

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

31 March 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 25 March 2014, the Taliban attacked a campaign office of the election organisers in Kabul. After four hours of gun battle, the security forces killed the attackers. In addition, the attack took the lives of two policemen, one candidate for the local elections to the provincial council and two members of the electoral commission.

A suicide attack in Kunduz province in northern Afghanistan killed six civilians during a Buzkashi game near the capital of Kunduz. 20 were wounded. The attack was reportedly meant to hit a former Mojahedin commander. The attack has reportedly been carried out by the "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan".

In Asadabad, the capital of Kunar province in eastern Afghanistan, suicide attackers linked to the Taliban stormed a branch office of Kabul Bank. Two policemen and three civilians were killed, 16 people were wounded. The attack was meant to hit policemen of the Afghan Local Police and the Afghan National Police who were just cashing in their salary cheques at the bank.

One policewoman was shot dead in Greshk district in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan by an unknown person when she was on her way to work.

On 28 March 2014, the Taliban attacked a guesthouse in Kabul which is used by the US relief organisation "Roots of Peace". The gun battle had lasted for several hours, two of the attackers were killed and two other were wounded. A girl and one uninvolved Afghan civilian died, four members of the security forces were wounded. The Taliban said that the guesthouse had also been used as a Christian church.

On 29 March 2014, a group of Taliban fighters who were disguised under burqas stormed the headquarters of the independent electoral commission in Kabul. The five attackers were killed by the Afghan security forces.

On 30 March 2014, one Romanian ISAF soldier died in a bomb attack in Zabul province in southern Afghanistan, five soldiers were wounded.

Further attacks of the Taliban are expected prior to the elections which are planned for 5 April 2014. The president and the members of the provincial councils of the 34 provinces will be elected.

Following the attack on the Serena Hotel last week (see BN dated 24 March 2014), the American National Democratic Institute and the OSCE decided to withdraw their election observers from Afghanistan for the time being. In view of the tense security situation, approximately 750 of the 6,400 election centres will presumably remain closed.

Pakistan

Christian sentenced to death owing to blasphemy

On 27 March 2014, a court in Lahore sentenced a Christian to death owing to having insulted the prophet. The convict's lawyer announced that he will appeal against the judgment. Until now, a person sentenced to death owing to blasphemy has never been executed in fact; there is however the danger that he may become the victim of lynching by the mob.

Other proceedings in a court of appeal for blasphemy against a Christian woman have again been deferred. The defendant has been in prison since 2009.

Further attacks on vaccination team member

On 24 March 2014 in Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), the body of a woman of a polio vaccination team was found. The day before, the woman had been kidnapped by unknown people. On 27 March 2014, an attack on a vaccination team in Loralai district in Balochistan province killed one policeman. The Taliban often attack vaccination team members. They accuse them of spying for foreign countries.

Peace talks with the Taliban

The Pakistani government has taken up direct talks with the Taliban. A first result is reportedly the renewal of the ceasefire. Observers however say that they are sceptical regarding possible successes. In the past, the Taliban only used negotiations as a means to obtain rest periods. It cannot be expected that they will accept the Pakistani constitution. In addition, negotiations are reportedly only conducted with the largest group, namely the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, which is an umbrella organisation for about 12 groups); there are however reportedly far more than 30 other groups which in parts have different aims.

Further attacks

On 28 March 2014, unknown people shot on the car of a well-known Pakistani TV journalist. His chauffeur was killed.

On 29 March 2014 in a suburb of Quetta, a girl died in a bomb attack on a vehicle of the security forces. 16 civilians were wounded. Nobody has taken responsibility for the attack so far.

Iraq

Security situation

According to Iraq Body Count, 959 civilians have been killed in March so far (as of 29 March 2014). According to the news agency AFP, 502 people have been killed in March (as of 29 March 2014), among them 86 policemen, 59 soldiers, nine members of the Sahwa and 21 extremists.

According to the UN relying on Iraqi government information, 66,520 families (as of 27 March 2014) have been displaced in Anbar province for the time being owing to the difficult situation. Among them 50,922 stayed Anbar and 15,598 went to other provinces. Since January 2014, 336 civilians were killed and 1,562 were wounded.

Members of the electoral commission now cancelled their withdrawals

On 25 March 2014, all nine members of the electoral commission together withdrew from candidanship. According to a press release, they wanted to protest with this action against the “interference of politics and the judicial system” into their work. They reportedly disapproved in particular that a jury of judges had ordered the exclusion of some candidates whom the electoral commission had already accepted for the elections on 30 April 2014. Following negotiations with national and international organisations, they have in the meantime cancelled their withdrawals.

Killing of journalists

Since November 2013, 14 journalists have been killed, among them five through a suicide attack on the TV station Salahaddin in Tikrit. Three became victims through suicide attacks or car bombs and six journalists died in targeted attacks. Two other journalists survived the attacks for attempted murder.

Turkey

Election victory for government party AKP in local Turkish elections

In the municipal elections on 30 March 2014, approx. 53 million eligible voters voted for new mayors as well as for members of the district councils, town councils and local councils. After counting of about 90% of all votes, the Islamic conservative government party AKP has obtained 44% which is a plus of more than 5% in contrast to the municipal elections of 2009. Prime minister Mr Erdogan’s aim was to reach a threshold of 40 per cent, at least the results of the last municipal elections should be reached. The largest opposition party which is the secular Kemalist CHP obtained 29 per cent.

There have been clashes during the elections in which eight people have died in gun battles between family members of individual candidates in eastern Turkey. In addition, observers reported already in the morning of the polling day on alleged electoral fraud and rigging attempts across the country. They also said that pressure had been put on voters to vote for the AKP and election observers were reportedly urged to leave the polling station. Some people have reportedly attempted to cast their votes several times and pre-fabricated ballot papers have reportedly appeared. In total, approximately 1,500 complaints owing to ballot rigging have been handed in.

Iran / Iraq / Saudi Arabia

Considerable increase in executions

In a report on capital punishment in 2013, AI [*Amnesty International*] mentions 369 executions in Iran, 169 in Iraq and 79 in Saudi Arabia. With these numbers, these three states account for almost 80% of all executions outside of China.

League of Arab States / Israel

No acknowledgment of Israel as a Jewish state

On 25 March 2014, the foreign ministers of the League of Arab States adopted a draft declaration in Kuwait in which they exclude the acknowledgment of Israel as a Jewish state. This decision was the basis for the organisation's summit meeting which started the same day in the Emirate. It is the aim of the League of Arab States to support the Palestinians with this declaration who are urged by the Israeli government to acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state in the framework of the current peace talks. Palestinian President Mr Mahmoud Abbas had declared that he will never acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state. The Israeli Prime minister Mr Benjamin Netanyahu however, insists on this express acknowledgment. The reason behind this is the intention of the Israeli government to reject any Palestinian claims for return for Palestinian refugees and their offspring.

Yemen

20 people killed in rebels' attack

On 24 March 2014, a rebels' attack on a military post in the south-east of the country killed 20 soldiers. The official news agency Sana reported that the attack was meant to hit a control post near the town of Reida in the region of Hadramaut. A member of the armed forces said that the terror group al-Qaida on the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) is responsible for the attack. The militant Islamist rebel group has been fighting for years against the government in Sanaa and has repeatedly committed bloody attacks on the police, the armed forces and the authorities. During the mass protests in spring 2011 against the then president Mr Ali Abdallah Saleh, the group used the central government's weakness and brought large parts of the south and east of the country under its control. During a military offensive, the group has now been driven out of the larger cities. According to US information, AQAP is still the most dangerous branch of al-Qaida.

Egypt

529 Muslim Brothers sentenced to death

On 24 March 2014, a court in Minya sentenced 529 supporters of the ousted President Mr Mohammed Morsi to death owing to violent protests and murder committed in common; 16 defendants were acquitted by the court. Only 147 defendants were present in court. The other defendants who have fled or who have been released on bail money were sentenced in absentia. The judgment in the hearings which were opened on 22 March 2014 only (see BN dated 24 March 2014), was made without listening to any one of the defence lawyers. These announced that they will file an appeal.

On 26 March 2014, protests among students against the judgment caused clashes with the security forces. One student was killed in these clashes.

On 25 March 2014, the same court deferred the hearings against 683 other Muslim Brothers; among them is reportedly Mr Mohammed Badie, the spiritual guide of the Muslim Brotherhood. The judgments are planned for 28 April 2014.

Further mass trials announced

According to media reports, the general prosecution office has announced two other proceedings against supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. One trial shall be opened for 715 defendants owing to the death of six people who were killed on 14 August 2013 in attacks on public institutions. These defendants are in addition accused of attempted murder of 51 people. A second trial will be opened against 204 people owing to incitement to violence.

Chief of the armed forces Mr al-Sisi runs for president

On 26 March 2014 in an address delivered on television, Mr Abd al Fattah al-Sisi announced his candidanship for the presidential elections. As according to the electoral law only civilians are allowed to run for president, he resigned from office as chief of the armed forces. The first round of the presidential elections in Egypt is planned for 26 and 27 May.

There have been protests in several cities against Mr al-Sisi's candidanship. Violent clashes in Cairo killed four people.

Morocco

Attempted self-immolation

On 26 March 2014, 13 unemployed and blind university graduates in Rabat attempted to set fire on themselves in order to protest against the hiring freeze in the public sector. Another hundred protesters supported this protest for more jobs. In January, Morocco had decided a hiring freeze and pay cuts for the public sector, it had cut on subsidies and announced to reform the pension schemes in order to reduce the budgetary deficit through savings in the public sector.

Nigeria

New Shekau video

On 24 March 2014, different press media in Nigeria received a new video of the Islamist organisation Boko Haram. In this video, Mr Abubakar Shekau, the group's leader takes responsibility for the attack on the Giwa barracks in Maiduguri (capital of the north-eastern federal state of Borno) on 14 March 2014. The video shows how attackers shoot rockets and rocket-propelled grenades on the barracks and how they succeed in entering the premises without facing any resistance, how they set fire on buildings and vehicles and how they release hundreds of prisoners including some women and children. Mr Shekau said that more than 2,000 "brothers" of the Boko Haram – most of them commanders – have reportedly been released. The people killed in Maiduguri have reportedly been "simple" released prisoners and not members of the Boko Haram. Mr Shekau refers in this context to more than 400 bodies which have been found in different parts of the town following the attack. They were presumably attackers and released prisoners who were shot dead by the security forces and the Civilian Joint Task Force (Civilian JTF). Mr Shekau uttered the severest death threats against the Civilian JTF and Muslim clerics who criticise the Boko Haram. He also said that girls should leave Western education institutions and he threatened to start the kidnapping of disbelieving women as well as selling them as slaves. He also called on his "brothers" - wherever they may be, in Abuja, Lagos or in southern Nigeria - to take up the sword, as an individual [*and in groups*] and to kill other people.

Attempted jailbreak of members of the Boko Haram in Abuja

A female spokesperson of the Nigerian intelligence service "Department of State Service" (DSS) which is also known as "State Security Service" (SSS) said that there were some riots in the detention institution of the SSS in their headquarters in the capital of Abuja on 30 March 2014 around seven a.m. of alleged members of the Islamist group Boko Haram. 18 of them were shot dead by the security forces, three other died later owing to their injuries. Other sources said that the fighters of the Boko Haram have broken into the prison's premises from outside in order to release the detained members of the Boko Haram.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

UN mission renewed by one year

On 28 March 2014, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution in favour of the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and in favour of the mission of the UN Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) by one year by 31 March 2015. This UN mission with its yearly budget of approximately 1.5 billion dollars and almost 20,000 soldiers is the largest and most expensive UN mission worldwide. At the end of 2013, the UN Force Intervention Brigade defeated together with government troops the Tutsi rebels of the M23 (Movement of 23 March) in North Kivu province in eastern Congo. At present, it supports the offensive of the government troops against the Ugandan Islamist rebels group ADF (“Allied Democratic Forces”) which was started on 16 January 2014 in North Kivu. Plans for a military action against Rwanda’s Hutu militia FDLR (“Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda”) which is active in South Kivu and North Kivu, have seen much progress.

Somalia

Somali armed forces and AMISOM capture several built-up areas

On 25 March 2014, the Somali armed forces (Somali National Army – SNA) and AMISOM captured the built-up area of Mahas in the region of Hiraaan. On 26 March 2014, they released the town of Elbur in the region of Galgaduud from the al-Shabaab. As early as on 22 March 2014, the town of Qoryoley in the region of Lower Shabelle had been captured. Now, since the beginning of the month, the al-Shabaab has reportedly lost control over ten built-up areas (see BN dated 3 March 2014).

The built-up area of Gendershe south-west of Mogadishu which had been under control of the SNA and AMISOM since February was reportedly attacked by fighters of the al-Shabaab in the night of 29 March 2014. Government sources said that the attack was beaten back.

South Sudan

More than one million refugees

Owing to the renewed gun battles between the government’s armed forces and supporters of the former deputy President Mr Riek Machar in December 2013, more than one million people have been made refugees, as the UN said on 29 March 2014. Out of these numbers, approximately 800,000 have found shelter within the country and about 255,000 have fled abroad. Almost five million South Sudanese need humanitarian help said the UNHCR. It is expected that the food supply will further deteriorate as the fighting has prevented the people from the cultivation of their fields prior to the imminent rain period.

On 25 March 2014, the peace negotiations in Addis Ababa have been taken up again (see BN dated 3 March 2014). In spite of a ceasefire, there are still gun battles in order to win strategically important built-up areas.

Kenya

Refugees sent to camps

On 25 March 2014, a government representative announced that refugees living in Kenya’s cities will have to move into refugee camps. Approximately 50,000 people – most of them Somali – are affected by this decision. The reason for this measure is reportedly security.

Background

Such an initiative of the Kenyan government of December 2012 was prevented by Kenya’s High Court on 26 July 2013 with the reasoning that a relocation of the refugees would violate their rights and would place them under the indirect danger of a forced return to Somalia.

The UNHCR said that almost 530,000 refugees – most of them Somali – live in six refugee camps in Alinjugur, Dadaab and Kakuma. There have always again been attacks in Kenya since Kenya’s military operation in Somalia, in particular in parts of Nairobi where mainly Somali live and which are reportedly

carried out by the Islamist militia of the al-Shabaab. The government thinks that the attackers are to be found among the Somali refugees.

The latest attack was on 23 March 2014 when unknown people attacked a church near Mombasa and killed six people.

Survivors of sexual violence accuse government

Survivors of sexual violence which happened during the riots following the elections in 2007 accused the Kenyan government. The six women and two men supported by several human rights organisations accuse the government among others that they are not prosecuting those in court who are responsible for the acts of violence. The trial was opened on 25 March 2014.

At the beginning of 2012, hearings were opened in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, among others against the Kenyan President Mr Uhuru Kenyatta and Deputy President Mr William Ruto owing to their role in these riots. The court became active following ineffective attempts of the Kenyan courts to deal with the riots.

Kosovo

EULEX mission to be renewed by two years

The media in Kosovo reported that the European Union had decided to renew its EULEX mission by an initial period of two years from July 2014 for the time being. Kosovo's government had suggested the discontinuation of the EULEX mission as – in the meantime – they themselves have now been able to take over full responsibility in the judicial system and among the police forces.

EULEX however shall reportedly continue to be fully responsible for the investigation, persecution and arrest of all people who are suspected of having committed war crimes, of corruption and of organised crimes. The number of employees however shall reportedly be reduced and some competences in “simpler cases” shall be transferred to the local authorities.

Background

The so-called rule of law mission (European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo – EULEX) was initiated in 2008. Its aim was to support Kosovo's judicial system and to guarantee that the rule of law is respected and that internationally recognised standards will be applied. EULEX has a total of approximately 2,200 members, among them approx. 1,150 coming from the EU countries. Germany's participation is on average covered with 140 police forces coming from the Bund [*federation*] and the federal states as well as civilian experts (male and female). Since 1 February 2013, the German diplomat Mr Bernd Borchardt is head of the mission. By now, 350 people have been put on trial owing to war crimes, of corruption and/or of organised crimes. Many investigations and trials have not yet been completed, for example those regarding organ trafficking during the Kosovo war.

Russian Federation / Northern Caucasus

Security situation in Dagestan

On 27 March 2014, Dagestan's Chief police officer Mr Abdurashid Magomedov said in a meeting of the regional parliament that there are 13 illegally active militant groups in Dagestan. He also mentioned 167 killed terrorists in 2013, among them ten leaders. 27 fighters had reportedly capitulated and 213 had been arrested and sentenced. The security forces recorded 92 fatalities and 176 people wounded, said Mr Magomedov. Twelve civilians were killed and 73 were wounded, Mr Magomedov added. For years, Dagestan has been the focus of militant clashes in Northern Caucasus.

Ukraine

Billionaire runs for president

On 29 March 2014, the oligarch Mr Pjotr Poroshenko officially announced his candidatedship for the presidential election on 25 May 2014. The strongest competitor is allegedly former Head of government Ms Yulia Tymoshenko, whereas opposition leader Mr Vitali Klitschko surprisingly had withdrawn his candidatedship. Mr Poroshenko promised his supporters “new armed forces which are modern and efficient and which can defend Ukraine’s sovereignty and integrity”. From 2009 to 2010, Mr Poroshenko was foreign minister in the pro European government of his home country. Under the pro Russian President Mr Victor Yanukovych – who has been ousted only recently - Mr Poroshenko was in 2012 minister for economic affairs for a short period of time. He is seen as the most important source of finance for the opposition which he during the protests had supported through his TV station called Channel 5. The 48 year old businessman is also called “chocolate king” because he is the owner of the candy group of companies “Roschen”. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, he made a fortune of many billions and is today among the ten richest Ukrainians.

Tatars in favour of autonomy

Two weeks after the referendum on the separation of Crimea from Ukraine, the Tatars have come out in favour of autonomy for the peninsula. On 29 March 2014 in a meeting in the town of Bachtshyssaraj, representatives of the approximately 300,000 Crimean Tatars voted in favour of taking steps for the implementation of more autonomy. The basis for this vote was a resolution providing for political and judicial steps in order to grant national and territorial autonomy to the Tatars on their historic territory, namely Crimea. What remained unclear, however, was the procedure how the autonomy shall be implemented and whether the desired autonomous unit is to be located within Ukraine or within Russia.

Background

Two weeks ago, the Muslim Tatars boycotted the referendum on the separation of Crimea from Ukraine which had been organised by the pro Russian regional leaders. The Tatars account for twelve per cent of the population on the Black Sea peninsula where most inhabitants are ethnic Russians. The Tatars have a difficult relationship with Moscow since Stalin had ordered their deportation from Crimea to Central Asia at the end of World War II. Approximately half of them had died on their way to Central Asia. At the end of the 1980s, the Tatars were allowed to return to Crimea.

Sri Lanka

UN Human Rights Council wants investigation of war crimes

With its resolution of 27 March 2014, the Human Rights Council requested an investigation of the war crimes of the civil war. The resolution (with 23 votes against 12 votes and 12 abstentions) was made on the request of the USA and the European Union which accuse the government in Colombo of insufficient investigation measures. Germany also voted in favour of the resolution.

In 2009, the Sri Lankan armed forces defeated the rebel organisation LTTE (“Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam”) which intended to build up its own state in the north of the island. Human rights activists accuse the government troops to have bombed civilians and hospitals. The LTTE is accused of having recruited child soldiers and having misused civilians as human protective shields.

China

Executions

China is leading the world’s list of all executions for 2013 – ahead of Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the USA – published by Amnesty International on 27 March 2014. The organisation does not mention any exact numbers for China, as it has been the case since 2009; all the more, they assume thousands of executions which are more than those in all other countries taken together (778). In China, the number of executions is treated as a state secret.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Resolution of the UN Human Rights Council on North Korea

In a resolution adopted on 28 March 2014, the UN Human Rights Council requested the UN Security Council to deal with the topic of a judicial prosecution of the North Korean government as well as to deal with possible sanctions against it. The reason for this is the outcome of an investigation report published on 17 March 2014 regarding the human rights violations in the country's penal camps.

Myanmar

Mob attacks offices of international organisations

On 26 March 2014, a mob attacked in Sittwe, capital of the Rakhine state the offices of international relief organisations and the flats of their staff members. The offices of Malteser International were attacked after a representative of the organisation had removed a Buddhist flag from the building. Witnesses said that it was humiliating how the flag was dealt with. Before the police were able to stop the violent actions on 27 March 2014, the premises of approximately a dozen of UN organisations and other international organisations had been the target of attacks. The police took a dozen of employees of the organisations to safe places. One person accidentally died through a police warning shot. A dusk-to-dawn curfew was ordered for Sittwe.

Background

The Rakhine, the Buddhist population of Rakhine state accuse the international relief organisations in the region to preferably support the Muslim Rohingya. The organisations are increasingly under threat and are being hindered to do their work. At the end of February, the government banned the relief organisation "Doctors without Borders" from doing their work in Rakhine state. The protests were also directed against the participation of the Muslim Rohingya in the population census from 30 March to 10 April 2014.