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Group 62 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

8 April 2019

Afghanistan

Floods leave scores of people dead and buildings destroyed

Since 28 March 2019, heavy floods have been hitting seven northern and western provinces of the country (see BN of 25 March 2019), killing at least 35 people. The most severely affected provinces are Faryab, Herat, Badghis und Balkh. A total of 3,000 homes have been destroyed.

Attacks and assaults by Taliban insurgents

In northern Balkh Province, Taliban insurgents have ambushed a convoy escorting Afghan vice president Dostum. He survived the attack, but one of his guards was killed. The convoy continued its way to neighbouring Jowzjan province, where it was attacked again, but without any damage.

In Bala Murghab district (western Badghis province), Taliban members have besieged a police headquarter for two days. In the incident, at least 30 soldiers and police officers and at least as many Taliban insurgents lost their lives.

Albania

Conviction in Germany for blood feud

On 3 April 2019, the trial for blood feud of an ethnic Albanian holding a German passport ended with a life sentence for murder. The criminal court established blood feud as the motive for the murder, with a vendetta going on for some time between two ethnic Albanian enemy families. The court found it proven that the perpetrator had been ordered to carry out a revenge killing for the death of a man who had been shot dead on the open road in Elbasan region in the year 2000 in a dispute over the payment of debts. The perpetrator has been in a prison in Albania for some years now. The victim, a nephew of the perpetrator, had hidden in Greece for some years before coming to Germany. Meanwhile, all male family members of the Elbasan murderer who are older than 18 have been killed.

Despite prohibitions and awareness campaigns, Albania is still riven by blood feuds, even though vendettas occur less frequently than they used to. According to recent estimates, around 300 families are affected by genuine blood feuds.

Algeria

Protests continue

After President Bouteflika resigned from office on 2 April 2019, parliament named the chair of the national council Abdelkader Bensalah as interim head of state for a maximum period of 90 days during which new elections must be organised. Despite the resignation of President Bouteflika, mass protests occurred for the seventh weekend in row against the current government and the power elite around Bouteflika.

Benin

Parliamentary elections; protest marches

On 3 April 2019, the council of ministers decided to carry out the parliamentary elections as scheduled on 28 April 2019. The electoral commission had declared several opposition parties ineligible due to incomplete election documents (see BN of 25 March 2019). On 4 April 2019, police dispersed or stopped protest marches called for by the opposition parties in Cotonou.

DR Congo

Raia Mutomboki rebel group leader arrested

An army spokesperson informed that Masudi Alimasi Kokodiko, leader of the widely feared east Congolese Raia Mutomboki militia, was arrested on 2 April 2019. He was detained in Shabunda territory of eastern South Kivu province after being wounded in a firefight. The Raia Mutomboki militia was founded in 2005 to fight armed Rwandan Hutu groups active in eastern DRC and became the most powerful of the scores of armed groups active in the area bordering Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. Its members are accused of severe human rights violations including mass rape of at least 17 women in the town of Lubila in September 2018, use of child soldiers and participation in a massacre in 2012 in which more than 260 civilians were killed.

India

Incidents ahead of parliamentary elections

Ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled to begin on 11 April 2019, Maoist violence has increased noticeably. Violent attacks of Maoist insurgents have been reported from the Jharkhand and Maharashtra states. In Chhattisgarh state, clashes between Maoist rebels and security forces claimed the lives of at least four individuals on each side. In Bihar state, Maoist activists blew up the home of a local leader of the Hinduist Bharatiya-Janata party (BJP).

In eastern Tripura state, clashes occurred between BJP activists and supporters of the Indian National Congress party (INC).

In Arunachal Pradesh state located in the Eastern Himalayas, a supporter of the National People's Party (NPP) was allegedly killed by a member of a rivalling party. The NPP, founded in 2012, is determined to strengthen the rights of tribal groups all over the country.

In Delhi, thousands of rural workers demanded compliance with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act providing at least 100 days of wage employment for unskilled manual workers. The organisers of the protests say that last year, the average employment provided per household was only 50 days.

Iraq

Security situation

On 30 March 2019, IS insurgents attacked a village in Salah ad-Din province and killed two security officers. In Kirkuk province, IS militants attacked a Kurdish village and fired on a group of inhabitants, killing one individual and severely injuring another one.

On 2 April 2019, four IS fighters were killed in targeted air raids in the Hamrin Mountain Range (Diyala province).

Impact of water shortage

On 4 April 2019, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)¹ published a report on water shortage-induced displacement. The organisation identified 45 locations facing water shortage and drought in the central Qadissiya, Najaf, Babylon, Wassit and Kerbala provinces, leading to the displacement of around 1,727 families. In southern Missan, Muthanna, Basra and Dhi-Qar provinces, 100 localities are affected, and up to 5,347 families have been displaced, the IOM reports.

¹ IOM (2019): Assessing Water Shortage-Induced Displacement in Southern Iraq, <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ShowReportDetails.aspx?RepID=17>.

Dealing with IS members of German nationality

With the consent of their parents, a one-digit number of children under the age of 18 of German IS members has been transferred from Iraq to family members in Germany.

Presently, eight individuals holding a German passport appear to have been convicted and are now imprisoned in Iraq. The verdicts range from long-year prison sentences to death penalty. Three German IS fighters have been deported to Germany.

UN human rights expert Agnes Callamard said that trials of IS insurgents do not meet the international standards of fair criminal proceedings; for example, defendants are often denied access to legal counsel.

On 3 April 2019, the German Bundestag adopted a new law facilitating the expatriation of IS fighters who are in possession of a second nationality apart from the German one. This law does not apply to individuals under 18 years.

Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

Payment of wages for public service employees

Following an agreement between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abd al-Mahdi, the civil service salaries shall be paid from now on completely and in time. Since 2014, the salaries have been either reduced to up to 50 percent or paid out every two months only. For the first time, the salaries for the Kurdish Peshmerga will come from the federal Iraqi budget.

Agreement between KDP and PUK in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

On 1 April 2019, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) reached an agreement regarding the share of political key positions in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Following the parliamentary elections held on 30 September 2018 (see BN of 8 August 2018), disputes between the two parties had prevented the formation of a new government.

Libya

Advance of the Libyan National Army (LNA)

In the evening of 4 April 2019, the LNA launched a military operation with the official aim of taking Tripoli. As of 8 April 2019, several access roads to Tripoli have apparently come under LNA control. There are also reports on an amphibious craft being used in an operation on the coastal road. A LNA advance toward Az-Zawiya was apparently pushed back, with scores of LNA soldiers taken prisoner (reports put the figure of POW at 140). The situation remains unclear. There are reports from further clashes in several locations including the area of Ain Zara in Tripoli and the road to the airport; the current situation is highly volatile.

Mali

Protests against rising violence

On 5 April 2019, thousands rallied in the Malian capital Bamako to protest at the failure of the government and international peacekeepers to stem rising ethnic violence. The protest was one of the largest in Mali in recent years. It followed the massacre from the Dogon ethnic group of rival Fulani herders on 23 March 2019, in which more than 130 people were killed (see BN of 25 March 2019).

Morocco

Long prison sentences upheld against Rif protesters

On 26 June 2018, several activists of the Hirak Rif movement based in the Rif region of northern Morocco had been sentenced to lengthy prison terms for 'undermining state security' by a first-instance court in Casablanca. The movement's leader Nasser Zafzafi and three others had received sentences of 20 years. On 6 April 2019, an appeal court upheld the prison sentences.

Background

Since autumn 2016 and throughout 2017, the Hirak movement, active in the rural region inhabited mainly by ethnic Berbers, have protested against the dire economic and political situation and demanded social justice in the region. The protests broke out in 2016 when a fisherman was crushed to death in a rubbish truck, while trying to retrieve his goods that had been confiscated by the authorities. During the rallies, violent clashes occurred between the protesters and security forces. Several individuals were arrested, among them Nasser Zafzafi, who had taken a lead in the protests.

Nigeria

Government order to leave the mining areas

On 7 April 2019, the Nigerian government ordered all foreigners working in the mining sector of the federal state of Zamfara to leave the mining areas within 48 hours. Also, the government ordered the suspension of all mining activities in this state. According to supreme police chief Mohammed Adamu, the government's move is based on intelligence reports clearly indicating a strong, blatant connection between the activities of armed bandits and those of illegal mining workers.

Apparently, the government's orders were a response to protest marches in Abuja on 6 April 2019 staged by people from Zamfara. The protesters called on President Buhari to take appropriate measures to end the continuing killing and kidnapping in Zamfara. On that day, Buhari stated that he had already ordered a fast and robust transfer of troops to all areas affected by banditry. The security situation in the state of Zamfara has been deteriorating for about two years. There have been repeated attacks of armed bandits at villages (see BN of 1 April 2019), with hundreds of locals killed and a large number of individuals kidnapped for ransom.

Fights claim more than 50 lives in Zamfara

On 5 April 2019, the speaker of Zamfara state's parliament Sanusi Rikiji stated that fights between the Civilian Joint Task Force militia (CJTF) and armed bandits claimed more than 50 deaths in the village of Sakajiki (Kaura Namoda Local Government Area) on 2 April.

Twin suicide bomb attack in Maiduguri

On 6 April 2019, two female suicide bombers ignited their explosive belts on a vivid square in Muna-Dalti on the outskirts of Maiduguri. Apart from the attackers themselves, three individuals were killed in the incident and 45 others were injured.

Pakistan

Attacks, fights and assaults

Along the Line of Control, the de-facto border in the embattled Kashmir region, frequent firefights and gun battles result in occasional deaths of both Indian and Pakistani soldiers.

In Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, several attacks have claimed at least three lives. In other assaults in the same province, one border guard and two activists of the moderate Awami National Party ANP were killed.

In Sindh province, unknown perpetrators shot dead a Sunni Muslim imam and a policeman in two separate incidences.

Controversy about imminent military attack

On 7 April 2019, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Qureshi addressed the public, claiming that India was planning a military attack against Pakistan between 16 and 20 April 2019. He referred to reliable information forwarded to Prime Minister Khan, the international community and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

India rejected Qureshi's claim as being irresponsible and absurd. Such statements were fostering war hysteria in the region and were counterproductive regarding the fight against terrorism, officials from India stated.

Serbia

Four months of anti-government protests

For four months now, thousands of citizens have been taking to the streets every week. The protests are targeted above all against President Aleksandar Vučić.

However, given his good survey results, Mr Vučić appears to be relaxed and affirms his determination not to talk to ‘fascists and tycoons who have enriched themselves’, referring to three leaders of the opposition bloc Alliance for Serbia (SZS), which has emerged as the leading force of the opposition movement. Despite the continuing protests, the President and his governing Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) are still supported by a majority of the citizens, while the opposition parties are lagging far behind. Surveys say that the SZS would arrive at about 10 to 15 percent.

On 13 April 2019, a huge anti-government rally is scheduled to take place in Belgrade, organised among others by the opposition parties. President Vučić, in turn, wants his supporters to take to the streets on 19 April.

Somalia

Fighting

On 31 March 2019, al Shabaab fighters attacked units of the Somali National Army (SNA) and AMISOM in the city of Qoryoley (Lower Shabelle region). The attack was eventually fended off after heavy fighting.

Recently, there have been reports of fights between al Shabaab and SNA/AMISOM in Gedo as well as Lower and Middle Juba regions.

Attacks

On 4 April 2019, a car bomb exploded near a police academy in Mogadishu. Several individuals were killed or injured in the incident.

Also on 4 April, government forces apparently opened fire at a bus with civilian passengers in Ugunji (Lower Shabelle region), killing one individual and injuring six others.

SNA captures former al Shabaab territory

Media report that on 1 April, SNA and AMISOM forces captured the village of Sabiid, located 40 km southwest of Mogadishu in Lower Shabelle region.

Civilians killed by US attacks

On 5 April 2019, the United States Africa Command (US AFRICOM) stated that apart from four al-Shabaab fighters, also two Somali civilians fighters had been killed incidentally in a US air attack targeting Elbur (Galgudud region) on 1 April 2018. The statement came after Amnesty International had maintained in March 2019, that it had examined five US airstrikes (out of a total of more than 100) in Somalia, and found out that at least 14 civilians have been killed since 2017. The attack at Elbur was not mentioned in the Amnesty report.

Sudan

Continuing anti-government protests and demonstrations

Since December 2018, peaceful protests have been continuing (see BN of 25 February and 21 January 2019) with new demonstrations being staged almost every day. While the protests were initially triggered by the tripling of bread prices, they are now targeted particularly against President Omar al-Bashir, with numerous protesters demanding his resignation. In February, President al-Bashir imposed the state of emergency (see BN of 25 February 2019). Since then, the protests have been mainly restricted to the country's capital of Khartoum.

Official sources state more than 30 deaths since the demonstrations began. Several human rights organisations estimate over 60 fatalities and thousands of arrests. The protests are mainly coordinated by the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), an association comprising medical doctors, journalists, university professors, pharmacists, lawyers and other professions.

On 6 April 2019, the largest protest rally against al-Bashir's government so far took place, with thousands of people getting as far as the army headquarters in Khartoum. People called on the military to take a position and to choose the people's side. Security forces and police used tear gas and batons against the protesters. The organisers of the rally deliberately chose this day, as it marks the anniversary of the mass demonstrations in 1985, which eventually had led to the ousting of the then President by the military. The protests were continued on 7 April 2019, and apparently claimed four more deaths among the protesters.

Arrests of journalists and other restrictions on the freedom of press

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) says that at least 79 journalists have been detained since the protests started. Among those arrested journalists are those who reported on the protests and others who protested themselves against the political censorship by the government.

One of the detained journalists was Osman Mirghani, editor-in-chief of al-Tayar newspaper. He had been arrested on 22 February 2019, after commenting on the imposition of the state of emergency in a TV interview. Apparently, he was released from prison on 29 March 2019.

Syria

Arrest warrants issued in Germany against IS fighters

The German ministry of interior has informed that arrest warrants were issued against 21 IS fighters who are detained in Syria. In total, 66 suspected IS members with German citizenship are held in Syrian prisons.

According to media reports, the 21 IS fighters were taken prisoner by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). 19 of them are categorized as 'potentially dangerous terrorist offenders' by the German security authorities; other 7 potential offenders have not yet been charged in an arrest warrant.

It is not possible in every individual case to provide a valid, legally robust proof that a German citizen or a foreigner residing in Germany has been fighting for the terrorist militia in Syria or Iraq, the German security authorities say. However, non-armed actions for the IS may also be categorised as participation in combat.

As of March 2019, a total of 104 adults who had left German territory were held imprisoned in areas controlled by IS, the German federal government states. Apart from the 66 individuals detained in Syria mentioned above, there are 38 more imprisoned in Iraq.

Attacks targeting rebel territory

The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says that last week, at least 12 civilians died in attacks of Syrian government troops targeted at communities in the region around the rebel stronghold Idlib.

Tunisia

President states not to seek re-election

On 7 April 2019, Tunisia's 92-year-old President Beji Caid Essebsi announced at a meeting of his ruling party that he does not plan to stand in the presidential elections expected in November. He said that someone younger should take charge. In January 2019, the secular Nidaa Tounes party had selected him as the presidential candidate. It can be assumed that his decision is associated with the events in neighbouring Algeria where, four days before, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika had resigned from office following six weeks of massive street protests against his intentions to run again for office.

Turkey

Governing party raises objections to official election result

In view of the narrow defeat in the municipal elections, Turkey's ruling party AKP demanded a new vote in Istanbul and Ankara on 2 April 2019, claiming that the municipal elections held the weekend before had been marred by fraud and other irregularities. On 7 April, the AKP also filed an appeal before the supreme electoral council that all votes cast in Istanbul be recounted. So far, a full recount has been carried out in 18 of Istanbul's 39 electoral districts.

Ukraine

Official final election result and official date for run-off vote

On 7 April 2019, one week after the first round of the presidential elections, the election commission announced the official final results, with 41-year old Volodymyr Zelenskiy securing 30.24 percent of the vote and 53-year-old incumbent President Petro Poroshenko 15.95 percent. The voter turnout was 62.8 percent. The electoral commission set the date for the run-off to 21 April 2019. The candidates are expected to meet for a face-off on 19 April 2019 in Kiev's Olympic Stadium. In view of the fact that more than half of the Ukrainian electorate had cast their vote for other candidates, a heated campaign is to be expected.

Venezuela

Power failures

Also during the week of 1 to 7 April 2019, recurring electrical blackouts severely jeopardized medical care as well as food and water supply. On 1 April 2019, energy minister Motta Dominguez was replaced by electrical engineer Igor José Gavidia León.

Protest rallies

On 6 April 2019, large protest rallies were held by both the opposition and followers of President Maduro. The opposition demonstrations were directed against the ongoing power failures and the general living conditions.

Guaidó stripped of parliamentary immunity

Upon request of Venezuela's supreme court, the constituent assembly met on 3 April 2019 and unanimously decided to lift the parliamentary immunity of Juan Guaidó who had been elected as the country's interim president by the Venezuelan national assembly, largely deprived of its power, by invoking article 233 of the constitution

Yemen

Attacks and fighting

On 7 April 2019, several people including children were killed or wounded in an air raid on a metal factory and a school in the capital of Sanaa. The Saudi Arabia-led military coalition has rejected any responsibility for the attack.

On 2 April 2019, several fighters were killed or wounded in clashes between Houthi rebels and government forces in the city of Hodeidah.

Also on 2 April 2019, Saudi-Arabian forces apparently intercepted two drones launched by Houthi rebels in southern Asir region of Saudi Arabia. Five Saudi-Arabian civilians were wounded by shell splinters.

On 1 April 2019, the Saudi-led military coalition began airstrikes against Houthi positions in al-Dhali governorate. In the northern part of the governorate, Houthi rebels are fighting against government forces. So far, several fighters of either side appear to have been killed.

On 30 March 2019, the U.S. apparently launched drone attacks in Sawma district (al-Bayda governorate), killing three members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Since January 2019, the U.S. has conducted eight airstrikes against AQAP, one in Marib governorate and the other seven in al-Bayda.

On 1 April 2019, Islamic State in Yemen (IS-Y) claimed to have killed or wounded ten AQAP members in Qayfa area (western al-Bayda). Last month saw several armed conflicts between IS-Y and AQAP in al-Bayda.

On 2 April 2019, AQAP apparently attacked Yemeni security forces in the city of Sayun (Hadramawt governorate). Media report that four soldiers were killed and several others wounded.