

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

7 April 2014

Afghanistan

Elections

Elections for provincial councils and to find a successor to president Karzai were held on 05.04.14. Initial reports indicate that the turnout was unexpectedly high. The first results are expected in the middle of the week. An official final result is scheduled for 14.05.14. Should none of the candidates for the presidential office obtain an absolute majority, a run-off is planned for 28.05.14.

Despite numerous threats from the Taliban, there were only isolated incidents during the elections. Bomb attacks in the province of Badghis left one voter dead and two voters were injured in Logar. Polling stations in Parwan and Wardak came under fire from machine guns and rockets and four voters were injured in Kunduz. Also in Kunduz, a truck carrying ballot boxes was blown up by a booby trap, killing three people.

The polling stations were protected by a strong military and police presence. 211 polling stations remained closed on election day on account of the security situation – 748 had previously been declared closed. In all, 6,212 polling stations were open.

German photographer killed

A German photographer was shot dead by a policeman in the eastern Afghan province of Khost on 04.04.14. Another journalist from Canada suffered serious injuries. A police spokesman stated that the perpetrator was seeking revenge for NATO air raids on his village. There have been several so-called insider attacks in the past involving Afghan policeman or soldiers attacking foreigners.

Pakistan

Christians sentenced to death

A court in Punjab province sentenced a Christian married couple to death last week for insulting the prophet Mohammed. The husband allegedly sent blasphemous messages to an imam on the mobile phone which is registered in his wife's name. Ten days previously, a court in Lahore had sentenced another Christian to death for allegedly insulting the prophet in the course of a drunken argument with a Muslim friend. Death sentences based on religious law are often imposed in the first instance. While these sentences have never been carried out, the accused often fall victim to lynch justice.

Iraq

Security situation

Attacks continue to take place on a daily basis. According to Iraq Body Count, 1,009 civilians were killed in March.

The AFP news agency puts the death toll in March at 512, including 86 police officers, 62 soldiers, nine members of the Sahwa and 22 extremists. In all, 1,237 people suffered injuries, including 86 police officers, 65 soldiers and nine members of the Sahwa.

According to UN figures, 592 Iraqis were killed in March (including 484 civilians) and 1,234 were injured (including 1,104 civilians). In addition, 108 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed and 130 injured.

The most severely affected province was Baghdad, followed by Salahaddin, Babil, Ninive and Diyala. The figures do not include victims from the province of Anbar.

According to their own information, Iraqi security forces killed more than 40 insurgents in fighting with the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Yousifya, south-west of Baghdad, on 03.04.14. An army officer reportedly also died.

According to UN information, the situation in the province of Anbar remains unchanged. The conflict between the armed opposition groups (AOGs) and the Iraqi security forces (ISF) continues to spill over into other provinces. There are reports of attacks in the province of Salahaddin and the province of Diyala, for example. Press reports claim that the ISIL has expanded its scope of operations into the regions around Baghdad. Towns in the east and the north of the province of Babil are also reported to be affected.

Polio vaccination

According to a dpa report, the United Nations started a vaccination campaign to combat polio on 06.04.14. More than 20 million children are to be vaccinated in the space of five days in Syria, Egypt and Iraq.

Turkey

Internet bans

On 02.04.14 the Turkish constitutional court declared the government-imposed blockage of the Twitter short message service to be illegal, finding that the ban violates the basic right to the free expression of opinions. The Turkish regulatory authority TIB implemented the ruling on 03.04.14. Prime minister Erdogan expressed dissatisfaction with the constitutional court's ruling, stating "We have complied with the decision, but do not respect it."

The YouTube video portal, which has been blocked since 27.03.14, remains inaccessible. A court in Ankara initially lifted the ban last week but, according to reports by the "Hürriyet" newspaper, ruled that 15 disputed items must be deleted before the portal can be re-activated, following an objection from the public prosecutor's office.

Syria

Civil war has claimed 150,000 lives to date

The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on 01.04.14 that more than 150,000 people have died in the civil war to date. It is difficult to obtain independent verification of this figure.

Israel / Palestinian territories

Release of Palestinian prisoners in doubt following diplomatic offensive by the Palestinians

According to a source with a close knowledge of the Near East peace talks, the Israeli government will not be going ahead with the planned release of 26 Palestinian prisoners for the time being. Justice minister Tzipi Livni told her Palestinian interlocutors on 03.04.14 that no such release would be possible. According to the source, the Israeli side is becoming increasingly irritated by the Palestinian's repeated efforts to join international organisations and sign up to international treaties. In an initial official reaction, the Israeli prime minister, Netanyahu, threatened countermeasures.

The release of long-term Palestinian prisoners forms part of a package of measures aimed at advancing the Near East peace talks. Since the talks were resumed, Israel has released 78 long-term Palestinian prisoners in three phases. The final 26 were to be released by the end of March. After the Israeli government failed to release the prisoners on 29.03.14 and announced the building of new settlements in occupied East Jerusalem, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas decided to sign up to 15 international agreements and conventions in a renewed push for international recognition.

Yemen/Iran

President complains of Iranian interference

The Yemeni president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, has accused Iran of supporting armed groups in their fight against the central government. Hadi made the claim in an interview published by the Arab daily newspaper "Al-Hayat" ("Life": pan-Arabian and western-oriented) on 31.03.14. He alleged that Iran was helping the separatists in the south as well as the Shiite Zaidi group al-Houthi in the north. Hadi said that repeated calls to change this "false policy" had made no impression on the Iranian leadership. He added that while Yemen was not seeking to bring about any escalation in its dealings with Teheran, it did expect Iran to keep out of the country's internal politics. The poorest country on the Arabian peninsula is regarded as highly unstable not least of all on account of revolts, armed uprisings and gangsterism. The Houthi rebels in the province of Saada recently took control of areas in the province of Amran.

Attack on army headquarters claims lives

According to a representative of the military, at least 20 people were killed in an attack on the military headquarters in the Tawahi district of the port of Aden on 02.04.14. A security officer suspects that the terrorist network "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" (AQAP) was behind the attack. There is confusion as to the number of attackers. According to information from the army, reinforcements have been deployed to the district. An army representative told the AFP that the fighting had continued for several hours, but stated that the situation was now under control once again.

Jordan

People injured in riots at refugee camp

According to press reports, at least 25 people were injured in violent clashes between security forces and residents of the Jordanian refugee camp in Saatari (close to the border with Syria) on 05.04.14. 22 of those injured were reportedly police officers, while three were Syrian refugees. A riot apparently broke out when police prevented a group of residents from leaving the camp.

Egypt

Explosions in Cairo claim lives

Two people were killed in three bomb attacks outside the University of Cairo on 02.04.14, including a police brigadier-general. According to the interior ministry, several police officers were also injured. Security forces and students opposed to the government have clashed at the university on various occasions in recent days. The number of attacks on security forces has risen sharply since president Mursi was removed from power.

Brother of al-Swahiri to stand trial

Mohammed al-Swahiri, the brother of Al Qaeda leader Aiman al-Swahiri, is to be put on trial. The state prosecutor accuses him and 67 co-defendants of forming a terrorist organisation affiliated to Al Qaeda. Mohammed al-Swahiri was originally arrested back in August 2013, on charges of supporting Mohammed Mursi.

Tribal fighting claims numerous lives

28 people have been killed and more than 50 injured since 04.04.14 in fighting between members of an Arab and a Nubian tribe in the town of Aswan in southern Egypt. Insults reportedly sparked the conflict. An attempt by government representatives to mediate on 05.04.14 led to a ceasefire. The conflict flared up once again on 06.04.14.

Conflicts between different groups are a frequent occurrence in southern Egypt. They are generally settled through intervention by local government representatives.

Nigeria

High death toll in attack by Fulani herdsmen in Zamfara

According to official information, 79 people were killed in an attack on a meeting of church leaders and representatives of self-defence militias from the federal states of Zamfara, Kebbi, Kaduna and Katsina in the village of Dorf Yar Galadima (north-western federal state of Zamfara) on 05.04.14. Some Nigerian press reports on 07.04.14 put the death toll at between 200 and 250. The aim of the meeting was to discuss strategies to combat armed bandits and cattle thieves. The authorities accused herdsmen of the Fulani ethnic group of being responsible for the attack. The background to the attack is a conflict which has been smouldering in central Nigeria for some years now between nomadic herdsmen belonging to the predominantly Muslim Fulani and sedentary, in part Christian farmers. The Fulani complain that the farmers are increasingly laying claim to the grassland that they require for their herds.

Amnesty International: Serious human rights violations in Boko Haram conflict

According to a report published by amnesty international (ai) on 31.03.14, more than 1,500 people died in the Boko Haram conflict in north-east Nigeria in the first three months of 2014. At least half of those killed were civilians who perished in attacks by the Boko Haram. The report focuses in particular on the events of 14.03.14, when Boko Haram attacked the Giwa barracks in Maiduguri (capital of the north-eastern federal state of Borno) and freed over 1,000 suspected Boko Haram members and sympathisers. Investigations conducted by ai, including interviews with residents and hospital staff in Maiduguri, have confirmed that over 600 people – mostly freed prisoners – were extra-legally executed by security forces on this day at various locations in Maiduguri. ai asserts that these executions constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Suicide attack by Boko Haram near Maiduguri

According to information from the military, suspected members of the Islamist organisation Boko Haram attempted to drive four vehicles carrying explosives into a filling station in Mulai, a suburb of the town of Maiduguri, at around 2 p.m. on 01.04.14. Three of the vehicles were reportedly prevented from continuing their journey when they were fired on by soldiers at a nearby military checkpoint, while in the fourth car one of the attackers ignited the explosives. 15 civilians and six terrorists were killed in the attack. One of the attackers was arrested.

Cameroon

Priests and nun abducted

Two Italian priests and a Canadian nun were abducted from their house in the region of Maroua (north) on the night of 04.04.14. It remains unclear who carried out the abduction.

Uganda

Raid on relief organisation for people infected with HIV

The premises of the Walter Reed Project (US-financed clinic and research establishment) in Kampala were searched by the police on 03.04.14, presumably on the basis of the law against homosexuality which has been endorsed by president Yoweri Museveni. One man was detained temporarily. Various accusations were levelled at the organisation, including the "recruitment of homosexuals".

Human rights activists lodged an appeal for a review of the law against homosexuality with the constitutional court on 01.04.14.

Kenya

Radical Muslim cleric killed

Radical Muslim cleric Abubaker Shariff Ahmed, also known as Makaburi, was shot dead in broad daylight by unknown assailants in Mombassa on 01.04.14. One person accompanying him was also killed. Makaburi was known as a supporter of Osama bin Laden and the Somali Al-Shabaab militia.

Makaburi is the third radical Muslim cleric to be killed by unknown attackers since 2012. He preached at the Masjid Musa mosque (recently renamed Masjid Shuhadaa) and was the successor to Ibrahim Ismail, who was killed in October 2013. The latter was the successor to Aboud Rogo Mohammed, who was murdered in August 2012 (cf. BN of 07.10.13). Supporters accuse the government of being behind the murders.

Numerous arrests after attacks

Three explosions killed six people in Nairobi's Eastleigh district on 31.03.14. In the wake of the attacks by unknown assailants, which are thought to be the work of Al-Shabaab, the police have arrested or temporarily detained more than 1,000 people in the district, which has a large Somali population.

Mali

New prime minister

Following the resignation of prime minister Oumar Tatam Ly and his cabinet, president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita has appointed former urban planning minister Moussa Mara as prime minister and instructed him to form a cabinet. Nothing is known to date regarding the reasons for Oumar Tatam Ly's resignation.

Albania

Progress on the way to candidate status for accession to the EU

During the visit to Germany by Albania's prime minister, Edi Rama, German chancellor Merkel spoke of progress made by Albania in its efforts to accede to the EU. She also warned of the need for further success in the fight against corruption and the establishment of an independent judiciary, however. The decision on the granting of candidate status for accession to the EU is to be reached at the EU summit in June 2014.

Background

The EU Commission recommended for the first time that candidate status for accession to the EU be granted in October 2012, in recognition of the country's reforms. This recommendation was repeated in October 2013. The progress report states that Albania has made good progress in meeting the political criteria for accession and has undertaken a series of reforms.

Despite much progress, the predominantly agricultural country remains one of the poorest in Europe, however. The official unemployment rate stands at 16.9 per cent. Experts estimate that the actual rate is substantially higher. The average wage is 323 euros. This means that migration potential remains high. The number of Albanians seeking asylum in Europe has been on the rise again since the lifting of the visa requirement in 2010 and the end of the economic crisis in Europe.

Russian Federation/North Caucasus

Attack in Chechnya claims lives

The interior ministry in Moscow has reported that four Russian soldiers were killed and seven injured in a bomb attack in the North Caucasian autonomous republic of Chechnya on 03.04.14. The members of a sapper unit were travelling in an armoured personnel carrier which passed over a concealed explosive device in the region of Atschchoj-Martan.

Ukraine

Pro-Russian protests in eastern Ukraine

Seven weeks before the planned presidential election on 25.04.2014, serious rioting has broken out once again in the east of the country. Despite a heavy police presence at both locations, pro-Russian activists occupied the regional government buildings of the cities of Kharkiv and Donetsk, each of which has one million or more inhabitants, and raised the Russian flag on the roofs. The attackers called for referenda on secession from Ukraine along the lines of the referendum for the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea, which has not been recognised by the international community. The central government claims that the majority of the occupiers are provocateurs from nearby Russia.

Following a peaceful demonstration in Donetsk, the demonstrators smashed windows in the regional government building. Scuffles broke out with militiamen. Demonstrators outside the government building declared their intention to establish their own regional assembly. Forces loyal to Moscow initially took brief control of the regional administration back at the beginning of March 2014.

In Kharkiv, around 1,500 pro-Russian activists assembled outside the regional government building following a peaceful demonstration. Hundreds are reported to have forced their way into the building in the space of a few minutes. A number of police officers are said to have sided with the demonstrators. The crowd outside cheered the attackers on with chants of "Russia". Dozens of protestors loyal to Moscow threw rocks and fireworks at a number of supporters of the central government.

Security service headquarters occupied in Luhansk

Rioting also occurred on 06.04.14 in the city of Luhansk, close to the Russian border. Demonstrators temporarily occupied the offices of the Ukrainian security service, SBU. The attackers broke down the door and threw bricks and smoke bombs. Two people were injured. The attackers are also reported to have gained access to weapons. Following negotiations, the authorities released six activists loyal to Moscow. On the day before, the SBU had announced the arrest of 15 men in the region who were intending to occupy government buildings by force.

India

Parliamentary elections began on 07.04.14

An electorate of some 820 million is called on to cast their votes. For logistical reasons, the elections for the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house) extend over nine days. According to the election commission, the result is to be expected on 16.05.14. It is already certain that there will be a new prime minister. After serving two terms in office, Manmohan Singh of the Congress Party is not running for re-election. India experienced rapid economic growth under the 81 year-old, but has recently begun to falter. Polls put the Congress Party with its front runner Rahul Gandhi, son of prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, who was murdered in 1991, well behind the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is contesting the elections with Narendra Modi at its head. The 63 year-old is expected to return the BJP to power after ten years and take up office as the second BJP prime minister.

The BJP has its supporters in the upper and lower classes, traditionally first and foremost in the caste of traders, as well as among the Brahmins and Kshatriyas – the two upper castes. Modi is considered capable of revitalising the economy and bringing inflation back under control. Modi, who has governed the western union state of Gujarat since 2001, is a contentious figure, however. Critics describe his style of government as "totalitarian". It is not forgotten that Modi failed to intervene when over 900 people, predominantly Muslims, were killed in religious riots in 2002.

It is thus considered unlikely that the BJP will achieve an absolute majority.

Severe social problems

The new government faces major challenges. The leading foreign policy issue concerns relations with the country's arch enemy, Pakistan. It is feared that tension between the two nuclear powers will rise again following an election victory by Modi's BJP nationalists.

Social policy is another focal point. The majority of the population has yet to benefit from the economic successes of recent years. The gap between rich and poor has grown even larger during Singh's period in

office. Women continue to be disadvantaged. While rape attacks on women are not currently in the spotlight, the problem remains far from resolved, despite stricter laws.