

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

5 May 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

Fighters belonging to the Haqqani network, which is allied with the Taliban, attacked an Afghan military base in the district of Siruk in the eastern Afghan province of Paktika close to the border with Pakistan on 28.04.14. The attack was repelled with NATO air support. According to information from the military, over 60 attackers and five Afghan soldiers were killed. There are no reports of any killed or injured civilians.

On 30.04.14 four policemen died in an attack on a checkpoint in the province of Khost in eastern Afghanistan.

Six police officers and seven civilians died in a suicide attack by the Taliban on a checkpoint in the central Afghan province of Panjsher on 01.05.14. A further attack on a police station in the northern Afghan province of Kunduz claimed the lives of four police officers and injured three policemen. Two police officers are reported to have been taken captive.

Over 2,000 killed in landslide

On 02.05.14 the thaw and heavy rainfall led to a landslide which buried the village of Ab-e-Barik in the district of Argo in the northern Afghan province of Badakhshan. 300 bodies have been recovered so far, but the authorities are assuming that over 2,000 people have been killed, stating that over 4,000 people have been directly or indirectly affected by the disaster. Heavy rainfall and floods had previously destroyed several villages and claimed numerous lives in northern Afghanistan last week (cf. BN of 28.04.14)

Pakistan

Province of Sindh introduces mandatory minimum marrying age of 18 for women

The parliament of the province of Sindh is the first Pakistani province to promulgate a law under which marrying off a girl under the age of 18 is a criminal offence punishable with a prison sentence of up to three years or a fine. In the remainder of Pakistan the marrying age is 16 for women and 18 for men. In reality, children are married off at much younger ages, generally without the parents incurring any punishment or only minor punishment.

Attacks

Bomb attacks were carried out on three primary schools in north-western Pakistan (Mohmand Agency, Charsadda, province of Khyber Pakhtoonkwa) in the early hours of 01.05.14. There were no casualties.

Also in Khyber Pakhtoonkwa, armed men attacked a convoy carrying supplies for the NATO troops in Afghanistan on 05.05.14. Two truck drivers were killed in the attack.

Iraq

Security situation

According to Iraq Body Count, 1,013 civilians were killed in April. The AFP news agency puts the death toll in April at 795, including 82 police officers, 74 soldiers, 17 members of the Sahwa, one member of the Kurdish security forces and 259 extremists.

According to UNAMI, 610 civilians died in April and 1,311 were injured. In addition, 140 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed and 230 injured. The most severely affected province was Baghdad, followed by Ninive, Diyala, Salahaddin and Kirkuk. The figures do not include victims from the province of Anbar.

Parliamentary election

The first parliamentary election since the withdrawal of the US Army took place on 30.04.14. More than 20 million Iraqis were called on to elect 320 MPs to parliament. Eight seats are reserved for religious minorities, five for Christians, one seat for Sabians/Mandeans, one seat for Shabak and one seat for Yezides. Nationwide, some 9,000 candidates ran for the parliamentary seats. A driving ban was imposed in Baghdad for security reasons. The airports were also cordoned off. According to provisional figures from the election commission, turn-out stood at approx. 60 %.

Police, soldiers, patients in hospitals and medical personnel were able to vote on 28.04.14.

Initial results indicate victory by incumbent prime minister's alliance, which is committed to the rule of law. The official final result is expected in mid-May.

Syria

Official announcement of Assad's candidacy in the presidential election

On 28.04.14 the Syrian parliamentary speaker, Al-Lahham, officially announced that Bashar al-Assad, who has been Syria's president since 2000, will be running as the 7th candidate in the presidential election on 03.06.14. Four additional candidates submitted their application to run to the constitutional court on 29.04.14. It is as yet unclear whether these candidates will be able to muster the required 35 endorsements from parliamentarians. Only Syrians who have lived in the country continuously for the past ten years are eligible to run for the presidency. The registration deadline for candidates wishing to run in the election on 03.06.14 expires on 01.05.14. Voting is to take place only in the government-controlled territories. Since the beginning of the civil war, a large part of the population has fled to the neighbouring countries. The new constitution from 2002 permits several candidates to run for the post of president. To date, Syrian presidents have been appointed by referendum – most recently Bashar al-Assad with 97.6 % in 2007.

It was announced on 04.05.14 that the three candidates for the presidential election had been finalised. This means that apart from Assad only two other applicants met the constitutional court's conditions for eligibility, with 21 applicants having been rejected. The approved candidates are reportedly the businessman Hassan Abdullah al-Nuri from Damascus, a former minister of state and manufacturer of shoe polishing sponges, and the MP Maher al-Hadschar from Aleppo. The latter belongs to a Communist party which has been allied with the Baath party for some years now.

Army advances on the town of Mleiha

On 04.05.14 the Syrian army advanced on the strategically important town of Mleiha near Damascus, which had been under siege by the army for some months. According to military representatives, over half of the town is allegedly already under the control of the government troops, including the town hall and the fields and roads in the south, west and south-east of the town. The advance has also been confirmed by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Agreement on withdrawal from Homs

On 04.05.14, government and rebels agreed on the insurgents' withdrawal from their former stronghold of Homs. In return, the agreement is said to provide for the safe withdrawal of the roughly 1500 combatants

from the largely destroyed old quarter and the release of 70 Lebanese and Iranians who have been held in Aleppo by Islamist rebels.

Turkey

Clashes at demonstrations on 1 May

Trade unions, political parties, left-wing groups and other critics of the government defied an official ban and called for demonstrations at Taksim Square in Istanbul on 1 May. According to press reports, some 40,000 police were subsequently deployed, almost half of them in the area around the square. When demonstrators attempted to storm the cordoned off square, the security forces deployed tear gas, water canons and truncheons. Violent clashes ensued, in the course of which numerous people were injured and arrested.

Iran

Opposition politicians Moussawi and Karroubi remain under house arrest

The house arrest imposed on opposition politicians Mir-Hossein Moussawi and Mehdi Karroubi in February is to remain in force until further notice. This was confirmed by chief public prosecutor Mohseni-Ejei at a press conference in Teheran. According to government figures, Moussawi and Karroubi were defeated by the then incumbent Ahmadinejad in the 2009 presidential election. The green opposition movement built up above all behind Moussawi, until the regime crushed the mass protests by force.

Government and censor's office at odds over WhatsApp ban

The authority for internet crime has banned the WhatsApp short message service. The decision was justified in part by reference to the takeover of WhatsApp by the US internet group Facebook, claiming that Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, was an American Zionist. The Iranian government headed by president Rohani criticised the ban. An open row has since broken out between the government and the censor's office. The Iranian president, who is considered to be a moderate, is in favour of lifting internet censorship in Iran, where Facebook and Twitter are also banned. The religious leadership under revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei rejects the networks as espionage instruments of the USA.

Israel / Palestinian territories

USA holds Israel responsible for failure of peace talks

According to a report in the "Yediot Ahronot" ("Latest News") newspaper, the USA is accusing Israel of sabotaging the peace talks with the Palestinians. The 03.05.14 issue of the newspaper quotes US diplomats as saying that there are many reasons for the collapse of the talks, but the Israeli people should not ignore the fact that the settlement projects were a crucial contributory factor to the failure. The US representatives stated that Israel had pressed ahead with plans for 14,000 new settlers' homes during the negotiations, for example. The Palestinians had thus no longer believed that Israel would ever grant them their own state, they argued. One of the diplomats was quoted as saying that the region perhaps needed another intifada (Palestinian uprising) in order to establish the right conditions for progress.

Israel imposes financial sanctions on Palestinians

Following the failure of the Near East peace talks, Israel has begun the implementation of financial sanctions against the Palestinians. Citing unnamed government representatives in Jerusalem, Israeli media reported on 29.04.14 that Israel intended to retain tax and customs revenue that it collected for the Palestine National Authority.

Palestinians accede to five UNO conventions

Following months of unsuccessful Near East peace talks with Israel, it became known on 03.05.14 that the Palestinians have formally acceded to five UNO conventions with the aim of promoting their claim to statehood. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) announced in Geneva on Friday evening that the conventions concerned are the UN Convention against Torture, the

Convention against Racism, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Yemen

Heavy fighting between army and Al Qaeda units

An army offensive against the terrorist network Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) at the weekend claimed dozens of lives. According to information from the Yemeni defence ministry, 37 suspected Al Qaeda fighters were killed and dozens injured in fighting in the Maifaa area on 04.05.14. It was also reported that five insurgents were killed in the region on 02.05.14. According to information from the defence ministry, AQAP commander Abu Islam al-Shisheni was also killed on 03.05.14. The defence ministry had already announced the death of AQAP leader Abu Muslim al-Uzbeki on 02.05.14. According to official figures, 67 Al Qaeda fighters and 24 soldiers have been killed in all since the beginning of the offensive (29.04.14) in the southern provinces of Abjan and Chabwa.

Egypt

Presidential election campaign underway

The two candidates running for election as president, former army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sissi and the left-wing politician Hamdin Sabahi, officially launched their election campaigns on 03.05.14 for the presidential election which is planned for 26 and 27 May 2014.

Also on 03.05.14, the Egyptian judiciary handed down ten-year prison sentences to 102 defendants in a new mass trial against supporters of toppled president Morsi. State-run television reported that two other defendants received seven-year sentences. On 28.04.14, 638 defendants, including the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Badie, were sentenced to death in mass summary proceedings. 529 Islamists were also sentenced to death back in March. The majority of these sentences were commuted into life prison sentences on 28.04.14.

Libya

Election of new prime minister may be null and void

Businessman Ahmed Maitik's election as the new prime minister of Libya may be invalid. Parliamentary vice-president Essedin al-Awami declared the vote "null and void" on 04.05.14, because Maitak received only 113 instead of the required 120 votes in the third run-off. Salah al-Machsum, who also holds the post of parliamentary vice-president, declared that Maitik had received 121 votes, however. Maitik, who was sworn into office on 04.05.14, is to succeed the interim head of government, Abdullah al-Thinni, who stepped down in mid-April 2014 following threats to his family. His predecessor, Ali Seidan, was removed in March 2014, after sustained criticism from parliament regarding the security situation.

Algeria

Sellal appointed prime minister

Shortly after being sworn in for a fourth period of office, Abdelaziz Bouteflika appointed the head of his election campaign, Abdelmalek Sellal, to the post of prime minister. This was announced by the president's office in Algiers on 28.04.14. Sellal headed the government from September 2012 to March 2014, before stepping down to direct the election campaign for Bouteflika.

Morocco/Western Sahara

UN mission's mandate extended

The UN Security Council extended the UN mission in Western Sahara, MINURSO, on 29.04.14. The Security Council also called in a resolution for human rights to be observed in Western Sahara and in the refugee camps in Tindouf. The scope of the mission, which has been in place since 1991, was not broadened, however. UN Secretary-General Ban and human rights groups had called for the scope of the mandate to be extended to include monitoring the human rights situation.

Nigeria

20 killed in car bomb attack on bus station in Nyanya

A car bomb exploded opposite the bus station in the Nyanya suburb of the capital, Abuja, on the evening of 01.05.14. 20 people were killed and 66 injured. On 03.04.14 the police arrested several people in connection with the attack, most of them foreigners. While no-one has claimed responsibility for the attack as yet, it is assumed to have been carried out by the Islamist organisation Boko Haram. Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for a bomb attack which took place on 14.04.14, only around 200 m from the site of the attack on 01.05.14, killing 75 people according to official figures. Fearing further attacks, the government has announced the deployment of 5,000 soldiers and police to Abuja, where the International World Economic Forum on Africa is to begin on 07.05.14.

Fate of schoolgirls abducted in Chibok uncertain

Nigerian president Jonathan admitted in a television address on 04.05.14 that it was still not known where the schoolgirls who were abducted by Boko Haram from a school in Chibok (north-eastern federal state of Borno) on the night of 14.04.14 were being held and that no negotiations were underway with the abductors. The police had announced on 01.05.14 that the number of schoolgirls still missing had risen to 276. In all, more than 300 schoolgirls are said to have been abducted. 53 managed to escape. Citing a village elder, the Nigerian daily newspaper "Daily Trust" reported on 29.04.14 that the girls had been taken over the border into Cameroon and Chad and sold as brides to the Boko Haram fighters for around nine euros per girl.

DR Congo

Amnesty lists published

On 30.04.14 the Congolese government published a second list containing the names of beneficiaries of an amnesty law for members of armed rebel movements which was adopted in connection with the peace process with the M23 rebel organisation on 11.02.14. Included on the list are the names of 25 separatist Bakata Katanga militiamen, ten supporters of the religious/political movement "Bundu dia Kongo", five former M23 rebels and supporters of the "Imperium Group" close to imprisoned MP Diomi Ndongala. Also on the list is former MP Muhindo Nzangi, who was sentenced to three years' prison in August 2013 for insulting the country's president. An initial list of 50 people was published on 19.04.14. This list included 15 former M23 rebels, 15 people who had been involved in attacks on Kinshasa on 27.02.11 and members of Faustin Munene's ARP rebel movement and exiled Mobutists close to Honore Ngbanda.

Central African Republic

Coverage of events difficult

The power struggle and violence between Christian and Muslim militias are also hampering Central African journalists in their work. Many editorial offices have been destroyed or plundered. In order to provide comprehensive reporting, the radio stations and newspapers are adopting coverage from foreign media. Only a small number of non-governmental organisations are supporting the local media.

Ethiopia

No toughening of punishment for homosexuality

The Ethiopian parliament has reversed a decision to adopt harsher provisions for the punishment of homosexuals under criminal law. It had been intended to include homosexuality – along with corruption, human trafficking, smuggling, terrorism and rape, for example – as one of the criminal offences to be excluded from amnesty. A government spokesman stated that homosexuality was "not so widespread" and that the previous laws were "adequate". Homosexuality is illegal in Ethiopia and punishable by a prison sentence of up to 15 years.

Churches promote homophobia

A demonstration against gays and lesbians in Addis Ababa was cancelled. The Ethiopian Orthodox Christian group Woyniye Abune Teklehaimanot had called for the demonstration. The state-influenced media had recently contained frequent reports alleging a substantial increase in the number of homosexual "incidents". According to a poll conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project in 2007, 97 % of Ethiopians believe that homosexuality should not be accepted by society.

Eritrea

Rebel groups claim attack on soldiers

The Eritrean rebel organisation Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) claims to have killed 27 members of the Eritrean security forces and to have injured others in an attack on a military base close to Alhan in the northern Red Sea region on 24.04.14. As always, the government declined to comment on the announcement. Ethiopia is regularly accused of supporting terrorist activities in Eritrea, however. The RSADO has bases in Ethiopia. The RSADO is pushing for autonomy for the Afar, who live in parts of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti. A similar attack in the Afar region was last reported in December 2011.

South Sudan

Town of Bentiu retaken

The South Sudanese army confirmed on 04.05.14 that it had taken the town of Bentiu in the federal state of Unity. A massacre occurred after the town was captured by rebels in April 2014.

Kenya

Attacks claim lives in Mombassa and Nairobi

On 03.05.14 an unknown assailant threw a hand grenade onto a bus in the Mombassa district of Mwembe Tayari. Many people were killed and at least 15 injured. A bomb exploded in the entrance to a hotel on the same day without causing any casualties.

Simultaneous bomb attacks on two buses in Nairobi on 04.05.14 killed two people and injured 62, some seriously.

President signs polygamy law

Kenya's president Uhuru Kenyatta signed a law on 29.04.14 which allows men to marry several women. Consent from existing wives is not necessary. Polygamous forms of marriage have always been widespread in Kenya, but had not been recognised in law to date. Women are traditionally only permitted to marry one man.

Somalia

Attack in Mogadishu

A bomb attack close to Mogadishu's city centre on 03.05.14 claimed at least seven lives and injured several people. Police officers and civilians were among the casualties. The radical Islamic Al-Shabaab organisation claimed responsibility for the attack.

Serbia/Bosnia and Herzegovina/FYR Macedonia

Bill on safe countries of origin

On 30.04.14 the cabinet adopted a bill which classifies the three countries as safe countries of origin, as set out in the coalition agreement. The interior ministry referred to the new classification as a "matter of urgency", because nationals of these countries had filed asylum applications in massive numbers (6,682) once again between January and March.

Numerous civil rights and refugee organisations and representatives of the opposition are opposed to the bill.

Ukraine

Security situation



In the east, government units continue to take action against the pro-Russian insurgents with attack helicopters and armoured vehicles. The leader of the self-proclaimed people's militia, Miroslaw Rudenko, announced on the evening of 04.05.14 that the rebels had taken the administrative buildings in the crucial regional centres. The situation overall was reported to be calm, fighting having ceased in the evening.

Heavy fighting had previously been reported above all from Kramatorsk. While the government in Kiev announced on the morning of 04.05.14 that the armed forces had restored public order there, in the evening the separatists claimed that they had the city under their control once again. There were also reports that the headquarters of the national intelligence service (SBU) had gone up in flames. Many of those living in the city wish for an end to the fighting and a return to normality. Following the bloody clashes between Ukrainian demonstrators and pro-Russian activists in Odessa in which at least 46 people died on 02.05.14, Russia's deputy foreign minister, Grigori Karasin, asked how these "punitive actions by the powers that be in Kiev" fitted in with the Geneva Convention, noting that it appeared the Ukrainian government was unable to conduct any dialogue without external help.

Diplomatic activities

OSCE Chairperson Didier Burkhalter is to travel to Moscow on 07.05.14. His discussion topics will include the establishment of round tables under the auspices of the OSCE. This offers a means of bringing the parties to the conflict together for talks before the planned presidential election on 25.05.14.

The tense situation in Eastern Ukraine was also the central issue in a telephone call on 04.05.14 between German chancellor Angela Merkel and the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. Merkel expressed her relief at the release of the OSCE military observers who had been held by pro-Russian separatists for over a week. Putin and Merkel discussed what steps needed to be taken to deescalate the situation. The Kremlin chief

called for dialogue between the parties to the conflict in Ukraine, urging the leadership in Kiev to seek talks with the pro-Russian separatists.

Russian Federation/North Caucasus

Security situation in the North Caucasus

According to estimates by the Russian internet journal "Caucasian Knot" at the end of April 2014, the armed conflict in the North Caucasus resulted in a total of 133 casualties in the first quarter of 2014. 84 people were killed and 49 seriously injured. In the first quarter of 2013, clashes in the region claimed 199 victims, killing 124 and injuring 75. While a further decline in the number of casualties in comparison to the corresponding period in 2013 is to be observed first and foremost in Ingushetia and Chechnya, Dagestan remains the hot spot in the North Caucasus. The majority of the security forces' special operations against armed groups took place in Dagestan. In the main crisis region of the North Caucasus, at least 65 people died and 41 were injured in the first quarter of 2014 alone. This toll included 58 combatants of so-called illegal combat formations. While the death toll in Chechnya and Ingushetia in the first quarter of 2013 stood at 33, current estimates put the corresponding figure at around 20 in both regions in the first quarter of 2014.

India

Insurgents shoot several dozen Muslims dead

In the wake of the attacks on Muslim villagers in the federal state of Assam, the death toll has risen to 32. The police have claimed that the violence was the work of the banned rebel group National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), which has been fighting for a home state in the region for some decades. The separatist group denies any involvement. India's north-east is frequently the scene of bloody unrest between long established sections of the population and Muslim immigrants, who usually originate from neighbouring Bangladesh.

Narendra Modi, opposition front-runner from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and favourite to accede to the office of prime minister in the parliamentary elections which are currently in progress, played the anti-migrant card only a few days ago, announcing that migrants could "pack their bags" if he were to come to power. Modi accuses Assam's government of being excessively lenient on immigration issues.

China

Attack in Xinjiang claims lives

Three people were killed and 79 injured in an attack with knives and explosives on a railway in the city of Ürümqi, capital of the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, on 30.04.14. The dead include the two attackers, who presumably committed suicide when they detonated their bombs. The authorities blamed the attack on "religious extremists". They identified one of the perpetrators as an Uyghur from the Xayar region in Xinjiang. The incident occurred on the eve of the wave of May Day holiday traffic in China. President Xi Jinping was just ending a four-day visit to the region.

North Korea

Military exercise

According to information from the South Korean military, North Korea began a gunnery exercise close to the disputed maritime border on the morning of 29.04.14. Several South Korean islands are situated in the maritime region. The military instructed their inhabitants to go to bomb shelters. A similar military exercise

in the region led to a skirmish between North and South Korea at the end of March. These are the second military manoeuvres to be conducted by the North at the maritime border within the space of a month.

Food situation

North Korea is currently experiencing its worst drought for 30 years. Major crop shortfalls are expected.

New head of politburo

A report by the official KCNA news agency on the official May Day celebrations named party official Hwang Pyong So as the head of the politburo of the Korean People's Army. In the military hierarchy, this is the second highest-ranking post behind that of the country's ruler, Kim.