



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Food situation

According to a report issued by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS-NET), in February 2021 most of Afghanistan was in stage two “Stressed” of the IPC scale (the provinces of Badakhshan, Nuristan, Samangan, Ghor, Daikundi, Bamiyan, Ghazni, Wardak and Uruzgan as well as small parts of other provinces were in stage three “Crisis”). The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) ranges from “Minimal” to “Stressed”, “Crisis” and “Emergency” to “Famine”. The cumulative rainfall of the last rainy season (October 2020 to February 2021) was significantly below average due to the El Nino weather phenomenon, which could lead to crop failures. In the forecast for February to September 2021, level three is therefore expected for almost the whole of Afghanistan, with the exception of the provinces in the east and parts of the centre of the country (Nangarhar, Kunar, Ghazni, Bamiyan, Wardak, Logar, Parwan, Kabul, Kapisa, Laghman and Panjshir). In addition, many food prices have also skyrocketed since March 2020 in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, while the purchasing power of casual labourers and livestock farmers has declined. Many households have taken out loans so that they can buy food.

High-Risk List of the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

In its “2021 High-Risk List” published in March 2021, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) criticises the Afghan government, in some cases strongly, and states, among other things, that Afghanistan is still nowhere near being able to support itself. In particular, he said government tasks, including the military and police, could not be financed from its own resources, nor could infrastructure projects such as road construction or energy supply. Other major problem areas are the illegal drug trade, which he said remained unaffected even by the COVID-19 pandemic, and endemic corruption, which is not being tackled decisively. In addition, the future funding for a post-peace settlement uncertain, the reintegration of an estimated 55,000 to 85,000 Taliban fighters has not yet been clarified and women’s rights will be threatened by any future government.

Suicide attacks, hostilities, civilian casualties

On 06.03.21, three persons were killed in a blast in the city of Lashkar Gah (Helmand province), including a provincial prosecutor in charge of intelligence.

On 11.03.21, the local prosecutor was killed in an armed terrorist attack in the town of Gardez in Paktia province. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

In Herat, a car bomb exploded in front of a police outpost on 12.03.21. Seven persons (including civilians) were killed and 60 were injured. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 14.03.21, a police officer was killed by unknown gunmen in the city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province. The policeman’s weapon was also stolen in the process. On the same day, three civilians were killed and 12 others were injured in two separate explosions in Kabul. Both attacks involved minibuses.

According to research conducted by the New York Times, at least 257 government forces and 66 civilians were killed in February 2021 (as of 25.02.21).

Situation of women

On 10.03.21, the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) banned girls aged twelve and older from singing the national anthem and any other group songs in mixed company. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has condemned this as interference in the freedom of expression and discrimination based on gender. The MoE had repeatedly drawn attention to its conservative stance. On 13.03.21, due to public pressure, the MoE revoked its decision in a press release and stated that an investigation would be launched.

The number of women employees in media organisations has dropped from 1,678 to 1,377 year-on-year since March 2020, representing a decrease of 18%, according to a report published by the Journalists' Safety Committee on 08.03.21. It says many women had quit work due to increased attacks against women.

Algeria

Early re-election scheduled

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune announced that the next parliamentary election would take place on 12.06.21. Due to numerous protest marches and demonstrations in recent weeks, he had ordered the dissolution of parliament and the upcoming election to be held on 21.02.21 (cf. BN of 22.02.21).

Benin

COVID-19 pandemic: vaccine arrives

On 10.03.21, Benin received the first 144,000 vaccine doses through the COVAX initiative. A total of 792,000 vaccine doses are to be delivered by May 2021. Healthcare workers and persons over the age of 60 are to be vaccinated first.

Bolivia

Former President Jeanine Anez detained

Conservative ex-president Jeanine Anez Chavez was arrested on 13.03.21 on charges of "terrorism" and "sedition". Earlier, prosecutors had issued arrest warrants for Anez in connection with an alleged coup against long-time former President Evo Morales. Anez had taken over the office in November 2019 on an interim basis after Morales resigned following mass protests and under pressure from the military over allegations of rigging in the presidential election in October 2019 (cf. BN of 11.11.19). Anez described the action as "political persecution". The arrest warrants against two ministers from Anez's interim administration were also executed.

In order to avoid his own prosecution (cf. BN of 07.09.20 and 02.11.20), Morales had temporarily stayed abroad, but returned to Bolivia after the election victory of his party friend Luis Arce in the presidential election in October 2020 (cf. BN of 26.10.20), once again taking over the leadership of the Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS)), which he had founded (cf. BN of 23.11.20).

Burundi

UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi criticises the human rights situation

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi has criticised the human rights situation in the country. The President of the Commission of Inquiry, Doudou Diène, recognised the first symbolic steps and declarations of intent, but considered them to be insufficient to achieve a lasting improvement of the situation.

According to the report, several security-related incidents occurred especially in the summer of 2020 that were directed against rebels. It also mentioned the increase in measures against persons suspected of belonging to or supporting an armed group. Diène listed various examples, ranging from arbitrary arrests of family members of former soldiers serving in the former Burundian army (FAB) to extrajudicial killings. The Commission of Inquiry named employees of the secret service (SNR) and members of the youth organisation of the ruling party (Imbonerakure) as the main responsible actors.

The strict surveillance of members of the opposition party National Congress for Liberty (Congrès National pour la Liberté (CNL)) was also criticised. In this context, important opposition representatives had been arrested in recent months because they had accused President Nkurunziza of human rights violations. The Commission of Inquiry also pointed out that although more than 5,000 detained persons were released at the beginning of March 2021, they did not include any human rights defenders or any of the President's political opponents.

China

Hong Kong: electoral reform decided

At the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China (NPC) session held in Beijing on 11.03.21, Parliament voted to reform Hong Kong's electoral system, with only one abstention and 2,895 delegates voting in favour. The ruling provides for an increase in the number of election committee members from 1,200 to 1,500. The 300 newly-created seats are to go to MPs from the NPC and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (PKKCV). Seats in the Hong Kong Parliament (Legislative Council) are to be increased from 70 to 90. In addition, Beijing plans to set up a committee that will be responsible for choosing Hong Kong's Chief Executive and many of the members of the Legislative Council. In order to safeguard China's security and development interests and the stability of Hong Kong, China wants to ensure that Hong Kong is governed by patriots.

Côte d'Ivoire

Ruling party RHDP defends absolute majority

President Alassane Ouattara's party Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RHDP)) defended its absolute majority in the parliamentary elections held on 06.03.21 (cf. BN of 08.03.21). According to media reports based on data from the Electoral Commission, the RHDP took 137 of the 254 seats. This is 30 seats less than before. This means the party has lost its two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, which had previously allowed it to push through constitutional amendments on its own. The parliamentary election was considered to be an important test for the political stability of the country. More than 80 persons were killed during the presidential election held on 31.10.20, which was boycotted by large parts of the opposition. Ouattara's political opponents had considered his candidacy for a third term as president of Côte d'Ivoire to be unconstitutional (cf. BN of 09.11.20). According to media reports, the results of the parliamentary elections held on 06.03.21 were not recognised by parts of the opposition initially. Observers consider it positive that all major political forces in Côte d'Ivoire took part in the parliamentary elections, which were conducted by and large peacefully.

Power struggles feared following death of the Prime Minister

Prime Minister Hamed Bakayoko died on 10.03.21 in a hospital in Freiburg where he was being treated for cancer. According to media reports, the 56-year-old had already left Côte d'Ivoire in mid-February 2021 and had initially undergone treatment in France. As he was considered to be a possible successor to President Alassane Ouattara, observers assume that the West African country could now face politically turbulent times with power struggles in the ruling party RHDP. Bakayoko had only been appointed successor to the former head of government Amadou Coulibaly, who died unexpectedly of heart disease, as recently as 30.07.20 (cf. BN of 03.08.20).

Equatorial Guinea

Many killed and injured in explosion at military camp

An explosion at the Nkoa Ntoma military camp in the economically important town of Bata on 07.03.21 killed 105 persons, according to the latest count. More than 600 persons were injured. President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo who has ruled the country since 1979, faulted the military for mishandling explosive devices kept in its care. A funeral service for those killed in the explosion was held on 12.03.21.

Gambia

Situation of women and their representation in elected positions

On the occasion of this year's International Women's Day themed "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world" the government-appointed National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) called for greater and equal participation of women in leadership positions. The NHRC said that despite a slight female majority in the population (52%), there was an imbalance between women and men in the political and public decision-making process. Women continue to be underrepresented in elected political decision-making positions at national as well as local level. Of the 58 members of the National Assembly, only six are currently women. Only four women are part of the eighteen-member cabinet. Only 15% of the 144 elected councillors are women and only one of the eight local authorities and one of the five administrative regions is chaired by a woman. There are currently no female district chiefs (so-called "seyfo") and only a few elected village chiefs (so-called "alkalo"). No state-owned enterprise is currently run by a woman.

Patriarchal role models, illiteracy, socio-cultural and religious beliefs continue to hinder women's political participation and socio-economic progress, and fuel discrimination, exploitation and violence suffered by women in both the public and private spheres. Sexual harassment in the workplace is widespread. Maternal mortality remains high. It is estimated that one in three women is or has already been a victim of gender-based violence. The NHRC urged the government to consistently enforce laws that are particularly protective of women, such as the Women's Act 2010, the Domestic Violence Act 2013, the Sexual Offences Act 2013 and the Trafficking in Persons Act 2007.

Guinea-Bissau

Journalist abducted and beaten

According to media reports, the journalist António Aly Silva was abducted and severely beaten by unknown masked men in the centre of the capital Bissau on 09.03.21. Part of his tongue was cut out. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called for a serious and impartial inquiry in a tweet. The journalist himself blamed people "connected to power" for the attack. Aly Silva is a supporter of Domingos Simões Pereira, leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), who was defeated in a disputed run-off for the presidency on 29.12.19 (cf. BN of 13.01.20). President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, denied any involvement and promised that the perpetrators would be apprehended and punished by the judiciary.

Meanwhile, after more than a year in Portugal, Simões Pereira returned to the country on 12.03.21. The police dispersed the crowd that had gathered to welcome him. They reportedly used batons and tear gas. They referred to the ban on gatherings of more than 25 persons because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Civil society organisations bemoan human rights violations

In connection with the abduction of journalist Aly Silva (see above), 23 civil society organisations jointly demanded the resignation of the Attorney General and the Minister of the Interior on 10.03.21. An atmosphere of terror and impunity had recently prevailed in the country with cyclical human rights violations, especially abductions and mistreatment. The vice-president of one of the organisations, the Guinean League for Human Rights (Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos (LGDH)), told Deutsche Welle (DW) in an interview that a climate of intimidation and the "attempt to install a dictatorship" was being observed.

India

COVID-19 pandemic: number of cases rises

On 12.03.21, the Indian Ministry of Health reported the largest increase in new cases of coronavirus in a single day since the end of December 2020, with the western state of Maharashtra being particularly hard hit. There, a lockdown of at least one week was announced for the densely populated city of Nagpur as well as measures in five other districts of Maharashtra. In addition, a curfew has been imposed in 16 hotspots in the Thane district bordering the Mumbai metropolis until the end of March 2021.

In India, case numbers had been steadily declining since reaching a peak at the end of September 2020. The resurgence is attributed to increased public gatherings and failure to observe protection concepts.

Kumbh-Mela festival in Haridwar

On 11.03.21, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, tens of thousands of pilgrims thronged the banks of the River Ganges in the city of Haridwar in the state of Uttarakhand on the first of three bathing days as part of the Kumbh Mela festival. Authorities expected a total of 2.5 million participants. The festival is one of the largest pilgrimage and religious festivals in Hinduism that only takes place every twelve years.

Iran

Army deployed to prevent future protests inside the country

Iranian media abroad, referring to an interview with the Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces, Brigadier General Kiyumars Heidari, published on the Revolution Leader's website, reported that the army had been present during the crackdown on protests in January 2018. This is seen as the first time an army official has spoken out in the country's recent history, as the army had previously been considered to be apolitical and neutral. Until now, in addition to the police, the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia have been primarily responsible for restoring public order. Revolution Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued special decrees on the role the army would play in the country after the protests in early 2018. These allow for future operations against unrest and domestic protests.

Female activist handed prison sentence for protesting against mandatory hijab

A 22-year-old activist has been sentenced to seven and a half years in prison by an appeals court in Tehran for opposing and violating the requirement to wear a headscarf in public. The woman was arrested in June 2019 and was sentenced to the maximum penalty of 15 years in prison by a revolutionary court three months later. The charges were "spreading moral evil and sin by removing the hijab and walking without a veil" and "assembly and actions against national security" and "propaganda activities against the system". These charges resulted in a total sentence of 24 years in prison. The mother of the woman convicted was sentenced to 31 months in prison for researching her daughter's case and giving interviews to the media.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic in Iran, Javid Rahman, pointed out in his latest report that women and girls are being treated as second-class citizens in parts of Iranian society. He emphasised restrictions women face in the areas of marriage, divorce, professional life and culture. According to Rahman, three other women are currently in prison for protesting against the obligation to wear the veil on International Women's Day.

Judicial authorities crack down on musicians in exile and fans

Iranian foreign media report that Iranian judicial authorities are ramping up pressure on the exiled musician Sasy Mankan (real name Sasan Heidari Yafteh) and his fans and followers. The reason is a controversial video featuring Mankan's latest song "Tehran Tokyo". The judicial authority is threatening the singer with international criminal prosecution if he releases the video clip which is considered to be offensive in Iran. The authority also warned fans and threatened anyone who sings the song in public or distributes copies with sanctions. In addition to a ban on advertising on the Internet, there are also reports that initial arrests have been made. Sasy Mankan has been living in exile in the USA since 2012.

Iraq

New protests in Najaf

Protest rallies took place in Najaf on 13.03.21 and 14.03.21 which ended in violent clashes with the security forces. Unlike many similar clashes in previous months, there were no fatalities and no live ammunition was used. Nevertheless, there was a considerable amount of violence. The protesters demanded the resignation of the regional government and an end to corruption.

Family in Salahuddin murdered

ISIS carried out a raid in the village of al-Boudour near Tikrit in the early hours of 12.03.21. It claimed responsibility for the massacre a day later. In the process, ISIS members wearing military uniforms and ostensibly carrying out house searches murdered six members of a family – including women – as well as a lawyer and a member of the security forces. ISIS published footage of the victims taken shortly before their deaths, among other things. The crime appears to be both politically and personally motivated, as witnesses recognised an ISIS member who had previously lived in the village and was personally acquainted with the victims. Several members of the family are members of a PMU militia that was involved in driving ISIS out of the village.

Activist's father assassinated

The father of the activist Ali Jaseb who was abducted in October 2020, Jasb Hattab Aboud, was shot dead in the street by two unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle in Maysan on 10.03.21. Initial reports in Arab media spoke of a tribal conflict, but according to Iraqi media reports, the modus operandi and context suggest that the Iran-affiliated militia Ansarullah al-Awfyia'a is responsible for the assassination and kidnapping of Ali Jaseb. Reports of attacks on the families of activists, occasionally even against female or underage relatives, repeatedly surface in the context of the PMU militias.

Jordan

Seven die when oxygen supply fails

On 13.03.21, seven patients suffering from coronavirus died in a hospital in al-Salt, north of Amman, due to a failure in the oxygen supply. The vaccination campaign is also facing difficulties due to late deliveries, underfunding and limited supplies. The incident in al-Salt led to protests demanding an end to the government's policy. People are accusing the government of mismanagement and are demanding an end to extensive restrictions.

Kosovo

Official final result of the parliamentary election

On 13.03.21, the Central Election Commission confirmed the official final results of the early parliamentary elections held on 14.02.21. According to these results, the Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination) party received 50.28% of the valid votes and 58 of the 120 seats. Vetëvendosje benefited from a strong share of non-resident voters who were not counted until later, as well as from the cancellation of numerous votes for parties of non-Serbian minorities. The parties Romani Initiative (RI), Ujedinjena Zajednica (English: United Community) as well as Vakot Coalition had received a substantial proportion of their votes in Serb-dominated municipalities, although they had stood to represent the Roma and Bosniaks respectively (cf. BN of 01.03.21). The Election Commission considered this to be a distortion of the voters' will with regard to the parliamentary seats reserved for minorities. The Supreme Court upheld the decision. Accordingly, the RI won only one of the previously expected two seats.

In view of the annulment of the votes, the vote shares of the other parties of the Albanian majority also increased slightly compared to the first counts. The new parliament must convene for its constituent session within 30 days of the confirmation of the election results. According to media reports, 40% of the members of parliament will be women.

Accusation of vote rigging; foreign Minister resigns

The incumbent Foreign Minister Meliza Haradinaj-Stublla resigned from her post on 09.03.21 and also left her party, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK). She said she wanted to concentrate on her legal defence against what she considered to be false accusations that her husband had bribed election officials in the 14.02.21 parliamentary election to ensure that she won a seat. Two election officials were also arrested on 09.03.21, against whom a Pristina court later ordered 30 days' pre-trial detention.

The AAK led by former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj came fourth in the election with 7.1% of the valid votes. It thus lost five of its previous 13 seats.

Lebanon

Protests

On 10.03.21, the roadblocks erected by protesters were cleared by the Lebanese army. These roadblocks have been in place for a week in several cities across the country, after they were set up there in protest against the economic and political crisis in the country. For a week now, people in Lebanon have been taking to the streets daily to protest. On 12.03.21, thousands of people took to the streets once again. They demanded an independent government that would lead the country out of the crisis. On 13.03.21 clashes erupted with the police when security forces used tear gas against a small group of protesters near the parliament, who threw stones at the police officers and tried to cross the cordon into the parliament.

Economic crisis and COVID-19

On 12.03.21, parliament approved a loan worth US\$ 246 million from the World Bank. This is intended to combat extreme poverty in the country. The affected households are to receive about US\$ 100 per month in aid. The World Bank also largely finances the country's vaccination strategy and had already warned that it would no longer do so if parliamentarians jumped the queue for the vaccine. Since 14.02.21, 100,000 people in Lebanon have already been vaccinated.

Libya

Entire parliament endorses new cabinet

In Sirte, the entire Libyan parliament met for the first time from 08.03.21 to 10.03.21 to vote on the cabinet proposal put forward by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh who had been elected on 05.02.21. The delegates approved the cabinet proposal by a large majority on 10.03.21. The new Government of National Unity (GNU) is tasked, among other things, with preparing for the planned parliamentary and presidential elections in December 2021. Both the Government of National Unity led by Fajis al-Saraj (GNA) and the government in office in eastern Libya led by Abdalla Thinni announced that they would hand over power to the newly-elected unity government. In recent weeks, following Dbeibeh's election as prime minister by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), allegations of corruption were made against Dbeibeh in connection with his election.

Civil air traffic resumes between Benghazi and Misrata

Civil air traffic between the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi and the western Libyan city of Misrata resumed for the first time in six years on 09.03.21.

Mali

COVID-19 pandemic

Mali received its first delivery of 396,000 vaccine doses from the international COVAX initiative on 05.03.21. By the end of 2021, a total of 1.4 million vaccine doses are to be delivered within this framework. The vaccination campaign will be officially launched in April 2021.

Montenegro

Language dispute flares up again

According to recent media reports, supporters of self-proclaimed patriotic organisations attempted to storm the building of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport in the city of Cetinje on 08.03.21 in a protest against the new government. With the participation of professors of the Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature, the activists had accused the government, which in their opinion was pro-Serbian, of bias against the Montenegrin language and insinuated that the abolition of the faculty is planned which is the only educational institution of this kind in Montenegro. The dean of the faculty had accused the new Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic of seeing Montenegro as a Serbian state. In a statement following the protests, the Ministry of Education

accused the dean of misleading the public and gave assurances that it has enough funds to cover the faculty and salaries. According to the last census, Montenegrin, which has also been an official language in the education system since 2011, is spoken by 36% of the population, and Serbian is spoken by 44%.

ECHR confirms police violations of European Convention on Human Rights in 2015

According to recent media reports, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled on 11.03.21 that the Special Police Unit of Montenegro (SAJ) violated Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights and thus its powers over protesters during opposition protests in October 2015. The two plaintiffs were awarded financial damages for inhuman or degrading treatment during their arrest. Their ill-treatment had been sufficiently proven by video footage and had also been previously established by the Ombudsman and Montenegrin courts, including the Constitutional Court. However, the ECHR's ruling emphasised procedural deficiencies such as a lack of transparency, thoroughness and independence on the part of the public prosecutor's office responsible at the time, especially in identifying the police officers involved.

Morocco

Expansion of the sand wall in the border area of Western Sahara

Morocco is reported to have extended the sand wall in the Western Sahara/Algerian border area by 50 km to secure the area against drug smugglers and illegal immigrants. The sand wall is about 2,700 km long and is equipped with barbed wire and a modern surveillance system. On 13.11.20, the Moroccan armed forces broke up a Polisario blockade in the border area with Mauritania and established a security corridor for goods and passenger traffic (cf. BN of 16.11.20).

Myanmar

Violent crackdown against protest movement, situation increasingly tense

Three persons were shot dead by security forces during protests in Myitkyina and Pyapon as part of a renewed nationwide general strike on 08.03.21. Protests also took place in Yangon (Rangoon), Mandalay, Bagan, Monywa and other locations. Although the military government had threatened immediate dismissals in advance, participation in the strikes was again high. The junta was unable to realise its plan to reopen the banks. Rail transport, hospitals and universities are also heavily affected by the work stoppages.

Security forces arrested Zaw Myat Lynn, a member of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and head of an educational institution, during overnight raids on residential areas in Yangon on 08.03.21. The military announced his death on 09.03.21. Zaw Myat Lynn had called for the continuation of pro-democracy protests via Facebook. In Bago on 09.03.21, Ko Ja Mar, NLD member and bodyguard of ousted government leader Aung San Suu Kyi, was arrested. He is one of hundreds of persons whose whereabouts are unknown following night-time arrests at their homes.

Meanwhile, the protest movement received support from the two ethnic guerrilla groups Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). In addition to demonstrators, the armed groups also want to protect the growing number of police officers who deserted their posts.

On 11.03.21, at least seven persons were killed by shots fired by security forces during a demonstration in Myaing. In Mandalay, police fired shots into a march led by Buddhist monks, killing one person. One man was killed in each of the demonstrations in Myingyan, Yangon and Bago. Another man was reportedly killed in Dawei.

Protesters who were temporarily detained in Myeik on 10.03.21 reported being mistreated by soldiers and police officers.

According to local media reports, a clash took place between the military and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) on 11.03.21. The KIA allegedly raided a military camp near Sal Zin village without receiving an order from the central command. The military then allegedly launched a counter-attack with fighter jets (according to other reports, helicopters). KIA spokesperson Col Naw Bu reported the military had carried out several raids on KIA posts in Shan State since the coup on 01.02.21. The KIA claimed responsibility for the protest movement against military rule and threatened to retaliate if security forces continued to use violence against demonstrators in Kachin State.

In Taunggyi, a journalist working for the German Press Agency was reportedly arrested and beaten by soldiers on 11.03.21.

On 12.03.21, thousands of people gathered in several cities to hold vigils for the protesters who had been killed. During these and other protests, at least twelve persons were killed in Mandalay, Yangon, Pyay and Chauk before 13.03.21, including a monk, a pregnant woman and a 13-year-old child.

On 14.03.21, at least 39 people were killed in protests in Yangon, Mandalay, Bago and Hpakant, 35 of them in Yangon. The Chinese embassy reported attacks on several Chinese factories in Yangon and called on Myanmar to restore order. The junta then imposed martial law in the two districts of Hlaing Tharyar and Shwepyitha. This was extended to other districts on 15.03.21.

In total, 126 to 134 people were killed in the protests against the military coup, according to different sources. The number of arrests rose to 2,156.

Amnesty International: use of weapons of battlefield weaponry against peaceful demonstrators

On 11.03.21, Amnesty International (ai) published an analysis based on the review of video footage, showing systematic and premeditated killings of protesters by the military and police. Furthermore, ai identified several military units among the security forces deployed against the protest movement, which are said to be known for committing human rights violations and war crimes against ethnic minorities in the states of Kachin, Shan and Rakhine.

UN Security Council condemns military crackdown

At another session, all the members of the UN Security Council agreed on a statement released on 10.03.21 condemning the violence against peaceful protesters and calling for the immediate release of all those detained, including members of the civilian government elected in November 2020. At the same time, the US announced the imposition of further sanctions against the military regime via the US Department of the Treasury. On 12.03.21, the US Department of Homeland Security announced a temporary halt to the deportation of approximately 1,600 Myanmar nationals in the US.

Civil leader speaks from hiding

On 13.03.21, the acting vice-president of the deposed civilian government, Mahn Win Khaing Than, who is in hiding, called on the people to continue with the protests and said people must win the uprising. The Committee for Representing the Union Parliament (CRPH), co-founded by Mahn Win Khaing Than and seeking international recognition as Myanmar's legitimate government, was seeking the formation of a federal democracy involving all ethnic groups in the country.

Corruption allegations against Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains under house arrest, has been accused of corruption by the military regime. This was announced by junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun at a press conference held in Naypidaw on 11.01.21. According to the allegations, Suu Kyi had accepted US\$ 600,000 and eleven kilogrammes of gold worth US\$ 680,000. The junta has not yet provided any evidence. Suu Kyi is to be questioned again by a court on 15.03.21 via video link.

Niger

Thousands flee violence in neighbouring Nigeria

According to a UNHCR report, more than 7,660 persons have already fled to safety to the Maradi region in southern Niger in 2021 to escape increasing violence in the northwest of neighbouring Nigeria. Of the nearly 100,000 people now displaced in Maradi, 77,000 had crossed the border from Nigeria to escape armed groups and communal clashes in Nigeria's Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto states. But also from Maradi itself, refugees report an increase in violence in the form of murders, abductions and looting of villages. The UNHCR says it is working closely with the Nigerien government to move people from the border to safe places in the interior of the country.

Mahamadou Issoufou wins Mo Ibrahim Prize

Mahamadou Issoufou, who will remain the executive holder of the presidential office until his successor is sworn in, has received the Mo Ibrahim Prize, making him the sixth recipient of this US\$ 5 million award, which has been

presented to outstanding African leaders since 2007. One of the requirements is that he must serve the term of office stipulated by the constitution. Issoufou did not stand for re-election in the last presidential election after serving two terms in office, thus laying the foundation for the first democratic change of power in Niger. The chairman of the prize committee highlighted the fact that during Issoufou's presidency, the number of Nigeriens living below the poverty line had fallen from 48% to 40%.

Nigeria

Renewed kidnapping of dozens of schoolchildren

On 11.03.21, a large number of schoolchildren were abducted, the second kidnapping to occur within a few weeks. According to the authorities, unknown gunmen stormed the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in the northern state of Kaduna and abducted 39 boys and girls. Many other students were injured in the attack. They say security forces had started pursuing the attackers. According to media reports, a video with ransom demands surfaced two days after the attack. A series of kidnappings related to attacks on schools have occurred in the northern states since December 2020 (cf. BN of 21.12.20, 22.02.21 and 08.03.21). Further kidnapping attempts were thwarted by security forces, according to authorities. In the fight against criminal gangs, President Muhammadu Buhari had only recently issued a shoot-to-kill order on all illegal carriers of Kalashnikov assault rifles (AK-47). Only security forces are allowed to use such weapons, he said. Kalashnikov assault rifles are considered to be the standard weapon used by Nigerian gangs.

Pakistan

COVID-19 pandemic: second vaccination phase

On 10.03.21, the second vaccination phase for protection against the coronavirus began in Pakistan, according to government sources. Citizens over 60 years of age are to receive their first dose in stages at adult vaccination centres.

Death sentence for Christian accused of blasphemy

On 10.03.21, the High Court in Lahore (Punjab) commuted the life sentence of a Christian convicted of insulting the Prophet (blasphemy) to the death penalty. The 28-year-old had been accused of blasphemy in 2011 because of a text message allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

Pakistan / Iran

Protests following killings in Baluchestan in Iran

In early March 2021, politically active persons advocating for the rights of the Baloch ethnic minority took to the streets to protest in the southern Pakistani metropolis of Karachi (Sindh) in response to violent unrest and internet shutdowns in the southeastern Iranian province of Sistan and -Baluchestan, which is on the border with Pakistan. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), at least 10 suspected Pakistani traffickers belonging to the Baloch ethnic minority were killed by Iranian border guards in the Iran-Pakistan border area on 22.02.21. In addition to demanding compensation for the bereaved families of those killed, the protesters are also calling for the Iranian government to stop using violence against traffickers who have little other means of making a living in the poverty-stricken Pakistani province of Balochistan.

Republic of the Congo

Shortly before the election: leading human rights activist arrested

According to consistent media reports, persons dressed in civilian clothing arrested human rights activist Dr Alexandre Ibacka Dzabana in Brazzaville on 11.03.21. His lawyer has confirmed the arrest and stated that he had

identified his client on the premises of the Central Intelligence and Documentation Centre. The authorities have so far refused to allow the lawyer to meet his client.

Dzabana is accused of threatening internal security and destabilising the electoral process with the help of Congolese officers based abroad. His arrest came ten days before the presidential elections scheduled for 21.03.21. Dzabana is the coordinator of the Congolese Platform of Human Rights and Democracy NGOs, a member of the M22 movement as well as the Turn the Page Coalition. Civil society as well as various NGOs have demanded the immediate release of Dzabana as well as the release of the anti-government journalist Raymond Malonga, who had been arrested in February 2021 (cf. BN of 15.02.21).

Russian Federation

Arrests made at opposition meeting

According to the Ministry of the Interior, around 200 persons were arrested at a meeting of the Russian opposition in Moscow on 13.03.21. Among others, the well-known opposition politicians Vladimir Kara-Mursa, Ilya Yashin, Andrei Pivovarov and Yevgeny Roizman were led away and escorted to prison vans. Some said they were released a few hours later. Journalists were also temporarily detained at the meeting place, a hotel. Under the title “Communal Russia”, MPs from all over the country wanted to network with each other. Strategies were to be discussed over two days to defeat the monopoly of power of the Kremlin party United Russia in the long term. Half an hour after the conference began, security forces entered the hall and declared it over. The police officers justified their action by saying the event had been arranged by an undesirable organisation in Russia. They are probably referring to the organisation “Open Russia” which was established by the former Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky who is now residing in the West, whose coordinator is Kara-Mursa and which was declared an undesirable organisation in Russia a few years ago. Some media had previously interpreted the conference as a closing of ranks between Khodorkovsky’s movement and supporters of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. Navalny’s team repeatedly promotes the principle of “smart voting” in elections: According to this principle, voters should vote for any candidates bar those of the Kremlin party.

Saudi Arabia

Sentence against women’s rights activist upheld

On 10.03.21, a criminal court specialising in terrorism confirmed the sentence of six years’ imprisonment for Loujain al-Hathloul which she had appealed against. After already serving three years for allegedly aiding and abetting terrorism, al-Hathloul was released early in February 2021. However, she faces three years’ probation and a five-year travel ban. The defendant had campaigned for the lifting of the ban on women driving and the abolition of the concept of male guardianship over women.

Senegal

Situation remains tense following unrest

The situation in Dakar remained tense on 08.03.21 following the arrest of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko on 03.03.21. Local media reported tanks and roadblocks in the Senegalese capital. Protests called for by the new opposition “Movement for the Defence of Democracy” (M2D) were to be prevented. Schools remained closed as a precaution. A court in Dakar charged the opposition leader with rape on 08.03.21. The opposition says the charge is politically motivated, as Sonko is considered to be the most promising candidate for the 2024 presidential elections. According to the constitution, incumbent Macky Sall would then not be allowed to run again after serving two terms in office, although rumours persist that Sall is not willing to leave power. Tensions eased somewhat after Sonko was released from detention on bail on 08.03.21. According to information provided by Amnesty International (ai), at least eight persons have been killed since the protests began. President Macky Sall is trying to calm down the population and has announced that the evening curfew, imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, will be shortened in the hot spots. This should also help ease the economic situation of many people. After a day of mourning for the demonstrators killed on 12.03.21, calls were made for new peaceful protests.

South Sudan

Additional rebel groups to be included in the government

According to media reports, several rebel groups, which were not originally included in the 2018 peace agreement, signed a declaration of ceasefire and re-engagement with the government on 11.03.21. This declaration is intended to guide subsequent negotiations with the government and re-commits both parties to the cessation of hostilities agreement concluded in Rome in 2020. The meeting to sign the Declaration of Principles was also attended by representatives of Kenya, Uganda, the European Union, Sudan, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. Representing the South Sudan Opposition Movement Alliance (SSOMA), Pagan Amum, former secretary general of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, and Paul Malong, former commanding general of the armed forces, signed the declaration.

Syria

Conflict in Syria nears 10-year mark

According to a UNICEF report published on 10.03.21, nearly 12,000 children have been killed or injured since 2011. More than 5,700 have been forcibly recruited into fighting. A press release issued on 10.03.21 by the International Committee of the Red Cross showed that 47% of 18-25-year-old Syrians had lost a close relative or friend during the conflict. UNHCR published in a press release on 12.03.21 that 5.5 million Syrians have sought protection abroad, while 6.7 million have been internally displaced. 86% of children living abroad did not want to return to Syria, according to the results of a survey conducted by the Save the Children organisation.

In total, according to the opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, nearly 400,000 persons have died in the country since the beginning of the conflict in 2011.

Togo

COVID-19 pandemic: vaccination campaign launched

On 07.03.21, Togo received the first 156,000 vaccine doses through the COVAX initiative. The vaccination campaign was launched on 10.03.21. Healthcare workers and persons over the age of 50 in the area of the capital Lomé will be vaccinated first.

Supreme Court upholds publication ban for two newspapers

On 09.03.21, the Supreme Court upheld the decisions of the media regulator High Authority for Communication (Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC)) in January and February 2021 respectively to ban the publication of the newspaper L'Alternative for four months and to permanently revoke the licence of the newspaper L'Indépendant Express. L'Alternative had accused a minister of fraud in connection with a real estate deal in an article published on 02.02.21. L'Indépendant Express had accused female ministers of theft in an article published on 29.12.20.

Turkey

Journalists sentenced for revealing state secrets

A court in Ankara sentenced journalists Muyesser Yildiz and Ismail Duken on 08.03.21 for revealing state secrets. Yildiz, the Ankara news editor for the news website OdaTV, was sentenced to three years and seven months in prison and Duken, the Ankara representative for the broadcaster TELE1, to one year and 15 days in prison. They were reporting on Turkey's military involvement in Libya.

Protests on International Women's Day

On the occasion of International Women's Day, women's rights activists and opposition activists took to the streets of Istanbul on 08.03.21 to protest against discrimination and domestic violence. According to media reports, more than 60 Turkish women had been killed by partners or relatives in the period leading up to March 2021 alone. The

judiciary is accused of passing lenient sentences on perpetrators. Protesters also criticised hostile statements by government officials against LGBTQI people, which contribute towards discrimination. Two days after the protest, 13 women were arrested on charges of violating the right to demonstrate and insulting the President, before being released on probation.

Court ruling in the trial over assassination of Andrei Karlov

On 09.03.21, five persons were sentenced to life imprisonment for the assassination of Russian Ambassador Andrei Karlov in Ankara in 2016. Six other defendants were acquitted. Eight defendants received sentences for membership in a terrorist organisation, according to media reports. The gunman himself, who was killed by special forces shortly after the attack, was accused of belonging to the Gulen movement. Fethullah Gulen, who lives in the USA, is also charged with the crime; a separate trial against him and other defendants is to be held separately.

Ukraine

Human rights under pressure

The ongoing COVID-19 situation is having a negative impact on the human rights situation in the context of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, according to a report issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on 11.03.21. The restrictions on movement imposed to contain COVID-19 particularly affect persons from the separatist areas who are dependent on travel to the Ukrainian-controlled areas for the purpose of receiving services and pension payments. The report says that while the security situation in the conflict zone has improved recently, there are still documented human rights violations against civilians by both Ukrainian and separatist security forces. In addition, the continued practice of unofficial detention facilities run by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) for persons with suspected links to the separatist areas constitutes a violation of the Ukrainian Criminal Code.

Vietnam

Sentences upheld in the Dong Tam land conflict

On 09.03.21, an appeal court in Hanoi upheld the sentences against five activists and one activist from Dong Tam commune, including two death sentences. The sentences handed down on 14.09.20 were preceded by a land dispute in the commune, located near Hanoi, in the course of which three police officers and the village chief were killed in January 2020 (cf. BN of 13.01.20 and 21.09.20). In Vietnam, all land is owned by the state. The state grants rights of use. Conflicts with farmers, among others, arise time and again when land is reallocated for construction projects and those affected do not feel properly compensated or see themselves as victims of corruption.

Blogger arrested

On 09.03.21, the Facebook user Tran Quoc Khanh was arrested in Ninh Binh Province for posting anti-government articles on social media. According to media reports, he had posted articles about human rights, among other things.

Prison sentences for supporters of the Provisional National Government of Vietnam

For their involvement in the Provisional National Government of Vietnam in exile, four individuals were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to 13 years by a court in Binh Phuoc province on 11.03.21 for activities to overthrow the government. The US-based organisation has been classified as a terrorist organisation by the Vietnamese government since 2018.

Yemen

Fire at detention facility for migrants

Houthi rebels are accused of being responsible for a fire at a migrant detention facility in Sanaa on 07.03.21. According to reports, members of the rebel group locked more than 350 migrants inside a hangar and launched projectiles through the windows, starting a fire. A large number of those trapped, mostly Ethiopians, burned to

death or were injured. The death toll varies between dozens and several hundred, depending on the source, and is difficult to verify because the Houthis are obstructing access to the injured. The reason for this act of violence is said to have been a hunger strike organised by the migrants who were protesting against poor living conditions.

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