



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

31 May 2021

Afghanistan

Attacks on civilians / internally displaced persons

Reports say that on 30.05.21, a total of 20 civilians were killed and 34 others wounded (including employees of a university and guests of a wedding party) in five provinces within one day. On 28.05.21, four civilians were killed and six others wounded in a Taliban attack in Faryab province. On 22.05.21, it was reported that up to 8,000 families have been displaced due to intensifying fights between the Taliban and the government on multiple fronts in at least five provinces (Baghlan, Kunduz, Helmand, Kandahar and Laghman). The displaced have no access to shelter, food, schools or medical care. Also on 22.05.21, three children died and seven other civilians were wounded when mortar shells hit their homes in Takhar and Helmand provinces. Reports say that on 20.05.21, a roadside bomb explosion killed nine civilians, among them women and children, in southern Helmand province.

Taliban offensives have increased significantly

The most recent report by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) apparently shows that while Taliban offensives increased by 37 percent in the first quarter of 2021 over the same time last year, no locations of strategic value were captured. Cooperation with al-Qaida continues, the report says.

COVID-19 variant from India

On 25.05.21 it was reported that Afghan doctors have expressed concern that the COVID-19 variant first discovered in India might now spread to Afghanistan. At the central hospital for COVID cases in Kabul, where all 100 beds are occupied, many of the seriously ill patients have recently returned from India. Up to ten people die there every day, the reports say. On 29.05.21, it was reported that in 16 provinces, schools would be closed for 14 days due to rising case numbers.

Border fence with Pakistan

On 17.05.21 it was reported that the border fence between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is approx. 2,600 km long, was almost completely erected. The fence is three metres high and topped with barbed wire. More than two dozen Pashtun tribes living in this region will thus be restricted in their right to move freely between the countries. Kuchi nomads and traders in particular are affected by the fence.

Albania

Former attorney general sentenced to imprisonment

On 20.05.21, a special court for organised crime and corruption sentenced Adriatik Llala to two years in prison and ordered the confiscation of his assets. Llala, who had served as attorney general from 2012 to 2017, was found guilty of failing to declare his assets. A flat and over 2 ha of land had been confiscated as part of the investigation

against him. Llala is considered one of the most senior officials to have been convicted of such charges. Apparently, he had opposed judicial reform introducing a vetting process (cf. BN of 09.03.20 and 25.05.20). In 2018, the USA had put him on a list of persons who are not allowed to enter the USA because of urgent suspicion of serious corruption.

On 19.05.21, the U.S. Department of State issued the same measure against Sali Berisha and his family. Berisha had played a key role in shaping the politics of post-communist Albania as president from 1992 to 1997 and as prime minister from 2005 to 2013. He is still considered to have considerable influence in the now opposition Democratic Party (PD). In the elections on 25.04.21, he regained a parliamentary mandate. So far, no charges have been brought against him or members of his family.

Algeria

Numerous arrests at protest rally - government increases pressure

Various sources report that in the past two weeks, over 2,000 protesters have been temporarily arrested during rallies in 19 regions (wilayas). Apparently, about 40 people have been detained. They are accused of attacking national unity, prohibited assembly, disturbing public order and rebellion, among other things. At the same time, prison sentences were handed down to another 17 people.

The security forces have also prevented Tuesday's student protest march several times.

The security forces are stepping up operations against protesters ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled to be held on 12.06.21.

Bangladesh

Arrest of well-known journalist

The arrest of journalist Rozina Islam on 17.05.21 has led to great outrage among journalists and human rights organisations. In the past months, the investigative journalist of a well-known Bangladeshi daily newspaper had reported several times about mismanagement and corruption in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. She is accused of stealing confidential documents from the health ministry. She has been charged with violating the Penal Code as well as the Official Secrets Act of 1923. According to media reports, she could face up to 14 years in prison or death penalty. Human rights organisations strongly criticise the arrest and the charges and speak of an increasing restriction of freedom of expression in the country. On 23.05.21 she was temporarily released on bail until 15.07.21.

Bangladesh / Myanmar

Cox's Bazar: Donor conference for Rohingya refugees

On 18.05.21, a donor conference pledged USD 340 million for the more than 800,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in Cox's Bazar district and for the 472,000 people in the communities surrounding the refugee camps. The Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISC), which is the coordinating body for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh, has stated that this represents over 35 percent of the total financial needs for 2021 to support and protect the refugees.

COVID-19 pandemic: Lockdown in refugee camps

On 21.05.21, a one-week lockdown was imposed in five of the 34 refugee camps for Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. Within a few days, there had been a surge in people testing positive. More than 800 people have tested positive in the camps and 12 people have died, reports say.

Belarus

Opposition activist arrested after plane diversion

The blogger and opposition activist Roman Protasevich is in pre-trial detention. He was editor-in-chief of the opposition Nexta channel on Telegram, which posted meeting places and other tips on protests against Lukashenko, among other things. On a flight from Greece to Lithuania, the expat who was on the wanted list in Belarus was arrested together with his girlfriend during an unplanned stopover in Minsk on 23.05.21 after the plane was diverted there with the help of a fighter jet. President Lukashenko explained that the plane had to make an emergency landing because of an alleged explosive device on board. Representatives of Western governments consider this statement as a pretext for Protasevich's arrest. In a video broadcast by Belarusian state television, Protasevich testified to having organised mass protests against the regime.

The convictions in connection with the protests against the president continue. On 25.05.21, seven more defendants received multi-year prison sentences. After the disputed presidential election of 09.08.20, in which Lukashenko was officially declared the winner, regular protest rallies have been staged against the president.

Burkina Faso

Deaths in attack and military operation

On 18.05.21, unidentified individuals killed 15 people who had gathered for a baptism in Adjarara near the village of Tin-Akoff (Sahel region).

On the same day, the military reported that it killed 15 militants in the municipality of Bangao (Sahel region) in an operation against armed groups.

Central African Republic

Two WFP staff killed

On 19.05.21, an attack attributed to the rebel group Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) killed a World Food Programme (WFP) worker and his driver, according to a media report. The victims were delivering food in the eastern prefecture of Haut-Mbomou. The Central African Republic is considered one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarian aid workers. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has noted that between January and April 2021, the number of security-related incidents was 202, with one fatality. With a population of about 4.9 million, 2.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. For the period April to August 2021, it is expected that around 2.3 million people will be affected by food insecurity.

COVID-19: Start of vaccination campaign

On 20.05.21, the government officially launched the country's vaccination campaign. Support is provided by UNICEF and WHO, among others. At first, government officials and health workers were symbolically vaccinated. The first shipment of 60,000 doses from the COVAX initiative will go to exposed health workers and vulnerable people over 50 years of age in the capital Bangui, which is the central site of the infection. In total, the country is to receive at least 372,000 vaccine doses through COVAX. So far, the Johns Hopkins University has registered 7100 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 98 related deaths.

China

Hong Kong: New prison sentence for Jimmy Lai

On 16.04.21, 73-year-old multi-millionaire and founder of a daily newspaper critical of the government Jimmy Lai had been sentenced to 14 months in prison for taking part in protests against the Chinese government on 18. and 31.08.19 (cf. BN of 19.04.21). On 28.05.21 he was sentenced to another 14 months in prison for participating in a banned demonstration in October 2019. Nine other democracy activists were sentenced to prison terms of up to 18 months for organising and participating in the same rally.

Colombia / Venezuela

Death of former FARC fighter Jesús Santrich

On 18.05.21, the FARC dissident group Segunda Marquetalia reported the death of its member Jesús Santrich. He apparently died in Venezuela. Information on the exact circumstances and responsibility for his death varies depending on the source. The rebels accuse the Colombian government of the killing, Bogotá speaks of clashes between criminal gangs on Venezuelan territory, Venezuela has not yet commented the fact. Santrich was on Interpol's wanted list, and in 2020, the USA had offered a reward of USD 10 million for his arrest. In the past, there have been repeated fights between guerrilla groups and the Venezuelan army in the border area (cf. BN of 29.03.21 and 03.05.21). Media reports note that tensions are expected to rise between Colombia and Venezuela as a result of the current incident. While Colombia's President Iván Duque accuses Nicolás Maduro's regime of harbouring Colombian rebels, the latter considers his country a victim of such groups.

Deployment of military personnel to the province of Valle del Cauca; continuing protests and negotiations

The UN Human Rights Office has informed that since 28.05.21, a new total of 14 people has died in Cali in the protests which have been going on for a month now (cf. BN of 03.05.21 and 10.05.21). The government of President Iván Duque states to have deployed military personnel to the province of Valle del Cauca on 29.05.21 in support of the police after the protests had escalated; in addition, the authorities have imposed a curfew in the region. Negotiations between the government and the protesters, which started two weeks ago, have not yet been successful (cf. BN of 17.05.21); the government sticks to the demand for the protesters to lift the roadblocks, calling the issue non-negotiable. The continuation of the negotiations was postponed until 30.05.21.

DR Congo

30 death sentences passed

On 15.05.21, a court in Kinshasa sentenced a total of 30 defendants to death for attempted murder, assault, rebellion and criminal association in a televised criminal trial. Two days before, two rival Muslim factions within the Congo Islamic Community (Comico) had clashed in Kinshasa during the festival of breaking the fast (Eid al-Fitr), resulting in the death of a police officer and of several injured emergency personnel. Several media report that a succession crisis in the Comico has repeatedly led to clashes between the two Muslim factions in recent years. In the DR Congo, death sentences are repeatedly imposed but have not been carried out since 2003 due to a moratorium. Since then, death sentences have been commuted to life imprisonment.

Human trafficking and forced recruitment of children

The independent information radio station Radio Okapi reported on 22.04.21 that the government agency 'Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Human Beings', established by Presidential Decree No. 19-027 of 22.04.21, stated at a joint workshop with the IOM that various forms of trafficking in human beings are still widespread in the DRC. Women and children, as the primary objects of exploitation, are particularly affected by both sexual and labour exploitation. Besides, children are recruited by armed groups for combat missions.

Eastern regions under state of emergency: Humanitarian and security situation

IOM and UNICEF estimate that more than 400,000 people, among them many children, have fled the city of Goma in North Kivu province which had been partially evacuated following the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano on 22.05.21 and the fear of a second volcanic eruption. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports a worsening of the humanitarian crisis in the province, which is already affected by considerable militia violence. 44 percent of the total of five million internally displaced persons in the DR Congo are in Goma alone, and around a third of the population is affected by severe food insecurity, OCHA stated. Given the continuing poor security situation, the state of siege declared for the province has met with criticism in domestic political circles. Despite the increased presence of both the Congolese security forces, which have executive (special) intervention powers, and the UN troops of the stabilisation mission (MONUSCO), local and international media report that in recent days some 33 civilians were killed in attacks by the rebel groups Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the Beni region.

Also, the state of siege imposed on Ituri province has provoked criticism because of the way the local population is treated by both the Congolese armed forces and the police. Citizens point to criminal activities and forms of inhuman and degrading treatment by members of the Congolese armed forces, and there are reports of cases of flogging, harassment, theft and extortion of money and property. The independent Radio Okapi informs that two people died in police holding cells due to lack of food and medicine in the Mungwalu commune in Djugu. Regional NGOs and other sources further report that more than 100 detainees are being held in cramped cells in the area, with many of those detained in critical health conditions.

Meanwhile, the military reported on 27.05.21 that the rebel group Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO) was pushed back from various areas of Mahagi territory in Ituri and that on 25.05.21, a military court in the capital Kalemie of the Tanganyika region sentenced four leaders of a Bantu militia to death for murder, torture, rape and arson to the detriment of the civilian population of the Kansabala chiefdom in the Moba area.

Ethiopia

UNHCR criticises arrests in refugee camps in Tigray

UNHCR reports that on 24.05.21, Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers arrested and abused more than 500 civilians in several refugee camps near Shire, in Ethiopia's Tigray Regional State. A government official justified the measure by the search for members of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Most recently, CNN has reported that almost all of those arrested have been released.

Also on 24.05.21, the USA announced to reduce its economic and security support for Ethiopia due to the conflict in Tigray. In addition, US President Biden criticised the escalating violence and called for a ceasefire in the crisis region, for unhindered access for humanitarian aid to prevent famine and for the immediate withdrawal of the Eritrean military and Amharic militias supporting Ethiopia in the fight against the TPLF. While Prime Minister Abiy had already pledged at the end of March 2021 that Eritrean units would withdraw, observers agree that the Eritrean Defence Forces, accused of massacres of civilians and sexual violence against women, are still deployed in Tigray.

Gambia

Gender-based violence; health and food situation

Several local media report that on 18.05.21, the Gambia Bureau of Statistics published the 2019-2020 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) which shows significant progress in several health and development indicators compared to the last survey conducted in 2013. Nevertheless, the reports say that the DHS 2019-2020 continues to paint a bleak picture of the situation of girls and women affected by gender-based violence. Early marriage, for example, remains widespread, as does female genital mutilation.

Compared to the 2013 DHS surveys, progress has been made in the area of health and food situation as well as modern family planning, it is reported. Compared to 2013, however, regressions have been observed in the area of child health, such as a renewed increase in infant and child mortality.

Meanwhile, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation reported in May 2021, citing the March 2021 Cadre Harmonisé analysis, that the total number of people severely affected by food insecurity (CH Phase 3 or higher) in The Gambia was declining and was currently estimated at 65,000. In the same month last year, 82,000 people had been severely affected by food insecurity.

Georgia

Opposition party ends boycott of parliament

On 30.05.21, the leader of the main Georgian opposition party United National Movement, Nika Melia, announced the return of his party to parliament after an almost seven-month boycott. After the ruling party Georgian Dream had won the parliamentary elections on 31.10.20, the opposition parties refused to cooperate in parliament, referring to election rigging and irregularities. Domestic tensions were exacerbated by the arrest of Melia on 23.02.21, who was accused of inciting violence at anti-government protests in 2019. Since March 2021, weeks of talks, led by representatives of the EU, resulted in a joint agreement between government and opposition on

19.04.21. In addition to changes in the judiciary and planned reforms regarding electoral law, the agreement provides for the return of opposition parties to parliament, which they had previously boycotted. Furthermore, the agreement provides for an amnesty for persons who were or are affected by criminal proceedings following the anti-government protests in 2019. On 10.05.21, Melia was released from jail after the EU had posted bail of around EUR 10,000. EU representatives welcomed the return of the opposition party to parliament, calling it another positive step towards strengthening democracy in the country. At the same time, they urged opposition leader Melia to officially join the EU-brokered political agreement by signing it, as the other opposition parties had already done.

Ghana

LGBTQI activists arrested

On 20.05.21, police arrested 21 people in Ho city (capital of Volta Region) who were attending a meeting to train LGBTQI activists on how to deal with human rights violations. The event was dispersed. Those arrested are accused of participating in an illegal gathering. A court ruled on 21.05.21 that they remain in police custody. They are to appear in court again on 04.06.21.

Report: COVID-19 pandemic leads to increased child labour

A joint report published on 26.05.21 by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the NGO Friends of the Nation (FoN) notes that children are pushed into exploitative and dangerous child labour by the economic consequences of the pandemic, by school closures and by insufficient government support. Following the loss of income opportunities for their parents during the pandemic, children are forced to work in gold mines, carpentry, fishing, transporting goods and street trading.

Guatemala

Deaths in prison riots

The Guatemalan interior ministry has informed that on 19.05.21, seven people lost their lives in a violent confrontation between inmates of the Granja Modelo de Rehabilitación Cantel prison in the Quetzaltenango region. On 20.05.21, police regained control of the situation. Local media report that the attacks between suspected members of the gangs Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 were triggered by the murder of the wife of a prisoner. In the past, human rights organisations repeatedly criticised the conditions of detention in the prison, which currently has an overcrowding rate of 200 percent.

India

COVID 19 pandemic: declining numbers in new infections

After a sharp increase in April 2021, the number of new daily infections has been declining noticeably since the end of May 2021. Official numbers suggest that the rate of infection has slowed down again. Relaxations of local restrictions have been announced, especially in metropolitan areas. Reportedly, more than ten percent of the population have received at least one vaccination dose, and more than three percent have been fully vaccinated.

Iran

New sentence for human rights activist

On 27.05.21, media reported that human rights activist and journalist Narges Mohammadi, who had been released from prison in October 2020, was sentenced to 30 months in prison and 80 lashes. Her lawyer confirmed press reports citing accusations of propaganda against the Islamic Republic, defamation and rebellion against the prison administration. The charges were based on her public stance against the death penalty, her complaint about inhumane prison conditions and the organisation of a sit-in during her previous imprisonment.

The activist and former spokesperson for the Iranian Centre for Human Rights Defenders had been arrested back in 2015 and sentenced to 16 years in prison on charges of founding an illegal organisation. After a reduced prison term, she was released in October 2020.

Activist ends hunger strike

On 19.05.21, activist Saba Kord Afshari, imprisoned in the women's prison Qarchak in Varamin near Tehran, ended her ten-day hunger strike on. She had protested against the situation of her mother, who is also imprisoned. Kord Afshari had campaigned against the hijab ban and had been sentenced to 24 years in prison on various charges (cf. BN of 17.05.21). Her mother was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for supporting her daughter's commitment.

Escalating dispute over sugar factory: armed special forces deployed

Some weeks after the private ownership of the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company (Neyshekar-e Haft Tappeh) was annulled by court order on 08.05.21, the dispute over the company is coming to a head. Before, workers had protested against corruption in the privatisation process and against withheld wage increases (cf. BN 22.03.21). On 27.05.21 Iranian foreign media reported that the workers' lawyer has been banned from practising for six months. In addition, criminal proceedings against the lawyer were apparently discussed for anti-government propaganda, assembly and conspiracy to plan actions against national security, spreading slander and membership in an insurgent group. Immediately after the return of the company to the state sector, the lawyer had been summoned to appear before a local court. In the meantime, tighter security measures have been imposed and armed special forces have been stationed on the company premises, reports say. Nevertheless, demands are continuing for a salary increase and an increase in water allocation for sugar cane cultivation in Khuzestan province.

Prison sentences against Kurdish activists

Media report that on 27.05.21, two labour activists from Saqqez (Kurdistan Province) were sentenced to three and six months imprisonment, respectively, for holding celebrations for International Workers' Day (1 May). The sentence may be commuted to a fine.

Citing the Kurdistan Human Rights Network, Iranian foreign media report that a political activist has been sentenced to 40 years in prison on charges of war against God (moharebeh) by the first chamber of the Revolutionary Court of Mahabad (Kurdistan province). Apparently, the man was a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (DPK).

Iraq

Arrest after rocket attacks

On 26.05.21 Qassem Mahmoud Karim Muslih, the regional commander of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMU) of Anbar province, was arrested on the basis of the anti-terror laws in force. This measure is unprecedented as it involves a very senior member of the PMU. Various reports say that he is suspected of involvement in the assassinations of activists Fahim al-Taie and Ihab al-Wazni; apparently, also his role in various missile attacks on US forces is under investigation. Official statements only cite charges under the anti-terrorism law and a joint investigation by various agencies.

Protests

On 25.05.21 there were new demonstrations in Baghdad and other parts of the country, especially in the south. The rallies were sparked by the recent assassination of activist Ihab al-Wazni on 09.05.21 and by several subsequent attacks against activists. Several reports highlighted that in contrast to the beginning of the protests in October 2019, this time people from different parts of Iraq had obviously come in larger numbers to the central rally in Baghdad; also, significantly more elderly people were participating in the protests. The demonstrators called not only for investigations and the conviction of the perpetrators; they also protested against the security forces' violence against protesters underpinned by louder calls for a fundamental change in the political system. There were also slogans against the elections scheduled to be held in autumn, arguing that no free election was possible

in the current climate of threat, and calls for a boycott of the elections were heard. In Baghdad, at least two people died in clashes, and at least ten others needed hospital treatment for their injuries.

Israel / Palestinian Autonomous Territories

Ceasefire between Hamas and Israel following escalation of violence

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) informed on 16.05.21 that the premises of 23 Palestinian and international media channels were destroyed by Israeli shelling on Gaza.

On 19.05.21, Israeli shelling on the Gaza Strip killed nine people, among them a two-year-old girl. On 21.05.21, a ceasefire brokered by Egyptian negotiators was reached.

Since the escalation of hostilities began on 10.05.21, Israeli shelling has further crippled Gaza's infrastructure. On 18.05.21, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported 52,000 displaced Palestinians in Gaza. 47,000 have sought shelter in the 58 schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). After the ceasefire, most of them returned to their homes, OCHA stated. On 22.05.21, the WHO expressed concern about an overburdening of the health system due to the high number of injured and the damage to the medical infrastructure. Almost all hospitals were only partially functional, and two had been completely evacuated due to the damage, the WHO said. An expected increase in COVID-19 infections might increase the burden on the health system, as large numbers of people had sought shelter in a confined space. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, announced on 27.05.21 that the UN Human Rights Council was planning to launch an investigation into possible war crimes committed by both Israel and Hamas. Israel rejected the investigation and announced that it would not cooperate; Hamas also rejected the accusations. Bachelet noted 270 verified Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip, including 68 children. Hamas rockets had killed ten Israelis. The numbers given by the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian side differed significantly in parts.

On 25.05.21 Israel opened the borders to the Gaza Strip for commercial goods traffic.

On 25.05.21, the US announced additional payments for 2021 of USD 75 million in development and economic assistance to the Palestinian Authority, USD 5.5 million in immediate disaster relief for Gaza, and USD 32 million to UNRWA. The UN has already announced the initiation of payments of USD 22.5 million. Qatar has pledged to contribute USD 500 million to the reconstruction of Gaza.

General strike in Israel and the West Bank, arrests of suspected rioters

On 18.05.21, a large number of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship as well as Palestinians living in the West Bank participated in a general strike. The strike was intended to express solidarity with the residents of Gaza, to protest against violence by the Israeli military and to demonstrate the existence of Palestinian unity. In the evening, Palestinians and the Israeli military clashed during demonstrations. Three Palestinians were killed, and 72 others were injured.

On 23.05.21, the Israeli military announced a wave of arrests targeting suspected rioters, criminals and participants in the previous riots (cf. BN of 17.05.21). A total of 1,550 people were arrested, an estimated 75 percent of them were Palestinians (as of 27.05.21).

East Jerusalem: More dead and injured in clashes; reopening of US Consulate

On 21.05.21, the Israeli military and Palestinian demonstrators clashed at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The military broke up protest rallies with stun grenades after demonstrators threw stones and petrol bombs. 20 Palestinians were wounded in the incident.

On 24.05.21, an Israeli died from a knife attack in East Jerusalem, another Israeli soldier was injured. The attacker was killed by Israeli military.

In talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 25.05.21, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced plans to reopen the Jerusalem Consulate, which had served as a channel of communication with the Palestinian Authority before it was closed in 2019 and merged with the new US Embassy in Jerusalem.

West Bank: Several dead in protests

On 25.05.21, a man was killed by Israeli military during raids in al-Amari camp near Ramallah. On 28.05.21, a man died in protests against settlement construction in the West Bank near the village of Beita, south of Nablus city.

The Palestinian health ministry stated that Israeli military shot the 26-year-old victim and wounded five other protesters. The Israeli military announced investigations into the incident. Media report that a total of 25 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military in clashes in the West Bank since 10.05.21.

Lebanon

Supply situation

On 26.05.21, a new version of the food subsidy and reference card programme currently under discussion was submitted to the finance ministry. Since no agreement could be reached to use the Central Bank's emergency reserves for this purpose, the finance ministry was instructed to find other funding sources. Currently, subsidies for several food items such as rice, milk powder and cooking oil are on the verge of being discontinued. On the same day, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced to triple its assistance to Lebanon, offering assistance to about 300,000 households for at least a basic supply.

Mali

Another military coup

On the evening of 24.05.21, Mali's government was overthrown again. Interim President Bah N'Daw and head of government Moctar Ouané were arrested and taken to a military camp near the capital Bamako. Apparently, Malian soldiers held them there until their release on 27.05.21. On 26.05.21, N'Daw and Ouané had submitted their resignations. Prior to their arrest, N'Daw and Ouané had reshuffled the government following the dissolution of the interim government on 14.05.21. In the process, Colonel Assimi Goïta, vice-president of the transitional government, accused them of bypassing him in the government reshuffle. On 28.05.21, the Constitutional Court declared Goïta the new interim president.

The UN Security Council has condemned the deposition and arrest. At a special summit in Accra held on 30.05.21, the heads of state and government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) excluded Mali with immediate effect from the community for the time being and called for the appointment of a civilian prime minister.

As recently as August 2020, there had been a military coup in which President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was overthrown and a transitional government was installed (cf. BN of 24.08.20 and 28.09.20). The political situation in Mali has been very unstable since 2012.

Mexico

Targeted killings of politicians in run-up to elections; Sinaloa police chief killed

Media report that on 26.05.21, the candidate of the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) party for mayor in Moroleón, Guanajuato, was shot dead during her election campaign. She is the third MC politician to be assassinated in the last 15 days. A consulting firm has carried out a study on crimes against politicians during the election campaign for the legislative, regional and municipal elections scheduled for 06.06.21, as well as in the fight against organised crime. The study has found out that between September 2020 and the end of April 2021, a total of 476 crimes were committed against politicians, 79 of which ended fatally. In addition, 28 relatives of politicians and 91 civil servants were murdered in this period. The detection rate is low, while impunity is widespread. According to the government, the aim of criminal organisations is to intimidate candidates and thus influence the outcome of the elections. On 24.05.21 Joel Ernesto Soto, police chief of the state of Sinaloa, was assassinated.

Myanmar

Continuing protests, increasing number of attacks on public institutions, new conflict zone Kayah

Four months after the military coup on 01.02.21, protest rallies against the junta are still taking place all over the country; meanwhile, resistance against the regime is increasingly taking the form of armed action and bomb attacks.

The attacks target police stations, administrative and military buildings, banks and schools, but also people suspected of being military sources. Between 21.05.21 and 27.05.21, four security forces, one administrative official and four other people died in attacks by unknown assailants in Yangon (Rangoon). Also in Chin, Shan and Mon states and in Sagaing and Mandalay regions, security forces and members of the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) became victims of assassinations. Civilians also lost their lives in the incidents.

On 21.05.21, the Karenni Army (KA) and the Karenni People's Defence Force (KPDF) clashed with the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw). Following the incident, Kayah State and parts of Shan State became a new flashpoint in the conflict between the EAO and People's Defence Forces allied with the National Unity Government on the one hand and the military on the other. About 40 Junta forces were reportedly killed in several clashes in Demoso, Bawlakhe, Loikaw (Kayah) and Pekon (Shan) communities. The clashes claimed more than a dozen civilian lives, among them four people who were killed on 23.05.21 in an artillery attack on a church in Loikaw where they had taken shelter. About 70,000 people from 150 villages have fled their homes.

Fighting continued in the states of Kachin, Chin and Kayin and in the regions of Sagaing and Magwe. On 28.05.21, the conflict between the Tatmadaw and the Chinland Defence Force (CDF) escalated again in Kanpetlet (Chin). Following the bombing of military trucks in Gangaw (Magwe), Junta forces opened fire on several villages on 28.05.21. Three civilians died in the incident.

The number of civilians killed in connection with the military coup has risen to 840, and the number of people detained currently stands at 5,529. A total of 4,409 arrest warrants are currently outstanding.

Concern about third COVID 19 wave

On 26.05.21, an aid organisation reported that 50 to 100 people had contracted a COVID-19-like respiratory disease in the small town of Kyikha (Chin State) near the Indian border. With the testing rate dropping from around 20,000 to around 2,000 tests per day since the coup, concerns are growing about an undetected spread of the coronavirus and a third wave of infection. On 27.05.21, 96 tests out of a total of 1,788 were positive, 24 of them in Kyikha. Most of the country's doctors are still on strike. The vaccination programme launched on 27.01.21 has stalled after the coup because many people refuse vaccination under the junta.

Nicaragua

Electoral law reform and replacement of the Supreme Electoral Council

On 04.05.21, the majority Sandinista parliament led by Daniel Ortega (FSLN) passed an electoral reform for which the Organisation of American States (OAS) had set a deadline by May 2021. Media reports say that this reform incorporates into the electoral law some laws from 2020 that have been described as repressive by human rights organisations and the opposition (cf. BN of 19.10.20, 02.11.20 and 11.01.21). In addition, parliament approved the replacement of the Supreme Electoral Council, whose task is to act as an independent organising and control body for the elections, with a majority of judges who are loyal to the government.

Subpoena of media professionals and raid of editorial offices

In the course of a money laundering investigation against opposition presidential candidate Cristina Chamorro, the Attorney General's Office summoned numerous media professionals on 24.05.21. In addition, a raid was conducted in the offices of the investigative newspaper Confidencial, whose editor is Chamorro's brother Carlos. The accusation against Cristina Chamorro is related to her former work as director of the Violeta Foundation, which had advocated for press freedom until the enactment of the Foreign Agents Regulation Act 2020 (cf. BN of 19.10.20). Media professionals see the action taken by the authorities as an attempt to restrict press freedom and independent reporting before the elections.

Nigeria

Death of Boko Haram leader unconfirmed

Unconfirmed media reports say that on the evening of 19.05.21 Abubakar Shekau, long-time leader of the radical Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram may have either killed or seriously injured himself in the north-eastern

state of Borno. According to the reports, the incident occurred after fighters from the rival Islamist terrorist group Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) had attacked the Boko Haram hideout in Sambisa forest with several heavily armed pick-up trucks as a retaliatory measure. Shekau had surrendered after fighting, but then attempted to avoid capture by either blowing himself up or shoot himself during negotiations with ISWAP members. The Nigerian military said it was investigating the case. So far, Shekau's death has not been confirmed. Shekau had taken over Boko Haram in 2009 after the death of its founder Muhammad Yusuf. ISWAP had split from Boko Haram in 2016 and sworn allegiance to ISIL/ISIS. Since then, the balance of power in the region has increasingly developed in favour of ISWAP (cf. BN of 03.05.21 and 17.05.21).

Dozens of school children abducted

In the north-central Niger state, dozens of school children were abducted on 30.05.21. Media report that the owner of the Islamic school Salihu Tanko estimated that 150 children were kidnapped. The owner of the Islamic school Salihu Tanko estimated the number of abducted children at 150, the reports say. The school is attended by about 300 pupils aged between seven and fifteen. In the attack by heavily armed gunmen on 20 to 25 motorbikes, one individual was reportedly shot dead and another one seriously injured.

In recent months, there have been repeated abductions of schoolchildren and students in northern Nigeria (cf. BN of 10.05.21).

Oman

Nationwide protests

On 23.05.21, a large number of people protested against layoffs, difficult economic conditions, government austerity and corruption in Sohar, a city located about 200 km northwest of the capital Muscat. Media report that during clashes, police used tear gas and arrested several people some of whom had thrown stones; later, the protesters were released. The protests continued for several days and spread to the cities of Nizwa, Ibri, Rustaq, Suwayq, al-Khaburah and as far as the southern parts of the Sultanate. These are the first major protests since Sultan Haitham bin Tariq took over the government from the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said in January 2020. On 26.05.21, the Sultan addressed the protests in a televised speech and ordered the acceleration of plans to create 32,000 new jobs in the state sector, as well as subsidies for private sector workers and the extension of state assistance for the unemployed. Poor economic performance has led to layoffs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to high youth unemployment in the country. In addition, a 35 percent reduction in oil revenues has seen Oman's budget revenues fall by 21.6 percent compared to last year.

Pakistan

COVID-19 pandemic: new infections declining; restrictions lifted

Since 17.05.21, the restrictions imposed to contain the pandemic have been lifted. Public transport is allowed again, markets and offices are also open. After a sharp increase in April 2021, the number of new daily infections has declined. A vaccination centre with a capacity to vaccinate up to 100,000 people per day has been opened in the southern metropolis of Karachi (Sindh).

Explosion in Balochistan kills several people

On 21.05.21, a bomb explosion at a pro-Palestinian rally organised by a regional religious party killed at least six people and reportedly injured a dozen others in Chaman (Balochistan province). No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Both separatist and radical Islamist groups are active in the province. On the same day, protests were staged in other places in Pakistan because of the escalated conflict between Israel and the Islamist Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Peru

Attack in Satipo province claims several lives

Media report that on 23.05.21, at least 16 people were killed in a terrorist attack in a bar in San Miguel del Ene in Satipo province. The town is located in the so-called Vraem area, one of the main coca-growing regions in Peru. The military has attributed the attack to the Militarizado Partido Comunista del Perú (MPCP), a successor of the leftist guerrilla organisation Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path, SL), which is active in drug trafficking in the region. MPCP pamphlets calling for a boycott of the run-off election between presidential candidates Pedro Castillo and Keiko Fujimori on 06.05.21 were found at the crime scene.

Republic of the Congo

New government

Three days after his appointment by President Denis Sassou-Nguesso, the new Prime Minister Anatole Collinet Makosso presented his government on 15.05.21. Apart from eight women, the 36-member cabinet includes the former leader of the largest opposition party Pan-African Union for Social Democracy, Honoré Sayi and also, for the first time, the President's son Denis Christel Sassou-Nguesso. There is speculation in national and international media as well as in domestic political circles that the President, who has been ruling almost uninterruptedly for 36 years, is making preparations for his son to take office in the future. Denis Christel Sassou-Nguesso has repeatedly faced various criminal investigations in the USA and France in recent years, including allegations of embezzlement of public funds amounting to more than USD 50 million and of making illicit profits.

Somalia

Protests

On 16.05.21, dozens of families staged protests in Mogadishu over missing young men who were allegedly recruited by the Somali government and sent to Eritrea for military training. Media report that after the training, they were sent as soldiers to the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, whereas the Somali government denies this. The families are demanding information about the whereabouts of their sons. Security forces tried to disperse the protests and attacked media workers.

Agreement reached on presidential elections

The Somali government informed on 27.05.21 that the federal government and the states reached an agreement and that the postponed presidential elections would take place within 60 days. The elections scheduled for 08.02.21 had been postponed as no agreement could be reached on the voting modalities (cf. BN of 16.02.21). As a result, pressure on Somalia's President Farmajo increased and violent clashes broke out (cf. BN of 03.05.21).

Attack

On 28.05.21, at least four people were killed and 14 others injured in an explosion at a café in the local Xero Jaad khat market in Baidoa town (Bay region). No one has claimed responsibility for the attack so far.

South Sudan

New fighting in Warrap State

Media report new fighting between armed groups from different states of the country. On 26.05.21, armed individuals from Unity State apparently went to Warrap State to steal cattle. As this plan did not succeed, the group attacked various villages. Subsequently, young men from Warrap State armed themselves and confronted the attackers. The fighting lasted for two days; at least 18 people were killed. A local official said that similar incidents had occurred in the weeks and months before, with attackers from Unity State moving to Warrap State. In total, over 30 people have been killed so far, the official said. In order to prevent such action and the resulting fighting, local politicians are calling for a central government-led nationwide disarmament campaign.

Sri Lanka

Arrests in connection with commemorations of the 12th anniversary of the end of the war

Various media report that on 18.05.21, eight men and two women were arrested in Batticaloa under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for commemorating the slain leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, government sources said. It is prohibited to commemorate and adore the organisation, which is listed as a terrorist group, and its members. On 18 May, Tamils annually commemorate their loved ones who had lost their lives in the civil war, while the government holds events to celebrate the end of the war. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the authorities had banned larger commemorative events and gatherings. In Sri Lanka's last military offensive in May 2009, the LTTE had been defeated, and the civil war had ended.

Sudan

New round of talks between government and SPLM-N

Hosted by South Sudan, the Sudanese transitional government and the leadership of the opposition group Sudan Popular Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) have resumed talks. The Prime Minister of Sudan, as well as the Chairman of the Sovereign Council, and the Chairman of the SPLM-N underlined their commitment to achieve a lasting peace and to be open to a corresponding dialogue. The talks now taking place are a new attempt after the SPLM-N had withdrawn in protest from the negotiations in August 2020. The reason for their withdrawal was the presence of the Sudanese delegation's chairman who is also the commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The SPLM-N accused the RSF of involvement in violent attacks in the Khor El Waral region in 2019 despite a ceasefire. In the current talks, the SPLM-N is calling for a secular state, the disbandment of all militias loyal to Bashir, and a reform of the military. If these demands are not met, the SPLM-N threatens to call for self-determination in areas it controls.

Situation remains insecure in El Geneina, West Darfur

In its latest emergency situation report on the West Darfur region of 27.05.21, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) notes that the situation is currently calm but still tense and unpredictable. After the last major outbreak of violence (cf. BN of 19.04.21), there have been no further incidents in El Geneina town. However, on 18.05.21 five people were killed in an attack on Gellu village, which is about 37 km away from El Geneina. Furthermore, 40 farms were burnt down and about 1,850 people fled to Chad. The clashes were triggered by a conflict between a group of nomads and a farming family, which escalated and quickly spread. In the conflict, 30 farmers had their agricultural yields destroyed, generators stolen and water points rendered unusable. IOM now estimates 151,300 people are seeking shelter in the town of El Geneina and surrounding villages. OCHA further reports that in West Darfur, there are many female-headed households amongst the IDPs in West Darfur, with associated exposure to sexual and gender-based violence and vulnerability in this situation.

Syria

Presidential election

According to the official count of the presidential elections of 26.05.21, incumbent Bashar al-Assad secured 95.1 percent of the votes cast. He had faced symbolic competition from two candidates. Voter turnout was officially listed as 78.6 percent (out of a total of 18 million eligible voters), with about eight million Syrians unable to participate in the elections because they live in the areas of north-eastern and north-western Syria outside government control. The majority of the approximately five million Syrians living abroad did not cast their vote. In Germany, as in France, Syrian abroad were banned from holding the election.

Togo

Prison sentence for opposition politician

On 18.05.21, opposition politician Djimon Oré was sentenced to two years in prison for insulting public officials and spreading false news. He had been arrested on 29.04.21 (cf. BN of 03.05.21).

Advisor of opposition politician arrested

Paul Missiagbeto, member of the Mouvement Patriotique pour la Démocratie et le Développement (MPDD) party and advisor to opposition politician Agbéyomé Kodjo, was arrested on 17.05.21. Initially, no reason was given for his arrest. Kodjo, MPDD candidate in the presidential election of February 2020, had lost against incumbent Faure Gnassingbé.

Turkey

ILGA assessment of the situation of LGBTQI people

On 17.05.21, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association Europe (ILGA-Europe) published its annual 'Rainbow Europe Map and Index' which rates 49 European countries according to their legal and political situation for LGBTQI people on a scale between 0 percent (gross human rights violations, discrimination) and 100 percent (respect for human rights, full equality). Turkey ranks 48th with four percent.

Suspected Gülen supporters arrested

On 20.05.21, a total of 35 people accused of having links to the Gülen movement were arrested in a large-scale raid in Izmir province. Among the accused are civilians as well as military personnel. On the same charges, 46 military, police and judiciary personnel were arrested nationwide on 21.05.21. In total, the public prosecutor's office issued arrest warrants for 127 persons. The search is on for further suspects.

Arrests of suspected ISIS members

On 20.05.21, at least 18 people suspected of being ISIS members were arrested in a large-scale raid by anti-terrorist units in Istanbul.

Reopening of Gezi Trial

On 21.05.21, a Turkish court began the re-trial of Osman Kavala and 15 other defendants who are accused of organising the Gezi protests in 2013 to overthrow the government. In February 2020, Kavala and eight of the defendants had been acquitted, but an appeals court overturned the verdict in January 2021 and ruled that the case must be retried. Some of the defendants had already been acquitted of the charges in 2015 and are now on trial for the third time. The current trial also deals with the cases of nine defendants who are staying abroad, among them is the journalist Can Dündar. Kavala, who has been in prison for three and a half years, is now also accused of espionage and involvement in the 2016 coup attempt. The European Court of Human Rights had already demanded Kavala's release in December 2019 on the grounds that his detention was politically motivated.

Uzbekistan

Admission of newly founded opposition party denied

Media report that already on 07.05.21 the justice ministry rejected the application of the oppositional association Haqiqat va Taraqqiyot (Truth and Progress) for official registration as a party on the grounds that the required number of signatures for registration (20,000) was not reached (cf. BN of 29.03.21). While the ministry stated that more than 2,000 signatories had applied for cancellation of their signatures, the Uzbek service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports that in April 2021, supporters of the group were deliberately put under pressure by local authorities. Currently, the party is collecting signatures for a second registration attempt in view of the presidential election scheduled for October 2021. No opposition party has been registered in Uzbekistan since the 1990s.

Vietnam

COVID 19 pandemic

The number of COVID-19 infections continues to rise. According to official figures, more than 7,100 people have been infected so far and 47 have died (as of 31.05.21). On 29.05.21, state media reported that a new easily transmissible variant of the virus was discovered in the country.

Yemen

Houthis refuse COVID-19 vaccine

The Houthis have reportedly refused to accept 10,000 doses of vaccine from AstraZeneca to be distributed to people in areas under their control. However, they have agreed to vaccinate 500 health workers. The Yemeni government has asked the remaining health workers to travel to government-controlled areas to receive the vaccine.

Participation in the vaccination campaign, which began in April 2021, has been relatively low, partly because of scepticism about the safety of the vaccine. However, demand has recently increased after Saudi Arabia announced that entry would require prior vaccination. As of 24.05.21, a total of 18,555 people have received their first vaccine dose.

Construction of an air base on Mayun Island

Satellite images show that an airbase is under construction on the strategically important island of Mayun in the Bab el-Mandeb strait, 3.5 km off the Yemeni coast. The Saudi Arabia-led coalition supporting the Yemeni government in the fight against the Houthis has admitted to storing military equipment on the island; but it has not claimed responsibility for building the base. Observers assume that the UAE is behind the construction, striving to expand its influence in the region. The airbase might be used for airstrikes in Yemen or for military operations in the Horn of Africa and other nearby areas. The UAE is formally part of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, but also supports groups in conflict with the government such as the Southern Transitional Council (STC).