



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

Between 27.02 and 03.04.22, the National Resistance Front (NRF) and the Taliban clashed several times in Baghlan, Panjshir and Badakhshan provinces. In Baghlan, eleven to 13 Taliban were killed, and 18 others injured; two resistance fighters were also killed. In Panjshir, three Taliban were killed and five other fighters injured after the third day of fighting. There is no information on NRF casualties. In Badakhshan, a landmine hit the car of a Taliban commander, injuring him and killing two of his bodyguards. On 31.03.22, Taliban members arrested and tortured a bodyguard of NRF leader Ahmad Massoud. In Farah Province, several bodyguards of a Taliban commander were killed in fighting between the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) and the Taliban on 30.03.22. Two bomb explosions in the city of Herat killed four civilians and injured 25 others. In Helmand province, five children were killed by landmines. In the last seven months, a total of about 300 children were killed by landmines. On 03.04.22, one individual died and up to 20 people were injured in an explosion in Kabul's largest foreign exchange market Sarai Shazadaa. The hand grenade was allegedly detonated by a robber.

Persecution situation and governance

Reports say that on 28.03.22 the Taliban arrested a former military member in Kunduz province. On 29.03.22, a former military member and two other individuals were arrested in Baghlan province. On 31.03.22, a former member of the security forces was found dead in Herat province. On 01.04.22, a former military doctor was detained and tortured in Badakhshan province. On the same day, the Taliban closed a Shiite mosque in Kabul; no reasons were given for the closure. Private TV stations were banned by the Taliban from broadcasting programmes produced in a local language by the foreign stations Voice of America (VOA), Deutsche Welle (DW), China Global TV Network (CGTN) and British Broadcasting Company (BBC). The Shiite TV station Tamadon TV was banned from broadcasting not only Western foreign formats but also those from Iran. In the city of Herat, many bookshops are closing down as buyers are staying away (mainly students). On 03.04.22, the Taliban issued a decree banning the cultivation of opium and the use and trade of drugs in the country.

Humanitarian situation

In response to the continued closure of girls' schools, the World Bank has frozen four projects worth USD 600 million. On 31.03.22, a virtual UN donor conference organized by Germany, the UK and Qatar raised a total of USD 2.4 billion for humanitarian aid for 2022, which is less than the amount of USD 4.4 billion targeted by the UN.

Algeria

Pardon and release of detainees and activists

On 03.04.22, at the beginning of the fasting month of Ramadan, President Tebboune announced the pardon of 1,076 prisoners and the temporary release of 70 people who had been imprisoned for their participation in the Hirak protests. Those detained for participating in the protests were released pending trial.

Burkina Faso

Dead in attack

In the night to 01.04.22, several dozen gunmen attacked a gold mine near Barga (Centre-North region), killing about 20 people and injuring about the same number.

Colombia / Venezuela

HRW report: human rights violations, ELN cooperates with Venezuelan security forces

A new Human Rights Watch (HRW) report released on 28.03.22, based among others on witness interviews, describes numerous human rights violations committed by both members of FARC dissident groups and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas against civilians in the Colombian-Venezuelan border area. According to the report, these groups are responsible for a significant increase in violence in the first months of 2022, with at least 103 homicides between January and February 2022 in the Colombian state of Arauca, forced displacement along the border, disappearances, kidnappings and forced recruitment, including of minors. In some cases, the ELN conducted joint operations against post-FARC groups together with Venezuelan security forces, especially with members of the national armed forces (FANB) and the national guard (GNB). Witnesses say that the security forces were also involved in abuses by the ELN.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Several LUCHA activists sentenced by military court

Media report that on 01.04.22, a military court in Beni sentenced activists (among them one woman) of the civil movement Lutte pour le changement (LUCHA) to each twelve months imprisonment and to pay court costs of 250,000 CFA francs (approx. 113 EUR, as of 04.04.22) for civil disobedience; the sentences were handed down in the absence of the defendants' counsel. Apparently, the defence has announced to appeal against the sentences. The convicts had been arrested in November 2021 in the town of Beni in the state of emergency province of North Kivu during a protest rally against a further extension of the state of siege, which has been in force since May 2021 and includes an absolute ban on demonstrations (cf. BN of 15.11.21). According to LUCHA, the convictions show that the state of siege serves as an instrument both to suppress and to intimidate critical civic voices. In 2021 and 2022, the exercise of constitutionally guaranteed rights has repeatedly led to arrests, detentions, and the initiation of criminal proceedings against LUCHA supporters (cf. BN of 15.11.21 and 24.01.22).

MONUSCO: Deteriorating human rights and security situation in the eastern conflict provinces

On 29.03.22 UN Special Representative and Head of the UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) Bintou Keita stated that the human rights and security situation in the eastern provinces affected by militia violence (especially in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri under siege) has deteriorated since her last report of December 2021. In the first three months of 2022, nearly 2,300 civilian deaths were recorded in the eastern provinces, she said. The number of human rights violations has increased by 10 percent compared to the previous report, mainly due to attacks by non-state actors and restrictions on democratic freedoms, she added. Civilian casualties and the refugee and displacement crisis continue to increase despite the joint military operations of the Congolese and Ugandan armed forces in the state of emergency provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, with the main responsibility lying with the radical Islamic group Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF) operating in Ituri and North Kivu and with the ethnically oriented factions of the Coopérative pour le Développement du Congo (CODECO) active in Ituri.

While the ADF leadership reaffirmed its affiliation to the terrorist organisation IS on 11.03.22, an alarming increase was noted in recent months in activities by the Tutsi rebel group Mouvement du 23-Mars (M23) in North Kivu's Rutshuru territory, Bintou Keita stated.

El Salvador

Numerous 'pandilleros' arrested in connection with outbreak of violence; increase of prison terms

In connection with the numerous killings on 26.03.22 (cf. BN of 28.03.22), state security forces have taken massive action against gang members. According to government information, more than 5,000 people were arrested by 03.04.22. In addition, prison sentences for gang membership were increased from three to five years to now 30 years for simple membership, and from a maximum of nine years to up to 45 years for leaders. The penalties against minors were also increased significantly. Additionally, the package of measures passed on 31.03.22 provides for more resources for the police and the army. Imprisoned gang members were forbidden to leave their cells and their food rations were halved. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has criticised these mass arrests and the considerable restrictions on prisoners.

Ethiopia

First humanitarian aid after ceasefire in Tigray

On 01.04.22, a first aid convoy arrived in the conflict region of Tigray. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) informed on Twitter that thirteen trucks arrived in the regional capital Mekelle. One day later, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also resumed its overland aid deliveries and brought medical aid, food, and water purification equipment to the region. These are the first overland deliveries of food and medical supplies in over three months. Since January, air transports carrying medicine and food from the capital Addis Ababa to Mekelle have resumed; however, these aids cover only about 4 percent of the needs, especially as fuel shortages make it almost impossible to distribute the supplies into the country's interior. Last week, the Ethiopian government had announced an "indefinite humanitarian ceasefire" (cf. BN of 28.03.22).

According to UN figures, 9.4 million people in Tigray and the neighbouring regions of Amhara and Afar are in urgent need of humanitarian aid; however, deliveries have been blocked since December 2021. The Ethiopian authorities and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which rules Tigray, blame each other for this situation. The TPLF has accused the government of not issuing the necessary permits, at the same time denying claims that they had prevented the delivery of aid by blocking the important road from Afar's regional capital Semera to Tigray. However, there are also reports of that trucks having been looted in Afar, most recently a WFP convoy on 20.03.22. As Afar is also in need of relief supplies, it is suspected that members of the local population were responsible for the looting. However, expert observers do not want to rule out that the attack on the aid convoy was perpetrated by militias trying to sabotage aid deliveries and peace negotiations, such as Eritrean units (for example, nationalist Amhara militias) who are hostile to the TPLF and categorically reject the ceasefire and humanitarian support. The situation on the ground is difficult to assess due to the lack of objective observers.

Guinea

Home of Cellou Dalein Diallo demolished

On 26.03.22, the authorities reportedly destroyed several buildings in the government quarter, among them the private home of Cellou Dalein Diallo, who in the past had held several government positions (among them the office of Prime Minister from 2004 to 2006). The official reason given for demolishing the houses was that they no longer met current standards. Diallo, who leads the Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée party (UFDG) and had been opposition leader during the presidency of ousted Alpha Condé (2010-2021), is accused of having unfairly acquired the house from state property during his time as a member of government. The same accusations have been made against Sidya Touré, another former prime minister and opposition party leader (Union des Forces Républicaines UFR). Both politicians were forced to leave their homes on 28.02.22 after a local court had declined

jurisdiction in the dispute. The junta in power, Comité national de rassemblement pour le développement (CNRD), stated that 53 houses were returned to state ownership. On 28.02.22, demonstrators protested against the measure in support of the two politicians, especially of Diallo. Three police officers were reportedly injured in the incident, one of them seriously.

The junta's explicit goal is the fight against corruption. In December 2021, a separate criminal court was set up to investigate cases of embezzlement of public funds (Cour de répression des infractions économiques et financières CRIEF). In February 2022, the budget minister and a minister of state from Condé's government were among those interrogated. In view of the fact that no-one from the circle of the current rulers was affected by the charges, accusations of a witch hunt were raised.

Honduras

Extradition of former President Hernández to the USA

On 28.03.22, the supreme court of Honduras rejected the appeal of former President Hernández against his extradition to the USA (cf. BN of 28.02.22). On 31.03.22, the special prosecutor's office for the fight against organised crime announced the initiation of proceedings against Hernández in order to secure and seize assets and funds belonging to him.

India / Myanmar

Kashmir: situation of the Rohingya; deportation of a Rohingya refugee

Human rights organisations have criticised as a violation of international law the deportation of a 36-year-old Rohingya woman by the Indian authorities on 22.03.22. The woman had been arrested in Jammu on 06.03.21 along with 155 other ethnic Rohingya refugees who had fled Myanmar and had been taken to a detention centre in Kathua district.

Human rights organisations say that the predominantly Muslim Rohingya refugees are closely monitored, arbitrarily arrested and interrogated by the Indian security authorities. They are also subjected to hostility and violent attacks by Hindu nationalist groups who accuse them of terrorism. The main danger, however, is deportation to Myanmar. Since 2017, India has deported 16 Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement under international law.

The UNHCR reports that at least 250 Rohingya refugees are currently detained in India for illegal entry: around 230 are being held in a detention centre in Jammu, and around two to three dozen in Delhi. On 01.04.22, a total of 25 more Rohingya refugees who had fled Myanmar were arrested in Ramban district in Indian-administered Kashmir, police stated.

Iran

Women's rights

Iranian foreign media report an escalation of the situation of Iranian women. On 29.03.22, security guards denied many women entry to a football stadium to attend a match although they had bought tickets. Violent clashes broke out in front of the stadium; police used pepper spray against the protesting women and used force to disperse an angry crowd. The events were also widely reported on social media. Leading critics have called for Iran's exclusion from the upcoming World Cup. The governor of Mashhad has announced an investigation into the incident. The FIFA has also criticised the crackdown by security forces and demanded that the Iranian Football Association change its tough stance on the issue of women's access to football stadiums.

On 29.03.22, the authorities reportedly cancelled a concert by the singer Hamid Aramzadeh in the central Iranian town of Ardakan (Yazd province) at short notice. The singer reportedly cited the presence of women in the accompanying orchestra as the reason. In Iran, women are banned from singing in public since the 1979 revolution. However, the ban on women performing in the context of orchestral performances is considered a novelty.

Meanwhile, the leadership of the Islamic Republic's law enforcement agency NAJA has issued an information letter stating that during the month of Ramadan, eating in public shall be avoided, as well as indecent dress and violation

of the hijab requirement at work and in public places. Police has announced steps against lawbreakers. In a letter to NAJA dated 02.04.22, attorney general Mohammad Jaafar Montazeri described a breach of the fasting commandment in public as a criminal act and announced legal action.

In connection with the reopening of Tehran University for face-to-face classes, foreign media have reported growing pressure from the Herasat on female students to wear the maghnaeh instead of a headscarf. The maghnaeh is a stricter version of the hijab. In some cases, enrolment cards have been confiscated. The Herasat is linked to the secret service and ensures ideological conformity at schools, universities, in companies and in the state administration.

Iraq

Presidential election failed

On 30.03.22, a new attempt to elect a new president failed in parliament. Subsequently Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the largest parliamentary bloc, announced that he was now giving his political rivals one month to form a government without him.

Missile attack on Turkish base in Iraq

On the evening of 29.03.22, five Katyusha rockets hit near the Zilkan military base in Nineveh province. The base houses 150 Turkish soldiers and 20 vehicles who were deployed there during the war against the Islamic State in 2015 and have remained since. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Zilkan has been targeted several times before, mostly in retaliation for Turkish airstrikes in the region (which, official Turkish reports say, are meant to target the PKK).

Lebanon

Economic situation

The Lebanese energy sector is facing severe problems in guaranteeing electricity supply for the elections scheduled to be held on 15.05.22. Costs are estimated at around USD 16 million, which exceeds the total budget for the elections by 30 percent. The conduct of the elections is currently not assured.

The Central Bank of Lebanon decreed on 30.03.22 that the private sector may no longer impose restrictions on the withdrawal of public sector employees' salaries.

The UK has announced a donation of spare parts to the Lebanese army, specifically for Land Rovers.

Libya

Libyan Red Cross worker released after ten months of abduction

In June 2021, Mansour Ati al-Maghrabi, head of the Red Cross office in the eastern Libyan city of Ajdabiya, had been kidnapped by unidentified assailants. Media report that he was released on 02.04.22 thanks to mediation by his tribal representatives. No further details were given about his release, the background and those involved in his abduction.

Second UN report on fact-finding mission released

Following the first report by UN experts on the independent fact-finding mission in Libya published in October 2021, which had examined human rights violations as well as alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since 2016, a follow-up report on the fact-finding mission in Libya was published on 28.03.22. In this second UN report, the experts point to numerous violations that have impaired or continue to impede Libya's transition to democracy and the integrity of the electoral process that failed in December 2021. These violations include intimidation and harassment of activists, attacks on members of the judiciary, and massive violations against vulnerable groups such as migrants, women, and detainees.

Mali

Scores of people killed in military operation in Mopti region

The Malian army has informed that 203 people were killed and 51 arrested during a military operation in the region around Moura village in the Mopti region. According to the Malian army, the people killed were "terrorists". Also, numerous weapons and motorbikes were reportedly confiscated during the operation, which took place between 23.03. and 31.03.22. However, media report that also many civilian victims were among the dead.

Figures are difficult to verify due to poor access to the conflict areas and a lack of independent sources of information. It was only in mid-March 2022 that Human Rights Watch and the UN reported an increasing number of civilian casualties in Mali (cf. BN of 28.03.22).

Montenegro

Deputy Prime Minister Abazovic plans more restrictive approach against "fake news"

According to a recent media report, Montenegrin Deputy PM Dritan Abazovic stated on 31.03.22 that the new minority government he is seeking to form will call for more restrictive measures against media that publish fake news. The Deputy PM stressed that the obligations to reduce the influence of fake news and disinformation should be fulfilled in the event of such a government being formed. Already on 08.01.2022, the Electronic Media Agency had banned the broadcast of some Serbian TV programmes in Montenegro for six months on the grounds that the programme "Good Morning Serbia" contained content inciting hatred, intolerance, and discrimination against people of Montenegrin nationality, the media report continues. However, Vuk Maras of the Media Association of South-East Europe MAJE and other political analysts have stressed the importance of media freedom in democracy and criticized Abazovic's plans as favouring media censorship, the report says.

Nicaragua

New NGO regulation and control act

On 31.03.22, the Sandinista-dominated National Assembly passed by summary procedure the new general law for the regulation and control of non-profit organisations (Ley General de Regulación y Control de Organismos sin fines de lucro). Among other things, the new law lists several grounds for revoking the legal status of an NGO and for retaining or transferring its assets to the state, thus expanding the regulatory and control powers of the interior ministry and the general directorate for registration and control of non-profit organisations.

Nigeria

Kaduna State: Attack on train; military air strikes

On 28.03.22, heavily armed assailants attacked a train carrying hundreds of passengers on the railway line between Nigeria's capital Abuja and Kaduna. Citing official sources, media reported that eight people were killed, at least 26 injured and around 30 kidnapped. The perpetrators, who have not yet been identified, stopped the train by detonating explosives on the tracks and then opened fire on the train. Kaduna is the capital of Kaduna State in northern Nigeria. It is particularly in the northern states of the country that criminal gangs have frequently taken violent action recently (cf. BN of 28.03.22). On 26.03.22, for example, one individual was killed in an attack on the airport of the city of Kaduna. In the case of the train attack, the governor of Kaduna state reportedly suspects that the perpetrators collaborated with Islamist insurgents. He categorically ruled out the payment of ransom. On 30.03.22, the Nigerian military killed 34 members of a local criminal gang in an airstrike near the village of Mangoro in Kaduna state, military sources said. Despite considerable military effort in the north, both politicians and authorities are criticized for failing to achieve lasting success in the fight against criminal gangs.

Niger state: More than a dozen killed in escape from raid

Media report that on 29.03.22 a total of 13 people from Galkogo village in Niger state drowned in a river while escaping from an attack by armed gangs. The accident occurred when the fugitives tried to cross the river in a boat

that capsized because it was not suitable for transporting a large number of people. The majority of the victims were children. At the end of January 2022, dozens of people had been killed in an attack on Galkogo and other places in the region (cf. BN of 07.02.22). Niger state is Nigeria's largest state, located in the west of the Middle Belt zone between northern and southern Nigeria. It has recently been the scene of several deadly attacks by criminal gangs on villages (cf. BN of 21.03.22). Media report that the criminal activities of armed gangs have caused hundreds of thousands of people to leave their communities, especially in the north-western part of the country.

AI Report 2021 denounces human rights abuses

A report by Amnesty International (AI) published on 29.03.22 takes a look at the state of human rights and developments in Nigeria in 2021. Apart from serious human rights violations and crimes under international law in the north-east of Nigeria, the report focuses on violence in the context of various unresolved rivalries in other parts of the country and on the persistence of kidnappings throughout the reporting period. In 2021, at least 5,290 people were abducted for ransom by bandits and other gunmen, among them at least 855 students in seven states. Also, violations of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association continued in Nigeria in 2021, the report says. Security forces used excessive force in breaking up protests, in some cases resulting in deaths. Hundreds of people who had demonstrated against police violence in 2020 (cf. BN of 19.10.20) were still in detention. The report on Nigeria is part of the AI Annual Report 2021/22 on the human rights situation in 154 countries in the reporting year 2021, which was also published on 29.03.22.

Pakistan

President Arif Alvi dissolves parliament without a vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Khan

The decision on the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan, which had been originally scheduled for 25.03.22, was postponed several times and most recently to 03.04.22. PM Khan had lost his parliamentary majority after a series of defections from his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to the opposition (cf. BN of 21.03.22).

On 03.04.22, deputy speaker of parliament Qasim Suri refused to hold the no-confidence vote against Khan, claiming that it was unconstitutional. Subsequently, President Arif Alvi dissolved parliament on the advice of Prime Minister Khan. In a video message, the PM said he had advised the President to dissolve both the national and the four provincial parliaments and to hold new elections.

The opposition has declared the move of the deputy speaker unconstitutional and demands that the vote of no confidence against Khan be held in parliament. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari deems the dissolution of parliament unconstitutional and considers it possible that it may be overturned by the supreme court. A panel of judges is due to meet on 04.04.22 on the matter.

Hindu girl killed in Sindh

On 21.03.22, a teenage Hindu girl was shot dead in Sukkur district in southeastern Sindh province after she resisted an alleged abduction for forced marriage and conversion. The main perpetrator is from an influential family in the region. Disputes with the victim's family preceding the crime had been ignored by the authorities for a long time. Human rights organisations say that an estimated 1,000 girls and women from religious minorities are forcibly married and converted to Islam in Pakistan every year.

Teacher killed by colleagues for blasphemy

On 29.03.22, three female teachers at an Islamic girls' school in Anjumabad in the Dera Ismail Khan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province killed a female colleague on allegations of blasphemy. During police questioning, the three women stated that a 13-year-old relative of one of them had had a dream in which the Prophet Mohammed accused the victim of blasphemy and ordered them to kill her. The crime was preceded by a dispute between the teachers on religious issues. The 21-year-old victim followed an Islamic TV preacher who was viewed with suspicion by the perpetrators. The three teachers and two minors, including the 13-year-old girl, were arrested after the crime. The perpetrators come from the strictly conservative region of Waziristan bordering Afghanistan.

TTP offensives in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 30.03.22, a firefight lasting several hours in northwest Pakistan left at least three Pakistani Frontier Corps (FC) soldiers and as many Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) attackers dead in Tank district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. In another TTP offensive on the same day, an army captain and a soldier were killed in South Waziristan.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Israel: Third attack in a week leaves five people dead

On 29.03.22, an armed motorcyclist killed five people in the central Israeli village of Bnei Brak east of Tel Aviv. Israeli media report that the attacker, a Palestinian from the West Bank, was stopped and killed by police officers. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades have claimed responsibility for the attack.

The perpetrators of the two previous independent incidents (cf. BN of 28.03.22) were linked to IS.

West Bank: A total of five Palestinians killed in raids; two more dead

During raids on a refugee camp in the northern West Bank town of Jenin on 31.03.22, two Palestinians were killed in an exchange of fire between armed residents of the camp and the Israeli military. Fifteen others were wounded, including one military personnel. Israel's military said that soldiers entered the refugee camp to arrest several suspects as part of a campaign against terrorist networks in order to prevent further attacks in Israel.

On the same day, a Palestinian on a bus in the West Bank wounded an Israeli with a knife. The attacker was killed.

On 01.04.22, one individual was shot dead in the city of Hebron during clashes between Palestinian protesters and the Israeli military, the Palestinian health ministry informed. The Israeli military reported that the individual had thrown firebombs at military personnel. According to the Palestinian Red Cross, a total of 36 people were wounded in various protests in the West Bank.

On 02.04.22, there was another exchange of fire near Jenin when the Israeli military attempted to arrest several suspects. Three Palestinians were killed; four members of the Israeli counter-terrorism unit were wounded, one of them seriously. The military said that the operation prevented concrete plans of an attack by the suspects. A Palestinian TV station reported that the bodies were seized.

Gaza: Partial easing of Israeli restrictions

In order to prevent unrest inside the Gaza Strip, the Israeli government introduced some relaxations of restrictions on Gaza in March 2022. Among other things, the Israeli government approved the employment of 20,000 Gaza residents in the Israeli construction and agricultural sectors. Also, Israel allowed the resumption of family visits in Israeli prisons, which had been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. New financial assistance from Qatar was also approved. In addition, the government announced that it would not set up checkpoints in the Damascus Gate area of East Jerusalem during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan.

Republic of the Congo

Cases of enforced disappearance

Citing the Congolese NGO Centre d'action pour le développement, Radio France International (RFI) reported on 27.03.22 that at least a dozen cases of enforced disappearance were documented between the years 2021 and 2022. According to the US Department of State (USDOS), the cases of enforced disappearance in the reporting year 2016 had been politically motivated, while the motivation for the cases registered in 2017 was unknown.

Deaths of prisoners

The Congolese Observatory for Human Rights reported on 01.04.22 that in the months of February and March 2022, at least four prison inmates died due to malnutrition, diarrhoeal diseases, and malaria in the detention centres of the northern Congolese towns of Owando and Ouessou.

Russian Federation

New prison term for Navalny

Opposition politician and activist Alexei Navalny was sentenced to an additional nine years in prison and fined the equivalent of about EUR 10,300. He was found guilty of several charges, among them embezzlement. A judge handed down the sentence on 22.03.22 in the high-security Pokrov prison camp, where Navalny is already serving another prison sentence. His legal representation announced an appeal against the sentence. On 30.03.22, the supreme court refused to hear an appeal against a court decision to change a suspended prison sentence into a real prison time. Navalny had received the sentence after returning from Germany for medical treatment of poisoning in January 2021. The supreme court also refused to consider his appeal against his immediate arrest upon returning to Russia. Navalny is facing two other criminal cases (cf. BN of 21.02.22).

Serbia

Parliamentary and presidential election

According to estimates by the two independent election research institutes CeSID and Ipsos, the incumbent President Aleksandar Vučić won the presidential election on 03.04.22 with 59.8 percent of votes; his party Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) again emerged as the strongest parliamentary group securing 43.5 percent. According to the forecasts, Vučić's main challenger, Zdravko Ponoš of the opposition coalition United Serbia, secured 17 percent of the vote, while his opposition alliance gained 12.9 percent. The state election commission is planning to present the preliminary results in the evening of 04.04.22. Vučić declared himself the winner already on election day.

Sri Lanka

Protests over economic crisis, declaration of state of emergency, resignation of cabinet

On 31.03.22, riots broke out during a protest near the residence of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in Colombo. Around 3,000 participants demanded the resignation of the president and his cabinet. Several police and military vehicles were set on fire by demonstrators. Security forces reportedly used tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets to stop the protesters from storming the president's residence. About 50 people were injured, among them five security forces; about 47 people were reportedly arrested. In the weeks and days before, there had already been repeated protests of a smaller scale. On 01.04.22, the government declared a state of emergency throughout the country. Military presence was massively increased. On the evening of 02.04.22, a nationwide curfew was imposed for 36 hours. Nevertheless, protests were staged throughout the country on 02.04. and 03.04.22. On Sunday, more than 20,000 people were reported to have taken part in protest rallies across the country. In Kandy (Central Province), among other places, security forces used tear gas against students. There were no reports of incidents regarding the protests in other parts of the country. More large rallies have been announced for 04.04.22. Reports say that the government temporarily blocked access to social media on 03.04.22. After an emergency meeting in the night to 04.04.22, the 26-member cabinet submitted its resignation in unison. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother Mahinda, who holds the office of Prime Minister, reportedly remain in office. The country is currently experiencing the most severe economic crisis since independence (cf. BN of 29.11.21, 31.01.22 and 21.03.22, inter alia).

South Sudan

Agreement between President Kiir and Vice President Machar

On 31.03.22, the president and his first vice-president reportedly agreed on a supplement to the 2018 peace agreement. This allayed recent fears of a new escalation of violence between the two camps (cf. BN of 28.03.22). A decisive controversial issue was the formation of a unified army, in which the forces of both politicians were to be merged. In particular, the future command structure of the joint armed forces was a matter in dispute. According to the agreement that has now been concluded, 60 percent of leadership positions are to go to followers of the president and 40 percent to representatives of the opposition. The new command structure is to be implemented

within the next two months. The agreement also commits both parties once again to respecting the existing ceasefire.

Sudan

Ongoing protests

On 30.03.22, protesters and security forces clashed in the capital. The conflict was triggered by an official order to remove commercial stalls located along streets. This measure is part of a campaign by the military government to remove so-called negative features in the city. When the stalls were not removed, security forces looted and destroyed them in the night to 30.03.22. The following morning, protests broke out against the military government's action, with the security forces using tear gas and stun grenades.

During further nationwide protests on 31.03.22, a protester was shot dead by security forces in Khartoum; more than 50 people were reportedly injured by the use of live ammunition. Security forces reportedly used tear gas, stun grenades and batons to crack down on demonstrators in several towns. In the town of El Gedaref, five activists were reportedly arrested by the intelligence services in a hospital and taken to prison.

During calendar week 13, about 30 directors and board members of public universities were dismissed from their offices and replaced by new heads. More professors resigned in protest, while other university employees begun an open-ended strike. Also in calendar week 13, a total of 13 employees of the education ministry were dismissed for not following instructions from the military government.

On 28.03.22, UN Special Envoy and Head of Mission UNITAMS Volker Perthes denounced the current situation in Sudan before the UN Security Council and warned that the country was heading towards economic and security collapse if the restoration of a civilian-led transitional government was not achieved. Subsequently, the Chairman of the Sovereign Council General al-Burhan threatened to expel him from the country. The Sudanese foreign ministry accused Perthes of processing "false and exaggerated information" in his report to the UN Security Council and of "blatant interference" in the country's affairs, saying that he was overstepping his mandate of the mission as head of UNITAMS and that he should confine himself to promoting dialogue among the Sudanese. Over the past two months, Perthes has increasingly met with various political actors to facilitate an intra-Sudanese dialogue, but had first sought the approval of the military leadership for this agenda.

On 03.04.22, al-Burhan and Perthes met to discuss the row. While al-Burhan reiterated his willingness to hand over power to an elected government, he rejected a reform of the security sector, although this is an integral part of the Juba peace agreement.

Security situation in Darfur

On 29.03 and 30.03.22, new clashes erupted between the ethnic groups of Arab Rizeigat and non-Arab Fallata in Nyala in the south of the Darfur region. Media report that the fighting was sparked by the killing of a Rapid Support Forces (RSF) officer by unknown gunmen. The victim was a member of the Rizeigat ethnic group. During the clashes, which lasted several days, two villages were burnt down and more than 30 people lost their lives; over 50 were injured and several hundred displaced. Tensions between Arab and non-Arab tribes in Darfur continue and keep escalating as the joint security forces of the government and some opposition actors are still not fully in place. Since the withdrawal of the UNAMID mission at the end of 2020, there has thus been a security gap. The governor of the region is currently trying to mediate between the groups involved.

Syria

Al-Hol: At least three dead in prison riot

The authorities of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have informed about firefights between the security forces and an IS sleeper cell in the al-Hol detention centre on 29.03.22. The camp houses tens of thousands of women and children, apparently wives, widows, and children of IS members. The attackers reportedly targeted local security forces with firearms and explosives. At least three people were killed in the ensuing fighting. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that an IS fighter, a woman and a child were among the victims, and four women and six children were injured.

On 31.03.22, the German foreign ministry informed that ten women and 27 children had been brought to Germany from Roj, a similar camp in north-eastern Syria. Four of the women were taken into custody at Frankfurt airport upon arrival for membership in a foreign terrorist organisation.

According to the SDF, the failure to repatriate foreign nationals is one of the biggest obstacles to the closure of the camps. German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock has stated that the majority of German children whose mothers support repatriation to Germany have been brought to safety.

Think Tank: Lessons from the Battle of Raqqa

In a new report dated 31.03.22, RAND, a US think tank established to advise the US military, presented lessons learned from the military operation to retake Raqqa from IS in 2017. The report was commissioned by the Pentagon itself.

According to some estimates, more than 1,600 civilians were killed in US airstrikes on the Syrian city of Raqqa. RAND also notes that 60-80 percent of the city was reportedly uninhabitable after it was liberated from IS control in October 2017. A particular challenge to avoiding civilian casualties was apparently due to the fact that there were no US forces on the ground who would have been capable of providing more precise information on targets.

Tunisia

No plans for early elections after dissolution of parliament

On 30.03.22, President Saied announced the dissolution of parliament, which had already been suspended eight months ago on 25.07.21 (cf. BN of 26.07.21). The President is continuing with the plan to hold the next parliamentary election on 19.12.22. According to the constitution of 2014, which had been partially suspended, the dissolution of the chamber triggers new elections within three months.

A few hours earlier, 120 out of the 217 MPs had held a virtual meeting and voted unanimously for the withdrawal of the measures ordered by Saied since then.

Saied has announced criminal prosecution of the MPs for disobeying the parliament's suspension. Tunisia's parliament speaker Ghannouchi said that on 31.03.22, at least 20 MPs were summoned for questioning by an anti-terrorist unit.

Turkey

Amendments to the electoral law adopted

On 31.03.22, the Turkish parliament adopted the amendments to the electoral law (cf. BN of 28.03.22), comprising a reduction of the election threshold for political parties from 10 to 7 percent.

Ukraine / Russian Federation

Russian military invasion, war events in Ukraine

The attacks by Russian forces in Ukraine are continuing in the course of the military invasion launched on 24.02.22. UNHCR informs that almost 4.2 million people have fled Ukraine as of 02.04.22; UN figures dated 03.04.22 indicate that at least 1,417 civilians have been killed so far, among them 121 children and young people, and the number of injured is reported to be 2,038 so far. Media report that on 03.04. and 04.04.22, numerous bodies of killed civilians were found in the town of Bucha near Kyiv. The Ukrainian government has blamed the Russian forces, who had held control of the town until shortly before, for what happened there. The UN has called for an independent investigation into the events in Bucha. Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated on 03.04.22 that cases of rape and killings by Russian forces against civilians have been documented in several Ukrainian regions since the beginning of the war. Ukrainian sources continue to speak of abductions of Ukrainian officials by Russian forces in occupied territories. According to the Ukrainian military, the Russian Federation has largely withdrawn its forces in the disputed areas of Kyiv and Chernihiv to its own or to Belarusian territory; the regional administration in Sumy also reported on 04.04.22 that Russian troops were beginning to withdraw. According to Ukrainian information, the transport connection between the cities of Kyiv and Chernihiv will be restored on 04.04.22, which will facilitate the

transport of humanitarian aid. As a result of the military encirclement by Russian forces, the city of Chernihiv was largely cut off from the delivery of humanitarian aid for several weeks; local sources also report extensive destruction of the cityscape. Ongoing military attacks by Russian forces continue to be reported, especially from the contested areas of Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk and Kherson; Ukrainian sources also report missile attacks on the cities of Odessa, Mykolaiv, Ternopil and Rivne and other locations on 03.04. and 04.04.22. Numerous media expect the war in eastern Ukraine to intensify in the course of troop deployments and new formations of Russian armed forces. Continuing evacuations of civilians to Zaporozhye are reported from the encircled port city of Mariupol. About 100,000 people are reported to be still living in the city; the supply of Mariupol with goods essential for survival by humanitarian convoys has been largely interrupted for weeks now. According to information from Russia of 03.04.22, progress in working out a peace agreement is not yet sufficient for a meeting of Presidents Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putin. Ukraine has repeatedly demanded a ceasefire and a face-to-face meeting of the two presidents, while the Russian government's consent is conditional on the further progress of the negotiations between the Ukrainian and Russian delegations.

Venezuela

Four farm workers killed

The National Federation of Venezuelan Cattle Breeders (Fedenaga) has informed that on 20.03.22, members of the criminal group J.L. Los Cañaderos killed four employees of the San Tomé farm in the municipality of La Cañada de Urdaneta in Zulia state. The killings were apparently related to previously reported extortion attempts. Already in February 2022, the Venezuelan Centre for Agrarian and Food Studies had noted an intensification of conflicts over land ownership and occupation, as well as increasing violence in rural areas, including kidnappings and assassinations. The NGO Fundaredes has also registered attacks and threats against both farms and members of the civil society in livestock farming areas, for the purpose of extortion (demanding payment in USD). The organisation has warned of corresponding incidents.

Poverty, food situation, death of indigenous child due to malnutrition

In a recent report, the International Federation for Human Rights and the NGO Provea have warned of an exponential increase in poverty, which had affected nearly 95 percent of the population in 2021. According to the organisations, corruption in the country was partly responsible for the fact that funds earmarked for food production and distribution were not used for their original purpose. Specialised organisations say that children and the elderly are the most affected by malnutrition. On 22.03.22, media reported the death due to severe malnutrition of a child of the indigenous Warao ethnic group from the community of Benítez in the state of Sucre, and the hospitalisation of another child. Other children and elderly people were affected by malnutrition, and tuberculosis was also spreading again, the reports said.

Yemen

Two-month ceasefire started

On 02.04.22, a two-month ceasefire began in Yemen. It was negotiated by the UN with both warring parties separately and began on the first day of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. The ceasefire also includes a partial easing of the Saudi sea and air blockade; hence the first of a total of 18 fuel ships was allowed into the port of Hodeida on 03.04.22. In addition, up to two commercial passenger flights a week will be allowed to resume between Sanaa and Egypt and/or Jordan.