

Information Centre on Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

18 March 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 13 March 2013, at least ten people were killed by a suicide bomber in the city of Imam Sahib (province of Kunduz, north Afghanistan). Three policemen, including the regional chief of police, and seven civilians, among them relatives of a prominent politician, were among the victims. The bomber blew himself up during a buzkashi match (a traditional sport played on horseback in the north of Afghanistan).

Pakistan

Parliament and government finish full legislative term

For the first time since Pakistan's independence/sovereignty in 1947, a democratically elected civilian government and parliament have lasted for the full five-year term of office, without being prematurely dissolved by the army. The government will probably remain in office as a caretaker government this week until a neutral interim government takes over until the election of a new parliament. The election date has not been set yet. Under the constitution, elections have to be held within 60 days after the end of the legislative term of the outgoing parliament. The provincial parliaments will probably elect the national parliament on the same day.

Sindh: Bombing in Karachi kills three and injures six

In the night between 14 and 15 March 2013, a remotely triggered bomb exploded near the police station Quaidabad in the New Muzzafarabad Colony (Landhi quarter) in Karachi. Three people were killed and six injured. The culprits have not been identified yet.

On the same day, Qaril Bilal, a deputy leader of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), was shot when he was to be arrested in Karachi. In another operation, six TTP members were arrested, including Sher Alam Mehsud, the leader for Karachi. Sher Alam Mehsud is regarded as one of the main instigators of the attacks on Shia Muslims in Abbas Town in Karachi on 3 March 2013, during which more than 45 people died and 135 were injured.

Iraq

Security situation

People are still killed or injured by attacks in Iraq. At least 27 people died on 11 March 2013. According to official statements, co-ordinated attacks in the government quarter of Baghdad killed 23 people on 14 March 2013. On 17 March 2013, al-Qaeda in Iraq (Islamic State of Iraq) claimed responsibility for the attacks. Also on 14 March 2013, the driver of former governor Khaled Hussein died in an attack on Hussein's car in Samarra (province of Salahaddin). Hussein himself was seriously injured; he is a candidate on the al-Iraqiya list for the elections to the provincial council in April. On 15 March 2013, at least 17 people lost their lives in attacks in Baghdad and the provinces of Salahaddin, Niniveh and Diyala, among others. On 17 March 2013, bombers in Basra (in the south of the country) killed at least ten people.

USA intensifies cooperation

According to US government officials, the US intelligence service CIA has intensified its support to Iraqi elite units in the fight against al-Qaeda terrorists. The US are increasingly concerned that the conflict in Syria might spread to Iraq.

Syria

Dispute about EU arms embargo

French President Francois Hollande called for a lifting of the arms embargo against Syria at the EU Summit on 14 March 2013. The UK supports France on this. The other EU countries were skeptical about France's and the UK's arguments. If some EU countries do not agree to an extension, the EU arms embargo will run out on 31 May 2013.

Unanimous declaration by the UN Security Council

On 14 March 2013, the UN Security Council adopted a unanimous declaration in which it spelled out its concerns about incidents on the border between Syria and Lebanon. The Council expressed its grave concern about the increasing violence which is spreading to Lebanon and has led to numerous deaths and injuries. It fears that the civil war might spread to the neighbouring country. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights the Syrian army has threatened to attack Lebanon if "terrorist groups" continued to cross the border to Syria.

Human-rights organisations accuse conflict parties of war crimes

In a study released on 14 March 2013, Amnesty International reports on war crimes on a large scale. While, according to Amnesty, most human-rights violations are committed by government forces, opposition groups are increasingly resorting to torture, hostage-taking and killings of prisoners. In a study Human Rights Watch reports on the use of cluster bombs by the Assad regime. According to this study, about 150 cluster bombs were used in about 119 locations in the past six months. They are reported to have killed hundreds of civilians.

Deportation moratorium for Syrians extended

On 15 March 2013, Federal Minister of the Interior Friedrich and the federal states extended the moratorium on the deportation of Syrian refugees by another six months.

Libya

Suspect arrested on charges of being involved in attack on US consulate

On 14 March 2013, Faraj al-Chalabi was arrested; he had been wanted for his involvement in the deadly attack on the US consulate in Benghazi of 11 September 2012. The US ambassador and several employees of the US embassy had been killed in the attack. Al-Chalabi had recently returned from Pakistan. He was also wanted for an attack of the Libyan Fighting Group in 1994; the group no longer exists.

Arson attack on Coptic church in Benghazi

On 14 March 2013, a Coptic church in Benghazi was attacked for the second time. The attackers forced the priests to leave the church and set it on fire. Since the first attack on 28 February 2013 the church had been guarded. It is not clear yet whether the guards were at their posts.

Turkey/Northern Iraq

PKK releases Turkish prisoners

On 13 March 2013 the banned Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) released eight kidnapped Turks in Northern Iraq. The men – soldiers, policemen and government officials – who had been captured more than a year ago in several Turkish provinces were handed over to a delegation which consisted of representatives of the Turkish Kurdish party BDP and NGO employees. The act is regarded as a gesture of goodwill against the

background of the peace talks between the Turkish government and PKK. The release came after reports that imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan had presented a peace plan and was negotiating about the PKK fighters' withdrawal from Turkey by summer.

Zimbabwe

Referendum on the constitution and arrests

On 16 March 2013, roughly 5.5 million registered voters were asked to vote on the new constitution in a referendum. Voter participation was low, and initial results suggest that a clear majority is in favour of the draft constitution, which is supported by both President Mugabe's party ZANU-PF ("Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front") and its rival MDC ("Movement for Democratic Change") led by Prime Minister Tsvangirai. In the run-up to the referendum, human-rights organisations had complained about an increase in politically motivated violence. However, the vote went smoothly and fears of violence proved to be largely unfounded. The news agency AFP reported that a local MDC representative was attacked in his home and kidnapped by armed attackers in the Headlands settlement in the east of the country. A party spokesman blamed a local ZANU-PF militia. On 17 March 2013, human-rights lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa was arrested in the home of Thabani Mpfu, one of the most important advisers to Tsvangirai, on charges of obstructing police operations. On the same day, four officials of Tsvangirai's party were arrested in his press office. Parliamentary and presidential elections are to be held in July.

DR of the Congo

Power struggle within M23 decided in favour of Makenga faction

Jean-Marie Runiga, the leader of the rebel organisation who was toppled by M23's military leader Sultani Makenga on 27 February 2013, has lost the power struggle within M23. On 16 March 2013, he and about 600 fighters fled to Rwanda, where they were disarmed by the army and brought to a refugee camp. Several hundreds of Runiga's fighters are said to have surrendered to the Makenga faction. In the morning of 16 March 2013, Makenga's fighters conquered the Runiga faction's headquarters in the city of Kibumba (about 30 km north of Goma, the capital of the province of North Kivu in eastern Congo). That means that almost the complete territory conquered by M23 north of Goma is being controlled by Makenga. The Munigi hills, from where M23 was able to threaten Goma directly, were occupied by UN soldiers during the internal power struggle within M23.

Congolese government spokesman Mende said on 17 March 2013 that former army general Bosco Ntaganda, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court and is regarded as the founder of the M23 rebel group in April/May 2012, had fled to Rwanda, too. However, the Rwandans deny this. Runiga's closeness to Ntaganda was one reason for his downfall.

Number of deaths in prisons doubles

According to a report by the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office of the UN (UNJHRO) released on 13 March 2013, 211 prisoners died from human-rights violations in Congolese prisons visited by UNJHRO between 2010 and 2012. 54 deaths occurred in 2010 and 56 in 2011. In 2012 the number of deaths almost doubled from the two preceding years, to 101. The main reasons are inadequate conditions such as excessive numbers of prisoners in individual cells, lack of food, lack of adequate medical treatment and insufficient funds as well as a lack of transparency concerning the management of the funds. In more than 10% of all cases, the deaths were caused by torture or ill-treatment of prisoners by officials. As the UNJHRO representatives were unable to access certain prisons for a number of reasons, the number of casualties in the country may be much higher than announced in the report.

Kenya

Proceedings in front of the International Criminal Court

Fatou Bensouda, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, dropped the charges against Francis Muthaura on 11 March 2013. The former Chief of Cabinet of former President Mwai Kibaki

had been charged in the same trial as Uhuru Kenyatta, the winner of the presidential elections of 4 March 2013. Both were charged with having instigated violence after the elections of 2007. Bensouda justified her decision by the lack of evidence against Muthaura. Key witnesses had been killed or died, others refused to testify. The Kenyatta trial will continue (see BN of 11 March 2013).

Togo

Opposition members charged

In connection with fires which destroyed two markets in Lomé and Kara at the beginning of January, opposition politicians Jean Pierre Fabre and Frédéric Abass Kaboua were officially charged after hours of questioning on 12 March 2013. Fabre is the President of the ANC party (Alliance Nationale pour le Changement), and Kaboua is the President of the MRC party (Mouvement des Républicains Centristes). Both are at liberty, but may not leave Lomé, the capital, without a judge's consent. The homes of the two defendants and their party offices have been searched. Both the ANC and the MRC belong to the opposition alliance CST (Collectif Sauvons le Togo).

At least 31 people, most of them opposition supporters, are said to have been charged in connection with the fires; more than 20 of them have been arrested.

Ivory Coast

Several dead in attack on village

Seven people died in an attack on the village of Ziléby in the west of the country, near the border to Liberia. Four civilians, two soldiers of the Ivorian army and one of the attackers were killed. The UN Mission to the Ivory Coast (ONUCI) confirmed that several people had died. So far it is unclear who is behind the attack. Thousands of inhabitants of the region have fled.

China

Increased security measures in Xinjiang

Reports of a bloody argument between Uighurs and Han Chinese in the city of Korla in the Uighur Autonomous Region Xinjiang on 7 March 2013 (see BN of 11 March 2013) were officially confirmed last week. Radio Free Asia reported on 12 March 2013 that, according to unconfirmed reports, unidentified attackers raided a police station in the prefecture of Hotan on 9 March 2013. Security measures were stepped up in parts of Xinjiang.

People's Congress confirms new government

President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, who governed China in the past ten years, will be followed by a new and younger generation of leaders. As expected, the National People's Congress confirmed Xi Jinping (59) as Hu's successor on 14 March 2013. The new Prime Minister is Li Keqiang (57), as expected. Xi had already been appointed as General Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the Military Commission in November 2012 at the 18th Congress of the Communist Party.

The annual National People's Congress took place between 5 and 17 March 2013 in Beijing.