



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Attacks on civilians / internally displaced persons

According to the UNAMA Midyear Report 2021 of 26.07.21, civilian casualties in the first half of 2021 exceeded the number for the same period last year by 47%. There had been 5,183 victims, of which 1,659 were killed and 3,524 injured. In the period from 01.05.21 to 30.06.21, the number of civilian casualties amounted to 2,392, as many as in the previous four months combined. Women (14%) and children (32%) had been affected most and there had been a threefold increase in attacks by non-suicide improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (38% of attacks), the report says. Reports of 25.07.21 said that the Taliban had killed 43 civilians in Ghazni province, 33 in Kandahar, and five in Kabul province. On 21.07.21 it was reported that six civilians were killed in a bomb attack in Nangarhar province. Reports on 20.07.21 quoted the UN as stating that 270,000 persons had been internally displaced in the country in recent months. On 19.07.21, it was reported that approximately 500 civilians had been injured or maimed in Kunduz province in the period 11.07.21-17.07.21. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported on 21.07.21 that it had treated about 49,500 people injured as a result of the war in Afghanistan in the last six months. The Afghan government reported on 22.07.21 that about 100 civilians had been killed in the fighting around Spin Boldak in Kandahar province. On 23.07.21, the UN Assistance Mission (UNAMA) announced its intention to investigate these incidents.

Hostilities / Holidays / Peace Talks

On Tuesday 20.07.21, the Eid al-Adha holidays began and the fighting subsided, although no ceasefire was negotiated. According to the Long War Journal (LWJ), as of 26.07.21, the Taliban controlled 224 districts, the government controlled 73 districts and 110 were contested. US General Milley said in a Pentagon press conference on 21.07.21 that the Taliban controlled about half of all districts. President Ghani said on 20.07.21 that the government had concluded that the Taliban were not interested in peace and that new plans were being made. The statement was made after three rockets hit near the presidential palace on the first holiday. According to the report of 25.07.21, the perpetrators were Taliban. The Taliban's request to release more prisoners would therefore not be accepted, and the Taliban continued to have close ties to al-Qaeda and other groups, the President said. On 23.07.21, the Taliban declared that they would be ready for a political solution if a new government were to be established and the current one voted out of office. Due to upcoming fighting against the Taliban, the Afghan government announced a night curfew in 31 provinces (except Kabul, Panjshir and Nangarhar) between 10pm and 04am, on 24.07.21. As recently as 19.07.21, the Afghan government and the Taliban had issued a joint statement saying that they would continue to work towards a peaceful solution. This was understood as a response to the joint declaration of NATO, the EU and 15 other states of 18.07.21 calling for an early peace in Afghanistan, which had received special praise by the UN. On 20.07.21, the Taliban announced that they had taken 90% of the border crossings. Since the fighting over the Spin Boldak border crossing, where the Taliban allegedly received support from Pakistan, tensions have been rising with mutual accusations between the Afghan and Pakistani governments.

in a new report on Afghanistan, the UN Security Council reported on 24.07.21 that the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISKP) was active in sleeper cells in the provinces of Nuristan, Badghis, Sar-e Pul, Badakhshan, Kunduz, and Kabul.

Regional powers

On 20.07.21, Russian soldiers arrived in Tajikistan near the Afghan border for joint manoeuvre exercises from 05.08.21 to 10.08.21. On 23.07.21, Russia moved military equipment to the border. On 22.07.21, it was reported that Tajikistan had put its entire army on high alert due to the situation in Afghanistan. Thousands of soldiers are now stationed on the border with Afghanistan. Refugee camps have been set up that can accommodate up to 100,000 Afghan refugees. China and Pakistan had issued a joint press statement on 25.07.21 calling for a ceasefire and a political solution in Afghanistan.

Humanitarian situation / drought

According to a report by the provincial government of Jawzjan on 17.07.21, about 98 % of the inhabitants are threatened by acute famine as a result of a drought.

Angola

Food insecurity and flight due to persistent drought

In a press release dated 22.07.21, Amnesty International (ai) drew attention to the consequences of the drought that has affected the south of the country for the past three years. The provinces of Cunene and Huíla are most severely affected. According to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), the lack of rain at the beginning of the rainy season between November 2020 and January 2021 has caused the worst drought in 40 years. At the end of June 2021, the WFP estimated that seven million people nationwide would be short of food. According to a recent media report, representatives of local NGOs criticised insufficient food aid or its distribution. According to ai, especially herder families from the south of the country have fled to neighbouring Namibia because of the prevailing situation. By May 2021, Angolan NGOs had already counted more than 7,000 refugees. In addition to climate change, ai blames the prevailing food insecurity on the progressive displacement of pastoralist communities from communal lands by commercial livestock farms since the end of the civil war in 2002. Media also reported plagues of locusts in the southern provinces in 2021.

Belarus

Multi-year prison sentences for political prisoners

On 19.07.21, a district court in Minsk sentenced eleven political activists to prison terms of between five and nine years. The defendants included ten people classified as political prisoners by the human rights organisation Vyazna, such as Rastislau Stefanovich and Syarhey Plonis. Both are members of the opposition's extended coordinating council. In connection with alleged radical statements made on the short message service Telegram, the court found them guilty of sedition and causing damage to property as well as several other charges. Four other political prisoners received prison sentences of three and a half to five years on the same day for taking part in the protests against President Lukashenko in August 2020 (cf. BN of 10.08.20). According to information from international NGOs, more than 500 people have now been sentenced in connection with the protests.

Ban on numerous NGOs

According to reports from the media and human rights organisations, the Belarusian judicial authorities closed down around 50 NGOs on 22./23.07.21 after house searches at several NGOs (cf. BN of 19.07.21). The measures were justified by alleging that they had exceeded the competences laid down in their statutes of the association. Not only human rights groups like Human Constanta are affected, but also charities like the Office for People with Disabilities. Human Rights Watch described the bans as a sign of the end of Belarusian civil society in its previous form, but predicts that civil society will continue to exist underground and in exile.

Meanwhile, several other NGO workers (cf. BN 19.07.21), including the historian couple Andrus and Tatsyana Mastyka, former leaders of the Historyka association, were arrested without any reasons being given.

Burkina Faso

Military: Base of suspected terrorist group destroyed; security forces killed

The military reported security operations between 12.07.21 and 18.07.21, in the course of which security forces destroyed a camp of unspecified extremist organisations in a forest area near Toulfé and Tougrebouli (North region), killing dozens of people on 13.07.21. On 16.07.21, three security forces were killed by two explosive devices near Dablo (Centre-Nord region).

Central African Republic

13 dead after attack by unknown persons

In a press release dated 22.07.21, the UN blue helmet mission MINUSCA confirmed the discovery of 13 bodies in the village of Bongboto (12 km north of Bossangoa in the north of the country) by a patrol that was sent after respective tip-offs on the day before. According to later media reports, the dead were young male and female traders who had been on their way to a market on motorbikes. The media further reported that the government was quick to blame the rebel alliance Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC) for the crime. The CPC, however, denied responsibility and defended itself against accusations being made without waiting for an investigation. In its statement, the CPC spoke of 16 victims and accused the Russian military advisers of the Wagner Group of being the perpetrators. Private security companies from Russia are repeatedly accused of human rights violations on the ground (cf. BN of 12.04.21 and 07.06.21).

MSF stops work

According to a media report of 24.07.21, the aid organisation Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) has stopped its work in the Central African Republic. MSF is said to have made this announcement the day before. The media report remains unclear as to what extent it is a complete cessation. The mobile clinics that were on the road along important connecting roads are affected. As recently as 19.07.21, MSF had issued a press release drawing attention to the consequences of the repeated interruptions or restriction of its services for the civilian population for certain periods or in certain places. The organisation said that in the last six months, there had been repeated incidents of damage to health facilities, armed intrusion into hospitals, including violence against and capture of patients, violence against local health workers, and attacks on sick and injured people or motorcyclists transporting medicines. Yet another attack on MSF personnel is said to have been the reason for the announced withdrawal.

China

Hong Kong: Arrests for publishing "seditious" children's books

On 22.07.21, Hong Kong police arrested five members of a speech therapists' union. The union's president Lai Man-ling and her deputy Melody Yeung Yat-ye were charged with conspiracy to publish, distribute, display or reproduce seditious publications on 23.07.21. They had published a series of children's books about a group of sheep defending their village against invading wolves. The arrests and charges were not based on the National Security Act, but under section ten of the colonial-era Crimes Ordinance.

Colombia

Government submits revised tax reform to Congress

The government submitted a USD 3.95 billion tax reform bill to parliament. Some items contained in the original tax reform, such as the increase in VAT and in the number of income tax payers, have been omitted, as well as certain tax exemptions. The planned tax reform had sparked nationwide protests at the end of April 2021 (cf. BN of 03.05.21 and 14.06.21) that are meanwhile directed against the government in general. On the occasion of Colombia's Independence Day on 20.07.21, protests were again held in several cities demanding, among other things, the full implementation of the peace agreement with the ex-guerrilla movement FARC, a police reform and

more support from the government after the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has recently experienced a rise in the poverty rate from 37% to 42% and high youth unemployment.

Cuba

USA imposes new sanctions after suppression of protests

The US government imposed new sanctions against Cuba on 22.07.21. The White House announced that the acting Minister of Defence, Álvaro López Miera, and the unit of the Cuban Ministry of the Interior National Special Brigade (SNB) were affected. They had played an essential role in the suppression of the protests (cf. BN of 19.07.21) in Cuba, the announcement said. On 11.07.21, thousands of people took to the streets in several Cuban cities calling for freedom and denouncing oppression and the economy of scarcity. According to Human Rights Watch, imprisoned demonstrators are currently being tried in summary proceedings without a defence lawyer.

DR Congo

North Kivu / Ituri: Extension of the state of siege

On 19.07.21, the representative bodies approved the fourth consecutive extension of the state of siege in force in the eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri since the beginning of May 2021. The armed forces and the police thus continue to have controversial executive (special) powers of intervention in the two provinces (cf. BN of 17.05.21). On 16.07.21, the Minister of Justice, Rose Marie Mutombo, justified the renewed extension of the state of siege with the persistence of the poor security situation as well as the high number of acts of terrorism. More than 150 local and foreign rebel groups are active in the provinces, which have been marked by violence and unrest for two decades. From the government's point of view, the positive results of the military intervention of the armed forces in the provinces must be consolidated, such as the maintenance of the state's territorial power that has been restored in the various places. Successful surrenders have been achieved with regard to various rebel groups, the government said, adding that rebels who had surrendered were already participating in the ongoing Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DD&R) programme.

Controversial conviction of a politician of the governing coalition

Jacky Ndala, the leader of the Youth League of the Ensemble pour la République (EPR) party, who was arrested by the National Domestic Intelligence Service (ANR) under controversial circumstances on 18.07.21, is said to have been sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine of CDF 500,000 (approx. EUR 214, as of 23.07.21) for inciting civil disobedience by a decision of the Kinshasa/Kinkole Peace Court of 20.07.21. His lawyer announced that he would appeal the sentence. The EPR party of the former governor of Katanga, Moïse Katumbi, which forms part of the current government coalition Union sacrée de la nation of President Tshisekedi, denounced the background and circumstances of the arrest of the politician by the ANR and considered it to be politically motivated. This had been preceded by the temporary arrest and torture of two members of the youth coordinator's staff by the ANR. The Congolese Association for Access to Justice (ACAJ) had also criticised the lack of constitutionality of the arrest. According to media reports and party statements, the politician's public criticism and calls for protests regarding a bill on the reform of the Congolese nationality law were the cause of his arrest and criminal conviction, but according to the authorities, these were the result of his calling for a non-peaceful demonstration. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), prosecution and punishment for incitement to violence are legitimate state actions. However, the rushed trial and harsh sentence in this case indicate that the aim was much more the suppression of critical voices than the maintenance of public order, HRW said. The bill, which has been criticised in national as well as international circles - for example at the UN Security Council briefing on 07.07.21 - because of its potential for national division and the risk of political destabilisation, stipulates that access to the presidency and to high state functions is reserved for persons with two Congolese parents. This would exclude the designated presidential candidate Moïse Katumbi from running in the presidential elections scheduled for the end of 2023, because he has mixed ancestry.

Demand for release of political activists

On 19.07.21, HRW called on the Congolese authorities to release three political activists from the civil society movement Lutte pour le Changement (Lucha) operating in the eastern province of North Kivu. They had been detained and charged including for participating in peaceful demonstrations held before the declaration of a regional state of siege and the accompanying ban on the organisation of and participation in public meetings, or for their allegations of embezzlement of donations by state officials intended for the victims of the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano on 22.05.21. Because civilian criminal jurisdiction was fully transferred to the military tribunals, when the state of siege came into effect, the activists, who are accused of various offences, have to stand trial before a military tribunal as accused civilians in criminal proceedings, it was said. There are reports that the military justice system in the regions under the state of emergency is troubled by major flaws (cf. BN of 12.07.21). Activists Elisée Lwatumba and Eric Muhindo, arbitrarily detained for participating in a demonstration, told HRW that the National Internal Intelligence Service (ANR) forced them by torture to confess to being members of a May May rebel group. After their detention in Butembo Central Prison, which is overcrowded and has extremely difficult conditions, they paid bribes to be transferred to other parts of the prison with better conditions. According to HRW, the government has been cracking down on pro-democracy forces, media workers and other dissidents since the beginning of 2020, and various cases of journalists and political activists being targeted by government measures have been documented.

South Kivu: Deterioration of the population's security situation

According to a statement by the UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) on 20.07.21 and a media report on 21.07.21, there has been a concerning increase in violence in South Kivu province following the resumption of fighting between local armed groups in the highland area of Minembwe of Fizi territory on the one hand, and because of fighting between Congolese armed forces and militia groups in the highland town of Uvira of the territory of the same name on the other.

Egypt

Harsher penalties for sexual violence

On 11.07.21, parliament approved a law that significantly increases the penalties for sexual harassment and violence. In the future, sexual harassment will be considered a felony and not a misdemeanour as before. International and local media are reporting different penalties, ranging from at least two to at least five years in prison and/or fines of a minimum of EGP 100,000 up to EGP 300,000. For crimes involving several attackers and/or the use of arms, prison sentences and fines may be increased even further.

Since last year, more and more women have been sharing their experiences of sexual violence in everyday life on social media and in some isolated cases the men have been charged and convicted.

Women's rights activists welcome the toughening of the criminal law, but cite concerns about its practical implementation. In their view, this requires raising the awareness for dealing with sexual violence with the police and judicial authorities as well as society. The vast majority of women in Egypt still do not report sexual violence to the authorities for fear of social stigmatisation and the risk of being accused of lewd behaviour.

Ethiopia

Conflict in Tigray also affects neighbouring region

According to media reports, units of the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) attacked targets in the neighbouring regional state of Afar on 18.07.21. According to a TDF spokesperson, it was "a very limited operation" to fight special forces and militias from the Oromia region, which are deployed there supporting the Ethiopian military. Other sources, however, report ongoing fighting between the TDF and Afar special forces and federal soldiers. Eyewitnesses accuse the TDF of killing civilians, looting and setting fire to houses, saying that thousands have fled. The districts affected are Yallo, Awra and Ewa.

There were also reports of an advance by the TDF towards the railway line and the road connecting Addis Ababa with Djibouti. If the TDF succeeds in blocking this transport link, through which 95 % of freight traffic flows, supply

bottlenecks are feared, including for fuel and food. Satellite images show long traffic jams in front of the border crossing to Ethiopia. According to media reports, Djibouti has stationed military forces near the border, which the government denies. Observers fear that a new front will come about and the conflict will spread.

Attack on aid convoy

Earlier, according to the UN, a convoy shipping humanitarian aid to Tigray was attacked. The World Food Programme vehicles were still in the regional state of Afar, not far from the border with Tigray. This attack, the UN added, was another setback in efforts to reach hundreds of thousands of people threatened by famine. Due to security concerns and the destruction of infrastructure, humanitarian aid has so far only been possible by this route. The background to the attack is still unclear. The Ethiopian government blames the TDF, but expert observers blame local pro-government militias.

Haiti

Interim government sworn in

Following the resignation of Haiti's interim prime minister, Claude Joseph, on 20.07.21, the new head of government, Ariel Henry, and his cabinet were sworn in in the capital Port-au-Prince. Joseph, who indicated to the Washington Post that he was stepping down for the good of the nation, remains foreign minister. Earlier, the so-called Core Group, which includes the German, EU and US ambassadors to Haiti, had encouraged Henry to form a "consensual and inclusive government". On 05.07.21, shortly before his assassination (cf. BN of 12.07.21), President Jovenel Moïse had appointed Ariel Henry as prime minister, however, Henry had not yet been sworn in. He now becomes Haiti's seventh prime minister within four years. Presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for 26.09.21.

Riots at the funeral of President Moïse

Police and protesters clashed at the funeral service of Haiti's slain president, Jovenel Moïse, on 23.07.21. The funeral service on the grounds of Moïse's former private residence in Cap-Haïtien was attended by members of the government, representatives of foreign governments, and diplomats.

India

Protests against liberalisation of the agricultural sector

Since 22.07.21, 200 farmers have been protesting daily against the controversial reforms to liberalise the agricultural sector at an observatory in New Delhi (Jantar Mantar) while Parliament held the so-called Monsoon Session, during which over a dozen new laws are to be passed.

Since 2020, large-scale farmers' protests have been taking place for several months, culminating in riots in New Delhi at the end of January 2021 (cf. BN of 01.02.21).

Tax investigations against media house

On 22.07.21, the tax administration raided offices of a well-known Hindi-language media house (Dainik Bhaskar Group) in several states. The searches were allegedly carried out to intimidate the media after an article questioned the official number of Covid deaths in India.

Landslides and floods

In large parts of the country, floods and landslides triggered by heavy monsoon rains have claimed 125 lives so far. The state of Maharashtra is the worst affected. According to a local government spokesperson, 90,000 people have been evacuated from the crisis areas. The situation on the ground interferes with traffic between the financial metropolis of Mumbai and the technology metropolis of Bengaluru. Some areas in the state of Telangana and its capital Hyderabad have also been severely affected.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic: Delta variant across the country

The delta variant has spread from the southern and south-eastern provinces to the entire country in the course of the fifth Corona wave. According to the National Covid Crisis Staff, as of 19.07.21, 169 cities and districts were designated as high-risk areas (Covid traffic lights on red) and 166 other districts were designated as areas of increased risk (Covid traffic lights on orange). On average, between 20,000 and 25,000 new infections were reported daily throughout the country. According to doctors, small children and even infants are increasingly affected. The infection is currently spreading mainly in the big cities and the southern provinces. On 19.07.21, a six-day quarantine was imposed in Tehran and the neighbouring province of Alborz. According to Iranian media abroad, 200-270 official deaths were reported daily in the period 19.07.21-26.07.21. In total, the official death toll is said to have exceeded 87,000.

Escalation and expansion of unrest in Khuzestan

The protests that began on 15.07.21 in water-strapped Khuzestan province, have spread from the Arab-dominated areas on the Iraqi border in the west to other regions, especially in the east of the province. In addition to towns such as Ahvaz, Shadegan, Shush and Susangerd, Iranian media abroad reported that riots had also broken out in Izeh, which is predominantly inhabited by Bakhtiari, and in Behbahan. In total, more than a dozen towns in the province experienced riots. Isolated incidents also occurred in neighbouring provinces (e.g. Khorramabad and Aligudarz, Lorestan). Since 24.07.21, protests had also erupted in other cities in areas inhabited mainly by ethnic minorities, these media reported. There have been numerous arrests in the city of Tabriz. In Khuzestan, most of the protests took place at night due to the high temperatures. The protesters shouted slogans in Persian and Arabic such as "Down with Khamenei, death to the dictator" (Persian: Marg bar Khamenei, marg bar diktator), "Khuzestan is thirsty" (Persian: Khuzestan teshneh ast) or "The people demand the fall of the system" (Arabic: al-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam). The security forces used firearms and tear gas against the protesters. According to Amnesty International (ai), a total of eight people had been killed by shots fired by the security forces until 23.07.21. Already on 21.07.21, the IRNA news agency and other media confirmed the death of a police officer in the port city of Mahshahr. The reason for the clashes was the water shortage in the wake of failed environmental and agricultural policies (construction of dams, diversion of rivers to the central desert areas, cultivation of irrigation-intensive crops such as sugar cane) and the extremely severe drought. In total, more than 700 villages in Khuzestan no longer had drinking water reserves, it was said.

IHR: Increase in executions in the first half of 2021

According to the report of the human rights organisation Iran Human Rights (IHR) of 22.07.21, at least 117 people were executed in Iranian prisons in the first half of 2021 (in the same period of the previous year: 123). Sixty-three of the 117 people were executed for murder, 40 for drug offences, six for rape and eight for security charges, it said. Of the eight people executed on security charges, six were charged with moharebeh (enmity against God) and two with armed insurrection. Since the presidential elections in June 2021, the number of executions has gone up to 38 people again (from 18.06.21 to 18.07.21), after executions had been stayed completely nine days before the elections, to be resumed two days thereafter.

In 2020, Iran executed at least 246 people, according to ai's annual report.

Iraq

Bomb attack in Sadr City

On the evening of 19.07.21, the al-Wahitat market in Baghdad's Sadr City was the target of a terrorist attack that killed at least 35 people and injured more than 60. IS claimed responsibility for the attack; in the following days, a terrorist network was dismantled by the security forces, mostly in the provinces of Kirkuk and Anbar, which had allegedly planned this and other attacks in Baghdad.

Son of an activist murdered

On 25.07.21, the remains of Ali Karim, the 26-year-old son of the well-known women's rights activist Fatima al-Bahadly, were found in Basra. Since the beginning of the protest movement in 2019, dozens of murders and attacks have already been committed against activists and their families. Arrests in such cases are still the exception, such as the arrest of the alleged murderer of activist Hisham al-Hashemi (cf. BN of 19.07.21).

Kosovo

Conviction for anti-Albanian slogan

According to media reports, on 21.07.21 the Pristina Basic Court sentenced a Montenegrin national to six months imprisonment, with a fine in lieu, for fomenting discord and intolerance between Kosovo's ethnic groups. He had been arrested on 28.06.21 at the Gazimestan monument near Pristina, where he had taken part in a gathering of Serbian Orthodox faithful on the occasion of "Vidovdan" (St Vitus' Day) in commemoration of the battle between Serbs and Ottomans on the "Field of Blackbirds" (Kosovo Polje), in 1389. He allegedly shouted nationalist slogans, including "Kill the Albanians" and "Kosovo is Serbia". The man denies the charges. He was released on payment of a fine of EUR 6,700 and banned from entering Kosovo for five years.

Lebanon

New Prime Minister Designate

After the failure of Saad Hariri to form a government, another Sunni politician is now said to make an attempt. He is Najib Miqati, who, like Saad Hariri, holds both Saudi and Lebanese citizenship. He is a billionaire businessman and comes from a family that has long guided Lebanon's fortunes. Unlike Hariri, he is considered pro-Syrian and a personal friend of Bashar al-Assad. He previously served as the country's prime minister in 2005 and 2011 to 2014, succeeding Saad Hariri in 2011, who held the office from 2009 to 2011 and from 2016 to 2019.

Trade agreement with Iraq

On 24.07.21, Lebanon and Iraq concluded a trade agreement. Iraq will supply one million tonnes of oil over a period of one year in return for medical goods and assistance, such as personnel.

Lebanon has neither refineries nor power plants in which crude oil can be used. It can only invest the sales revenue to buy usable fuels. This entails the risks of fluctuating world market prices and losses due to corruption.

Meanwhile, the head of Lebanon's largest hospital warned that Lebanon was unable to respond adequately to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Medical supplies and personnel were in shorter supply than ever before, he said, especially as electricity was only available from the grid for two to three hours a day. The UN Children's Fund warned on 19.07.21, that due to the power shortage and lack of spare supplies, fresh water supplies could collapse for the majority of the population in the coming weeks. A report by the Crisis Observatory of the American University of Beirut concludes that an average family in Lebanon currently needs five times the minimum wage to cover its daily food expenses.

Mali

Attempted knife attack on interim president Assimi Goïta

On 20.07.21, Malian interim president Assimi Goïta was attacked with a knife in the Grand Mosque of the capital Bamako. Two men armed with knives allegedly attacked Goïta during prayers for the Islamic festival of sacrifice Eid al-Adha, while he remained unharmed, another person is said to have been injured. Security forces arrested the attackers. The motive and identity of the attackers are not yet known. On 25.07.21, the Malian government announced that a man accused of being responsible for the attack on interim President Goïta had died in hospital in the custody of security forces. Investigations into the cause of death had begun.

Myanmar

COVID-19 pandemic: situation still out of control

The worsening infection rate, combined with the continuing lack of oxygen and distrust of government institutions, results in an increasing number of Covid-infected people dying at home. In Yangon (Rangoon), volunteers are passing from house to house to collect the dead. The junta acknowledged difficulties in dealing with the pandemic. It announced new recruitments in the health sector, releases of prisoners and new vaccine orders. At the same time, the junta continued to arrest and torture medical staff treating the sick unofficially. The UN fears that Myanmar is becoming a "super-spreader state" and that detentions could be tantamount to death sentences as the virus spreads in the overcrowded prisons. According to local media reports, the military and its hospitals are also severely affected by the pandemic. In Shan State, the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), the political arm of the Shan State Army North (SSA-N), launched its own vaccination campaign in the area under its control.

Military attacks Hpakant, Mindat and villages in Sagaing

On 19.07.21, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) shelled two villages in Hpakant (Kachin State). In one village in Shwebo Township (Sagaing Region), forces of the junta shot dead four volunteer night guards on 17. and 18.07.21. In another village, the Tatmadaw set fire to residential houses. After ceasefire negotiations had failed, fighting resumed between the Tatmadaw and the Chinland Defence Force (CDF) in Mindat (Chin State) on 21.07.21.

Nicaragua

Repression continues in the form of arrests, at voter registration and against NGOs

On 24.07.21, the opposition presidential candidate, Noel Vidaurre, and the political commentator Jaime Arellano were arrested and placed under house arrest. Both are accused of violating the "Law for the Defence of the Rights of the People to Independence, Sovereignty and Self-Determination for Peace", as were other arrested opposition figures before (cf. BN of 07.06.21, 14.06.21, 12.07.21). Six other presidential candidates had been arrested previously.

According to the non-governmental organisation Urnas Abiertas and media reports, on the same day, the first day of voter registration for the presidential elections in November 2021, members of the opposition were threatened and harassed by para-state actors. Furthermore, the Supreme Electoral Authority (CSE) had reportedly reduced the number of places where people could register.

In addition, at the request of the Ministry of the Interior (Ministerio de Gobernación, Migob), the National Assembly will vote on 27.07.21 to deprive 24 NGOs of their legal personality. Migob accuses them of having violated several laws, including the failure to disclose sources of funding and the reporting requirements on donors and funders.

Nigeria

One hundred abductees freed after 42 days

On 20.07.21, 100 women and children were released in the north-west more than a month after they were abducted. This is reported by the media citing official information from local security forces. According to a police spokesperson, gunmen raided the village of Manawa in Zamfara State on 08.06.21 and abducted 100 people into a forest hideout. The release is said to have been preceded by negotiations. Government officials emphasise that there had been no material compensation for the still unknown kidnappers. According to media reports, 13 policemen who were supposed to protect a village from raids were killed by unknown persons in the same state one day before the release.

Prominent Yoruba activist arrested

Sunday Adeyemo, a Yoruba self-determination activist also known as Sunday Igboho, was arrested in neighbouring Benin on 19.07.21, according to consistent media reports. The Nigerian government is accusing him of inciting violence and rebellion. A high-ranking Benin police official is said to have confirmed that the prominent activist will be extradited to Nigeria as soon as the two countries have agreed on the details of the transfer. Observers consider the arrest a clear signal by the Nigerian government that it will take decisive action also against secessionist efforts

in the country's south-west. As recently as on 03.07.21, a rally of supporters of the Yoruba independence movement had taken place in Lagos, in the course of which dozens of arrests had been made (cf. BN of 05.07.21). The Yoruba are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Military jet shot down by unknown persons in the north-west

A Nigerian Air Force fighter jet crashed in Zamfara State on 18.07.21 after heavy shelling. According to official reports, the pilot was able to eject from his jet and reach safety unharmed. According to media reports, this is the first time that armed groups active in the region have managed to bring down a military jet. The pilot reportedly had completed an attack directed against hijackers in the north-west, just before his aircraft was shot down.

Pakistan

Censorship on the Internet

The Asia Internet Coalition (AIC), founded by major internet companies such as Google, Ebay and others, expressed concerns about a law that would enable the deletion and blocking of content on the internet. Criticism centers around the decryption of data, data localisation and the possibility of making confidential inquiries with social media platform operators to have content deleted. It is regularly reported that such actions against Pakistani media persist.

Pakistan / Afghanistan

Daughter of the Afghan ambassador allegedly abducted

According to the Afghan Foreign Ministry, the daughter of the Afghan ambassador was abducted on her way home and tortured by unknown persons for several hours on 16.07.21 in Islamabad. On 17.07.21, she was taken to hospital with injuries. Nothing was known about the background.

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Violent in Gaza City

A severe explosion occurred in a densely populated area of the al-Zawiya neighbourhood on 22.07.21, killing one person and injuring ten others, according to the Palestinian Authority Minister of Interior. Some adjacent buildings were severely damaged. The cause of the explosion is still unknown. The Israeli military signalled early on that it had not been involved.

Israel responds to Gaza incendiary devices with air strike

Supporters of the radical Islamic Hamas used balloons to send several incendiary devices from the Gaza Strip across the border into Israel on 25.07.21, causing at least three fires. The Israeli military announced on the night of 26.07.21 that fighter jets had fired on a target in the south of the Gaza Strip. This was reportedly a Hamas military target, but there have been no reports of casualties so far.

Peru

Pedro Castillo new President of the Republic

On 19.07.21, the state electoral authority proclaimed the leftist politician Pedro Castillo winner of the run-off elections of 06.06.21 and thus, new head of state. The announcement of the official election result had been delayed for over a month, because the rival candidate, Keiko Fujimori, had contested the voting and the irregularities in the count that she had alleged were subsequently reviewed. Fujimory has now accepted the result.

Russian Federation

First media company classified as "undesirable organisation"

The Russian Prosecutor General's Office declared the US-based media company Project Media, publisher of the investigative Russian news site Project, an "undesirable organisation" on 15.07.21. This means that persons directly or indirectly involved in the site face up to six years imprisonment if they continue their activities (Art. 284.1 of the Russian Criminal Code). While the prosecutor's office stated in its justification that Project Media posed "a threat to the foundations of the constitutional order and the security of the Russian Federation", observers interpreted the de facto ban as a reaction to the site's publications about corruption and abuse of power by people close to President Putin. According to Reporters Without Borders, this is a new quality in that Project Media is the first media organisation to be banned as undesirable, while only NGOs had been affected previously.

At the same time, the Ministry of Justice added eight journalists, including the founder of Project, Roman Badanin, as well as employees of Open Media and the Russian service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, to the list of "foreign agents" and thus subjected their publications to extensive labelling obligations.

Sierra Leone

Abolition of the death penalty

Parliament unanimously voted to abolish the death penalty on 23.07.21, as had been promised by incumbent president, Julius Maada Bio, during his election campaign in 2018. He is expected to sign the corresponding law soon. Death sentences that have already been passed will be commuted to life imprisonment. According to Amnesty International, at least 94 people are still on death row. The last execution of the death penalty was by firing squad in 1998.

Somalia

US military attacks al-Shabaab with drones again

On 20.07.21, the US military carried out the first drone strike since Joe Biden took office, to assist Somali forces in fighting al-Shabaab in the north. The strike was flown by a military aircraft against al-Shabaab fighters who had attacked members of the Danab, an elite Somali commando force trained in the US, near the town of Galkayo, Galmudug/Puntland. No US forces were present during the military operation, advising and assisting from a distance. There are no official statements on the number of fighters killed. Other sources report between 20 and 50 casualties.

On 23.07.21, a second US military drone strike against al-Shabaab followed near Qeycad (Galmudug). Again, no US forces were present. There is no information on casualties.

Death of a 13-year-old girl after female genital mutilation (FGM)

In early July 2021, a 13-year-old girl bled to death after undergoing FGM in Jeerinle village, Galmudug state. Human rights organisations report that this is the first reported case of FGM deaths in Somalia since the death of a ten-year-old girl in 2018. Activists are calling on the authorities to investigate the case. FGM is practiced on 98% of all women in Somalia and is not prohibited by law.

Elections delayed again

On 25.07.21, the parliamentary and presidential elections were to start with the upper house elections after months of delays (cf. BN of 05.07.21). The elections could not start as planned because some states could neither submit the list of candidates in time nor form local electoral bodies. There is no further information on the expected delay.

Prime Minister Roble dismisses two NISA intelligence officers

On 23.07.21, Prime Minister Roble dismissed two senior officials from the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), including Abdullahi Kulane. Both officials were blamed for preventing a group of Somali passengers, including the former governor of Gedo region, Osman Nur Haji Moalimu, from leaving the airport in Mogadishu. Similar cases have occurred several times in recent weeks. As recently as 21.07.21, Roble had warned security

officials to stop obstructing the free movement of politicians during the election campaign. Kulane is supporting incumbent President Farmajo in his election campaign.

Sudan

Protests after attacks on refugee camp in North Darfur

Media reported a protest of several hundred people on 20.07.21 in the village of El Fasher against an artillery supported attack on the Sortony refugee camp, near the village of Kabkabiya on 17.07.21 which lasted several hours. The attackers are still unknown. The reports said that IDPs had been living in the camp. At least 17 people were killed and nine wounded during the attack. The protesters called on the state government to immediately ensure effective protection for displaced people in camps like Sortony.

South Sudan

Robberies and kidnappings in Eastern Equatoria and Greater Pibor Administrative Areas

Media reported the death of a 13-year-old girl in an attack from 19.07.21 to 20.07.21 by unknown persons on her family home in Oguruny village, Torit County (Eastern Equatoria), her father was injured during the same attack. The attackers have not been apprehended, the reports said. The commissioner of Torit County is assuming revenge as the motive and has announced that the local chiefs of the affected region will be dismissed. They were not neutral, did not defend themselves sufficiently against criminals and hardly cooperated with the government, he alleged.

According to further reports, three children were abducted in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) on 21.07.21 in the course of various raids. According to these reports, a ten-year-old girl was abducted outside the town of Pochalla, and two other small children were abducted near the village of Nyium. In all three cases, the perpetrators are unknown. In addition to attacks on cattle herds, the abduction of children is not uncommon. The head of the GPAA administration told representatives of the media that it was mainly unemployed youths who were responsible for such kidnappings, trying to earn a living in this way.

Syria

Idlib: Seven killed in artillery fire by government troops

Seven people were killed by artillery fire on 22.07.21 in Ibleen, in the south of Syria's last rebel stronghold. The town had recently been shelled repeatedly (cf. BN of 05.07.21 and 19.07.21). Rescue workers reported that four minors and their mother were among the dead. The attack occurred on the last day of the Islamic festival of sacrifice (Eid al-Adha), for which the family had gathered.

The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights counted a total of 21 deaths between 17.07.21 and 22.07.21, including 11 children, all believed to have been killed by government attacks in the region.

Two Turkish military personnel killed

On 25.07.21, the Turkish Ministry of Defence confirmed that two Turkish military personnel had been killed in an attack in the north of Aleppo governorate the previous day. The statement blamed "terrorists" for the attack. It is unclear whether these are Kurdish militia groups or another organisation.

Afterwards, according to reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the Turkish military fired dozens of rockets at unknown positions in the region, without causing any casualties. The ministry, on the other hand, said that seven people had been neutralised in the positions.

Tanzania

Arrest of opposition members

Eleven members of the opposition Party for Democracy and Progress (CHADEMA) were arrested in Mwanza on 21.07.21, including opposition leader Freeman Mbowe. While ten party members are being held locally without charge, Mbowe had been transferred to Dar-es-Salaam. He faces charges of conspiracy to commit terrorist acts and killing government officials. The arrests occurred shortly before a rally on the constitutional reform was to take place. A day earlier, the government banned any unauthorised non-religious gatherings related to COVID-19 protection measures.

Tunisia

Head of government dismissed after mass protests

On 25.07.21, in Tunis and other cities, such as Nabeul, Sousse and Kairouan, thousands of people protested against the government's Covid policy and the poor economic situation in the country; among other things, they demanded the dissolution of parliament. In Tunis, demonstrators stormed the building of the Ennahda party and destroyed its computers and documents. Violent clashes between security forces and protesters occurred in some places; numerous protesters were arrested.

In a speech on the evening of 25.07.21, President Kais Saied announced the dismissal of Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi, who had been in office since February 2020, the suspension of the work of parliament for 30 days and the lifting of the immunity of MPs. Together with a new prime minister, whom he would appoint in the coming days, he would run the affairs of state, Saied said. Critical voices called this a coup d'état against the revolution and the constitution.

Turkey

ECtHR judgement in the Tekin Akgün case

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled on 20.07.21 that the pre-trial detention of former police officer Tekin Akgün constitutes a violation of his human rights under Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). He has been in pre-trial detention since 2016 and is suspected of belonging to a terrorist organisation because during his interrogation it was discovered that he had used the encrypted messenger app ByLock. The Turkish prosecution considered the app's use as evidence of suspected membership in the Gülen movement. The ECtHR ruled that the Turkish courts did not have sufficient information about the ByLock app to establish that it was used exclusively by members of the Gülen movement. The use of the app was not sufficient to establish probable cause for the alleged offence. The ECtHR ordered Turkey to pay damages of EUR 12,000 to Akgün.

Venezuela

The Bank of England still refuses to hand over Venezuelan gold reserves to Maduro government

On 19.07.21, the British government declared that it continues to recognise Juan Guaidó as the only legitimate president of Venezuela. This declaration, according to media reports, has an impact on a court case in the UK Supreme Court for the handover of 15% of Venezuela's foreign exchange reserves, which are currently stored in the UK. The handover of these assets held by Venezuela's central bank (Banco Central de Venezuela, BCV) has been blocked since 2018 due to sanctions against the Venezuelan government, and a BCV claim for repatriation had been rejected in early July 2020. Referring to the current statement, the Bank of England continues to refuse to hand over USD 1 billion worth of Venezuelan gold reserves to the Maduro government.

Vietnam

Facebook users sentenced to prison

On 20.07.21, a court in Nghe An province sentenced a Facebook user to nine years in prison. He is accused of publishing posts online that were directed against the state. The sentence was handed down under Article 117 of the 2015 Criminal Law (Dissemination of Anti-State Information). On the same day, a court in the capital Hanoi sentenced another Facebook user to five years in prison under Art. 331 (Abuse of Democratic Freedoms). According to media reports, he had, among other things, critically commented the verdicts in the land rights conflict in Dong Tam commune in January 2020 (cf. BN of 13.01.20 and 21.09.20) and had called for violence.

Nguyen Xuan Phuc elected State President

On 26.07.21, Nguyen Xuan Phuc was confirmed in office as State President by the newly elected National Assembly in May 2021 (cf. BN of 14.06.21). In April 2021, he followed his predecessor Nguyen Phu Trong in this office (cf. BN of 12.04.21). The president holds the highest state office and is commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Yemen

Saudi Arabia intercepts Houthi drones

The anti-Houthi coalition has announced that the Saudi Air Force intercepted three armed drones and a missile that were aimed at Jazan province in southern Saudi Arabia. Another armed drone targeting Khamis Mushait in south-western Saudi Arabia was shot down by the coalition. Saudi Arabia blames the Houthi rebels for the attacks, which have been increasing for several months.

Expansion of humanitarian aid for Yemen

The World Food Programme expects to be able to increase the number of aid recipients from eight to eleven million due to the improved financial situation. Meanwhile, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, has ordered the payment of USD 100 million to the World Food Programme as aid for Yemen.

Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
BN-Redaktion@bamf.bund.de