



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

24 July 2023

Afghanistan

Security situation: Taliban fighting with resistance groups

The National Resistance Front (NRF) informed that it killed two Taliban fighters and wounded two others in Baghlan province on 18.07.23. The NRF also said that fighters were killed and wounded when it attacked a Taliban base in Kabul on 15.07.23. The Afghanistan Islamic and National Freedom Movement reported killing four Taliban fighters in Nangarhar province on 15.07.23.

Persecution situation

On 17.07.23, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) published a report on the current human rights situation. The report emphasises the violent implementation of the Taliban's decrees, especially the restrictions on women's rights that have been introduced. It also mentions the ongoing extra-judicial killings of former security forces and the severe restrictions on the media. On 19.07.23, women protested against the closure of beauty salons in Kabul (cf. BN of 10.07.23). The Taliban allegedly ended the demonstration by firing in the air and using water cannons, they took away several women. On 19.07.23, three women and one man were arrested for "moral offences" in Takhar province, two men were publicly flogged in Loghar province for the same reason. On the same day, the arrest of a journalist by the Taliban in Nangarhar province was reported. An increasing number of arrests of women wearing headscarves and cloaks instead of full body veils (burqa or chador) were reported from Herat on 16.07.23.

Governance: Ministry of Virtue burns musical instruments

According to the Taliban Ministry of Virtue, the Taliban burnt musical instruments confiscated across the country in recent months on 19.07.23. The Ministry of Virtue showed photos of the burning on its Twitter account and stated that these instruments were used to promote "corruption" and "evil" in society.

Humanitarian situation

According to reports on 23.07.23, at least 31 people were killed and 74 injured across the country in floods following heavy rain; 41 others are missing. The flash floods particularly affected the capital Kabul and the provinces of Maidan Wardak (Jalrez district) and Ghazni.

Cameroon

Attack on civilians in Anglophone Northwest Region

According to media reports, unknown armed men opened fire on civilians at a busy intersection in the Nacho district of Bamenda city (Northwest Region) late in the evening of 16.07.23. Ten people died and two people were injured

in the attack. Eyewitnesses reported that the gunmen accused the victims of collaborating with the Cameroonian government or of not complying with the separatists' orders. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. On 20.07.23, around 500 people took to the streets in Bamenda demanding an end to the violence in the Anglophone regions of Northwest and Southwest.

Central African Republic

Banned protest by BRDC against planned constitutional referendum; Wagner Group

According to media reports, a demonstration of the opposition party alliance Bloc Républicain pour la Défense de la Constitution (BRDC), which the authorities had banned before, was accompanied by the UN blue-helmet force MINUSCA and proceeded peacefully and without intervention by the security forces in the capital Bangui on 14.07.23. The ban on the demonstration was justified by the security situation and the "subversive character" of the project. The protest was directed against a constitutional referendum planned for 30.07.23 by President Faustin-Archange Touadéra. The referendum includes the abolition of the limitation of presidential terms, thus allowing the incumbent Touadéra to serve another term as president. His second and constitutionally last term ends in 2025. In this context, several media reported the arrival of dozens of new mercenaries from the Russian Wagner Group in the country - according to an anonymous military source, there were hundreds. The Central African government and a Wagner-controlled company operating in the country justified their presence by saying that they will ensure security for the referendum and safeguard it, as according to the Central African government spokesperson many fear a renewed flare-up of violence. Experts quoted by Deutsche Welle (DW) speak of direct political influence exerted by the Wagner Group. It further follows from the DW article that the Wagner Group has established itself as a power factor in the Central African Republic and continues to gain popularity and influence. Members of the Central African armed forces are appearing ever more rarely. The task of ensuring internal security is increasingly being outsourced to the Wagner Group.

Chad

President pardons 110 detainees

According to media reports, transitional President Mahamat Idriss Déby pardoned a total of 110 detainees on 17.07.23 by presidential decree. The pardoned persons had been arrested during the protests against the extension of the political transition period on 20.10.22 and taken to the Koro Toro high-security prison in northern Chad. Together with hundreds of other arrested protesters they had been tried in mass trials and sentenced to several years' imprisonment for participating in unauthorised gatherings, damaging property and arson as well as disturbing public order (cf. BN 24.10., 15.11. and 12.12.22).

At the end of May 2023, Déby had already issued a presidential decree pardoning 75 people who had also been arrested and convicted in connection with the protests of October 2022 (cf. BN of 05.06.23).

Colombia

More abductions

Kidnappings soared by 93% in the first half of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. These figures are cited in an article by the NGO Insight Crime published online on 18.07.23, they are based on data of the Colombian police's anti-kidnapping unit Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal (Gaula). The article specifies that there were 173 kidnappings in the first six months of 2023, against 80 in the same period of 2022. The Institute for Development and Peace Studies Indepaz (Instituto de estudios para el desarrollo y la paz) said on 06.07.23 that the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) was responsible for at least 15 kidnappings in the first half of 2023. The ELN is the largest guerrilla organisation still active in Colombia. During their peace talks (cf. BN of 17.07.23), the ELN and the government had agreed to stop operations against each other as of 06.07.23., the media reported. However, there was no commitment by the ELN to refrain from acts of violence against civilians. According to observers, ransom extortion is an important source of income for the ELN.

Egypt

President pardons two imprisoned human rights activists

State media reported that President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi pardoned activist Patrick Zaki on 19.07.23, shortly after a court had sentenced Zaki to three years in prison for spreading false news. The activist, who studied at an Italian university, had been arrested during a family visit in February 2020 and charged with spreading false news in connection with an article about everyday discrimination against Christian believers in Egypt he had published in 2019. In December 2021, the authorities provisionally released Zaki from pre-trial detention but imposed a travel ban on him; the court had adjourned his trial several times since then.

Human rights lawyer Mohamed al-Baqer was pardoned as well. The authorities had arrested the lawyer in 2019 while he was representing his client, the recently imprisoned activist Alaa Abd al-Fattah, during an interrogation. In December 2021, an emergency court had sentenced al-Baqer to four years in prison for spreading false news and membership of a terrorist organisation.

Ethiopia

Over 30 dead after militia attack in Gambella

An attack by a militia on 18.07.23 in Nuer woreda (district) in Zone 3 of Gambella Regional State has left at least 31 people dead, including 12 militiamen, 20 people were injured, according to local sources. The Ethiopian army took control of the area and a night curfew was imposed.

Already on 13.07.23, three people were reportedly killed and 23 injured in an attack on two public buses in the outskirts of Gambella town by an unknown militia. Gambella had been one of the most peaceful regions in Ethiopia for many years. Since mid-2022, however, armed conflicts have been on the rise, mostly with an ethnic background in the form of disputes over resources such as grazing land and access to water.

Blocking of online networks lifted

After a five-month nationwide blockade, access to social networks, such as Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, was reestablished on 19.07.23. According to Amnesty International, the government blocked all online services in February 2023 after several bishops split from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and called for protests. The Ethiopian authorities have blocked access to the internet and social media platforms several times in recent years, including to prevent criticism of the government, e.g., in the Tigray conflict.

The Gambia

Repression over alleged criticism of president's wife and police chief

Civic activist Madi Jobarteh reported police harassment and intimidation of a young activist and called for an end to the repressions against her. The woman had been temporarily detained, thereafter she was released on bail and given a police registration order, he reported and also said that reports circulated in the media and social networks that the police had revoked her release on bail. According to Jobarteh, in the absence of information to the contrary, the woman had not been guilty of any wrongdoing and had not been charged with or even suspected of any crime. Jobarteh said that conventional and social media reports indicate that the woman had criticised the president's wife Fatou Bah-Barrow and the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Abdoulie Sanyang. No further information is known.

Ghana

Ruling party speaks out against LGBTIQ

The leader of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) spoke out strongly against the activities of LGBTIQ persons in the country in a speech on behalf of the party on 16.07.23. According to the speech, the NPP considers itself a supporter of Ghana's long-standing values and traditions and perceives the prevention of the normalisation of LGBTIQ and related behaviours in Ghana as its political mandate. The Ghanaian parliament is currently debating an

anti-LGBTIQ law that provides for up to ten years imprisonment for same-sex activities as well as for any advocacy for LGBTIQ.

A female academic had sued Ghana's Speaker of Parliament and Attorney General over the alleged unconstitutionality of the bill. The suit, which sought to prevent parliament from hearing the bill, was dismissed by the Supreme Court on 19.07.23.

The bill entitled "Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill" was introduced to the parliament on 02.08.21. The bill is harshly criticised by human rights organisations (cf. BN of 16.08.21).

Iran

Armed attack on police patrol in Sistan and Baluchistan province

Foreign media, citing a report by the Tasnim news agency, report that four police personnel were killed in an attack in Sistan and Baluchistan province on 23.07.23. According to the report, armed men fired at a police car on the route between the towns of Chash and Taftan. So far, hardly any details about the incident are known. Just two weeks earlier, six people, including two police officers, were killed in an armed attack on a police post in the provincial capital of Zahedan, according to media reports on 08.07.23. The reports said that the separatist Sunni guerrilla group Jaish ol-Adl (Army of Justice) claimed responsibility for the attack (cf. BN of 10.07.23).

Conviction of actresses for headscarf violations

According to media reports, two well-known actresses were sentenced to prison terms of different lengths and additional requirements. The reason given was that they had appeared in public and on social media without headscarves. The media report that on 18.07.23, one of the women had been given a ten-months prison sentence as well as a two-year ban on working, a two-year ban on leaving the country and a five-year ban on using social media. She had posted pictures on a social network showing her wearing a hat. The second woman had been sentenced to two years' suspended imprisonment, a two-year ban on leaving the country and a five-year ban on social media for appearing at a public event without a hijab. She was also ordered to undergo weekly psychological treatment. Human rights organisations criticised the use of such additional punishments. In a letter to the head of the judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ezhei, Iranian psychology and psychiatry associations also demanded an end to the appropriation of these scientific disciplines by the judiciary. They said that the diagnoses of mental disorders are under the purview of medical specialists, not judges.

These convictions as well as measures such as shop closures intensified the debate about the hijab requirement within the country, human rights organisations said. This is especially true after the announcement of the renewed deployment of patrols of the so-called morality police (cf. BN of 17.07.23). The Iranian leadership continues to regard the obligation to veil as one of the foundations of the regime's Islamic identity and authority, despite obvious divisions within clerical circles about this issue. According to media reports of 20.07.23, Judiciary Chief Ezhei called for the appointment of special judges for hijab cases in the future, presumably with the intention of countering the high incidence of violations. According to consistent reports, many women, especially in the cities, continue to ignore compliance with the headscarf obligation despite the increased pressure.

Protests by retirees and pensioners

According to media reports, pensioners and retirees gathered for protest rallies in several cities on 19.07.23. These rallies take place at irregular intervals in several provinces of the country, often without confrontations with law enforcement officers. The protesters are demanding more social and economic justice, as well as regular adjustments of their pensions in line with continuing price increases caused by the high inflation rate (approx. 46 %, as of 21.07.23). According to social media reports, the largest gatherings took place in the cities of Kermanshah, Yazd, Shiraz, Hamedan, Ardabil, Karaj, Qazvin and Sanandaj and several others.

Religious minorities: Reprisals against Baha'i

Various reports indicate ongoing reprisals against the Baha'i religious minority. On 28.07.23, a well-known piano teacher belonging to the group was arrested in Rasht. The teacher's family has been in the focus of the Iranian authorities for some time, it was said. Two of their adult children and other family members have already been sentenced for various activities, some to several years in prison.

At the same time, members of the religious community were prevented from commemorating a deceased person in a religious ceremony at the Golestan Javid cemetery in Tehran. The cemetery is a traditional Baha'i burial site, however burials have been prevented there, the last time in April 2023. The denial of burial rituals has been reported repeatedly in the past, sometimes secret burials of Baha'i without notification of their relatives, and similar incidents were reported.

Iraq

Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KR-I): Crackdown on Journalists

On 20.07.23, Kurdish journalist Sherwan Sherwani was sentenced to four years in prison for allegedly falsifying documents. Sherwani is already in prison after being sentenced to several years of imprisonment together with four other journalists and activists in February 2021 for "endangering the security and stability of Kurdistan". The convicts had previously taken part in demonstrations against the Kurdish Regional Government.

Another Kurdish journalist, Omed Baroshki, criticised the renewed prison sentence against Sherwani and was himself briefly detained as a result, but released again on the same day. Baroshki had served a prison sentence of several months after also taking part in anti-government protests.

Freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the KR-I are restricted, and there are repeated attacks on journalists and activists, especially for criticising the Kurdish regional government.

KR-I: Elections

The Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq has postponed the KR-I elections scheduled for 18.11.23. The commission cited technical problems due to the proximity of the provincial elections in December 2023.

Elections in KR-I were originally scheduled to take place in October 2022, but due to disagreements over electoral reforms, the date was postponed, after which MPs had arbitrarily extended their mandate and set the date for the elections on 18.11.23. In May 2023, the Iraqi Supreme Court had ruled that the extension of the mandate did not comply with the constitution.

Freedom of expression and assembly

On 18.07.23, Amnesty International (ai) expressed concerns about two draft laws before the Iraqi parliament. According to ai, these restrict freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The planned law on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly criminalises insulting religious rituals, symbols and persons who are the object of worship or the like, sanctioning such offences with up to ten years in prison. Ai fears that this will criminalise criticism of religious leaders, who often are also politically active in Iraq. Under the planned law also protests can be banned. The second draft law criticised by ai is on cybercrime and provides for up to life imprisonment for publishing content on the internet that is contrary to Iraq's economic, political, military or security interests or causes sectarian strife. According to ai, criminal proceedings were opened against 20 people for expressing opinions in the first half of 2023.

Jordan

WFP to cut aid for Syrian refugees

On 18.07.23, WFP announced the reduction of monthly cash assistance for 120,000 Syrian refugees in two Jordanian camps, due to an unprecedented funding crisis. Specifically, monthly aid for residents of the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps will be cut from USD 32 to USD 21 as of August 2023.

Jordanian authorities warned that the kingdom would not be able to compensate for the resulting shortages and reminded that the care of refugees is the responsibility of the international community and not solely of the host countries. According to the WFP, this is the first in a series of steps that will eventually lead to a complete cessation of assistance to some 50,000 refugees in Jordan. Originally, the programme had covered 465,000 refugees. The WFP says that even after these cuts it still lacks \$41 million to fund the programmes. Thus, further cuts cannot be ruled out.

In a meeting with the Syrian government in spring the Jordanian government had negotiated that the Syrian authorities will accept 1,000 returnees. The deal triggered fears among Syrian refugees in Jordan, few of whom can

imagine returning to Syria, according to UN surveys. In the past, tens of thousands of Syrians have been deported to Syria for violating the law or failing to register with the authorities. According to official figures, Jordan hosts about 1.3 million Syrian refugees out of a total population of about 11 million.

Lebanon

Bank raids

Raids on banks by depositors demanding their money back continue in various Lebanese cities. Four such incidents became known nationwide between 17.07. and 20.07.23 alone. Among other things, hostages were taken; the youngest known person involved was 13 years old. In most cases, at least part of the money was paid out, thus settling all of the incidents peacefully.

Tensions with Israel

Several security incidents occurred near Kfar Chouba on the ceasefire line between Lebanon and Israel. On 18.07.23, Israel started to build a concrete wall along the ceasefire line. On 20.07.23, the local Lebanese administration responded by starting the construction of a passage fit for driving along the same line. Over the following days, several smoke grenades were fired from the Israeli side when people approached from the Lebanese side.

Liberia

Presidential candidate narrowly escapes mob violence

A mob narrowly missed presidential candidate Taiwan Saye Gongloe and fellow candidate Emmanuel Urey Yarkpawolo at a mass rally against corruption in Monrovia on 19.07.23. At least two people were injured in the attack on a protest by the Anti-Corruption Campaign (ACC) of the opposition Liberian People's Party (LPP), according to media reports. Gongloe and Yarkpawolo had jumped to safety in time when unknown violent actors disrupted the mass rally and threw stones at the stage. Gongloe, the initiator of the protests, is the LPP's opposition candidate for the presidential and parliamentary elections in October 2023. According to media reports, he speaks out against what he considers increasing corruption in the George Weah-led government and calls for the prosecution of corrupt state officials.

Libya

UN experts fear the restriction of women's freedom of movement

According to media reports, a group of independent UN experts has expressed concern about a legal provision adopted by the Government of National Unity (GNU) in April 2023 that restricts the right of women and girls to travel abroad without a male guardian. According to the directive, women and girls must fill out a form stating their personal details and reasons for travelling without a male guardian. Reportedly, the new directive is implemented systematically and without prior notice. It is said that those who refuse to fill in or submit such a form are stopped from leaving the country.

Nigeria

Plateau State: Inter-communal violence claims lives

Armed men killed at least two people in Wereng community in Riyom Local Government Area (LGA) on 19.07.23. According to media reports, the attackers were militiamen of the Fulani ethnic group. Operation Safe Haven (OpSH) forces were initially able to repel the attackers, who then proceeded to advance into the communities Kuru Station, Rinyan and Wereng, though. The forces also seized at least 1,000 cows and a large number of sheep. According to media reports, the animals had been released by herders from the Fulani ethnic group to graze on farmland in communities in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA). The actors involved in the conflict are herdsmen and sedentary farmers. The violence is probably the result of disputes over land, grazing and water rights as well as

ethnic rivalries. The fact that the nomadic people are mostly Muslims and the sedentary people often Christians, adds to the volatility of the situation (cf. BN of 22.05.23). Inter-communal violence is widespread in Plateau State, especially in Mangu LGA (cf. BN of 26.06.23).

Imo State: Traditional ruler killed

According to media reports, armed men invaded the residence of traditional ruler Eze Nnamdi Mmirioma in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area (LGA) of southeastern Imo State and shot him dead on 17.07.23. So far, no reason for the killing of the ruler of Ezuhu na Amadi autonomous community could be established. According to the police, the incident has caused great fear among the local population. Traditional rulers are still very influential in large parts of Nigeria. Already in November 2022, the killing of a traditional ruler in Imo State had caused a great stir (cf. BN of 21.11.22).

Katsina State: Air force kills dozens of people

On 17.07.23, the Nigerian Armed Forces killed about 22 people in air strikes in Batsari and Jibia Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the northern state of Katsina. According to media reports, the air strikes were directed against criminal groups, designated as terrorists, operating in the region, who are allegedly responsible for several kidnappings and violent attacks. In August 2022, the Nigerian Air Force had killed the leader of the violent group, Alhaji Abdulkareem Lawal (alias Kareem Boss), and some of his followers in Katsina State. He was responsible for organising kidnappings for ransom, cattle rustling and deadly attacks, according to media reports. The government of Nigeria has designated violent actors in the region as terrorists since the beginning of 2022 (cf. BN of 10.01.22).

Pakistan

Pakistan calls for decisive action against TTP by Afghan Taliban

Media reports of 23.07.23 cite accusations by the Pakistani government against the Afghan Taliban, alleging the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) are still being offered refuge and protection in Afghanistan, from where they then coordinate attacks in Pakistan. During a three-day visit to Kabul, Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghan Affairs, Asif Ali Khan Durrani, sent a strong message to the Taliban, calling for decisive action against the TTP. Earlier, Pakistani Defence Minister Asif and Pakistani generals had expressed similar criticism. The Afghan Taliban rejected the accusations. They are said to have advised Pakistan to engage peacefully with the TTP and not to fight them.

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Heatwave exacerbates energy shortage

An international press agency reported on 18.07.23 that a heat wave with temperatures of more than 38 degrees Celsius is causing prolonged power cuts in the Gaza Strip. As a result, electricity is cut off for up to twelve hours a day. Hamas, the ruling party in the Gaza Strip, cited Israel's 16-year blockade as the cause for the poor economy and lack of development, including of the electricity grid.

Representatives of Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank blamed each other for the current situation. According to local officials, the 2.3 million inhabitants need 500 megawatts per day in the summer. However, only 120 megawatts are available from Israel and another 60 megawatts from a power plant in the Gaza Strip, the report said.

Gaza Strip: Outstanding public salaries paid

The salaries of 50,000 public sector employees in the Gaza Strip were paid out three weeks late on 19.07.23. According to the Hamas Finance Ministry, the delay was due to late payments from the main donor, Qatar, a drop in taxes and additional expenses.

Currently, the Qatari government is supposed to transfer USD 30 million per month to families, for fuel for electricity generation and for public sector salaries. More than half of the population in the Gaza Strip is living below the poverty line.

West Bank: Several dead and injured in clashes with Israeli military

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in the West Bank, the Israeli military shot and killed a Palestinian at a protest in Nablus on 20.07.23. The Palestinian Red Crescent informed that four more Palestinians were wounded.

According to consistent reports, a minor Palestinian was shot by Israeli security forces on 21.07.23 when he, along with others, threw stones at the military near the village of Umm Safa.

Shortly before, three Israeli military personnel were wounded in violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces in the village of Beit Umar, near the city of Hebron.

On 22.07.23, a Palestinian was killed after Israeli military personnel opened fire on his car near Nablus. Another person was wounded by a gunshot and subsequently arrested. According to the military, the driver had tried to deliberately steer the car into a group of military personnel.

Republic of Congo

CAD: Report on the human rights situation in the first half of 2023

The Centre d'action pour le développement (CAD) documented more than 1,817 human rights violations and abuses of varying types and severity in the first half of 2023. This represents an increase of 761% compared to the same period last year. 1,685 (around 93%) incidents were related to forced mass evictions by the authorities in parts of the capital Brazzaville. During the reporting period, extra-judicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions as well as other human rights violations and abuses were recorded.

Republic of Moldova

Transnistria: Leading opposition politician assassinated

The leader of the opposition Communist Party in the non-central government-controlled breakaway region of Transnistria, Oleg Horjan (also transcribed as Khorzhan), was found murdered in his home on 16.07.23. Horjan had only been released from prison in December 2022 after serving a four and a half year sentence. The related conviction was allegedly connected to a protest he organised against the Transnistrian de facto government on 06.06.18. In an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) after his release, Horjan had discussed the conditions of his detention and the situation in the region. Citing NGOs, Horjan is described in a media report as the most vocal local critic of the pro-Russian Transnistrian regime.

According to the report, Horjan's body showed several stab wounds and head injuries when it was discovered on 16.07.23. The Transnistrian police originally announced that Horjan had been shot; the Transnistrian criminal investigation department stated that it assumed a robbery and referred to an open and empty safe. The murder was only widely publicised on 17.07.23 by Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), at a press conference.

Gagauzia: New governor inaugurated in the absence of representatives of the central government

On 19.07.23, Evghenia Guțul was inaugurated as head of government ("Bashkan") of the autonomous region of Gagauzia. On 14.05.23, she had won a run-off election against an independent candidate, who was, however, supported by the Party of Socialists (PSRM). Guțul stood for the Șor party, which is also pro-Russian oriented but has since been dissolved by the Moldovan Constitutional Court. It is the party of the oligarch Ilan Șor, who has been sentenced to a long prison term in Moldova (cf. BN of 17.04.23 and 26.06.23) and is presumed to be staying in Israel. According to media reports, eleven people are currently being investigated on charges of vote buying in the election. These reports also say that President Maia Sandu had referred to Guțul's relations with Șor and (thus) her support by a criminal group in explaining the central government's unusual total absence at the inauguration. Guțul's predecessor Irina Vlah and foreign diplomatic staff did not accept the invitation either. At her inauguration, Guțul defended good relations with Russia and thanked Șor for promising to invest €500 million in Gagauzia, the reports say.

This autonomous region in the country's south is predominantly inhabited by the Turkic-speaking minority of the Gagauzians, who historically are Orthodox Christians.

Russian Federation

Raising the age limits for belonging to the military reserve

On 18.07.23, the State Duma passed amendments to the "Law on Military Duty and Service" in the third reading, they were then adopted by the Council of the Federation on 19.07.23. They provide for raising the age limits for both the mobilised reserve ("active") and the normal reserve ("passive") by five years each.

The normal reserve includes all persons who have completed their compulsory military service but have not made any further commitments to the Ministry of Defence. This includes, above all, the enlisted ranks, non-commissioned officers without a rank, as well as the group of warrant officers. These reservists are divided into three categories, with the age limit for the first category being raised from 35 to 40 years of age, for the second category from 45 to 50 years of age and for the third category from 50 to 55 years of age.

In contrast, members of the mobilised reserve have committed themselves to participation in annual reserve exercises and receive a state stipend for this after completing their compulsory service or voluntary service tour. For them, the age limits for mobilisation increase in the rank group of generals from 65 to 70 years of age, in the rank group of other senior officers (staff officers from the rank of major) from 60 to 65 years of age, in the rank group of junior officers from 55 to 60 years of age and for all other ranks from 45 to 55 years of age.

The age limits will be raised over a transitional period from 01.01.24 by one year at a time, thus, from 01.01.28 the new age limits will come into full force.

Raising the age limits for mobilising reservists is another measure by which Defence Minister Shoigu intends to increase the number of active soldiers in the Russian armed forces from 1.15 million to 1.5 million.

Senegal

Two members of the PASTEF party leadership go free

According to media reports, the recently remanded leader of the parliamentary opposition coalition Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW) and vice-president of the opposition party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF), Birame Souleye Diop, was released on 19.07.23 (cf. BN of 17.03.23). The same applies to the PASTEF Secretary for Communications, El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, who was last taken into extended police custody and had already been under judicial and electronic surveillance (cf. BN of 17.07.23). Diop has been charged with, among other things, insulting the president and Ndiaye has since been charged with inciting insurrection and spreading false news. Meanwhile, PASTEF General Secretary Bassirou Diomaye Faye remains in custody. His lawyer announced on 20.07.23 that Faye's request for provisional release had been rejected. Faye, who criticised a politically motivated prosecution and instrumentalisation of the judiciary against party leader Sonko, who is threatened with imprisonment and remains under de facto house arrest, has been charged with several offences (cf. BN of 17.04.23).

Organisations call for termination of prosecution against Sané and others

In a joint statement of 17.07.23 the NGOs Amnesty International, Article 19 West Africa, Rencontre Africaine pour la Defense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO), the Senegalese Human Rights League (LSDH) and the think tank AfrikaJom expressed their concern about a request by the public prosecutor's office in Dakar to order the pre-trial detention of Aliou Sané - the leader of the protest movement "Y'en a marre" and vice-coordinator of the opposition movement "Mouvement des forces vives du Sénégal (F24)". He was arrested on 29.05.23 in Dakar together with YAW leader Diop and other F24 leaders while trying to visit opposition leader Sonko, who has been placed under de facto house arrest (see BN of 05.07.23). The statement says that he had been charged with offences against public security and order; a court had ordered his provisional release. The NGOs called for a halt to the proceedings against Sané and all those detained for exercising their right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression as enshrined in the Constitution and the regional and international human rights treaties ratified by Senegal.

Another ban on demonstrations imposed against F24

As in May and June 2023, the prefect of Dakar banned a protest planned for 21.07.23 by the opposition movement F24, which unites more than 100 political parties and civil society organisations (cf. BN of 24.04.23). The reason given was the risk of a disturbance of public order and the obstruction of the free movement of people and goods.

F24 called for the recent protest to demand the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience and the holding of free, inclusive and transparent presidential elections with eligibility of opposition leader Sonko.

Sudan

General situation and ongoing fighting

Fighting continued in and around Khartoum last week. In relation to the fighting reports of the use of drones by both the Sudanese Army (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are mounting. According to media reports, these are mostly commercial drones fitted with mortar shells which have only been used since around the end of May/beginning of June 2023. On 19.07.23, the use of such drones by the RSF in Khartoum killed at least 14 people who were near a military convoy.

Clashes between the SAF and the RSF in residential areas in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur, have reportedly increased since 20.07.23. At least 20 people are reported to have been killed and around 5,000 families displaced, according to UN figures. Residents of the city reported looting of important facilities.

The renewed flare-up of fighting between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North under the leadership of Abdelaziz Al Hilu (SPLM-N al Hilu) and the SAF in South Kordofan since 15.07.23 represents a setback, after the South Sudanese President had announced on 04.07.23 that he had been able to successfully dissuade the SPLM-N al Hilu from further fighting (cf. BN of 10.07.23).

Syria

Northeast: Adverse living conditions in detention centres

On 21.07.23, a UN Special Envoy published criticism of the indefinite mass detention of prisoners with suspected or proven links to IS, including in the al-Hol and al-Roj camps, as well as the living conditions there, after visiting the region.

The situation of children in the camps is particularly worrying, he said. Boys in particular are systematically separated from their mothers without notice. This is based on the unproven assumption that these children, due to their own or their parents' connection to IS, will pose a significant security threat once they reach adolescence.

More than 56,000 people are living in the camps, including many suspected extremists and family members of suspected IS fighters. The UN Special Envoy again called on all third countries to bring home their nationals who are still detained in the camps. The detention centres are under the control of the Kurdish-led and US-backed SDF, which has called several times in the past for the repatriation of third-country nationals detained there.

Damascus: At least two soldiers killed in Israeli air strike

According to the state news agency SANA, two Syrian soldiers were killed by a series of Israeli air strikes near the capital Damascus on 19.07.23. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), on the other hand, reported three dead, including two members of an Iranian-backed militia and only one Syrian soldier. The Israeli military, in line with its previous practice, did not comment on the reports.

Togo

Twelve soldiers killed in attack

Armed militants killed at least twelve soldiers in an attack in the town of Sankortchagou in the prefecture of Kpendjal on 17.07.23 as the soldiers were driving through the town in their vehicles. According to media reports, the soldiers of the defence and security forces were ambushed in the town in the north of the country, about ten kilometres from the border with Burkina Faso. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it is assumed to be terrorist in nature.

The Support Group for Islam and Muslims (GSIM), a splinter group of Al-Qaida in the Sahel, had claimed responsibility for ten of the last 14 violent and partly deadly attacks in northern Togo. On 13.06.22, the Togolese government had declared a state of security emergency in the northern region of Savanes and extended it for another year in April 2023 (cf. BN of 17.04.23).

Türkiye

Attack on members of the Hür Dava party

The provincial secretary of the Islamist-Kurdish Hür Dava Partisi (Free Cause Party) was killed and the provincial chairman injured in a knife attack in the Turkish city of Adana on 22.07.23. According to media reports, the attack took place in the prayer room of the party's office in Adana. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced on Twitter that the perpetrator had been arrested and a criminal investigation had been opened.

The motive for the attack is still unclear. Party representatives suspected that organised crime in the city of Adana was involved in the attack. Halef Yilmaz, the party's deputy leader, said on Twitter that there was a "dirty drug trade" in Adana and called on the authorities to track down those behind the attack.

Venezuela

Obstructions of election campaign appearances by two opposition candidates

According to various media reports, during the election campaign for the opposition primaries in June and July 2023, the candidates María Corina Machado and Henrique Capriles Radonski and their respective supporters were physically and verbally assaulted and attacks against them were attempted at least six times. Supporters of the ruling party PSUV or militias close to the government ("colectivos") were responsible for the corresponding restrictions and obstructions of campaign appearances, the reports said.

Yemen

WFP staff killed

On 21.07.23, the head of the local WFP office in the town of Taizz was killed by unknown persons. The WFP staff member was shot dead in the middle of the street by two armed men on a motorbike and succumbed to his injuries a short time later. The perpetrators initially managed to flee, but on 22.07.23 the police arrested two suspects and ten other people on suspicion of complicity. The background is still unclear.

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