

Asylum and Migration Information Centre

Briefing Notes

22 July 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

Also last week saw fights and attacks, mainly targeted at representatives of the Afghan state or at foreign military staff. On 17.07.13, a prosecutor was shot dead by Taliban members in the city of Karuch (western Herat province). The victim was a brother of the security advisor and former minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta. In Logar province (south of Kabul), Taliban members attacked eight Afghan civilians contracted by ISAF, who were on their way to work, and executed them with shots to the head on 18.07.13. On the same day, two police officers were killed and two injured in an attack on a police station by the Taliban in northern Kunduz city. On 19.07.13, four attacks occurred in different places in southern Helmand province, killing five Afghan intelligence officers, three policemen and six civilians. In neighbouring Kandahar province, several bomb attacks claimed the lives of at least five civilians, nine more people were injured. The attacks were launched in Panjwai, Arghandab and Spin Boldak districts. Also last weekend, Afghan and NATO units killed at least 30 Taliban insurgents within 24 hours, as was reported by the Afghan interior ministry.

Great Britain grants right of stay to Afghan helpers

According to several press reports, the British government plans to grant the right to reside in the UK to a total of around 600 Afghans who served the British forces by carrying out particularly dangerous and demanding jobs (mostly interpreters).

Setbacks for women's rights

NGO Human Rights Watch reports that the draft of a criminal law amendment is pending in parliament prohibiting the relatives of a criminal defendant from being questioned as a witness against the accused. Should this provision become law, victims and other family members who have been witnesses to abuse will be silenced in court in cases of domestic violence or forced marriage.

Already in May, a revision of Afghanistan's electoral law was passed, the HRW report continues, lowering to 20 percent the original guarantee reserving at least 25% of seats in each of Afghanistan's provincial councils for female candidates. Also, President Karzai appointed to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) a former Taliban government official who publicly spoke out against the Elimination of Violence against Women Law (EVAW) on several occasions.

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 18.07.2013, unidentified gunmen attacked a Frontier Corps (FC) vehicle in Kamar village (FATA Agency Bajaur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), killing two soldiers and injuring another four. Apparently, the area is a retreat for Taliban and al-Qaida members.

On 19.07.13, two members of the paramilitary FC were killed by a makeshift roadside bomb while on a patrol tour in Akkakhel area, Bara sub-district (FATA-Agency Khyber, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). In reaction to the attack, four FC members and 15 Pakistani Taliban were killed in an operation against militants in the same area on 20.07.13.

Punjab

Already on 09.06.13, a total of 27 guests were poisoned during a celebratory meal in the farming town of Mailsi (Vehari district, Punjab), among them numerous family members of the host Aurangzeb Khichi, a provincial deputy of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party. The Khichi family appears to be a powerful feudal clan. A relative of the deputy, whose father had also stood for election in the same district without political affiliation and who had not gained an assembly seat, is said to have bribed the cook to poison the food.

Sindh - Karachi

On 20.07.13, a roadside bomb exploded near Essa Nagri (Karachi, Sindh), when Karachi Metropolitan Commissioner Matanat Ali Khan left his office in the Civic Centre. His and some other vehicles were destroyed, but he himself was not injured. One person was killed in the accident and two more were injured, among them his bodyguard.

On the same day, an attack was launched on an office of the Awami National Party in Karachi's Gulshan-i-Buner area (Landhi district). Police reported that one party member was killed and two were injured; according to the Awami Party, even two of their members lost their lives and eight others were wounded. At first, an explosion occurred, which was then followed by gunfire attacks, the reports said.

On 18.07.13, an officer of the Ferozabad District Police (Karachi) in plain clothes was shot dead by unidentified gunmen on motorbikes. On the same day, unidentified militants attacked two officers of Azizabad District Police while on patrol; both policemen were injured, one died in hospital.

In Nazimabad (Karachi), a member of the pietistic Tablighi Jamaat movement was killed by unidentified attackers. The police are suspecting a sectarian background to the incident.

In Qaimkhani Colony (Baldia Town, Karachi), two members of the Awami National Party were gunned down by unidentified motorbikers. The police are suspecting a private background to the incident.

Iraq

Security situation

On 19.07.13, a suicide bomber launched an attack on a mosque in the town of Al-Wajihyah, killing at least 20 people. On 20.07.13, a series of bomb attacks in Baghdad killed at least 65 people and injured another 190, when a total of eleven car bombs and six roadside bombs were detonated in mostly Shia-Muslim dominated quarters. Further attacks were launched in Mossul, Madain, Kirkuk, Taji and Basaija. On 22.07.13, a suicide attack on a military patrol claimed the lives of at least 12 people. According to press reports, nearly 800 people died in attacks during the last month. So far, the death toll for the month of July amounts to 460.

Syria

U.S. consider military options in Syria

On 18.07.13, the chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey told a U.S. Senate panel that the Pentagon had presented various military options in Syria to the Obama administration, including the application of 'kinetic strikes'. General Dempsey did not further elaborate on this term. Presently, the Pentagon shares the view of various observers that Assad's troops have regained the upper hand in Syria.

Clashes between ethnic Kurds and Islamist groups

During the last days, fights have intensified between ethnic Kurds mainly from the military wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and Islamist groups, in particular members of Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), about the control of border crossing points to Turkey and about the oilfields in the region. On 16.07.13, JN members attacked the town of Ras al-Ain. After two days, the PYD regained control over the area, and the fights continued further east near Tall Abiad and east of Qamishli. For several months now, anti-government fighters have also been besieging the city of Afrin, where Kurds from Aleppo have found refuge.

Dozens of more victims

According to information provided by the UK-based NGO Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, government forces killed at least 49 insurgents in an ambush near the city of Adra close to Damascus on

21.07.13 In northern city of Ariha, which is mainly controlled by rebels, government forces fired mortar shells on the market place shortly before the meal that breaks the dawn-to-dusk fast during Ramadan, killing about 20 people, among them two women and two children. On 20.07.13, a pro-government militia killed 13 members of a family, among them four women and six children in what appears to have been a revenge act in the coastal city of Tartus.

Iran/Syria

Iran's president-elect Rouhani affirms support for Syria

Following the change of power in Iran, also the new president continues support of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. According to Tehran news agency Fars, Iranian president-elect Hassan Rouhani wrote a letter to President Assad confirming that Iran would remain on Syria's side to counter regional enemies, particularly the 'Zionist regime' in Israel.

Lebanon

Bodily injury following interreligious marriage

Family members of a Druze woman outraged by her secret marriage to a Sunni Muslim have cut off the husband's penis during a feigned reconciliation talk in Bajsur (southeast of Beirut).

The couple had signed a civil marriage document, a step which was only facilitated some weeks ago. Before, interfaith marriages could only be concluded abroad, with registration to be carried out subsequently in Lebanon.

Prominent supporter of Syrian President Assad killed / bomb attack on Hezbollah convoy

There are new signs that the Syrian civil war may spill over into Lebanon. For the first time, a prominent Syrian pro-government figure was assassinated in Lebanon. Mohammed Darrar Jamo was shot dead by Syrian rebels in the coastal town of Sarafand, where mostly Shia Muslims are living. On 16.07.13, a bomb attack was launched on a convoy of pro-Assad Shiite Hezbollah members near the Syrian border, injuring three people.

Israel/West Bank

EU to stop funding projects in Israeli settlements

The EU decision to exclude the West Bank settlements from any future funding has led to political tensions with Israel. In future, the EU will demand any new agreement with Israel to carry a clause guaranteeing that West Bank settlements are not part of the respective arrangement. This will apply to all EU support in the form of grants, prizes or financial instruments awarded to Israeli entities. With this new instrument, the EU is expressly making a legal distinction between the Israeli territory and the occupied territories, it was added. The guidelines agreed by the Commission on 28.06.13 were published in the Official Journal on 19.07.13 and will be effective from 2014. Contrary to the Israeli government, the Palestinians welcomed the decision, as did Yariv Oppenheimer, general director of the Israeli civil rights movement 'Peace now' ('Shalom Achshav').

Direct peace negotiations to be resumed

US Secretary of State John Kerry has announced a new round of direct peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. The negotiators of both sides had laid groundwork for new talks to start next week in Washington, Mr Kerry stated on 19.07.13 in Jordan's capital Amman. Direct talks between the two sides had come to a halt three years ago. It is the sixth visit of the US Secretary of State to the region in a concerted effort to revive negotiations since he took over office in February 2013.

Libya

Tripoli

On 16.07.13, several explosives were detonated on a military police vehicle and three civilian cars owned by employees of the military police in Hay al-Zahour district on Airport Road (Tripoli). The vehicles stood on different places in front of the interior ministry and were badly damaged by the blasts. There were no casualties.

Derna

Colonel Fathi El-Emami, commander of the Derna search and rescue division of the Libyan Air Force was assassinated on 16.07.13 while visiting a jewellery shop he owned in Derna. He died shortly after arrival in hospital.

Benghazi

On 19.07.13, Colonel Aqeela Mailoud Al-Abaidi, head of the search and rescue division of the Libyan army, who had been abducted the day before, was found dead near Benghazi. Residents said the assault may have been a revenge act of former prisoners.

Women's soccer team banned from playing at Berlin tournament

Libya has withdrawn its female soccer team from an important international tournament held in Berlin with competing teams from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia and Germany. The decision was justified with reference to the month of Ramadan. Before, the popular Islamic preacher Salim Jabar from Benghazi had stated in TV that the team was to be dissolved immediately because its existence was in contradiction to the laws of Islam. Soccer team leader Fadwa el-Bahi said that the players were threatened by extremists and had to train secretly, cover their faces, change their training sites and employ armed guards. Already in June, the extremist organisation Ansar al-Sharia, suspected of having participated in the killing of US Ambassador Chris Stevens, had condemned soccer for women saying it was incompatible with Sharia law.

Egypt

Continuing protest marches

After Friday prayers on 19.09.13, tens of thousands participated in protest marches all over the country, demanding the reinstatement of ousted President Morsi. In the night of 20.07.13, three female supporters of Mr Morsi lost their lives in clashes between supporters and opponents in the Nile delta city of Mansoura. In Cairo, thousands demanded the punishment of the perpetrators on 21.07.13. There were more demonstrations in the whole country; most of them took a peaceful course.

Since the ouster of President Morsi on 03.07.13, more than 100 people have died in clashes between supporters and opponents of his regime.

Violence in Sinai

On 20.07.13, two Egyptian soldiers and a police officer were killed in three attacks launched by suspected Islamists in the northern part of Sinai. During the night of 22.07.13, at least ten other attacks were carried out on police stations and military bases, claiming the lives of six people.

The region, which is considered a stronghold of Islamists, has been the scene of nearly daily attacks since the ouster of President Morsi.

Russian Federation

Court orders temporary release of Kremlin critic Navalny

Prominent Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has been temporarily released from custody. On 19.07.13, a court in the city of Kirov (approx. 900 km northeast of Moscow) suspended the verdict of five years imprisonment in a labour colony until it has become final. In a surprise move, the prosecutor general in Moscow had lodged the appeal. The court order is designed to facilitate the participation of 37 year-old lawyer Navalny in the Moscow mayoral elections to be held on 08.09.13. The verdict itself, however, was not contested in the

appeal. On 18.07.13, Navalny had been sentenced to five years imprisonment in a labour camp for embezzlement by a Kirov court. The new court decision is also seen as a reaction to the spontaneous protest marches against the imprisonment of Putin's opponent. In Moscow alone, thousands took to the streets in order to protest against the verdict; about 200 people were arrested. Protest marches were also staged in other cities. In St. Petersburg 50 people were temporarily detained.

Prominent blogger and anti-corruption activist Navalny is accused of having embezzled 400,000 Euro from a state timber company when working as advisor for Kirov's governor in 2009. The court procedure was criticized by international observers as a 'show trial' designed to eliminate a potentially dangerous opposition figure and to deter other Kremlin critics.

Kosovo

Increasing emigration

Kosovo media report a significant increase in people having left the country in the last months. On average, 200 people are leaving heading from Priština bus station to Belgrade, with ticket prices amounting to 15 Euro. Most passengers are young men and families with small children. Apparently, a major part of the passengers then illegally cross the border to Hungary. Also, organised cheap bus journeys are suspected to carry people abroad, e.g. to Switzerland for 55 Euro. Moreover, traffickers appear to smuggle more and more Kosovars to Austria.

In the first two quarters of 2013, numbers of asylum seekers from Kosovo have risen in all European countries. Germany has registered an increase of nearly 50 percent compared to the same time period of the previous year; in Austria, the figures have quadrupled in the first five months alone. In Switzerland, figures have increased by 21.8 percent in the first quarter compared to the same period last year.

The main reasons for this increase are to be found in the economic sphere. Despite international support, no improvement has been achieved in the country's economy so far. 30 percent of the population are living in dire conditions, with unemployment ranging around 40 percent. Corruption and mismanagement are aggravating the economic situation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Highest unemployment rate in Europe

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the unemployment rate was 44.5 percent in May, which is the highest rate in Europa. Youth unemployment amounts to 60 percent. In 2012, a major economic downturn was registered, with thousands of workers losing their jobs mainly in construction, mining and quarrying and in the processing industry.

The unstable economic situation is aggravated by a continuing governmental and constitutional crisis.

For much of the current legislative period, the country has not had a functioning government. The political stalemate is continuing to the present day. People are irritated about non-existent statal structures, the corruption and the precarious overall situation.

Protest wave against government failures shows success

In June, the country was shaken by a huge wave of protest, sparked by the inability of the political parties to agree on a new law on personal identification numbers.

This identification number is indispensable in order to obtain a birth certificate and other important identity documents. Since the members of parliament were not able to agree on a joint legislative draft, no birth certificates have been issued for newborns since the expiry of the original legislative act last February. Anti-government protests escalated when a seriously ill girl could not leave the country for medical treatment because she had no passport and died, with thousands of people taking to the street in Sarajevo and other cities. For some time, even the parliamentary building was blocked. The protesters have named their movement Bebolucij ('baby revolution'). Finally, the Bosnian government accepted the draft legislation on national identification numbers on 16.7.13.

Serbia

EU accession negotiations to start in 2014

At the end of June, the EU decided to start accession negotiations with Serbia in January 2014. Concrete negotiations will only commence after implementation of the 'Brussels Agreement' between Serbia and Kosovo dated 19.04.13 (see BN of 22.04.13 and 29.04.13). The 15-article pact is designed to pave the way for normalisation between the two states. A first assessment of the implementation of the agreement is scheduled to take place in December; then, the decision to commence negotiations will have to be confirmed by the EU Member States. With regard to Kosovo, the EU intends to start negotiations on a stabilisation and association agreement.

Nigeria

Boko Haram denies ceasefire

On 13.07.13 Abubakar Shekau, leader of the Islamic terror organisation Boko Haram, released a video message in which he denied the claim of a ceasefire agreement that Kabiru Turaki, minister of special duties and chairman of the 'Presidential Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North' had made on 08.07.13. The minister had stated that Mohammad Marwana, alleged deputy of Abubakar Shekau, had agreed to a ceasefire between Boko Haram and the government. Shekau also stated in his video message that his group had supported the attack on the Government Secondary School in Mamudo city (Potiskum Local Government Area, northeast Yobe State) that had been launched on 06.07.13. He did not, however, claim responsibility for the massacre in the school that had claimed the lives of about 30 people according to official information (other press reports said that up to 42 people had died in the attack). At the same time, Shekau announced that from now on, all teachers engaged in 'western education' would be targeted and killed in front of their students.

DR Congo

North Kivu: Fierce fights between M23 rebels and government forces near Goma

On 14.07.13, heavy fights erupted between the M23 rebels ('March 23 Movement') and government forces about 12 km northeast of Goma, capital of eastern North Kivu province. In the four days of fighting, the army used helicopters, heavy artillery and tanks and succeeded in pushing back the rebels some kilometres. Meanwhile, 1,200 Tanzanian and 800 South African soldiers stationed around Goma have started patrols. They are part of a new 3,000 member UN intervention brigade with a 'robust' mandate to fight the rebel groups operating in the eastern part of the country. On 19.07.13, UN Secretary Ban Ki-Moon stated that the UN MONUSCO peacekeeping force stationed in Congo and the new intervention brigade were prepared to intervene if the fighting should threaten civilians, particularly in Goma or in camps for internally displaced people.

South Sudan

Thousands escape to Ethiopia

According to UN information, thousands of South Sudanese people have fled in recent weeks from Pibor district (Jonglei state) to Ethiopia. Since May, apparently 5,000 South Sudanese have found refuge there. Presently, a total of 62,000 South Sudanese citizens are staying in Ethiopia. Thousands more people from Pibor district are seeking shelter in the bush.

In Jonglei state, the South Sudanese army is fighting against a rebel organisation led by David Yau Yau, a former SPLM member from the Murle tribe. Additionally, there are violent clashes between the ethnic groups of Lou-Nuer and Murle, who accuse each other constantly of cattle theft and infringement of pasture rights.

Cameroon

Gay rights activist murdered

On 15.07.13, prominent gay rights activist Eric Ohena Lembembe was found dead in his home in Cameroon's capital Yaoundé, apparently with his neck and feet broken. The exact cause of his death, the motive for the murder and the identity of the perpetrators have not yet been established. Mr Lembembe was one of the most prominent activists fighting for gay rights in Cameroon, documenting cases of arrest, violence and blackmail of homosexuals.

In Cameroon, homosexuality is punished with imprisonment of up to 5 years. According to the NGO Human Rights Watch, the country pursues more anti-gay prosecutions than any other in sub-Saharan state.

Kenya

Trial of Deputy President to be held at The Hague's International Criminal Court

On 15.07.13, the International Criminal Court (ICC) decided that the war crime trial against Kenyan Deputy President William Ruto will be held at the seat of the court in The Hague rather than be referred to Kenya or Tanzania. Proceedings are scheduled to commence in September. The ICC has allowed Mr Ruto to be absent from portions of his trial in order to attend to the duties of his office.

Deputy President Ruto is accused of having committed crimes against humanity arising from his involvement in the unrest following the presidential elections in 2007. At that time, more than 1,100 people were killed in ethnic violent clashes, several hundreds of thousands were displaced. Mr Ruto, who rejects the charges, has promised full cooperation with the court. Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta is expected to go on trial before the ICC in November. He is also facing charges of crimes against humanity, which he rejects.

Eritrea

Israel sends back Eritrean asylum seekers

Israel has started to return Eritrean asylum seekers to their home country. Further cases of forced return are planned to take place in the near future. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu justified the measure by referring to threats of internal security. In the last seven years, more than 60,000 migrants from Africa had arrived, he said. Several human rights organisation have voiced criticism, particularly with regard to the forced returns to Eritrea, making reference to the EU Member States who do not send back Eritrean asylum seekers in view of the insecure human rights situation there. According to official information from Israel, all returns to Eritrea are carried out on a voluntary basis.

In June, the UN Human Rights Council had published a report confirming the continued widespread and systematic violations of human rights committed by the Eritrean authorities, including cases of arbitrary and extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, the use of torture, arbitrary and incommunicado detention without recourse to justice.

Ethiopia

Opposition activists arrested after protest march

Several members and supporters of the opposition party Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ – Andinet) have been detained in the capital Addis Ababa, for having organised protest marches in the cities of Gondar and Dessie (Amhara region) on 15.07.13. On the next day, the 42 opposition leaders arrested were set free again. UDJ chairman and former Ethiopian President Negasso Gidada said that the roughly 90,000 protesters had demanded political reforms and the release of political prisoners. The government, in turn, declared that there were no political prisoners in Ethiopia, and called the protesters 'Islamist extremists'. An EU delegation was denied access to a prison.

Cambodia

Opposition leader returns

Cambodian opposition leader Sam Rainsy has returned from exile in France. He is planning to compete in the coming parliamentary elections.

India

Kashmir: Several protesters killed by Indian border guards

India's northern Kashmir state is shaken by new unrest. On 18.07.13, border guards killed at least six people and injured more than 20 others in clashes with Muslim protesters, security officials said. Apparently, the protests were ignited the day before by border guards who allegedly attacked several Muslim dignitaries and tore out pages from a Koran during prayer in a mosque in the village of Dharam. The incident is particularly critical as it occurred during the Islam holy month of Ramadan. The security forces stated that they were searching for militant Muslims.

Life imprisonment for rape

Four months after they had raped a Swiss tourist, six Indian men were sentenced to life imprisonment. Observers of the trial said that the harsh verdict was apparently intended to set an example. Recently, India has amended the legal basis of punishment for group rape, increasing the minimum sentence from 10 to 20 years imprisonment and raising the maximum verdict to life sentence. This is the first judgment in a series of proceedings in connection with group rape.

Myanmar

Release of political prisoners announced

On a visit to London, Myanmar's President Thein Sein announced the release of all political prisoners by the end of 2013, saying that he was striving for a transition to democracy after half a century of military rule. The reforms would also include the settlement of ethnic conflicts, he added, referring to the Rohingya Muslim minority.