

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

17 March 2014

Afghanistan

Swedish journalist killed

On 11 March 2014, a Swedish journalist was shot dead in Kabul's diplomatic quarter in broad daylight. A group called "Fidai-e Mahaz" (Islamic movement front) – so far unknown – has taken responsibility for the murder. They are allegedly a Taliban splinter group.

Taliban will attack elections

The Taliban have announced that they will take violent action against the presidential elections on 5 April 2014. Following the attack onto the convoy of the presidential candidate Mr Abdullah Abdullah at the end of February, two security men and four campaign workers were killed on 10 March 2014 in a bomb attack onto Mr Abdullah's office in Herat (western Afghanistan). On 12 March 2014, four members of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) were kidnapped in Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan. Three tribal elders and supporters of Mr Abdullah were shot dead in Faryab province in northern Afghanistan. Candidates and campaign workers have been attacked in five other incidents since February. Several people have died.

Pakistan

Attack on Hindus

On 16 March 2014, a furious crowd attacked a Hindu religious centre in Sindh province (Larkana district) in southern Pakistan. The religious centre and a near-by Hindu temple were partly burnt down. This attack had been triggered off by rumours of alleged desecration of the Koran. The province administration requested paramilitary forces in order to bring the situation under control.

Further attacks

Two bomb attacks on 14 March 2014 on security forces in Peshawar in north-west Pakistan and in Quetta in the south-west, took the lives of at least 19 people, more than 30 were wounded. The Islamist group of Ahrarul Hind which is hardly known and which allegedly has no links to the Taliban, has taken responsibility for the attacks. The Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) condemned the attacks and declared that they are still willing to conduct direct peace talks with the government.

Drought catastrophe

Drought and extraordinary cold weather have caused the death of more than 60 children in the past three months in the desert region of Thar in Sindh province in southern Pakistan. Thousands of people suffer from hunger and illnesses. The authorities say that in the meantime food has been distributed.

Iraq

General situation

According to Iraq Body Count, 530 civilians have been killed in March 2014 so far (as of 16 March 2014). According to this piece of information, on 15 March 2014 a series of bomb attacks in Baghdad killed at least

22 people, another 70 were wounded. The bombs mainly exploded in Shiite populated parts of the city. Observers assume that Sunni militants are carrying out the attacks. On 15 March 2014, 32 civilians were killed across the country and 34 on 16 March 2014.

According to a press release of 13 March 2014, again seven death sentences were executed.

Syria

Mr Assad announces presidential elections

On 11 March 2014, Syrian President Mr Bashar al-Assad announced presidential elections for early summer (April or May). The new electoral law provides for a direct election by the Syrian people. The candidates, however, must have lived in Syria for the past ten years without any interruption, the Syrian nationality only is permitted [*dual nationality is excluded*] and they must have the support of at least 35 of the 250 MPs. These rules would now exclude an opposition candidate. People expect that Mr Bashar al-Assad aims at a re-election.

Government troops conquer Yabroud

Following the continued offensive of the Syrian government troops since the middle of November 2013 in the Qalamoun mountains, they conquered on 16 March 2014 - with the support of the Hezbollah - the strategically important town of Yabroud (other spellings are: Jabroud, Jabrud) which is some 60 km north of Damascus. With this victory, a rebel support route from Lebanon can be cut off. The former rebel stronghold is near a motorway which connects Damascus with Aleppo in the north and the coast of the Mediterranean in the west. The government opposition includes Islamist rebels, members of the Jabhat al-Nusra and the group "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL or also ISIS = The Islamic State of Iraq and in Syria). In other areas, ISIL and Islamist groups fight against each other.

Lebanon

Suicide attack / clashes

In the evening of 16 March 2014, four people were killed in a suicide attack in the built-up area of al-Nabi Othman in the Bekaa plain near the Syrian border where mainly Shiites live. It is assumed that there is a link to the civil war in Syria; two of the victims had been members of the Hezbollah militia which participates in the civil war in Syria on the side of the Syrian regime. The groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Liwa Ahrar al-Sunna have taken responsibility for the attack.

Bloody clashes between Sunnis and Shiites killed at least ten people in the previous days in the Lebanese town of Tripoli according to a press release of 16 March 2014.

Turkey

Protests and violent clashes

On 11 March 2014, the death of a boy who had been wounded in protests against the government, led to some more protests. 15 year old Berkin Elvan who had been wounded by a teargas canister during the Gezi [*Park*] protests in summer 2013, died in a hospital in Istanbul. Ten thousands of people protested in the streets in several towns of Turkey; there were clashes between protesters and the police. On 12 March 2014, ten thousands of people gathered in Istanbul for a funeral procession which was peaceful in the beginning. After the end of the procession however, fighting in the street began and the police used teargas, water cannons and rubber bullets whereas the protesters themselves used slingshots, threw stones and built barricades.

The news agency Dogan reported that a 22 year old man died following clashes in the suburb of Okmeydani in Istanbul owing to his head injury. The newspaper "Hürriyet" reported the young man died owing to brawls among protesters without any participation of the police. The news agency Dogan also reported that a 30 year old policeman died after a police operation in the town of Tunceli. He died in hospital owing to a heart attack. Previously, he had reportedly been exposed to a large quantity of teargas.

In Ankara as well the police used teargas and water cannons against protesters. Other protests were reported from Izmir, Antalya and Eskisehir. Several people were arrested and some were wounded.

Iran

UN: Heavy increase in executions

Owing to the heavy increase in executions, UN experts have requested that the Iranian government suspend the execution of death sentences. Since the beginning of 2014 alone, 176 people have already been hanged (according to AA, there were more than 400 executions in 2013 in contrast), said UN special rapporteurs on 12 March 2014 in front of the UN Human Rights Council sitting in Geneva. Since the middle of 2013, the number of death sentences and executions has constantly been on the rise. Most death sentences have reportedly been imposed owing to drug crimes. As a consequence, Iran therefore violates international legal principles according to which capital punishment should only be imposed – if at all – in case of the most serious crimes. A most serious injustice was reportedly the execution of a 26 year old woman who first confessed under questionable circumstances having killed her husband six years ago, who however then has repealed this. Ms Farzaneh Moradi who was hanged on 4 March 2014, was forcibly married at the age of 15, the UN said. In her repeal she reportedly declared that the real murderer had persuaded her to confess the murder as in Iran a young mother would not be executed. The court however has rejected the notice of appeal.

Israel / Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Riots on the Temple Mount

On 16 March 2014, there were riots in the old town of Jerusalem on the Temple Mount (Arabic: Haram al-Sharif; Hebrew: Har haBait) between Arab protesters and security forces. The protesters reportedly threw stones and fireworks, the riot police answered with blend grenades and arrested seven “suspects”, said a police spokesperson. The riots had been triggered off by a visit of the Israeli minister of housing Mr Uri Ariel of the settlers’ party The Jewish Home (HaBayit HaYehudi). This place has always again been the scene of riots. A visit of the then Israeli opposition leader Mr Ariel Sharon in 2000 on the Temple Mount triggered off the so-called Second Intifada, namely the violent uprising of the Palestinians against Israeli occupation.

Palestinians announce that Egypt mediates ceasefire for the Gaza Strip

In view of the new massive violent clashes between Israel and militant Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, Egypt has reportedly again acted as a mediator (the last time was at the end of 2012). The government in Cairo had reportedly initiated a ceasefire between both sides valid from the afternoon of 3 March 2014, said a member of the militant Palestinian organisation al-Jihad al-Islami, Mr Chaled al-Baj in the Gaza Strip. On 12 March 2014, the Jihad al-Islami had according to its own information fired 130 rockets onto Israel within only a few hours; this has been the most serious attack since the end of 2012. Israel itself bombed a total of 36 targets in the Gaza Strip at night and on the following day. There have neither been any victims in Gaza, nor in Israel.

Libya

Head of government removed

On 11 March 2014, the Libyan parliament removed Prime minister Mr Ali Seidan by vote of no confidence with the majority [*of votes*]. Defence minister Mr al-Thenni shall be the interim prime minister. Within 15 days at the latest, the new head of government shall be nominated and within three months parliamentary elections shall take place. The background of the crisis was the dispute on the North Korean-flagged tanker “Morning Glory” which loaded oil in the port of al-Sidra supplied by the rebels, amounting to a value of 30 million dollars. The Libyan government wanted to block the vessel violently; the tanker however was able to escape the state escort secretly and left harbour. In addition and immediately after the vote of no confidence, the judiciary issued an arrest warrant against Mr Seidan for corruption in connection with the illegal oil sales by the separatists. Mr Seidan however, was able to immediately leave the country the same day in spite of a

travel ban and he allegedly first travelled to Switzerland where he had been residing for 30 years in the past. The news programme Al Arabiya reported that he has reached Germany in the meantime.

Since July 2013, militia have occupied the country's most important oil ports in order to stress their request for regional autonomy for Libya's east and in order to reach a better distribution of the income from the mineral oil business.

On 16 March 2014, US special forces brought the tanker "Morning Glory" which had loaded Libyan oil in the Mediterranean in international waters south-east of Cyprus under their control together with the European subordinate unified command SOCEUR (Special Operations Command Europe); reportedly nobody has been wounded. The US Ministry of defence said that both the governments of Libya and Cyprus had asked for this operation.

Nigeria

Many fatalities owing to attacks onto villages in the federal state of Kaduna

In the night of 14 March 2014, gunmen attacked the three villages of Ungwar Sankwai, Ungwar Gata and Chenshyi (all located in Kaura Local Government Area) in the south of the central Nigerian federal state of Kaduna. Approximately 200 of the Christian villagers of the Moroa tribe were burned to death inside their homes or were killed through shots and machetes. The attackers were presumably semi-nomadic Muslim Fulani herdsmen. In the past few years, mainly the central Nigerian federal states of Plateau and Katsina have time and again been the theatre of violent clashes between the cattle-herding Muslim Fulani people and mostly Christian settled villagers, something which has taken the lives of several thousand people. The clashes mainly arise out of disputes over land, cattle theft or they are a revenge for previous attacks.

Attack of the Boko Haram on military barracks

In the morning of 14 March 2014, fighters of the militant Islamist organisation Boko Haram attacked in Maiduguri, capital of the federal state of Borno in the north-east of the country, the largest military barracks of the town, namely the "Giwa Barracks" in the suburb of Fauri. They succeeded in releasing numerous of their members who had been detained there. Fighter jets interfered in the heavy gun battle between the armed forces and the members of the Boko Haram and threw bombs onto the fleeing terrorists. According to Nigerian press releases and under reference to leaders of the militia force "Civil Task Force", more than 200 members of the Boko-Haram (attackers and released terrorists) were reportedly killed in the clashes by soldiers and also by members of the militia.

Central African Republic

Critical situation

The situation is increasingly becoming difficult for the people in the Central African Republic. According to the Deutsche Welthungerhilfe [*German organisation against hunger in the world*], a large part of the population is starving in the meantime. The Muslims still staying in the country fear further massive attacks by the Christian dominated Anti-Balaka militia. The number of the originally 130,000 Muslims in the capital of Bangui has decreased to about only 1,000. Every fifth person in the Central African Republic is fleeing in view of the fighting between Christian and Muslim rebels. The UN says that there is chaos in particular in the countryside.

Russian Federation

Ten thousands protest in Moscow against Putin's Crimea policy

On 15 March 2014, several ten thousands of people protested in Moscow against Russia's interference in Ukraine. They followed an opposition group's request to join in the protests and they carried banners with slogans such as "Hands off Ukraine!" and "Say No to war!". The authorised protest march started from Moscow's Pushkin square and then concentrated on Sacharov street. There were also some well-known opponents of Mr Putin among the protesters such as former Deputy Prime minister Mr Boris Nemzov and the activists of the punk band Pussy Riot. This has reportedly been one of the largest protests in Moscow for months, said the radio station "Echo of Moscow". In the past few weeks, there have reportedly always again

been smaller spontaneous protests in Moscow against Mr Putin's Ukraine policy. During these protests, hundreds of people had been arrested. And in general, Russia takes action against critical opinions in the country with merciless force. The authorities have for example blocked the access to several government critical web sites in an unprecedented operation. Some well-known Russian authors and civil rights activists have also come out against Mr Putin's Ukraine policy with a protest letter. The 89 people having signed the letter, criticised Mr Putin's route and said that it is a "very dangerous" one.

Ukraine

Referendum on Crimea – Almost 97% in favour of accession to Russia

According to the official final results, 96.6% of the votes in the referendum of 16 March 2014 were in favour of a split of Crimea from Ukraine and the accession to the Russian Federation. The turnout was reportedly at more than 80%. Approximately 1.5 million citizens had been called in the referendum to cast their votes. As approximately 63% of Crimea's population is of Russian descent and as other groups of the population had called for a boycott, it had been clear in advance that there will be a clear majority in favour of Crimea's annexation to Russia.

A huge crowd gathered on the central Lenin square in Simferopol, Crimea's capital, in the evening following the referendum. "We have come home" was projected in green letters onto the seat of government. The square was covered in an ocean of Russian flags and Crimean flags. The Prime minister of Crimea's regional government Mr Sergej Aksjonow – not acknowledged by the West – spoke of a historic decision following the first forecasts.

Now, everything shall be completed very quickly: On 17 March 2014 already, parliament shall assemble for an extraordinary session in order to request the accession of the peninsula to the Russian Federation. In addition, a delegation shall travel to Moscow in order to discuss the process of accession to Russia. On 19 March 2014 already, the ruble shall be introduced on Crimea and at the end of the week some economic agreements shall be entered into with Russia. The vote in the Russian parliament on the accession of Crimea is planned for 21 March 2014. For two weeks now, the Crimean peninsula has already been under the control of pro Russian militia forces and heavily armed soldiers who are obviously under Russian command. Moscow says that the Russians on Crimea shall this way be protected against attacks, as now the Ukrainian President Mr Victor Yanukovich has been removed.

Serbia

Early elections: Victory of the conservative Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)

Two years prior to the regular end of the legislative period, early elections took place on 16 March 2014 in Serbia (see BN dated 3 February 2014). The election winner is – as expected – the right-wing conservative Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) with its party leader and acting Deputy Prime minister Mr Aleksander Vučić who will now probably take over office as Prime minister. The SNS obtained approximately 50% of the votes and has thus been able to almost double its percentage of votes and it presumably obtained the absolute majority, as the first forecasts have revealed. The socialist party (SPS) of Prime minister Mr Dacić – part of the outgoing coalition – only obtained 15%. The once powerful Democratic Party (DS) and the New Democratic Party of former President Mr Boris Tadić which had split off from the democrats, are far behind.

Background

44 year old Mr Vučić faces the biggest triumph of his whole carrier. In 1993 at the age of only 24, he gained the job as secretary general of the right-wing extremist Serbian Radical Party (SRS). He then served as minister of information under Mr Slobodan Milošević. Together with Mr Tomislav Nikolić, he founded the new Serbian Progressive Party in 2008. This party had once been counted to the ultra-nationalist and pro Russian wing; today it presents itself as a reform oriented party, however.

Mr Vučić is reportedly a master in political communication. He has reached a number of successes in his fight against corruption. Under his leadership, oligarchs have been arrested and brought to court for the first time in history. Mr Vučić has now announced economic reforms and he will fight against corruption. By 2018, he will have finalised the accession talks with the EU. Many citizens of Serbia regard him as rescuer and saviour. Many critics however are sceptical; they fear a too large concentration of power. They also

think that an improvement of the conditions of life (unemployment rate of approx. 27%) cannot be expected in the near future.

India

15 people killed in fighting with Maoists

On 11 March 2014, Maoist rebels killed at least 15 police officers in the federal state of Chhattisgarh in central India. The patrol had reportedly been on a regular patrol in a densely wooded region about 400 kilometres south of the regional capital of Raipur when they were attacked by up to 200 rebels, said representatives of the police and the media. There was no information available regarding the number of victims on the side of the Maoists.

Chhattisgarh is part of the so-called “Red Corridor” where Maoist groups have been active and which extends from central India to the east of the country. The Maoists, in India also known as Naxalites, are fighting against the government which they accuse of conducting a “semi-feudalistic, semi-colonial rule”; they request an agrarian reform and more work for the poor. According to estimates, ten thousands of people have been killed in the latent conflict since 1967.

China

Arrested civil rights activist dies

On 14 March 2014, the activist Ms Cao Shunli died in a hospital after being denied medical help during her arrest in prison over several months. Only at the end of February, she was taken to hospital. Ms Cao had already been ill in September 2013 when she was arrested in Beijing from where she wanted to fly to Geneva in order to attend a UN event. She had campaigned for public participation in a human rights review in China which China was preparing for presentation to the UN Human Rights Council. The human rights situation in China is this week’s topic in the UN Human Rights Council in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Self-immolations by burning

On 16 March 2014 and apparently independently from each other, two Tibetan monks were setting fire on themselves. One of these incidents happened in Aba (Sichuan province); local sources said that the self-immolation was a protest against the violent action taken by security forces vis-à-vis Tibetan protests of 16 March 2008. Another incident was reported from Huangnan (Qinghai province) with no further details, nor about the current condition of the two monks.

Now, for the time being, a total of 129 cases of self-immolation have become known in China since 2009; four of them have occurred in 2014.

“Enemies of the internet”

In a report published on 12 March 2014, the organisation Journalists without borders still counts China to the “Enemies of the internet”. The report says that the country maintains the most sophisticated system worldwide for the control of the internet. At least 70 people are reportedly in prison owing to their activities on the internet.

Thailand / China

Uighurs arrested in Thailand face extradition to China

On 13 March 2014, the Thai police discovered a group of more than 200 people, among them about 80 children which was hiding on a plantation in Songkhla province. The group, presumably mostly Uighurs from the Uighur Autonomous Region Xinjiang, has reportedly tried to flee to Malaysia; they now face extradition to China. The UNHCR is trying in cooperation with the Thai authorities to clear the legal status of the people concerned.