

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

23 September 2013

Afghanistan

Attack on state representative

On 15.09.13, a senior female criminal police officer was shot at by unknown gunmen in southern Helmand province. One day later, she died from her wounds. Her female predecessor had been assassinated in the same way. Women comprise no more than one percent of all Afghan police officers. They and their families are regularly threatened by Islamists.

On 18.09.13, the head of the independent electoral commission for northern Kunduz province was shot dead by Taliban insurgents. After the beginning of the preparations for the presidential elections, the Taliban had announced attacks on election officials and organisers.

Increase of attacks on aid organisation staff

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports a sharp increase in attacks on staff members of humanitarian and medical aid organisations. A total of 25 incidents have been reported, with eight people losing their lives. Most of the attacks on medical organisations and their workers have occurred in the eastern parts of the country, namely in Nangarhar, Laghman, Logar and Kunar provinces as well as in northern Balkh province.

Other aspects of the security situation

According to information provided by the German Federal Armed Forces, operations led by Afghan security forces have been carried out since 04.09.13 in the northern provinces of Badakhshan and Kunduz, aiming at pushing the rebels out of the area and securing their own mobility. On 18.09.13, a police unit ran into an ambush of the Taliban in northeastern Badakhshan province (Wardooj district), with approx. 16 police officers killed, 20 injured and 24 abducted (with different sources giving varying figures), as was reported by the Afghan authorities. Only one day before, the Afghan forces had announced the successful end of the operation.

Last week, further fights were reported from southern Helmand province.

In Sangin district, 40 Taliban fighters were eliminated, official sources stated, when Afghan security forces launched a three-day clearing operation.

On 20.09.13, a German soldier was injured in northern Kunduz province, when his vehicle went over an explosive booby trap.

On 21.09.13, an Afghan soldier killed three U.S. soldiers in eastern Paktya province.

Beginning of preparations for presidential elections

16.09.13 was the first registration day for candidates to submit their nominations to the election commission. The deadline expires on 06.10.13, and the final list of candidates will be published on 16.11.13. The election date is set for 05.04.14. Pursuant to the Afghan constitution, President Hamid Karzai is not allowed to run for presidency again.

District governor defects to Taliban insurgents

The governor of Kohistanat district (northern Sar-e-Pul province) appears to have joined the Taliban rebels.

Pakistan

Attacks on religious minorities

On 19.09.13, nine Shiite Muslims were killed when unknown attackers threw a hand grenade into a mosque in Karachi. One day later, a similar attack on a mosque killed three Shiite scholars and wounded 18 other Shia Muslims in Peshawar. Also in Peshawar, at least 78 Christian worshippers were killed and more than 100 others injured in a church on 22.09.13, as two suicide bombers blew themselves up when the worshippers were about to leave Sunday service.

Iraq

Attacks

On 17.09.13, a series of car bomb attacks in Baghdad quarters inhabited mainly by Shia Muslims killed at least 34 people. In and around the city of Mosul, seven members of the security force were shot dead.

An attack on a Sunni Muslim mosque in Samarra on 20.09.13 killed at least 18 people (other sources put the number of victims at 24).

On 21.09.13, a double blast on a funeral ceremony in Sadr City, Baghdad's quarter inhabited mainly by Shia Muslims, killed at least 57 people and injured another 130. At least 11 people, most of them security officers, died in the provinces of Salahuddin, Ninive and Kirkuk. The organisation Iraq Body Count reports at least 103 victims in attacks launched on 21.09.13, with 94 people killed in Baghdad alone.

On 22.09.13, a suicide attack on a Sunni Muslim funeral ceremony killed at least 16 people and injured another 42.

According to Iraq Body Counts, the civilian deaths amount to 815 for the month of September (last update 21.09.13).

Executions

So far in 2013, Iraq has executed nearly 70 persons accused of terrorist-related activities.

Elections in the Kurdistan Regional Government

On 21.09.13, parliamentary elections were held in the three Kurdish provinces of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniya. According to estimates, roughly two thirds of the 3 million voters cast a ballot. It was the first time that the two dominant parties – the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – competed for the seats. Before, they had participated in elections with a common list. The official results have not yet been published.

Syria

Syria complies with OPCW requirements

With the civil war continuing using conventional weapons, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague said in a statement released on 21.09.13 that Syria has submitted the required information on chemical weapons in time. Meanwhile, Russia has offered to send observers to Syria who would monitor the destruction of the weapons.

National Coalition agrees to participate in planned peace conference

Syria's main opposition alliance, the National Coalition (also called the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces) has indicated their readiness to participate in a Geneva peace conference planned by Russia and the U.S.. However, they insist that President Bashar al-Assad will play no role in a future transitional government.

Rival rebel groups agree on ceasefire

On 20.09.13, a rebel group allied with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and armed jihadists of the al-Qaeda linked 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria' (ISIS), also called 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant', agreed on a ceasefire in the northern town of Azaz, as was reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Apparently, this agreement was brokered by the Tawhid brigade which is based in Aleppo. On 18.09.13, ISIS had started to take over some areas of the strategically important town of Azaz. In reaction to this, Turkey closed the nearby border crossing point of Öncüpinar in its Kilis province.

Iran

Prominent human rights activist Nasrin Sotudeh among several released political prisoners

Prominent Iranian lawyer and human rights activist Nasrin Sotudeh has been released from prison. She had been arrested in September 2010 and was accused and convicted to a prison sentence of 11 years for propaganda against the establishment. Last December, she was awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought established by the European Parliament, together with Iranian film maker Jafar Panahi.

According to the pro-Iranian opposition Green Movement website Kalame, Nasrin Sotudeh is among the group of more than 15 political prisoners who have been released since 17.09.13. Among the released are also former deputy foreign minister Mohsen Aminzadeh (56) and Feizollah Arabsorkhi, who had been deputy trade minister under former President Mohammad Khatami. The releases are considered to be a major domestic success for new President Hassan Rouhani who had made a commitment to release all political prisoners and advocated freedom of expression during the election campaign.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Gaza: Israel announces lift of major import restrictions

Israel has announced to remove the disputed import restrictions on construction materials for Gaza. Starting on September 22nd, cement, iron and gravel would be accepted to pass through Kerem Shalom border crossing for the first time in six years, a representative of the autonomous Palestinian Authority said on 17.09.13. In future, a daily import quantity of 1,600 tons of gravel, 800 tons of cement and 400 tons of iron would be allowed. Israeli government circles confirmed the plan which aims at strengthening private entrepreneurship in Gaza and hence the position of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Israel had closed the borders to Gaza after the abduction of an Israeli soldier in 2006; one year later, the blockade was reinforced after Hamas had won the elections.

Rami Hamdallah sworn in again as new head of government

Palestinian interim Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah was confirmed again as Prime Minister in Ramallah (West Bank). In the presence of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Hamdallah and his transitional cabinet took the oath of office on 19.09.13. In June, college president Hamdallah, a political newcomer, had resigned from office due to a 'conflict over authority' after only 18 days. However, Abbas asked him to continue assuming his duties temporarily. In August, the President appointed Hamdallah again to form a new government. Initially, Rami Hamdallah was supposed to stay in office only until August, when al-Fatah and the radical Islamist Hamas were to have formed a coalition government. This plan, however, failed due to the differences between the two Palestinian organisations.

Egypt

Egyptian counter-terror unit storms town held by Islamists

On 19.09.13, a police counter-terror unit stormed the town of Kerdasa on the western outskirts of Cairo. On 14.08.13, Islamists had attacked Kerdasa police station and killed 11 policemen. Subsequently, they controlled the town until 19.08.13, when special police forces re-conquered the city. In the fighting, a police general was shot dead, and twelve people were injured.

Egyptian authorities continue to target Muslim Brotherhood members

An Egyptian court has confiscated the assets of 14 Muslim Brotherhood members, among them the assets of the Brotherhood's leader Mohammed Badie and of his two deputies. All three of them are currently in prison.

After the military coup against former President Morsi, Egyptian security forces have been continuously targeting Muslim Brotherhood members. In the violent clearing of a protest camp on 14.08.13, more than thousand people were killed. In total, more than 2,000 Muslim Brotherhood members have been detained since the army has taken over power.

Two bombs defused in Cairo metro / reduction of curfew hours

On 19.09.13, two bombs were detected in the Cairo underground. Several metro lines were closed down, until security experts defused the bombs.

The Egyptian authorities have reduced the curfew hours to 12am until 5am, except for public holidays when the curfew begins already at 7pm.

Libya

Beginning of court trial against son of Gaddafi

On 19.09.13, the trial of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of ousted Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, was moved to Tripoli. Together with 20 other former regime officials, he is accused of crimes committed during the popular uprising in 2011. They are charged with political murder, incitement to rape and kidnapping of critics. If convicted, the defendants face death penalty. The International Criminal Court is accusing Gaddafi's son of crimes against humanity and demands his handover to The Hague.

South Sudan

Dozens of civilians killed

The organisation Human Rights Watch reports that South Sudan's army killed civilians and committed grave violations of human rights when fighting insurgents in the time period January 2012 until July 2013.

The incidents were reported from Jonglei State, when violence broke out between ethnic Murle rebel groups and the South Sudanese military, with the army killing 70 civilians and up to 24 Murle security force members in Pibor district. The report continues describing that army members burned and looted homes and physically and verbally abused civilians.

The Murle population, mainly residing in Jonglei State, has repeatedly been targeted by ethnic violence in the past.

Somalia

Donors pledge 1.8 billion Euros to Somalia

On 16.09.13, fifty donor countries met in Brussels for a one-day conference organised by the EU in order to discuss support for the reconstruction of Somalia. In total, a package of 1.8 billion Euros was agreed. The 'New Deal' for the coming three years aims at the improvement of the security situation, the reform of the judicial and financial system and the reconstruction of the economy. Despite considerable progress in recent years, Somalia is still one of the poorest, most instable and most dangerous countries of the world, with large parts controlled by militias.

Kenya

Terror attack in Nairobi

On 21.09.13, a dozen gunmen of the Islamist al-Shabaab militia stormed a shopping mall in Nairobi frequented mainly by tourists and rich Kenyans, shooting indiscriminately and throwing grenades. At least 68 people were killed and another 175 injured. Security forces entered the building where the attackers had taken hostages and barricaded themselves. Most of the hostages could be saved; in the morning of 23.09.13, there were only about ten hostages were still being held by the terrorists. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Since Kenya's deployment of military units to Somalia at the end of 2011, there have been repeated attacks ascribed to the al-Shabaab militia.

Rwanda

Governing party wins parliamentary elections

On 16.09.13, a coalition of the dominant governing party Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and several minor parties won the elections for the House of Representatives of the two-chamber parliament, gaining 41 out of 53 seats. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) came second with seven seats, the Liberal Party (LP) secured five mandates. 410 candidates from eight parties had competed for a total of 80 mandates. 53 of the 80 parliamentary seats were directly awarded in the elections, the remaining 27 seats were attributed to women (24 seats), young people (2 seats) and people with disabilities (one seat) by way of indirect elections on 17.09. and 18.09.13.. A total of 51 mandates went to women; for this reason the Rwandese parliament is considered the parliament with the highest proportion of women members worldwide. The turnout reached 98.8 percent.

On 13.09. and 14.09.13 two people were killed by two grenade attacks in Kigali, 22 more were injured.

Background

President Paul Kagame has gained international recognition for his successful economic policy and for Rwanda's political stabilisation. However, he is criticised for undemocratic governance and for repression of the opposition. Eleven parties were registered, with most of them having close ties to the government. 'Real' opposition parties did not take part in the elections: The Democratic Green Party had received its official registration as a political party only shortly before the elections; the FDU-Inkingi is not officially registered. According to Human Rights Watch the PS-Imberakuni, which took part in the election and had so far been considered an opposition party, was taken over by a faction loyal to the government.

Togo

New government

On 17.09.13, a new 27-member government led by former Prime Minister Kwesi Séléagodji Ahoomey-Zunu was installed. The oppositional Union des Forces du Changement (UFC), which had seven ministers in the last government, now has only three ministerial portfolios. No other opposition parties are represented in the government.

After the parliamentary elections in July, the entire cabinet had resigned on 27.08.13

Nigeria

Boko Haram attacks leave more than 140 dead

In attacks conducted by suspected fighters of the Islamist Boko Haram sect, more than 140 people have been killed in northeastern Nigeria. An official representative stated that armed men dressed up as soldiers burnt down houses, shot at escaping people and beheading some of them. Also, Boko Haram supporters indiscriminately killed pedestrians and car drivers on a nearby country road, it was stated.

Bangladesh

Death sentence imposed on Jamaat-e-Islami party leader

On 17.09.13, the Supreme Court imposed a death sentence on Abdul Quader Mollah, leader of the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami. Mollah was accused of crimes against humanity. The Jamaat-e-Islami party had opposed the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and supported the (West) Pakistani army during the war of independence. Allegedly, JI members not only supported atrocities of the Pakistani army, but were also actively involved in them. The judgement against Mollah has sparked violent protests of JI supporters in

several parts of the country, leaving approx. 30 people injured. The JI party announced a 48 hours strike for 18.09.13.

China

Ousted leading politician Bo Xilai sentenced to life in prison

On 22.09.13, former political leader Bo Xilai, accused of corruption and abuse of power (see BN of 29.07.13), was sentenced to life-long imprisonment by the people's court in the city of Jinan (Shandong province).

Police storm camp of suspected Uyghur terrorists

On 17.09.13, Radio Free Asia reported that up to 12 people were shot dead during a police action against suspected Uyghur terrorists in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region. The incident had already taken place on 23.08.13 in Poskam county (Chin.: Zepu) near the city of Kashgar. Unconfirmed reports said that around 30 Uyghurs were being trained and building explosives in a secret camp, when the camp was raided by police.

Sri Lanka

Tamil party wins regional elections in Sri Lanka

Regional elections in the north of Sri Lanka ended with a landslide victory of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) on 21.09.13. Winning in all five districts, the TNA gained 30 seats out of 38. Although the central government had invested large amounts in the reconstruction of the infrastructure of Sri Lanka's North, which had been destroyed in decades of fighting, President Mahinda Rajapaksa's alliance of parties secured only seven seats. Many inhabitants are concerned primarily about the army's continuing presence. The designated Prime Minister for the region, former the Supreme Court judge Kanagasabapathy Wigneswaran, has expressed his willingness to cooperate with Rajapaksa regarding Tamil local self-government in a united federal Sri Lanka.

The voting was monitored by more than 2,000 election observers. No serious incidents came to be known. The UN Council of Human Rights had considered the election a decisive measure to overcome the ethnic divide in Sri Lanka. The Regional Parliament had already been installed in 1987; however, due to the civil war no elections could be held so far.