



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Al-Qaeda remains active in Afghanistan

The Afghan Ministry of Defence announced on 01.03.21 that 30 Taliban militants were killed recently in a military operation in the Nijrab district of Kapisa province, including 16 Pakistani al-Qaeda fighters. One of the conditions for the Taliban in the Doha negotiations on the withdrawal of international troops is that they cease providing sanctuary to al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. According to a UN report issued in June 2020, a number of key al-Qaeda leaders remain in Afghanistan.

Hizb ut-Tahrir outlawed

The Afghan government declared the pan-Islamist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation, HuT) illegal on 28.02.21. Supporters of the organisation are now no longer allowed to hold meetings or to spread propaganda. The organisation is said to be similarly opposed to the government as the Taliban or ISIS and wants to establish an Islamic caliphate in the country. Hizb ut-Tahrir tries to influence young people in particular with its propaganda and is often active at universities.

Attacks on journalists

On 02.03.21, three female journalists who worked for the Enikass TV channel were shot dead in two separate local attacks in the city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province. Back in December 2020, another employee of the station had been shot dead together with her driver. None of the insurgent groups in the country claimed responsibility for the crime. On 15.02.21, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) had published a Special Report on attacks on human rights defenders and media workers in Afghanistan between 2018 and 2021, noting that such attacks had increased since the start of peace negotiations with the Taliban in late 2020.

COVID-19 pandemic

The Afghan Ministry of Health reported 24 new cases of COVID-19 in the country on 04.03.21, bringing the total number of cases to 55,827. Most of these new cases were in the regions of Nangarhar and Herat. During the same period, two persons died of COVID-19 and three recovered. However, the number of unreported cases is likely to be much higher due to the lack of testing capacity, inadequate clinic equipment and documentation. Meanwhile, China has agreed to provide 400,000 vaccine doses for the Afghan population to support the immunisation that began in the country last week, with 500,000 doses of vaccine having been supplied by India. But it was not yet clear when the vaccine could be delivered, it said. The vaccination of the armed forces in Afghanistan has also begun.

Peace talks

According to press reports of 08.03.21, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has written a letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani proposing new peace negotiations with the Taliban. To this end, he said an international

conference should be held under the auspices of the UN. The proposal is for a transitional government in which the Taliban and the current government share power.

Algeria

Protests continue - UN concerned about the human rights situation

Thousands of citizens continue to gather in the streets every Friday to demonstrate for a comprehensive change in policy and system.

The UN has warned of a deterioration in the human rights situation, as security forces have once again begun using violence against participants in the peaceful protests and arbitrarily arrested hundreds of persons over the past two weeks. There have also been reports of restrictions on press freedom and threats of imprisonment for activists, as well as allegations of torture and sexual abuse in prison.

Armenia

Protestors raid government building

During renewed demonstrations by the opposition in the capital Yerevan, an incident occurred on 01.03.21 in which a small group of protesters broke into a government building. They demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and left the building unhindered after a short time. That same evening, at a rally of his supporters, Pashinyan declared his willingness to hold new elections in Armenia ahead of schedule. He also admitted that mistakes had been made during the armed conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan last year and declared that only the people could decide in a democratic election who would lead the country in the future. Pashinyan has been criticised for months because of the ceasefire agreement reached Azerbaijan on 09.11.20.

Benin

Members of the opposition accused, convicted

On 01.03.21, a leader of the Les Démocrates opposition party, Bio Dramane Tidjani and his associate Mamadou Tidjani, were charged with criminal association and terrorist acts and were detained. They had been arrested on 22.02.21. They allegedly tried to recruit young people to disrupt the presidential election scheduled for 11.04.21. The arrest of Reckya Madougou (Les Démocrates) on 03.03.21 is also allegedly linked to the charges.

Sebastian Ajavon was also sentenced to five years in absentia for forgery and fraud on 01.03.21. The opposition politician, who lives in exile in France, had already been sentenced to 20 years in prison for drug trafficking in 2018..

Burkina Faso

Fatalities during attacks

A soldier and five members of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Nation (Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP)) were killed when a military detachment was ambushed in Gaskindé (Soum province) by unknown persons on 06.03.21. The VDP are a network of civilians who help the army to secure the region.

On 02.03.21, a pregnant woman and five others died when the ambulance they were travelling in hit a landmine between Gaskindé and Namissiguia in the north of the country, on the border with Mali. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Côte d'Ivoire

Parliamentary election goes off peacefully for the most part

The parliamentary election took place on 06.03.21. Compared to the presidential election held on 31.10.20, during which numerous violent attacks occurred (cf. BN of 26.10.20, 02.11.20 and 09.11.20) and, according to media reports, a total of 87 persons were killed, the parliamentary election went off peacefully. However, the mayor of

Abidjan reported that three persons suffered stab wounds. Tensions threaten to rise, however, since the different sides have already claimed victory in the election.

The Election Commission has so far only published the election results of individual constituencies. A total of 255 seats are up for grabs. This is the first election to be held since the 2010 presidential election, which was overshadowed by major violence, in which all major political forces took part. The presidential election held on 31.10.20 was boycotted by the opposition.

COVID-19 pandemic: vaccination campaign launched

Côte d'Ivoire became the second African country to receive a shipment of 504,000 doses of vaccine from the international COVAX initiative on 26.02.21. The vaccination campaign officially began on 01.03.21 with the vaccination of several ministers as well as dozens of nurses, police officers and teachers. Medical personnel, defence and security forces and teaching staff will be the first to receive the vaccine. The over-50s, the chronically ill and international travellers are to be vaccinated in a later second phase. To this end, the country expects to receive another 1.5 million vaccine doses from the COVAX initiative and also wants to procure vaccines with its own funds. The goal is to vaccinate more than 5 million people, about 20 % of the population.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Two whistleblowers are handed the death sentence

According to reports, a court in Kinshasa has sentenced whistleblowers Gradi Koko Lobanga and Navy Malel to death in absentia without the representation of a defence lawyer. The "Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa" (PPLAAF) and "Congo is not for sale" network condemned the death sentences, The accused were charged with theft of documents, violation of banking secrecy, forgery and use of forgeries, slanderous denunciation, all in an organised gang. The PPLAAF platform and the anti-corruption organisation Global Witness uncovered an alleged international money laundering network in July 2020 with the help of two former employees of Afriland First Bank.

Death sentences are imposed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) but have not been carried out since 2004 when a moratorium was imposed.

Catholic Church regrets deterioration in human rights situation

The Bishops' Conference, which is influential and respected in the DRC, issued a statement on 01.03.21 stating that the human rights situation had deteriorated, having initially improved after the Tshisekedi government took office in January 2019. The bishops highlighted the repression of human rights activists, restrictions on freedom of expression and demonstration, and attacks by armed and government groups against civilians.

New militia violence against civilians and fighting in eastern Congo

According to media reports, militiamen killed ten civilians in an attack on Mambelenga market in the north-eastern province of Ituri on 03.03.21. According to a senior provincial administration official, the attack triggered a new wave of internal displacement. According to the AFP news agency, the military has blamed the attack on the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamic militia originally from Uganda. According to the military, the ADF was also responsible for two attacks carried out at the end of February 2021 in the provinces of Ituri (Boyo village) and North Kivu province (Kainama village). In the process, houses were set on fire and ten civilians were killed, eight of them were beheaded, he said. Among the estimated 120 armed groups operating in eastern Congo, the ADF is being held responsible for killing civilians, according to a recent report issued by Kivu Security Trackers (cf. BN of 01.03.21). Meanwhile, the military has reported successes in the fight against the Patriotic and Integrationist Congo Forces (FPIC) rebel militia operating in eastern Congo according to the AFP news agency. According to military reports released on 01.03.21, 16 rebels and three soldiers were killed and seven other rebels were arrested. During its three-day military operation, the military also managed to recapture two villages besieged by the FPIC.

Egypt

COVID-19 pandemic: additional groups of persons eligible for vaccine

Since the country began vaccinating medical staff in hospitals entrusted with the treatment of persons infected with coronavirus at the end of January 2021, around 50% are said to have received the vaccination. From the beginning of March 2021, persons over the age of 40 suffering from chronic illnesses can register for the vaccination on a website set up by the authorities.

Recently, the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in Egypt has begun to slow down and, according to official figures, a total of 185,334 cases had been reported by 05.03.21, 10,916 of which were fatal. Due to the low number of COVID-19 tests, experts assume that the number of unreported cases is high.

El Salvador

President Bukele's party wins parliamentary election

According to preliminary results, President Nayib Bukele's New Ideas (Nuevas Ideas) party clearly won the parliamentary election held on 28.02.21, taking 56 of the 84 seats. A total of ten parties ran in the election. The unicameral parliament has so far been dominated by the right-wing political party Nationalist Republican Alliance (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA)) with 37 seats and the left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)) (FMLN: 23 seats). They have now won 14 and four parliamentary seats respectively. Nuevas Ideas has not been represented in parliament until now. It was founded in 2017 as a citizens' movement. As it was not foreseeable whether it would be recognised as a party before the end of the application period for the presidential candidacy, Bukele ran for the right-wing Grand Alliance for National Unity (Gran Alianza por la Unidad Nacional (GANU)) in the 2018 presidential election.

Preliminary results indicate that Nuevas Ideas won 149 of the 262 municipal councils in the local elections that were also held on 28.02.21.

Ethiopia

No agreement reached on declaration to end violence in Tigray

A UN Security Council meeting held on 04.03.21 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray failed to reach agreement on a joint statement. The aim was to call for an end to the violence in a resolution, to ensure unrestricted access for humanitarian organisations and to investigate allegations of serious human rights violations. However, Russia, China and India considered this to constitute interference in internal affairs and vetoed it.

US calls for withdrawal of Eritrean units and Amhara militia from Tigray

Last week, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said the US was deeply concerned about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Tigray. He called on Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali in a phone call to take "immediate and concrete steps to protect civilians, including refugees, and prevent further violence" and urged the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean forces and Amharic militias from the region. He also offered mediation between the parties to the conflict. According to concurring reports, fighting between the parties to the conflict continues in parts of Tigray.

HRW accuses Eritrean troops of massacre

After Amnesty International (ai), Human Rights Watch (HRW) has now also concluded that Eritrean troops committed a massacre of over 200 civilians in the town of Axum in Tigray in late November 2020 (cf. BN of 01.03.21). HRW has urged the UN to launch an independent inquiry into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Ethiopian government responded by announcing on 04.03.21 that it would investigate the "credible reports" of atrocities and serious human rights violations in Tigray. It said it was ready to cooperate with the UN.

Gambia

Option of prosecution to remain part of the process of coming to terms with the past

The chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission Emmanuel Joof told a press conference in early March 2021 that the option of coming to terms with the past through prosecution would continue to exist alongside the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRRC). He said the government had explicitly guaranteed that the recommendations of the TRRC could trigger the prosecution of individuals not yet prosecuted or amnestied, adding that the government would make preparations.

The process of coming to terms with the past, for instance with the paramilitary unit Jungler, which was responsible for serious human rights violations, a unit which swore absolute loyalty to the long-term president Yahya Jammeh and which operated outside the law, had sparked a nationwide outcry.

Ghana

Supreme Court rejects appeal against election result

On 04.03.21, the Supreme Court dismissed the appeal of John Mahama, who had lost to incumbent Nana Akufo-Addo (ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP)) in the presidential election of 07.12.20 with 47.4% to 51.6% of the vote. Mahama (National Democratic Congress (NDC)) had accused the Electoral Commission of manipulating the election results and called for an annulment and rerun of the election (cf. BN of 14.12.20).

Guinea

Arrest for insulting the President

On 01.03.21, the journalist Amadou Diouldé Diallo who specialises in sports and history was charged with insulting the head of state in a radio programme. According to different sources, he had been arrested the day before or on 27.02.21. His lawyer says the arrest was made without a prior summons or warrant and that arrest is unusual for a press offence, which is also only punishable by a fine. The chairperson of the human rights organisation Guinean Organisation for the Defence of Human Rights (Organisation guinéenne de défense des droits de l'homme (OGDH)) condemned the arrest and described it as a restriction of the freedom of the press.

On 25.02.21, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) had called for the immediate release of another sports journalist, Ibrahima Sadio Bah. He had been sentenced on 04.02.21 to six months imprisonment and a fine for insult and defamation. In an article, he repeated allegations of corruption against the elected president of the Guinean football federation, which had been brought forward by a defeated candidate for the post.

India

Criticism voiced by Freedom House

In its latest report, the non-governmental organisation Freedom House has downgraded India from free to partly free and fears that the world's largest democracy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is increasingly taking on the characteristics of an authoritarian regime. Reasons cited include violence and discrimination against the Muslim population, as well as the targeted crackdown on anti-government voices in the media and on civil society activists, with restrictions on the freedom of expression.

Internet shutdowns

According to a report by the non-profit digital rights organisation AccessNow, India was the country experiencing the most internet shutdowns between 2019 and February 2021. The 109 shutdowns documented for 2020 were mainly in the troubled region of Jammu and Kashmir, where a shutdown occurred statistically every fortnight and the Internet was also only available in 2G standard.

Iran

Protests by pensioners and arrests

According to reports in Iranian foreign media, demonstrations by pensioners and retirees took place in 20 Iranian cities on 07.03.21. They are demanding that their pensions be brought into line with inflation and the rising cost of living. They are also demanding an end to the disparity between pensions from the Social Security Organisation and pensions from military coffers and other pension pots in the country. In Tehran, a large number of people, including teachers, therefore gathered in front of the Ministry of Labour and the Social Welfare Office. Eventually, security forces forcibly dispersed the crowds and arrested an unknown number of people. Those arrested were reportedly taken to Tehran's Eighth Police Command. Police also broke up protests, sometimes violently, in Mashhad, Ahvaz and Karaj. This was the ninth such large protest to be held in two months.

Tensions in Sistan und Baluchistan

The situation in the province remains tense one week after unrest began in Sistan and Baluchistan. Amnesty International (ai) is calling for an independent inquiry into the incident that occurred on 22.02.21 (cf. BN of 01.03.21), in which ten persons, including a 17-year-old boy, were killed by members of the Revolutionary Guards on the Iran-Pakistan border. The persons killed were allegedly fuel smugglers. Afterwards, riots broke out in the border town of Saravan and spread to the entire province. A total of 23 persons are reported to have been killed in the clashes.

On 02.03.21, the Sunni guerrilla group Jaish ol-Adl attacked two Pasdaran patrol vehicles in the border region of Bam Posht, southeast of Saravan. According to local sources such as the Kampain-e Fa'alan-e Baluch, five members of the Revolutionary Guards were killed. The Pasdaran confirmed that one of their members had been wounded and another was missing.

Regulation of the Internet

According to reports in foreign media, the Supreme Council of Cyberspace had already published a decision on 15.02.21 to monitor social media accounts that have more than 5,000 followers. The reason given was to prevent the spread of false news. The Ministry of Culture and Law and Islamic Guidance will be obliged to identify and record relevant web content. This will not only affect domestic websites, but also foreign Internet media. According to the parliamentary resolution of 03.03.21, the Ministry of Communications will be obliged to expand the national Internet by February 2022. President Hassan Rouhani remained opposed to Internet restrictions in January 2021.

Protestors handed prison sentences

A court in Behbahan district (Khuzestan province) has sentenced three young men to prison terms, one to 11 years and two to one year as well as 74 lashes. The defendants had taken part in the protests in November 2019. One of the defendants was convicted of arson and destruction of bank buildings and public facilities, as well as disrupting public order. His two co-defendants were convicted of disruption of public order.

Iraq

Missile attack

On 03.03.21, the Ain al-Asad airbase where US troops are stationed was attacked by ten missiles. There were no casualties. During the attack, a civilian employee died of a heart attack. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Protests

Large groups of protesters took to the streets in Baghdad on 01.03.21 in support of the demonstrations in Nasiriya and marched towards Tahrir Square. The police and security forces responded with batons and tear gas and prevented them from reaching Tahrir Square. Clashes with security forces also took place in Diwaniyah on the same day. Protesters burned car tyres in front of government buildings and demanded the resignation of the government there. On 05.03.21, further rallies took place in Diwaniyah and Babylon, resulting in more than 100 arrests. The

protesters are demanding the resignation of the governor of Babylon, Hassan Mandil who has been accused of corruption.

Papal visit to Iraq

Pope Francis' visit to Iraq, the first ever visit by a head of the Roman Catholic Church to Iraq, dominated the headlines in the Iraqi press. The visit is considered to be an historic event. Pope Francis met with the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who is considered to be the most important Shia religious authority in Iraq. Shia Muslims make up the majority of Iraq's population. In the run-up to the meeting, al-Sistani had spoken out in favour of a peaceful course of events; the Shiite militia who had shelled Erbil the previous month, then announced a ceasefire for the duration of the Pope's visit. Pope Francis called on all sides in Iraq to live together peacefully and appealed to the country's Christians not to give up on Iraq. The individual stops on the trip included a meeting with high representatives of Islam and Yezidism in the Plain of Ur and in regions particularly affected by the war with ISIS, such as Qaraqosh and Mosul. 6 March 2021 was declared a public holiday as the "Day of Tolerance and Coexistence".

Yezidis

On 01.03.21, the Iraqi parliament passed a law in which the survivors of the genocide will receive financial support from the state. This includes that 2% of public service jobs will go to survivors, who will receive a fixed salary and will be allocated a piece of land. This law also applies to Turkmen, Shabak and Christians. With this law, the Iraqi government has officially recognised the genocide of the Yezidis, as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had previously done.

COVID-19 pandemic

On 05.03.21, the Iraqi government lifted the ban on entry and exit from more than 21 countries. Persons entering or leaving the country must show a negative PCR test taken less than 72 hours prior to arrival. Returnees have to stay in quarantine for 14 days. On 03.03.21, the number of new cases of COVID-29 reached a peak of 5,173 in a single day.

After the arrival of vaccine doses from China, Iraq launched its vaccination programme on 02.03.21.

Kosovo

Deportations to Turkey: indictment of high-ranking officials

The country's Special Prosecution has filed charges against three former top officials in connection with the deportation of six Turkish nationals to their country of origin on 29.03.18. The former head of the Intelligence Agency, director of the Citizenship and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior and the director of Migration and Foreigners in the Border Police are accused of abuse of official authority and deprivation of liberty. The indictment follows a February 2019 report by a parliamentary committee that found 31 legal and procedural violations surrounding the deportation. Some committee members accused former President Hashim Thaçi of ordering the deportations. According to media reports, some of the six individuals deported were sentenced to prison in Turkey for belonging to the Gülen movement, which is classified as a terrorist movement there. One individual was sentenced to eight years and one month in prison for belonging to the Gülen movement.

Liberia

96,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses arrive

Liberia initially received 96,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses on 05.03.21 which were shipped through the COVAX initiative. In total, Liberia is expected to receive 384,000 doses of the vaccine. In addition to the vaccines, the country received 97,000 syringes and 600 safety boxes that will be used for the administration and disposal of vaccines.

The priority target group to be vaccinated, about 20% of the population, includes healthcare workers, older persons (60+), people with co-morbidities (the presence of one or more additional conditions often co-occurring with a primary condition), refugees and other key workers who are unable to observe social distancing because of the work they do.

Montenegro

Government fires high-ranking police officer charged with corruption

According to media reports, the Montenegrin Ministry of the Interior dismissed the high-ranking police officer Zoran Lazovic, previously in charge of the department for fighting organised crime and corruption, as well as six other police officers at management level of the Police Directorate on 01.03.21. The new government, in office since December 2020, had demanded Lazovic's resignation after he had been accused for some time of having links to organised crime, which he has denied. According to a statement issued by United Reform Action (URA), the small social-liberal-green party bloc within the newly-elected governing coalition, the dismissals will fulfil the announced election promise to push for a transformation within the police apparatus and security services towards a corruption-free police force.

Morocco

COVID-19 pandemic

Morocco is suspending flights to and from Germany, Switzerland and other countries until 21.03.21 over fears of the spread of COVID-19 mutations. Exceptions can be granted for cargo and medical flights. The state of emergency has been extended until 10.04.21. It restricts travel between the provinces, stipulates a night-time curfew, imposes a ban on assemblies and compliance with hygiene regulations. Local security forces are stepping up their monitoring of compliance with the imposed measures. According to Morocco World News, 3,913,615 of the 33 million Moroccans have already been vaccinated and 578,942 citizens have received their second vaccination.

Mozambique

Ongoing tension in Cabo Delgado

Fighting has erupted once again between security forces and Islamist terrorists in the northeast, which has been conflict-ridden for months. On 19.02.21, four persons from Quionga, Palma District, were reportedly killed by terrorists and houses were destroyed and looted. On 25.02.21, Mozambican defence forces reportedly killed six terrorists in Luneke, Nangade District. For weeks, al-Shabaab fighters have been blocking access roads, ambushing villages and displacing residents. Numerous villages have been deserted due to the ongoing terrorist threat. Nevertheless, residents are returning partly in order to procure food. Two villagers who had returned to their homes were reportedly killed.

Myanmar

Protests continue, the death toll climbs steadily

On 03.03.21, at least 38 persons were killed by police and military gunfire during protests in Yangon (Rangoon), Mandalay, Sagaing, Magway and Mon, among other places. This is the highest number of deaths recorded in a single day since the military coup on 01.02.21. More than 400 protesters are reported to have been arrested that day in Yangon alone. The UN also reports that ambulances and medical personnel were attacked by security forces.

On 04.03.21, thousands attended the funeral of 19-year-old Kyal Sin in Mandalay, who had been shot in the head the day before. Large funeral ceremonies, which were also protest actions, were held at other locations too.

On 05.03.21, during mass protests involving tens of thousands of people in Mandalay, a bystander who was reportedly waving a flag to warn protesters of the advance of security forces was shot and killed. Also that day, police and military used tear gas and stun grenades.

On the same day, U Htway Naing, a member of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and head of Kyaung Gone Gyi village in Magway Region, and his nephew were killed in an attack by supporters of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). One of the attackers is believed to be U Kyaw Khine Oo, a USDP politician who contested the November 2020 election for a seat in the Lower House of Parliament but lost to the NLD candidate from his community.

On 06.03.21 and 07.03.21, mass protests and mourning rallies took place once again throughout the country, including in Yangon, Mandalay and the temple city of Bagan. Again, security forces used force against the protesters and fired live ammunition. Several persons were shot and numerous arrests were made.

Security forces in Yangon arrested the Muslim NLD politician U Khin Maung Latt on 06.03.21 as part of regular house searches during the night-time curfew. He was found dead in his cell on 07.03.21, the cause of death being torture, according to media reports.

A total of at least 54 persons have been killed since the protests began. According to UN estimates, several hundred persons have been injured.

The Auxiliary Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) puts the number of arrests at 1,790, of whom 1,472 are said to remain in custody. UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet assumes that the figure is much higher. At least 34 journalists had been detained since 03.02.21, according to the AAPP, six of whom were reportedly charged on 03.03.21 with causing fear, spreading false news and inciting government employees. Fifteen of them have since been released. According to UN figures, 29 journalists have been arrested and eight charged.

Charge against Aung San Suu Kyi expanded

The charges against ousted government leader Aung San Suu Kyi were expanded at a video court hearing held on 01.03.21. She had previously been charged with violations of the Foreign Trade Law and the Disaster Prevention Law. Now she is also accused of publishing information that spreads “fear or alarm”. The trial is scheduled to continue on 15.03.21.

Police officers flee to India

According to media reports, eight police officers and their family members crossed the border into India after refusing to carry out orders from the military junta. Myanmar authorities asked the relevant Indian authorities in Champhai district of Mizoram state to arrest the police officers and hand them over to Myanmar.

Nigeria

Kidnapped schoolgirls released

On 02.03.21, the governor of Zamfara state, Bello Matawalle, confirmed that all 279 schoolgirls who had been kidnapped from a boarding school in Jangebe in the northwestern state of Zamfara on 26.02.21 have since been released. The original number of 317 schoolgirls abducted by the police (cf. BN of 01.03.21) was corrected by local authorities. A representative of the authorities explained the discrepancy in numbers by the fact that some schoolgirls had fled shortly after the abduction. According to the governor, no ransom was paid for the release of the Jangebe schoolchildren. Earlier, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari had said that state governors had in the past handed over vehicles and money to kidnappers and urged them to reconsider the practice.

There have been repeated kidnappings in northern Nigeria in recent months (cf. BN of 30.11.20, 21.12.20, 22.02.2021 u. 01.03.21).

COVID-19 pandemic: vaccine arrives

Nigeria received its first shipment of 3.94 million vaccine doses through the COVAX initiative on 02.03.21. According to media reports, healthcare workers are to be vaccinated first.

Pakistan

Prime Minister Imran Khan wins vote of confidence after losing Senate elections

On 06.03.21, Prime Minister Imran Khan of the ruling Justice Movement Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party narrowly won the vote of confidence having recently lost Senate elections and securing 178 votes out of 172 required to win vote. The newly-formed Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of the two largest opposition parties Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), as well as other smaller parties, boycotted the vote. During the vote, only one independent parliamentarian from the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) was present in the 342-member National Assembly.

The PTI had requested the vote itself after its top candidate, Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, was surprisingly defeated in the Senate elections on 03.03.21. The Senate (upper house) in Pakistan is elected by members of the National Assembly (lower house) and the four regional parliaments, so it can be assumed that PTI MPs must have voted for the winning former Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), who was removed from office in 2012. The Pakistani government has come under increasing pressure since the formation of the PDM alliance at the end of 2020.

Senegal

Worst unrest in years

After opposition leader Ousmane Sonko was arrested on 03.03.21 on charges of rape, looting and rioting took place in the capital Dakar and other cities in the country in the days that followed. Hundreds of young people fought street battles with the police in Dakar. A man was killed in clashes between protesters and police in the Casamance region, home of the opposition leader. According to a statement issued by the Ministry of the Interior on 05.03.21, at least four persons have died in the clashes across the country in the past few days. A court ruled on 05.03.21 that Sonko must remain in custody for disrupting public order. On 05.03.21, the authorities restricted Internet access. Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube were partially unavailable ahead of a planned demonstration led by the protest movement "Y En A Marre" (Enough is Enough). Sonko, who is particularly popular among young people, is considered to be an opponent of President Macky Sall and is the leader of the opposition Pastef Party. He describes the rape allegations against him as politically motivated.

Serbia

SNS politician convicted of arson

According to media reports, a Belgrade court sentenced Dragoljub Simonović to four years and three months imprisonment on 23.02.21. The judges found the former mayor of the suburban district of Grocka guilty of ordering an arson attack on the house of investigative journalist Milan Jovanović in 2018. The reporter survived the attack. Jovanović had reported on the alleged involvement of Simonović, a member of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska napredna stranka (SNS)), in corruption and abuse of office before the attack. The person who carried out the crime remains at large.

Somalia

Attacks waged by al-Shabaab

The journalist Jamal Farah Adan was shot and killed by al-Shabaab militants in Galkayo, Mudug region, on 01.03.21 for opposing the group after receiving threats from the group.

Al-Shabaab had publicly executed five civilians in Jilib, Middle Juba region, on 01.03.21 whom they had accused of espionage on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Al-Shabaab ambushed a prison in Bosaso, Bari region, on 05.03.21. The group claims to have freed about 400 prisoners in the raid, killing several members of Puntland security forces. According to the government, 87 prisoners have been recaptured, some of whom are believed to belong to al-Shabaab and ISIS.

On 05.03.21, a suicide bomber blew himself up outside a restaurant in Mogadishu. At least 20 persons were killed and 30 were wounded. The police accused al-Shabaab of being responsible for the attack.

Another suicide bomber blew himself up in a restaurant in the town of Waajid, Bakol region, the same day. One soldier and one civilian were killed and four others were injured. Although no one has claimed responsibility for the attack, police have reportedly arrested suspected al-Shabaab members.

Journalist convicted by military court in Puntland elite

Freelance journalist Kilwe Adan Farah was sentenced to three months in prison by a military court in Garowe, Puntland on 03.03.21. He was arrested on 27.12.20 by the Puntland Intelligence Agency (PISA), which accused him of inciting violence for reporting on protests in Puntland criticising rising inflation.

COVID-19 pandemic

The number of cases of coronavirus continues to rise in Somalia. The government has therefore introduced new measures to stop the spread, including temporarily closing schools and government offices, ordering the wearing of face masks in public places and suspending domestic flights. Incoming travellers must present a negative PCR test that is less than 72 hours old and spend seven days in quarantine. The recent increase in cases has led to an acute shortage of oxygen in hospitals, which is why the WHO has recently provided new oxygen supplies to treat patients.

South Sudan

Head of UNMISS completes his assignment

On 03.03.21, the current Head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), David Shearer, briefed the UN Security Council for the last time before being replaced by Nicholas Haysom - most recently Special Advisor for Southern Africa - next month.

In his final report, Shearer said that South Sudan was making progress, but that it was “frustratingly slow”. He contrasted negative aspects, such as existing power vacuums at local level, which encouraged outbreaks of violence, with positive developments, such as the formation of the Council of Ministers and the transfer of power to the governors of the country’s ten states. In a personal outlook, Shearer addressed failures of the mission, which he sees, for instance, in the lack of a financial system. He said the wealth from the oil deals was being siphoned off without the public’s knowledge. Overall, he described the peace process as “extremely fragile”.

Shortages in food supply expected

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reports that nine out of the ten states in South Sudan are expected to experience significant food shortages. Compared to the 2019 crop yields, the 2020 grain and vegetable harvest yields have been reduced by 50%, it said. The ICRC attributes the listed shortages primarily to the combination of extreme climatic events and armed conflict. This fragile situation is being further exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Syria

Northern Syria: rebels’ oil-loading facility destroyed

A missile attack on the site near the towns of Jarablus and al-Bab in the early hours of 06.03.21 destroyed more than 180 trucks and tankers, Syrian opposition groups say. At least four persons were reportedly killed and another 24 injured. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that three missiles had been fired at the area from Russian warships off the Syrian coast, causing a huge blaze. Russia has not yet commented on the reports. The Turkish state news agency Anadolu reported that it was not clear who had carried out the attack.

MSF staff killed in northern Syria

The international aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) announced on 02.03.21 that one of its members had been killed and three others injured in the Al-Hol camp for relatives of suspected ISIS supporters. The attacks on the staff occurred on 24.02.21 and 27.02.21. MSF expressed concern about the lack of security in the camp, where more than 30 persons are reported to have been killed since January 2021. Most of the victims are said to have been killed by gun violence. Security is the responsibility of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which have long appealed to the global community to return the foreign prison inmates (and their children born in Syria) to their respective countries of origin.

Three-quarters of the population dependent on humanitarian aid

The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) highlighted the poor supply situation in Syria at a press conference held on 04.03.21. He said there was a lack of food, medical equipment, medicines and fuel, adding that the shortage of fuel was making it difficult to transport the injured and sick to hospitals. The number of Syrians in need of humanitarian aid has risen by 20% in the last twelve months.

Meanwhile, the UN estimates that almost 80% of Syrians are living below the poverty line. In recent months, the Syrian government also reduced its subsidies for all basic supplies. The average income in Syria is currently around US\$22.50 per month. The Syrian pound reached a new low on 03.03.21 (SYP 1256.00 : US\$), and the US dollar is said to be trading even higher on the black markets (SYP 4000.00 : US\$ 1).

Tajikistan

New regulation on compulsory military service

According to media reports, since 04.02.21 it has been possible for men aged between 18 and 27 for whom two years of military service is compulsory to be exempted from military service in return for payment of a fee. However, the size of the fee has not been officially fixed yet. The Minister of Defence had announced the introduction of a one-month basic military reserve service for young men who pay the fee.

Turkey

COVID-19 measures eased

All 81 provinces in Turkey have been assigned a coronavirus risk rating since 01.03.21. The four-level system ranges from blue (low risk), yellow (moderate risk) and orange (high risk) to red (very high risk). According to government information, the night-time curfew from 09:00 pm to 05:00 am will initially continue in all provinces regardless of the risk rating. However, as of 07.03.21, the curfew will be eased somewhat. In provinces belonging to the blue and yellow category, the curfew will be completely abolished from Friday to Sunday, in the orange and red category it will only apply on Sundays. For persons under the age of 20 and over 65, daily curfew restrictions will be removed in the two lowest risk categories. There are no curfews for tourists, as before.

Restaurants and cafés in Turkey are now allowed to reopen from 07:00 am to 07:00 pm in all provinces on a low to high risk alert. Accordingly, restaurants and cafés will remain closed in only 17 provinces on the red corona warning alert (where the number of cases exceeds 100). The opening is generally linked to conditions, for example, the restaurants and cafes may only use a maximum of 50% of their seating capacity. In addition, primary schools are to reopen and pupils attending eighth to twelfth grades are to start attending classes again.

Further arrest warrants issued for FETÖ suspects

According to media reports, the public prosecutor's office in Ankara issued arrest warrants on 05.03.21 for 53 persons who are suspected of having links with FETÖ, including 40 suspects in the naval forces. They are accused of having been in contact with other FETÖ members via payphones (cf. BN of 01.03.21).

Tunisia

Protests over conviction of activist

On 05.03.21, hundreds of persons protested against the imprisonment of Rania Amdouni, a democracy and LGBTIQ activist who was sentenced to six months in prison on charges of insulting the police. Amdouni is a member of the human rights group Damj, Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality, and had taken part in the protests in recent weeks. The police had published personal information about Amdouni on social media over several weeks, including her address, and had also made derogatory comments about her.

Turkmenistan

COVID-19 pandemic: monitoring tightened

According to a press report, the Turkmen police have further intensified their crackdown on media coverage of the pandemic. In Turkmenabat, the country's second-largest city, the mobile phones of medical staff have been checked for evidence of contact with media representatives. It was also reported that authorities in Mary, the

fourth-largest city, stopped people on the street to search their mobile devices for virtual private network services (VPNs) that allow them to bypass government internet blocking.

Contrary to media reports of related outbreaks and overburdened hospitals, officials deny there are any cases of COVID-19.

Vietnam

COVID-19 pandemic: vaccination campaign launched

On 08.03.21, the first vaccinations started in Vietnam (cf. BN of 01.03.21). According to media reports, the vaccine will first be available in particularly affected cities and provinces, including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Hai Duong Province. Healthcare workers, among others, are to be vaccinated first.

Yemen

Security situation

On 07.03.21, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition carried out air strikes on the capital Sanaa and other governorates in Yemen in retaliation for the Houthi rebels' missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia in recent weeks.

Fighting between pro-government troops and Houthi rebels continues in Marib governorate. According to reports by the military on 06.03.21, 90 fighters on both sides had been killed in the past 24 hours.

Fighting was also reported in Taiz governorate last week. The organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders (MSF)) said it was treating 28 injured persons at a hospital it runs. The hospital was also ambushed, injuring at least three persons, including a member of the medical staff and a child.

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