

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

19 January 2015

Afghanistan . . .

Security situation

Several security incidents were reported once again last week. The situation remains unchanged. Armed fighting took place between the Taliban and security forces in the provinces of Paktika (south-east Afghanistan), Helmand (in the south), Sar-i-Pul and Balkh (in the north), Herat (in the west), Kunar (in the east). Suicide attacks were carried out against police officers (in Helmand), healthcare workers were abducted in Herat (in the west) and an education officer was killed in Ghor (in the west). A journalist was killed in Nangarhar (in the East) and bombings were carried out in Uruzgan (in the south).

Violence against Afghan journalists on the rise in 2014

According to the Afghan Journalists' Safety Committee, the number of attacks against journalists rose by around 69 percent year-on-year, with 129 cases attacks and threats reported. Government employees and security officers were the perpetrators in around 35 percent of the cases, influential persons were responsible for 26 percent of the attacks and the Taliban were responsible for 21 percent. The majority of attacks were carried out in the north-east and in Kabul. The attacks involved arrests, beatings, threats, murders abductions and assaults.

Iraq . . .

Situation

According to a press report issued on 17 January 2015, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS) released more than 200 Yezidi on 17 January 2015. Other press releases say 350 Yezidi were released. They reportedly include women, children, elderly persons and the mentally ill. According to a Commander of the Kurdish troops, nearly all of those released are in poor health. It is not clear why the Yezidi were released.

The US-led coalition continues to fly airstrikes against ISIS targets. It has been reported that eleven airstrikes were carried out on 15 January 2015.

Pakistan . . .

Battle against extremist stepped up

One month after the terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar, 20 persons charged with a range of terrorist acts have been executed. This has put an end to the ban on the death penalty. Pakistani troops have stepped up their offensive along the border with Afghanistan. According to some sources, the troops are coordinating their missions more closely with Afghanistan than ever before. Whereas Afghanistan and Pakistan have repeatedly accused each other in the past of supporting terrorists, there is evidence to suggest that Pakistan has also decided to take action against the Afghan Haqqani network which has been on the list of terrorist organisations of the United Nations and the US since 2012. It was reported on 17 January 2015 that five men were arrested in Afghanistan in an area close to the border with Pakistan who allegedly supported the attack on the school in Peshawar. They are reportedly not Afghan nationals.

Nationwide protests against Charlie Hebdo

Thousands of people took to the streets in Karachi, Peshawar, Lahore and Multan on 16 January 2015 in protests against the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published by the French Charlie Hebdo magazine. The Pakistani Parliament condemned the most recent cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed on 15 January 2015. Although the rallies went off peacefully for the most part, around 200 people, most of whom were supporters of the Jamaat-e-Islami Party, gathered in front of the French Consulate in Karachi after Friday prayers and tried to raid the building. Heavy clashes ensued with police officers who used gunfire, water canons and tear gas to disperse the rally. Three people were wounded.

Turkey . . .

Criticism by the EU Parliament

The EU Parliament condemned the police raids and detention of journalists in Turkey in December in a resolution adopted on 15 January 2015. It voiced concern over the increasing lack of tolerance the Turkish government is showing vis-à-vis public protest and critical media, urging it to fully respect the rights of its citizens. The Parliament also said the detentions are incompatible with European values and with the freedom of the press.

Iran . . .

US reporter in detention to stand trial before Revolutionary Court

The US reporter Jason Rezaian who has been detained for the past six months is to stand trial before Tehran Revolutionary Court. This was announced by the competent public prosecutor in Tehran. The Revolutionary Court deals mainly with cases of espionage. Mr Rezaian, who holds dual US-Iranian citizenship and his wife Yeganeh Salehi, who works for the Arab newspaper "The National" (Abu Dhabi) were arrested in late July 2014 on unspecified charges of espionage. Yeganeh Salehi was released on bail in October 2014 . Her husband remains in detention at Tehran's Evin prison.

Plans to launch national dating website

Vice-Minister Mahmoud Gholrazi has said that young people seeking marriage through a dating website to be launched by the Ministry for Youth and Sports must have serious intentions. The strict Islamist laws and intensive monitoring by the moral police mean young people have little or no opportunity to meet members of the opposite sex. Those who do risk high fines each time they meet for a date. That is why many young people prefer to get to know each other through dating sites and to flirt online. Mahmoud Gholrazi said there are as many as 300 websites deemed "illegal and immoral" . Owing to a lack of information at schools, young people encounter many problems before and after marriage. The Vice-Minister say the Ministry is trying to help young people by providing counselling services.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories/Gaza . . .

Hundreds of Hamas officials occupy seat of government in Gaza

Over 100 employees of the former Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip began a sit-in in front of the headquarters of the Palestinian unity government in Gaza on 13 January 2015, vowing to stay until their salaries were paid. According to the spokesperson of the trade union for public service in Gaza city, Khalil al-Zayan , the sit-in is being staged to ensure staff recruited by the former Hamas administration had not received any wages for seven months.

The formation of the unity government made up of independent experts supported by the secular Fatah party and the rival radical-Islamist Hamas. Since then, they have been arguing over the continued employment and payment of salaries to 50,000 public service staff hired by Hamas when it took control of the Gaza Strip on 2007. The new unity government would also like to rehire 70,000 employees laid off when the Islamist movement seized power in 2007. Hamas government's employees would also be taken on but only in case of ministerial "need".

Row at Erez crossing

A row broke out at the beginning of the week between Hamas militiamen and the official Palestinian border guards at the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. The checkpoint of the Palestinian government at the only pedestrian crossing point was closed on 12 January 2015. The head of the border authorities, Hussein al-Sheik, said some Hamas supporters had tried to stage a sit-in in front of the border guard barracks. This has meanwhile been refuted by Hamas officials. They are accusing government representatives of closing the crossing for no reason. However, foreigners and patients requiring emergency medical care, for the most part, are being allowed to cross Erez crossing point in both directions.

Israel . . .

Members of Islamic State cell arrested

Seven members of the first known Islamic State cell operating inside Israel has been arrested, the country's Shin Bet security service said. According to sources of Shin Bet, the suspects are Arab citizens of Israel, including a lawyer from Nazareth. It said they were caught just before executing an attack and were practising on animals how to behead people.

Yemen . . .

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula claims responsibility for Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has claimed responsibility for the attack on the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in which twelve people were killed. In a video broadcast on the Internet on 14 January 2015, one of the leaders of AQAP, Nasser Ben Ali al-Anassi, said heroes had been recruited who had taken action. He said the attack was revenge for insulting the Prophet Mohammad. The editor-in-chief of the "Charlie Hebdo" magazine, Stéphane Charbonnier, was also on a "wanted list" in the "Inspire" digital jihadist magazine. The magazine is published by AQAP.

Heavy fighting between security forces and Houthi rebels

Heavy fighting broke out between security forces and Houthi rebels near the presidential palace in Sanaa on 19 January 2015. These were the worst clashes to erupt since Shia militiamen gained control over most parts of the capital in September 2014. Security forces blocked off the roads leading to the presidential palace. The situation in Sanaa is tense since the Shia rebel group abducted the Chief of Staff of the President, Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak, on 17 January 2015. The Shia militia are trying to force amendments to the future constitution which Hosni Mubarak is working on. The rebels are accusing the government of failing to observe an agreement drawn up by both sides following the occupation of the city in September 2014. A deal signed between political parties and the Houthi rebels called for the formation of a new unity government followed by the withdrawal of Houthi fighters from government institutions.

Syria . . .

Clashes between government troops and Kurds

After government troops gained control of buildings in a demilitarised zone, breaking a silent truce that has been observed for the most part in order to focus on other foes, particularly ISIS, heavy fighting broke out between militiamen affiliated with the People's Protection Units (YPG) and government troops. At least 18 persons were reportedly killed.

4,000 people evacuated from Ghouta

Following negotiations with the rebels, Syrian forces have evacuated nearly 4,000 people from a rebel bastion in Ghouta close to Damascus, taking them to emergency shelters. Most of the persons evacuated were women, children and elderly persons. Ghouta has been repeatedly bombarded by Syrian troops.

Israeli airstrike

At least five members of the radical-Islamist Shia militia Hezbollah who are fighting on the side of Syria in the civil war have reportedly been killed by an Israeli airstrike in Syria.

Egypt ...

Homosexuals released

A court in Egypt ordered the release of 26 men detained on 7 December 2014 in a raid on a Cairo bath house for allegedly taking part in a gay orgy on charges of "debauchery" (cf. BN of 15 December 2014).

Islamic clerics condemn Charlie Hebdo

Clerics from the Cairo Centre for Islamic Legal Issues (Dar al-Ifta; the educational institute founded to represent Islam and a centre for Islamic legal research) said the publication of recent cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed by the Charlie Hebdo magazine was a "racist act" and "unjustified provocation of 1.5 million Muslims all over the world". They said it would unleash a wave of hatred in France and western societies.

President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi calls for religious revolution

Speaking to an audience of religious scholars celebrating the birth of Islam's Prophet Mohammed at Al-Azhar University in Cairo that is widely regarded as the leading world centre for Islamic learning, President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi called for a "religious revolution in Islam" and for "enlightenment" in the interpretation of religious texts in a bid to counteract growing extremism.

Somalia ...

Prime Minister withdraws list of cabinet members

Somalia's Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke who was elected in December 2014 has withdrawn the list of cabinet members he recently submitted, asking for another 14 days to submit a new list. He withdrew his list of 60 appointees just hours before a confidence vote in the country's top lawmaking body.

Parliament in Jubaland

The autonomous government of Jubaland announced on 18 January 2015 that it would be setting up the first Parliament on 20 January 2015. Members of Parliament are nominated by clan elders.

Jubaland is located in the south-west of Somalia along the border with Kenya. It comprises the regions of Gedo, Lower Juba and Middle Juba. Its largest city is Kismayo, which is situated on the coast near the mouth of the Jubba River. Jubaland perceives itself to be an autonomous state of Somalia. Warlord Ahmed Mohamed Islam "Madobe" is the "President" of Jubaland, he was elected by a constituent assembly in May 2013. In August 2013, the autonomous government signed a national reconciliation agreement with the Somali government in Mogadishu that had been brokered with Ethiopia. It makes provision for Madobe to lead an interim government for a period of two years.

Protests against Charlie Hebdo

Protests against Charlie Hebdo's satirical magazine have seen thousands of schoolgoers and students take to the streets of Mogadishu on 17 January 2015— with students chanting 'Je Suis Muslim – and I love my Prophet'. The protests were fuelled by the front cover of the first edition of the magazine to be published since the Paris attack.

Shortage of food

According to a statement issued by members of government on 15 January 2014, at least six children have died of starvation in Wajid district in the region of Bakool in the south west in the past few days. The District Commissioner has apparently asked the government in Mogadishu for help. The district has been badly hit by drought which has affected the area since mid-2014.

Nigeria ...

Suicide attacks in Potiskum und Gombe

A suicide bomber blew himself up at around 10.00 am on 18 January 2015 at Bulala bus station on the outskirts of Potiskum (north-eastern Yobe State). At least four persons were killed and more than 40 were wounded. This was preceded by another suicide attack at Arawa market in the city of Gombe (capital of Gombe State in the north-east) at around 7.30 pm on 16 January 2015. Six people were killed and ten were wounded in this attack.

Boko-Haram attack wreaks havoc on Baga and surrounding area

The human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) published high-resolution satellite images of the city of Baga on Lake Chad and of the surrounding areas showing the area before and after the Boko Haram attacks between 3 January 2015 and 7 January 2015. According to Amnesty International, the images show that around 620 buildings and 3,700 structures were either damaged by fire or completely destroyed in Baga and in the town of Doron Baga 2.5 kilometres away. Amnesty said interviews with eyewitnesses, local government officials, and local human rights activists suggest that Boko Haram militants deliberately shot hundreds of civilians. Nigeria's Director of Defence and Information announced on 12 January 2015 that the number of people killed in Baga including Boko Haram fighters had so far not exceeded 150. Amnesty says the attacks on Baga and the surrounding villages mark the largest and most devastating attack Boko Haram has carried out to date.

Boko Haram attack on Biu repelled

During the morning of 14 January 2015, Boko Haram insurgents in ten pick-up vehicles raided the town of Biu (which is around 200 km south-west of Borno's capital Maiduguri) in an unsuccessful attempt to conquer the military base. According to military sources, 78 terrorists were killed in two hours' fighting that ensued, including several Chadian nationals.

Cameroon ...

Villagers abducted by Boko Haram

Boko Haram insurgents attacked the villages of Mabass and Makxy (Mayo-Tsanaga district, Far North Region) which are located along the border with Nigeria. In the early hours of the morning of 18 January 2015. They abducted around 80 villagers including a large number of children. Three villagers were killed.

Boko Haram attack on Kolofata military base

According to government sources, Boko Haram insurgents attacked Kolofata military base (Mayo-Sava district, Far North Region) close to the Nigerian border during the morning hours of 13 January 2015. After fighting lasting five hours, the insurgents were repelled by heavy artillery. 143 of the attackers and one soldier were killed.

Cameroon/Chad ...

Chadian forces deploy to Cameroon against Boko Haram

An initial convoy of Chadian tanks and armoured vehicles arrived in the Far North Region of Cameroon on 17 January 2015 to help fight the Nigerian insurgent group Boko Haram. They are to help fight the Boko Haram insurgents. In total, around 2,000 Chadian troops are to be deployed.

Democratic Republic of Congo ...

Police officers in Kinshasa used tear gas to prevent several hundred anti-government protestors from entering Parliament on 12 January 2015. According to the President of Congo's third-largest opposition party,

UNC, Vital Kamhere, around 100 supporters of the opposition were arrested and several received gunshot wounds. The police indicated that seven police officers were wounded in the clashes. The rally convened by the opposition-led popular movement "Sauvons le Congo" was aimed against the bill to amend the law that may delay elections due in 2016 which is due to have its first reading in Parliament on 12 January 2015. This bill requires a census to be conducted before the presidential and parliamentary elections due in 2016 can be held. Members of the opposition fear that the polls could be delayed by years and allow President Joseph Kabila, who is not longer permitted to stand according to the 2016 constitution, to put off standing down. Police officers used tear gas to disperse a similar rally by the opposition in the vicinity of Boulevard Triomphal in Kinhasa on 11 January 2015.

Ultimatum runs out for FDLR rebels

On 8 January 2015, the UN Security Council approved joint military operations by Democratic Republic of Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to "neutralize" the rebel group FDLR ("Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda"). The FDLR allowed a six-month ultimatum imposed by African countries in the region for the unconditional surrender of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) to pass on 2 January 2015. Only 337 of its estimated 1,300 to 1,500 rebels handed themselves over.

Senegal

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Gambian leader of the opposition extradited

The Gambian leader of the opposition, Junkung Bayo left Senegal for France on 14 January 2015. The Supreme Court in Dakar had ruled that he was to be extradited within three days on 13 January 2015. Bayo is accused of being involved in the attempted coup against President Yahya Jammeh in Gambia on 30 December 2014. Junkung Bayo who was born in France was living in exile in Senegal where he was arrested on 1 January 2015.

Tanzania

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Hundreds of schoolgirls return after escaping genital mutilation

Around 800 Tanzanian schoolgirls have returned home after spending three months hiding in shelters run by charities and church organisations that offer protection during the months in which female genital mutilation (FGM) is traditionally carried out. Some of the shelters were given police protection to ensure the girls remained safe. Since FGM is traditionally carried out from October to December, the schoolgirls have meanwhile returned home to their families.

FGM was outlawed in Tanzania in 1998 and carries a punishment of up to 15 years in prison, but is still regularly carried out, especially in northern and central regions of the east African nation..

Côte d'Ivoire

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Trial against the wife of former President Simone Gbagbo begins

Simone Gbagbo, wife of former President of Côte d'Ivoire Laurent Gbagbo will stand trial before a court in Abidjan on charges of fomenting post-election violence between 2010 and 2011. The violence was triggered by the then President Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to recognize that the election had been won by his opponent Alassane Ouattara, Côte d'Ivoire's current president. Fighting broke out between supporters of the opposing camps and more than 3,000 people were killed. This is the first time a high-ranking member of the old regime has been summoned to appear before court in connection with the violence. The 65-year-old stands trial along with 82 other defendants. Her husband awaits trial before the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague has issued an arrest warrant for Simone Gbagbo, accusing her of crimes against humanity. The Ivorian authorities have refused to extradite her on the grounds that they want to try her at home.

Simone Gbagbo has always had major influence on her husband's actions. While in exile the couple founded the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) in 1982. Simone Gbagbo has been arrested numerous times. She entered

parliament in 1995; five years later her husband and the FPI became President. . She became president of the FPI parliamentary group and a vice president of the FPI. Simone Gbagbo has also been charged with misuse of power: she is said to have made the security forces serve her own political ends. Her name was repeatedly mentioned in connection with death squads that targeted supporters of Alassane Ouattara.

Critics speak of a political trial

The trial is controversial. Even though human rights organisations think supporters from Ouattara's camp are to blame for the escalation, only two out of those detained in connection with the unrest belong to the President's camp. The political divide is also mirrored in the attitude of the population. Whereas some people consider the detainees to be political prisoners and demand their release, others see a criminal trial as the prerequisite for reconciliation in the divided camps. Some of the accused have been in pre-detention custody for around three years.

West Africa/Ebola

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Situation report on Ebola virus disease (EVD)

Mali's health minister officially declared the end of the Ebola epidemic on 18 January 2015. The UN representative responsible for fighting EVD has confirmed the end of the epidemic. Mali recorded seven deaths from Ebola. According to World Health Organization data, the number of new cases in neighbouring Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea has dropped significantly. WHO spokesperson, Tarik Jasarevic, spoke of an "initial optimistic sign".

The World Bank has meanwhile warned of the far-reaching socio-economic effects of EVD such as loss of jobs and food unsafety in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Whereas 50 percent of breadwinners in Liberia continue to be unemployed and the harvest has been less abundant owing to the ban on labour, many households in Sierra Leone have been affected by unemployment although there is no evidence at present that this will have any negative impact on the harvest.

Kosovo

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Growing concern as emigration soars

EU and Kosovar politicians are becoming increasingly concerned about the recent wave of emigration. In 2014, around 20,000 Kosovar nationals left Kosovo (above all Roma and Ashkali), mostly travelling through Hungary to destinations in western Europe. Kosovo's President said this is a "national, social and economic tragedy". It is feared this will also have a negative impact on the visa liberalisation process. Kosovo is the only country in the Western Balkans whose citizens are still asked to acquire a visa to enter the Schengen zone. In this respect, the EU called on Kosovo authorities to engage strongly in tackling involvement of organised and criminal trafficking groups that seek to profit from the desperation in address the causes of migration (poverty, unemployment, lack of prospects). They have also called for a strategy on sustainable reintegration.

Albania

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Labour migrants return/number of asylum seekers rises

Since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2009, 133,000 labour migrants have returned to Albania from Greece and Italy, according to information provided by the National Institute of Statistics, INSTAT. They face considerable hardship. A mere 8 percent have managed to start a small business of their own, over 50 percent are hoping to go abroad again. In parallel, the number of asylum seekers has risen in Europe. Whereas France, Sweden and Belgium have been the main destination countries for labour migrants from Albania up to now, the number of Albanian asylum seekers in Germany has also been rising steadily since the autumn of 2013. Rumours that Albanian nationals may be eligible for asylum in Germany has fuelled the wave of emigration.

Ukraine

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Mass military call-up

The Ukrainian Parliament resolved on 15 January 2015, following a decree issued by the President on 14 January 2015, to replace troops who have been serving longer than their term of service against pro-Russian separatists and bring in veterans from the reserve. Around 50,000 young persons or persons who have undergone special military training are to be conscripted from 20 January 2015 onwards. There are plans to call up around 50,000 troops from April and June 2015 in two further rounds of conscriptions.

The move to rearm troops contravenes the ongoing international peace talks for eastern Ukraine.

Situation in the East

The ceasefire agreed on 9 December 2014 between Ukraine and pro-Russian rebels is becoming more and more shaky. According to media reports, the heaviest clashes in a long time erupted on the weekend of 17/18 January 2015. The battle for Donetsk airport rages on. Many people have reportedly been prevented from leaving the cities of Luhansk and Donetsk without food. Access to medical care has also been affected as many hospitals have neither electricity nor water.

Myanmar

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Clashes between rebels and army troops

Rebels belonging to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) abducted the Transport Minister of Kachin State and three police escorts in Hpakant district, Kachin State, on 14 January 2015. This led to the outbreak of clashes between rebels and army troops on 15 January 2015 leading to the displacement of up to 2,000 people. The Minister has since been released.

The KIA is one of two ethnic rebel organisations which have not yet agreed to a bilateral ceasefire with Myanmar's government. The latter is planning to sign a comprehensive ceasefire agreement with more than a dozen rebel organisations on 12 February 2015.

Sri Lanka

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Difficult balance of power

Around seven days after his surprising victory in the presidential elections, President Maithripala Sirisena has announced initial changes. The 61-year-old will introduce major constitutional amendments within 100 days which many critics say place too much power in the hands of the President. In particular his predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksa had been accused of nepotism, running the government like a family business and of using constitutional amendments to expand his powers. However, given that Sirisena does not hold the required two-thirds majority in Parliament, he announced that the parliamentary elections will be brought forward - probably to April 2015. It is not certain that the elections will manage to overcome the deep-rooted differences between the parties. At the same time, Sirisena urged journalists and dissidents to return to Sri Lanka, announcing that he will abolish the censorship of anti-government websites, the monitoring of critical journalists and politicians and will put an end to wiretapping.

New policy vis-à-vis the Tamils?

Experts are sceptical about the question whether Sirisena's election victory will lead to a new course of action being adopted vis-à-vis the Tamil minority. The International Crisis Group has pointed out that important issues affecting the Tamil minority did not feature in the election campaign. Notwithstanding this, Sirisena was supported above all by the largest Tamil party, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). The Tamil votes ultimately swayed the balance in his favour at the elections. Some observers therefore say that Sirisena's victory in the elections may pave the way for a reconciliation between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. By contrast, critics argue that it will be difficult to overcome all the religious, ethnic and political difference that divide them. Dealing with the war crimes committed during the civil war that lasted almost 30 years would be an initial step in the right direction, they say. This is one issue Mahinda Rajapaksa refused point blank to

address. A large-scale military offensive against the Tamil rebel organisation Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009 under his presidency defeated them and restored state control in the areas held by the separatists. 40,000 civilians were reportedly killed in the fighting in the last few months of the war.

New President accuses his predecessor of attempted coup

The accusation which Maithripala Sirisena levelled at Mahinda Rajapaksa that he had urged the army to intervene when he realised his chances of winning the election were running out fast caused quite a stir. A government spokesperson said the first step would be to investigate the "coup and the conspiracy". The former President only conceded his defeat when the Commander of the Army, Daya Ratnayake, and the Inspector General of the Police, N. K. Illangakoon, had refused to stop the counting of votes and to announce Rajapaksa as the winner. Rajapaksa denies the allegation.