

Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Government affairs

It was reported on 31.10.21 that the Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akkhundzada, had shown himself in Kandahar province for the first time since the Taliban assumed power. On 01.11.21 the Taliban approved the construction of the TAPI gas pipeline from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. The border crossing point to Pakistan in Chaman/Spin Boldak was reportedly reopened on 02.11.21. Thousands of Afghans (including women and children) are said to have crossed the border into Pakistan on the first day, and 200 trucks transporting medicine and food also crossed the border. On 03.11.21 the Taliban government banned the use of foreign currencies in the country, stipulating that the afghani was to be used as the sole means of payment. On 08.11.21 the Taliban government announced that new governors had been appointed in 17 provinces, with new appointments totalling 43 in all.

Violence against civilians / hostilities

It was reported on 27.10.21 that 30 cases of violence against journalists had occurred since the Taliban assumed power. The majority of the offences were committed by the Taliban themselves. It was also reported that armed robberies were on the increase in Kabul. On 01.11.21 it was reported that 34 fighters from the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) had joined the Taliban. It was also reported on the same day that former army soldiers had joined ISKP. 19 people were reportedly killed and approximately 34 injured in two bomb attacks carried out by ISKP on 02.11.21 in the area around the Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan military hospital in Kabul. An important Taliban commander (Hamdullah Mukhlis) was allegedly killed in the attacks. Five armed men then reportedly stormed the hospital and were shot dead by Taliban. Three people were reportedly killed in two bomb attacks in the city of Jalalabad (Nangarhar province) on 07.11.21.

Women's rights / education / LGBTIQ

Young girls demonstrated for the nationwide reopening of girls' schools on 29.10.21. These schools remain closed in a number of provinces. In Kandahar province, schools which were destroyed in the fighting first of all need to be rebuilt. On the same day, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the Taliban are instituting stricter rules on virtue than was initially publicly declared. In many provinces, the rules contained in a "vice and virtue handbook", which stipulates which women may serve as chaperones for other women and prohibits parties with music as well as adultery and same-sex relationships, for example, apply by law. Some 29 members of the Afghan LGBTIQ reportedly arrived in the United Kingdom on 30.10.21. The British government intends to fly out further members of the community. HRW reported on 05.11.21 that the Taliban were hindering aid workers in most provinces.

Humanitarian situation

UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated on 26.10.21 that 50 % of the Afghan population was at risk of acute food insecurity for the winter. On 28.10.21 it was reported that 2,500 internally displaced families from Kabul had

been relocated to their original places of residence. The US government announced on 29.10.21 that it was making US\$ 144 million available as humanitarian aid for Afghanistan. The United Kingdom pledged US\$ 68 million of aid at the G20 summit. It was reported on 31.10.21 that the prices of wood, bread and petrol were rising continually as winter approaches. Snow fell in a number of provinces (Bamiyan, Badakhshan, Panjshir, Salangha, Maidan Wardak) in mid-October 2021. It was reported that the UNHCR had delivered 33 tonnes of winter gear to Kabul for internally displaced people on 02.11.21, with further flights planned for 04.11. and 07.11.21. On 03.11.21 the central bank announced that people may now withdraw US\$ 400 a week from their bank accounts. In addition, 500 families have allegedly received humanitarian support in Parwan province. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced that it would be directly supporting 4,000 poor families in Kabul with the equivalent of US\$ 33 a month for the next four months. On the same day the UNHCR stated that there were 3.5 million internally displaced people in Afghanistan, 500,000 of whom could be supported in the coming winter. On 04.11.21 UNICEF announced its intention to set up a system via which Afghan teachers could be paid directly. It was reported on 06.11.21 that growing numbers of Kabul residents are selling their furniture on the street to obtain money for food.

Bangladesh

Violence ahead of local elections

Violent incidents have been reported from various parts of the country ahead of the second phase of local elections, which are to take place on 11.11.21. A number of people were injured in clashes between supporters of rival candidates in the districts of Patuakhali, Bogura and Pirojpur on 30.10. and 31.10.21. Four people were reportedly killed and around 50 injured in violent clashes between supporters of two rival politicians in the sub-district of Sadar (Sylhet district) on 04.11.21. In addition, at least two people were reportedly killed and more than 20 injured in the Cox's Bazar, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Pirojpur and Pabna districts in violence connected with the elections between 05.11. and 08.11.21.

Belarus

Measures to control online communication

The authorities have stepped up their measures to control communication on social media. At the end of October 2021 the police arrested dozens of people in the city of Gomel who had registered with a Telegram channel which is classified as extremist. The human rights organisation Wjasna has reported that a female student was sentenced to 15 days' imprisonment for this offence, following a three-minute court hearing. Similarly, on 01.11.21 a court in Minsk sentenced a journalist and his wife to 15 days in prison for sharing extremist content on Facebook. The ministry of information announced on 28.10.21 that access to three news websites, including Deutsche Welle, had been blocked.

Benin

Suspected jihadists arrested

Four suspected jihadists were arrested in an operation by the security forces in the town of Kouatena (department of Atacora) on 24.10. and 25.10.21. The Beninese nationals were the subjects of a manhunt. They are accused of membership of a terrorist organisation.

Burkina Faso

Attacks claim lives

Ten people from the town of Dambam (Sahel region) died on 01.11.21 when they were attacked by unknown assailants on their way to a market in a neighbouring town.

On 31.10.21 unknown attackers killed five members of the police at a police station in the town of Di (Boucle du Mouhoun region).

Security forces killed around ten people in operations in the Cascades region between 25.10. and 31.10.21. Three members of the security forces died in an attack by unknown assailants in Comoé province, while an attack in Oudalan province claimed the lives of two other members. Both provinces are situated in the Cascades region.

Central African Republic

Call for full investigation into attack on MINUSCA

Ten Egyptian police officers belonging to the UN's MINUSCA mission were injured, two severely, on their way to their base in Bangui, when the presidential guard opened fire on their vehicle, which according to MINUSCA was clearly marked "UN". The incident took place on 01.11.21 around 120 m from the president's residence. The unit, which had just arrived in the course of the customary rotation process, was allegedly unarmed at the time and the presidential guard did not provide any warning. In the attempt to leave the area, the bus containing the Egyptian police officers ran into an uninvolved woman, who died of her injuries. According to a spokesperson, UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the attack and called on the Central African authorities to spare no effort in identifying those responsible and bringing them to justice, adding that an attack on UN peace-keeping troops could constitute a war crime. According to media reports, the government has described MINUSCA's depiction of the incident as false, alleging that the bus had entered a prohibited area around the president's palace, the Egyptian police officers had photographed the residence and the driver had been ordered to stop. A MINUSCA report of 12.10.21 apparently documents 41 breaches of the MINUSCA covenant in the period from 01.06.21 to 01.10.21, including hindrance of patrols, the detainment of UN personnel and searching their accommodation.

Chad

Rebel groups prepared to enter into dialogue

Following preliminary talks between representatives of the transitional government, which has been in power since May 2021, and the Union des forces de la résistance (UFR), an alliance of various rebel groups, the UFR has stated that it is prepared to take part in the dialogue of national reconciliation initiated by Mahamat Déby, chair of the Transitional Military Council (CMT), subject to certain conditions. Among the UFR's demands are the release of war prisoners, a general amnesty and the return of seized property.

DR Congo

Eastern Congo: Critical security situation

According to press reports from October and November 2021 there have been repeated attacks, some on a large scale, by rebels and militias in various eastern provinces, as well as hostilities between the Congolese army and armed groups. This violence reportedly resulted in a high number of casualties, razed villages and numerous abductions, sparking a new wave of internal displacement. Various Mai-Mai groups and, in particular, the radical Islamic group Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF) and the militia Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO), are seen as bearing the main responsibility for this violence in North Kivu province, above all in the territories of Beni, Lubero, Masisi and Ituri (the latter with a key focus on the Djugu territory). Various Mai-Mai groups have also carried out several attacks directly in South Kivu's provincial capital, Bukavu, for the first time since 2017. Recent months have witnessed repeated reports verifying a worsening of the security situation in the Fizi, Uvira and Mwenga territories of South Kivu province (cf. BN of 25.10.21). On 05.11.21 civil society warned of increasing activities by the Twirwaneho rebels and their allies in the highland regions of Mwenga, Uvira and Fizi. Other reports indicate that the security situation is tense on the Kalemia-Nyunzu axis in the northern part of Tanganyika province. Isolated attacks are attributed to the Mai-Mai-Hapa na pale and a Twa militia. According to Anaclet Kabamba, civil society coordinator in the Congo, the presence of the troops of the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) remains necessary in parts of Tanganyika province due to the continuing bad security situation. He said that a number of armed groups continued to operate unabatedly in several regions of the Nyunzu and Bendera territories. On 25.10.21 Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, ruled out a withdrawal of MONUSCO troops from the northern parts of

Tanganyika in view of the continuing violence there. In July 2021 MONUSCO had held out the prospect of a troop withdrawal from Tanganyika province by mid-2022, subject to a corresponding assessment of the situation (cf. BN of 12.07.21).

North Kivu, Ituri: State of siege extended, human rights violations

At the beginning of November 2021 the Congolese representative bodies approved a further 15-day extension to the state of siege which has been in place in Ituri and North Kivu provinces since the beginning of May 2021. This represents the eleventh such extension and means that the military and police forces continue to hold far-reaching powers of intervention (cf. BN of 17.05.21). Criminal jurisdiction was initially transferred entirely from civil to military courts when the state of siege came into effect. Although justice minister Rose Mutombo stated at the beginning of September 2021 that she had approved the restoration of criminal jurisdiction to civil courts even if the state of siege continued, press reports from October and November 2021 indicate that civilians continue to be tried before military courts (cf. BN of 18.10.21). 57 parliamentarians from North Kivu and Ituri voted against an extension to the state of siege for the first time, on the basis that the security situation in the provinces had continued to deteriorate despite this measure. A number of MPs called for the military governors of the two provinces to be removed and introduced a motion of no confidence against the defence minister.

While the government reported military successes, including the liberation of towns and hostages, the killing of armed combatants and arrests of combatants and collaborators, various civil society organisations and the appointed defence and security committee of the national assembly have pointed to a further worsening of the security situation and highlighted the poor structures in place to ensure the respect of human rights in the provinces. According to the parliamentary committee, massacres of the civilian population have increased since the state of siege was imposed and serious human rights violations have been on the rise. Members of the military judiciary, including military judges, are accused of committing human rights violations of various kinds and levels of severity, or of being involved in such incidents. The committee is calling, among other things, for an end to the collection of illegal taxes and the military's collaboration with various armed groups, as well as the release of human rights activists who are in prison because they have called for peace and good governance. On 02.11.21 the forum of women's leaders from the two provinces complained that women and children were in particular danger as a result of the unsafe situation and the risk of malnutrition.

According to the US monitoring group Kivu Security (KS), almost 1,000 civilians have been killed since the state of siege entered into force six months ago. KS puts the number of civilians killed in 2019 and 2020 at 1,070 and 1,569 respectively. Meanwhile, UN radio station Okapi has reported that 75 civilians were killed in Ituri province alone between 18.10. and 01.11.21. According to civil society, the state of siege has not led to any improvement of the security situation in the city of Beni or North Kivu's capital, Goma, either, with human rights violations and crimes continuing unabated in a climate of impunity.

Situation of journalists

According to the report "Mauvais temps pour la presse en RDC", which the NGO Journalists en Danger (JED) presented on 02.11.21, at least 110 attacks of various types on media representatives have been recorded in 2021 to date. More than half of all cases involved threats to or violation of the physical integrity and safety of media representatives and almost half of all cases were reported from the eastern provinces, in particular the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu, in which the state of siege applies. Media representatives face intimidation, attacks and in some instances assassination, and are being forced underground. The report sees the pressure on media representatives as emanating both from political spheres and from non-state armed actors. According to JED, four journalists have been murdered in the two provinces which have been placed under a state of siege and there are no indications of any criminal investigations being initiated into these cases. JED alleges that the new government has failed to improve either the legal framework or the environment in which journalists work, despite all its assurances to the contrary. State and non-state reports repeatedly present a critical picture of the situation regarding freedom of the press in the country and point to the repressive and dangerous climate for journalists (cf. BN of 01.03.21 and 26.07.21).

Egypt

Four-year state of emergency lifted

On 25.10.21 president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced the lifting of the state of emergency which had been in force since April 2017. It was introduced after more than 40 people were killed in attacks carried out by an Islamist group on two Coptic churches. Under the emergency legislation, the Egyptian security forces were invested with greater powers and freedom of speech and assembly were severely restricted. On 01.11.21 parliament passed a number of amendments to the law which are aimed at upholding a stronger standing for the president, the military and the security services in the context of counter-terrorism.

Ethiopia

Conflict intensifying – government declares state of emergency

On 01.11.21 the government imposed a state of emergency for six months. Among other things, this authorises the installation of road blocks, the interruption of communications links, the recruitment of adults, the assumption of administrative roles by the military in certain areas and the detainment of suspects with links to “terrorist” groups for the duration of the state of emergency. In addition, the population in the capital, Addis Abeba, has been called on to take up arms against the militia of the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), if necessary. In an address on Facebook, prime minister Abiy said that everyone was under an obligation to “stop, destroy and bury” the rebel troops. It is unclear whether the TDF is actually intending to advance as far as the capital, some 400 km away. The Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) - the TDF’s political leadership - has stated that the TDF will march to Addis Abeba, should its aims in Tigray so require. Shortly before this statement, its sole aim was allegedly to break the blockade which was preventing humanitarian aid from reaching the Tigray people. The UN estimates that no aid convoys have reached Tigray since mid-October 2021. Over five million people are reportedly dependent on food aid there, with some 400,000 in acute danger of starving to death.

TDF reports substantial territorial gains

In the days leading up to the state of emergency, the TDF conducted an offensive which saw it capture the city of Dessie and the town of Kombolcha in the regional state of Amhara. The Ethiopian military stated that it had withdrawn on tactical grounds in order to avoid civilian casualties, and accused the TDF of having arbitrarily shot dead more than 100 young people in Kombolcha. A TDF representative described the accusation as “completely false”. No independent information is available, as the majority of telephone and internet connections have been blocked.

Dessie - one of the largest cities in the country - and Kombolcha are considered strategically important, as the main road linking Addis Abeba and the port of Djibouti, which represents Ethiopia’s most important transport link, is situated only 80 km to the west. Djibouti handles around 90 % of Ethiopia’s foreign trade. Parts of this route are reportedly already under the control of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which joined forces with the TDF in August 2021 (cf. BN of 16.08.21).

On 04.11.21 - one year after hostilities broke out between the army and the TDF - Abiy nevertheless stated that the military was on the verge of victory. Meanwhile, attacks by the Ethiopian air force - officially on military targets alone - continue to take place in Tigray (cf. BN of 25.10.21).

Ethnic Tigrays detained in Addis Abeba

There have been eye witness reports of ethnic Tigrays being stopped for ID checks, having their homes searched and being detained in Addis Abeba. The security forces have stated that measures against “TPLF supporters and nostalgics” have been stepped up. Hundreds of Tigrays are reportedly being held at military camps on the grounds that they are TPLF sympathisers.

UN calls for ceasefire and negotiations between the warring parties

The UN Security Council has called for a ceasefire and the commencement of a comprehensive national dialogue. It also considers the humanitarian situation alarming, noting that the continuing fighting is leading to the large-

scale displacement of people accompanied by a growing need for humanitarian support, as a large number of displaced people from the surrounding areas are already in the region.

Hundreds of thousands protested against the TPLF, as well as the international community, at demonstrations organised by the government on 07.11.21.

UN report provides evidence of severe human rights violations

A report published by the UN on 03.11.21 accuses all parties involved in the Tigray conflict of violations of international human rights, international humanitarian law and refugee law. UN human rights commissioner Michelle Bachelet said that some of these violations may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. She noted that the conflict was “characterised by extreme brutality”, stating that in addition to attacks on civilians and civilian institutions the conflict had also witnessed torture, maltreatment, arbitrary arrests, looting, sexual violence and the displacement of people. She said that all the parties involved bore responsibility, adding that while the majority of the crimes to date had been committed by the Ethiopian and Eritrean armed forces, accusations against the TDF were also becoming more frequent.

Gambia

Private press conference of No Alliance Movement broken up, criminal proceedings

According to reports in the media, on 25.10.21 the police used force to break up a press conference organised on private grounds by the only recently founded No Alliance Movement of exiled former president Yahya Jammeh. The organiser, a journalist and two other individuals who later protested to demand the organiser’s release were reportedly detained but released on bail on the same day. The journalist is said to have been injured in the course of his arrest. Yahya Jammeh founded the No Alliance Movement on 15.10.21, declaring the electoral alliance between his former party, Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), and the People’s Party of president Adama Barrow in connection with the presidential elections on 04.12.21 null and void in the absence of his consent (cf. BN of 13.10.21). While Yahya Jammeh arbitrarily declared himself leader of the APRC, replaced the party’s entire leadership and presented a new electoral alliance partner (which has since been replaced again), the APRC under the leadership of Fabakary Tombong Jatta denied the former president’s legitimacy. There are reports of violence between supporters of the APRC party and the No Alliance Movement, which claims that it is the legitimate party.

New prosecutions for human trafficking

Press reports from October 2021 indicate that two new trials are pending on charges of human trafficking. According to official information, several trials for human trafficking have been conducted in the reporting year of 2021 to date (cf. BN of 19.07.21). Three people have each been sentenced to prison terms of 15 years for human trafficking (cf. BN of 12.07.21). According to the US Department of State’s annual report “Trafficking in Persons 2021”, there is no knowledge of any convictions for human trafficking in the past four reporting years.

Georgia

Local government elections: Governing party wins run-offs as well

In the local government elections on 30.10.21, the governing Georgian Dream party also emerged victorious from the second round on 30.10.21, winning 19 of a total of 20 run-offs, including those in the capital, Tiflis, and in the other four major cities of Batumi, Kutaisi, Poti and Rustavi. The largest opposition party, United National Movement, only led the field in the Tsalenjikha region in the west of the country. Referring to the results in the other regions and cities, its representatives spoke of electoral fraud and called on people to protest.

Opposition continues to demand release of ex-president Saakashvili

A large number of people demonstrated in the city of Rustavi on 02.11.21 for the immediate release of ex-president Michail Saakashvili, who has been in prison there since 01.10.21. He has been on hunger strike since his arrest and is believed to be in very poor health. His lawyers and doctors have called for him to be transferred to a hospital in Tiflis. Saakashvili was sentenced in absentia to several years’ imprisonment in 2018 for abuse of office – a charge he

rejects as politically motivated (cf. BN of 18.10.21). Hundreds of opposition supporters called for his release in Rustavi once again on the weekend of 06./07.11.21.

India

Open Doors on situation of Christians

Open Doors is warning about the recently escalating spread of hate and violence against the 67 million Christians who live in India. According to the organisation, India ranks tenth among the countries in which it is most dangerous for Christians to live their faith. It alleges that the violent and sometimes fatal attacks, which often go unpunished, are perpetrated for the most part by Hindu nationalists.

Hindu nationalist groups such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have been fomenting hatred of Christians and other religious minorities in the country for years, claiming that they used force or dishonest means to convert Hindus to their faith. These assertions have been sparking mass protests in central India for a number of months. According to Open Doors, the police are regularly placed under pressure to take action against alleged forced conversions by Christians. In many federal states, this purportedly leads to the authorities making arrests and imposing restrictions on the free practice of religious faith.

Social media are also seen as increasingly contributing to the spread of religiously motivated violence. Those operating such channels often refuse to remove hate campaigns and videos showing violent attacks on Christians. Reports by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) claim, for example, that Facebook gives preference to prime minister Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and rarely takes action against religious propaganda. A study produced by the London School of Economics on behalf of Open Doors reports of disinformation against religious minorities being propagated in an uncontrolled manner.

Hate campaign against Christians in Chhattisgarh

According to Indian media, on 01.10.21 a prominent Hindu nationalist, Swami Parmatmanand, called for proselytising Christians to be beheaded at a rally in the federal state of Chhattisgarh which was attended by leading members of the ruling BJP. According to the chairman of the Christian Forum, Arun Pannalal, at least ten attacks on Christians have been reported to the police in Chhattisgarh in the past two weeks and the police and the government have failed to take any action.

Iran

Instagram users detained

According to reports in the media, 17 Instagram users have been arrested in the city of Behshahr (Mazanderan province) and accused of aiming to propagate a western lifestyle and harmful practices. The arrests were carried out by the Cyber Police (FATA). Officials are cited as stating that the accused had disseminated offensive images and publicised models and inappropriate content. Their aim was allegedly to incite young Iranians to fraudulent behaviour. The individuals concerned have reportedly since been transferred to the competent judicial authorities.

Prison sentences for protesters in Tabriz

The first criminal trial has taken place in connection with the protests and unrest in the summer of 2021. The trial took place from 25.10. to 27.10.21 at branches 111 and 112 of the criminal court in Tabriz. The accused were three men who had taken to the streets in Tabriz out of solidarity with the protesters in the south-western province of Khuzestan. One of the defendants was in hospital at the time of sentencing, where he was recovering from serious injuries resulting from a beating by a security officer. The three defendants were arrested directly after the demonstrations and subsequently released on bail. The sentences have yet to be pronounced, however. The beginning of July 2021 marked the start of weeks of protests and unrest in Khuzestan (cf. BN of 12.07.21, 19.07.21 and 26.07.21). The protests were sparked by shortages of water and electricity and the economic marginalisation of the south-western province, in which the country's Arab minority makes up the majority of the population. The protests gradually spread to other cities and towns.

Brief detention of individuals ahead of memorial event for deceased blogger

According to media reports, the mother and sister of the blogger Satta Beheshti, who died in 2012, were briefly detained by security forces on 03.11.21. A memorial event to mark the ninth anniversary of Beheshti's death and also to remember the victims of the November protests in 2019 was to be held in the presence of his mother on 04.11.21. The activist was arrested and charged in November 2012. According to press reports, he died as a result of torture by security agents in prison. A prison officer was subsequently sentenced to three years in prison and 74 lashes. In the same context, other individuals who had gathered at the activists' grave ahead of the memorial event were reportedly also arrested.

Kurdistan Human Rights Network: Increase in transfers of prisoners to high-security prisons

Citing Kurdish human rights organisations, on 26.10.21 foreign media reported on the transfer of two prisoners on death row in Urumiyeh prison (West Azerbaijan province) to an unknown location. One of the two men was reportedly convicted of membership of a Kurdish opposition party. According to a bulletin from the Kurdistan Human Rights Network on 04.11.21, they have been transferred together with six other individuals to a high-security prison of the Revolutionary Guards (pasdaran) in Urumiyeh. The Human Rights Network notes an increase in such transfers of prisoners since the end of September 2021. A special report by the organisation refers in this connection to secret prisons of the secret service ministry and the Revolutionary Guards in the cities of Urumiyeh, Sanandaj and Kermanshah in which prisoners, including Kurdish activists, have allegedly been tortured and abused.

Death sentence for adultery upheld by the Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has upheld a controversial death sentence handed down to a man and a woman for adultery. The trial took place at the instigation of the man's wife, who filed an action and submitted comprehensive evidence in the form of video recordings. In the face of the overwhelming evidence, the two accused made a confession in court. The death sentence has now been confirmed by the Supreme Court, although the plaintiff has since withdrawn her action.

Iraq

Operations against IS (escalation in Diyala)

The conflict with IS in Diyala province has been escalating since 26.10.21. The IS attacked a Shiite village in the Muqdadiyah district, killing 15 people, most of whom belonged to a single large family. The IS stated that the victims were members of a PMF militia. There is every indication, however, that an escalation between different villages and families was being stoked here by the IS. Two days later a revenge attack took place on a neighbouring Sunni village, claiming at least seven lives. The Iraqi government responded by dispatching troops to the region. Politicians and religious leaders of all ethnic groups represented in the region travelled to the area to calm the situation. Since 03.11.21, central Iraqi and Kurdish forces have been conducting a large-scale joint security operation against IS in the region. Security operations have also been stepped up substantially in other parts of the country - specifically Salah ad Din and Kirkuk - and efforts to track down IS have been intensified; numerous arrests have been made.

Protests against election / attack on prime minister Kadhimi

After Friday prayers on 05.11.21 there were renewed protests by pro-Iranian groups against the election results, which saw the Fatah Alliance - the militias' political wing - lose almost two thirds of its seats. The protests escalated when the protesters attempted to enter the "Green Zone" in Baghdad. At least 125 people were injured. On 07.11.21 a drone packed with explosives hit the home of prime minister Kadhimi in the Green Zone. The prime minister was unharmed, but at least six of his bodyguards were injured. No information on any fatalities has emerged as yet. Directly after the attack, Kadhimi called for moderation. Pro-Iranian groups denied accusations that they were behind the attack.

Lebanon

Economic situation

Lebanon's economy remains in a downward spiral. On 04.11.21 further price increases were announced for petrol and bread, which continue to be highly subsidised. 20 litres of petrol now cost around half of the official minimum wage.

The desolate economic situation is being further exacerbated by a diplomatic crisis. Responding to questions from young people from the region on a TV show, information minister Kordahi criticised the Saudi presence in Yemen and asserted that the Houthis had a right to defend themselves. As a consequence, since the end of October 2021 various countries, including Saudi Arabia and Yemen and a number of allied Gulf monarchies, have recalled their ambassadors from the country and imposed economic sanctions, which has a further severe impact on Lebanon, as the country's relatively small volume of exports goes primarily to the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia is now calling for the dismissal of Kordahi, whose supporters include Hezbollah, which lends the Houthis in Yemen moral support at least.

Mali

Seven die in attacks on troops

It has been reported in the media that seven members of the Malian armed forces died in two terrorist attacks on 30.10.21. Two troops were killed near the town of Mourdiah, some 200 km north of the capital, Bamako. Only two hours later, an army truck drove over a bomb near the town of Ségou, around 200 km north-east of Bamako. All five people travelling in the vehicle were reportedly killed.

Accusation of extralegal killing

According to a report from Human Rights Watch (HRW), the bodies of eight civilians were found in the town of N'Dola in the central region of Ségou on 25.10.21. One villager has alleged that the victims were executed during a counter-terrorism operation by the government. A government spokesperson confirmed that the operation did take place near N'Dola and that 14 people were arrested, but denied any involvement in extra-legal killings.

According to official information, five of the seven local administrative divisions in the Ségou region are already in the hands of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), a jihadist group with links to Al Qaeda. The jihadists are reportedly driving out teachers and health workers, killing people who work in the farming sector and laying siege to villages.

Sanctions against transitional government

According to media reports, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed sanctions such as travel bans and the freezing of foreign assets on members of the Malian transitional government and members of their families on 07.11.21, after the transitional government announced that it would be unable to hold the elections for a new president and parliament on 27.02.22, as originally planned.

Mexico

Migrant caravans: Cuban dies

On 31.10.21 a Cuban national was killed and four other migrants were injured when the national police fired live ammunition in clashes between migrants and police in Chiapas. On 05.11.21 local media carried reports of tear gas being deployed against migrants, who responded by throwing stones. Families were separated when arrests were made in the course of an operation by state security forces and members of the migration authority on 07.11.21.

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press: Two more journalists killed

According to information from the NGO Reporters Without Borders, fatal attacks were perpetrated on two journalists in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, and Acapulco on 28.10.21. Both victims died of their injuries. This means that nine media representatives have been killed in Mexico in 2021 to date, already surpassing the total for last year as a whole (8).

Morocco

UN's MINURSO peace mission extended by one year

The UN Security Council extended the MINURSO peace mission in Western Sahara by one year on 29.10.21. The mission was deployed in 1991 in order to secure the ceasefire and peaceful negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front, which is fighting for the independence of Western Sahara and its population, the Sahrawi people. In 1975 the former Spanish colony declared the majority of Western Sahara to constitute Moroccan territory.

Myanmar

Renewed escalation of violence in Chin, Shan and Sagaing

Following the murder of a junta soldier by a fighter of the Chinland Defence Force (CDF), Myanmar army troops (Tatmadaw) shelled the largely deserted town of Thantlang in Chin State on 29.10.21. According to local media reports, 160 houses and two churches were burned to the ground. The offices of the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) and the children's rights organisation Save the Children were also destroyed. At the end of September 2021, almost the entire population of Thantlang fled to villages along the Indian border and into the Indian federal state of Mizoram in the face of fighting between the Tatmadaw and local resistance groups (cf. BN of 20.09.21). Further clashes between the Tatmadaw and CDF combatants occurred between 30.10. and 04.11.21, with casualties on both sides.

Fighting between the Tatmadaw and local People's Defence Forces (PDF) in the federal state of Shan on 27.10. and 02.11.21 forced a total of around 700 people to flee from Pekon Township. Fighting with fatalities and air raids by the military were also reported between 28.10. and 03.11.21 from Demoso (federal state of Kayah), Kyunhla, Kanbalu and Kalay (Sagaing region).

Reports of systematic torture and crimes against humanity

According to information from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), the number of people killed as a result of police and military force since the military coup on 01.02.21 has risen to at least 1,243. 7,079 people are currently in prison on political grounds and arrest warrants have been issued for a further 1,954 individuals (as per 06.11.21). A report based on interviews with 28 former prisoners, AAPP employees and a deserted Tatmadaw officer which was published on 28.10.21 and a report by the transgender author Saw Han Nway Oo, who was recently released from prison, indicate the systematic use of torture and sexual abuse during arrests and in prisons throughout the country. Most recently, two men died while being interrogated by the military in Chauk (Magway region) and Sintgaing (Mandalay region). One was accused of supporting a local PDF, while the other was involved with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

UN investigator Nicholas Koumjian reported on 05.11.21 that the military's actions constituted a "widespread and systematic attack on the civilian population in Myanmar" which amounted to crimes against humanity. He said this assessment was substantiated by more than 1.5 million pieces of evidence which the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) had collected since the coup d'état and which it was currently analysing.

Nicaragua

Parliamentary and presidential elections

Parliamentary and presidential elections took place on 07.11.21, with the incumbent Ortega and vice-president Murillo standing for re-election. In the ballot, which was described by the opposition and various foreign governments as a farce and a sham election, the incumbents ran against five largely unknown candidates, following the arrest of seven presidential candidates with good prospects in recent months (cf. BN of 26.07.21). Many Nicaraguans stated beforehand that they would be boycotting the ballot in protest at a lack of freedom and fairness in the elections, while a number of civil servants reported that they were coerced into voting by intimidation. Priests spoke of attacks on believers and attempts to intimidate them into voting; Facebook and other social media removed various fake profiles which were intended to attack and delegitimise the opposition. After monitoring the elections, the national NGO Urnas Abiertas estimates that around 80 % of the population abstained from voting and reports irregularities and numerous instances of hostility, threats and acts of political violence on the day of

the elections. Various independent international reporters were refused entry into the country or - as happened to a team from the Honduran newspaper El Heraldo - after gaining entry, they were immediately expelled again on migration-specific grounds, despite meeting all the relevant conditions. International election monitors were not accredited, either. The NGO Urnas Abiertas reported the arrest of a total of 21 government opponents between 05.11. and 07.11.21, 17 of whom are still in custody in the wake of the election. The NGO IM Defensoras additionally recorded the disappearance of two defenders of human rights between 06.11. and 07.11.21.

Niger

At least 69 killed in attack on delegation

According to reports in the media, at least 69 members of a delegation headed by the mayor of the commune of Banibangou died in an attack by suspected jihadists in the south-west of the country, not far from the border with Mali, on 02.11.21. Only 15 people survived the attack. The mayor and a leader of a self-defence militia were among the victims. The attackers fled over the border to Mali after the attack, taking their dead with them. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack to date. According to information in the media, more than 530 people had already died this year in the border region of south-western Niger as a result of acts of violence by Islamist groups, prior to the attack of 04.11.21.

15 soldiers killed in the south-west

According to information in the media, around 15 members of the armed forces were killed and a number of people were injured in an armed attack on a remote military outpost in the commune of Anzourou in the south-western region of Tillabéri on the evening of 04.11.21. While no group has claimed responsibility for the attack as yet, security circles are blaming it on the jihadist group Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).

Nigeria

Attack on mosque claims lives

According to media reports, between 16 and 18 people were killed in an attack on a mosque in the Maza-Kuka community in the federal state of Niger on 25.10.21. The armed attackers reportedly arrived on motorbikes and opened fire on people who were gathered for morning prayers.

Many people abducted from church

According to reports in the media, 66 members of the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Kakkau Daji in the federal state of Kaduna were abducted by around 50 armed persons on 31.10.21. The attackers reportedly stormed the church during morning service. One person was killed and several injured in the attack. The kidnappers are reported to have shot dead two of the hostages on 06.11.21, with three others seriously injured by gunshots. The kidnappers are apparently not demanding any ransom money, but rather a round-table discussion with the government.

New ISWAP leader appointed

According to media reports, Sani Shuwaram is the new leader (wali) of the IS-linked jihadist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). His appointment apparently took place in the presence of an IS delegation at the de facto ISWAP headquarters in Kurnawa (Abadam local government area) at Lake Chad in the north-eastern federal state of Borno. Sani Shuwaram succeeds Malam Bako, who was killed by the Nigerian military in October 2021. Bako had, in turn, only recently taken over the leadership from Abu Musab Al-Barnawi, after the latter was killed (cf. BN of 18.10.21).

North Macedonia

Prime minister Zaev announces resignation after defeat in local elections

Following a clear defeat for the governing Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) in the local elections on 31.10.21 it has been reported in the media that the incumbent prime minister, Zoran Zaev, stated on the evening of

the election that he assumed full responsibility for the result and was resigning as prime minister and also as the SDSM leader. According to reporting on the elections, the SDSM lost 41 of its previous tally of 57 mayoral seats, thus ceding the vast majority of the 80 local authority districts, including the capital, Skopje, and other important cities to the opposition party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and to independent candidates (20 town halls). The loss of the SDSM's mayoralty in the national capital, Skopje, to the independent candidate Danela Arsovska, who was supported by the opposition, is said to have been a major contributory factor to Zaev's decision to resign. Zaev has yet to tender his resignation in parliament. The deadline for this is 08.11.21.

Pakistan

TLP breaks off protest march

Supporters of the Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) broke off their ten-day protest march to the capital, Islamabad, in Wazirabad, which is around 200 km from the capital, following talks with government officials on 31.10.21 (cf. BN of 25.10.21). Thousands of demonstrators have called for the French ambassador to be expelled in connection with the publication of caricatures of the prophet Mohammed in France in 2020. The demonstrations became violent in some instances. At least seven members of the security forces were killed and dozens of demonstrators were injured. The TLP has announced that a sit-down strike will be continued in Wazirabad to demonstrate for the release of its imprisoned leader, Saad Rizvi. In its campaign for the parliamentary elections in 2018 the TLP defended the blasphemy laws, which stipulate the death penalty for insulting Islam or the Islamic prophet, Mohammed.

Torkham border crossing point reopened

The Afghan-Pakistani border crossing point at Spin Boldak/Torkham reopened for goods traffic and commuters at the beginning of November 2021, following a one-month closure. Thousands of people reportedly entered Pakistan on the first day after the reopening. Some 200 trucks crossed the border in the opposite direction into Afghanistan, carrying food, medicine and relief supplies.

After Pakistan lifted the permit requirement for Afghan nationals wishing to cross the border at the end of September 2021 (cf. BN of 04.10.21), the Afghan Taliban closed the border crossing point at the beginning of October 2021. This border crossing point has been closed a number of times since the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan in August 2021.

Palestinian territories / Israel

West Bank: Israeli authorities issue building permits

Israeli authorities announced the approval of 1,300 Palestinian homes in the West Bank on 25.11.21, several days after presenting plans for the construction of more than 3,000 homes for settlers in the West Bank. These plans met with disapproval in the international community, including in European countries and the USA.

West Bank: Palestinian minor killed

On 05.11.21 the Israeli military shot dead a 13 year-old Palestinian boy in clashes with the Palestinian population in the village of Deir al-Hatab. According to information from the military, large numbers of Palestinian men and women attacked the Israeli troops with stones and the military responded with live ammunition. No other cases of serious injury were reported.

East Jerusalem: Families in Sheikh Jarrah reject settlement offer

On 02.11.21 the four Palestinian families from the East Jerusalem district of Sheikh Jarrah rejected the offer of a settlement which they had received from the Israeli supreme court (cf. BN of 18.10.21). The settlement offer would have enabled them to pursue further legal steps in the future, but would have been tantamount to recognising the Nahalat Shimon settlers' organisation, to whom the families concerned would have had to pay rent. Following the rejection of the offer, the Israeli supreme court will now have to pass a judgement.

Gaza Strip: Convictions for drug trafficking, including one death sentence

On 21.10.21 the Hamas-led Military Justice Commission announced the passing of 13 sentences, including a death sentence for drug dealers. The seized drugs have been destroyed. The commission's chair, Nasser Suleiman, announced the intention to speed up legal proceedings against people who smuggle narcotics through the closed military zone at the border in future. Critics complained that the cases were tried before a military tribunal rather than a civilian court and expressed concern that the plans to speed up trials did not offer defendants adequate opportunity to put up a defence.

Republic of the Congo

Remand prisoners make up majority of prison population

In a statement dated 01.11.21, the chairman of L'Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture au Congo, Christian Loubassou, revealed that the majority of the people held in the country's prisons are remand prisoners. Conditions in Congolese prisons are repeatedly described as exceptionally bad (cf. BN of 04.11.21).

Saudi Arabia

Demonstrator on death row released after a decade

Ali al-Nimr, who was arrested as a minor in 2012, was released by the Saudi authorities on 27.10.21. Al-Nimr was charged with betrayal of the ruler and sentenced to death in 2012 at the age of 16 in connection with his participation in Shiite-led demonstrations. His uncle, a well-known Shiite cleric, critic of the Saudi government and key leader of the Shiite protests in eastern Saudi-Arabia in 2011, was executed on the basis of similar charges in 2016.

Al-Nimr has benefited from a presidential decree dating from 2020 which enables the subsequent lifting of death sentences for persons who were minors at the time of committing the offences concerned. A man who was sentenced to death as a minor on similar charges was executed in June 2021, however. At least two other persons who were also sentenced to death as minors remain in prison.

Somalia

Fighting in Guriel: Ceasefire, AMISOM accused of active involvement

The minister of information in Galmudug, Ahmed Falagle, announced on 27.10.21 that the Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a (ASWJ) had agreed to a ceasefire and that hostilities between the Somali army (SNA) and the ASWJ militias had ended in Guriel (Galmudug) (cf. BN of 25.10.21). Guriel is allegedly under the control of the SNA and Galmudug's security forces. According to reports in the media, the ASWJ has left the city, heading north into the Godwill region. The UN, the EU, the African Union and other international partners had previously warned in a joint statement that the fighting could worsen the humanitarian crisis and further delay the parliamentary and presidential elections. On 28.10.21, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) issued a statement denying reports that AMISOM soldiers had participated in the fighting in Guriel and had supplied the pro-government forces with weapons. AMISOM described the accusations as false, malicious and evidently intended to drive a wedge between AMISOM and the Somali people.

COVID-19 pandemic: Delivery of vaccine doses

Somalia received a further 163,000 vaccine doses under the COVAX initiative on 26.10.21. The vaccination rate among the population is low. To date, 289,925 people (1.85 %) have been fully vaccinated. 21,998 COVID cases and 1,208 deaths have been recorded since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020.

Three people convicted by Al-Shabaab

It has been reported in the media that Al-Shabaab has convicted three people in the Kuntunwarey district of the Lower Shabelle region. One man was stoned to death for allegedly having raped a girl. A second man was accused

of theft and had his arm amputated. A third man, who was accused of spying for the government, was publicly executed.

Next phase of elections begins

The first two MPs for the next 275-seat lower house of the national parliament were elected on 01.11.21. This is the next phase in the protracted parliamentary election process (cf. BN of 16.02.21, 26.07.21 and 02.08.21). The elections to the upper house have been completed in all member states apart from Galmudug. Following the formation of parliament, the president will be elected. As the elections continue to lag behind schedule, the international community has called for the election process to be speeded up.

AU diplomat expelled

The Deputy Special Representative of the AU Commission's Chairperson, Simon Mulongo, was declared a person non grata in a written declaration by the Somali government on 04.11.21. He is accused of participating in activities which are inconsistent with the peace mission. No further details of the attendant grounds are known. Mulongo is required to leave the country by 11.11.21. Mulongo has denied the accusations to Ugandan media.

Sri Lanka

Presidential task force "One Country, One Law" established

On 26.10.21 president Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced the official establishment of the 13-strong presidential task force "One Country, One Law", which aims to unify legislation in the country. In Sri Lanka, various laws exist alongside one another for the different ethnic and religious communities in the area of civil status legislation. According to the official announcement, the first task will be to carry out a study on implementation of the concept and to draft a corresponding bill. Rajapaksa used the slogan "One Country, One Law" in his 2019 election campaign. The announcement immediately sparked strong criticism from human rights circles, the science sector and representatives of the Tamil and Muslim communities. Criticism is aimed in particular at the appointment of the nationalist Buddhist monk Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thero, co-founder of the organisation Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force, BBS) as the chair of the task force. Thero is accused of initiating violence against the Muslim community (in 2014, among other instances). In addition, the monk was sentenced to a six-year prison term for contempt of court in 2018, but was pardoned by former president Sirisena after only nine months. Apart from the possibility of the task force bypassing the legislative, a further point of criticism is that the task force does not include any representatives of the Tamil minority or any women. The task force comprises members of mainstream Sinhalese Buddhist society and four Muslim scholars.

Sudan

Military coup

On 25.10.21 the military under the leadership of the highest-ranking general Al-Burhane detained the incumbent prime minister, Abdullah Hamdok, together with a number of his advisors and other members of the Sovereign Council, proclaimed a state of emergency and declared that the existing transitional government and the Sovereign Council were to be dissolved. The internet was also blocked under the state of emergency and use of the internet has since been highly restricted. After being detained at general Al-Burhane's home, the prime minister was taken back to his home on 27.10.21, where he was placed under house arrest and under permanent guard. The military has repeatedly called on Hamdok to cooperate with them, which he has always refused to do. Four civilian members of the transitional government were released again on 04.11.21. Other primarily high-ranking civilian members of the government remain in custody, however. According to reports in the media, Hamdok is now meeting with national and international interlocutors, but always in the company of military representatives. Sudan's ambassadors have also been recalled from the EU, the USA, China, France, Qatar, South Africa, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Geneva. In addition, further diplomatic staff at the foreign ministry have been relieved of their duties.

Background

The military has stated that it staged the coup because peace and security were in danger in Sudan and it had become necessary to act. It has provided assurances that the democratic transition process would be continued and that a civilian government was to be installed. Corresponding elections were announced for July 2023. An independent government is to lead the country until these elections. Ahead of the coup there had been frequent disputes between civilian and military representatives within the transitional government. An exact date for the impending change of leadership of the Sovereign Council was a topic of discussion, for example. Up to the coup, this council was headed by general Al-Burhane, but under the constitution it was to be handed over to a civilian in the near future. Another recurrent contentious issue was the planned handover of former president Al-Bashir to the International Court of Justice. Against the backdrop of the increasingly evident differences within the transitional government, supporters of the military leadership camped outside the presidential palace in which the transitional government resides on 16.10.21. On 21.10.21 supporters of the civilian transitional government protested against the army and its supporters and called for a civilian-led government.

Further course of events

On the day of the coup, 25.10.21, authorities and ministries supportive of the prime minister called for protests and strikes, which continue to this day. On 28.10.21 there was a call for a “march of millions” on 30.10.21. This led to large-scale protests in various towns and cities throughout the country on 30.10.21 which lasted until 01.11.21.

The coup and the detainment of the prime minister and other members of the transitional government met with sharp criticism from various quarters at both national and international level. The World Bank and the USA have frozen pledged funds for the time being - in the USA these amount to US\$ 700 million. The EU and Germany also warned that financial support would be discontinued on account of the coup. A planned cancellation of debts by international creditors may also be retracted. The African Union (AU) has suspended Sudan’s membership and excluded the country from the AU’s institutions until the civilian-led transitional government is reinstated. Russia, on the other hand, has described the coup as the “logical consequence of failed policy”. The UN Security Council was unable to agree on a joint declaration on the coup at an emergency session. In addition, Russia, China and Venezuela distanced themselves from a call for the adoption of a resolution calling on the member states of the UN to condemn the coup and to support the return to the civilian-led transitional government under prime minister Hamdok.

The Sudanese military has applied force and used live munition against the demonstrators from the outset. On 05.11.21 the UN reported at least 13 confirmed cases of civilians killed by the security forces. According to other sources, at least 14 people have been killed. In addition, more than 300 people have reportedly been injured to date. The security forces have a strongly increased presence on the streets, they are reportedly deploying military vehicles against road blocks in some instances and arbitrary searches, arrests and clashes with demonstrators are a frequent occurrence. Various African states, international partners such as the USA, the Arab League or the UN and also South Sudan are engaged in ongoing efforts to mediate between the civilian and military parties. The UN has repeatedly called for the parties to renounce the use of force, for example, and is calling for legal action against those responsible for the deployment of live munition and other violations of human rights in the military, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and other security forces.

The umbrella organisation of Sudanese trade unions, the Sudanese Professionals Association, called for two days of protests in the form of civil disobedience. Those participating in this protest are to suspend their professional activities. Preparations for the demonstrations were reportedly carried out in various towns and cities in the country on 06.11.21, in order to protest against the military’s actions on the following two days. In Khartoum the demonstrators set up barricades for this purpose. The security forces again used force against the demonstrators. A peaceful demonstration by around 100 teachers who assembled for a silent protest outside the education ministry, for example, was reportedly broken up by the police using tear gas. Between 80 and 87 teachers were arrested and several were detained at the military headquarters. In the capital of the South Darfur region, five teachers were arrested - some directly after prayers and others at home. Many people stopped work as part of the announced strike in this region as well, with bank employees joining the teachers. A number of bank employees were reportedly dismissed from their jobs directly after the protests last week. On 06.11.21 five senior managers from five different banks were reportedly dismissed and replaced directly by decree of general Al-Burhan.

In a statement, general Al-Burhane re-iterated that the military’s actions did not represent a coup, but rather a necessary step to safeguard the transition process, which had been at risk of failing. He further denied that the army

was responsible for the deaths of demonstrators. He said that committees of inquiry had been set up to establish what had actually happened.

Syria

Several attacks from Israel

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), an Israeli jet fighter shelled targets in the south of the governorate of Quneitra on 25.10.21. Two military outposts on the border with the Golan Heights, which have been annexed by Israel, were reportedly destroyed. No information is available on casualties. Syrian state media have also reported on an attack on 30.10.21 in which several surface to surface missiles were fired at a Damascus suburb from northern Israel. Two members of the Syrian military were allegedly injured. SOHR has reported that the missiles hit targets in the north-west of Damascus, killing five members of militias supported by Iran. Those killed had apparently escorted a consignment of weapons and ammunition into Lebanon beforehand. On 03.11.21 the Syrian army reported an Israeli air raid on a military installation in Zakia, close to the capital, which allegedly only caused material damage.

Togo

Opposition activist arrested

Jean-Paul Edoh Oumolou, an activist of the initiative Dynamique Mgr Kpodzro (DMK), was arrested in Lomé on 04.11.21.

The DMK supports Agbéyomé Kodjo, the opposition candidate who was defeated in the presidential election of February 2020. Kodjo claimed victory in the election and declared himself president. Following the initiation of criminal proceedings and his temporary detainment, Kodjo went into hiding abroad. He appointed an alternative government, whose members are also abroad, and ambassadors, including Oumolou. The latter is also spokesperson of the Togolese community in Switzerland (CTS). He was in Togo on a visit when he was arrested.

Publication of a newspaper suspended

On 03.11.21 the High Authority for Audio-Visual Media and Communication (HAAC) banned publication of the La Symphonie newspaper, which appears twice monthly, for two months. In its most recent issue, the newspaper had criticised the HAAC's decision in October 2021 to ban publication of the weekly newspaper The Guardian for four months (cf. BN of 18.10.21).

Turkey

Investigations into Twitter posts

According to reports in the media, legal action was taken against 30 social media users on 03.11.21 in connection with their Twitter posts concerning rumours of president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's death. The police stated that their posts were considered manipulative and insulting to the president and had offended his honour.

Arrests of FETÖ suspects

It has been reported in the media that raids in 40 different provinces on 02.11.21 led to the arrest of at least 43 people, after public prosecutors had issued arrest warrants against 100 individuals suspected of having links to the Gülenist terrorist group FETÖ. The suspects are said to be individuals who were part of FETÖ's efforts to infiltrate the general command of the Turkish gendarmerie.

In further operations conducted in six Turkish provinces on 03.11.21 more than a dozen suspects were arrested for allegedly having links to FETÖ. Arrest warrants were issued against 17 suspects who are accused of having infiltrated the Turkish armed forces. The security forces were able to detain all but one of the suspects.

Independently of these events, nine FETÖ terrorism suspects were arrested in an operation in the eastern province of Van on 06.11.21. According to information from the local security forces, two of the suspects have been remanded in custody and the other seven have been released on bail with travel restrictions.

Over 8,500 terrorism suspects expelled from the country

The Turkish interior ministry reported in a statement on 30.10.21 that a total of 8,585 people suspected of terrorism had been expelled from the country since the breakout of the Syrian conflict. The ministry stated that the expellees were foreign fighters who had entered Turkey from 102 countries in order to join groups in Syria such as IS, the PKK or its Syrian sister party, the PYD, and its military arm, the YPG/YPG. According to the statement, 44 individuals originated from the USA and 1,075 from the EU. 61 suspects from eight EU countries have allegedly been expelled in 2021 to date.

Uganda

Further bomb attacks near Kampala

According to police information, a suicide attack took place on a long-distance bus near Kampala on 25.10.21. The attacker, who according to the police was a member of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), died in the attack. The attack is apparently linked to the bomb attack in a restaurant (cf. BN of 25.10.21). The Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP), an administrative unit of IS, has claimed responsibility for both attacks. The USA has officially identified a link between the ADF and IS since March 2021. A further bomb attack allegedly occurred on 29.10.21 in Nakasese district (north of Kampala), killing two children. There has been no official confirmation of the attack. 48 suspects who are believed to be linked to the attacks have since been arrested.

Uzbekistan

Incumbent wins presidential election

According to the official final result, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was re-elected for a second term in office in the presidential election on 24.10.21, claiming 80.1 % of the vote (as compared to 88.6 % in 2016). In addition to Mirziyoyev, four other candidates were approved to run for election. These were considered to be puppets of the incumbent, however. Members of the opposition were excluded from the election, as their parties were refused the necessary registration (cf. BN of 28.06.21). The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also noted “numerous serious irregularities” during the ballot, including people voting without presenting any ID and multiple voting. According to reports in the press, repressive measures were also stepped up against people critical of the government ahead of the election.

Venezuela

ICC institutes investigations into crimes against humanity

The International Criminal Court (ICC) announced the formal institution of investigations into Venezuela in connection with crimes against humanity on 03.11.21. It is to be examined whether the state security forces were responsible for torture and excessive use of force in connection with demonstrations in 2017 against the Maduro government in which more than 120 people were killed and many were injured or arbitrarily arrested. Preliminary investigations into the matter began in 2018, and these are now to be raised to the next level. In this connection, Venezuela’s president Maduro and ICC secretary Khan signed a declaration of intent on 03.11.21 in which the country undertook to cooperate.

Vietnam

Journalists and a blogger sentenced to several years in prison

According to various reports in the media, a court in the city of Can Tho in southern Vietnam sentenced five journalists to prison terms of between two and four and a half years on 28.10.21. They were also banned from working in journalism for three years following the end of their sentences. They were found guilty of abusing democratic liberties (Art. 331 of the criminal code). In 2019 the men founded the Bao Sach group (Clean Newspaper)

which, according to information from state media, slandered the government and distorted information via publications on Facebook and a YouTube channel.

Also on 28.10.21, a court in Ninh Binh province sentenced a blogger to six and a half years in prison for streaming videos critical of the government on social media. According to reports in the media, he was arrested on 10.03.21 and charged under Art. 117 of the criminal code (propagation of subversive information). Prior to his arrest he had reportedly publicised his intention to run as an independent candidate in the elections to the National Assembly (parliament) in May 2021.

Yemen

Fighting in Marib

On 28.10. and 31.10.21 Houthi rebels launched rocket attacks on a house, a mosque and a religious education establishment to the south of the city of Marib. Some 52 people died, most of whom were civilians.

In the course of their offensive which began in February 2021, Houthi rebels have also continued their advance on the city of Marib in the governorate of the same name. Two districts to the south of the city of Marib were reportedly captured on 29.10.21, after local tribes joined forces with the Houthis. Meanwhile, the anti-Houthi coalition has claimed that it killed around 750 Houthi fighters in the course of its counter-offensive to defend Marib between 28.10. and 07.11.21. Marib is the last town under the control of the government in northern Yemen.

Attack on Taiz

Houthi rebels shelled a residential area on the outskirts of the city of Taiz on 30.10.21. Three children died and six children were injured, several seriously. The city of Taiz is currently divided, with one part under the control of the coalition troops while parts in the south-west of the city are controlled by Houthis. The anti-Houthi coalition launched an offensive against Houthi positions in Taiz on 31.10.21 to drive them out of the city.

Car bomb near Aden airport

A car bomb exploded at a security checkpoint at Aden airport on 30.10.21, killing twelve people. It is as yet unclear who is responsible for the attack. Aden has been the interim capital and seat of government since the Houthis assumed power in Sanaa, but is controlled by the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC). Tensions between the government and the STC are high, and are particularly prone to escalations in Aden.

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