

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

16 June 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 02.06.14 the director of the Jesuit Refugee Service was abducted by unknown persons in the western Afghan city of Herat. Also on 02.06.14, three Turkish construction engineers were killed in a suicide attack in the district of Behsud, province of Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan). On 06.06.14 the convoy of presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah was attacked in Kabul. The combined suicide and bomb attack claimed the lives of 13 civilians and security personnel. 46 people were injured, while Abdullah escaped unscathed. On 10.06.14 Taliban attacked a group of mine clearers in the north of the central Afghan province of Logar (district of Agha), killing eight workers and injuring three. Despite widespread efforts, there are still over 4,500 regions in Afghanistan identified as containing mines and unexploded bombs, covering a total area of 521 square kilometres. Also on 10.06.14, unknown persons abducted 36 lecturers and students of the University of Kandahar who were on their way to Kabul in the south-eastern Afghan province of Ghazni.

Natural disasters

At least 80 people died in flooding in the north-eastern province of Baghlan (district of Guzargah-e-Nur) on 06.06.14. Some 2,000 houses are said to have been destroyed.

Presidential elections

The run-off between Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani on 14.06.14 was overshadowed by attacks and armed clashes. According to information from the government and the provincial authorities, some 250 people were killed. The casualties are reported to comprise 176 insurgents, 44 civilians and 29 members of the security forces.

The election commission will announce the provisional result on 02.07.14. The final result is to be announced on 22.07.14. The inauguration of the new president is planned for 02.08.14.

Pakistan

Attacks

Seven people died on 03.06.14 when their vehicle hit a roadside booby-trap near the town of Parachinar (Kurram Agency, FATA). The authorities suspect an act of religiously motivated violence. Clashes between Sunnis and Shiites are common in the area.

Two army officers and three civilians were killed in a suicide attack in the town of Fateh Jang near Islamabad on 04.06.14. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. Four soldiers were killed and four injured in an attack on a checkpoint in the region of Bajaur (tribal regions, north-west Pakistan).

On the night of 08.06.14, ten fighters belonging to the Pakistani Taliban attacked the airport of the coastal city of Karachi in southern Pakistan. In the six-hour battle, all the attackers and – according to various sources – between 14 and 38 other people were killed. At least 22 people were injured. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP; an alliance of at least a dozen Islamist groups) stated that the attack was carried out in revenge for air raids by the Pakistani army in the tribal areas near the border with Afghanistan. According to the Pakistani authorities, the attackers were foreigners from Uzbekistan and Chechnya. On 10.06.14 there was a further attack on the airport.

In response to the Taliban attack, the army launched an offensive against Taliban positions in the north-west of the country on 10.06.14, reportedly killing at least 15 Taliban. Rumours of an imminent ground offensive by the army prompted around 58,000 people to flee from North Waziristan into the surrounding regions. On 15.06.14 the air force bombed Islamist positions in North Waziristan, reportedly killing around 80 extremists, including Abu Abdur Rehman Al-Maani, who masterminded the attack on Karachi airport. Shiite pilgrims were attacked in the Balochistani town of Taftan on the border with Iran on 09.06.14. 24 Shiite pilgrims and three of the attackers died. A Sunni group by the name of Jaishul Adil claimed responsibility for the attack. At least three people were shot dead and two injured in an attack by unknown assailants in Bara Bandi, district of Swat, province of Khyber Pakhtoonkwa on 11.06.14. One of those killed was a member of the peace committee which is conducting negotiations with the Taliban.

Following a pause of some six months, the USA resumed drone attacks on militant Islamists in Pakistan on 11.06.14. At least 16 Taliban fighters have allegedly been killed in two attacks in North Waziristan.

A tribal elder with close ties to the government was shot dead with his son by suspected Taliban in Bajaur (Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA) on 12.06.14. Three militiamen close to the government have been murdered in Swat Valley (also FATA).

Private TV channel closed down

The Pakistani authorities temporarily closed down the private television channel GeoTV on 06.06.14, accusing it of broadcasting programmes with blasphemous content. According to observers, the real reason is the channel's repeated critical coverage of the military and secret services.

Iraq

ISIS/ISIL take Mosul and other cities and city districts

Fighters from the terrorist group The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria / The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL) have been conducting major operations in the provinces of Ninive, Salahaddin, Anbar, Diyala and Baghdad since 05.06.14.

According to the "Institute for the Study of War", a series of attacks on 10.06.14 indicates that ISIS/ISIL is continuing its activities along the Mosul-Baghdad highway and along the Kirkuk-Baghdad highway to the south, in the direction of Baghdad.

According to a press announcement of 10.06.14, Mosul is totally under the control of ISIS/ISIL. The announcement stated that the group had stormed Badush prison, the largest prison in the province of Ninive, and hundreds of prisoners had been able to free. The military airbase was also reported to be in the hands of the extremists.

According to other reports, large parts of Mosul are allegedly under ISIS/ISIL control and the Iraqi government has conceded that it has lost control over the entire province of Ninive.

The extremists have also captured several predominantly Sunni-Arab regions in the ethnically mixed province of Kirkuk. ISIS/ISIL has similarly taken control of the Siniyah and Sulaiman Bek regions in the province of Salahaddin, after driving out the Iraqi security forces.

Developments following the capture of Mosul

According to information from the "Institute for the Study of War" on 11.06.14, ISIS/ISIL also took control of other cities after capturing Mosul on 10.06.14. On 11.06.14 the extremists took Tikrit, capital of the province of Salahaddin, as well as Baiji and the oil refinery in Baiji.

Other reports claim that ISIS/ISIL have also captured the smaller towns of Duluyia and Yathrib to the north of Baghdad and the district of al-Dour/al-Daur in the province of Salahaddin and are now outside Samarra (province of Salahaddin). The extremists are reported to be holding between 10 and 15 per cent of Iraqi territory at present, excluding the Kurdish region (as per 11.06.14).

Kurdish towns such as Shangal and Tel Ward, near to Mosul, appear to be under the protection of the Kurdish Peshmerga, as are Kirkuk (province of Kirkuk) and Tuz Khormato (province of Salahaddin) (as per: 11.06.14).

According to a DPA bulletin on 16.06.14, the Iraqi army, volunteers and Kurdish Peshmerga troops have reportedly since pushed back the ISIS/ISIL fighters in certain areas.

The situation is confused. Armed clashes and attacks are reported in Baghdad, Tal Afar (province of Ninive) and the provinces of Salahaddin, Diyala and Anbar, for example.

According to a press report on 15.06.14, both the Iraqi government and the ISIS/ISIL terrorist group are claiming to have killed hundreds of people in recent days. The report points out that while these claims cannot be independently corroborated, at least 30 civilians have been killed and bomb attacks and artillery fire have claimed a further 89 lives.

According to a DPA bulletin of 16.06.14, the USA is preparing for direct talks with Iran, with the security situation in Iraq and ways of driving out ISIS/ISIL on the agenda. The bulletin claims that direct talks are expected to begin this week.

Refugees from Mosul

According to a report from the Shafaq news agency on 10.06.14, thousands of inhabitants of Mosul have fled the fighting in the direction of Erbil and are located at the al-Khazar checkpoint to the west of the city of Erbil.

According to a press report of 11.06.14, IOM has put the number of Mosul inhabitants fleeing the fighting at 500,000 (out of a total population of some two million), some of whom are seeking protection to the east of the city, in the province of Ninive or in Iraq's Kurdish region. The report states that the city's hospitals cannot be reached. The rush is reported to have led to bottlenecks at the checkpoints on 10.06.14, as people attempted to reach the safety of Erbil.

Rise in the number of displaced persons in the province of Anbar

According to information from the UNHCR (cf. BN of 06.06.14), the number of displaced persons in the province of Anbar is rising. According to the Iraqi government, around 434,000 people have left their homes in the province of Anbar since January 2014. The UNHCR points out that the actual scale of the situation is not known, as the Iraqi authorities have had to discontinue registration procedures on account of the lack of security. The UNHCR estimates that some 480,000 people have currently been displaced. The highest concentrations of displaced persons are to be found in the provinces of Anbar and Salahaddin, followed by Erbil, Kirkuk, Suleimaniyah and Baghdad.

Leader of the "Ramadi Awakening Council" killed

The leader of the "Ramadi Awakening Council", also known as "Sons of Iraq", Mohammed Khamis Abu Risha, was killed in a suicide attack on 03.06.14. The organisation is fighting on the side of the Iraqi government against the terrorist network "The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria".

Attack on PUK party building

At least 19 people were killed and some 60 injured in a suicide attack on the party headquarters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Jalawla (province of Diyala) on 08.06.14. The majority of the victims were Kurdish security personnel. ISIS/ISIL has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Military frees hostages

The Iraqi military regained control of the university campus in Ramadi (province of Anbar) after a number of hours on 07.06.14. ISIS/ISIL fighters had attacked the university in Ramadi and taken students and university staff hostage. The hostages were freed. The suspected leader of the extremists, Abu Ataa al-Halabi, was killed by Iraqi security forces.

Syria

Assad wins presidential elections

According to official information released by Syrian parliamentary speaker Mohammad al-Laham, Bashar al-Assad won the country's presidential election on 03.06.14 with 88.7% of the vote. The two opposition

candidates, Hassan al-Nuri and Maher al-Hajjar, claimed 4.3% and 3.2% of the vote respectively. Turn-out reportedly stood at 73.42%. The EU had already announced beforehand that it would not recognise the illegitimate election. Due to the continuing fighting, voting was only possible in the areas controlled by government troops (approx. 40% of the national territory).

Amnesty announced

In the wake of his re-election, the Syrian president announced a general amnesty, which is also to apply to convictions for membership of a terrorist organisation under the anti-terrorism law imposed by Assad in 2012. The amnesty is to cover crimes committed prior to 09.06.14. The prisoners concerned will not be released, but their sentences are to be reduced. Death sentences are to be commuted into life imprisonment, for example. Prisoners who are aged 70 or over or who are suffering from an incurable illness are to be released. Foreign fighters are to be granted one month's time in which to turn themselves in. 320 prisoners were reportedly released from the prison in Aleppo on 06.06.14, while 480 prisoners, including 80 women, were released from the prison in Adra on 06. and 07.06.14. They had all been imprisoned on terrorism charges.

ISIS (ISIL) also in Deir ez-Zor / Syrian air force reportedly attacking ISIS fighters

Following the offensive by the terrorist group "The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) / "The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) in Iraq, the already besieged Syrian city of Deir ez-Zor (Deir al Zour) is now also on the brink of being captured by ISIS fighters. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 600 ISIS fighters and rebels and 40 civilians have been killed in the province of Deir ez-Zor since the beginning of May 2014. 130,000 people are reported to have fled from the city. Syria's air force reportedly carried out large-scale attacks on jihadist positions on the border with Iraq on 14. and 15.06.14, also carrying out heavy bombing of ISIS positions in the Syrian provinces of al-Hassakeh and ar-Raqqa for the first time. The attacks were explained as a response to the increasing flow of military equipment from Iraq to Syria.

Fighter returning from Syria detained

On 14.06.14 a French extremist was detained by the German police in Berlin on his return from Syria, where he had allegedly taken part in fighting. A few days previously, the president of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Hans-Georg Maaßen, had warned about people joining the Islamist jihad, travelling to the conflict regions and then returning to Germany. He substantiated the warning by reference to the murder of four people in the Jewish Museum in Brussels on 24.05.14. The attack is believed to have been carried out by a Frenchman who joined the terrorist group "The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)" / "The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) and became active after returning to Europe.

Lebanon

Presidential election fails once again

The sixth attempt to elect a new Lebanese president also failed, because insufficient MPs were present in parliament for a legitimate vote. There is to be a fresh attempt on 18.06.14. The tenure of the previous president, Michel Suleiman, ended on 25.05.14. Only a Maronite can become the president of Lebanon. The Hezbollah block and the rival "14th of March" faction have so far been unable to agree on a candidate.

Palestinian territories

Around 150 Palestinians arrested

Around 150 Palestinians were arrested in a "comprehensive operation" in the occupied West Bank on 15.06.14 aimed at finding three young people (two 16 year-olds and one 19 year-old, all Talmud students) who have been missing since 12.06.14. Those arrested include at least seven MPs and around 40 members of the radical Islamist Hamas organisation, including parliamentary speaker Asis Dweik, as well as a number of ex-prisoners whom Israel had recently released. The Israeli prime minister assumes that the young people have been abducted by "a terrorist organisation", by which he means Hamas. No Palestinian group has claimed responsibility for an abduction to date. Israel recalls the abduction of the soldier Gilad Schalit in 2006, who was held hostage by Hamas in the Gaza Strip for five years before finally being released in October 2011.

EU, USA and Arab states recognise unity government

Following the reconciliation agreement concluded by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) headed by Abbas and the extremist Hamas organisation at the end of April 2014, the two sides have taken the first step of forming a unity government which is to organise presidential and parliamentary elections within six months. The prime minister of the unity government, Rami Hamdallah, is to receive political and financial support from the USA, the European Union and Arab states. Israel's calls for a boycott of the unity government have thus come to nothing.

Yemen

Ceasefire after heavy fighting

Following heavy fighting between Houthi rebels and tribal fighters on the one side and government troops on the other over the provincial capital of Amran (Omran) in the north of Yemen, which cost the lives of 100 Houthi and 20 soldiers on 02.06.14 alone, a ceasefire was announced on 03.06.14. At the beginning of the year, the Houthi, who belong to the Zaidist branch of the Shiites, advanced from their stronghold in the northern province of Saada in a southerly direction as far as Amran, approx. 50 kilometres from the capital, Sanaa. Here they engaged in frequent fighting with combatants of the Ahmar clan, which leads the largest tribal confederation and is allied with the Islamist Islah party. The government has brokered numerous ceasefires in the past. These were always broken after only a short time, however.

Turkey

Criticism of police violence

One year on from the nationwide Gezi protests, in its report published last week Amnesty International accused the government in Ankara of continuing to suppress peaceful protests through the use of police force and of granting the police impunity. According to the report, more than 5,500 people face criminal prosecution for organising, participating in or supporting the Gezi protests, while despite hundreds of complaints only nine police officers have been charged.

OSCE monitors to oversee presidential election

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is intending to dispatch monitors to oversee the Turkish presidential election at the end of August 2014. According to the OSCE, such action is necessary in the wake of the local government elections on 30.03.14, which gave rise to doubts as to compliance with democratic standards. The Turkish government has agreed to such monitoring.

Initial counts in the local government by-elections on 01.06.14 indicated victory for the opposition parties in most of the 13 constituencies in which the ballot had to be re-run due to irregularities. According to the initial counts, the AKP, which claimed clear victory in the local elections at the end of March 2014, was ahead in only four of these constituencies.

Ban on alcohol advertising

The transition period for a stricter law on alcohol which entered into force in September 2013 ended on 11.06.14. Shop owners, restaurants, public houses and supermarkets are required to remove all advertising for alcoholic beverages and alcohol producers are no longer permitted to advertise with their brand logos as sponsors. Repeated breaches of the ban are punishable with high fines of up to half a million Turkish lira (approx. € 175,000). Shops have already been banned from selling alcohol between 10 p.m. and 6 p.m. since September 2013. Alcohol can still be drunk in restaurants and bars, however. The government has stated health grounds as the reason for the law.

Iran

MPs call for stricter rules on the wearing of the veil

A majority of 195 of the 290 MPs in the Iranian parliament have signed a written petition calling on president Rohani to enforce the law on the wearing of the veil by women more rigorously. According to the quotes from the petition released by the official Isna news agency, the "cultural invasion" of Iran by the west was deemed to be aiming to "alter the Iranians' way of life with regard to the wearing of the veil."

Islamic law has prevailed in Iran since the revolution of 1979. Women are required to wear loose-fitting clothing and to cover their hair and their neck with a veil. In recent years, increasing numbers of women have begun wearing their veils more loosely and putting on tighter clothing, however. In October 2013 president Rohani, who was elected a year ago, called on the police to show more tolerance on the veil issue.

Egypt

New president sworn in

Former army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was sworn into office before members of the Supreme Constitutional Court on 08.06.14. Dignitaries attending the subsequent celebrations included Iranian president Hassa Rohani and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

The interim government stepped down on 09.06.14 to allow al-Sisi to form a cabinet. The previous prime minister, Ibrahim Mahlab, is expected to remain in office.

Sexual violence at Tahrir Square

In the celebrations relating to the swearing-in of the new president, several incidents of sexual harassment and attacks on women occurred at Tahrir Square on 08.06.14. According to information from the interior ministry, the authorities arrested seven men.

Opposition activists convicted

On 11.06.14 a summary court of jurisdiction sentenced well-known opposition activist and blogger Alaa Abd al-Fattah and 24 co-defendants to 15 years' imprisonment each for contravention of the law on demonstrations and attacking a police officer. Al-Fattah is recognised as a leading figure of the revolution of January 2011. He later organised the protests against president Morsi and subsequently criticised the new government after his removal.

Libya

Violence continues

At least eight people were killed and 15 injured in fighting between armed Islamists and units of dissident ex-general Haftar in the city of Bengasi, eastern Libya, on 15.06.14.

Former Libyan general Haftar survived an attack on 04.06.14 in which a suicide bomber blew up a car loaded with explosives outside a house in Abyar, some 60 km east of Bengasi, where Haftar was believed to be. Three of his militiamen were killed and there were numerous casualties. This stalled his unit's "Operation Dignity" which had been resumed against Islamist militia, claiming at least 20 lives in Bengasi. Armed attackers fired a bazooka at prime minister Maitiq's seat of government on 04.06.14, but no-one was injured. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) suspended activities in Libya on 05.06.14 after a Swiss ICRC worker was shot dead by unknown assailants in Sirte on Wednesday.

On 09.06.14 the Libyan supreme court declared the election of prime minister Ahmed Maitiq unconstitutional on account of irregularities relating to the ballot and the counting of votes. Former prime minister Abdullah al-Thinni, who had actually announced his retirement following threats from militias against his family in April 2014, subsequently announced that he would be remaining in office. A new parliament is to be elected on 25.06.14. Ex-general Haftar is also reported to support this election.

Sierra-Leone/Guinea

Number of deaths from Ebola epidemic rising

The health ministry announced on 09.06.14 that twelve people had died of the Ebola virus since the outbreak of the epidemic. 42 cases of the illness had been confirmed and 109 suspected cases registered, it said.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) stated on 04.06.14 that 208 people had died of Ebola in neighbouring Guinea since the beginning of the year. 328 suspected cases have been registered, of which 193 have been confirmed. The regional focuses are Gueckedou, with 190 infections (140 fatalities), Conakry, with 56 infections (27 fatalities) and Macenta, with 44 infections (24 fatalities).

Nigeria

Multinational task force to fight Boko Haram

A meeting of several western and African countries was held in London on 12.06.14 to discuss how to fight the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram. Nigeria, Chad, Benin, Niger and Cameroon resolved to set up a regional intelligent unit. Joint border patrols are also to be carried out, in order to cut off the terrorists' escape routes in the north-east of Nigeria. The United Kingdom, France and the USA intend to make a contribution in the areas of reconnaissance, technical support and training for the Nigerian security forces.

Battle with Boko Haram

On 09.06.14 the defence ministry spokesman announced that the military had killed over 50 Boko Haram fighters near the village of Bita (Gwoza LGA, federal state of Borno) at the weekend (06.-08.06.14). He said the terrorists had been en route to carrying out attacks on villages in the federal states of Borno and Andamawa.

Suicide attack on barracks

At around 11 a.m. on 08.06.14 a female suicide attacker approached the barracks of the 301st artillery regiment on Biu Road in Gombe (capital of the federal state of the same name). When stopped by soldiers, she blew up the explosives which she was wearing. The attacker and one soldier were killed. Another soldier was injured.

Print editions of newspapers seized

On 06. and 07.06.14 the military seized print editions of the nationwide daily newspapers Punch, The Nation, Leadership and Daily Trust at various locations in Nigeria (e.g. Abuja, Port Harcourt). Vehicles delivering the newspapers were also searched. In isolated cases, drivers were briefly detained. The measures were said to have been carried out due to reports that explosives were being transported in the vehicles together with the newspapers.

20 women abducted

On the afternoon of 05.06.14 suspected fighters of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram attacked the village of Garkin Fulani and abducted 20 young women and three men. Boko Haram is demanding 40 cows for the release of each of the 20 women. The village of Garkin Fulani is only around 8 km from Chibok, where Boko Haram abducted well over 200 schoolgirls on 14.04.14.

Attacks by Boko Haram on villages

On 03.06.14 suspected Boko Haram fighters disguised as soldiers entered the small town of Ngoshe and the three villages of Attagara, Agapalwa and Aganjara (all in Gwoza LGA, situated on the border with Cameroon) in the north-eastern federal state of Borno. After gathering the inhabitants together under false pretences, the militants opened fire on them. Up to 500 inhabitants are reported to have been killed.

On the evening of 04.06.14 suspected Boko Haram fighters entered the village of Bardari, situated close to the university on the outskirts of Maiduguri (capital of the federal state of Borno). Under the pretext of delivering a sermon, they called on the inhabitants to gather outside the village mosque. They then shot at the assembled inhabitants, shouting "Alluha Akbar". Some 45 people were killed.

DR Congo/Rwanda

Fighting on the border with Rwanda

On 11. and 12.06.14 fighting broke out between the Congolese and the Rwandan army around 20 km north of Goma, capital of the eastern Congolese province of North Kivu. According to information from the Congolese side, the fighting broke out after a Congolese soldier was abducted and later killed by Rwandan soldiers. Rwanda claims that Congolese soldiers crossed the border and attacked Rwandan soldiers, in response to which five Congolese soldiers were killed.

Mali

Attack on military base

At least four soldiers belonging to the MINUSMA UNO peace-keeping force were killed in a suicide attack on a military base in the north of Mali on 11.06.14. Ten other people were injured. The attacker, who blew himself up at the entrance to the base in the town of Aguelhok, was also killed. The four dead soldiers came from Chad.

Kenya

Attack on coastal town claims many lives

On 15.06.14 some 50 suspected al-Shabaab fighters attacked various targets including hotels and a police station and shot at passers-by in the coastal town of Mpeketoni, 30 kilometres south-west of the holiday islands of Lamu. The death toll varies according to sources between at least 26 and at least 48. At least one hotel was set on fire.

Muslim cleric killed

Mohamed Idris, chairman of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, was shot dead in broad daylight by unknown assailants in Mombassa on 10.06.14. The influential moderate cleric was opposed to al-Shabaab and supported the government in the fight against radical Muslim movements.

Cameroon

Suspected Boko Haram attack village

More than 300 heavily armed men plundered and pillaged the village of Gorsî Tourou in the north of Cameroon on 06.06.14. The military drove back the attackers. An uncertain number of people were killed. The government stationed a 1,000-strong security force in the north of the country in the border region with Nigeria at the end of May 2014 in order to counter Boko Haram fighters entering the country there.

Refugees from the Central African Republic

According to UN figures released on 04.06.14, more than 86,000 people have fled to Cameroon from the Central African Republic since December 2013. The UN said that up to 2,000 refugees, mainly women and children, were arriving in Cameroon each week; 20 to 30 per cent of these were suffering from acute malnutrition. In all, more than 120,000 people have fled the country. Apart from Cameroon, they have also sought refuge in Chad, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Côte d'Ivoire

Ex-Ivorian president on trial

The former president of Cote d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, is on trial before the International Criminal Court in The Hague on charges of human rights violations. The court stated on 12.06.14 that Gbagbo faced "four charges of crimes against humanity", including murder, rape and persecution.

The court statement said that Gbagbo had been transferred to a court division of first instance and would be answerable for the violent clashes following the disputed presidential election in November 2010. Up to May 2011 more than 3,000 people were killed in the course of his power struggle with his rival and present-day successor, Alassane Ouattara. The ex-president has been in custody in The Hague since November 2011. According to information from the court, before deciding to go ahead with the trial it analysed the statements of 108 witnesses and more than 22,000 pages of documentation, as well as audio and video recordings. 69 year-old Gbagbo denies the charges which have been brought against him.

Somalia

Puntland declares war on Somaliland

After Somaliland troops captured the town of Taleh in the Sool region without any resistance on 12.06.14, Puntland's president Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gaas declared war on Somaliland. He described the neighbouring country's actions as unacceptable and announced a corresponding response from his government. Following relocations of troops on both sides, Somaliland and Puntland units are now facing one another in the north of the Sool and Sanaag regions. The Khatumo III conference was underway when Somaliland captured Taleh (see Background below). The participants were granted free passage. Somaliland had already captured Taleh briefly back in April 2014 (cf. BN of 22.04.14).

Background:

Disputes over the territories in the border region between Somaliland and Puntland, some areas of which are believed to contain substantial oil fields, are not limited to these two parties. The regional administration "Khatumo State of Somalia" also lays claim to the territories.

Founded by clan elders and politicians in 2012, the regional administration with its "capital" of Taleh comprises the regions of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (part of Togdheer). In contrast to Somaliland, Khatumo is striving not for independence, but for a federally structured Somali state. The majority of the population belong to the Harti-Darod clans of the Dulbahante and Warsangeli. Puntland's population is predominated by the Harti-Darod clan of the Majerteen. The Somali government has yet to recognise Khatumo State.

Ukraine

Increasing influxes of refugees

Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the fighting in eastern Ukraine are causing ever increasing numbers of people to flee the region. The annexation of Crimea has prompted thousands of Crimean Tartars to move to the neighbouring southern regions of Ukraine, the capital, Kiev, and Lviv in western Ukraine. The majority of the Crimean Tartars, who number around 300,000 in total, do not intend to leave Crimea, however.

According to information from Russia, tens of thousands of Ukrainians are fleeing the fighting in eastern Ukraine, the majority seeking refuge in the Russian border regions. According to the Russian migration authority (FSM), more than 5,000 Ukrainians have applied for refugee status this year. The FMS estimates the total number of Ukrainian refugees at over 140,000. The UN and the Ukrainian authorities put the figures much lower, estimating that just over 10,000 Ukrainians are fleeing the violence, while most of the refugees from the eastern regions are staying in the country.

To date, the number of Ukrainian refugees in the EU remains low. The Polish authorities have reported around 600 refugees since the beginning of the year, but point to a dramatic rise in recent weeks.

Fighting continues in the east

The situation has intensified following the shooting-down of a Ukrainian transport plane by pro-Russian separatists in Lugansk on 14.06.14, which claimed 49 lives. President Poroshenko aims to step up operations against the pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country and has threatened retaliation. The Ukrainian army is pursuing a large-scale offensive against separatists and claims to have driven separatists out of the centre of the city of Maripol. According to the defence ministry, the militant groups have suffered major losses in fighting in the Donetsk region.

Kosovo

Power struggle after parliamentary elections

Following the early parliamentary elections on 08.06.14, a surprising constellation has come together to form a government. Although the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) led by prime minister Hashim Thaci won the election with 31 per cent of the vote, it does not have a viable majority in parliament. Totally unexpectedly, the rival parties Democratic League (LDK, 26 per cent), the Alliance for Progress (AAK, 9 per cent) and the newly established "Initiative for Kosovo" party (Nisma, 5 per cent) agreed on 10.06.14 to

form a government. They would be dependent on the support of the left-wing nationalist Vetevendosje party (VV, 14 per cent), however. Former UCK commander Ramush Haradinaj (AAK), who was prime minister back in 2004, is to take up the office once again.

Thaci called an early election in May, following a row in parliament over the establishment of a Kosovo army (cf. BN of 12.05.14). The election went off peacefully and without any incidents. Turn-out stood at an all-time low of around 42 per cent. This is attributed to the prevailing economic and social misery, all-pervasive corruption and the lack of a functioning judicial and health system. The Serbian minority took part in the election for the first time, though only on a very small scale.

Bundestag extends KFOR mandate

On 05.06.14 parliament endorsed the German government's motion to extend the German armed forces' involvement in the KFOR operation in Kosovo by one year. The maximum number of soldiers assignable to the mission remains at 1,850. At present, 840 members of the German armed forces belong to the total force of just under 5,000 KFOR soldiers. The situation is unstable particularly in the north of the country. The situation is described as "essentially calm", but with a "high potential for escalation" in the Serbian-dominated north.

Albania

EU commission recommends candidate status

In its report published on 04.06.14, the EU Commission again recommended granting Albania candidate status for accession to the EU. The report states that Albania has made progress in fighting corruption and organised crime and in its reform of the judicial system. Similar, the tenor at the international conference on the Balkans which was held in Vienna on 03.03.14 was also that, following the accession of Croatia, the ongoing accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia and the granting of candidate status to Macedonia, the next step was logically to see Albania as a candidate country. The EU member states will decide on the instigation of accession negotiations on 26./27.06.14.

Columbia

Incumbent wins presidential election ballot

As the presidential election failed to produce a winner from among the candidates on 25.05.14 (cf. BN of 26.05.14), a run-off between incumbent president Juan Manuel Santos and Óscar Iván Zuluaga took place on 15.06.14. According to the provision result published by the election commission, Santos won, taking 50.9 per cent of the vote. Zuluaga received 45.1 per cent. The guerrilla group Ferias Armadas Revolutionaries de Colombia (FARCE) had declared a unilateral ceasefire from 09.06.14 until 30.06.14 to tie in with the election. A regional FARCE leader was nevertheless killed in a battle between the military and the rebels in Tango (province of Antique) on 14.06.14.

Peace negotiations with ELM

It became known on 10.06.14 that the government has been holding preliminary talks about peace negotiations with the Ejection de Liberation National (ELM), the second-largest rebel organisation in the country after the FARCE, since January 2014. Peace talks with the FARCE have been in progress since the autumn of 2012.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka bans memorial event for victims of the civil war

Sri Lanka has imposed a ban on all memorial events for civilian victims in the north of the island to mark the fifth anniversary of the end of the civil war. It was here that the rebel organisation LTTE fought for an independent state for the Tamil minority for a quarter of a century. A military spokesperson stated that no gatherings would be allowed on 15.06.14. "It is not permitted for two or three families to meet in a home, either." The university in the northern city of Jaffna remained closed. The government in Colombo fears that

such events could glorify and revive the LTTE. Meanwhile, in the south of the country president Melinda Rajapaksa celebrated the anniversary as the "Day of victory".

China

Commemorations of the Tiananmen massacre

Security forces were deployed on a massive scale to prevent any public commemorations on the 25th anniversary of the crushing of the democracy movement on 04.06.14. Amnesty International reported on 03.06.14 that at least 66 people were detained, placed under house arrest or had their liberty otherwise curtailed in connection with the anniversary. Only in the special administrative region of Hong Kong were demonstrations allowed, as in previous years. Tens of thousands of people gathered there. The former British colony has belonged to the People's Republic of China since 1997 and broadly enjoys freedom of speech and freedom of assembly according to the principle of "one country, two systems".

Situation in Xinjiang

Radio Free Asia reported on 11.06.14 that five people died in an outbreak of violence in Shufu in the prefecture of Kashgar on 04.06.14. Government representatives were attacked by men armed with knives and sticks when they removed a woman's veil during a raid on a house. One policeman died and security forces shot four attackers dead.

The authorities continue to take firm action against suspected extremists. According to Chinese media reports of 05.06.14, various courts in Xinjiang have passed sentence on a total of 81 defendants; nine have been condemned to death on charges including terrorism; three received death sentences suspended for two years, which are generally commuted into life imprisonment. On 16.06.14 a court in Ürümqi sentenced three people to death for their involvement in an attack on Tiananmen Square in October 2013 (cf. BN of 04.11.13). Five co-defendants received prison terms ranging from five years to life sentences.

Legal experts call for abolition of camps

In a letter to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, dozens of Chinese legal experts have called for the abolition of camps to re-educate prostitutes, arguing that there is no legal basis for the underlying system ("custody and education"). In connection with the crackdown on prostitution, the police is able to lock up prostitutes and their clients at the camps for up to two years without trial. A similar institution, the system of camps aimed a re-education through work, was officially abolished in December 2013.