.20. This happened only three days after the publication of an article criticising the ethical behaviour of the state security forces. On 02.03.20 he was released without charges, only to be re-arrested by NISA on 07.03.20. He has since been in solitary confinement.

Journalists covering coronavirus have also suffered harassment by the authorities in recent weeks.

On 14.04.20 the deputy director and editor of Goobjoog Media, Abdiaziz Ahmed Gurbiye, was arrested by the police. He is accused by public prosecutors of having spread fake news and having insulted the president. On the day before his arrest he reportedly wrote that a donated respirator (which was intended for COVID-19 patients) had been taken from the De Martini hospital in Mogadishu to the president's office. He was released on bail on 18.04.20.

On 19.03.20, police officers took Somali Cable TV reporter Abdullahi Farah Nuur (Yariisow) and his cameraman briefly into custody as they were reporting on the lack of masks and gloves at local markets against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were released without charges.

Syria

North-west: Clashes with Turkish military claim lives

Opposition activists have reported that two people were killed and several injured in clashes between protesters and the Turkish military on 26.04.20. According to the activists, Turkish soldiers shot at people with tear gas and live ammunition in Nairab, Idlib province after the people concerned had thrown stones at the military. Prior to this, the soldiers had had to remove debris from the patrolled M4 highway which the activists had placed there in an attempt to prevent the convoy from continuing its journey.

The local population has reportedly been attempting to block the highway for some weeks now, in order to prevent the joint patrols which Turkey and Russia have agreed to carry out along the strategic transport route. The patrols, which have been carried out since 15.03.20 along the M4 road, which passes through Idlib in an east-west direction, form the core element of the current ceasefire in the region.

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the two people who died were rebel fighters.

North-east: Local residents attack US convoy

Mutually consistent reports by Syrian state media and the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights detail attacks by the local population on a military convoy belonging to the US armed forces. According to the reports, the incident occurred on 22.04.20 in the village of Farafrah, near Qamishli, forcing the US soldiers to retreat. This was the second such incident in the space of two months. No-one is believed to have been injured. Several hundred US military personnel are currently still in the region to fight remaining elements of IS together with the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The US convoy had evidently left a specified deployment area and strayed into territory which is under government control. The territories controlled by SDF on the one hand and the Syrian central government on the other lie very close together in and around Qamishli.

Togo

Opposition politician temporarily detained

Opposition MP Agbéyomé Kodjo was arrested on 21.04.20. Law enforcement officers forced their way into his home in Lomé and led him away. He had failed to present himself to the police in person in response to two summons, instead sending his lawyers to represent him. At least 34 other people who were at his home were also arrested, together with neighbours. 18 of them were released on 25.04.20, Kodjo one day earlier.

Kodjo was beaten by the incumbent, Faure Gnassingbé, in the presidential elections in February 2020, but declared himself the democratically elected president. After his parliamentary immunity was revoked in March 2020, the chief public prosecutor's office initiated investigations into Kodjo (cf. BN of 23.03.20).

Turkey

Lockdown

An extensive four-day lockdown was imposed in 31 Turkish towns, cities and provinces due to the COVID-19 pandemic on 23.04.20. The lockdown included Turkey's largest city, Istanbul, and the capital, Ankara. This first prolonged lockdown went off without any major incidents. Previous to this, the government had imposed two lockdowns which extended only over the weekend.

COVID-19 and Ramadan

It has been reported in the media that the interior ministry stipulated special rules in connection with Ramadan traditions for all 81 Turkish provinces last week, on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rules at a glance:

- The traditional iftar tents in which people break their fast together are not permitted this year. No permits will be issued for events pertaining to sahur (breakfast before sunrise) or iftar.
 - In order to avoid excessive congestion or traffic hold-ups around sunset, public transport capacities will be increased three hours before the iftar.
 - Bakers' shops which sell the traditional "Ramazan pide" must finish producing and selling them two hours before sunset, to prevent long queues from forming.
 - Visits to graves will be subject to restrictions during the Ramadan month. Cemetery entrances and exits will be kept apart and people visiting cemeteries on the day before Bayram (Arife) and on Bayram will have their temperatures taken.
 - The Ramadan drummers will not be permitted to go from door to door collecting donations. Donations are to be collected via the local residents' administration offices.
- The rules are to apply from 24.04.20 until the Bayram festival (24.-26.05.20).

Ukraine

The return of Saakashvili

Ukraine's president Zelenski has proposed the former Georgian president and governor of Odessa, Michail Saakashvili, for the role of deputy prime minister, in which he would be charged with moving the economic reforms forward and negotiating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Saakashvili was president of Georgia from 2004 to 2013 and acquired a reputation as a reformer during his time in office. In 2015 he was granted Ukrainian citizenship by the former Ukrainian president, Poroshenko, and was appointed governor of Odessa. He failed in his fight against corruption, however. At the end of 2016 he resigned as governor and, after fiercely criticising the government and the president, he fell out with Poroshenko, who withdrew his Ukrainian citizenship in 2017 and had him deported to Poland in February 2018. The chief public prosecutor threatened him with criminal proceedings in connection with an allegedly planned coup d'état, should he return to Ukraine. Shortly after being sworn into office in May 2019, Zelenski restored Saakashvili's Ukrainian citizenship. The judiciary in Kiev subsequently ended investigations into Saakashvili and he returned to Kiev. Saakashvili's nomination is to be seen against the background of Ukraine's impending national bankruptcy, which he is to ward off through negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and the EU.

Venezuela

Oil price and end of production by Chevron

US president Trump decreed on 23.04.20 that Chevron's special licence to continue producing oil in Venezuela is not to be extended. Chevron's oil production must be completely shut down by 01.12.20. Chevron has been operating in Venezuela for over a century, and was one of the last remaining major investors from the US. The severe drop in state revenues and the strict regulations on the sale of petrol have caused black market prices for petrol to rise to around 2 dollars per litre. Petrol has traditionally been heavily subsidised in Venezuela and is officially cheaper at filling stations than water.

Effects of the crisis on the harvest

The collapse of imports and petrol production and the substantial restrictions on freedom of movement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are having a severe impact on the agricultural sector. Harvests of many seasonal crops have been decimated due to a lack of fuel for both agricultural machinery and transportation to the markets, in addition to which harvest workers have become substantially less mobile.

Vietnam

Prison sentence for bomb attack

On 21.04.20 a court in Binh Duong province sentenced Truong Duong to eleven years in prison for a bomb attack and required him to pay compensation amounting to 800 million dong (approx. 32,000 euros). Duong was found guilty of terrorist activities. He was allegedly paid by the US-based Vietnamese exile organisation Provisional Government of Vietnam to set off a bomb at the tax authority of the provincial capital, Thu Dau

Mot, on 30.09.19. The attack caused only damage to property. The Provisional Government of Vietnam has been classified as a terrorist organisation since 2018.

Yemen

Separatist group declares self-rule in the south

On 26.04.20 the Southern Transitional Council (STC) declared a state of emergency in the southern administrative districts, including the city of Aden, and announced the introduction of self-rule. The STC is a separatist group supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The STC accuses the Yemeni government of corruption and maladministration. Saudi Arabia, which supports the government, and the authorities in several southern administrative districts have rejected the STC's course of action, however. It is feared that this will re-ignite the conflict between the STC and the Yemeni government troops. Fighting arose between the two parties back in August 2019, when the STC took control of Aden. In November 2019 the two parties reached a power-sharing agreement. This has yet to be implemented, however.

Saudi Arabia extends unilateral ceasefire

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Saudi-led coalition announced a two-week ceasefire on 09.04.20 (cf. BN of 20.04.20). On 24.04.20 the coalition announced a one-month extension to the unilateral ceasefire. The Houthi rebels have not accepted the ceasefire. Fighting has continued in various parts of the country.

100,000 people affected by flooding, critics temporarily detained

According to the UN, more than 100,000 people have been affected by unusually heavy rainfall and flooding since mid-April 2020. The administrative districts of Aden, Abyan, Lahij, Marib, Sanaa and Amanat al-Asimah (the city of Sana'a) have been most seriously affected. Water supplies have been contaminated, homes and infrastructure damaged and a number of people have been injured or died.

Former culture secretary Khalid al-Ruweishan recently publicly criticised the Houthi rebels' handling of the floods in Sana'a. He was reportedly arrested by Houthi rebels in Sana'a on 19.04.20 and released again the following day.

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