

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

6 May 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

Three British soldiers hit a road bomb with their armoured vehicle and died in the southern province of Helmand (Nahr-e Saraj district) on 30 April 2013. The chairman of the High Peace Council of the southern province of Helmand (Gereshk district) was assassinated in a bombing together with two policemen on 01 May 2013. On 04 May 2013 one German soldier was killed and one wounded in a battle with the insurgents in the northern Afghan province of Baghlan. In another incident in this region on the same day anti-aircraft weapons and small arms were fired at two German helicopters. In the southern province of Kandahar (Maiwand district) five US soldiers died in a bomb attack on 04 May 2013. On the same day two more US soldiers were shot by an Afghan soldier in a so-called insider attack in the western Farah province.

Pakistan

Court deprives Pervez Musharraf of right to stand as a candidate

According to one news report of 30 April 2013 the Peshawar High Court deprived ex-president and ex-dictator Pervez Musharraf of the right to stand for election to provincial parliaments and the National Assembly.

Musharraf had lodged a complaint with the court about not being admitted as a candidate in a constituency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province; the court then reconfirmed his non-admittance and went even further in its decision.

Meanwhile Musharraf figures on the Exit Control List, i.e. he may not leave Pakistan at any of the official border crossings. The Islamabad High Court extended Musharraf's preventive detention on his farm until 18 May 2013 which is the day of his court summons. On 6 April 2013 there will be a court hearing of Musharraf's motion to be released on bail. The police informed the competent court for the criminal proceedings that they will be unable to guarantee security in the Islamabad court house, because of the manpower required to provide security until the elections on 11 May 2013.

Punjab province: Prosecutor in Musharraf case shot dead

Unknown gunmen shot a prosecutor investigating in the murder of Benazir Bhutto in Islamabad. He was expected to indict Musharraf in the case in the next days. A Frontier Constabulary staff accompanying him was wounded and could injure the four attackers who escaped.

Baluchistan province: Attacks on politicians

On 05 May 2013 the motorcade of two candidates standing for elections to the National Assembly were hit by a bomb planted at the roadside in the area of Tali in the district of Sibi (Baluchistan province). In the ensuing gun battle two body guards and the two attackers were killed, while the politicians remained unharmed.

On 30 April 2013 a candidate named Abdul Fateh Magsi and two people attending a campaign event in Goth Shanmbani in constituency PB 32 (Jhal Magsi, Baluchistan province) were shot during an attack by gunmen. Another three people in the audience were wounded.

Sindh province: Assault on politicians

A candidate of the secular Awami National Party for the National Assembly elections was shot together with his four-year-old son in Karachi (Sindh province) on 03 May 2013. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack and announced that they would continue to assassinate candidates of the Awami National Party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement and the Pakistan People's Party.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province: 57 people dead and many injured

23 militants were killed and three soldiers injured in fighting between the Pakistani Taliban and the security forces in the Tirah valley on the border between the FATA agencies Orakzai and Khyber on 05 May 2013. In North Waziristan (FATA) two soldiers were killed and three wounded by a roadside bomb explosion near Kam Sarobi when they passed in a convoy on Razmak-Eisha road on their way from Razmak to Bannu.

Pakistani Taliban and the security forces had several shoot-outs on 03 May 2013.

Members of the Pakistani Taliban sub-group Shamim Mehsud attacked a security post in the Ghundai area in Southern Waziristan (FATA in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province). 13 people died and several were wounded. On the security forces' side one soldier died and three were injured, while twelve of the Taliban died and several were wounded.

The security forces and the Pakistani Taliban also confronted each other in the FATA Agency Orakzai. Fighting in the Dabori area claimed nine victims among the Pakistani Taliban and one of the army. One soldier was killed when the Pakistani Taliban attacked a control post in Shin Qamam, also in the Dabori area. After the attack a gun battle started with the military reinforcement that arrived and nine Taliban were killed and several wounded. The Taliban reported different numbers for the victims saying that more members of the security forces died than Taliban.

Iraq

Security situation

Violence continues in Iraq. On 30 April 2013 at least 20 people were killed and 49 seriously injured in several attacks, in particular in Baghdad and the provinces of Salahaddin, Diyala and Ninive.

On 01 May 2013 there were at least 28 fatalities and 75 wounded as a result of several attacks in Baghdad, Kirkuk and the provinces of Anbar, Salahaddin, Diyala and Ninive.

At least nine policemen died in fighting with armed attackers on 03 May 2013 in Mosul, seven more were injured. At least four people were killed by a car bomb exploding in front of a Sunni mosque in Rashidiyah, north of Baghdad, over 20 were wounded.

In a series of attacks in and around Baghdad at least nine people were killed and 30 were wounded on 05 May 2013.

Relying on information from Iraqi security and medical sources AFP news agency reported that 460 people were killed and 1,219 wounded in April. In March there had been 271 fatalities and 906 wounded.

UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq) reports 712 dead and 1,633 wounded in April. 117 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed and 195 wounded. Baghdad province was most affected with 211 fatalities and 486 wounded, followed by Diyala, Salahaddin, Kirkuk, Ninive and Anbar. In March 2013 229 civilians had lost their lives and 853 had been wounded. April was the 'deadliest' month since June 2008.

Maliki announces offensive against militias

After violence escalated at the end of April 2013 Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki announced to take strong action against armed groups. Since December 2012 Sunni have been protesting against the government of the Shiite Prime Minister al-Maliki.

al-Maliki wins provincial elections

The press reported on 05 May 2013 that the Iraqi election committee announced that the alliance of Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki won the majority of seats in ten of twelve provinces. The coalition of the Shiite party Supreme Islamic Council of Ammar al-Hakim came in second and was followed by the coalition of Liberals that are close to the Shiite clergyman Muktada al-Sadr.

Turkey

Clashes during May Day demonstrations

In violent clashes between the police and demonstrators at least 16 people were injured and 20 arrested during the demonstrations celebrating the 1st of May in Istanbul. The unrest began already early in the morning when groups of trade unionists and opposition members wanted to march to Taksim square to hold a rally, although the traditional May Day manifestation on Taksim Square had previously been prohibited for safety reasons, because of the construction works on the square. Protesters threw stones and incendiary bottles at the police who responded with water cannons and tear gas.

Rallying on Taksim square had been prohibited after 36 people had died during confrontations in 1977 and was only allowed again in 2010.

Syria / Lebanon

Israel attacks Syria /Syria threatens revenge/ Hezbollah leader confirms activity of fighters in Syria

In the nights to 03 and 05 May Israel fired missiles against targets in and near Damascus. Israel justified the operations by intending to avert a direct threat to Israel resulting from the Hezbollah's armament with chemical weapons and long-range missiles that might be aimed at Israeli settlements in any future conflicts. Syria's regime considered the attacks to be a "declaration of war" and threatened to take revenge. The Syrian opposition alliance National Coalition also condemned the attacks. The Arab League warned Israel of serious consequences and urged the UN Security Council to act. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon was concerned and called upon all sides to practice restraint to avoid any further escalation of the conflict.

Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah said in an interview on 30 April 2013 that fighters of the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah militia, who according to Israeli estimates possess another 60,000 missiles, are actively involved in the Syrian civil war. He also said that Hezbollah might very well become involved even more, if "the situation continued to escalate". This means that Lebanon is on the brink of being dragged even further into the conflict in the neighbouring country, in particular because of the fighting between anti and pro Assad forces in Northern Lebanon.

Syria

Rebels might be using Sarin

Carla Del Ponte, member of the UN-Commission investigating the human rights situation in Syria, stated that witness testimonies established a "clear, specific suspicion" of the use of the fatal nervous gas Sarin by Syrian rebels against their opponents. This suspicion was, however, not confirmed by experts.

International Day of the Freedom of the Press: Since the beginning of the war 36 journalists have died in Syria

The human rights organization Amnesty International reported that at least 36 journalists have been targeted and killed since the war in Syria started. „Both Syrian government troops as well as the armed opposition are responsible for the violence committed against journalists", Syria expert Ruth Jüttner said, when the new Amnesty Report was published on the occasion of the International Day of the Freedom of the Press on 03 May 2013. The report highlights the critical role of local activists who often risk their lives to describe the atrocities. Just as their professional colleagues they were at risk and fearing revenge. „Attacks on civilians, which includes journalists, are war crimes, and the offenders must be held accountable, " Jüttner said.

Syrian government troops allegedly murdered 150 people

The opposition reported that government troops killed at least 150 people, mainly civilians, including women and children, in the village al-Baida in the Syrian province of Tartus. On 03 May 2013 the National Syrian Coalition accused the international community of standing by idly watching the Assad regime commit war crimes. The state news agency Sana, however, reported that the army killed terrorists and found arms in several villages around the coastal town of Baniyas. The reports could not be confirmed by independent parties. The area is populated mainly by Alawites, which is the Islamic Shiite faith to which also the potentate al-Assad belongs. There are several villages inhabited by Sunni in the south of Bania. The uprising against the governing regime is mainly lead by Sunni.

West Bank

Abbas is prepared to accept a solution with two states and smaller scope of territorial exchange with Israel

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is prepared to accept a solution with two states within the 1967 borders as suggested by the Arab League and a smaller scope of territory swap with Israel as part of a peace treaty. But he also said that Israel could not be recognized as Jewish state as demanded by Israel's head of government, Benjamin Netanyahu. Previously Netanyahu had described this refusal as the core of the conflict and not the territorial issues. Abbas had frequently rejected the recognition of Israel as Jewish state, arguing that this would mean ignoring the rights of the Palestinian minority in Israel. About 21% of the eight million Israeli citizens are Palestinians. Furthermore such recognition would automatically be a renunciation of the right to return for the Palestinians and their descendants who lost their homes in the 1948 war of independence.

Iran

Several potential presidential candidates criticize Ahmadinejad's ranting against Israel

Six weeks before the presidential elections more and more potential candidates distance themselves from the outgoing President's foreign policy. The essence of the criticism of several high-ranking politicians is that Ahmadinejad had caused major damage for the country with his controversial statements on the Holocaust and his repeated threats against Israel. The former main negotiator on nuclear matters, Hassan Rohani, who intends to stand as a reform candidate, added that Iran's international reputation had reached its lowest point in the last eight years because of the President's foreign policy. The powerful former president Ali Akhbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani stressed that Iran had to go through bitter times in the last eight years due to the President's foreign policy blunders. Many observers see these statements by leading politicians as an attempt to rebuild Iran's international reputation.

Internet censorship: Tendency for uncontrolled "shadow networks" in Iran

In the view of internationally active bloggers the possibilities of expression on the internet will survive in the long-term despite government attempts for repression, as exercised e.g. by the Iranian "Cyber Army". At an event of the German broadcasting station Deutsche Welle on the occasion of the Day of the Freedom of the Press Iranian blogger Arash Apadpour said that the trend in his home country was to establish "shadow networks" that escaped state control with the help of radio technology like WiFi and Bluetooth. On these networks one could show that there are several realities - "an official reality as the state wanted it to be and another reality".

Tunisia

Agreement on new constitution

After several months of negotiations the political parties of Tunisia agreed on the future political system for the country last week. The agreement provides for a mix of parliamentary and presidential constitution in which the head of government as well as the head of state will have their own privileges. The leader of the Islamic governing party Ennahdha, Rached Ghannouchi, stated on Tunisian radio that this is a constitution "in which neither the head of state nor the head of government wields supreme control over the executive". He did not give any details on the distribution of powers.

Libya

Benghazi citizens drive out militia and destroy an illegal prison

According to a report of 30 April 2013 the citizens of Benghazi in the district Eat Selman drove out a militia that was operating an illegal prison where allegedly drug and alcohol dealers, prostitutes and others accused of moral failures, had been tortured. After the attack on the US consulate in September 2012 the militia had reportedly been integrated into the Libyan army.

Benghazi police station bombed

On 02 May 2013 a bomb was thrown at a police station in Birkah in Benghazi, which caused considerable damage to the building and wounded three policemen.

Militias renew siege of the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs in Tripoli

On 01 May 2013 armed militia-men again surrounded the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tripoli and stopped all business there. On 28 April 2013 they had already laid siege on the Ministry of Justice. Their intention is to reinforce their demand on the General National Congress to adopt the Political Isolation Law which would remove Gaddafi loyalists and persons related to the former regime from political and public office.

On 05 May 2013 the General National Congress held a debate the Political Isolation Law. On the same day citizens of Tripoli and the militias supporting the law clashed. The citizens are against the blockades of the ministries and demand an end to the government of the militias. Already on 03 May 2013 the army had occupied strategic positions around the city and taken control of the entry points to the city.

Sudan

Dinka leader shot in Abyei

On 5 May 2013 Kual Deng Majok, a prominent leader of the Ngok Dinka from South Sudan was killed in the Abyei region that is contested by Sudan and South Sudan. Majok and his driver were shot in a shoot-out between Arab Misseriya nomads and the soldiers of the UN Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA). He was traveling in Abyei on a fact finding mission in the company of the Ethiopian UNISFA commander. Also two UNISFA soldiers and 17 Misseriya died. The Sudanese Ministry of the Interior stated that Majok's tribe had failed to inform the Misseriya of the visit.

Observers fear that the ethnic tensions in the region will increase after the Dinka leader's death.

Many die in mine accident

When an illegal gold mine collapsed in Northern Darfur dozens of people were killed on 29 April as the local authorities informed. While the exact number of fatalities is unknown, the names of 66 people had been registered before they went underground. One must, however, expect that more workers were in the mine. The search for survivors has been stopped. The gold mine had triggered armed confrontations between two Arab tribes in the area in January 2013 (see BN of 14 and 21 January 2013).

Gold is the most important export commodity for Sudan, in the first six months of 2012 the gold revenue amounted to about 70% of the country's foreign trade income.

130 fatalities in tribal clashes

In fighting over land ownership between the Arab tribes of the Gimir and the Beni Halba in South Darfur more than 130 people died on 02 May 2013.

Somalia

15 die in Mogadishu bombing

The suicide bombing of a motorcade of Somali government representatives accompanying a delegation from Qatar in Mogadishu killed at least 15 people, 13 of them civilians, on 05 May 2013. At least 18 others were injured. The suicide bomber had driven a vehicle with explosives into the motorcade and then detonated it. The members of the Qatar delegation escaped unharmed. Allegedly al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

Mali

UN peace force approved

On 02 May 2013 the UN Security Council approved a 12,600 men strong United Nations peace keeping force for Mali. MINUSMA (Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali) shall become operative on 01 July this year and has an initial mandate for twelve months. The resolution was unanimously adopted by the 15 Security Council members and authorizes the UN soldiers to "use all necessary means" to protect the civilian population, UN staff and the cultural heritage of Mali and to ensure the distribution of humanitarian aid. The protection of human rights is another essential element of the mandate. MINUSMA will assist the Malian authorities "to re-establish the constitutional order, democracy and national unity", Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations Herve Ladsous said.

France extends mandate for Mali mission

The French parliament extended the mandate for the mission in Mali. But also provided for a progressive reduction of the strength of the force of currently 3,850 to 1,000 soldiers by the end of the year.

French soldier killed

The French President's press service informed that on 29 April 2013 a French soldier was killed in an armed confrontation in the north of Mali. No further details of the incident are known. Six soldiers have died to date since the French military intervened in Mali in January 2013.

Five assassins and two soldiers killed in attack

Five assassins and two Malian soldiers died in a suicide bombing in Mali on 04 May 2013. The military informed that the five Jihadists blew themselves up near an army patrol in the vicinity of the city of Gao in Mali's north east. The attack is blamed on the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).

Ivory Coast

Independent candidates win local elections

Independent candidates take home an impressive success in the local elections in Ivory Coast. According to the official results they won 72 of the total of 194 seats. Observers see this as an expression of the people's disenchantment with the government of President Alassane Ouattara. His party, Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR), won 65 seats, the coalition party, Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), won 49. 36.44 percent of the voters turned out for the first local elections in ten years. The party of former President Laurent Gbagbo, Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), boycotted the election. In view of the growing disagreement within the governing coalition, independent candidates could score by promising local development projects. There were multiple clashes between the police and party members and between the members of rivaling parties on election day, most of them in the capital Abidjan. Two people are reported dead and several wounded as a result of these confrontations.

Tanzania

One woman dies in an explosion in front of a church in Tanzania

On 05 May 2013 a woman was killed by the explosion of a grenade in front of a Catholic church in Arusha, in the north of Tanzania. The authorities reported that at least 50 people were injured by the explosion, four of whom are in critical condition. One person was detained and the search is on for another suspect. According to the information available the grenade was thrown at the church entrance when the faithful were entering to attend mass. It is not entirely clear what caused the explosion, but tensions between Christians and Muslims had been mounting in the country in recent months. In the course both churches and mosques were attacked.

Bangladesh

Bloody fighting erupted between radical Islamists and security forces during which 22 people were killed and hundreds wounded in the capital of Dhaka on 05 May 2013. Tens of thousands of the members and supporters of the Islamist organization Hefajat-e-Islam blocked the streets and engaged in street riots with the police. Hefajat-e-Islam is supported by Jamaat-e-Islami and is demanding things like the introduction of the death penalty for blasphemy, strict separation of the sexes, the reintroduction of the reference to Allah in the constitution, mandatory religious education and the restriction of the activities of Christian missionaries.

Myanmar/Indonesia

Risk of terrorism after anti-Muslim violence

On 02 May 2013 two men were arrested in the Indonesian capital Jakarta that had been planning an attack on the embassy of Myanmar in the city, officials stated. Several self-made bombs were found in their house. The police said that the attack was planned in response to the violence against Muslims in Myanmar. A few hours before they were arrested an article appeared on the website „Voice of Al-Islam“ that included a statement of 23 April 2013 attributed to the radical Muslim clergyman Abu Bakar Bashir who is imprisoned in Indonesia. In the statement he said that Jihad is the only means to end the "genocide" of the Rohingya in Myanmar.

One person dies in assaults of Muslims in Myanmar

Renewed assaults of a Buddhist mob on Muslims lead to the death of one person in the village of O(a)kkan, about 100 kilometres north of Rangoon, on 30 April and 01 May 2013; about ten people were injured. Two mosques were destroyed and about 100 houses burnt down. 18 persons were arrested. Reportedly the violence started when a Muslim woman by accident bumped into a Buddhist monk who then dropped and broke his begging bowl.

Sri Lanka

Amnesty International accused the government of Sri Lanka to become progressively more aggressive against critics. The organization's report "Assault on Dissent" tells of attacks against journalists, judges, human rights activists and government critics. The abuse by the security forces is legalized. In this way the government was attempting to strengthen its hold on power, the report says. Immediately after the military victory over the Tamil LTTE rebels in May 2009 these repressions started and by now created a "climate of fear".

India/China

Border conflict in the Himalayas resolved

India and China have ended their border conflict and started to withdraw their troops from the Ladakh region in eastern Kashmir which is claimed by both countries. The conflict had rekindled about three weeks ago when Chinese military crossed the border into India and set up camp.

North Korea

US citizen sentenced to 15 years in a labour camp

A North Korean court sentenced the US citizen and native South Korean Kenneth Bae to 15 years of forced labour for crimes against the country. The US demanded his immediate release. If Bae is released he would be the sixth US citizen who has been detained in this way on North Korean territory, sentenced and deported after a plea for release since 2009. China's news agency Xinhua which has a correspondent stationed in Pyongyang reported that the Supreme Court in Pyongyang had handed down its sentence of Bae already on 30 April, but waited until after May Day to announce it on 02 May 2013 to attract more attention. The tour guide from Washington had entered the North Korean city of Rason on the border to China and Russia with a valid entry visa. This is where he was arrested later. Allegedly he filmed begging children in the country in which people are starving and the economy lies in ruins.