



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Economic situation; supplies

Experts fear that GDP will fall by 9.7% this year and that the economic crisis will be exacerbated by rising prices and the decline of the national currency. Banks and government offices are still closed, many people have lost their jobs. Aid agencies are warning of a hunger and supply crisis. According to the UN, 18 million people, almost half the population, are dependent on humanitarian aid. First aid shipments of medicines and other medical supplies arrived at Mazar-i-Sharif airport on 30.08.21. Currently, however, many NGOs are forced to close down health facilities or restrict other forms of assistance due to lack of funding and of other resources. Such assistance includes immunization for children, antenatal and postnatal care and deliveries for pregnant women, malnutrition care, COVID-19 treatment centres, and other essential health services that will disproportionately affect women, children, and the elderly. On 05.09.21, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths, met with Taliban representatives in Kabul and pledged further assistance to those in need in the country.

Formation of government

The formation of a new Taliban government is not yet in sight. On 06.09.21, the Taliban stated that negotiations to form a new government had been completed, but that some technical issues still needed to be resolved. Taliban representatives said that the participation of former members of the government was out of the question. Observers see indications of infighting within the Taliban between various Pashtun Ghilzai and Durrani leaders, between eastern and southern networks, between hardliners and those who want more flexibility. Various networks within the Taliban have moved fighters to Kabul after the city was captured to avoid losing positions or power. Currently, anyone carrying a gun and traditional clothing can claim to be a Talib and conduct searches and seizures. Taliban fighters on the street control the population according to their own rules and decide for themselves what is inappropriate behaviour, hairstyle or clothing. Former members of the security forces report being less afraid of the Taliban leadership than of the ordinary fighters.

Fighting / violence against civilians

Negotiations between the Taliban and the resistance in the Panjshir Valley have so far been unsuccessful. Fighting is reported. The Taliban are partially blocking communications in Panjshir province. On 05.09.21, both sides claimed to be controlling the province. On the same day, US General Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed concern that the country could slide into civil war, if the Taliban failed to consolidate power against other groups such as al-Qaeda or ISKP. On 04.09.21, the head of Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI, General Faiz Hamid, had become the first senior foreign official to travel to Kabul for negotiations with the Taliban. On the same day, Taliban fighters had fired shots throughout the country to celebrate the supposed victory over Panjshir province. As many as 70 civilians were either killed or injured thereby, reports said. The Taliban leadership condemned this behaviour and announced consequences.

Bangladesh

Death penalty for supporters of Islamist group

Six supporters of the banned militant group Ansar al-Islam were sentenced to death for murder by a court in the capital Dhaka on 31.08.21. According to media reports, four of the convicts are in custody, two are at large and were sentenced in absentia. In April 2016, the convicts had attacked and brutally murdered two LGBTQI activists in their home.

Burkina Faso

Police operation at gold mine claims lives

Eight deaths resulted, when police used tear gas against people illegally prospecting for gold in abandoned parts of Nordgold's Bissa gold mine (Centre-North Region), one of the country's largest gold mines, on 01.09.21. The public prosecutor's office launched an investigation.

Without alternatives to gain an income, an increasing number of people have turned to illegally mining gold manually in recent years. Jihadist groups also try to finance themselves by controlling non-industrial gold mines. Burkina Faso is one of Africa's largest gold producers. Gold is the country's most important export commodity.

China

New censorship rules for the entertainment industry

On 02.09.21 the National Radio and Television Authority (NRTA) published new guidelines for the regulation of entertainment programmes. Among other things, TV stations are instructed not to hire artists who represent "incorrect political positions". In addition, a stop must be put to the "abnormal aesthetics" of "niang pao" (i.e. "girl guns"), the authority said. It used this vulgar term to refer to actors and singers whose appearance does not correspond to the male image of traditional gender concepts. Fears have been raised on Chinese social media that such instructions could encourage violence in schools and develop into a formal crackdown on LGBTQI people.

Colombia

Court declines to indict former army commander

On 30.08.21, Bogota's Supreme Court rejected a request from the Attorney General's Office to file charges against former army commander Mario Montoya, on the ground of lack of competence. According to the Supreme Court, while the Attorney General's Office can investigate such crimes, the Special Justice for Peace (JEP), created under the 2016 peace agreement to prosecute former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and military leaders for alleged war crimes, is the only organization that can file charges for such crimes. The retired general is held responsible for 104 extrajudicial killings, so-called 'falsos positivos', between November 2007 and November 2008. The so-called 'falsos positivos' occurred between 2002 and 2008, when soldiers murdered civilians and registered them as guerrilla fighters killed in combat, in order to receive bonuses. According to JEP, at least 6,402 people were killed in this way.

DR Congo

North Kivu, Ituri: state of siege renewed yet again; criminal justice

On 03.09.21, Congolese media reported a further 15-day extension of the state of siege that has been in force since the beginning of May 2021 in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. This means that the military and police forces continue to be vested with extensive powers of intervention (cf. BN of 17.05.21). According to the Congolese news portal La Prospérité, the Minister of Justice, Rose Mutombo, has declared that she has agreed to the resumption of civilian criminal jurisdiction, thus the ordinary courts will resume operations, even during the extension of the state of siege (cf. BN of 17.05.21).

Kivu provinces, Ituri: number of internally displaced persons; humanitarian situation

At the end of August 2021, some 2.8 million of the country's 5.3 million internally displaced persons were in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces alone, the UNHCR stated. The majority of the internally displaced are affected by multiple displacement. In late August 2021, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed deep concern about the security and humanitarian situation in the eastern parts of the country, affected by militia violence, particularly in Kivu provinces and Ituri province. The ICRC said that the population's - already inadequate access to health care - is problematic and that the repeated attacks by the armed groups on the local health facilities further aggravate the situation.

Eastern conflict provinces: Rise in child rights violations; child combatants.

According to Radio France Internationale (RSF), abductions and the exploitation of children are on the rise in the various eastern provinces affected by chronic instability and militia violence. Despite the existing state of siege and the stepped-up military fight against the armed groups, especially the forced recruitment of children and their use as combatants by armed groups increased, the station said. Referring to a report by the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), RSF said that in the reporting month of July 2021, most child rights violations had been documented in North Kivu province, followed by Ituri, Tanganyika, and South Kivu provinces. During the reporting period, the armed groups Nyatura (North Kivu), Mai-Mai-Mazembe (North Kivu), Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO, Ituri), Mai-Mai-Apa Naa Pale, and the Islamic Allied Democratic Forces (ADF, North Kivu and Ituri) were the main perpetrators of these crimes, it said.

Conviction of several members of the security forces for rape

According to a media report, a military court in the province of South Kivu sentenced a total of eight police officers and eleven military officers to prison terms of between twelve months and 20 years for rape. The victims of the rapes were primarily minors between the ages of three and 17. The defence intends to appeal the sentences to the High Military Court.

In the DRC, gender-based and sexual violence is widespread in all parts of the country (cf. BN of 02.08.21). The laws are insufficiently enforced; impunity continues to be a problem. Care and support for victims of sexualised violence is described as poor and access to justice (which is already severely limited) is problematic. Reportedly, in reality, victims often refrain from reporting the crimes due to fear of discrimination, family pressure, social stigma and fear of humiliation and/or retaliation. In the eastern part of the country, most women live in even greater poverty after being raped, it is said. Children born of rape suffer stigma and exclusion.

El Salvador

Judicial reform: one third of judges retired

On 31.08.21, the Legislative Assembly, mainly controlled by President Nayib Bukele, passed a series of bills to reform judicial career law. As a consequence, one-third of the country's 690 judges and dozens of prosecutors will be retired. The provision affects judges and prosecutors who are over 60 years old, or have completed 30 years of service. Parliament Speaker Ernesto Castro cited ending the era of corrupt judges and a judiciary tailored to power groups, as the main argument for the draft reforms. Already in May (cf. BN of 10.05.21), parliament had removed the judges of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court (CSJ) and the Attorney General.

Supreme Court allows re-election of president

The Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court amended El Salvador's electoral law in its most recent ruling on 03.09.21. The judges found that the previously customary mandatory break of ten years between two terms as head of state, was no longer necessary and recommended that the country's supreme electoral court, El Tribunal Supremo Electoral de El Salvador (TSE), allow candidates to run for a second consecutive term. In response, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal said it would abide by the ruling of the highest court because they are "unappealable and binding." The ruling will allow President Bukele, who according to several polls enjoys wide popular support, to run for president again in the next elections in 2024.

The Gambia

Increase of the ECOWAS troop contingent

The Gambian news portal The Chronicle reported on 02.09.21 that with a view to the presidential elections, officially scheduled for 04.12.21, the deployment of a further 625 Senegalese troops as part of the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS) mission was imminent. By stocking up the troop contingent political instability during the presidential elections shall be prevented. Multinational troops have been deployed in the country since the formal transfer of power in early 2017. The ECOWAS mandate was last extended for a further twelve months in early 2021 (cf. BN of 01.02.21). The planned conversion of the ECOWAS troop mandate into a police mandate after the 2021 presidential elections has met with criticism in Gambian political and civil society circles, which have repeatedly criticised the president's lack of trust in the national security authorities.

Guinea

President Condé held; uncertainty after overthrow

The situation in Guinea is unclear following a coup d'état on 05.09.21. President Alpha Condé was detained by special forces of the army led by Colonel (elsewhere Lieutenant Colonel) Mamady Doumbouya and taken to an undisclosed location. In a statement and televised address earlier in the afternoon, Doumbouya, speaking on behalf of a "National Committee for Unification and Development" (Comité National du Rassemblement et du Développement, CNRD), declared the constitution and state institutions dissolved.

Already in the morning of the same day, shots were heard in the capital Conakry; there are no reports of casualties. In the afternoon, the Ministry of Defence stated that the insurgents had been pushed back under the leadership of the presidential guard. Numerous security forces are said to be in the streets of Conakry. Little is currently known about the situation outside the capital, which the CNRD says it controls. The CNRD declared the regional governors and prefects (heads of prefectures) deposed, to be replaced by military personnel. In addition, a curfew from 8pm was declared until further notice, and air and land borders were closed. The CNRD summoned the "former ministers and presidents of the institutions" to a meeting on 6.09.21. Failure to appear would be considered rebellion. Government employees are to report for work. It remains to be seen to what extent authorities and especially security forces will follow the CNRD.

The group justified the overthrow with the country's "socio-political and economic situation." Things such as dysfunctional state institutions, disregard for democratic principles, mismanagement, corruption and poverty had led the army to assume its responsibility for the entire Guinean people, it said. The CNRD also announced the drafting of a new constitution through an inclusive process.

The coup was condemned internationally, including by UN Secretary-General Guterres, the Economic Community of West African States (CEDEAO/ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), France, and the US. There are reports from Conakry and from other parts of the country of people celebrating. Opposition leaders have so far not commented on the events, according to media reports. However, the opposition alliance Front national pour la défense de la Constitution (FNDC) said it had taken note of the "arrest of the dictator" [Condé] and the CNRD's statements on the constitution.

India

Kashmir: measures to prevent unrest

On 01.09.21, Syed Ali Geelani, a well-known personality of the movement for an independent Kashmir, died at his home in the capital Srinagar, where he had been living under house arrest for the past eleven years.

To prevent unrest in the area, Indian authorities imposed curfews, shut down mobile internet and closed access roads to the deceased's residence.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic

According to media reports, the Ministry of Health announced on 02.09.21 that around 600 people died from COVID infection within 24 hours. This brought the total official death toll to around 109,000 people. The deputy chief of the Covid Crisis Staff in Tehran warned of the possible spread of the lambda virus variant and proclaimed the need to use two masks at the same time. He also pointed out inadequacies of domestic vaccine production and stressed the need to import more vaccines from abroad. So far, about eleven percent of the population of over 83 million has been vaccinated twice.

Prisoner dies shortly after lashing punishment

Foreign media report on a prisoner in the city of Ahar (eastern Azerbaijan) who died shortly after he had been subjected to a punishment by whipping. According to the Fars news agency, the chief judge of the province of Eastern Azerbaijan had denied the whipping as the cause of death. The deceased's brother rejected this account in a press interview. He said that his brother's condition had deteriorated after he had been whipped and that he had been taken to hospital only two days later despite his complaints.

Conservative academic the only woman in the presidency

According to media reports, university professor Ensiyeh Khazali has been appointed as the new women's and family affairs commissioner in the presidential office under Ebrahim Raisi. This makes the 58-year-old the only female member of the new president's government. She is the daughter of a cleric, is considered conservative and was previously a professor of Arabic studies and dean at the Alzahra Women's University in Tehran and lectures at several universities.

Iraq

IS attacks in Kirkuk and Mosul

On 02.09.21, Shahal village in Kirkuk governorate, Rashad district was attacked and several people were wounded. At least one person was abducted. During the night of 04.09.21 to 05.09.21, a firefight lasting at least two hours raged in the same district. At least 13 casualties among Iraqi Security Forces were reported as the result of the fighting and an attack on reinforcements as of 06.09.21. Another battle was fought near Mosul on 05.09.21, in the course of which at least three Iraqi soldiers were killed.

Attack on a refugee camp in Makhmour

On 05.09.21, a refugee camp in Makhmour, a district disputed between Baghdad and the KRG, was presumably hit by an air strike. Sources close to the PKK attribute it to Turkey. The camp in question has existed since the 1990s and is predominantly inhabited by Kurds, or their descendants, who formerly fled from the Kurdish settlement areas to Turkey. Only property damage was reported, the target was allegedly a vacant house. In recent months, the camp, which Turkey considers a PKK retreat, has been attacked repeatedly.

Ivory Coast / Guinea

No Ebola case in Ivory Coast after all

On 31.08.21, the WHO announced that it does longer assume that the Guinean woman who had allegedly contracted Ebola and had entered Ivory Coast shortly before, was actually infected (cf. BN of 16.08.21). A second test by a French institute showed no evidence of the Ebola virus. After the Institut Pasteur of Ivory Coast initially reported a positive result, measures were promptly taken as part of the WHO's so-called no-regrets policy, in both Ivory Coast and Guinea, including the vaccination of numerous persons in the vicinity of the patient. Early on, Guinean authorities had doubted the diagnosis from the neighbouring country.

Kosovo

Sentence against politician for hate speech upheld; EU criticises proceedings

According to press reports on 25.08.21, the Court of Appeal in Pristina has upheld the conviction of Kosovo Serb MP, local politician and former minister Ivan Todosijević (Srpska Lista). Todosijević had described the Račak massacre during the Kosovo war in 1999 as an event faked by "Albanian terrorists", and had been sentenced to two years in prison in December 2019 for "incitement to national, racial, religious hatred, sedition or intolerance". Kosovo Serb judges in the city of Mitrovica temporarily stopped work in protest against the confirmation of the sentence by the second instance. The EU Commission criticised that the court proceedings violated the 2013 Brussels Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, as there had been no majority Kosovo Serb composition of the panels judging defendants from the same ethnic group, as agreed therein. Todosijević's party Srpska Lista called the verdict politically motivated.

Lebanon

Economic crisis

While there still is no progress in the formation of a government, the economic and monetary crisis continues to deteriorate. It has now become primarily a supply crisis in the energy sector, as power generation, hospital supply, refrigeration and even water supply primarily depend on diesel generators and other forms of oil-based power generation. Currently, several attempts are being made to mitigate this crisis. Hezbollah's ties with Iran and Syria helped to facilitate Iranian oil shipments despite the sanctions in place. It is considered unlikely that the US or its allies will take direct action against the tankers. According to various statements by Lebanese politicians close to Syria, the tankers are to be unloaded in Banias, from where the cargo will then reach Lebanon by land. The UN has provided funds to enable Lebanon to make additional purchases on the world market. A total of ten million US dollars is available which can be spend to supply hospitals and water utilities for some time (depending on the world market price). If at all, electricity is currently available to the population for a maximum of two hours a day. Since 01.09.21 an agreement with Egypt has been prepared, once it enters into force, Egypt would supply liquefied natural gas to Lebanon to be used to power the country's two largest power plants once again. Furthermore, Egypt would supply additional natural gas to Jordan, which would in turn export electricity to Lebanon via Syrian power lines. However, these contracts are subject to the formation of a government in Lebanon. So far, none of these measures have taken effect, an improvement is expected in the next weeks, though.

Mali

Violence against civilians and members of the military

According to a report by the UN stabilization mission MINUSMA, the number of acts of violence against civilians increased by 25% in the second third of 2021, compared to the first third. According to the report, a total of at least 527 civilians were killed, injured, abducted or reported missing in the period from 01.04.21 to 30.06.21. The number of people killed has surged by 49%, the report says. According to the MINUSMA report, 287 of these acts of violence against civilians were attributed to groups such as Jama'at nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS/EIGS), and similar groups, and 157 to militias and self-defence groups. Forty-six of the acts of violence against the civilian population were committed during operations of the Malian Defence and Security Forces (Forces de Défense et Sécurité Maliennes-FDSM) and 31 during operations by international or regional forces (MINUSMA and G5-Sahel are explicitly mentioned).

However, there are not only attacks on the civilian population in Mali. On 19.08.21, according to media reports, 15 Malian military personnel were killed in an ambush between the towns of Nokara and Boni in the centre of the country. On 15.08.21, three Malian soldiers were killed when their vehicle hit an IED on the way to the airport in Menaka in the country's north-west, according to media reports.

Montenegro

Violent clashes at enthronement of the new metropolitan of the SOC

According to a current media report, violent clashes occurred in Cetinje on 5.09.21 during the church ceremony for the inauguration of the new regional head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro (SOC). Supporters of the opposition parties as well as so-called "self-proclaimed patriotic forces" had tried to prevent the enthronement of the new Metropolitan of the SOC, Joanikije, and clashed with police forces. Police used tear gas in an attempt to disperse the protests. According to police, two officers were injured and eight protesters were arrested during the confrontations, including, according to media reports, former police chief Veselin Veljovic, a member of the opposition Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS), (cf. BN of 30.08.21). Montenegrin Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic had described the unrest in Cetinje as an attempted terrorist act by the opposition and attacks on the police as an attack on the state. On the occasion of the ceremony, the head of the SOC, Patriarch Porfirije, and the new metropolitan were flown to the monastery located in Cetinje with an army helicopter, to avoid the barricades erected by protesters. After the enthronement ceremony, the new Metropolitan Joanikije said that it would take time to overcome the ethnic, political and religious divisions in Montenegro.

Myanmar

Fighting and attacks in several parts of the country

From 28.08.21 to 02.09.21, fighting, some of it very intense, took place between the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) of the autonomous region Kokang in Shan State and the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw). In addition to four civilians, at least 17 Tatmadaw soldiers and two MNDAA fighters were killed.

During raids in Magwe region, the Tatmadaw and the Pauk People's Defence Force clashed on 27.08.21 and 29.08.21, causing deaths. According to various accounts, between 30,000 and 50,000 people subsequently fled some 30 villages by 01.09.21. Also in Magwe, junta troops destroyed food donations for 2,000 displaced people from Kin Ma village, which was destroyed in June 2021. Raids and looting by security forces were also reported from Mindat and Falam communities in Chin State on 30.08.21.

In Sagaing and Tanintharyi regions, unknown persons murdered several suspected military informants on 28.08.21. In Mandalay region, members of the pro-military Pyusawhti group killed the son and brother of the chairman of a charity in his place, on 31.08.21. A total of twelve explosions occurred in Yangon (Rangoon) and Mandalay on 29.08.21 and 30.08.21. Among the targets were offices of both the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

Nicaragua

Report on political violence and poor prison conditions

According to a report by the NGO Urnas Abiertas, a total of 214 incidents related to the presidential elections scheduled for November occurred between 15.07.21 and 15.08.21, including physical attacks, threats and insults, torture and arbitrary arrests. As of 30.08.21, the NGO registered a total of 35 political prisoners. All of these acts were committed by state security agencies, the public prosecutor's office or the Supreme Electoral Authority with the aim of preventing any competition from the opposition in the presidential elections in November 2021.

On 31.08.21 and 01.09.21 visiting some of the political prisoners was allowed for the first time. Subsequently, many relatives reported poor prison conditions. The two former presidential candidates Félix Maradiaga and Juan Sebastián Chamorro are said to have been victims of psychological abuse in prison, including solitary confinement, 24-hour lighting and constant interrogation without the presence of a lawyer. The Association of Families of Political Prisoners (Asociación de Familiares de Presos Políticos (AFPP)) and the Human Rights Collective Nunca Más had already denounced cases of physical and psychological torture.

According to the Public Prosecutor's Office, Félix Maradiaga and Juan Sebastián Chamorro had been charged with crimes of conspiracy to undermine national integrity under Articles 410 and 412 of the Criminal Code already on 26.08.21, along with six other opposition leaders. The first hearing was held in camera and their lawyers were not

present. If convicted, the defendants face prison sentences of ten to 15 years. An arrest warrant has been issued for the opposition political scientist Manuel Salvador Orozco Ramírez.

Nigeria

At least 73 schoolchildren abducted

On 01.09.21, at least 73 school children were abducted by armed bandits from Government Day Secondary School in the remote village of Kaya in the Maradun Local Government Area of the north-western state of Zamfara. According to the police, five girls were freed. The new abduction occurred only a few days after the liberation of three groups of schoolchildren (cf. BN of 30.08.21).

According to the Information Commissioner, Ibrahim Dosara, the Zamfara State Government has ordered the closure of all primary and secondary schools to discourage further kidnappings. He also said that night curfews had been imposed on 13 districts and the state capital, Gusau. On 03.09.21, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) stated that the security situation in Zamfara required the immediate suspension of all telecommunications services for two weeks. According to media reports, mobile phone operators have been asked to shut down mobile phone services in Zamfara. The Zamfara government had called for this measure as informants were using mobile phones to pass on troop movements to bandits.

17 fatalities after ISWAP attack

On 30.08.21, fighting units of the jihadist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) killed at least 17 people in the north-eastern state of Borno. According to media reports, hundreds of attackers stormed the town of Rann on the border to Cameroon, driving troops of the Nigerian military from their camp, killing eleven people and setting fire to houses and vehicles. The dead included a soldier and a local employee of an international aid organization. The attack caused the residents to flee towards Cameroon, until the Nigerian military recaptured the town with air force support. Also on 30.08.21, jihadist forces reportedly attacked the nearby town of Ajiri, killing six people. Back in May, jihadist attacks in the border town of Rann had killed 35 people, including five members of the troops and 15 members of militias, according to media reports.

Pakistan

Shiite Ashura Festival: Attack in Punjab

On 18./19.08.21 the Shiite minority in Pakistan celebrated the Ashura festival, an important celebration to commemorate the death of Hussain, a grandson of the Islamic prophet Mohammed and a saint of the Shiites. The latter are a minority in predominantly Sunni Pakistan, where extremist Sunni Muslims view them as apostates. As a result, security measures have been tightened during the nationwide processions, which have repeatedly been targeted by sectarian violence in the past. On 19.08.21, at least four people were killed and dozens more injured in a grenade attack on an Ashura procession in Bahawalnagar in Punjab province by unknown perpetrators.

Attacks in Balochistan

On 24.08.21, an attack, for which no one has claimed responsibility, killed three miners in Balochistan province, not far from the capital Quetta. The media also reported a suicide attack on a convoy of Chinese engineers in which two children were killed and four injured, during the same period. This attack was claimed by the separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA). According to police, eleven suspected members of the Islamic State (IS) were killed during an operation by an anti-terrorist unit in Mastung district, on 31.08.21.

The troubled region of Balochistan frequently experiences militant attacks and is also marked by a long history of activity by Baloch separatists seeking independence for the resource-rich province bordering Iran and Afghanistan as well as the limitation of Chinese influence in the region.

In addition, the radical Islamic Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has a presence there. On 05.09.21, the TTP staged a suicide attack on a patrol of the paramilitary Frontier Corps in Mastung district, killing at least three security personnel. Since the capture of the Afghan capital Kabul by the Taliban, the TTP has stepped up its activities and

carried out more attacks on security personnel in Balochistan province in recent weeks. For example, three members of the paramilitary Levies unit were killed in bomb attacks in Ziarat district on 26.08.21, and a Pakistani army officer was killed in Panjgur district on 22.08.21.

International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance

On 30.08.21, activists gathered for the "International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances" in the capital Islamabad. They allege that the military is responsible for the disappearance of at least 8,000 civilians. The authorities reject the accusations, saying that many of the disappeared were either killed in anti-terrorist operations or have gone into hiding in Afghanistan.

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Numerous persons injured in a series of protests against blockade at border installations

Since 25.08.21 further protests have erupted in the border area between the Gaza Strip and Israel. A Hamas member wounded in last week's clashes, a twelve-year-old Palestinian and an Israeli soldier succumbed to their injuries (cf. BN of 23.08.21).

According to the organizers, the protests shall put pressure on Israel to ease the blockade.

On 26.08.21, Israeli authorities announced that they would relax commercial import restrictions in response to the protests. Imports of new vehicles, goods and equipment for civilian projects are to be increased. In addition, more entry permits to Israel will be issued to Gaza businessmen. Furthermore, Egypt will partially reopen the Rafah border crossing, the announcement said (cf. BN of 23.08.21). On 31.08.21, urgently needed construction materials were imported into Gaza via the Kerem Shalom border point, to begin reconstruction of the destruction caused by the May 2021 war. On 01.09.21, Israeli authorities also approved further easing of the blockade on Gaza. The measures include an expansion of the fishing zone (from nine) to 15 nautical miles, the opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing, the delivery of an additional five million cubic meters of water, and an additional 5,000 entry permits into Israel (2,000 to date) for Palestinian businessmen and workers.

Nevertheless, hundreds of Palestinians protested at the border for days, supported by Hamas. They hurled explosive devices in the direction of the border fortifications. The Israeli military used live ammunition to keep the protesters away from the fortifications. According to Palestinian authorities, several Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were injured. On 02.09.21, one Palestinian protester died.

West Bank: One dead in incident at border crossing

On 01.09.21, a resident of Beit Ur al-Tahta, near Ramallah, died, presumably due to shelling by Israeli military near a security point. The man killed was returning from his work as a gardener in Israel in the early morning, according to his family and Palestinian authorities. No further details of the circumstances are known. The Israeli military announced investigations into the incident.

Israel pledges supportive measures for President Abbas

On 30.08.21, Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz announced some concessions to strengthen the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. These include a loan of more than \$150 million. In addition, another 15,000 work permits for Israel are to be issued to Palestinians. Furthermore, the residence status of several people living in the West Bank is to be clarified. These include people originally from Gaza or foreign spouses of Palestinians. According to a Palestinian representative, more than 5,000 families will be affected by such clarifications.

The measures are part of the new Israeli government's efforts to support Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas against Hamas' growing popularity among the population and were announced after a meeting between Gantz and Abbas, the first high-level meeting between the two parties since 2014.

Russian Federation

Internet censorship tightened

On 03.09.21, Russia's media regulator Roskomnadzor blocked access to six of Russia's most widely used virtual private network services (VPNs) that allow users to circumvent state internet censorship, including Nord VPN and

Express VPN. The reason given was that the services promote illegal activities such as drug trafficking, extremism and child pornography, among others. As became known on 05.09.21, the Moscow Arbitration Court also banned the operators of Google and the Russian search engine Yandex from displaying search results containing the term "smart voting". This is a project of imprisoned opposition politician Navalny, which calls on voters to vote for the most promising opposition candidate in the parliamentary elections on 19.09.21. According to media reports, the background to the court decision is that in the past, "smart voting" has already caused the loss of a number of mandates for the Kremlin party United Russia at the municipal level.

Somalia

UN Security Council votes to extend UNSOM

The UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2592 (2021) extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) until 31.05.22. It was also resolved that UNSOM pursue joint programmes in cooperation with the federal government of Somalia and its federal states, focusing on supporting government-led inclusive policies. The Council also called on the federal government and the federal states to hold free, fair, credible and inclusive presidential and parliamentary elections without further delay in accordance with the agreements of 17.09.20 and 27.05.21.

NISA blames al-Shabaab for disappearance of female employee

On 02.09.21, the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) said in a statement that investigations had revealed that al-Shabaab had killed NISA agent Ikran Tahil Farah (cf. BN of 19.07.21), who had gone missing in June 2021. Al-Shabaab denied the allegation in a statement. Details of the crime scene and time were not released. Moreover, the finding of her body has not been confirmed. Close family members believe Farah is still alive and being held at a secret location by NISA. They say, she possesses confidential information about the recruitment of young Somali soldiers who are believed to have been taken to Eritrea for military training and used to support the Ethiopian military in the armed conflict in the Ethiopian regional state of Tigray (cf. BN of 14.06.21). Prime Minister Roble expects an explanation from NISA by 06.09.21. The opposition demands the removal of NISA's leadership.

Sri Lanka

Proclamation of state of emergency due to food shortage

Due to rising prices of various basic commodities, a state of emergency was declared on 31.08.21. Hoarding of basic food items such as rice, wheat, and sugar has thus been outlawed. According to reports, an army officer has been assigned to coordinate the supply of basic food items to the people and the government has started seizing sugar and rice stocks from warehouses to make them available on the open market at regulated prices. Various media reports cite the fact that the banks are unable to finance foreign imports as one of the reasons for the emergency. Sri Lanka relies on foreign imports for many products, including milk, milk powder, petrol and medicines. The Sri Lanka rupee has already fallen 7.5% against the US dollar in 2021. Last year, the country's economy contracted by 3.6%, partly due to a slump in the tourism industry.

South Sudan

State pressure on journalists and media

The authorities have reportedly intensified their crackdown on journalists and the media in recent weeks. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported that on 27.08.21 the radio station Radio Jonglei was stormed and closed down by government security forces. Three journalists were arrested and briefly detained in the process. They were accused of sympathizing with the opposition party People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA). In the course of the opening of parliament on 30.08.21, a journalist from al-Jazeera was briefly detained for allegedly getting into an altercation with security forces. Two other journalists who were on site at the same time were threatened and beaten. Furthermore, their equipment was confiscated because they had refused to attend the opening of parliament in protest at the arrest of their al-Jazeera colleague. Another media outlet told RSF it had been fined heavily for posting videos

on Facebook that the government had deemed "malicious". According to RSF, also the internet is meanwhile strictly monitored and censored. On 30.08.21, internet access had been cut throughout the country due to the protests planned for that day (cf. BN of 30.08.21). No protests were held in the end, because of the strong presence of heavily armed security forces as well as the threat to use live ammunition. The US, Great Britain, the EU and other states criticised the action.

Sudan

Many regions remain unsafe

On 31.08.21, local authorities declared a night curfew from 10pm to 6am in North Kordofan State for the districts of El Obeid Sheikan, El Kharasana, El Jebelein, and Farig El Hor, until further notice. At the same time, patrols in these regions have been stepped up, and a commission consisting of forces from the police, security police, Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and the General Intelligence Service (GIS) has been established. These measures come in response to the killings of four people in these regions on 31.08.21. According to the authorities, there is a connection between these recent killings and earlier clashes between Misseriya tribesmen, which escalated violently, a month ago.

It was reported that rebels and security forces exchanged fire in Khartoum on 01.09.21, resulting in at least two deaths and several injured persons. The violence was triggered by the eviction of the Rahaf housing complex in Soba by security forces. In October 2020, police temporarily housed peace delegations from various armed groups in the complex to support the peace process in the country. Some of those accommodated in the complex united under the name "Tamazuj" and refused to move out as requested, hence the eviction. In the course of the operation, seven rebel fighters were arrested, while others escaped to neighbouring city quarters, it was said. Surrounding roads were closed and the presence of security forces increased for security reasons.

Syria

Dar'a: new fighting erupts after mediation fails

Initially, an agreement was initially reached with the remaining rebels in the southern part of Dar'a on 31.08.21 (cf. BN of 30.08.21) under Russian mediation, according to which government forces were to regain comprehensive control over the region. Units of the Russian military police had started to patrol the Dar'a al-Balad district. However, according to news agency reports, the agreement failed on 03.09.21 when the rebels refused to agree to the establishment of new checkpoints and house searches by the Syrian army. Under the agreement, the remaining rebels would have had the option of being evacuated to north-western Syria by bus; a practice that had already been followed in other reconciliation agreements. However, the rebels insisted that they would only go to Jordan or Turkey. On 05.09.21, the Syrian army reopened fire on rebels in the city.

Turkey

Electoral threshold

On 01.09.21, Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), declared that the ruling People's Alliance had confirmed its decision to lower the electoral threshold for parliament from ten to seven percent. According to media reports, a five-percent threshold had originally been envisaged.

Measures against the reception of refugees in Ankara

According to media reports, local authorities in Ankara have stopped accepting new registrations for temporary protection status for refugees since 02.09.21. The new regulation also obliges all Syrians staying in Ankara who are registered in other places in Turkey, to leave the city. According to media reports, the measures are related to the attacks against Syrian and Afghan migrants on 11.08.21 (cf. BN of 16.08.21). The Interior Ministry also announced that Ankara police will carry out checks and send migrants without local registration back to the provinces where

they were registered. Migrants without refugee status or residence permits are to be arrested and taken to deportation centres.

Proceedings to ban the HDP party

On 02.09.21, the Turkish Constitutional Court granted a request by the Kurdish opposition party, Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), for additional time for its defence in the pending proceedings to ban the party. The legal deadline for the defence is thus extended by a further four months.

Arrest of suspected Gülen supporters

On 03.09.21, 18 people accused of links to the Gülen movement were arrested in Istanbul and other provinces. A further ten suspects are being sought. The suspicion is based on the use of the mobile phone app Bylock.

Venezuela

Second round of dialogue between government and opposition representative; opposition's participation in the elections

From 03.09.21 to 06.09.21 the second round of dialogue between government representatives and representatives of the opposition (Plataforma Unitaria de Venezuela) took place in Mexico under mediation of Norway and in the presence of Russia and the Netherlands. On 04.09.21, it was announced that the opposition politician Freddy Guevara (cf. BN of 23.08.21), who had been released in the course of the last round of negotiations, would replace the delegate Carlos Vecchio as representative of the Voluntad Popular party at the negotiating table with immediate effect. On the same day, the opposition demanded the release of political prisoners, whose number, according to a recent study by the NGO Foro Penal dated 25.08.21, can be put at a total of 264. In addition, a timetable and guarantees for free and fair regional elections with the participation of opposition candidates on 21.11.21 are to be negotiated. Already on 31.08.21, opposition representatives of various parties had announced that for the first time after boycotting all elections for the last three years, they would again participate in the upcoming regional elections with candidates on a joint list. Previously, the opposition had argued that participation in the elections would only serve to legitimise Maduro's authoritarian government.

Vietnam

Blogger arrested

On 30.08.21, a blogger was arrested by security forces at his home in the northern province of Thanh Hoa. He is accused of sharing content on social media that violates national security.

Yemen

Hunger as a weapon of war

In a report published on 01.09.21, various human rights organizations have accused both the Houthi rebels and the anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia of using hunger as a weapon of war. The Houthi rebels are accused of massively obstructing the distribution of humanitarian aid. The coalition is said to have carried out air strikes specifically against farms, fishing boats and water supply facilities.

Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia

On 31.08.21, a drone attack on Abha airport in the Saudi province of Asir injured eight people and damaged a passenger plane, among other things. An explosives-laden drone targeting the airport had been intercepted by the Saudi military already on the day before. Further drone attacks against Saudi Arabia were repelled by the Saudi Air Force on 01.09.21 and 04.09.21. Saudi Arabia blames the Houthi rebels, who have not yet commented on the incidents.

Also, on 04.09.21, the Saudi military intercepted several missiles aimed at the cities of Najran and Jazan, as well as at the Aramco facilities, the largest Saudi oil production company, in Dammam. In the process, two children were

slightly injured by shrapnel in Dammam. A spokesman for the Houthi rebels confirmed the attack against the oil production facility.

65 killed in fighting around Marib

A spokesman for the Yemeni government announced on 02.09.21 that a total of 65 soldiers from both warring parties were killed in fighting south of the city of Marib. The city of Marib has oil reserves and is the last city in northern Yemen under government control.

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