



# Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

12 April 2021

## Afghanistan

### Attacks on civilians

On 11.04.21, one security guard was killed and another injured in an armed attack on the car of the deputy head of the Senate Secretariat in Kabul. Afghan media report that 28 civilians were killed and 57 injured in Afghanistan from 03.04.21 to 09.04.21.

On 08.04.21, the Afghan ministry of interior issued a press release stating that a terrorist cell was uncovered which was responsible for the murder of a journalist at the end of 2020 and carried out a number of other targeted attacks, also against civilians.

On 06.04.21, two civilians were killed and 18 others injured in a bomb attack in the city of Jalalabad, Nangarhar province. Four of the injured are in critical condition. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

One civilian was killed and a policeman injured in an explosion in Mazar-e Sharif city, Balkh province on 03.04.21. Five civilians were killed in a bomb explosion in Lashkargah, Helmand province, on 02.04.21.

On 31.3.21, the Afghan Human Rights Commission reported that since the beginning of the year, a total of 36 women were killed (14) or injured (22) in the country.

### Peace negotiations

After the Afghan government's rejection of the US peace plan, President Ghani presented his own plan on 06.04.21. A specially founded High Council for National Reconciliation has received a total of 30 proposals from 25 political parties for a peaceful settlement of the conflict, including President Ghani's plan. On 08.04.21, the Council announced that it had reviewed all the proposals and would now submit them in the bundled form of a single plan to the negotiations at the upcoming peace conference in Turkey, which is intended as a complement to the Doha process. The conference was to take place, if possible, before the possible withdrawal of international troops on 01.05.21, the Council stated. The USA would present a new plan similar to the one presented at the so-called Bonn Conference of 2001. The current phase in Afghan politics was often compared with the end of the Najibullah government in 1989 and the withdrawal of Soviet troops, with the gap between withdrawal and regime collapse having been three years, the Council added. This was also predicted for the Ghani government in case of the US troops' withdrawal. According to Afghan intelligence, Taliban attacks have increased by 24 percent since the beginning of the Doha negotiations. On 09.04.21, there was a large demonstration in Kabul with thousands of citizens calling for peace in the country and an end to the war, the Council concluded.

### Al-Qaida active in 21 Afghan provinces

The Long War Journal reported on 08.04.21 that al-Qaida and its arm al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) were active in 21 of the 34 Afghan provinces. The Taliban were continuing to deny their presence, as this was a basic condition for the withdrawal of international troops. In order to determine the figures, the Journal had analysed issues no. 3 to 18 of the Thabat magazine (the press medium of al-Qaida and AQIS). Afghan media

confirmed their activity in at least seven provinces, the Journal said. In July 2020, the United Nations Security Council Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team had reported that al-Qaida was active in 12 provinces. Al-Qaida and the Taliban continued to have good contacts with each other, the Monitoring Team said.

### **Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic**

According to WHO findings, Afghanistan is facing a sluggish economic recovery amid ongoing political uncertainties and a possible decline in international aid. Solid growth in agriculture has partially supported the Afghan economy, which contracted by about two per cent in 2020, much less than initially estimated. However, the service and industrial sectors have been hit hard, increasing unemployment in urban areas. Due to rapid population growth, per capita income is not expected to recover to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels by 2025.

## **Bangladesh**

### **COVID-19 pandemic: sharp increase in infection numbers**

The number of new infections has risen sharply in recent days. A lockdown introduced at the beginning of April 2021, including the closure of shops, will be further tightened from 14.04.21 due to the deteriorating situation, media reports say.

## **Benin**

### **Protests ahead of presidential election**

In the presidential election of 11.04.21, the two little-known politicians Alassane Soumanou and Corentin Kohoué ran against incumbent Patrice Talon. Most of the key opposition figures either live in exile, are in detention or were excluded from the election (cf. BN of 01.03.21). Candidates had to submit at least 16 signatures of members of parliament or mayors to be admitted to the election. Only parties close to the president are represented in parliament, and they also control the vast majority of mayoral offices. Some opposition representatives called on their supporters to boycott the election. Turnout was moderate, initial reports say.

Since 05.04.21, protests have taken place in several cities, including Cotonou, Parakou and Porto Novo. On 08.04.21, security forces violently broke up rallies in the town of Savè (Collines department). According to different reports, one or two people were killed and five or six others injured. Savè is a stronghold of former President Boni Yayi. In the town of Bantè (Collines department), an unknown number of people were killed in protests on 08.04.21. The election day itself was largely peaceful.

## **Burkina Faso**

### **Deaths in attacks**

In an attack on 05.03.21 on security forces in Tanwalbougou (Gourma province), at least three police officers and four members of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Nation (Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie VDP) were killed by several dozen gunmen on motorbikes.

On 01.04.21, six VDP members died in an attack by unknown individuals in Dablo (Sanmatenga province).

## **Cameroon**

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

On 11.04.21, Cameroon received a first delivery of 200,000 vaccine doses. These are now to be distributed throughout the country. Health workers, people over the age of 50, teachers and vulnerable people will be vaccinated first. At present, the country is being hit by a second wave of Corona.

## **Central African Republic**

### **Swearing-in of Touadéra and restrictions on opposition politicians**

On 30.03.21, Faustin-Archange Touadéra was sworn in as President of the Republic in the presence of several African heads of state and government and other high representatives. He had been confirmed in office in the presidential election of 27.12.20 (cf. BN of 11.01.21 and 25.01.21). The largest opposition coalition did not attend the swearing-in ceremony; their spokesperson declared that they would not recognise the legitimacy of Touadéra's re-election.

Meanwhile, media report that three of his opponents in the recent presidential elections were prevented from leaving the country by the authorities. Among them was the runner-up Anicet-Georges Dologué who wanted to go to France for medical treatment. In addition to this, a motion for the removal of the immunity of the three politicians in their capacity as MPs and of a fourth opposition politician was disclosed on 09.04.21. Investigations against them will reportedly be conducted in connection with allegations of a coup attempt and other wrongdoings made against ex-president François Bozizé.

### **Allegations against Russian private security companies**

On 31.03.21 a group of UN experts raised concerns to the UN Human Rights Council over the increasing role of foreign mercenaries in the government's struggle for control of the country. Specifically, the experts named three Russian private security companies. Continuing reports indicate that since the elections of 27.12.20, these companies have been guilty of arbitrary executions, torture during interrogations and displacement of the population, as well as attacks on humanitarian aid workers. The experts said they were disturbed to learn of the proximity to the national security forces, but also to the UN peacekeepers (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic MINUSCA). There seemed to be no investigations and no accountability for these abuses, due to the close connections between the various actors, along with the lack transparency, the experts said. MINUSCA head Mankeur Ndiaye rejected the allegations made against the UN mission, but said in an interview on 09.04.21 that investigations would be conducted into the circumstances. Russia also declared willingness to cooperate with the UN in the investigation.

### **Weakening of the rebel alliance CPC**

As one of the six rebel groups that had formed the rebel alliance Coalition of Patriots for Change (Coalition des patriotes pour le changement CPC) before the elections of 27.12.20 (cf. BN of 11.01.21), the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique UPC) announced on 05.04.21 that it was withdrawing from the CPC. This was reported by various media with reference to a UPC document. The UPC justified the step with the suffering of the population. The CPC has denied the move.

A few days earlier, another CPC group, Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation 3R), announced the death of its leader Sidiki Abbas who apparently succumbed to older injuries on 25.03.21.

## **China**

### **Tibet/international: election of exile parliament and head of exile government**

On 11.04.21, tens of thousands of Tibetans living in exile cast their ballots in the second round of elections for a new Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). The Election Commission in Dharamsala, India, where the exile government is based, reported that about 83,000 people from 26 countries had registered to vote. Voting was for members of parliament and the post of prime minister (Sikyong) with two candidates, namely Penpa Tsering, former speaker of parliament, and Kelsang Dorjee Aukatsang, adviser to the current incumbent Lobsang Sangay. The results are expected to be announced in May 2021. The first round of elections had taken place on 03.01.21 (cf. BN of 11.01.21). The Government in Exile is not recognised internationally.

### **Hong Kong: electoral reform bill passed**

On 30.03.21, the 167 deputies of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in Beijing unanimously adopted amendments to Hong Kong's electoral law. Subsequently, President Xi Jinping issued a corresponding amendment to the Hong Kong Constitution. The reform, which will significantly limit the opposition's ability to

influence political decisions, was initiated at this year's session of the People's Congress on 11.03.21 (cf. BN of 15.03.21).

## Colombia

### Targeted killings of activists

Media report that three civil society actors lost their lives in assassinations in March 2021. On 31.03.21, Aura Esther García Peñalver, an activist for the rights of the Wayuu indigenous people, was killed in the municipality of Uribe (La Guajira Department) by two unknown gunmen, after previously receiving threats. On 29.03.21, union leader Carlos Alberto Vidal was killed by a gunshot in the municipality of La Florida in Valle del Cauca. María Bernarda Juajibioy, an activist and mayor of an indigenous reserve, was shot dead along with her granddaughter by unknown individuals on 17.03.21 in the municipality of Orito (Putumayo Department). The perpetrators are attributed to armed groups involved in drug cultivation, smuggling and illegal mining in these regions.

## Côte d'Ivoire

### Attacks on security forces

During the night of 28.03.21 to 29.03.21, at least six people were killed in two attacks on defence and security forces in the towns of Tehini and Kafalo (spelling also Kafolo) near the border with Burkina Faso. Media reports indicate that the government of the West African country has classified the incidents as jihadist terrorist attacks. Already on 11.06.20, there had been a deadly attack on a military post in Kafolo (see BN of 29.06.20).

### ICC confirms Gbagbo's acquittal

The acquittal of former President Laurent Gbagbo is lawful, as was confirmed by a notice published on 31.03.21 by the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. In January 2019, the prosecution had appealed the acquittal and demanded a retrial. Gbagbo had been President from 2000 to 2010. In the trial before the ICC, he was accused of murder, rape, ill-treatment and persecution of hundreds of political opponents after the 2010 presidential elections. Although the current President Alassane Ouattara had won that election, Gbagbo had refused to relinquish power. The conflict had lasted until April 2011, leaving thousands dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. Gbagbo is currently staying in Belgium.

## Democratic Republic of the Congo

### UN: DR Congo has highest level of acute food insecurity in the world

According to the latest Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) analysis by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme, more than 27.3 million inhabitants, or one in three, are affected by high acute food insecurity (IPC phase 3 or higher). The food insecurity situation in the DRC is thus at an all-time high. In 2018, a total of 13 million residents had faced high acute food insecurity. Presently, around seven million residents are suffering acute hunger (famine/IPC phase 4). The main cause of the food and hunger crisis is the conflicts in the eastern parts of the country and in the central region of Kasai. The crisis is exacerbated by the poor economic situation, the COVID-19 pandemic and other highly contagious infectious diseases.

### Eastern Congo: Protests against UN peacekeepers, call for vigilante justice, militia violence

On 08.04.21, protest rallies took place in the towns of Butembo and Goma in North Kivu province against the presence of UN peacekeepers in the country. The demonstrators demanded their withdrawal, saying that despite the troop presence, the regional security situation had not improved and militia violence against civilians had increased even further. While media report that police used physical force and tear gas against the demonstrators, police reports say that the protesters threw stones at police officers and set up barricades. AFP news agency reports that one demonstrator was killed by police in Butembo. The protests were preceded by several militia attacks by the rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) on the villages of Moliso, Beu-Manyama and Musangwa in the Beni region of North Kivu province on 30.03.21 and 31.03.21. Radio Okapi reported on 01.04.21 that in the attacks, 29

residents were killed and 50 others abducted. Claiming a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of both national and international security forces in fighting the militia, hundreds of heavily armed youths followed a call and hunted down members of the ADF in and around the town of Beni on 02.04.21. On the same day, the military killed eight ADP rebel members allegedly involved in the various attacks occurring at the end of March 2021, military sources said.

## Djibouti

### Presidential elections

According to preliminary results, President Ismail Omar Guelleh won the presidential elections of 09.04.21 with approximately 97 percent of the vote. Guelleh has been in power since 1999. There was only one opposing candidate, as the rest of the opposition boycotted the elections, arguing that they were neither free nor fair.

## Georgia

### Opposition leader Melia in court

Detained since 24.02.21, Nika Melia, leader of Georgia's main opposition party United National Movement is accused of inciting 'mass violence' during the anti-government protests in 2019. Melia's trial began in Tbilisi on 08.04.21 with a closed-door hearing due to the COVID-19 pandemic measures. Hundreds of his supporters gathered outside the courthouse demanding his immediate release. If convicted, the opposition politician faces up to nine years in prison. Melia himself describes the charges against him as politically motivated. Since the parliamentary elections held on 31.10.20, tensions between the governing alliance Georgian Dream and the opposition parties have increased as the latter refuse to recognise the election results and to enter the new parliament. The opposition parties have spoken of election rigging and are calling for new elections. In March 2021, two rounds of EU-mediated talks between government and opposition, aiming at defusing tensions and allowing parliament to function properly, failed to produce a breakthrough.

## India

### COVID-19 pandemic: number of cases continues to rise

The number of new infections continues to rise sharply in India. The central government is trying to prevent a second nationwide lockdown. Regional elections are being held in several states, including West Bengal, where five people have been killed in two unrelated shooting incidents. In addition, religious celebrations involving tens of thousands of pilgrims have been held with insufficient attention to hygiene regulations. Some states were forced to tighten measures. The most affected state, Maharashtra with its capital Mumbai, has imposed weekend curfews until the end of April 2021. Restaurants there will remain permanently closed and public gatherings of more than five people are prohibited.

### Political narrative against Sikhs; peasant protests

In the course of farmers' protests against the liberalisation of the agricultural sector decided in 2020, a new political narrative directed against the religious minority of the Sikhs has been instrumentalised by the Hindu nationalist BJP, after resistance against the market reform had also formed among Sikhs from Punjab (cf. BN of 22.03.21). Some BJP politicians have accused the protesting Sikhs of fighting for an independent Khalistan, thus bringing back memories of the movement of the 1980s and 1990s. On 09.02.21, a Sikh farmer who had allegedly taken part in the protests (which had reached a preliminary climax on 26.01.21 with a tractor parade and the storming of the Red Fort in New Delhi, cf. BN of 01.02.21) was arrested for alleged sympathy for the Khalistan movement. He denies the accusations.

### Heavy firefight with Naxalites in Chhattisgarh; Jesuit priest in custody

On 03.04.21, security forces engaged in a four-hour gun battle with Maoist rebels in Bijapur district in the eastern state of Chhattisgarh, after some 400 Maoists armed with grenades and automatic rifles had attacked a police raid.

This has been the most serious clash of its kind in four years, with 22 security personnel killed and at least 30 others injured. The rebels suffered unspecified casualties.

The Maoists, also known as Naxalites, have been waging an armed struggle against the government for decades. In line with their doctrine, they have stood up for the poor sections of the population who have not benefitted from India's economic boom. They operate in the resource-rich eastern and southern parts of India known as the Red Corridor or Naxalite Corridor. After large-scale operations by security forces in recent years, their numbers have shrunk considerably. An expansion of operations has been announced.

Jesuit priest Stan Swamy remains in detention for allegedly supporting the Maoists after his arrest in October 2020. Recently, a court has rejected his request for release. Around 2,500 people have called for a reconsideration of his application to be released on bail and signed a petition to that effect in a Mumbai court.

#### **Kashmir: Protests after killing of three insurgents**

Protests erupted in Pulwama district in India's Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir on 02.04.21 after three suspected separatists were killed in a firefight with security forces.

On 06.04.21, a directive was issued in Kashmir prohibiting media practitioners from approaching police operations or broadcasting live reports of firefights for reasons of national security.

#### **Deportation of Rohingya to Myanmar lawful**

On 08.04.21, the Indian Supreme Court found that the deportation of 170 Rohingya from the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir was lawful on national security grounds. An estimated 5,000 Muslim Rohingya have fled in recent years to the Indian part of Kashmir to escape military violence against them in Buddhist-majority Myanmar and have been living there in camps or slums since. During raids in early March 2021, 170 Rohingya were arrested and taken to a detention centre in Hiranagar for return to Myanmar. A total of around 40,000 Rohingya are believed to be living in India, mostly undocumented, in various cities and regions. Apart from Jammu and Kashmir, they are mainly living in Hyderabad, Nuh and the capital New Delhi.

## **Iran**

#### **COVID-19 pandemic:**

In Iran, the Corona virus warning light has turned red for the capital Tehran and all other major and provincial capitals; red and orange warning colours have been issued for 386 districts. Reports from Iranian foreign media say that the British variant of the virus has spread from Khuzestan province on the Iraqi border to almost the entire country during the 14-day Nowruz holiday. In Tehran alone, the number of Corona-related deaths has apparently tripled. For this reason, a ten-day nationwide lockdown came into effect on 10.04.21, it was reported. Iran has a four-stage corona alert system, based on the capacity utilisation of the health system (red: more than ten COVID-19 patients hospitalised per day or 25 cases per 100,000 inhabitants; orange: six new hospital admissions per day; yellow: four new admissions, and blue: less than four new patients admitted).

#### **Prison sentence against Sunni Muslim**

The Human Rights Activist News Agency (HRANA) reports that a 36-year-old Sunni Muslim was sentenced to 26 years in prison by a revolutionary court in the city of Urumiyeh on 04.04.21. The charges were 'membership in a Salafist group', 'founding a group with the aim of undermining the country's security' and 'propaganda against the system'. Citing Sunni Muslim sources, Iranian foreign media report that the man had been arrested on 22.07.20 for insulting Qasem Soleimani, the General of the Qods Brigade of the Revolutionary Guards. General Soleimani had been killed in an American drone strike near Baghdad on 03.01.20.

#### **Prison sentences for Baha'i**

Media report that seven members of the Baha'i religion were taken into custody by security forces on 06.04.21 in Shiraz (Fars province). Also in the city of Mashhad (Khorasan-e Razavi province), at least four Baha'i women began serving their prison sentences and were taken to the city's Vakilabad Prison. The four women had been arrested earlier because they had organised an exhibition of handicrafts and had been each sentenced to one year in prison in September 2020. An appeal court had upheld the punishment for spreading propaganda against the state.

## **Arrests**

Media report that at least 22 people were arrested by security forces on 07.04.21 in Isfahan (central Iran). Among those arrested, who were underway in a bus, were apparently several relatives of victims of the protests against fuel price increases in November 2019 (cf. BN of 25.11.19).

## **Iraq**

### **Assassination attempt on a representative of Muqtada al-Sadr**

On 09.04.21, during a memorial service in honour of deceased members of the Peace Companies (formerly: Mahdi Army), which is the armed wing of the political Shia Islamic movement lead by the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, an attack was made on his representative Hazem al-Araji. The movement stated that gunmen opened fire, after which al-Araji's bodyguards engaged in the fight. Initially, the Mahdi Army had supported the anti-corruption forces in 2019; however, since February 2020 it has also been involved in suppressing protests.

### **Protests in Nasiriya and other parts of Iraq**

On 03.04.21, an attack took place during a funeral of those killed during the protests. An explosive device detonated and wounded three people. This attack significantly intensified the protests in the following days. Among other things, protesters blocked the Nasiriya oil refinery for at least a week, leading to petrol shortages in the region. The protests are aimed against high unemployment and corruption.

### **Yazidi shrine reopened in Shingal**

After its reconstruction, the Yazidi holy shrine Sheikh Mand on Mount Shingal was consecrated on 06.04.21. It had been destroyed in 2014 by ISIS militants along with seven other Yazidi shrines on Mount Shingal as part of the genocide against the Yazidis. Currently, another shrine, Sheikh Hassan, is being prepared for reopening. In total, there are 28 Yazidi holy shrines on Mount Shingal; their reconstruction is largely based on funds from Nobel laureate Nadia Murad's organisation.

## **Israel**

### **Member of Parliament injured by police during protests**

On 09.04.21, Ofer Cassif, a member of the majority Arab United List party, took part in protest rallies against further building of settlements in occupied East Jerusalem. He claimed that the protests were peaceful until the Israeli police intervened. They beat Cassif, although he said he was a member of parliament. Across party lines, there were complaints that Cassif's parliamentary immunity was violated. The Israeli police said that the incident was triggered by a demonstrator who attacked a policeman. As soon as it became clear that the alleged attacker was a member of parliament, he was released, police said. The incident is now to be investigated.

The weekly protests are aimed against expanded settlement construction in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, for which the homes of 16 families are to be forcibly evicted. This decision had been taken by an Israeli court on the grounds that the premises may have been owned by Jewish families prior to 1948. A UN expert has called for the withdrawal of the eviction orders.

## **Jordan**

### **Arrests after rumours of coup plot**

Various media report that numerous high-ranking political and royal figures were arrested on 03.04.21. Among them were Bassem Awadallah, former finance minister and confidant of the king, and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a member of the royal family. The arrests were reportedly related to conspiracy charges against Prince Hamzah, the King's half-brother and former Crown Prince. Prince Hamzah himself has accused the government of wrongfully placing him under house arrest and cutting him off from the outside world. The government has denied these accusations. While Prince Hamzah was critical of both government and the King in his statement, accusing them

of corruption and incompetence, he denied allegations of a conspiracy under his leadership. On 05.04.21, a statement was made public by the palace in which Hamzah confirmed his loyalty to the king.

On 06.04.21, the Attorney General imposed a ban on the dissemination of information about the alleged plot. A day later, the King announced in a read-out statement that the rebellion had been quelled and that he and Prince Hamzah had reconciled.

The whereabouts of the prince and the 16 or more people arrested are currently unknown.

## Kosovo

### **Vjosa Osmani elected President of the Republic**

In a specially convened session held on 04.04.21, the Kosovo parliament elected former speaker Vjosa Osmani as the new President of the Republic. The election was decided only in the third and last round of voting, when the absolute majority of votes in parliament is sufficient provided that the necessary quorum is reached at the same time (at least 80 voters out of 120 mandates). Vjosa Osmani secured the votes of both the MPs of Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination), on whose list she had won a parliamentary mandate, and of non-Serb minorities. MPs from her former party Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) cast an invalid vote but ensured that the quorum was met. The other opposition parties boycotted the election by staying away. Had the election been unsuccessful, new parliamentary elections would have had to be called after the last ones held only 14.02.21.

In her first speech as President addressing parliament, Osmani spoke out in favour of dialogue with Serbia. A prerequisite for peace was an apology and the prosecution of crimes committed by Serbia during the war for Kosovo's independence (1998-1999), she said. Osmani is the second woman to head the young state, after Atifete Jahjaga had held the office from 2011 to 2016.

## Liberia

### **Curfew after violent protests**

After days of violent protests with 20,000 to 30,000 participants, President George Weah imposed a night curfew on the southeastern district of Maryland on 01.04.21. The demonstrations were directed against the inactivity of the police to bring before court Moses Mlamah who had allegedly murdered a youth in the town of Pleebo. He is accused of committing a ritual murder. During the protest rallies, police fired shots into the crowd; several people were injured. The mayor stated that many public and private buildings were destroyed and set on fire.

On 30.03.21, angry citizens had broken into the Harper County Jail demanding the release of suspect Mlamah, leading to the escape of 91 inmates.

On 08.04.21, a total of 31 people were arrested for rioting in Pleebo and Harper.

## Libya

### **Two people left injured and one dead by shooting in detention centre**

On 08.04.21, one migrant was killed and two others injured in a detention centre for migrants in the capital Tripoli. The local authorities said that there was no further information on the incident, but that an investigation would be launched.

Human rights organisations have long been criticising the conditions in these detention centres as inhumane, pointing out that the inmates are also subjected to violence and abuse by prison staff.

## Morocco

### **Nationwide protective measures against COVID-19 pandemic extended**

On 08.04.21, the Moroccan government extended nationwide protective measures against the COVID-19 pandemic until 10.05.21. The measures include a curfew from 9pm to 6am. Restaurants, cafes, shops and supermarkets must close at 8pm; private events are banned. For the coming month of Ramadan, the protective measures are to be

tightened again due to the increasing number of infections with the British coronavirus mutation. The curfew will be brought forward by one hour to 8pm. This will make it more difficult to go to a mosque to pray and to break the fast together with the extended family. Press reports say that eleven percent of the population have already been fully vaccinated, and Morocco is in first place in terms of vaccination progress in Africa.

### **Contract teachers demonstrate in Rabat**

Despite a ban on demonstrations, contract teachers began rallying for equality with their counterparts in the civil service in Rabat on 06.04.21. The demonstration was mostly peaceful. Scuffles broke out when police tried to contain the protests regionally.

## **Mozambique**

### **Mozambican armed forces regain control of Palma**

In a written statement, ISIS militants have claimed responsibility for the attacks on the town of Palma (cf. BN of 29.03.21). Media have reported at least 50 casualties, among them foreign workers. Aid organisations assume that dozens of people have been killed and at least 11,000 displaced. On 04.04.21, the government announced that the town had been secured by Mozambican forces and was under control again. The town's inhabitants found refuge in surrounding forests or were evacuated by sea to Pemba, capital of Cabo Delgado province. The energy company Total, which operates in the region, has already evacuated more than 1,000 employees. South Africa and Portugal have announced to send soldiers to the region to train with the Mozambican army. Government representatives from South Africa, Malawi, Botswana and Zimbabwe are meeting in Maputo to discuss a joint approach to dealing with the terrorists.

## **Myanmar**

### **Protests and armed conflicts continue, number of people killed rises to over 700**

The human rights organisation Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) has adjusted upward to 141 the number of people killed in the protests of 27.03.21. Previously, 114 people had been reported killed (cf. BN of 29.03.21).

On 29.03.21 and 30.03.21, between 14 and 16 people were reported killed in Yangon (Rangoon), Myingyan and Pathein, among them a 15-year-old boy. The military used grenade launchers against unarmed protesters and fired indiscriminately into residential areas and houses.

A police officer was injured in an explosion outside a police station in Bago on 30.03.21. There were further attacks on military buildings in Bago on 05.04.21.

In Yangon, a bank employee was shot in the head on 31.03.21. She died on 02.04.21.

On 01.04.21, Kyaw Kyaw, member of the central committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD) died while in detention in Naypyidaw. In Yangon, two shopping malls owned by the military burnt down. In Mandalay, at least two people died in protests. In Kale (Sagaing province), where local people have been on the offensive against the military since 29.03.21, two local people were killed in armed clashes. In Monywa, one individual was killed by a shot in the head.

On 02.04.21, eleven people were arrested in Yangon after speaking to a CNN team. Eight of them were released on 05.04.21, CNN reported. On 02.04.21, the junta also cut wireless broadband internet connections without notice. On the same day, security forces killed at least four protesters in Monywa. In Thaton (Mon State), a man was shot dead. Two protesters were killed in armed clashes with soldiers in Yinmabin Township (Sagaing province). In Tamu (Sagaing province), a police officer on strike led an attack on local security forces. He himself was killed, as were five of those attacked. On 05.04.21, four soldiers lost their lives in a grenade attack in Tamu.

On 03.04.21, four people were killed in protests in Bago and Monywa.

On 04.04.21, a protester was killed in Bhamo (Kachin State). Two protesters were shot dead in Naypyidaw and a 19-year-old woman in Mandalay. A man arrested the same day in Taunggyi was tortured to death, his upper body cut lengthwise and sewn back up. Photos of bodies similarly mutilated as a result of night-time arrests have been appearing on social media for weeks. NLD member Dr. Win Naing said he suspected the military of deliberately

shooting young protesters in the head to keep their organs intact and steal them. The media regularly report of protesters being killed and their bodies taken away by the military.

On 05.04.21, one individual was killed during the crackdown on protests in Sagaing province.

On 06.04.21, three people were arrested in Naypyidaw who are friends of an activist and former president of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) who is wanted by the military. The news portal Myanmar Now reports that people related to or friends with leading members of the protest movement are increasingly being arrested when the wanted individuals themselves cannot be found. Also on 06.04.21, prominent comedian Zarganar, beauty blogger Win Min Than and NLD MPs Aye Khaing and Ye Kyaw Thwin were arrested. Security forces shot dead one protester in Nyaung Shwe Township (Shan State) and three others in Pinlebu Township (Sagaing province).

On 07.04.21, at least twelve people died in clashes between the military and protesters in Kale. Two people were killed in Sagaing province and two other protesters died in Bago. One civilian was killed in clashes between the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). At least seven explosions occurred in Yangon, targeting government buildings, a military hospital and a shopping centre, among others. A Chinese garment factory was set on fire. In March 2021, a total of 32 arson attacks were carried out on factories with Chinese stakeholders in Yangon.

In Namtu (Shan State), over 1,000 people fled Panlong village and about 100 people escaped from Mansan village by 07.04.21. The reason is the fighting that started on 29.03.21 in the context of a territorial conflict between the two ethnic armed groups Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).

On 07. and 08.04.21, eleven civilians were killed in clashes with security forces in Taze. To resist the military's actions, protesters had armed themselves with knives, homemade guns and firebombs. Also on 08.04.21, Paing Takhon, a well-known actor, singer and supporter of the protest movement in Myanmar and Thailand, was arrested in Yangon. In Kyaukpadaung Township, Mandalay province, soldiers shot dead a member of the protest movement.

On 09.04.21, at least 82 people were killed by machine guns and grenades targeting protesters in Bago. Their bodies were taken away by the military. Artillery shell attacks on three villages in Hpaung district claimed the life of one man. In Mon State, the army occupied Man Aung village and the entire population fled. On the same day, state media announced the imposition of the death penalty by a military court on 19 people from North Okkalapa Township in Yangon, which is under martial law. Apparently, the sentences are related to the death of a military officer on 27.03.21. Another six people were sentenced to seven years in prison for vandalism.

On 10.04.21, one individual was shot dead during protests in Tamu and another one in Wa Roung (Sagaing province). In Tamu, protesters killed three soldiers in an attack on security forces. Also, two civilians died in the incident. Near Lashio (Shan State), an alliance of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the TNLA and the Arakan Army (AA) attacked a police station, killing eight police officers (other sources put the number at 14). On the side of the alliance, one individual was killed.

On 11.04.21, a military sniper killed a motorbiker in Tamu. Fighting broke out between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Momauk Township, Kachin State. In Yangon, a security guard was injured when an explosive device was detonated outside the branch of a military-affiliated bank.

In total, at least 706 people have died in connection with the military coup on 01.02.21, among them almost 50 children. 3,059 people are currently held in custody. Hundreds of arrest warrants are still in force, including for over 120 prominent supporters of the protest movement.

Military leadership spokesperson Zaw Min Tun has announced plans to extend the one-year state of emergency imposed on 01.02.21 to up to two years.

### **Refugees refused entry in Thailand and India**

NGOs report that Thai security forces have pushed back at least 2,000 Myanmar refugees who had escaped to Mae Sariang and Sop Moei counties (Mae Hong Son province) in Thailand following Tatmadaw airstrikes on villages in Kayin state on 27.03.21 and 28.03.21. The head of Mae Sariang County said the pushbacks were carried out by orders of the National Security Council. Thai authorities have denied the incidents, saying that 1,167 of the recent refugees are still living in the country (as of 01.04.21). AAPP reported on 29.03.21 that about 10,000 people from seven Karen villages were trying to escape from air strikes. A spokesperson for the Karen National Union (KNU) stated that most of the refugees are staying in forests and caves near and across the Thai border. On 07.04.21, the UN said that an estimated 7,100 civilians from Kayin State and Bago were now internally displaced.

In areas in northeastern Myanmar bordering India, hundreds of refugees are apparently holding out in the forests. The Indian central government has given instructions to turn away the refugees, while the local governments of the states of Mizoram and Manipur are demanding that asylum be granted.

#### **New accusation against Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of the ousted government**

The ousted head of government Aung San Suu Kyi reappeared on 01.04.21 for a court hearing by video. In addition to the previous charges against her (cf. BN of 22.03.21), she herself, her Australian economic adviser Sean Turnell and three deposed cabinet members are now accused of violating a state secrets law. The law, which is open to broad interpretation, had been enacted by the British colonial administration in 1923. If convicted, the accused face up to 14 years in prison.

### **Niger**

#### **New President and new Prime Minister in office**

One day after his swearing-in on 02.04.21, the new President Mohamed Bazoum appointed former energy and finance minister Ouhoumoudou Mahamatou as the country's new Prime Minister. Most recently, Ouhoumoudou Mahamatou had been chief of staff to the previous President Mahamatou Issoufou since 2015. The inauguration of the new President marked the first democratic change of power since Niger's independence in 1960 (cf. BN of 01.03.21 and 15.03.21). In his inaugural speech, Bazoum condemned the attacks on civilians in the west of the country, which he attributed to criminals of the Islamic State in the Sahara and which, according to media reports, have already claimed more than 300 lives this year (cf. BN 11.01.21, 22.03.21 and 29.03.21).

### **Nigeria**

#### **Attack on aid facility in the northeast**

On 10.04.21, gunmen targeted the town of Damasak in Borno State and stormed a UN relief centre. Media report that the attackers killed at least four people, set fire to several buildings in the town and stole medical supplies and several vehicles, including an ambulance. This incident is the second attack on UN facilities in Nigeria within a few weeks. On 01.03.21, six civilians had reportedly been killed in an attack on an aid centre in Dikwa town in Borno. Apparently, militants of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a breakaway group from Boko Haram, are responsible for the attacks.

#### **Five kidnapped schoolchildren released**

On 07.04.21, five of the 39 pupils abducted on 11.03.21 in the northern state of Kaduna (cf. BN of 15.03.21) were handed over to their parents. According to media reports, the five schoolchildren were taken into the custody of the Nigerian military two days earlier. Further information on how exactly the pupils regained freedom has not yet been available. In the northern states of Nigeria, a whole series of kidnappings in connection with attacks on schools have occurred since December 2020 (cf. BN of 22.03.21).

#### **Over 1,800 detainees freed**

On 05.04.21, over 1,800 prisoners escaped from a detention centre in Owerri in southeastern Imo State after heavily armed assailants blew up part of the prison walls, media reports say. President Buhari has described the incident as an act of terrorism. Observers of the security situation in southeastern Nigeria believe that the incident may be linked to activities of secessionist groups. Recently, attacks on police stations have increased in the south and southeast (cf. BN of 22.03.21). On 06.04.21 and 07.04.21, two more attacks on police stations in the southeast were repelled.

## **North Macedonia**

### **Police officers suspected of passport forgery arrested with the help of Interpol**

Recent press reports say that nine police officers have been taken into custody for allegedly issuing 215 forged passports mainly to foreign nationals, among them members of criminal organisations and drug cartels who are subjects of international arrest warrants. In cooperation with US authorities and Interpol, the North Macedonian police had been able to uncover the true identity of the recipients, the reports say. The arrests have led to strong domestic tensions, as the largest opposition party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) under its leader Hristijan Mickoski had already informed the media about the existence of a forgery ring in the police the day before the operation. The press reports indicate that in its statement, VMRO-DPMNE accused both Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and interior minister Oliver Spasovski of close links to the forgery ring and dismissed the action against nine low-ranking police officers as a mere cover-up. The two government politicians of the Social Democratic League of Macedonia (SDSM) have reportedly rejected the allegations and in turn accused the opposition of having considerably jeopardised the police action and the work of Interpol by issuing the press release. Interior minister Spasovski, who has announced a prosecutorial investigation, reportedly pointed to alleged existing contacts between Mickoski and one of the arrested police officers. A press release of 08.04.21 stated that due to the disclosure, Mickoski received covert threats which the interior ministry said it was taking seriously.

## **Palestinian Autonomous Territories**

### **West Bank: One dead in incident at checkpoint**

On 06.04.21, a man was killed at an Israeli army checkpoint in Bir Nabala, north of Jerusalem. His wife, who was in the car with him, reported that the military opened fire unjustifiably after conducting a security check when the driver started to continue his journey following the soldiers' instruction. The Israeli military stated that the vehicle was being driven towards a group of soldiers in a life-threatening manner, whereupon fire was opened on the car. The case is now being investigated.

### **Resumption of US support for UNRWA**

On 07.04.21, the US government under President Joe Biden announced the resumption of payments to various projects and to the Palestinian Refugee Agency (UNRWA), which has been facing increasing financial difficulties since the US had cut aid by USD 300 million in 2018. The announced payments to UNRWA amount to USD 150 million. In addition to this, an amount of USD 75 million is earmarked for economic and development aid in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Another USD 10 million is to go to peace-building programmes through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

### **Gaza Strip: Peace activist forced to divorce**

According to press reports of 01.04.21, which are based on information provided by the individual concerned and his wife, Rami Aman was offered release after weeks of imprisonment and torture if he divorced his wife who is the daughter of a Hamas official. Aman, who was accused by Hamas of collaborating with Israel, had participated in an online exchange meeting with Israeli activists. Shortly afterwards, he and his wife were arrested and taken to different prisons. After he gave his consent to divorce his wife, he was released. However, an exit ban prevented him from following his wife to Egypt. She had already been released from prison and is now staying with her family, the reports say.

## **Republic of the Congo**

### **Constitutional Court confirms re-election of Denis Sassou Nguesso**

On 06.04.21, the Constitutional Court declared the results of the 2021 presidential election valid. This means that incumbent Nguesso, who was able to secure a five-year term for the fourth time in a row through a controversial constitutional amendment, can be sworn in as president in a few days. Complaints filed by the opposition at the end of March 2021 for vote rigging were dismissed as unfounded (cf. BN of 29.03.21).

## Saudi Arabia

### **Death penalty for man convicted while under age**

A human rights organisation reported on 31.03.21, Abdullah al-Huwaiji had already been sentenced to death in October 2019 for murder and armed robbery in the first instance; at the time, he was 17 years old. At the age of 15, he allegedly robbed a jeweller, shot at the clerks, and shot dead a police officer. Despite conflicting evidence, the court relied mainly on the confessions of al-Huwaiji and his five co-defendants, which, according to the defendants, had been coerced through torture and ill-treatment in custody.

Despite a law introduced in 2018 abolishing the death penalty for minors, al-Huwaiji is to be executed. This results from a differentiation within Saudi legislation between punishments prescribed by God and the Qur'an (Hadd), those based on judicial discretion (Tazir) and those intended to bring about retributive justice (Qisas). The punishment of al-Huwaiji is said to be one of the latter, but the law in question refers exclusively to the second category of punishments.

The case will now be heard by the Supreme Court in Riyadh. The allegations of torture and ill-treatment were not further investigated.

### **Aid worker sentenced to 20 years in prison**

A press release from the US State Department says that aid worker Abdulrahman al-Sadhan has been sentenced by an anti-terror court to 20 years in prison followed by a 20-year ban on leaving the country. The State Department assumes that he was arrested because of a Twitter account, which was humorous about the Saudi government and was operated by al-Sadhan.

### **Execution of three soldiers for ‘cooperation with the enemy’**

According to media reports of 10.04.21, the state press agency has announced the execution of three soldiers on charges of cooperating with the enemy. Mohammed bin Ahmed, Shaher bin Issa and Hamoud bin Ibrahim, were sentenced without officially naming the enemy with whom they were accused of cooperating.

## Somalia

### **Attacks**

On 29.03.21, at least five people were killed and several others injured, among them civilians, when a bomb exploded and hit a car carrying government officials in Mogadishu. The government official who was apparently the target survived the attack.

On the same day, a military official drove over a landmine in Mogadishu. The military official was unhurt, but three other people were killed, among them two government soldiers. Reports say that al-Shabaab is responsible for both attacks.

On 03.04.21, several people, among them civilians, were killed or wounded when al-Shabaab attacked a makeshift kiosk in Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab claims that the attack was launched near a district police station and killed several government officials.

On the same day, al-Shabaab attacked two army bases in Bariire and Awdhigle in the Lower Shabelle region. There were reportedly dozens of casualties on both sides.

On 10.04.21, an al-Shabaab suicide bomber blew himself up in Baidoa, capital of the Bay region. The governor of the Bay region, who was targeted in the attack, survived, but a number of other people were killed or injured, among them civilians.

On the same day, there were reportedly two separate explosions in Mogadishu, killing three members of the security forces.

### **Al-Shabaab rejects COVID-19 vaccine**

30.03.21 Al-Shabaab stated that the Somali population should reject AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine because it is unsafe, referring to the discussions and suspensions that have taken place in Europe because of the risk of adverse side effects. Somalia received the vaccine under the COVAX initiative in March 2021 and has reportedly vaccinated over 20,000 people with it so far.

## Syria

### **Northwest: Seven dead in rocket attack**

Opposition activists report that on 08.04.21, several civilians were killed when a rocket fired by government forces hit a car. The attack occurred near the town of Najia in Idlib governorate. UNICEF confirmed that an attack on a car killed three children from the same family.

### **Raids in al-Hol ended**

On 02.04.21, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) declared their raids in the detention centre for suspected ISIS militants to be over (cf. BN of 29.03.21). They had arrested a total of 125 extremists, among them the suspected masterminds behind several dozen violent crimes committed in recent months, SDF stated. The approximately 5,000 security forces who took part in the raids also uncovered a tunnel network under construction beneath the camp.

The SDF described the raids as a ‘first phase’ of a wider effort to improve security at the camp and protect its residents. The camp houses about 62,000 people from 59 different countries and has long been considered a potential breeding ground for a new generation of ISIS fighters. In its statement, the SDF argued that the camp would remain a threat as long as the international community refused to repatriate their own nationals from northeastern Syria.

### **International donor conference in Brussels**

On 30.03.21, the EU, the US and dozens of other nations pledged USD 6.4 billion in humanitarian aid in connection with the Syrian conflict. The money will be used both in Syria and in the neighbouring countries where millions of refugees have found shelter. However, the target of USD 10 billion set by the UN could not be reached. Also, this year's amount is less than what was achieved last year (USD 7.7 billion). According to the UN; a total of 13.4 million Syrians are dependent on international aid this year; this is 20 percent more than a year ago.

Meanwhile, the US Secretary of State appealed to the UN Security Council on 29.03.21 not to politicise international aid. Of the former four border crossings into Syria used to bring international aid supplies into the country, only two remain open today. Following pressure from Russia, one crossing from Turkey into northwestern Syria was closed to international aid in January 2020. In July 2020, the UN Security Council decided to stop aid deliveries from Iraq to northeastern Syria.

Russia criticises aid deliveries from abroad that do not go to areas under Syrian control but to rebel areas, saying this violates Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and does not contribute to the country's reconstruction.

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

On 03.04.21, the Syrian ministry of education ordered the closure of all educational institutions, following a recent sharp increase in confirmed COVID-19 infections in Syria. According to the health ministry, incidence levels at schools rose dramatically last week. Many students, but also many teachers, have already stopped going to classes. Adding to the pandemic, public transport is currently facing fuel shortages, which affects the overall mobility of many people.

On 30.03.21, President Assad made his first public appearance in three weeks after he and his wife reportedly overcame a COVID-19 infection with mild symptoms.

The WHO has said that it aims to have vaccinated 20 percent of the Syrian population by the end of 2021. Government sources say that Syria will receive the required vaccines from China, Russia and the WHO.

## Togo

### **COVID-19 pandemic: Vaccinations expanded**

After the start of the vaccination campaign in March 2021 (cf. BN of 15.03.21), particularly vulnerable groups of people were able to be vaccinated in the greater Lomé area, most recently extended to include drivers of motorbike taxis, prisoners and teachers, among others. On 09.04.21, vaccination of all people over 30 years of age began in the greater Lomé area. By the beginning of April 2021, more than 77,000 people received their first vaccination dose.

## Turkey

### Arrest of retired admirals

Following their public criticism of President Erdogan's planned project to build the Istanbul Canal (between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara), ten retired admirals were arrested on 05.04.21, accused by the public prosecutor's office in Ankara of trying to overthrow the constitutional order through the use of force and coercion. Ahead of the arrest, the retired admirals had reacted to the public debate about Turkey's possible withdrawal from a shipping treaty, the Montreux Convention, in a statement signed by more than 100 former admirals. In their open letter, the former admirals stressed the need for the international agreement, which had allowed Turkey to maintain neutrality during World War II, and called on the government to continue to abide by the convention. The treaty, signed in 1936, regulates the use of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits by cargo ships and limits their use by military vessels. An official had said that the planned canal was exempt from the Montreux Convention. President Erdogan has denied this and implied a coup attempt on the part of the retired admirals.

### Arrests for suspected PKK affiliation

On 05.04.21, a raid was conducted in Diyarbakir province on the Rosa Women's Rights Association, which works for victims of violence. 22 women were arrested, accused by the public prosecutor's office in Ankara of holding meetings and protests in order to recruit members for the PKK and spread political propaganda for the organisation. A further nine suspects are being sought.

### Verdicts in coup plot trial

In connection with the failed coup attempt of 2016, a total of 38 former military officers were sentenced to life imprisonment for 'efforts directed against the constitution' in a mass trial held by a court in Ankara on 07.04.21. The defendants were accused of belonging to a network of Gulen supporters. According to the verdicts in the trial, which was held against 497 defendants, 106 defendants were sentenced to prison terms of more than 16 years; 121 were acquitted.

## Turkmenistan

### Elections to the People's Legislative Council

On 28.03.21, the first elections were held for the legislative upper chamber of parliament, the People's Council, which had been created by constitutional amendments in September 2020. No opposition members were on the ballots. Eligible voters were allowed to cast their ballots within two hours at one of six polling stations, whereupon, through indirect suffrage, an electoral college decided on the filling of 48 of the 56 seats in the chamber. According to the state-controlled media, President and head of government Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov received 100 percent of the votes; voter turnout was 98.7 percent. Foreign observers were not allowed to monitor the elections. For eight seats in the chamber, the president appoints the members himself. Berdymuhamedov has held the office since 2007 and leads the country in an authoritarian manner.

## Ukraine

### Escalation of the Ukraine conflict

The increase in ceasefire violations on the line of contact with the separatist areas in eastern Ukraine as well as reports of Russian troop movements near the Ukrainian border and on the annexed Crimean peninsula have led to a further escalation of the fragile security situation in the Ukraine conflict (cf. BN of 22.03.21). In a statement released on 09.04.21, the Russian Federation did not rule out the possibility of military intervention should fighting break out between the Ukrainian army and the separatist armed forces. On 08.04.21 and 09.04.21, reports emerged about the planned deployment of US and Russian warships to the Black Sea. Shortly before, on 06.04.21, Ukrainian President Selenskyj had called on NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg to speed up the process of Ukraine's NATO membership in view of the situation. Ukrainian sources say that a total of six members of the Ukrainian armed forces were killed in the conflict area in the last week of March and the first week of April. The separatist forces accuse Ukraine of being responsible for the death of a five-year-old child near the line of contact in early April 2021.

The child was reportedly killed by an explosive device dropped by a drone. The Ukrainian army has rejected this account. According to UN figures, the Ukraine conflict has so far claimed more than 13,000 lives, including more than 3,000 civilian deaths, and around 1.4 million registered internally displaced people. Despite the lack of recognition by the Russian Federation, it is estimated that more than 400,000 people already hold Russian citizenship in the separatist-controlled parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine.

## Vietnam

### Arrests

On 07.04.21, prominent human rights activist Nguyen Thuy Hanh was arrested in Hanoi and charged with disseminating subversive information under Article 117 of the Criminal Code. In 2016, she had stood as an independent candidate for the National Assembly election; she is the founder of the 50K Fund, which has been providing financial support to political prisoners and their families since 2017. Human rights organisations report that two other people, who intend to stand as independent candidates in the upcoming National Assembly elections to be held on 23.05.21, have already been detained and charged under Article 117 of the Penal Code in recent weeks.

### Nguyen Xuan Phuc elected president

On 05.04.21, Nguyen Xuan Phuc was elected President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. He has served as Prime Minister for the past five years. He takes over from Nguyen Phu Trong, who is also General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). The President holds the highest state office and is commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Pham Minh Chinh, head of the CPV's Central Commission for Organisational Affairs, has been named to replace the Prime Minister. The leadership structure in Vietnam consists of four pillars; in addition to the three mentioned above, there is also the office of Chairperson of the National Assembly.

## Yemen

### COVID-19 vaccine received

On 31.03.21, Yemen received the first 360,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine through the COVAX initiative. A total of 1.9 million doses are expected to arrive this year. The vaccines will be distributed throughout the country. Vaccination will be free; health workers and other prioritised groups will be the first recipients. Recently, there has been an increase in COVID-19 infections (cf. BN of 29.03.21).

### Houthi rebels responsible for attack on Aden airport

According to a UN investigation, Houthi rebels were responsible for the attack on 30.12.20 on Aden airport which left more than 20 people dead and more than 100 injured. Rockets had hit the airport just as a plane carrying government representatives was landing (cf. BN of 11.01.21). The Houthis continue to deny responsibility for the attack.

### Civilians affected by fighting in Marib

On 28.03.21, at least seven people were wounded after Houthi artillery fire hit an IDP camp in the north of Marib governorate. More than 4,000 IDPs were reportedly forced to leave the camp the same day. Human Rights Watch (HRW) notes that Houthis rebels have fired artillery and rockets at densely populated areas in Marib since February 2021, causing mass displacement and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

### Prisoner exchange

There has reportedly been a prisoner exchange between the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC). The former has released five prisoners, the latter twelve.

