



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

18 October 2021

Afghanistan

Formation of a government

According to media reports, a number of foreign ministers from Islamic countries arranged to meet the Taliban government on 14.10.21 to discuss the inclusion of women in the education system, among other matters. The Taliban's foreign minister, Muttaqi, travelled to Turkey on the same day. The Turkish foreign minister told him that Turkey was keen to support a lifting of the sanctions, but said that the Taliban must understand that Muslim countries also wished for the Taliban to make greater efforts to integrate women.

One of 25 issuing offices for electronic national ID cards reopened after two months on 16.10.21. It is claimed that 80,000 ID cards will be issued in the coming week. It was reported on 13.10.21 that the national issuing office in Kabul had issued 30,000 passports to Afghan citizens for travel abroad since it reopened on 04.10.21. The office is allegedly able to issue 4,000 passports a week at present and the aim is to increase this figure to 6,000 a week. In talks between Taliban representatives and envoys from the USA and EU on 13.10.21, the Taliban warned that there would be a wave of refugees heading for western countries if the West failed to lift the sanctions. On 13.10.21 it was reported that the Taliban had set up a commission charged with excluding dishonourable fighters from its ranks (e.g. fighters who behave badly towards the population or who carry out aggressive acts in the name of the Taliban).

Violence against civilians / hostilities with ISKP

Approximately 50 people were killed and 90 injured in a bomb attack at a Shiite mosque in the city of Kandahar on 15.10.21. The Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility. The head of the Taliban police was reportedly killed and eleven other people were injured in a bomb attack in the city of Asadabad (Kunar province) on 14.10.21. No-one has claimed responsibility as yet. Similar attacks in the region to date have been carried out by ISKP. On 14.10.21 Russia's president Putin warned that increasing numbers of fighters with an IS background from Syria and Iraq were going to Afghanistan, where they could reorganise. Putin claimed that some 2,000 IS fighters are in northern Afghanistan. The Taliban has refuted this. On 17.10.21 the Taliban stated that there was no safe haven for ISKP in Afghanistan and that they intended to guard Shiite mosques more effectively in future. It was reported on 13.10.21 that the attack on a Shiite mosque in Kunduz by a Uighur member of ISKP on 08.10.21 was also aimed at the Taliban and its cooperation with China, as this was tantamount to endorsing the suppression of the Muslim Uighurs in China.

Women's rights / musicians

On 12.10.21 UN Secretary-General Guterres stated that the Taliban had broken their promise to integrate Afghan women better than in 1996. On 07.10.21 it was reported that some 100 musicians belonging to the Afghanistan National Institute for Music had been able to leave Afghanistan on 03.10.21 with the support of Qatari diplomats. They are believed to include many members of the Zohra women's orchestra.

Humanitarian situation

It was reported on 15.10.21 that the customs were preventing approx. 50 trucks transporting medicinal products from entering Afghanistan. As Afghanistan imports the majority of its medication, this would further shrink the already scant reserves in the country. It was reported on the same day that ten children had died of exposure, malnutrition and a lack of medical care at camps for internally displaced people in Kabul. At the summit in Rome on 13.10.21 the G20 resolved to avert a collapse of the economy in Afghanistan. Germany undertook to provide EUR 600 million for humanitarian aid, while the EU announced that it would provide one billion euros for Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries which were admitting Afghan refugees. It was emphasized that this was in no way to be construed as recognising the Taliban government, however. On 14.10.21 the People's Republic of China undertook to provide humanitarian aid to the sum of US\$ 30 million. The World Food Programme (WFP) stated on 13.10.21 that it would be providing humanitarian aid for five million people in northern Afghanistan, explaining that 60 % of the population there were currently living below the poverty line. It added that the same applied to the people in Bamian province. On the same day, Iranian relief supplies for the victims of the bomb attack on a Shiite mosque on 08.10.21 reportedly arrived in the city of Kunduz. On 13.10.21 it was reported that the central hospital in the city of Herat was in urgent need of support. Patients are apparently travelling to the hospital from the surrounding provinces, where the healthcare system has already ground to a halt. Patients in Herat are allegedly required to buy the medicines for their treatment at the hospital themselves. According to a bulletin on 12.10.21, food and fuel prices have doubled since the middle of August 2021.

Angola

Constitutional court annuls election of UNITA party leader

Only a few days after the opposition coalition, Frente Patriótica Unida (FPU; cf. BN of 11.10.21) was formed, it was reported in the media that the constitutional court had announced a verdict which calls into question the possibility of the FPU's Adalberto Costa Júnior running for presidential office in the elections scheduled for 2022. According to the verdict, the leader of the largest opposition party, União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), was elected to his post in breach of the law on political parties and UNITA's own constitution. UNITA's leadership election took place back at the end of 2019. Ten members of UNITA reportedly brought the action before the court. Since August 2021, the presiding judge at the constitutional court has been Laurinda Cardoso, a former undersecretary and member of the governing party Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA).

Bangladesh

Disturbances in response to alleged blasphemy

Violent disturbances broke out in the Cumilla district on 13.10.21, following the circulation in social media of photographs showing a Koran on the knees of a statue of the Hindu god Hanuman. The ensuing outrage led to demonstrations attended by hundreds of thousands of people in Cumilla and neighbouring districts. The enraged crowds reportedly attacked and destroyed around ten Hindu shrines and temples and smashed statues of Hindu deities to pieces. Following intervention by the security forces, four Muslims were reportedly killed in as yet unclarified circumstances and dozens of people were injured. Further disturbances took place on 15.10. and 16.10.21 in the capital, Dhaka, and in the southern town of Begumganj. In Dhaka the security forces used tear gas and water canons. Muslim and Hindu believers reportedly staged separate protests, some of which were attended by several thousand people. More than 80 Hindu shrines which had been prepared for the Hindu festival Durga Puja appear to have been attacked. According to varying reports, two or three additional people were killed in these disturbances and one report refers to 150 injured Hindus.

Bangladesh / Myanmar

Support from UNHCR for refugees on Bashan Char

On 09.10.21 the Bangladeshi government and the UN signed an agreement to support the Rohingya on the island of Bashan Char. According to the UNHCR, the agreement comprises support in the areas of protection, education,

qualification, subsistence and health. The Bangladeshi government announced plans to relocate some 81,000 refugees from the severely overcrowded refugees in the Cox's Bazaar region to the island in the Bay of Bengal in the coming months. According to various sources, around 19,000 people have been taken to Bashan Char to date since December 2020. The plans are controversial, however, due to the island's remoteness and its vulnerability to storms and flooding. There are regular reports of people wishing to return to Cox's Bazaar or being apprehended by security forces when attempting to leave the island.

Belarus

Many people arrested for comments on shootout

The authorities have arrested numerous individuals who have posted comments in the social media on an exchange of fire on 28.09.21 in which a secret service officer and an employee of an IT company died in an apartment in Minsk. The authorities state that 136 people had been arrested in this connection up to 06.10.21. According to human rights organisation Wjasna, approx. 120 people have been detained. President Lukashenko announced on 01.10.21 that those who had criticised the killed officer and the government would be punished.

Burkina Faso

Attack claims lives

Two members of the security forces died on 11.10.21 when their vehicle passed over a mine in Farakorosso (Cascades region). There has been a strong increase in such attacks with improvised explosive devices since 2018. According to figures from the Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency, almost 300 security personnel and civilians have died in such attacks since 2018.

Côte d'Ivoire

UN High Commissioner for Refugees recommends ending refugee status for Ivorian refugees

According to a UN bulletin on 07.10.21, the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, has recommended the revocation of refugee status for refugees from Côte d'Ivoire with effect from 30.06.22, in view of fundamental and lasting changes in the country. The UN states that there are some 91,000 Ivorian refugees and asylum seekers worldwide at present, with 51,000 in West Africa alone. More than 278,000 Ivorian refugees have reportedly returned voluntarily to their native country since 2011. The recommendation to end refugee status for Ivorian refugees forms part of a comprehensive strategy to resolve the situation pertaining to Ivorian refugees which was adopted by Côte d'Ivoire, UNHCR, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Togo and other stakeholders in Abidjan in September 2021. Apart from enabling voluntary return and integration, further options envisaged in the strategy paper include settlement permits and naturalisation in the refugees' current countries of residence. Grandi praised the regional efforts which had led to the repatriation of Ivorian nationals from Liberia, noting that 5,000 people had been reunited with their families since the end of August.

Hundreds of thousands of people fled civil wars in Côte d'Ivoire between 2002 and 2007 and in 2011 and 2012.

Cuba

Government prohibits planned demonstrations

On 12.10.21 the government rejected an application for nationwide demonstrations which the Archipelago group was planning for 15.11.21. While the authorities declared the protests to be unconstitutional and destabilising, the coalition of young Cubans, artists and activists led by Yunior García demanded civil liberties, including the right to peaceful protest and an amnesty for imprisoned opponents of the government. The mayor of Havana, Alexis Acosta, claims that the announced protests violate Art. 56 of the constitution, according to which protests are permissible but "public order and compliance with regulations" must be upheld. Nationwide protests took place on 11.07.21

(cf. BN of 19.07.21), when thousands of people took to the streets in various towns and cities to demonstrate for freedom and against suppression and the economy of scarcity.

DR Congo

Provinces under siege: Civilians remain subject to military justice

Press reports in October 2021 show that civilians have repeatedly been brought before military courts, at least in the province of North Kivu, which is under siege. This is at odds with the statement by justice minister Rose Mutombo at the beginning of September 2021 to the effect that she had approved the restoration of criminal jurisdiction to civil courts in the regions of North Kivu and Ituri, which are subject to the state of emergency (cf. BN of 06.10.21). Criminal jurisdiction was initially transferred entirely from civil to military courts when the state of siege came into effect at the beginning of May 2021 (cf. BN of 17.05.21). This reportedly resulted in an overstrained and overwhelmed judicial system, with extreme backlogs of cases and overcrowded prisons (cf. BN of 12.07.21). Following formal indictment by the military prosecutor, defendants such as singer Idengo Delcato, who has been charged with “incitement to take arms against the authority of the state and demoralising the armed forces and the police”, and two activists of the citizens’ movement Lutte pour le Changement (Lucha) who were arrested three months ago find themselves having to stand trial before a military court in North Kivu. According to further media reports, at least one of the total of 44 criminal trials taking place before a military court in Goma (North Kivu) concerns a civilian, who is accused of raping children.

Ituri: New wave of internal displacements

Citing the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN radio station, Okapi, reported on 14.10.21 that more than 100,000 people had become internally displaced in the wake of the attacks by the Islamic fundamentalist group Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF) on the town of Komanda and the surrounding villages in the Irumu region of Ituri province (cf. BN of 04.10.21 and 27.09.21) between 23.09. and 01.10.21. At least 95 % of the resident population of Komanda and the surrounding area and 40,000 of the people who sought refuge in the region in 2020 have reportedly taken flight. According to OCHA, those who have fled lack food, water and healthcare in their places of refuge. Quoting local sources, Radio Okapi also stated that 70 % of the villages in the Irumu region are difficult to access, making it more difficult to provide humanitarian aid. Various NGOs have reportedly ceased operating in and around Komanda, on account of the security situation. According to press reports over recent weeks, various attacks by diverse armed groups in Ituri province have led to further cases of internal displacement. The clashes on 17.10.21 between the Congolese armed forces and the militia Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO) in the grouping of Peti, in the Walendu Djatsi sector of the Djugi territory alone apparently displaced more than 5,000 people. According to one resident, several villages have been virtually depopulated.

Ethiopia

Ethiopian army launches ground offensive against Tigray groups

Western diplomats have confirmed reports from the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) concerning a military offensive in the north of the regional state of Amhara (cf. BN of 11.10.21). Following the deployment of combat aircraft, artillery and drones, a large-scale ground offensive is reportedly now underway by the Ethiopian army and its affiliated Amhara militias. Troop movements have also been reported in the regional state of Afar.

The TPLF states that the armed forces took advantage of the ceasefire which was announced at the end of June 2021 (cf. BN of 19.07.21) to rearm and recruit thousands of soldiers. Few details of the fighting are known, on account of

a strict communications blackout imposed by the government. The UN fears that the fighting will further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in the region.

Gambia

Situation regarding the rule of law, human rights situation

Gambia has dropped eight places in the Rule of Law index of the NGO World Justice Project and now ranks 89th among 139 assessed countries worldwide. At regional level, Gambia ranks tenth among 33 examined sub-Saharan countries. With regard to the key factors, such as constraints on government powers, corruption, regulatory enforcement, civil and criminal justice and fundamental rights, there have largely been only minor deteriorations in performance compared with last year. The key factors are assessed methodically on the basis of household and expert surveys.

Regarding the composite indicator of the safeguarding and protection of (eight selected) fundamental rights, drops in performance apply to sub-factors such as the principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination, the guarantee of the right to life and security, the right to due process of law and the rights of criminal suspects. The scores for these sub-factors are well below the global average and also fall short of the regional average. Marginal drops in performance compared with last year are to be observed in the area of freedom of belief and religion and freedom of assembly and association. These ratings continue to be above the global average, however. The situation regarding freedom of opinion shows no changes compared to last year. The ratings for this sub-factor remain above the global average. Drops in performance are to be observed in the area of freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy.

Georgia

Tens of thousands of people demonstrate for the release of ex-president Saakashvili.

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets of the capital, Tiflis, on 14.10.21 to call for the release of imprisoned ex-president Michail Saakashvili. The banners bore messages such as “Freedom for Saakashvili” and “No to political persecution”. The demonstration went off peacefully and without incident. The 53 year-old former president was arrested when he returned to Georgia from exile in Ukraine on 01.10.21. He has since reportedly gone on hunger strike in prison. Saakashvili was sentenced in absentia to several years’ imprisonment in 2018 for abuse of office - a charge he rejects as politically motivated. Saakashvili stressed that he had returned to Georgia to support the opposition and “to restore democracy”. Prime minister Irakli Garibashvili countered that Saakashvili’s sole aim was to “destabilise the country and stir up agitation”.

Guinea

Freedom of the press under pressure

Contrary to initial announcements, de facto restrictions on the freedom of the press do apply in the wake of the coup of 05.09.21. Only state broadcaster RTG was able to attend the “national consultations” and the swearing-in of Mamady Doumbouya as interim president and Mohamed Béavogui as prime minister (cf. BN of 20.09.21 and 11.10.21); private media were excluded. On 09.10.21 the headquarters of the Djoma Média group, which is considered close to former president Alpha Condé, was searched by soldiers - allegedly without a search warrant. Urtelgui, an association of private broadcasters, and the trade union Syndicat des Professionnels de la Presse de Guinée (SPPG) called on the interim government to uphold the freedom of the press.

Haiti

Missionaries and dependants abducted

17 members of the missionary organisation Christian Aid Ministries were abducted to the east of the capital, Port-au-Prince, on 17.10.21. The abductees comprise seven women, five men and five children from the USA and

Canada. According to police inspector Frantz Champagne, a criminal organisation by the name of “400 Mawozo” is suspected of having seized the group. He said that the gang kidnapped five priests, two nuns and three relatives back in April 2021, later releasing them. Gang crime and kidnappings continue to increase in the face of the volatile security situation. More than 600 kidnappings have already been recorded between January and September 2021, as compared to only 221 cases over the same period last year. The criminal groups demand high ransoms, often in excess of US\$ 1 million, and according to human rights associations they sexually abuse their female kidnap victims.

India

COVID-19 pandemic: Overview, vaccination rate and socio-economic consequences

The number of reported new coronavirus infections has been falling continually since May 2021. India has reached its preliminary vaccination target of one billion administered doses. To date, over 70 % of adults entitled to vaccination have reportedly received at least one vaccination dose and around 30 % are fully vaccinated. India plans to open up again for international tourism on 15.11.21.

The closures which took place due to the pandemic in 2020 made the livelihoods of those segments of society which are marginalised under the caste system more precarious, especially for women. Women are reported to have been affected particularly severely by the loss of employment. According to a study by Azim Premji University, some 100 million people lost their jobs during the nationwide lockdown from April to May 2020. Most of these resumed work again in June 2020, however, while 15 million remained unemployed through to the end of 2020. Of the working men, 61 % retained their employment, while 7 % lost their jobs on a permanent basis. In contrast, only 19 % of working women retained their employment, while 47 % lost their jobs on a permanent basis. Almost half of all formally employed persons switched to self-employment (30 %) or informal employment (19 %). The study states that the effects of the labour market situation are having particularly negative consequences for the food situation of women from the lowest castes (Dalits) and for tribeswomen (Adivasis).

Kashmir: Hostilities and military operations

Five soldiers were killed in a skirmish with rebels in the part of Kashmir under Indian control on 11.10.21. According to information from the military, they were ambushed and shot at. The incident took place during an operation launched by Indian forces in response to targeted killings which occurred, among other places, in the city of Srinagar last week (cf. BN of 11.10.21). Five rebels were killed in the course of two subsequent military operations on 11./12.10.21. According to local residents, the soldiers blew up a house in which civilians lived in one of the operations, which claimed three lives. This was described as a customary tactic of the Indian troops in the region. Tens of thousands of civilians, insurgents and members of the security forces have been killed since 1989 in hostilities in this region with a majority Muslim population.

Iran

Civil rights activists arrested

According to media reports, well-known civil rights activist Sepideh Qolyan was arrested on the night of 11.10.21. 30 female law enforcement officers forced their way into the young woman's apartment in the city of Ahvaz in southern Iran and took her to an unknown location. Qolyan is currently serving a five-year prison sentence and was on parole at the time of her arrest. The activist was arrested for the first time in November 2018 in connection with the workers' protests at the Neyshekar-e Haft Tappeh sugar company and was subsequently released on bail. She was later sentenced to a five-year prison term, which she began at Evin prison in June 2020. On 10.03.21 she was moved to the prison in Bushehr in the south of the country. In September 2021 she took advantage of a period of parole due to a COVID-19 infection to report on conditions at this prison in a Twitter series. Her reports of torture and sexual exploitation of female prisoners were taken up on various occasions by Iranian media abroad. New criminal proceedings were instituted against Qolyan on 20.09.21. She is charged with spreading lies on the internet and carrying out propaganda activities against the system.

More protests by teaching staff

According to reports in the media on 14.10.21, further protests have taken place in more than 30 towns and cities by teachers and educational staff who are demanding higher salaries and a new pay system. At protests in towns and cities including Tehran and Bandar Abbas (Hormozgan province) they have also called for the release of imprisoned colleagues who were arrested in connection with previous protest rallies staged by retired teachers and teaching staff without civil servant status (cf. BN of 04.10.21). According to press reports on 11.10.21, the spokesman of the teachers' association in Gilan province who was arrested in this connection has since been released on bail.

Births to underagemothers as a result of child marriages

According to media reports, the national registration authority puts the number of children born to underage mothers (10 to 14 years of age) in the period from March to October 2021 at approximately 791. The province of Sistan and Balochistan shows the highest number of such births, at 248. It is followed by the provinces of Khuzestan with 92 births, Razavi Khorasan (65), Golestan (46), Kerman (45) and East Azerbaijan (35). Human rights organisations consider this to be a direct consequence of child marriage. According to information released by the statistical authority in August 2021, marriages of girls in the age group between 10 and 14 rose by 10.5 % in 2020 compared with the previous year (cf. BN of 30.08.21). Under the Iranian civil code, girls are officially able to marry from the age of 13. In actual fact, marriage is also possible for girls of a younger age, subject to the consent of the male guardian and a judge.

Iraq

Elections

Elections to the Council of Representatives - the national parliament - took place on 10.10.21. On the basis of a provisional result announced on 17.10.21, the party of Shiite preacher Muqtada as-Sadr has emerged as the winner, with 72 seats (previously 54), but can only claim a relative majority in parliament, with its 329 seats. The other parties representing the Shiites who make up the majority of the population, which have dominated the past 20 years, have shrunk substantially. The Kurdish opposition party, Gorran, which has formed part of the government at times, has lost nearly all its voters and is now no longer represented in the Iraqi parliament. The Fatah Alliance, which serves as the political arm of the Popular Mobilisation Units - that is, the large, Shiite-dominated militias - suffered major losses, taking 17 direct seats. With the help of independent candidates who are supported by the Fatah Alliance, its tally totals around 30 seats (previously 48). The turnout of around 41 % was the lowest to date.

Kosovo

People injured in clashes

According to media reports on 13.10.21, clashes between the police and Kosovo Serbian civilians have occurred in the course of a nationwide operation to combat smuggling. The incidents took place in the Serb-dominated northern part of the city of Mitrovica, where police were searching for smuggled goods. Several groups of people blocked roads with trucks and threw Molotov cocktails, explosive devices and stones at the police forces. The police deployed tear gas and flash grenades, and also opened fire on a civilian, wounding him. Ten police officers were injured. The law enforcement forces arrested eight people.

Arrests in connection with planned terrorist attacks

It has been reported in the press that the police arrested five members of an Islamist group on 10.10.21. The public prosecutor accuses the men of planning terrorist attacks in Kosovo and of violations of the law on weapons and gun control. Explosive devices, assault rifles, an anti-tank weapon, ammunition, drones and cash were seized in houses searches in the Peja and Prizren regions. The court of first instance in Pristina has ordered the men to be remanded in custody for 30 days. One of the accused was expelled from Germany as an IS supporter in 2015.

Lebanon

Fighting in Tayouneh

Armed clashes occurred in the Tayouneh district of Beirut on 14.10.21 between supporters of Hezbollah and the Amal movement on one side and the army and hitherto unknown forces on the other. There is some disagreement as to the precise chain of events. It began with at least several hundred supporters and militia men of Hezbollah and Amal demonstrating for the removal of the judge who has been appointed to investigate the explosion in the port of Beirut on 04.08.20, whom they accuse of being biased against Hezbollah. At the time of the explosion, the relevant part of the port and the competent authorities were largely in the hands of Hezbollah.

Weapons were fired in the course of the protests. It remains unclear so far who was the first to open fire. The protests took place in a Christian district of the city. Masked individuals allegedly fired from the rooftops. Exchanges of fire ensued. The army attempted to separate the parties, in the course of which fire was exchanged between the army and Hezbollah. Amal and Hezbollah each lost three militia men and an uninvolved civilian woman was also killed. In social media and on news channels, Amal and Hezbollah accuse the Christian Lebanese Forces party of being behind the masked attackers. This is denied by the party. Lebanon is experiencing its worst armed clashes since 2008. In view of the country's desolate situation and the failure of anyone to assume political responsibility for the explosion in the port of Beirut, both local and international observers fear a further escalation.

Montenegro

Pride parade in Podgorica calls for further strengthening of LGBTIQ rights

At the ninth Pride parade on 16.10.21 in Podgorica, LGBTIQ activists called for further improvements to the rights of the LGBTIQ community and full implementation of the law on same-sex partnerships. According to a current media report, the demands focus on the as yet outstanding complete harmonisation of the legal system with the law adopted in 2020, under which Montenegro became the first non-EU Balkan state to legalise the registration of same-sex partnerships. The Pride parade organised by the NGO Queer Montenegro reportedly took place in compliance with the COVID-19 security measures. The event was attended by various high-ranking government representatives, including prime minister Dritan Abazovic, foreign minister Dordje Radulovic and the minister of finance and social affairs, Milojko Spajic, as well as representatives of political parties and other NGOs. The report notes that, despite the most recent positive comments from official sources, homosexuality continues to be a sensitive issue in this enduringly socially conservative country, as previous surveys show that 71 % of the population regard homosexuality as a disease or a danger.

Myanmar

UN concerned at actions by the military, clashes in Mandalay, Sagaing, Yangon and Kayah

A UN press release on 08.10.21 expresses concern at reports of recent weeks, according to which the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) has undertaken large-scale troop deployments in the townships of Kanpetlet and Hakha (federal state of Chin), Kani and Monywa (Sagaing region) and Gangwa (Magway region). An increase in the number of attacks, including killings, was reportedly recorded in these areas in September 2021. There have also been increasing numbers of raids on villages, in the course of which houses were set on fire. It is suspected that these actions are intended to uncover resistance forces and to punish village communities which sympathise with local People's Defence Forces (PDF) or armed ethnic armies. There are also reports of mass arrests, torture and summary executions, as well as artillery and air strikes on villages.

According to a report on 15.10.21, Tatmadaw troops set fire to several houses and a church in two villages in the federal state of Chin on 13.10. and 14.10.21.

Around 50 Tatmadaw soldiers were reportedly killed by civilian resistance groups and local PDFs in violent clashes, attacks and by land mines in the Mandalay, Sagaing and Yangon regions and in the federal state of Kayah between 13.10. and 15.10.21.

Nicaragua

Prison conditions for political prisoners

According to reports in local and international media, the condition of a number of political prisoners has deteriorated significantly, including student leader Lesther Alemán, who has been in custody for more than 100 days, and the former director of the daily newspaper La Prensa, Juan Lorenzo Holmann Chamorro. Relatives were allowed to visit their family members for the second time in the week of 11.10.21. They subsequently reported that the prison conditions were particularly harsh, including a lack of medical treatment for existing medical conditions, lighting which remained on for 24 hours, assignment to totally sealed-off cells in continual darkness or total isolation and a ban on talking. Long interrogation sessions take place at all times of the day and night, with no lawyers present. The majority of the 37 political prisoners who have been in custody since May 2021, including former presidential candidate Félix Maradiaga, have reportedly suffered serious losses of weight. In addition, political prisoners such as Max Jerez and José Adán Aguerri were not able to take their leave of dying close relatives or to attend their funerals.

Curtailement of freedom of expression and freedom of the press

The director of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) for Latin America noted on 16.10.21 during a visit to Costa Rica that the organisation was observing a “cocktail of censorship” by the Nicaraguan government against the remaining free media in the country. By way of substantiation, he cited the shutdown of independent TV and radio stations, the closure of print media and numerous cases of hostility towards media representatives. In all, RSF has recorded more than 35 different forms of harassment of journalists between 2020 and 2021, including at least 157 cases of intimidation, 115 cases of hindering journalistic activities and the criminalisation of 83 media representatives. Since 2021, Nicaragua’s president Ortega has been on RSF’s list of “press freedom predators”. More than 40 journalists have gone into exile in recent months.

Niger

Ten killed in attack on mosque

According to information in the media, suspected jihadists killed ten people in an attack on a mosque in the south-western region of Tillabéri on 11.10.21. The attackers arrived on motorbikes and shot at the believers who were attending evening prayers at the mosque in the commune of Banibangou. On 13.10.21 the authorities subsequently renewed the ban on motorbikes in several areas of the Tillabéri region which is intended to prevent attacks by jihadists on motorbikes. The ban, which had been in place for some time, was temporarily lifted on 01.09.21. This year has witnessed repeated attacks by armed groups in the Tillabéri region on the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso, which have claimed numerous lives (cf. BN of 23.08.21). The precarious security situation and the recurrent attacks on the farming population and civilians have further exacerbated the already strained food situation. The UN has warned of a substantial food crisis in Tillabéri which could affect 600,000 people.

Nigeria

ISWAP leader Barnawi dead

It was reported in the media on 14.10.21 that military officials have announced the death of Abu Musab al-Barnawi. Barnawi was the leader of the Islamist terrorist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and is believed to have been the eldest son of Boko Haram’s founder, Mohammed Yusuf. No details were initially forthcoming as to the circumstances of his death. It is considered that ISWAP will remain a danger to peace and stability in West Africa. Following the death in May 2021 of Abubakar Shekau, the long-standing leader of the Boko Haram faction Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’Awati Wal-Jihad (JAS), ISWAP emerged as the strongest jihadist group in Nigeria (cf. BN of 23.08.21).

Attack on police station in federal state of Enugu

On 09.10.21 armed assailants attacked a police station in the town of Umulokpa in the southern federal state of Enugu. According to the official statement by a police spokesperson, a female police officer was abducted in the

course of the attack. The identity of the attackers has yet to be established. According to media reports, no-one was killed but the police station's armoury was looted. 2021 so far has witnessed a series of attacks on police officers, other security forces and security establishments such as police stations and prisons in the south of Nigeria (cf. BN of 27.09.21).

Students abducted from Catholic seminary

According to media reports, unknown assailants on motorbikes attacked a Catholic seminary in Kagoma in the north-western federal state of Kaduna on 11.10.21, abducting three students and injuring several others. Following an increase in mass kidnappings in the areas around educational establishments which began in December 2020, a substantial number of kidnab victims have recently been released (cf. BN of 27.08.21).

North Macedonia

Facebook page violates human dignity of Roma women

According to a recent media report, the police are looking into claims by human rights activists that private photographs and videos of Roma girls (many of whom are minors) and Roma women have been posted on a Facebook page which has been online for two months now, with the intention of exposing them. The police are reportedly working to apprehend the responsible individuals and to have the online content removed. According to police findings, cases of online abuse have increased over the past two years since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The human rights group Shuto Orizari Women's Initiative, which operates in Shuto Orizari, a municipality with a majority Romany population in Skopje, has reportedly stated that the posts contain private photographs and videos of Roma women from North Macedonia and abroad, and have triggered a flood of harassing comments and hate speech from individuals and calls for public lynching. The interior ministry has reportedly since launched a campaign by the name of "Say no", aimed at instilling a heightened awareness of the need to protect privacy and to combat online sexual abuse.

Pakistan

Journalist assassinated in Balochistan

A journalist was killed in Balochistan province on 11.10.21 when an explosive device attached to the car in which he was travelling blew up. The reporter for a Karachi-based Urdu-language TV station died of his severe injuries. The separatist Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) has claimed responsibility for the attack. Another journalist was killed in Balochistan back in July 2021. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) criticised the inadequate protection provided by the government for media representatives in Pakistan. According to its South Asia Freedom Press Report, a total of nine Pakistani journalists have been killed in attacks in 2020 and in 2021 to date.

Palestinian territories

West Bank: Increase in clashes during the harvest season

The Israeli military reported on 14.10.21 that it had opened fire on two suspicious individuals who were throwing incendiary bombs at passing cars on one of the main roads in the West Bank, close to the town of Beit Jala, south of Jerusalem. One of the suspects died of his injuries. The military took the other suspect into custody.

Also on 14.10.21, an Israeli border police officer was wounded in an alleged attack with a car on the Qalqilya border crossing point. In a separate incident, Jewish settlers attacked Israeli military personnel with pepper spray. The security forces were investigating claims that the settlers had illegally felled olive trees.

According to media reports, a group of Palestinian farmers were attacked by a group of residents from a nearby settlement in their olive orchard. Four people incurred minor injuries. The Israeli military reported that four settlers had been detained in connection with the incident.

It has been reported in the media that a minor settler was attacked by Palestinian residents from the area while he was tending his sheep near the city of Hebron.

Shortly afterwards, violent clashes occurred between settlers and Palestinian residents in the Palestinian town of Yasuf. According to Palestinian media, the Palestinian residents were attacked while harvesting in their olive orchard. According to information from the Israeli military, the harvesters had come too close to an unauthorised settlement without prior arrangement. Tensions between the residents of settlements and the Palestinian towns are a regular occurrence during the olive harvest.

Gaza Strip and West Bank: Convictions for collaborating with Israel

It was reported in the media on 17.10.21 that Hamas had sentenced two people to death for collaborating with Israel, while two others were sentenced to hard labour. It was not known when the sentences were to be executed. In the West Bank, a court in Bethlehem sentenced a man to 15 years in prison for attempting to sell land to Jewish Israelis. The sale of land to Jews can constitute a capital offence under the laws of the Palestinian National Authority.

East Jerusalem: Offer of settlement for residents in Sheikh Jarrah

According to reports in the media on 12.10.21, the Israeli Supreme Court has ordered four families to respond by 02.11.21 to an offer of a settlement for vacating their houses in the Sheikh Jarrah district of East Jerusalem. The action for eviction was one of the factors which sparked the military conflict in Gaza Strip in May 2021 (cf. BN of 10.05.21). This settlement would enable the Palestinian residents to remain in the houses as protected tenants for the next 15 years while the houses are recognised as the property of the Nahalat Shimon organisation. The residents, who up to that point had lived in their houses as de facto owners, were forced to pay annual rents to the organisation.

Rwanda

Renewed clampdown on the expression of opinions in social media

Following the conviction of a person operating a YouTube channel on 30.09.21 (cf. BN of 04.10.21), six more people were arrested on 14.10.21 on charges of spreading rumours against the government. Those arrested include the operator of a successful YouTube channel with over 16 million viewers and three members of an opposition party. The operator of the YouTube channel had called for human rights violations by the government to be denounced. The security agency Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) stated to the media that the arrested individuals had been an organised group and had aimed to spread rumours so as to bring about an uprising or unrest in the population. The agency claimed that various social media had been employed to this end.

Senegal

Clashes

On 11.10.21 clashes occurred in Ziguinchor in the Casamance region in the south of the country between supporters of Ousmane Sonko, the leader of the opposition Pastef party, and Doudou Ka from the Alliance for the Republic (APR) - the party of president Macky Sall - at an event in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in July 2022. A number of people were reported injured on both sides.

Somalia

Attacks

According to official information, at least three civilians were killed and several injured when a suicide attacker blew himself up in a busy restaurant in the Yaqshid district of Mogadishu on 12.10.21. In another incident on the same day, a secret service officer and two bodyguards were killed when their vehicle was hit by a land mine in the Daynile district of Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for this attack and also claimed that its fighters had ambushed security officers and killed more than twelve soldiers.

Sri Lanka

NGO report on torture

In September 2021 the organisation International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP), which by its own account aims to protect and promote justice and accountability in Sri Lanka, published a report on the torture of people held in custody by security forces in the island nation. In addition to information on the extent of torture in Sri Lanka in recent years and decades, the report also includes testimonies by 14 Tamil men and one Tamil woman who have fled to the United Kingdom. These were reportedly taken into custody by security forces in the country between 2019 and 2021, where they were tortured and the men in particular were subjected in some instances to extreme sexual violence. The report observes that the continuing climate of impunity in the island nation which has been marked by political and ethnic violence over many decades enables members of the security forces to arrest people without any charges and to torture them with virtually no consequences whatsoever.

There have been numerous reports of torture in Sri Lanka in recent years. In a report published in January 2021, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) stated that it continued to receive plausible claims from established human rights organisations detailing torture, abductions and sexual violence by Sri Lankan security personnel.

Sudan

Further demonstrations

Following the protests at the end of September 2021 calling for an entirely civilian transitional government (cf. BN of 04.10.21), last week witnessed further demonstrations in the capital, Khartoum. On 14.10.21, lawyers demonstrated against the military members of the transitional government and the security council. They called for the handover of power to a purely civilian government and a reform of legal and military structures.

According to media reports, thousands of people protested on 16.10.21 against the current civilian-military transitional government and called for it to be dissolved. One of the demonstrators' central demands was for an exclusively military government to be taken over by an initiative to be led by general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan – commander in chief of the army and chair of the civilian-military security council. The demonstration was organised by various political parties, including parts of the alliance Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC). In the course of the demonstration, clashes occurred between the demonstrators and supporters of a civilian government. Supporters of a purely civilian government have announced that they will hold demonstrations on 21.10.21.

Renewed violence in South Kordofan and Darfur

A person living at a camp for internally displaced people was shot dead and another person was injured on 12.10.21. The attackers stole the victim's mobile phone and fled the camp immediately. Although the incident was reported to the police, they did not take any action, allegedly because no vehicles were available. People living at the camp then attempted to find the attackers themselves. On 16.10.21 a farmer was shot dead in the village of Teiba, near to the city of Abu Jubeiha. According to reports from the Human Rights and Development Organisation (HUDO), armed attackers in uniforms of the Popular Defence Force (PDF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) shot the man dead and stole eleven of his cows. This incident was also reported in vain to the police. In substantiation of its claim of inaction by the police, HUDO additionally referred in the same report to a fatal attack on 02.10.21 in which a farmer was also shot dead. Here too, the case was reported to the police, who failed to follow it up.

Syria

Breakthrough in UN mediation endeavours

Geir Pedersen, special envoy for Syria, announced on 17.10.21 that the Constitutional Committee initiated by the UN had agreed to draft a new constitution for Syria.

The committee was set up in January 2018 and comprises representatives of the government, civil society and the Syrian opposition. Following the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011, in 2012 the United Nations passed a

resolution providing for the drafting of a new constitution and elections for Syria under the supervision of the UN. These elections are to include all Syrians, including those who have fled abroad. The current breakthrough in the negotiations was achieved only after president Assad staged elections in May 2021 which confirmed him in office for the next seven years. Attempts at mediation by the UN back in January 2021 failed.

Attacks in Turkish-occupied north, Turkey threatens new military offensive

A car bomb was detonated in the Turkish-occupied north of the country on 11.10.21. The attack took place at a marketplace and, according to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, not far from a position held by an Islamic group. Two Turkish police officers had died the previous day in the Syrian city of Azaz when their armoured vehicle was hit by a rocket which was allegedly fired from Tel Rifaat, an area under the control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). In a press conference after a cabinet meeting, Turkish president Erdoğan stated that this and other recent attacks had contributed to the current escalation. On 15.10.21 two Turkish government officials told the Reuters news agency that a new military offensive in Syria was being planned.

Togo

Publication of a newspaper suspended

Following a decision by the High Authority for Audio-Visual Media and Communication (HAAC), publication of the weekly newspaper The Guardian is to be suspended for four months as of 12.10.21. According to official information, the newspaper's publisher, Ambroise Kpondzo, failed to appear in response to two summonses by the HAAC. He was supposed to state his position on articles published in the newspaper which the HAAC considers to have propagated false information about the introduction of a COVID-19 vaccination passport.

Tunisia

Attacks on freedom of the press

Various sources, such as RSF and the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists, SNJT, reported on 15.10.21 that a number of attacks on journalists by the police and demonstrators had occurred following the removal from power of the parliament and the former head of the government. The office of TV station Al-Jazeera has reportedly also been raided, on the grounds that Islamism had been granted too much scope.

New government sworn in

On 11.10.21 president Saïed swore in 24 members of the new cabinet, including eight women. Most of the members of the government have no previous involvement in party politics.

Turkey

Legal proceedings against 18 media representatives

Legal proceedings took place from 11.10.21 to 15.10.21 against 18 journalists, the majority of whom work for Kurdish media. The defendants are accused of spreading propaganda or belonging to a terrorist organisation. Some are additionally accused of breaching law no. 2911 on assemblies and demonstrations. The Turkish interior ministry decreed in April 2021 that media representatives require a permit to report on protests.

Arrests of suspected Gülen supporters

On 15.10.21 the chief public prosecutor's office in Ankara issued arrest warrants against 98 persons within the gendarmerie's general command on suspicion of carrying out activities for the Gülen movement. A further 46 people were detained in police operations in 45 provinces. According to reports in the media, the investigations were carried out in order to identify users of coin-operated telephones which the Turkish public prosecutor's office suspects of having been used for clandestine communications by members of the Gülen movement.

In another investigation initiated by the public prosecutor's office in Balıkesir, arrests warrants were issued against 15 persons for alleged links to the Gülen movement. 15 people, including three civil servants, were arrested in raids conducted simultaneously in Balıkesir, Istanbul and Düzce.

Arrests of suspected DHKP-C members

On 15.10.21 Turkish security forces arrested 54 people in a number of provinces who are suspected of having links to the radical left-wing Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C). The public prosecutor's office in Istanbul issued arrest warrants against 126 people who, according to media reports, had allegedly planned terrorist attacks and had received weapons training. The search for further suspects continues.

Venezuela / Curaçao

Violation of Venezuelan asylum seekers' human rights, breaches of non-refoulement principle

A report published by Amnesty International (ai) on 11.10.21 concludes that the human rights situation for Venezuelan asylum seekers on the former Dutch Antillean island of Curaçao has not improved since 2018. The organisation has documented 22 cases of Venezuelan nationals, including minors, who have been victims of human rights violations on Curaçao. These include automatic imprisonment in inhumane conditions, abuse, separation of families and refusal of the right to apply for asylum. In a number of cases, for example, officials at the immigration authority reportedly pressured new arrivals into signing an untranslated removal order in Dutch, in breach of the non-refoulement principle.

Venezuela

Political prisoner dies in prison

The former defence minister, Raúl Isaías Baduel, died in prison as a political prisoner on 12.10.21. While chief public prosecutor Saab claims that he died as a result of infection with coronavirus, his relatives, lawyers and the opposition assert that inhumane treatment and acts of torture in prison led to his death.

After leaving the governing United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in 2009, he was convicted for the first time in the same year of allegedly stealing money belonging to the Bolivarian armed forces and of alleged abuse of power. Following his conditional release in 2015, which was revoked in January 2017, he was additionally charged in March 2017 with treason and incitement to rebellion, for which he had been in prison ever since.

Relatives and the secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS) have called for Baduel's body to be exhumed and for an independent autopsy to establish the cause of his death. The opposition described Baduel as the tenth political prisoner to die in prison. According to information from NGO Foro Penal, the number of political prisoners currently stands at 259.

Extradition of Alex Saabs, suspension of dialogue with the opposition, imprisonment of the so-called Citgo 6

According to information from the US Justice Department, Alex Saab, a Colombian businessman and ally of the Maduro government, was extradited to the USA from Cabo Verde on 16.10.21. In the USA he is accused, among other things, of money laundering in connection with his activities as a contractor for the Venezuelan government. He is to be brought to trial in Florida on 18.10.21.

In recent weeks the Maduro government had warned against extradition and attempted to include Alex Saab in its delegation at the second dialogue event with the opposition. When this was refused, it appeared one day later than planned at the talks concerned in Mexico City by way of protest.

In the wake of the extradition, Jorge Rodríguez, the speaker of parliament and a representative of the government delegation, announced on 16.10.21 that the dialogue with the opposition, which was supposed to continue on 17.10.21, was being suspended. Also on 16.10.21, six management personnel - five US citizens and a holder of a permanent US residence permit - of the Citgo company (US subsidiary of the Venezuelan state oil company, PDVSA) who had previously been under house arrest on alleged corruption charges were arrested by the authorities and taken to El Helicoide prison by the Venezuelan secret service (SEBIN). Media and relatives see this as a reprisal for the extradition. Various protests against Saab's extradition also took place in Caracas on 17.10.21.

Vietnam

Supporter of the Provisional National Government of Vietnam arrested

A man was reportedly arrested on 15.10.21 in a coordinated police operation between Lam Dong and Ho Chi Minh City on suspicion of participating in the banned exile organisation Provisional National Government of Vietnam. He is accused of activities to overthrow the government. The organisation based in the USA has been classified as a terrorist organisation by the Vietnamese government since 2018.

Yemen

Hundreds killed in fighting in Marib

On 11.10.21 the Saudi-led anti-Houthi coalition began to step up its air strikes against the Houthi rebels. According to the coalition, at least 700 Houthi fighters have since been killed. The coalition's air strikes come in response to the Houthis' advance towards Marib - the last city under government control in northern Yemen. The coalition states that it has carried out an average of between 19 and 42 air strikes a day in the region around Marib. The Houthis are further accused of having laid siege to the Al-Abdiya district to the south of the city of Marib for tactical reasons, in effect cutting off the area. Internally displaced people and medical consignments are unable to leave the area and relief supplies cannot enter.

Saudi Arabia intercepts Houthi drone

On 12.10.21 the Saudi-led anti-Houthi coalition intercepted a drone of the Houthi rebels which was loaded with explosives and was aimed at the Saudi city of Khamis Mushait. On 13.10.21 the coalition destroyed two boats loaded with explosives off the coast of Hodeida, which it claims had been brought into position for attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea. Neither of the incidents involved any casualties.

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