

Information Centre on Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

21 January 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 16 January 2013, six Taliban suicide bombers attacked the headquarters of the Afghan security service NDS (National Directorate of Security) in Kabul. The attackers were shot by security officials; about 30 civilians were injured. This was the first attack in Kabul in almost one month.

Also on 16 January 2013, two NDS employees were killed in a bomb blast in Tarin Kowt (the capital of the province of Uruzgan in southern Afghanistan), and a policeman shot his commanding officer in the province of Kandahar (also southern Afghanistan) before he fled carrying a gun and munition.

On 21 January 2013, a number of suicide bombers attacked the headquarters of the traffic police in Kabul. There are reports of gunfire and explosions, but more detailed information is not available yet.

Torture by security forces continues

According to a recent report by UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) there is reliable proof that torture is widespread in Afghan prisons. Interviews with 635 prisoners in 89 prisons operated by the security forces or the secret service NDS showed that more than half of the detainees had been tortured or ill-treated.

Many Afghan diplomats remaining abroad

According to an article in a Kabul newspaper, the Afghan government is concerned about the number of Afghan diplomats who choose to remain abroad once their mission is over. The government plans to raise diplomats' wages and provide homes in the Afghan capital. According to reports, 40% of all diplomats do not return home after having been posted abroad. Allegedly, the number of emigrants runs to hundreds of Afghan government officials, including employees of the President's office, plus 70 journalists, 60 sportspeople and numerous students who do not return from stays abroad.

Pakistan

Supreme Court orders arrest of Prime Minister

On 15 January 2013, the Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered the National Accountability Bureau (NAB; Pakistan's highest anti-corruption authority) to conclude the investigation in the so-called RPP scandal and to arrest Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf. The investigation focuses on Ashraf's actions during his time in office as minister for water and energy. Under the so-called Rental Power Project (RPP), orders should be placed with private investors to secure part of the country's energy supply. According to the allegations, large sums of money changed hands without any service in return. The Prime Minister is one of the key suspects in the investigation. So far, there have been no news of his or any other suspect's being arrested.

Supporters of cleric Qadri marching on Islamabad

On 20 January 2013, about 50,000 supporters of cleric Dr Tahirul Qadri reached Islamabad and demonstrated in front of the parliament building even though they had been forbidden to do so. Qadri, who is the leader of the Tehrik-e-Minhajul Quran (TMQ) movement, had announced that he would have four million people march on Islamabad to force the government to step down. He also demanded the dissolution of the

electoral commission. Before, Qadri had given the government three weeks to resign in favour of a transitional government of honourable and independent people, which was to implement electoral reforms and pave the way for free and fair elections. Qadri said that Pakistan's politicians were criminals.

On 17 January 2013, a high-ranking government delegation started negotiations with Qadri, and he and the Prime Minister signed an agreement. Qadri then announced that the revolution was over and that his movement had prevailed. In fact, however, he had only achieved that his movement may send two representatives to the electoral commission. He dropped his demand of involving the army and the legal system in the commission. Under current law, all parliamentary candidates are to undergo an examination of their reputation. However, so far these checks have been insufficiently conducted. The government's resignation had already been decided upon, as had the election of an interim government during the electoral campaign. Qadri is no longer calling for an immediate resignation of politicians, whom he regards as corrupt.

Background

Qadri was a member of parliament under President Musharraf and initially supported Musharraf's programme. There are widespread suspicions that he is backed by the military. Qadri holds double nationality (Pakistan and Canada) and has only recently returned to Pakistan from Canada. Due to his double nationality, he may not run in the parliamentary elections. So far, his movement has not been registered as a party. It is unclear how he managed to organise his movement from scratch and where the considerable funds of the TMQ come from. In fact, his organisation has paid all transport, accommodation and meals expenses for his supporters.

Thousands protest in front of the governor's office in Peshawar

On 17 January 2013, roughly 3,000 tribe members from the Bara area in the FATA agency Khyber protested in front of the governor's office in Peshawar (province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). The demonstrations were triggered by the fact that persons in military uniforms killed 18 tribe members in night-time raids on 15 January 2013. The protesters demanded that the incident be investigated and placed the bodies of 17 victims outside the office. The government denied any involvement of the army and pointed out that militant groups often used uniforms as a disguise. Following jirga negotiations (a jirga is a tribe or elders council), in which members of the governing Awami National Party participated, the protesters left and buried the dead. The jirga ordered the government to pay damages to the families, to establish a judicial investigation commission and to take action against militants in the area of Bara.

Supreme Court ultimately dismisses blasphemy charges against Christian girl

On 15 January 2013, the Supreme Court of Pakistan dismissed the appeal against the decision of the High Court in Islamabad, which had dismissed the blasphemy action against Rimsha Masih, a minor Christian girl. (See BN of 26 November 2012)

India

Indian fast-track court sentences rapist to death

One of the new fast-track courts for rape cases in India, which were formed after the rape of a 23-year-old woman in December 2012, has given its first judgement. On 16 January 2013, the New Delhi Court sentenced a sexual offender to death for having raped and killed a three-year-old child in April 2011. The court wrote in its judgement that the number of crimes against women, particularly those who were not yet of age, was rising quickly and that the sentence was a message to society. The case had been taken over by the fast-track court ten days ago because the proceedings were still in the stage of hearing the evidence.

Iraq

Security situation

The attacks continue. On 15 January 2013, Sunni tribe leader and member of parliament Eifan Saadun al-Issawi was killed by a suicide bomber in Falluja (province of Anbar). Six other people lost their lives in this attack, too. Al-Issawi was a member of the al-Iraqiya alliance.

On 16 January 2013, several bombings killed at least 49 people and injured 240. In the city of Kirkuk alone, at least 23 people lost their lives. One bomb exploded in front of the office of the Kurdish Democratic Party, another in front of a building of the Kurdish security forces. An attack on the office of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Tuz Khurmato (province of Salahaddin) killed three people and injured 37.

Seven policemen and soldiers were killed in bomb blasts in Baghdad and Baiji (province of Salahaddin).

On 17 January 2013, a series of attacks on Shia Muslims claimed at least 17 lives. The most serious attack took place in Dujail (province of Salahaddin), others occurred in Hilla (province of Babil), Kerbela (province of Kerbela) and Baghdad.

On 19 January 2013, four people were killed in attacks in Mosul, Kirkuk and Baghdad.

According to a press report dated 21 January 2013, the Islamic State of Iraq (al-Qaeda in Iraq) claimed responsibility for the attacks carried out between 15 and 17 January 2013.

Renewed protests against the policies of the Shia government

On 18 January 2013, thousands of Sunnis once again protested against the policies of the Shia government in western and central Iraq. This was the fourth Friday in a row on which protests occurred.

Syria

Explosions in Aleppo and Idlib kill people

Two blasts on the university campus of Aleppo killed at least 87 people and injured 160 on 15 January 2013. After months of fights, neither the government troops nor the rebels are in control of Syria's second-largest city. The university campus belongs to the area which is controlled by the government. Both sides blame each other for the explosions. At the moment, not only the students, but also about 30,000 refugees from the environment of the city are housed on the campus.

In Idlib, three car bombs targeted at vehicles of the security forces killed at least 22 people and injured 35.

Reportedly, at least 165 people were killed on 14 January 2013 alone in the country as a whole.

Homs: reports of a massacre and of chemical weapons being used

According to opposition reports, the Syrian army killed more than 100 civilians in a raid and massacre in the province of Homs on 15 January 2013. Homs is a large, strategically important province with major trade routes.

The French newspaper "Le Monde" reported intelligence information, according to which the Syrian army used chemical weapons against rebel fighters in Homs on 23 December 2012. These weapons were not meant to kill people, but make them unable to fight.

Fights between rebels and Kurds

Reportedly, Islamist rebels (the al-Nusra Front and the Muslim fighting brigades Ghuraba al-Sham and Ah-fad al-Rasul) and Kurdish fighters clashed once again in the border town Ras al-Ain. Al-Nusra Front fighters are said to have crossed the Turkish border with at least three tanks on 17 January 2013 in order to reach the strategically important city Ras al-Ain, where serious fights are said to have taken place on 17 January 2013. The Democratic Union Party (PYD; the largest Kurdish party, which is regarded as a branch of the Turkish PKK) has accused Turkey of having allowed the fighters to reach Ras al-Ain via Turkish territory.

UN mission to examine humanitarian needs

A UN delegation led by John Ging, the head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), was received by several Syrian ministers on 20 January 2013. It is to examine humanitarian needs.

International Criminal Court to investigate war crimes

On 18 January 2013 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay signed a petition of 57 countries which had been sent to the Security Council a few days before. She called on the UN Security Council to ask the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate war crimes in Syria.

Sexual violence often a reason why women become refugees

The US aid organisation International Rescue Committee announced on 14 January 2013 that physical and sexual violence was one of the main reasons why girls and women fled the country. They were kidnapped, raped (often in front of relatives in gang rapes), tortured and killed. Domestic violence was rising in the refugee camps, too.

Libya

Gunfight: Minister of Defence uninjured

Following talks between Minister of Defence Mohammed Mahmoud al-Barghati and army members in Tobruk on 19 January 2013, his bodyguards and members of a local militia traded fire. The minister was unhurt. According to reports, the fight was triggered because a local militia leader had been asked to resign after he had refused to put his men under government command. There were no reports of casualties. The militia's action is said to have been directed not at the minister of defence, but the local army representatives.

Moderate salafist cleric killed

On 15 January 2013, Muslim cleric Sheikh Fakhri Husein Jahani was killed by a hand grenade when he left the Omar Ibn Khatab mosque in Misrata after evening prayers. Four people were injured, some of them seriously. Jahani was regarded as a salafist. Three persons were arrested; however, they deny their involvement. Iman Jahani had taken a stand against "fake salafists" in his sermons. He said that these persons used Islam for their own purposes and condemned their practice of declaring other Muslims infidels. At the beginning of the month two Copts had been killed in a similar attack on a Coptic church near Misrata. The Sufi Muslims in Misrata clearly condemned the attack on Jahani. So far, Misrata has been much less affected by such acts of violence than Benghazi.

Police officers murdered in Benghazi again

On 16 January 2013, a member of the police organisation of the National Security Directorate was killed by a bomb placed under his car. The incident occurred in Benghazi's al-Laithi quarter. The victim is reported to have worked as an oil facility guard. On 15 January 2013, a police officer had been killed and two others injured in a similar way in Benghazi's Kish district.

Pakistani Ahmadis arrested on grounds of proselytising

Five Pakistani members of the Ahmadiyya movement were arrested in the Gurgi suburb of Tripolis around the turn of the year on charges of proselytising. They are said to have been living in Libya since 2006. Another Libyan citizen is wanted by the police in connection with these arrests. According to Pakistani reports, four of the detainees are being held in the prison of Abu Salim (Tripolis) and consular access has been granted to them. It is unclear whether the Ahmadis will be tried or deported. According to reports by their families, they might be deported if they give details on the persons they have converted. A converted Libyan citizen is said to have been arrested as well.

Background

According to the "International Religious Freedom Report for 2011" by the US Department of State there is no law which regulates or prohibits proselytizing or converting to another religion in Libya. However, the government has prohibited proselytising. While the report only covers 2011, there have been no reports of legal changes in the area of religious freedom since Gaddafi's being overthrown. However, the new government appears to be following former practices and taking measures against converts, too.

Algeria

Hostage-taking at gas field results in more than 50 deaths

On 16 January 2013, a group of Islamist terrorists from six countries led by long-searched-for terrorist Mokhtar Belmokhtar seized a gas compression facility operated by Sonatrach (Algeria), BP (UK) and Statoil (Norway). Initially, two people were killed and six injured in the raid. The facility is near Amenas (a town with 5,000 inhabitants), 100 km from the Libyan border and roughly 1,300 km south-east of Algiers. Algerian, US, British, Irish, Norwegian and Japanese citizens were held hostage. Belmokhtar claimed that the hostage-taking was a response to the French army's intervention in Mali and the fact that the Algerian government had permitted the French airforce to fly through the country's airspace. He demanded that the French troops leave Mali. Belmokhtar, an Algerian terrorist leader, split away from the terrorist group al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) last month. About 15 foreigners and 60 Algerians were able to escape right at the beginning of the raid or later on. The Algerian army attacked the facility on 17 January 2013. Numerous hostages and terrorists are reported to have been killed in the fights. On 19 January 2013, the army conquered the rest of the facility and killed the remaining eleven (out of probably 32) terrorists. So far, the bodies of 25 hostages have been found. It is uncertain how many people were killed overall. According to the Algerian minister of the interior, the army freed 685 Algerian and 107 foreign employees.

Refugees from Mali/increased border protection

So far, about 7,000 refugees from Mali have arrived in Tamanrasset (the capital of the southern province with the same name).

Border protection was stepped up due to the French military action. This applies in particular to the border to Mali, which has been closed meanwhile (1,400 km). On 14 January 2013, the army shot three terrorists who tried to enter Algeria at Meskeline, near the tripoint of Algeria, Niger and Libya.

Somalia

French hostage killed

Al-Shabaab claimed to have killed the French hostage on 16 January 2013 after a liberation attempt by a French command unit had failed on 12 January 2013 (see BN of 14 January 2013).

Journalist murdered

On 18 January 2012, unknown killers shot a radio journalist employed by the private media company Shabelle Media Networks in Mogadishu. The victim is the fifth journalist of the Shabelle Media Networks to be murdered in the past 13 months. In 2012, 12 journalists were murdered in Somalia. Prime Minister Abdifarah Shirdon Saaid promised the government would do everything in its power to find the culprits.

Sudan

More than 100 dead in Darfur

According to UN reports, the disputes between Arab tribes about the exploitation of a gold mine in North Darfur (see BN of 14 January 2013) claimed more than 100 lives. Several villages were destroyed, and about 60,000 people fled. In the meantime the fights are said to have abated. The situation is still regarded as tense.

Government plans to ban activities by opposition parties

The Sudanese government announced on 14 January 2013 that it planned to ban all activities by the opposition groups which had signed the "New Dawn" declaration in the Ugandan capital Kampala at the beginning of the year. In this document the opposition parties said that they wanted to end the reign of President al-Bashir in Sudan. More than 20 opposition groups signed the document. The signatories include the opposition parties National Umma Party (NUP), Popular Congress Party (PCP) led by Hassan at-Turabi and Suda-

nese Communist Party (SCP) as well as civil society organisations, youth movements and the rebel organisations Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, Sudan Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement.

Nigeria

Attack on the emir of Kano

On 19 January 2013, more than a dozen gunmen attacked the convoy of Alhaji Ado Bayero, the emir of Kano, in the city of Kano in northern Nigeria. The attack occurred shortly after noon in the Zoo Road in the Hausawa quarter, just after the emir had left the Murtala Mohammed mosque (Masallaci Murtala). While the 83-year-old emir suffered only minor injuries, his driver, an aide and a bodyguard as well as three other persons were killed. The attackers escaped. So far, nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack. Together with the sultan of Sokoto, the emir of Kano is one of the two highest-ranking traditional Muslim leaders in Nigeria. Both are held in high regard by the people.

ANSARU: Attack on soldiers to be deployed in Mali

On 19 January 2013, an explosives attack in the city of Okene (state of Kogi in central Nigeria) killed two soldiers and injured eight others. They belonged to a contingent which was to be sent to Mali in the framework of the international intervention. The bomb exploded when the soldiers' convoy passed it. According to a letter published in the newspaper "Desert Herald" on 20 January 2013 the Islamist group ANSARU ("Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Bidalis Sudan" – "Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa") claimed responsibility for the attack. At the same time the organisation called on the African countries to stop their support for the western countries in the fight against Islam and Muslims and threatened they might otherwise face with "difficulties" from the group.

The organisation is known under the name ANSARU and is regarded as the newest Jihadist movement in Nigeria. It announced its existence in a video in June 2012. ANSARU is probably a split-away from the radical Islamist terror organisation Boko Haram. In contrast to Boko Haram, it focuses more on the international Jihad than on domestic politics. Among other things, the group was responsible for a raid on a major police station in Abuja in November 2012, during which several prisoners were set free, and for the kidnapping of foreign nationals in northern Nigeria.

Togo

Leading members of the opposition party OBUTS arrested

On 16 January 2013, parliament lifted the immunity of opposition member Agbéyomé Messan Kodjo, who was arrested on the same day. Kodjo, who is president of the OBUTS party (Organisation pour Bâtir dans l'Union un Togo Solidaire) as well as a former Prime Minister and parliamentary spokesman, is charged with being responsible for two cases of arson in large markets in Togo. On 10 and 12 January 2013, respectively, the country's largest market in Kara and the market of Adawlato in Lomé were destroyed by fires. On 13 January 2013, OBUTS vice-president Gérard Adja was arrested, probably also in connection with the fires. The opposition alliance CST (Collectif Sauvons le Togo) criticised that proper procedure had not been followed in the move to lift Kodjo's immunity. OBUTS claimed that there were political reasons for the arrests of Kodjo and Adja. Kodjo is one of the key figures in the CST. Together with the opposition party FRAC (Front Républicain pour l'Alternance et le Changement), the CST organised a demonstration against the authorities' proceedings in Lomé on 19 January 2013. Before, security forces had forcefully prevented CST demonstrations which had been announced for 10, 11 and 12 January 2013, but forbidden by the authorities. The opposition criticises insufficient reforms of the electoral law, which it regards as unfair to the opposition, and has called for postponing the parliamentary elections. On 16 January 2013, the national electoral commission decided to hold elections on 24 March 2013.

Serbia

Tensions in southern Serbia

On 17 January 2013 the Serbian government had a disputed Albanian memorial in south Serbian Presevo removed. The memorial, which was erected in autumn 2012, honoured 27 fallen Albanian “heroes” of the war in 2001. The Serbian government argued that the memorial bore the names of “Albanian terrorists” and was therefore prohibited. The Albanians had refused for months to remove the memorial themselves. They threatened a new armed rebellion if the memorial was demolished by force. Albanian leaders in southern Serbia called demonstrations for 21 January 2013. They had threatened to break off all links to the government in Belgrade in case of the memorial’s removal.

Background

The border area between Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo is still an area with significant ethnic tensions. About 70% of the 100,000 inhabitants of the Presevo valley are ethnic Albanians. The area is one of the weakest economic regions in Serbia; unemployment and poverty are wide-spread. In 2000/2001, the area saw armed clashes between Serbian security forces and the rebels of the “Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac” (UCPMB), which wanted to gain control of the valley first and join an independent Kosovo later on. The international community succeeded in negotiating an end to the rebellion in 2001.