

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

16 September 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 10.09.13, a bomb attack on a bus near Larmi town (Maqur district, eastern Ghazni Province) killed 7 civilians and injured another 17. On 11.09.13, several incidents in southern Helmand province claimed the lives of 18 insurgents and four civilians.

Taliban militants attack U.S. consulate in Herat

In an attack on the U.S. consulate in Herat, several people including the attacker were killed on 13.09.13.

Member of Parliament demands execution of Christian converts

Christian news agencies cite a member of the Afghan parliament demanding that all those should be executed who have converted from Islam to Christianity. Apparently, Afghani news services have reported an increase in the number of Christians in the country and that numerous Afghans have become Christians abroad, particularly in India.

Women comprise 95 percent of suicides

The Afghan health ministry said that more than 2,500 women committed suicide last year, with most of the victims aged between 16 and 19. Violence and forced marriages are the main reasons for these high rates.

Pakistan

Taliban insurgent to be released from prison

To support the peace process in Afghanistan, the Pakistani government has decided to release Afghan Taliban insurgent Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar from custody. He has been described as number two to Afghanistan's supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. After his arrest in Karachi in August 2010, Baradar has been held in prison. He might be released already this month, but will probably remain in Pakistan. Last month, Afghan President Karzai had urged the Pakistani government to support his country in the negotiations with the Taliban, demanding the release of all Afghan Taliban insurgents from Pakistani prisons. So far, the Taliban have rejected negotiations with the Afghan government, considering Karzai to be a U.S. ally. Observers doubt that the release of insurgents will contribute to a change of this attitude.

Senior military officer killed

On 15.09.13, a roadside bomb attack killed high-ranking commander Major General Sanauulla Khan and two military officers in Swat district close to the Afghan border.

Iraq

Attacks

On 10.09.13, four men and two women were killed in Yussufiyah, south of Baghdad, while washing a corpse ahead of a funeral according to Sunni Muslim rites. On the same day, three car bomb attacks near Baquba claimed the lives of 8 people.

On 11.09.13, a suicide attack on a Shia mosque in Baghdad killed at least 30 people and injured another 55. Other attacks killed a total of 7 people in several provinces including Nineveh and in Basra.

An attack on a mosque on 13.09.13 in Baquba claimed the lives of at least 30 people participating in a joint Shia-Sunni Friday prayer. According to press reports, such joint prayers are occasionally organised by activists and politicians to counteract violence between the two groups. Also on 13.09.13, Sunni cleric Shauki al-Duleimi was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Baquba. In Mosul, several armed men killed a family of six in their house.

A suicide attack on a funeral in Baashiqah near Mosul killed at least 26 people and wounded another 50 on 14.09.13

On 15.09.13, a series of bomb attacks killed at least 46 people in areas mainly inhabited by Shia Muslims, including Basra, Hilla and Kerbala.

Syria

U.S. and Russia agree on plan on destruction of Syrian chemical weapons/plans for UN Resolution

On 14.09.13, agreement was reached between the U.S. and Russia in Geneva that the Syrian regime shall open its arms depots and submit a full list of its inventory of chemical weapons. By mid-2014, all Syrian chemical weapons shall be destroyed. Inspectors of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) based in The Hague are scheduled to start their controls and the preparation of the arms shipment for destruction outside of Syria no later than mid-November. If the OPCW experts establish that Damascus fails to comply with the plan, the U.S.-Russian framework agreement provides for a 'response in accordance with UN Charter Chapter 7'. The chapter provides for military action as defined by international law. In a meeting on 16.09.13, the foreign ministers of the UK, France and the United States will prepare a draft for a new UN Security Council Resolution on Syria, which then could be put to vote before the end of the week. The Syrian government supports the U.S.-Russian agreement.

Ahmad Tumeh elected as Syrian opposition interim prime minister

On 14.09.13, the representatives of the Syrian National reported that the Syrian opposition coalition, in a meeting in Istanbul, have elected moderate Islamist Ahmad Tumeh as the new provisional prime minister. He replaces Ghassan Hitto, who had resigned in July without managing to form an opposition cabinet from among the fractious group.

Iran

House arrest of Mousavi and Karroubi to end soon/demand of release of all political prisoners

After more than two-and-a half-years, the house arrest of the two Iranian opposition leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi is to end soon, as was posted on several opposition websites on 12.09.13. They had been placed under house arrest in 2011 for inciting street protests. Karroubi's son, Mohammad Taghi, said that Iran's supreme revolutionary leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei has referred the cases to the national security council for a decision on the release from house arrest.

President Rouhani has appointed Ali Shamkhani as the new secretary of the supreme national security council. Shamkhani had served as minister of defence during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005).

Turkey

Protests

In the evening of 10.09.13, the death of a 22 year-old protester in a rally against the Turkish government in the city of Antakya provoked protests in many cities, with some lasting the whole night. Turkish media report about protest marches in numerous cities including Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Antakya. In some places, violent clashes erupted between young protesters and police officers who occasionally resorted to harsh measures. In Istanbul alone, more than 40 people were arrested, news agencies reported. The Turkish government rejected the accusation that the police was responsible for the death of the protester, stating that

he fell from the roof of a building. Video footage has emerged apparently showing that he died without the intervention of the security forces. Citing eyewitnesses, Turkish media had reported that the young man had been hit on his head by a teargas cartridge during the rally and later died of the injuries. Also in the following days, protest marches and clashes with the police lead to several arrests in various Turkish cities.

PKK stops withdrawal process

On 09.09.13, the banned Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) halted the agreed withdrawal of their militants from Turkish soil to northern Iraq. They are accusing the Turkish government of not implementing the reforms announced to strengthen the rights of ethnic Kurds. At the same time, PKK leaders gave the assurance to maintain the ceasefire proclaimed in March 2013. Prime Minister Erdoğan in turn accused the PKK of having broken the agreement on the withdrawal from Turkey, since so far, only 20 percent of the rebels left the Turkish territory, most of them women and children.

Disputed anti-alcohol law in force

On 09.09.13, a very controversial anti-alcohol law entered in force, banning the sale of alcohol after 10pm and in 100m vicinity of schools and mosques. Besides, alcoholic drinks offered for sale in retail shops must be hidden from view; drinking alcohol in parks and in public is also prohibited. Additionally, the Turkish government has drastically restricted advertising of alcoholic drinks and ordered the provision of warning signs. The new law was met with strong criticism, mainly by Turkish citizens accusing Prime Minister Erdoğan of trying to islamize the society. The disputed law had also been an issue during the protest marches after the forced eviction of a protest camp in Gezi-Park.

Egypt

Extension of state of emergency

On 12.09.13, the transitional government extended the state of emergency for another two month, justifying this measure with the persistent critical security situation.

Protests against ousting of Morsi

After several weeks of relative peace due to the harsh measures of the security forces, Muslim Brotherhood supporters held country-wide protest rallies on 13.09.13 against the ousting of President Morsi. In Alexandria, one person died and several were injured in the clashes between Morsi supporters and opponents.

Violence on Sinai

The Egyptian army is continuing its offensive against Islamist insurgents. On 13.09.13, a major military campaign was launched against rebel positions near the cities of Sheikh Suwaid and el-Arish. On 14.09.13, two suicide attacks on a local headquarter of the security forces and a checkpoint killed at least 6 people.

Libya

Bomb attack in Benghazi

In the morning of 11.09.13, unidentified attackers detonated a car bomb near the foreign ministry branch in Benghazi. The building and the adjacent central bank were badly damaged. Local media reported that two guards were injured and had to be brought to hospital. Passengers were hit by smashed glass fragments. Exactly one year ago, U.S. ambassador Chris Stevens and three of his staff members had lost their lives when the US consulate in Benghazi was torched by Islamist extremists.

Algeria

Cabinet reshuffle

Ahead of the presidential elections scheduled for April 2014, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika made a major cabinet reshuffle on 11.09.13, affecting important positions in the government led by Abdelmalek Sellal, the state news agency APS reported. Tayeb Belaiz, head of the constitutional council, was appointed interior minister. General Ahmed Gaid Salah was named deputy defence minister while retaining his post as army chief. Diplomat Ramtane Lamamra was appointed the new foreign minister, and former labour minister Tayeb Louh was tasked with heading the justice ministry. This was the first major action of President Bouteflika after he had suffered a stroke in April 2013.

Russian Federation

Security situation in North Caucasus

According to information released by the Russian online newspaper 'Caucasian Knot', the armed conflict in the North Caucasus region claimed a total of 76 victims in August 2013, with 42 people dead and 34 injured. Again, by far the highest number of victims (31 dead and 30 injured) was recorded in Dagestan. This fact shows once more that the fighting in the region has been concentrating in Dagestan. In Chechnya, two people died and four were injured. Seven people lost their lives in Kabardino-Balkaria and two in Ingushetia. No victims were recorded in Stavropol Territory, in Northern Ossetia and in Karachay-Cherkessia. In July 2013, the North Caucasus region had recorded 46 dead and 19 injured.

Opposition candidate wins mayoral elections in Yekaterinburg

On 08.09.13, mayoral elections in Russia's fourth-largest city Yekaterinburg (Ural region) ended with a surprising victory of opposition candidate Yevgeny Roizman who gained 33.3 percent of the votes, defeating the Kremlin's candidate. Yakov Silin, who was backed by the government party, received only 29.1 percent. Roizman won with a simple majority already in the first round of voting. This is the first large Russian city where an opposition candidate has defeated the Kremlin-backed candidate.

Kenya

Trial against deputy president Ruto opened at the ICC

On 10.09.13, the International Criminal Court (ICC) started the trial against Kenya's deputy president William Ruto. This is the first ICC trial against a ruling high ranking politician (see BN of 09.09.13). Together with the deputy president, journalist Joshua Arap Sang is charged as co-defendant. Since Mr Ruto has declared his readiness to cooperate with the Court, he remains at large. Meanwhile, several witnesses for the prosecution have withdrawn from the procedure. Already before the opening of the trial, some witnesses had stepped back or had lost their lives. Observers do not exclude that this will affect the progress of the trial.

Somalia

Donor Conference started in Brussels

On 16.09.13, a one-day conference dealing with the support of Somalia's reconstruction is held in Brussels at the invitation of the European Union, with delegations participating from 50 countries. The EU is hoping to receive commitments of more than 1 billion euro, and is envisaging to provide a further 124 million euro to support the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In a press statement, Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission said that Somalia, as we can see it today, shows what progress can be made when a country and its partners cooperate with determination to overcome the suffering of a civil war and abject poverty. Supported by the European Union, AMISOM and the Somali army succeeded in creating security and political room for manoeuvre and in launching a process of national reconciliation, she added.

Fatwa against al-Shabaab

On 11.09.13, a total of 160 Somali Muslim scholars issued a fatwa against al-Shabaab, calling the organisation a group gone astray and damaging the reputation of Islam. The fatwa prohibits all Muslims to

join the militia, to sympathize with it or to support it by any means. According to the fatwa, it is a religious duty to refuse shelter to al-Shabaab members who must be handed over to the Somali security institutions.

Foreign jihadists shot dead

On 11.09.13, al-Shabaab fighters allegedly shot dead two prominent foreign jihadists who had dissociated themselves from the militia two months ago and had been hiding since. Apparently, the two victims are US-born militant Abu Mansur al Amriki, coming from an Irish/Syrian family, and Osama al Britani, British citizen with Pakistani roots. Another foreign jihadist of Egyptian origin allegedly surrendered.

Observers consider the killing of the former militia fighters an expression of the lengthy dispute on the militia's future direction, with AMISOM gaining ground on the Islamists in the military field.

Central African Republic

Clashes between Séléka members and adherents Bozizé

Clashes between fighters of the Séléka rebel alliance and supporters of former President Francois Bozizé, who had been ousted in March 2013, have claimed almost a hundred lives in the area around the cities of Bossanga and Bouca two weekends ago, a spokesperson of President Michel Djotodia stated in a radio message. He went on that more than 30,000 people had fled into the surrounding bush and that Bozizé's supporters reconquered several villages in the region.

On 13.09.13, President Djotodia dissolved the Séléka alliance in a surprise move. After the ousting of Bozizé, the fighters of the alliance have repeatedly been accused of being involved looting and violence against the population.

Background

Bozizé comes from the region of intense fighting in the Northwest of the CAR, where more than 148 people died in the month of August alone, the UN stated. 4,100 have fled to neighbouring Chad and 17,000 have been internally displaced. However, the recent fighting is said to be the first major military operation of Bozizé's supporters since his ousting. It remains unclear, if really all of the fighters are organized supporters of the former President. After his ousting, most of the country's infrastructure has fallen apart. For this reason, the Séléka alliance, supported predominantly by Muslims including fighters from neighbouring countries, is very unpopular in large parts of the population. While observers do not consider the Séléka group to be obliged to political Islam, concern has risen that the tensions in the country might escalate to a conflict between Muslims and the Christian majority. This may also be a threat to the neighbouring countries Cameroon and Chad, observers say.

In a report published by the UN on 12.09.13, the Séléka group and the troops fighting for ousted President Bozizé are accused of grave human rights violations before the takeover of power in March.

India

Rapists sentenced to death

In the trial for rape resulting in the death of a 23 year old female student in December 2012, four defendants were sentenced to death. The decision of the court is not yet final, as the defence lawyers intend to lodge an appeal. Already in August, another defendant who had been under age at the time of the crime was sentenced to three years in a juvenile detention facility; a sixth co-defendant had been found hanged in his prison cell. The rape had sparked protests all over India, with people demonstrating, organising vigils and silent protests for several weeks. The government's response to the crime was to tighten the laws on sexual crimes. Now, death penalty can be imposed if the court considers life imprisonment not harsh enough in view of circumstances and cruelty of the crime. Besides, fast-track courts have been introduced to allow prompt condemnation of rapists.

Approx. 130 death sentences are imposed annually in India, but only few are carried out. The first executions since 2004 were carried out in November 2012 and in February 2013; the defendants were two Muslim terrorists.

China

Death penalty against Uyghurs

On 13.09.13, state media reported that a court in the city of Turpan (Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang) condemned three Uyghurs to death and another one to 25 years imprisonment on 12.09.13. The men were accused of plotting a ‘terror attack’ in the city’s remote Lukqun township on 26.06.13 (see BN of 01.07.13).

Guangzhou to empty labour camps by the end of the year

According to a report of Chinese newspaper *People’s Daily* dated 09.09.13, the city of Guangzhou (capital of Guangdong province) intends to empty its labour camps by the end of the year, when the remaining approx. 100 prisoners will have served their sentences. The city authorities have not sent any new prisoners to the labour camp since March 2013.

Background

Police can order administrative detention in labour camps for up to 4 years without trial. Recently, speculations have been circulating that China’s leadership wants to reform or even abandon its disputed system of labour camps (‘re-education through labour’, Chinese: *laojiao*). However, no corresponding official decision has yet been published. Apparently, some local authorities have started to act autonomously, e.g. in Yunnan province, where officials announced not to impose imprisonment in labour camps any longer.

Internet censorship

On 09.09.13, the supreme peoples’ court and the state prosecutor published a joint statement defining the situations in which dissemination of rumours and defamatory statements on the internet are to be considered a punishable criminal offence. According to the official interpretation of the criminal law provisions which entered into force on 10.09.13, a prison sentence of up to three years is the punishment for internet dissemination of rumours and defamatory statements that ‘endanger social order and national interests’ and are read by at least 5,000 users or re-distributed at least 500 times.

Since August 2013, the Chinese authorities have been running a campaign against ‘online rumours’, with measures including the temporary detention of hundreds of internet users and the closure of more than 100 news websites operated by lay journalists.