

## Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

26 January 2015

### Afghanistan

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#### **Large number of fatalities in the offensive against the Taliban**

According to the police spokesperson of Kunduz province, 63 Taliban insurgents were killed and 50 were wounded in a joint operation carried out by the army, the police and the secret service in the district of Imam Saheb (Kunduz province close to the border with Tajikistan) on 25 January 2015. The insurgents were reportedly driven out of several villages. Ten members of the security forces were also killed.

#### **Protests against Mohammed cartoons**

At least 20,000 people took to the streets of Herat on 23 January 2015 to protest against the cartoons published in the Charlie Hebdo magazine. They set fire to French flags and demanded an apology from the French government. This was the largest rally of its kind ever to be held in Afghanistan. Several thousand people also took to the streets in Kabul. Security officers fired warning shots when people began throwing stones at the French Embassy.

### Iraq

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#### **General situation**

Daily reports of armed clashes and suicide attacks continue unabated.

The US-led coalition continues to fly airstrikes against strongholds of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS). According to the Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby, although the US-led airstrikes on ISIS strongholds have managed to prevent ISIS from advancing into Iraq, they have only lost around one percent of their territory in Iraq since the air campaign began in August 2014. He said the Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi government troops had won back around 700 square kilometres with the support of airstrikes but ISIS continues to control around 55,000 square kilometres.

On 20 January 2015, the bodies of 15 civilians and eleven Peshmerga fighters were found in two mass graves in a rural district around 90 kilometres north-east of Baghdad that had been under the control of ISIS.

The Human Rights Office of the United Nations confirmed reports on 20 January 2015 that ISIS had introduced so-called Sharia courts reporting “cruel and inhuman” punishment of men, women and children in areas under their control.

According to a press report issued on 21 January 2015, 41 men, women and children were executed in less than three weeks - frequently following summary proceedings. It claims, for instance, that physicians refusing to treat ISIS militants were killed in Mosul.

According to a press report issued on 25 January 2015, several University professors were murdered in Mosul (Nineve province) on 25 January 2015 for opposing ISIS. A priest was reportedly shot dead in Ninive province because his family was unable to come up with the required ransom on time.

## **Iraq/Saudi Arabia**

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### **Border fencing under construction**

Saudi Arabia has allegedly begun establishing a "Northern Border Security Project" along the border with Iraq. The border security barrier is said to consist of three layers of fencing, reinforced by watchtowers. There will also be a sand embankment on the Iraqi side. Vehicles equipped with night-vision cameras, radars and infra-red cameras will patrol the Saudi side. 30,000 additional troops were reportedly deployed there in the summer of 2014. A large proportion of the territory on the Iraqi side is under the control of ISIS.

## **Saudi Arabia**

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### **King Abdullah dies**

Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz died on 23 January 2015 at the age of 90. His 79-year-old half-brother, Salman, has been confirmed as the new king. It is not clear whether 69-year-old Muqrin bin Abdulaziz will be his successor since his mother was reportedly a slave from Yemen. Seven of the 34 representatives of the "Allegiance Council" withheld their approval or abstained from voting. King Salman has appointed his son Mohammed ibn Salman the new Minister of Defence.

### **Federal Government trying to stop arms exports to Saudi-Arabia**

At a meeting of the Federal Security Council on 21 January 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel, Federal Minister of Economics, Sigmar Gabriel and several additional ministers who are members of the Council rejected applications to export arms to Saudi Arabia, deferring a decision until further notice because they consider the situation there to be too unstable. Saudi Arabia comes under the fire of criticism continually for infringing human rights and was recently condemned for sentencing the blogger Raif Badawi to 1,000 floggings for "insulting Islam".

## **Turkey**

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### **Prison sentences handed down for death of a protestor**

Two police officers received lengthy prison sentences on 21 January 2015 for their role in the death of a university student who was killed during nationwide protests around Gezi Park. A court in the city of Kayseri in Central Turkey sentenced one police officer to 10 years in prison. Another police officer received ten years and an additional 10-month sentence. Two other police officers were acquitted in the trial. The court deemed it proven that a total of six people were responsible for the death of the 19-year-old man, Ali Ismail Korkmaz. Three defendants were handed six-year and eight-month prison terms and a fourth received a prison term of three years, four months. The court did not establish wilful intent in any of the defendants which explains why the verdict was a lot milder than called for by the public prosecutor.

The student Ali Korkmaz died on 2 June 2013 in Eskisehir, western Turkey, while participating in protests against construction plans for Istanbul's Gezi Park. Images taken by surveillance cameras showed how he was beaten up by several police officers and civilians. He suffered brain haemorrhaging and fought for his life in a coma for 38 days at a hospital before passing away.

## **Iran**

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### **Former Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi convicted**

Mohammad Reza Rahimi who served as Iran's first Vice President under former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from 13 September 2009 until 3 August 2013 has been sentenced by a court in Tehran to five years and three months in prison on charges of embezzlement. This was reported by the news agency IRNA. Rahimi had consistently denied accusations of corruption.

## **Israel**

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### **Israeli Northern Command issues high alert / troops presence strengthened**

The Israeli army is expecting retaliatory attacks above all from Syria and Lebanon after six fighters of the Lebanese military group Hezbollah including one General were killed when an Israeli helicopter opened fire on a convoy in the south Syrian Quneitra region on the Golan Heights on 18 January 2015. The 25-year-old Hezbollah militiaman Jihad Mughniyeh was one of the best-known persons to die in the attack. He was commander of the "Golan-Division" of Hezbollah. From Israel's perspective, the fact that Mughniyah was present proves unequivocally that the Hezbollah, which has managed to amass an arsenal of 100,000 missiles in Lebanon, is planning on "expanding its infrastructure". The Israeli army obviously considers the Syrian regime and its allies, the Hezbollah and Iran, to pose the largest threat to Israel and not the Al-Nusra Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda. Surprisingly, Israel actually supports the Nusra-Front. Additional infantry and artillery units were deployed to northern Galilea and to the Golan Heights over the course of the week. An AFP reporter observed the deployment of several "Iron Dome" missile defense batteries along the Syrian border. Many roads close to the border have been sealed off for private transport. At a funeral ceremony held in Iran for General Mohammad Ali Allahdadi who was killed in the airstrike, the Commander of the Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami (Revolutionary Guard), General Major Ali Jafari, threatened Israel on 21 January 2015 with "ruinous thunderbolts". Iran's Minister of Defence Hossein Dehkan announced that there will be a response to the attack on the Golan Heights.

### **Arab stabs Israeli passengers on a bus in Tel Aviv**

12 Israelis were wounded, several of them seriously, in a stabbing attack carried out by an Arab from the West Bank city of Tul Karmon on 21 January 2015.

## **Yemen**

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### **President and government resign/nationwide protests against "Houthi coup"**

The president of Yemen resigned along with his Yemeni government on 22 January 2015. Although Parliament reportedly refused to accept Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi's resignation, a government spokesperson said the resignation was "irrevocable". Things had come to a head over the past few days. On 20 January 2015, Shia rebels who have held the most of the capital of Sanna under their control since September 2014, stormed the presidential palace and occupied the residence of the head of government until 21 January 2015. According to press reports, they reached an agreement with President Hadi by 21 January 2015 to end the crisis by reaching a compromise. The rebels said they were willing to release members of government whom they had abducted and to cease all violence in return for an expansion of Houthi representation in parliament and state institutions. On 21 January 2015, the UN Security Council had condemned the attack on the President who has Western support. The Gulf Cooperation Council accused the rebels of attempting a coup.

Separatists took advantage of the the vacuum of power on 24 January 2015 by seizing checkpoints in the south of the country from the army after the governors of the southern provinces had said they would not follow any orders issued by military leaders from the capital of Sanaa. Rallies were held in Sanaa, Taes, Ibb and Hodaida against the "coup" by the Houthi rebels. Clashes broke out between Houthi rebels and Sunni tribesmen.

Yemen is on the brink of collapse. Houthi rebels in the north who have felt they are at a disadvantage for many years are struggling to regain power. In the south where the Sunni Al-Qaeda still have a strong presence, the separatists are also trying to seize power. President Mansour Hadi who resigned is keen to set up a federal state comprising six regions with the support of the international community.

## **Syria**

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### **Syria talks in Moscow**

Talks at which Russia is endeavouring to broker a deal in the Syrian civil war are due to kick off on 26 January 2015 which more than 35 participants are due to attend. The National Coalition, the most important opposition group in Syria, refused to take part as no invitation was extended to any opposition groups but only to selected critics of the regime. A meeting of members of the opposition led by former UN negotiator for the civil war in Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, is due to take place today. The delegation of the Syrian government

led by Syria's Ambassador to the UN, Bashar al-Jafari, will join the talks on 28 January 2015. Both leaders led the peace talks that failed in Geneva in February 2014 before Lakhdar Brahimi resigned from his UN post in May 2014.

## **Egypt** . . .

### **Several people killed during protests**

Violence erupted with the security forces during anti-government protests organised by Islamists to mark the fourth anniversary of Egypt's 2011 uprising. 18 persons were killed and at least 54 were wounded. Three police officers were reportedly among the dead.

## **Ethiopia** . . .

### **Forced relocations reap criticism**

An internal investigation report by the World Bank sees links between the forced relocation of indigenous people and the institution itself. The Protection of Basic Services (PBS) programme is a healthcare and education initiative which the World Bank invested almost US\$ 2 billion in within the space of two years. Regional governments reportedly used the funds to pay the salaries of public servants directly involved in carrying out the forced evictions of the indigenous Anuak people. By contrast, the World Bank said that these people relocated voluntarily. In 2012, Human Rights Watch said that the Ethiopian government has abused the rights of the indigenous people in connection with the "villagization" programme launched by the Ethiopian government. This programme is said to have involved rape, assaults and arbitrary arrests.

Officially speaking, the government said it wanted to create better living conditions with the relocations between 2011 and 2013 and promised medical aid, drinking water and education facilities in the new villages. Relief organisations argue that the soil is unfertile and this has led to a shortage of food. All in all, 60 percent of the population of the Gambella region have been relocated (Gambella is a region located in the west along the border with south Sudan. It spans around 26.000 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 400,000) .

## **Somalia** . . .

### **Suicide attack against Turkish delegation**

A suicide bomber blew himself up in front of the hotel in Mogadishu where members of the Turkish delegation were staying on 22 January 2015 on the eve of a visit to the Somali capital by Turkey's president. Five people were killed in the blast, among them three security guards. None of the members of the delegation were killed or seriously hurt in the blast.

Al-Shabab has claimed responsibility for the attack. One of its spokespersons said the attack had targeted members of the delegation .

The suicide bomber had reportedly been a member of Al-Shabaab since 2013 and had been living in Switzerland up to a year ago. He is said to have been a leader of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), an umbrella organisation of independent sharia courts, until 2016. This organisation held Mogadishu and vast parts of southern and central Ethiopia in its grip until they were driven out by Ethiopian troops at the turn of the year in 2007. Militant supporters and above Al-Shabaab which emerged as the youth movement of the UIC remain active.

## **Nigeria** . . .

### **Boko Haram attacks on Maiduguri and other cities**

Shortly after midnight on 25 January 2015, Boko Haram militants attacked the city of Maiduguri (which has a population of around two million. It is the provincial capital of Nigeria's north-eastern Borno state). They advanced as far as communities in Njimitilo with the intention of seizing the airport. The army managed to ward off the attack with the help of the air force. Several vigilantes and troops were also killed in the clashes.

While fighting raged on in Maiduguri, Boko Haram tried unsuccessfully to attack the town of Konduga which is located around 35 km south-east of Maiduguri. However, Boko Haram militants managed to seize the city of Monguno (which is located around 140 km north of Maiduguri) during the afternoon of 25 January 2015. Boko Haram militants had set fire to the village of Kambari (which is around 5 km from Maiduguri) on 23 January 2015, killing at least 14 persons.

#### **190 persons abducted by Boko Haram released**

On 23/24 January 2015, Boko Haram released around 192 of the 218 young men, women and children who had been abducted by the terrorists from their village Katarko (Gujba Local Government Area) on 6 January 2015.

### **Cameroon/Nigeria** . . .

#### **German national abducted by Boko Haram released**

Cameroon's President Paul Biya announced on 21 January 2015 that the German national, Robert Nitsch Eberhard, who had been held hostage by Boko Haram had been released. He was released following an operation by Cameroon's military and the security forces of its allies. The teacher, Robert Nitsch Eberhard, had been kidnapped in July 2014 in the Nigerian city of Gombi (Adamawa state in north-east Nigeria) where he had been working at a vocational training centre.

### **Democratic Republic of Congo** . . .

#### **Dozens killed in violent protests against new law on elections**

Dozens of people have been killed by police and members of the presidential guard particularly in Kinshasa and Goma in four-day violent protests by the opposition against President Joseph Kabila and a planned law on elections since 19 January 2015. The protests centred around the university in Kinshasa which was ambushed by security forces. According to a statement issued by the human rights organisation "Human Rights Watch" on 24 January 2015, 36 people (including one police officer) were killed during the protests in Kinshasa. At least 21 of them were killed by security forces. At least four people were killed at demonstrations held in the city of Goma, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo on 22 January 2015. The daily newspaper Taz reported on 23 January 2015 that according to opposition sources, 143 persons had been killed in the violence.

The protests were directed against a controversial article in the law on elections which envisaged updating the voting lists by holding a census before the next parliamentary and presidential elections. Members of the opposition fear that this could delay by several years elections scheduled under the Constitution to take place by late-2016 at the latest, thus enabling President Kabila to remain at the helm beyond his term of office. The law was adopted without the clause on a census in the wake of the road rallies and diplomatic pressure. Vital Kamerhe, President of the third-largest opposition party UNC (Union for the Congolese Nation) subsequently called off further protests that were due to be held on 26 January 2015. In order to enter into force, the law will need to be signed by President Kabila within 30 days.

### **Tanzania** . . .

#### **Intervention against Albino murders**

Tanzania intends to employ a special task force to get to the bottom of dozens of albino murders. The task force will comprise members of the government as well as members of the Tanzania Albino Society (TAS). The task force is to ensure, inter alia, that those responsible for the murders are prosecuted. According to official sources, around 70 albinos have been murdered in the past six years. However, only ten people have been convicted of murder. The so-called witchdoctors are also to be held accountable. They claim that the body parts and organs of "white Africans" have magic powers. Government representatives say they are the main culprits and that is why witchdoctors have now been banned. "Nationwide operations" are to be carried out in the next few weeks to identify the witchdoctors and put them on trial. As well as the ban, the government has launched an education campaign to stop the superstition. Experts doubt that the ban can be imple-

mented as there is a fine line between traditional healers who can continue practising and witchdoctors. To make matters worse, they are an integral part of Tanzanian society. A survey indicates that 93 percent of the population believe in witchcraft.

### **Background:**

Albino people are being killed because potions made from their body parts are believed to bring good luck and wealth. Fishermen weave albino hair into their nets in order to attain the best possible catch whereas gold and diamond diggers spray powder from albino skin into their trenches to increase their harvest. Shop owners believe that the hand of an albino buried in front of their shop door will attract new customers. The leg or arm of an albino can command up to 4,000 4.000 USD, with an entire corpse fetching \$75,000. For unknown reasons, Tanzania has a relatively large Albino population (1 in every 3,000/compared to 1 in every 20,000 in Europe).

## **Côte d'Ivoire** ...

### **Children obviously abducted for ritual sacrifices**

Several children have been kidnapped in Côte d'Ivoire in recent weeks raising fears of a wave of ritual sacrifices. Police say 21 children have been kidnapped since December 2014. Only one has been found alive. Most of the children were found dead, decapitated or without their genitals, According to official sources, no arrests have been made so far.

## **Mali** ...

### **UN peacekeepers fire at rebels in the North**

UN peacekeepers launched an airstrike against rebels in the north for the first time on 20 January 2015. The U.N. mission, known as MINUSMA, said Dutch UN peacekeepers were responding to heavy weapons fire directed at its peacekeepers in the town of Tabankort (which is located around 200 km north of Gao), pointing out that the action taken is covered by MINUSMA'S mandate. MNLA rebels have been clashing with pro-government militiamen in Tabankort since 16 January 2015. A spokesman for the MNLA Tuareg separatist rebels said five fighters had been killed. In response, the group announced it would suspend peace talks for the time being. Protests were held in Ber and Kidal during which UN peacekeepers drove protestors out of an airfield in the rebel stronghold of Kidal on 21 January 2015.

### **President names new government**

President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita named his new cabinet by decree in the early hours of 11 January 2015. The decree comes after Modiba Keita, who is not a relation of the president, was named as Mali's new prime minister on 8 January 2015, succeeding Moussa Mara. Eight ministers lost their posts. Tieman Hubert Coulibaly was appointed Minister of Defence, the banker Mamadou Igor Diarra was appointed Economy and Finance Minister. Mohamed Ag Erlaf, a representative of the Tuareg, has been appointed new Minister of Defence.

## **Mauritania** ...

### **Anti-slavery activists sentenced**

A criminal court in southern Mauritania sentenced three anti-slavery activists to two years in prison on 15 January 2015, charged with belonging to an illegal organisation, leading an unauthorised rally, and violence against the police. Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid, the runner-up in 2014 presidential elections who has been in prison in the past for his activities, was among those convicted. Amnesty International has demanded the immediate release of the detainees. Although slavery has been officially abolished in Mauritania, it still exists in some regions.

## **Niger** ...

### **Several people killed at rallies against cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed**

At least ten people have been killed in violent protests against the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published in the French "Charlie Hebdo" satire magazine since 16 January 2015. Five people were killed and at least 45 were wounded in the city of Zinder in southern Niger. Around 300 Christians were under police and army protection on 17 January 2015. Five civilians were killed in the capital of Niamey on 17 January 2015 according to a TV broadcast by Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou. The French Cultural Institute was raided and shops owned by Christians and several churches were destroyed. Rallies were also held in other former French colonies such as Mali, Senegal and Mauritania on 16 January 2015. However, they went off peacefully.

### **Dozens of arrests made at opposition rallies**

According to official sources, 90 people were arrested by the government during rallies organised by the opposition in Niamey on 18 January 2015 in protests against the "destruction of opposition parties". Around 300 people had gathered for a long-planned march to the parliament on 17 January 2015, flouting a ban on protests imposed the day before. According to local media reports, several high-ranking members of the opposition are among the detainees.

## **Chad**

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### **Trial against ex-dictator Hissène Habré**

According to interviews initiated on 14 November 2014 to shed light on crimes committed by Dictator Hissène Habré (1982-1990) in Chad, 21 former agents of the political police have confirmed that systematic torture was used. The interviews are intended to prepare for a trial to be instituted before the Extraordinary African Chambers in May 2015.

## **West Balkans**

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### **Battle against Islamist terror**

Experts assume that around 500 persons have left the largely Muslim-populated countries of Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and the Sandzak region (which has an ethnically mixed population of Serbs and Montenegrins) for Syria and Iraq in recent months to fight for the terrorist organisation Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS). They share the vision that the Balkans will become part of a new Caliphate.

Sunni Islam on the Balkans is moderate for the most part. In the past few years, Wahabbi communities have developed which espouse a Salafist interpretation of Islam whose influence on the young people is increasing. The majority of the population is opposed to the more radical form of Islam, and the public authorities of the countries are also fighting terrorism. In Kosovo, laws have been tightened in order to prosecute ISIS militants. Dozens of people have been arrested in raids. A new law prohibiting fighting in foreign armies has been adopted by Parliament. Dozens of Islamists have also been arrested in Bosnia in recent months and criminal law has been tightened. The authorities are also taking cross-border action in the fight against terrorism.

### **Physicians leaving the healthcare system which is on the brink of collapse in the Balkans**

In recent years, hundreds of thousands of people have left the West Balkan countries temporarily or for good, including many from the medical and nursing professions. This is leading to a shortage of medical staff. 570 nurses from Bosnia emigrated to Germany in 2014 alone. The number is probably much high because private emigration is not recorded in statistics. According to the Medical Council in Bosnia, the healthcare system is on the brink of collapse. Around 5,000 physicians emigrated from Serbia in 2014. A survey suggests that around 80 percent of young physicians and medical students want to leave the Balkans as soon as possible.

## **Ukraine**

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### **Foreign Ministers of Ukraine and Russia reach agreement on heavy weapons withdrawal**

The Foreign Ministers of the Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France met in Berlin on 21 January 2015 in a bid to contain the conflict in the East of Ukraine between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian government troops. Essentially, the Ministers were keen to implement the Minsk agreement concluded on 5 September 2014. In talks lasting around three hours, Ukraine and Russia had agreed to withdraw heavy weapons. According to this agreement, heavy weapons of the pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian army are to be withdrawn on each side by 15 kilometres of the agreed demarcation line.

### **Heaviest clashes in weeks**

Despite this agreement, eastern Ukraine has experienced the heaviest clashes in eastern Ukraine over the past few days. The separatists had announced a new offensive on 23 January 2015. They focused in particular on the city of Donetsk and the strategic port city Mariupol where more than 30 persons were killed and around 100 people were wounded in a missile attack waged by separatists on a marketplace on 24 January 2015. Mariupol enables Russia to funnel supplies to Crimea which was annexed by Russia in March 2014.

The Ukrainian army lost Donetsk airport to the separatist in the middle of last week following months of fighting. A bus was hit by grenades in Donetsk on 22 January 2015, killing 13 people. It is thought that the attack was carried out by the Ukrainian army.

According to statistics provided by the OSCE, more than 5,000 people have been killed so far in the warfare.

## **Armenia/Azerbaijan**

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### **Fighting along the border**

On 23 January 2015, fighting erupted once again along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Two Armenian troops were reportedly killed. Once again, Armenia and Azerbaijan are blaming each other for breaking the ceasefire agreement.

## **Nepal**

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### **No agreement on a new Nepal Constitution**

Nine years after the end of the civil war, Nepal still has no Constitution. The deadline by which the MPs were to reach agreement ran out in the early hours of 23 January 2015. Two days before, strikes brought large parts of the country to a standstill. Supporters of the opposition parties called a general strike in factories, schools and shops, set vehicles on fire and blocked roads. Around 50 persons taking part in the rally were arrested by police officers. Raucous protests broke out in Parliament. The main bones of contention of the dispute involving the Constitution include the division of power between the Prime Minister and the President, the formation of federal states, the way in which the Prime Minister and President are to be elected and the establishment of a constitutional court. The Constitution is to be adopted by 28 May 2015, Nepal's National Day.

### **Background:**

Since the civil war lasting ten years ended in 2006, the monarchy was overthrown, the Republic was proclaimed and the Maoists were defeated in the first free elections in 2008, rival political parties have not yet managed to draft a new Constitution. Several deadlines have expired without any results being achieved.

## **Sri Lanka**

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### **Former Minister and brother of former President on suspicion of murder**

Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, younger brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa who was President until January 2015, has been charged with murder. He is suspected of have running death squads and being responsible for the death of Lasantha Wickrematunga while he was Defence Minister. Wickrematunga who was a vocal critic of the government and editor-in-chief and publisher of the English newspaper "The Sunday Leader" was assassinated in January 2009. Wickrematunga had accused the then Minister of corruption over the purchase of second-hand aircraft and arms for the military. The journalist was due to give evidence at a trial a few days later. Rajapaksa is also charged with organising the abduction of political opponents. Since Presi-



dent Mahinda Rajapaksa's surprising defeat in the presidential elections held on 8 January 2015, charges of bribery against members of his cabinet abound.

**President Sirisena replaces military governor in the North with civilian diplomat**

The announcement that General Major G.A. Chandrasiri who was governor of the Tamil-dominated Northern Province would be replaced by the retired diplomat H.M.G.S. Palihakkara came as quite a surprise. Observers see this as a sign the president is reaching out to ethnic Tamils who deeply mistrust the army which has been controlling nearly all aspects of everyday life since the civil war ended almost six years ago. It remains unclear to what extent the region will be accorded greater autonomy.

At the same time, it was announced that all restrictions against foreigners travelling to the former war zones in the east and west of the country would be lifted with immediate effect. This applies above all to journalists. This decision is seen as a move to strengthen the freedom of the press which had suffered under Rajapaksa.