

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

30 September 2013

Pakistan

New attacks in Peshawar

On 27.09.13, an attack on a bus carrying government employees killed 18 people. Another heavy attack on a market in the northern city of Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) killed at least 37 people (other source: 31) and injured dozens more on 29.09.13. Already on 22.09.13, a total of 82 people died in an attack on a Christian church in Peshawar (see BN of 23.09.13). The Pakistani Taliban have claimed responsibility for this attack.

Severe earthquake in southwest Pakistan

A major earthquake struck Balochistan province on 24.09.13. In the devastated district of Awaran, an emergency has been declared. In this district alone, more than 200 people have lost their lives. Balochistan is the largest, but least densely populated of Pakistan's four provinces.

Iraq

Kurdistan Regional Government parliamentary election results

Press reports said on 29.09.13 that Kurdish Democratic Party gained most of the parliamentary seats (38), with the Gorran (Change) Movement securing 24 seats and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan 17 seats.

Security-related incidents

On 25.09.13, a total of 33 people were killed in attacks across the country.

On 26.09.13, attacks launched on several Baghdad markets killed 22 people and left 46 injured.

In Arbil (Kurdistan region), several car bombs were detonated near the headquarters of the security services on 29.09.13, shortly after the official results of the regional parliamentary elections were made public. At least six people lost their lives, and at least 40 were wounded.

Also on 29.09.13, at least 24 people died (other sources put the figure at 43) in a suicide attack on a Shia Muslim mosque in Mussayab (Babil province), 27 were injured.

On 30.09.13, a total of nine bombs were detonated within a short time in different places of Baghdad.

AFP news agency reports a death toll of some 800 for the month of September so far; Iraq Body Counts puts the number of civilian deaths at 1,151 for September (last update: 29.09.13).

New internal displacement sparked

According to UNHCR, bombings and rising sectarian tensions since the beginning of the year have displaced some 5,000 Iraqis, with people mostly fleeing from Baghdad into Anbar and Salahuddin provinces, as well as causing displacement within Diyala and Ninewa provinces. Reports received suggested that up to 160 families from Basra and Thi Qar were displaced into Salahuddin and Anbar provinces, and 57 families from Baghdad arrived in Babil province, the refugee agency said. A smaller number of families had also fled from various provinces into Kerbala, Najaf and Wassit. Those displaced include Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Shia Shabak, Turkmen as well as Shia Arabs, the report went on.

Syria

UN Security Council adopts Resolution on destruction of chemical weapons

On 26.09.13, the U.S. and Russia agreed on a draft text for a Resolution on Syria which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council in the night from 27.09. to 28.09.13. Condemning the use of chemical weapons as a threat to international peace and security, Resolution 2118 calls for the implementation of the chemical weapons destruction programme. Should Syria not comply with its obligations, Chapter VII of the UN Charter opens room for measures allowing the use of military force, for which a new resolution would be required. Syrian President Assad accepted the UN decision. On 30.09.13, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will send twenty inspectors to Syria to prepare the destruction of the chemical arsenal totalling an estimated 1,000 tons.

Plans for second international conference on Syria

As was stated by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, a second international conference, 'Geneva II', is planned to be held in mid-November 2013. Syrian President Assad as well as the Syrian opposition platform National Coalition have signalled their willingness to participate. However, the opposition coalition is insisting that Bashar al-Assad step down from office.

Bomb attack near Damascus

On 27.09.13, a car bomb attack near a mosque killed at least 37 people in the rebel stronghold of Rankus near Damascus.

Syria/Russian Federation

North Caucasian fighters active

According to a news report, there are more than 1,000 fighters active in Syria from the North Caucasus, most of them Chechens. They are forming an independent group fighting on the side of the Islamists against Bashar al-Assad's government forces. The group calling itself 'al Muhajireen' (Arab for 'emigrants') has set up a training camp in Aleppo, led by Chechen commander Abu Abdurrahman, as was reported by Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper. Apparently, most of the over 1,000 members have collected combat experience in the Chechen wars. On 20.09.13, the Russian domestic intelligence agency FSB stated that more than 400 mercenaries from Russia were fighting in Syria.

Iran

80 political prisoners released ahead of Rouhani's address to the UN General Assembly

Iranian news agency ISNA reported that the Iranian judicial authorities have pardoned and released further 80 political prisoners, as was stated by prosecutor general Gholam-Hussein Mohseni-Ejei on 23.09.13. - one day ahead of President Hassan Rouhani's address to the UN General Assembly. Last week, 16 political prisoners had been released from Tehran Evin prison, among them prominent lawyer and human rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh. At least 100 more political prisoners are still kept in jail. Most of the released had been detained in connection with the 2009 protests, the prosecutor general said. At that time, there had been accusations of voting fraud in connection with the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The release of the political prisoners was regarded as a great domestic victory for moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani and may be seen as a further signal of change in course under his leadership. He had advocated the release of all political prisoners and the freedom of speech already during the election campaign.

Lebanon

Clashes between Shiite Hezbollah and Sunni Muslims

On 28.09.13, at least four people were killed in clashes between Hezbollah militants and members of a Sunni Muslim clan in the town of Baalbek, when the Sunnis refused to show their passports to the Hezbollah

members at a roadblock. In the Syrian civil war, Hezbollah militants are supporting Assad's government forces, while many Sunni clans sympathize with the Syrian rebels.

Turkey

Police officers on trial for protester death

As was reported by Turkish Dogan news agency on 24.09.13, a court in the city of Eskişehir will try four police officers and four other defendants for the premeditated murder of a protester. The defendants are facing life imprisonment. The date of the trial will be fixed within a month, the news agency said. The 19-year-old protester had been beaten in a rally against the Turkish government in the beginning of June and died of his injuries on 10.07.13. In the course of the protests against a construction project in Istanbul's Gezi Park, six people had been killed, a further protester died in new unrest that broke out two weeks ago (see BN of 16.09.13).

Russian Federation

Attacks in North Caucasus

On 25.09.2013, a judge of the Supreme Court was killed in an attack on his car in Makhachkala, the capital of the Russian constituent Republic of Dagestan. In Tabasaransky district, also situated in Dagestan, a car bomb was detonated in front of a police building on 23.09.13. Two officers were killed and approx. 20 more people injured. Already on 16.09.13, three policemen had lost their lives and four more were injured under similar circumstances in a car bomb attack in Sunzhenskoye district close to Sernovodsk town in Chechnya. The assassin had rammed the gate of a police station with his car and tried to reach the residential tract. When he was stopped by a barrier, he blew himself up. On the same day, a man wearing a so-called Shakhid belt was apprehended in Ingushetia. In the lead-up to the Sochi Olympics in February 2014, the security authorities are fearing further attacks. For this reason, security arrangements and controls have been significantly increased.

Serbia/Kosovo

Increased tensions in Northern Kosovo /European Union police officer shot dead in Kosovo

On 19.09.13, an attack on two vehicles of the EU's Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) in Kosovo claimed the life of an EU customs official from Lithuania; two of his colleagues were injured.

In another bomb attack on the following day nobody was injured. Apparently, the perpetrators were Serb extremists who want to prevent Serbs from taking part in the municipal elections on 03.11.13. A week before, the government in Belgrade had dissolved several municipal councils in Northern Kosovo, after some council members had campaigned for a boycott of the local elections.

Background

Northern Kosovo is mainly inhabited by Serbs, who are refusing to integrate into the Kosovar state. Under EU pressure, Serbia and Kosovo agreed a normalisation of their relations in April 2013 (see BN of 22.04; 21.05., 19.08.13), with local elections to be held in November 2013 as a core element of the agreement. Kosovo-Serb leaders have called for a boycott of the election, because it would amount to the recognition of Kosovo's independence in their opinion. Participation of Kosovo Serbs in the elections is considered Serbia's core obligation deriving from the agreement. Its fulfilment is a precondition for the start of EU accession talks in January 2013.

Albania

New government takes office

On 15.09.13, the new socialist government led by Prime Minister Edi Rama was approved by the Albanian Parliament. In the June elections, Rama's leftist coalition had gained a clear victory after eight years in

opposition (see BN of 24.06.13), replacing the conservative Democratic Party of Albania (PD) of former Prime Minister Sali Berisha. Rama is determined to address the issues of poverty and unemployment and aims at moving closer to the EU.

On 17.09.13, EU Commission President Barroso announced that Albania may become an EU accession candidate by the end of 2013. Albania has made good progress towards fulfilling the political criteria for membership and implemented a series of reforms, he said. However, there was still a need for reform in the areas of justice and administration, anti-corruption measures, reinforcement of human rights and anti-discrimination policies, Barroso added.

Western Balkan States

European Union Parliament approves safeguard clause against visa abuse

On 12.09.13, the European Parliament approved a suspension clause in the Visa List Regulation, which allows the suspension of the exemption from the visa requirement for third country nationals under strict conditions (sudden substantial increase of the number of asylum applicants for a period of six months, unfounded applications or refusal of readmission by the state responsible in accordance with the readmission agreement in force). When the European Commission considers it necessary to suspend the exemption, suspension will be imposed for a period of six months by means of a legal act, on which the European Parliament will be informed.

Since the abolishment of the visa requirement for all western Balkan countries except Kosovo in 2009/2010, several EU member states have complained about an increase in asylum seekers, in particular from Serbia and Macedonia. In view of these circumstances, six member states (among them Germany) demanded from the EU an emergency clause to allow the re-introduction of the visa requirement.

Egypt

Court bans Muslim Brotherhood

On 23.09.13, the Urgency Court of Cairo imposed a ban on Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, prohibiting all activities of the movement and confiscating all assets including real estate.

Political unrest affects universities

According to state media and security circles, at least 29 people were injured on 29.09.13, when supporters and opponents of ousted president Mohamad Morsi attacked each other in three universities in Cairo and some cities in the Nile delta; some of the students carried firearms and incendiary devices with them.

German Foreign Office modifies security warning

The Federal Foreign Office has lifted its categorical advise against traveling to Egypt. However, tourists should be very careful in the whole country, including the Red Sea resorts, it was stated.

Tunisia

New government announced

After several weeks of crisis, the Tunisian government has decided to resign. According to official reports released on 28.09.13, a caretaker administration will be tasked with the preparation of new elections. The composition of the new leadership will be negotiated by the Islamist Ennahda party and secular opposition parties. Apparently, the governmental decision was mediated by the powerful UGTT labour union. Ennahda has agreed to three weeks of negotiations with the opposition parties, after which it would step down and make way for a transitional government. The political crisis in Tunisia had been triggered by the murder of opposition politician Muhammad Brahmi on 25.07.13. Opposition parties and numerous citizens are accusing Ennahda of bearing a share in the killing. The government, in turn, is putting the blame on radical Salafists. Moreover, the opposition accuses Ennahda of mismanagement and political failure. Another disputed issue is the role of Islam in the political and social spheres.

Sudan

Protests after fuel subsidies cut

In the frame of austerity measures taken by the Sudanese government, fuel subsidies were cut on 23.09.13. Since then, serious unrest has erupted in the capital of Khartoum and other cities. According to police information, 29 people have been killed in clashes so far, 21 of them in Khartoum. Human rights groups said that 50 protesters were shot dead on 24/25.09.13 alone. The interior ministry stated that around 600 people have been detained on charges of vandalism. These are the severest social protests since President al-Bashir took office. He decided not to attend the UN General Assembly where he was scheduled to address the UN.

Mali

Attack in north Mali

On 28.09.13, suicide bombers attacked a military base near Timbuktu. Apparently, the attackers and two civilians lost their lives, several soldiers were injured. The attack was the second one on security forces in the region since the Tuareg rebels and ethnic Arab insurgents withdrew from the peace negotiations with the Mali government on 26.09.13.

Nigeria

New Boko Haram video showing leader Abubakar Shekau

A video released on 25.09.13 appears to show Boko Haram militia leader Abubakar Shekau, claiming responsibility for the most recent attacks in Borno State. On 19.08.13, Nigerian military officials had stated that Shekau may have been killed between 25.07. and 03.08.13. This statement has not been confirmed by independent sources.

Dozens killed in attack on agricultural college

In the night to 29.09.13, an attack on an agricultural college in the town of Gujba (Yobe State) ascribed to Boko Haram killed around 50 people, with different sources giving varying figures.

Liberia/Sierra Leone

UN Court upholds Charles Taylor's 50-year term

The Appeals Chamber of the Special Tribunal for Sierra Leone in Leidschendam near The Hague has upheld the 50-year term of former Liberian head of state Charles Taylor for incitement and complicity in war crimes. 65-year-old Charles Taylor had been held accountable for thousand-fold murder, torture and rape. From 1998 until 2001, he had equipped the rebel movement Revolutionary United Front (RUF) with arms and logistic support in exchange for the so-called 'blood diamonds'. The rebel organisation had imposed a reign of terror in neighbouring Sierra Leone. Taylor, who has been claiming to be innocent since his arrest in 2006, is expected to spend the rest of his life in a British prison.

India

Extremist attack in Kashmir kills at least 11 people

On 26.09.13, four police officers and two civilians were killed in an attack of suspected extremists launched at the police station in Hiranagar (Kathua district) in the part of Kashmir under Indian control. Subsequently, armed gunmen attacked an army camp in Samba, apparently killing six army servicemen. The Indian army has deployed tanks into the region. According to a local newspaper, an unknown group called 'Martyrs Brigade' has claimed responsibility for the attack.

India/Pakistan

India and Pakistan work to restore border ceasefire

India and Pakistan will strive to end ceasefire violations, Pakistan's Premier Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh agreed in their meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York on 29.09.13. In the past, the two nuclear-armed powers had repeatedly accused each other of violating the border ceasefire established in 2003. The most disputed issue remains the divided Kashmir region inhabited mainly by Muslims.