



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Taliban cooperate with al-Qaeda / ISKP still active in the country

As reported by LongWarJournal on 07.06.21, the UN Sanctions Monitoring Team published a new report on insurgents/Islamists in Afghanistan on 01.06.21. According to the report, the Taliban still maintain good connections to al-Qaeda in the country, especially through the Haqqani network, whose members have married into al-Qaeda families, amongst other things. In addition, Sirajuddin Haqqani is a leading figure within al-Qaeda, but not of the al-Qaeda core leadership (the Hattin Shura), the report says. Al-Qaeda is active in 15 Afghan provinces, despite the Taliban's claims to the contrary, and is led by its Jahbat al-Nasr wing, the report continues. Both the al-Qaeda leadership and that of al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS), including the leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, are based in the border region with Pakistan. Besides, the Taliban are in control of 280 mining locations across 26 provinces (government control: 281 locations across 16 provinces; warlord control: 148 location across 12 provinces) and had gained about \$450 million profit from them last year, the report continues. Despite its defeats in Kunar and Nangarhar, the ISKP also remains a threat, being still active in small cells (about 1,500-2,200 fighters) in the two provinces; other fighters (Tajiks, Uzbeks) are also active in Badakhshan, Kunduz, Balkh and Sar-e Pul, the report says.

Taliban: more districts captured

Reports of 09.06.21 say that the Afghan parliament has confirmed the capture of several districts by the Taliban in the last two months: Jond district in Badghis, Barka in Baghlan, Nerkh and Jalrez in Maidan Wardak, Dawlat Shah in Laghman, Qaisar in Faryab, Gizab in Uruzgan, and Sharak in Ghor. The Taliban themselves claim to have captured 20 districts during this period. The LongWarJournal reported on 07.06.21 that eight districts have been seized in recent weeks. On 11.06.21 it was reported that the Taliban now also control the district of Ishkimish in Takhar province. On 12.06.21, it was reported that they had taken Tulak district in Ghor province. On 13.06.21, the Taliban apparently captured Aliabad district in Kunduz province and on 14.06.21, they seized Khan Abad district in Kunduz and Sayad district in Sar-e Pul. During the fighting for the district of Qaisar, 180 soldiers of the Afghan army were captured and 80 injured, reports say.

Attacks on civilians

On 12.06.21, two bombs detonated under civilian minibuses, killing seven people and injuring six others in western Kabul, which is mainly inhabited by people from the Shia Hazara ethnic group. In recent weeks, there have been six such attacks on minibuses, killing a total of 25 people and injuring another 26 in this part of the city. The ISPK has claimed responsibility for most of the incidents. In addition, the girls' school in this part of the city had been attacked on 09.05.21, leaving 90 people dead (cf. BN of 11.05.21). The Afghan Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has called the attacks a genocide against the Hazaras and demanded more security for western Kabul. Many Shia Hazaras are fighting against ISIS in Syria on the side of Iran (Liwa Fatemiyoun Brigade), which is one of the reasons

why ISKP is targeting this ethnic group in Afghanistan. On 09.06.21, ten employees of a demining company, many of them also Hazaras, were killed and 16 others injured by the ISKP in Baghlan province. On the same day, a journalist died in Logar province in fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan army. On 06.06.21, two civilians were killed and 67 others injured in a Taliban bomb attack on the police headquarters in Baghlan province.

Albania

Parliament votes to remove president from office

On 09.06.21, Albania's parliament (140 seats in total) decided in an extraordinary session to remove President Ilir Meta from office with 105 votes in favour, seven against and three abstentions. A few days before, on 28.05.21, a committee that had been specially set up (cf. BN of 10.05.21) concluded that Meta had committed serious violations of the constitution during the election campaign and the parliamentary election of 25.04.21. A two-thirds majority was required to impeach the president. The Socialist Party (PS) camp of Prime Minister Edi Rama, which had pushed for the president's removal, would probably not have been able to achieve this majority after the new parliament had convened.

President Meta had refused to cooperate with the committee. Commenting on the parliamentary vote, his spokesperson said that the president was not disturbed by this unconstitutional act. The final decision on his removal rests with the constitutional court, which is expected to decide within three months.

Algeria

New parliament elected

A new parliament was elected on 12.06.21. About 24 million eligible voters were called to cast their ballots for 407 seats in the National Assembly. Before, several opposition parties and parts of the protest movement Hirak had called for a boycott of the elections. According to official figures, voter turnout was only 30.25 percent. Preliminary results are expected early this week.

France 24's operating licence cancelled

The Algerian authorities have cancelled the accreditation of the TV channel France 24 due to repeated hostility towards the country and its institutions. On 13.03.21, the channel had been given a final warning over its coverage of the Hirak protest movement's Friday marches.

Burkina Faso

Internally displaced persons after attack

On 09.06.21 the minister of communications and relations with parliament, government spokesperson Ousséni Tamboura informed that after the attack in Solhan village from 04.06.21 to 05.06.21 (cf. BN of 07.06.21), a total of 7,644 people have fled from the village to Sebba (capital of Yagha province). The attack had killed 132 people, he stated. Local sources assumed about 160 casualties.

State of emergency

On 09.06.21, the council of ministers approved a bill to extend by 18 months the state of emergency that has been in force since January 2019 in a total of 14 provinces in the Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Est, Est, Hauts-Bassins, Nord and Sahel regions affected by Islamist violence.

Chad

COVID-19: start of vaccination campaign

After the delivery of 200,000 vaccine doses from China, the COVID-19 vaccination campaign began on 04.06.21. Priority will be given to pilgrims, people over 65, medical personnel and members of the military. According to

official figures, 4,938 people have been infected with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, 174 of whom have died.

Côte d'Ivoire

Attacks on security forces

On 07.06.21, unspecified gunmen killed a soldier in the village of Tougbo (Zanzan district) on the border with Burkina Faso. The attackers were repelled, the military stated. On 13.06.21 another report followed, informing about the death of two soldiers and a policeman. Apparently, their vehicle was hit by an explosive device while on patrol at the border to Burkina Faso in the north of the country. Four other security personnel were injured in the incident. It was the fourth attack in the region so far this year (cf. BN of 12.04.21).

DR Congo

COVID-19: hospitals in Kinshasa under pressure

On 12.06.21, President Félix Tshisekedi informed that hospitals in the capital Kinshasa are overburdened by an increase in COVID-19 infections, with the delta variant predominating, a media agency reports. The president announced drastic measures without giving details. In Kinshasa, the National Police (PNC) has already been tasked with enforcing the sanitation measures since 10.06.21. The country is facing a third wave of infections. Official figures put the number of infected people at around 35,000 and the number of dead at around 830 since the beginning of the pandemic. However, given the low number of tests, experts suspect that the number of unreported cases is considerable. In the course of the vaccination campaign, which began on 19.04.21, fewer than 30,000 doses have been administered so far.

Ethiopia

UN warns of famine in Tigray

The UN has warned of a severe hunger crisis in the Ethiopian regional state of Tigray. The situation is catastrophic, with 350,000 people at acute risk of starvation, the UN said in a report published on 10.06.21. This is the largest number of people affected in a single country in a decade. In total, about 5.5 million people in the region are dependent on food aid, about 90 percent of the population, the report continues. The Ethiopian government has denied a famine in Tigray.

The poor supply situation is to be seen against the background of the civil war in the region, which has been ongoing since November 2020. The conflict between the Ethiopian government and its allies against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has triggered the displacement of the population as well as restrictions on their freedom of movement, obstruction of humanitarian access, crop losses and collapsed markets, the UN report says. The disaster is expected to become 'far worse'. At the same time, the UN renewed its offer of aid. Currently, only about ten per cent of Tigray's total area is freely accessible to international emergency relief operations.

G7 countries condemn violence in Tigray

In a joint statement at the end of the G7 meeting in the English county of Cornwall, the leading Western economic powers have expressed 'deep concern about the ongoing conflict and reports of an unfolding major humanitarian tragedy' in Tigray. They condemned 'ongoing atrocities, including widespread sexual violence' and called for immediate cessation of hostilities and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Gambia

Entitlement to compensation for unlawful arrest

The Point news portal reported on 02.06.21 that the Banjul High Court, in a judgment of 01.06.21, considered indemnifiable the unlawful infringement of the plaintiff Adama Faal's right to liberty in connection with a purely civil matter (land dispute) without any discernible criminal connection. The competent criminal judge found that the plaintiff's constitutionally guaranteed and inalienable rights to liberty had been violated by his temporary arrest and detention of less than 24 hours by the police. The National Police Agency was then ordered to pay Adama Faal damages in the amount of 150,000 Dalasi (approx. 2,399 Euros, as of 09.06.21).

Ghana

LGBTQI activists: release on bail

On 08.06.21, the Ho district court rejected the application of 21 arrested LGBTQI activists (16 women and five men, cf. BN of 31.05.21). However, on 11.06.21, the higher instance Ho High Court allowed the release of all those arrested on bail of GHS 5,000 each (approx. EUR 711, as of 14.06.21). The next court hearing at the Ho district court was scheduled for 16.06.21.

Haiti

Gang violence on the rise in Port-au-Prince

Since 01.06.21, fighting has increased in the capital Port-au-Prince between police and rival gangs over the control of some areas of the city. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has informed that numerous people have been killed and injured in the clashes. About 1,000 people have fled to less dangerous parts of the city and are in urgent need of humanitarian aid. At present, the local police are no longer able to guarantee the protection and safety of the civilian population, OCHA stated.

India

Child labour in the mining sector

On 12.06.21, on the occasion of the World Day against Child Labour, attention is drawn to the fact that many children and young people worldwide still are forced to work under exploitative conditions. In 2020, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that 152 million children between the ages of five and 17 (about 10 percent of all children worldwide) were subjected to child labour: 73 million minors worked under unhealthy and dangerous conditions, about one million of them in the mining sector. According to UNICEF figures of 10.06.21, 160 million children worldwide are now affected, and there might be another 9 million by the end of 2022. India, along with Madagascar, is the world's largest exporter of mica, a group of silicates used in the cosmetics and automotive industries. The two north-eastern Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand supply a quarter of the mica consumed worldwide. An estimated 300,000 people in the region depend on mining. More than 20,000 children had already been working in precarious and life-threatening conditions before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the situation has worsened for the children living there, the aid organisation Terre des Hommes (TDH) has stated. According to Convention 182 of the ILO, mining is one of the worst forms of child labour and is prohibited in all countries of the world. In India, the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act prohibits the employment of children and adolescents in mining.

Rohingya refugee camp in New Delhi destroyed in massive fire

On 13.06.21, a Rohingya refugee camp was destroyed in a massive fire in Madanpur Khadar in the south of the Indian capital New Delhi, leaving homeless more than 50 families of the Muslim minority persecuted in Myanmar who were living there. There were no reports of deaths or serious injuries. An estimated 40,000 Rohingya refugees are living across India, most of them undocumented, mainly in New Delhi, Jammu, Hyderabad (Telangana) and Nuh

(Haryana). Some of them have received refugee cards issued by the UN providing access to social assistance and protection from deportation.

Iran

Prison conditions in Tehran jails

On 07.06.21, Iranian foreign media reported the death of a political prisoner in Tehran central prison. The prisoner had died due to illness and lack of access to medical care. He had been arrested by the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Service in June 2019 and was sentenced in May 2020 to eight years in prison, five of which to be served without parole, by the 36th branch of Tehran's Revolutionary Court. The charges were assembly and conspiracy against national security, propaganda against the system and insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic. In addition, he was charged of supporting a monarchist system in social media and distributing corresponding leaflets. A news item released on 10.06.21 reports the ill-treatment of a detained 28-year-old female civil activist by fellow criminal prisoners in Qarchak women's prison. The victim was reportedly beaten and injured with sharp tin lids by fellow prisoners at the instigation of prison staff. In August 2020, the young woman had left her house and was arrested by security forces without a warrant and taken to a detention centre run by the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Service. On 03.02.21, the 26th branch of the Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced her for propaganda against the system and insulting sacred principles.

On 13.06.21, two political prisoners in Tehran Central Prison ended their hunger strike after nearly two weeks. They had gone on hunger strike after being transferred to the fourth wing of the prison where dangerous felons are kept. One of the two men was mistreated by fellow prisoners and complained about the poor hygienic conditions in an open letter at the end of May 2021. The two men had been arrested in the course of the November riots in 2019 and were sentenced to five and six years in prison each on the usual charges.

Pensioner sentenced to five years in prison and 74 lashes

According to media reports, a 67-year-old pensioner and labour activist was sentenced to five years imprisonment, 74 lashes and a fine of two million Tuman (approx. EUR 71) for having participated in the organisation of the pensioners' protests in Tehran. The charges were assembly and conspiracy against the country's security. The man had been briefly detained by security forces on 07.03.21 during a rally in front of Tehran's labour ministry and was arrested at his home on 03.04.21. In March 2021, pensioners and retirees had staged rallies demanding that their pensions be brought into line with inflation and the rising cost of living (cf. BN of 08.03.21).

Iraq

Release of Commander Qassem Musleh

Following the murder of the activists Fahim al-Taie and Ihab al-Wazni in Kerbala, the senior commander of the pro-Iranian Hashd al-Shaabi, Qassem Musleh, was arrested on 26.05.21. He and his militia were accused of being involved in the murder of the two activists. He was released on 09.06.21 as there was apparently no evidence of his involvement in the incident.

On 10.06.21, Muqtada al-Sadr stated in this context that the mission of the Hashd al-Shaabi was to serve the people of Iraq, regardless of their ethnicity or confession. After the release of the commander, many activists stated that the Iraqi government was unable to do anything against the powerful militias.

Rocket attacks

On 09.06.21, two missile attacks were launched on bases used by US forces. Three missiles hit the Balad airbase and at least one missile struck near Baghdad airport.

Kazakhstan

Three political activists sentenced to restriction of liberty

On 01.06.21, the Karatau district court in Shymkent announced the sentence of one and a half years in prison for three activists for their 'participation in the activities of a banned organisation' (Art. 405 of the Kazakh Criminal Code). The defendants were also sentenced to 100 hours of community service and were banned from participating in socio-political activities for three years. The three activists were accused of participating in the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (Qazaqstannıń demokratiyalıq tańdauı QDT) and Köşe Partiyası movements. The Kazakh judiciary declared the two organisations extremist and banned their activities. In a resolution of 11.02.21, the European Parliament described the above-mentioned organisations as 'peaceful opposition movements' and spoke of an 'abuse of extremism laws to persecute the opposition and human rights defenders' with regard to previous convictions of supporters of the above-mentioned organisations.

Mongolia

Ukhnaa Khurelsukh wins presidential election

On 09.06.21, Ukhnaa Khurelsukh was democratically elected as the country's sixth president with 67.8% of the votes cast. Khurelsukh belongs to the ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP). He had resigned as prime minister on 21.01.21 after a health scandal involving a woman infected with the coronavirus and her infant had sparked protests in Ulan Bator (Ulaanbaatar). Khurelsukh's presidency is the first to be limited to a single six-year term as a result of a constitutional amendment. Running against Khurelsukh were Dangaasuren Enkhbat of the Right Person Electorate Coalition (RPEC), an alliance formed in 2020 between the National Workers' Party, the Mongolian Social Democratic Party and the Justice Party, and Sodnomzundui Erdene of the Democratic Party (DP). Enkhbat secured 20.3% of the vote, with Erdene taking 6 percent. 5.9 percent of the ballots were blank. The voter turnout was 59.2 percent. Being the winner of the presidential election, Khurelsukh now needs to give up his party affiliation.

Montenegro

Resignation of prosecutors clears way for judicial reform

A recent media report says that prosecutor general Ivica Stankovic and several other prosecutors retired on 10.06.21, paving the way for the judicial reform initiated by the government majority. With the votes of the government majority, an amendment to the law had been passed in parliament on 27.05.21 to pave the way for the dismissal of both the prosecutor general and the special prosecutor for organised crime and corruption, Milivoje Katnic, and to re-regulate the appointment of future prosecutors. The Venice Commission (the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional law) had previously expressed concerns about the draft because of possible politicisation and jeopardisation of the reform process.

Mozambique/Tanzania

Ongoing refugee movements in Cabo Delgado

Almost three months after the attacks on the city of Palma (cf. BN of 29.03.21), the situation in the region remains tense. Media report continuing exchanges of fire and the destruction of homes. Thousands of people are still fleeing within Mozambique and to Tanzania. Since January, Tanzanian border officials have forcibly expelled more than 9,600 Mozambican refugees.

Myanmar

UN warns of humanitarian catastrophe

On 08.06.21, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews warned of 'mass deaths' in Kayah State due to hunger and disease. As a result of the ongoing conflicts between rebel groups and the Myanmar

military (Tatmadaw), over 108,000 people have been displaced in the region. Many of them remain in forests, where they are cut off from supplies of food, water, and medicine. Local media report that on 08.06.21, junta forces burnt food and medicine supplies for 3,000 IDPs and placed landmines on public roads to block access to the refugees. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet also warned of a further escalation of violence, especially in Kayah, Chin and Kachin states, where security forces are firing with heavy weapons and from the air at rebel groups, civilians, and civilian objects, including Christian churches. Credible reports say that security forces have also used civilians as human shields and attacked humanitarian aid workers.

In Chin State, about 5,000 IDPs and locals from three villages near Mindat town have fled from junta attacks by 09.06.21. The IDPs lack food and other daily necessities as the junta has also confiscated aid supplies in Chin. A total of 20,000 Mindat residents have been displaced following the clashes between rebel groups and the Tatmadaw in May 2021 (cf. BN of 17.05.21).

On 09.06.21 and 10.06.21, fights broke out between junta forces and local rebel groups in Kani (Sagaing Region) as well as in Hakha and Thantlang (Chin State). Ten Tatmadaw soldiers were reportedly killed in Kani, and 27 in Hakha and Thantlang. Thousands of people fled the area. In Hakha, security forces arrested 80 people for staging anti-regime protests and having anti-regime protest photos on their mobile phones and social media accounts.

On 09.06.21, the authorities ordered Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) to suspend its activities in Dawei (Tanintharyi region). MSF last provided care for 2,162 people suffering from HIV and tuberculosis in Dawei. MSF programme director Adrian Guadarrama said that the suspension might become life-threatening for the patients at a time when public healthcare remained severely disrupted.

Since the military coup on 01.02.21, at least 862 people have died as a result of police and military violence. 4,848 people are in detention for political reasons and arrest warrants for 1,963 people are still outstanding. At least 22 people have been tortured to death in detention or during interrogations, the human rights organisation Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reports.

Nicaragua

More opposition presidential candidates and regime-critical actors arrested

After the imposition of house arrest on Cristiana Chamorro and the arrest of Arturo Cruz (cf. BN of 31.05.21 and 07.06.21), the Nicaraguan public prosecutor's office ordered the arrest of the two opposition presidential candidates Félix Maradiaga and Juan Sebastián Chamorro on 8.06.21. Both are accused of violating the law for the defence of the rights of the people to independence, sovereignty, and self-determination for peace (Ley de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo a la Independencia, la Soberanía y Autodeterminación para la Paz). On the same day, dissident activist Violeta Granera and the former president of the supreme council of private enterprise (COSEP) José Adán Aguerri were also arrested on the same charges. As a result of the arrests, which the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the UN General Secretariat have criticised as arbitrary, US President Joe Biden imposed new sanctions against persons of the Ortega regime on 09.06.21. On 13.06.21, five more opposition figures were arrested, citing the above-mentioned law. They are party members of the Unión Democrática Renovadora (Unamos), among them former vice-chancellor Víctor Hugo Tinoco, former general Hugo Torres and Sandinista ex-guerrilla Dora María Téllez.

Nigeria

Attacks in the northwest leave scores dead and abducted

On 10.06.21 and 11.06.21, scores of people were killed and injured in attacks on villages in Zurmi Local Government Area of north-western Zamfara State. Casualty figures given in media reports ranged from 53 to 93. Witnesses say that the attackers, generally referred to as bandits in the Nigerian media, invaded the villages on motorbikes and spoke French. A member of the state police said the attackers demanded that village farmers not cultivate any crops without paying them money.

The governor of Zamfara, Bello Matawalle, has called on the population not to wait for security forces when attacked by bandits and to defend themselves. He has also suspended the Emir of Zurmi, Alhaji Abubakar Muhammad, whose involvement in the attacks will be investigated.

Media report that in the night of 10.06.21 to 11.06.21, a student was killed, and eight students and two lecturers were abducted in Kaduna State, south-east of Zamfara, in an attack on Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic in Zaria city. Already on 03.06.21, a total of 88 people were killed in attacks on several villages in Kebbi State, which borders Zamfara to the west, media reports say. A spokesperson for the governor of Kebbi said that the attackers had come from Zamfara and Niger states and had stolen cattle and burnt crops. In response, Kebbi State police launched Operation Ganuwa to prevent further attacks on vulnerable communities, the spokesperson said. In recent weeks and months, there have been numerous attacks and abductions in the north-west of the country (cf. BN of 26.04.21 and 31.05.21).

Democracy Day Protests

On the occasion of Democracy Day, protest rallies were staged against President Muhammadu Buhari in Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan and other cities on 12.06.21. Media reports say that police used tear gas and arrested demonstrators. However, compared to the #EndSARS protests in October 2020 (cf. BN of 26.10.20), the rallies were manageable, a Nigerian newspaper stated.

Democracy Day is a bank holiday in Nigeria to commemorate the transition to a democratic form of government.

Pakistan

Christian couple acquitted of blasphemy charges

On 03.06.21, a high court in Lahore (Punjab) acquitted a Christian couple of blasphemy charges after eight years in prison. After a dispute with Muslim work colleagues, the Christians had been accused of exchanging blasphemous text messages. In mid-May 2021, the European Parliament had passed a resolution calling for the death sentence to be overturned and for the couple to be released immediately. Christians and members of other religious minorities in Pakistan are often accused of insulting the Prophet without evidence. Court proceedings are apparently often one-sided and unbalanced. The current blasphemy laws provide for the death penalty for insulting Islam or the Prophet Mohammed. Critics have long called for their abolition.

Attack on polio vaccination team

On 09.06.21, two policemen accompanying a polio vaccination team were shot dead by unknown assailants in Mardan district (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa). As part of the polio vaccination campaign, tens of thousands of children under the age of five are planned to be immunised by the end of the year.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories/Israel

West Bank: Three killed in night military raid

On 10.06.21, two Palestinian military intelligence officers and a suspected member of the Islamist group Islamic Jihad were killed in the northern West Bank town of Jenin.

The Israeli Yamam unit, specialised in anti-terror operations, attempted to arrest two suspected Islamic Jihad members. Although Israeli military operations in the West Bank are usually coordinated with the Palestinian Authority, in this case the Palestinian authorities had no knowledge. Apparently, the Palestinian officers wanted to prevent the arrest. According to media reports, both sides operated at least in part covertly and were not directly recognisable as members of their respective units.

West Bank: Youth killed by Israeli military during protests

The Palestinian health ministry has informed that on 11.06.21, a 15-year-old protester was killed. The protests were directed against the expansion of Jewish settlements near the village of Beita near Nablos, which would mean the loss of land for Palestinians. Six other protesters were injured in the incident.

West Bank: Palestinian woman dead after knife attack

On 12.06.21, a Palestinian woman was shot dead by a private security guard at the Qalandiya military checkpoint near Jerusalem when, according to the military, she tried to attack the base armed with a knife. She had apparently ignored warnings from the military.

Israel: New government confirmed by Knesset

On 13.06.21 the Israeli parliament confirmed the new Israeli government under Naftali Bennett with a narrow majority of 60 to 59 votes (cf. BN of 07.06.21). Benjamin Netanyahu's twelve-year term in office thus comes to an end. Due to the diverse political views within the new eight-party coalition, the new Prime Minister Bennet has announced to build on common ground and leave controversial issues aside for the time being.

Russian Federation

Network of opposition politician Navalny finally banned

After the regional offices of Alexei Navalny's network had already been declared 'terrorist and extremist organisations' by the Russian financial supervisory authority (cf. BN of 03.05.21), the Moscow city court on 09.06.21 classified as 'extremist' and thus officially outlawed all three organisations belonging to the network (in addition to the regional offices also the Anti-Corruption Foundation FBK and the Civil Rights Protection Fund FZPG). The court thus followed the request of the public prosecutor's office, which had accused Navalny's organisations of destabilising the social and political situation in the country. As a result, employees, donors, and other supporters of the network face up to ten years' imprisonment (if they continue their activities) and now also exclusion from the parliamentary elections in September 2021. The background to this is an amendment to the law signed by President Putin on 04.06.21, which deprives people with current and past links to 'extremist' associations of the right to stand for election for several years. Observers see the court ruling as a severe, albeit expected 'blow' against Navalny and the Russian opposition as a whole. Media report that Navalny's lawyers immediately announced that they would appeal against the ruling; also, there appear to be plans for the network to continue using a new name.

Somalia/Ethiopia

UN report: Presence of Somali soldiers in Ethiopia's Tigray region

A report published on 02.06.21 by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea indicates that Somali soldiers are involved in the civil war in the Ethiopian region of Tigray. The report says that Somali soldiers, accompanied by Eritrean troops, were removed from their military training camps in Eritrea and taken to the frontline in Tigray. Besides, Somali soldiers appear to be present around the town of Aksum. While the Somali government denies the participation of Somali soldiers in the Tigray conflict, the parliamentary committees on foreign affairs and defence have recommended that Somalia's President Farmajo send a fact-finding mission to Eritrea, the report says. The report of the Special Rapporteur follows months of rumours about the involvement of Somali soldiers in the conflict (cf. BN of 25.01.21). For months now, families of missing young men sent to Eritrea for military training have been protesting and demanding information about their whereabouts (cf. BN of 31.05.21).

Syria

Idlib: artillery fire and air strikes claim several lives

On 10.06.,21, at least eleven people were killed in the village of Ibleen, southern Idlib governorate, when about ten artillery shells from the Syrian army hit the area, rescue workers reported. A convoy of rebel fighters that arrived to rescue survivors was apparently fired upon by Russian warplanes, killing four more people.

Afrin: shelling of a hospital leaves at least 13 dead

On 12.06.21, the al-Shifaa hospital in Afrin, northern Syria, was destroyed by rocket fire, injuring 43 people and killing 15 others. Afrin is under the control of Syrian Arab militias supported by the Turkish military. Turkish government officials say that the shelling came from Tal Rifaat, a town under the control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The SDF, however, has condemned the attack and denied any responsibility.

On 13.06.21, the Turkish military attacked targets in Tal Rifaat.

Turkey

Indictment seeking ban on HDP refiled

On 06.06.21, the chief public prosecutor's office refiled an indictment seeking dissolution of the pro-Kurdish HDP for 'crimes against the independence of the state and its inseparable unity with the nation and the people'. The initial indictment had been rejected by the constitutional court in March due to technical shortcomings. In addition, on 10.06.21, the chief public prosecutor's office filed another indictment demanding that 451 HDP members be barred from political activities. The HDP's bank accounts are also sought to be frozen. The constitutional court has to make a decision within 15 days.

Suspected TIKKO member arrested

On 10.06.21, a suspected member of TIKKO, a militia of the communist TKP/ML party, which is listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, was arrested in Mugla province. The detainee is accused of involvement in an attack back in 1979 in which a policeman had been killed.

Child labour

On 12.06.21, World Day Against Child Labour, opposition CHP member of parliament Candan Yüceer said that out of 23 million children in Turkey, two million were forced into child labour. According to Turkey's state statistics institute, 513 children have died in workplace accidents during the last eight years. In the first five months of 2021, 19 children died while working.

Confirmation of ECtHR ruling by constitutional court

On 10.06.21, Turkey's constitutional court issued a decision in the case of Cahit Tamur, Eyyup Yaşar, Fuat Bor and Hüseyin Duman, who had been convicted of 'armed attacks against the state' by the Diyarbakir criminal court in 2007. In 2008, the defendants had appealed the verdict to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which ruled in 2017 that their rights to a defence lawyer in detention and to a trial within a reasonable time had been violated. However, the Diyarbakir criminal court rejected an application for retrial based on the ECtHR ruling in 2018. Now, the constitutional court upheld the ECtHR judgment, also pointing out the binding nature of ECtHR judgments and stating that Turkey is obliged to guarantee the fundamental rights and freedoms of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and to abide by ECtHR rulings on rights violations. The court ordered the retrial of the case.

Uzbekistan

Practicing Muslims forced to shave off beards

According to a report by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, dozens of practising Muslims were summoned by local police over several days last week and ordered to shave off their beard hair in the eastern city of Angren. If they refused to do so, they were threatened with coercion and charges of disobeying police orders.

The Uzbek authorities often associate the wearing of long facial hair with a radical Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.

Vietnam

Parliamentary elections

Elections to the 15th National Assembly (parliament) were held on 23.05.21. The elections are held every five years. Around 92 percent of the 868 candidates were members of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), 74 stood as independent candidates (2016: 97). Women represented 45 percent of the candidates. As in 2016, voter turnout was very high this time.

According to official data, 99.6 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots (2016: around 99 percent). Various media speak of sham elections to secure the KPV's hold on power. On 10.06.21, the national electoral council informed that 499 lawmakers were elected to the new parliament, 30 percent of them women. Quotas for young MPs, re-elected MPs and ethnic minority MPs were met or even exceeded. 495 of the elected lawmakers had been nominated by central and local authorities, four had run independently.

Yemen

New attacks in Marib

On 10.06.21, rocket and drone attacks by the Houthis reportedly killed at least eight people, among them civilians, and wounded 27 people in the city of Marib. The Yemeni government informed that a mosque and a prison for women were hit. Already on 05.06.21, a total of 17 people had been killed in a rocket attack by the Houthis (cf. BN of 07.06.21).

Explosion targeting STC

On 11.06.21, an explosion targeted Southern Transitional Council (STC) fighters entering a market in Abyan governorate, southern Yemen. Different sources report varying numbers of casualties, but at least six dead and 15 injured, among them civilians. So far, no group has claimed responsibility.

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Briefing Notes
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