

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

19 May 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

Two children were killed and two people injured when a booby trap exploded in the eastern Afghan province of Kunar.

Second ballot on 16.06.14

According to the official final result of the presidential elections, the candidate Abdullah Abdullah won 45 % of the votes and Aschraf Ghani 31.6 %. As no candidate attained an absolute majority, a second ballot is necessary.

Pakistan

Attacks

Two policemen and five civilians were injured in a bomb attack in Bannu, north-west Pakistan, on 16.04.14. An attack outside a restaurant in Rawalpindi on the same day injured 16 people. Several private schools at which English is taught in the district of Panjgur in the province of Balochistan, southern Afghanistan, have been closed since 07.05.14. The closures are in response to threats by a hitherto unknown group by the name of Tanzeem ul Islami ul Furqan, which claims that learning English and coeducational schooling are sins.

Ahmadi murdered after accusation of blasphemy

A member of the Ahmadiyya religious community suspected of blasphemy was shot dead in the province of Punjab on 16.05.14. According to an official spokesperson, after the accused had been arrested a man in uniform turned up at the police station and shot the man.

Iraq

Security situation

Attacks continue to take place on a daily basis in Iraq. According to Iraq Body Count, 558 civilians have been killed in May to date (as at 18.05.14). The AFP news agency puts the death toll in May to date (as at 17.05.14) at 490, including 27 police officers, 72 soldiers, nine members of the Sahwa and 180 extremists.

Series of attacks in Baghdad

At least 29 people were killed in a series of attacks in Baghdad on 13.05.14. The attacks occurred in districts with predominantly Shiite populations.

At least 20 people died on 15.05.14. The targets included a car park in the Karrada district which is situated close to administrative buildings, court buildings, a hospital and a market.

Syria

Air force chief killed

A representative of the security forces stated on 18.05.14 that the head of the Syrian air force, General Hussein Isaac, had been killed in fighting for the strategically important city of Mleiha. The air force headquarters are located in Mleiha. The military is currently attempting to recapture the city, which has been besieged by the rebels for a year now. The head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights described Isaac's death as an "important psychological blow" for the Syrian leadership.

Syria contact group meets in London

Representatives of a number of western and Arab states and the Syrian opposition met for talks in London on 15.05.14. Items on the agenda included further support for the opposition, aid deliveries to the victims of the civil war and increasing the pressure on the leadership in Damascus. The representatives of the contact group denounced the presidential election planned for 03.06.14 as a "farce" and an "insult to the people".

Election campaign

The election campaign began on 18.05.14. The best-known candidate running against president Assad is Hassan al-Nuri, a former minister of state and businessman.

Syria special envoy Brahimi steps down

After just under two years in the post, Lakhdar Brahimi, special envoy for Syria, announced that he would be stepping down as a negotiator for the United Nations and the Arab League on 31.05.14. Brahimi recently said that he saw hardly any further prospects for peace talks.

Security situation

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 43 people were killed in a car bomb attack near the Turkish border on 15.05.14. Several dozen people were injured. The attack took place at the Bab al-Salameh border crossing point in the province of Aleppo. The crossing point has been controlled by rebels for around two years now and is an important transit location for people and goods. Repeated clashes between the various rebel groups have occurred in the vicinity of the border crossing point in recent months. Many people are reported to have been killed in air raids in the north of the country.

Israel / Palestinian territories

Deaths at protests in the West Bank on the day of the Palestinian "Disaster"

Israeli border police shot dead two demonstrators at protests in the West Bank on the Palestinian memorial day "Al-Nqyba" (The Disaster). As on 15 May every year, the Palestinians once again held numerous demonstrations to commemorate the flight and expulsion of some 760,000 of their compatriots in the wake of the founding of the state of Israel in 1948.

Lebanon

Attempt to elect new president fails once again

On 15.05.14 parliamentarians failed for the fourth time in their attempt to elect a new president of Lebanon. The quorum of two thirds of the MPs was not attained because the Shiite, pro-Iranian Hezbollah block boycotted the session. Parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri called a new session for 22.05.14. Only a Maronite Christian can become president in Lebanon. The tenure of president Michel Suleiman ends on 25.05.14. If the Hezbollah block and the rival camps belonging to the Sunni Future Movement fail to agree on a candidate by then, a power vacuum will be on the horizon. This would be dangerous, as the situation is already extremely tense on account of the Syrian civil war. The Hezbollah militia is fighting on the side of president Bashar al-Assad's regime. The majority of Lebanese Sunnis sympathise with the opponents to the regime.

Yemen

Over 20 killed in fighting with Al Qaeda

According to information from the Yemeni army, ten soldiers and 13 Islamists have died in military clashes with combatants of the terrorist organisation "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" (AQAP). According to announcements by the military, the Islamists attacked two army posts in Azzan and Jul al-Rida in the south of the country on 14.05.14. The Yemeni air force bombed convoys of AQAP vehicles advancing towards Azzan. The army has been pursuing operations against the radical Islamist AQAP since the end of April.

Turkey

Protests after mining accident

In the wake of the mining disaster in Soma which claimed 301 lives, demonstrations took place in Soma, Istanbul and Ankara on 14.05.14. The police deployed tear gas and water canons against demonstrators throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails. Some of the protesters called for the government to step down. They hold the government responsible for the disaster because, according to opposition politicians, it declined only three weeks ago to appoint a commission to investigate the precarious safety situation at Turkish coal mines. At a press conference, prime minister Erdogan attempted to play down the disaster, commenting that industrial accidents happened all the time all over the world. He rejected accusations that the government was partly responsible for the disaster. The demonstrations continued on 15.05.14. Police used tear gas and water canon against some 20,000 protestors in Izmir, and there were also further clashes between demonstrators and security forces in Istanbul and Ankara. Several trade unions called for a general strike. The state prosecutor's office has since instituted criminal proceedings against three suspects belonging to the company which operates the mine. 25 suspects have been detained in all, including the mine's managing director and chief engineer. The operating company, Soma Holding, denied any responsibility for the disaster on 16.05.14.

Iran

Woman appointed governor

Esat Kamalzadeh Abbasi has been promoted to governor of the island of Gheshm, an important free trade zone in southern Iran. Four women have risen to the post of governor since president Hassan Rohani came to power in August 2013. After his election victory, Rohani had promised that women would take up leading positions during his tenure in office. Three of Rouhani's vice-presidents are women. A woman has yet to be appointed to his cabinet.

Blow against German-Iranian trafficking ring

The German state prosecutor and police recently took action against a German-Iranian trafficking ring. The gang concerned had advertised trips to Germany in Iranian newspapers with forged documents, such as visas or residents permits obtained by devious means. The investigators seized comprehensive evidence in raids on numerous homes in North Rhine-Westphalia and Frankfurt/Main, including numerous copies of ID documents, around € 10,000 in cash and a large number of data storage devices.

Egypt

Clashes in Cairo

Clashes between opponents and supporters of toppled president Morsi occurred in Cairo on 15.05.14, ahead of the presidential elections. The violence escalated on the fringes of a demonstration for Morsi. Four people were arrested.

Attack on election rally

Four people were injured, including two policemen, in a bomb attack on a campaign rally for Abdur Fattah al-Sisi on 17.05.14.

More convictions after mass protests

On 18.05.14 a court in the north Egyptian town of Kafr al-Scheich sentenced 126 participants in a demonstration in August 2013 to prison terms of ten years each. They were charged with taking part in acts of violence and membership of a terrorist organisation.

In Cairo, 37 people each received prison terms of 15 years for attempting to set off bombs at an underground railway station.

Libya

Attack on parliament claims lives

Militia men of former general Chalifa Haftar stormed the parliamentary building in Tripoli on the evening of 18.05.14, engaging security forces in a gun battle. At least two people were killed and more than 55 injured. The MPs are reported to have been brought to safety. A colonel who claimed to be speaking on behalf of Haftar's militia group, the Zintan Brigade, said that MPs and the Libyan parliamentary speaker also belonged to the Islamists, who must be fought. Haftar's fighters had launched an offensive against Islamist groups in the city of Bengasi in eastern Libya on 16.05.14, killing at least 80 people and injuring over 140, according to the Libyan health ministry. The interim government accused Haftar of planning a putsch and imposed a no-fly zone over Bengasi in order to curb the fighting. Haftar denied that he was planning a putsch, stating that his only intention was to provide for security in Bengasi and to rid the city of Islamists. The attack on the parliament building was not the first; last year, armed attackers stormed the building several times, kidnapping politicians to assert demands or to hamper the work of parliament.

Morocco

Large-scale attempts overcome border fence around Melilla

Under cover of rain and fog, around 500 people from countries south of the Sahara attempted to enter Melilla over the border fence on 17.05.14. They were intercepted by the Spanish Guardia Civil and the Moroccan authorities. A second attempt some three kilometres away was thwarted by the Moroccan police. The third attempt by some 200 people to storm the fence was stopped by the Moroccan authorities. Around ten people managed to overcome the three fences around Mellila and reach Spanish territory on 14.05.14.

Airport opened

On 16.05.14, King Mohammed VI of Morocco opened an airport in Beni-Mellal (around 200 km south-east of Casablanca). It has been built primarily for the large community of Moroccans from the Tadla-Azilal region who live in Italy. Royal Air Maroc will begin offering flights between Beni-Mellal and various Italian towns and cities this summer. Morocco is pursuing a programme to expand and modernise its airports between 2014 and 2016 with the ultimate aim of achieving an annual passenger volume of 36 million.

Algeria

Cabinet sworn in

The new cabinet was sworn in in Algiers on 09.05.14. New appointments have been made to almost half of the 34 ministries, while the key ministries have remained unchanged. The cabinet includes seven women. Most of the ministries are under the direction of technocrats; members of opposition parties have been appointed to three posts. On 15.05.14 president Bouteflika submitted 47 proposals for reforms to the parties. These are to be discussed and, following approval from the constitutional committee, put to a referendum. In addition to limitation of the presidential tenure to two periods of office, the prime minister is to receive broader powers, control of the media is to be relaxed and MPs are to be granted greater verification rights.

Cameroon

Boko Haram attacks Chinese factory

According to the governor, two people died in an attack by the Boko Haram organisation on a Chinese factory and ten people were abducted. 200 armed men reportedly attacked the town of Waza in the extreme north of the country at around two o'clock in the morning. The two people killed were a Chinese road construction worker and a soldier from Cameroon. It was announced in Chinese embassy circles in the capital, Yaoundé, that ten Chinese were missing and one person had been injured. The fatalities have not been corroborated.

Nigeria

Suicide attack claims lives in the city of Kano

Up to ten people may have died in a suicide attack in a busy district of the city of Kano in the north of the country on the evening of 18.05.14. The Channels TV station and the "Rhe Sun" newspaper in Lagos reported ten fatalities, while other sources put the death toll at at least five. There has yet to be any official information on the attack. It is commonly reported that a suicide bomber blew up his car loaded with explosives in a busy street in the district of Sabongari. The scene of the attack – a street with numerous bars and restaurants and a district with a predominantly Christian population – points to Boko Haram.

Action against Boko Haram

France and five African countries resolved to take concerted action against the Islamist organisation Boko Haram at a summit in Paris on 17.05.14. The group's activities have cost thousands of lives in recent years, above all in the Muslim north of the country.

Mali

Clashes in Kidal

According to information from the United Nations, two civilians and eight representatives of the authorities were killed by Tuareg rebels during a visit by prime minister Moussa Maras to the town of Kidal in the north-east of the country on 17.05.14. The representatives of the authorities were reportedly staff from the governor's office who had been taken hostage. According to the government, 36 people were killed, including eight soldiers, in heavy fighting between the Mali army and insurgent Tuareg in Kidal. The Tuareg group National Movement for the Liberation of Awawada (MNLA) had previously taken around 30 representatives of the authorities hostage in Kidal.

Uganda

New AIDS law

The parliament in Kampala passed a new AIDS law on 13.05.14. Under the new law, HIV-positive people who infect their spouse with the virus may be punishable with a fine of approx. 1,300 euros or a prison sentence of up to ten years. In addition, doctors are permitted to make their patients' HIV status public without their consent. Pregnant women and partners are required to undergo a test. Human rights activists were outraged by the new law. Activist and doctor Margret Mungherela described the law as "extremely harmful to the fight against AIDS". Human Rights Watch (HRW) also criticised the law sharply.

Central African Republic

New fear of attacks by the Séléka militia

The dispersed Séléka militia is reorganising itself in the Central African Republic; it aims to bring "order" to this country blighted by civil war. Many fear new offensives by a stronger rebel alliance. According to official information, Séléka rebels and fighters from the Peul ethnic group allegedly killed at least 13 people in the region of Kaga Bandoro on 17.05.14 by shutting them in a house and setting it on fire.

Journalist killed

The latest example illustrating the dangers faced by journalists is 26 year-old French woman Camille Lepage, who died at the weekend when she was caught in crossfire between Muslim rebels and Christian militia.

Somalia

Attack claims numerous lives

On 11.05.14 a suicide attack in Baidoa, capital of the Bay region, claimed the lives of at least 13 people and injured 25. The attacker blew up a vehicle loaded with explosives. Al-Shabaab is presumed to be behind the attack. The attack was probably aimed at the former governor of Bay, who remained uninjured, however.

Kenya launches air raid on Al Shabaab positions

Following an attack on a market in Nairobi on 16.05.14, Kenyan fighter aircraft bombed Islamist positions near to the town of Jilib in southern Somalia on 18.05.14. Al-Sabaab announced that it had repelled the attack. There are no reports of any fatalities or casualties.

UN military unit in Mogadishu

A 400-strong UN military unit comprising Ugandan soldiers took up duty on 18.05.14. It is charged with protecting United Nations facilities and staff. The unit is stationed at Mogadishu airport.

South Sudan

Postponement of elections under consideration

On 12.05.14 the South Sudanese government announced plans to postpone the presidential elections scheduled for 2015 and to stage them by no later than 2018. The stated aim was to push ahead with national reconciliation under an interim government comprising all political parties. Former vice-president stated that he sees no need for a postponement, if the peace plan agreed on 09.05.14 is implemented.

Ban calls for special tribunal for South Sudan

In view of a published report which accuses both sides of the conflict in South Sudan of crimes against humanity, UN Secretary-General Ban asked the Security Council on 12.05.14 to consider setting up a special tribunal.

Warning of famine

In the face of sustained fighting, the Oxfam relief organisation is warning of a humanitarian disaster, noting that heavy rainfall and flooded roads in some regions were hampering helpers in their work. The United Nations estimates that more than 1.2 million civilians are on the run and some 3.7 million people are starving.

Sudan

Christian woman condemned to death

A court in Khartoum has sentenced a heavily pregnant woman whose father was a Muslim to death by hanging for renouncing Islam. Her father left the family early on and her Christian mother raised her child in her faith. Under Islamic law, the children of a Muslim man are also Muslims. The court also handed down a punishment of a hundred whiplashes, because the convicted woman is married to a Christian and Muslim women are forbidden from marrying Christians.

The heavily pregnant woman is currently in prison with her child. In the past, the Sudanese government has deferred the execution of death sentences imposed on pregnant or breast-feeding mothers until the end of breast-feeding.

Kenya

Bomb attack in Nairobi

Explosions at the Gikomba market in Nairobi, including one in a minibus, claimed at least ten lives on 16.05.14. Dozens were injured. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack to date. As in the case of previous attacks, the Islamist Al Shabaab militia is the prime suspect. Great Britain, France and the USA had warned of the possibility of new terrorist attacks in Kenya a few days before.

Serbia/Bosnia and Herzegovina

Heavy flooding – state of emergency declared

In the face of sustained heavy rainfall and serious flooding in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the governments have declared a state of emergency for the affected regions. At least 44 people are assumed to have died in the floods (as per 18.05.14). A danger is also posed by the risk of epidemics and by mines which the floods have carried away from minefields dating from the 1990s. Both governments have asked for international assistance. Water levels are now falling.

In Serbia over 3,000 people were evacuated and more than 100,000 homes were without electricity. Numerous traffic routes have had to be closed.

In Bosnia, the most severely affected regions are the centre and the north-east (main focus: Zenica, Bijeljina, Tuzla, Sarajevo). Hundreds of houses have been flooded or cut off from the outside world. In Sarajevo around 3,500 were without electricity. Traffic was disrupted on various roads in the country.

Kosovo

German cabinet prepares the way for extension of KFOR mandate

A resolution by the German cabinet on 14.05.14 prepared the way for a one-year extension of the mandate for the German armed forces in Kosovo (KFOR). 689 soldiers are presently in operation as part of KFOR. The resolution has yet to be ratified by the Bundestag. Meanwhile, defence minister von der Leyen has visited the troops in Kosovo.

Ukraine

Round table without concrete results

The second round table again failed to yield any concrete results. After the talks in Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine on 17.05.14, interim prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk said that the leadership in Kiev was prepared to do everything possible for the unity of the Ukrainian state. He added that there should be further round tables in order to find a solution to the crisis. The mediation talks were held under the direction of the German diplomat Wolfgang Ischinger. He appealed to all Ukrainians to use "words instead of weapons". Observers spoke of a markedly improved atmosphere of dialogue in comparison to the last meeting in Kiev on 14.05.14. Ex-president Leonid Kravchuk said that the discussions were more open, as representatives of the opposition and the regions with a predominantly Russian population were involved. The talks were also attended by interior minister Arsen Avakov and another former president, Leonid Kuchma. The leaders of the armed separatists were not invited. Yatsenyuk stressed again that there would be no negotiations with "terrorists", by which he means the militant pro-Russian forces which have declared independent people's republics in the cities of Lugansk and Donetsk in the east of the country. At the same time, he spoke in favour of special protection for the Russian language and for a "decentralisation of power", involving the transfer of certain powers from the capital, Kiev, to the regions.

Election commission warns of possible failed election

One week before the planned presidential election in Ukraine on 25.05.14, the election commission has warned of the possibility of a failed election, citing massive problems in the east. Due to the fighting between government troops and separatists, preparations for the election were not even underway in around a dozen of the constituencies, it said. Ukrainian media reported that the election commission had called on interim president Oleksandr Turchynov to ensure that the regional election offices could go about their work and to guarantee citizens' rights to participate in the vote. The previous days had witnessed repeated raids on regional election commissions in which electoral registers and computers were stolen.

India

Clear victory for opposition party in Indian parliamentary election

The opposition party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP – "Indian People's Party") has won the parliamentary election in India by a clear margin. With 284 of the total of 543 seats, it secured an absolute majority in India's lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha. In alliance with the "National Democratic Alliance" (NDA) it even has as many as 339 MPs, as compared to 160 in the last parliament. The new prime minister will thus be Narendra Modi. Many of the 1.2 billion Indians are hoping that the new leadership will again bring more growth, development and new jobs. At 66 per cent, the turn-out was higher than ever before. The Gandhi family's Congress Party which has been in power to date, and which has been shaping the country for decades, suffered a historic defeat, losing more than 75 per cent of its seats.

Narendra Modi to become new prime minister

Modi, who comes from a humble background, joined the paramilitary Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS – Hindi for National Volunteers' Organisation) while still at school. After studying political sciences, he went on to assume a leading role in the RSS. Modi is a staunch advocate of Hindutva, according to which Muslims and members of other religious minorities can only claim a place in India if they submit to the culture and customs of the Hindus. At the beginning of the 1990s Modi joined the BJP, whose ideology is much in line with that of the RSS, and was appointed head of the Gujarat government in October 2001. The 63 year-old made a name for himself here as a business-friendly and incorruptible politician. He does have a reputation for being authoritarian, however. Modi is a somewhat controversial figure on account of his questionable role in the religious riots which took place in Gujarat in 2002, when over a thousand people, for the most part Muslims, were killed, Muslim houses and businesses were set on fire, mosques and gravestones were destroyed and thousands were driven out of their homes. Hindu fanatics stirred up hatred and the police stood on the sidelines. To this day, Modi has neither apologised for the pogrom nor expressed any regret in this connection.



China

Video of the Turkistan Islamic Party

In a video released on 11.05.14, the Islamist organisation Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) welcomes the attack on a railway station in Ürümqi on 30.04.14, in which three people were killed and 79 injured (cf. BN of 05.05.14). Contrary to an announcement by the SITE Intelligence Group, however, according to the report by Radio Free Asia on 15.05.14 TIP leader Abdulheq Damolla did not claim responsibility for the attack. He called for further attacks. Analysts doubt whether the TIP is capable of carrying out such attacks in China.

Vietnam/China

Violent anti-Chinese protests

Following China's installation on 01.05.14 of an oil drilling platform in an area of the South China Sea close to the Paracelsus Islands to which Vietnam lays claim, a series of violent anti-Chinese protests began on 13.05.14. Demonstrators looted and set fire to factories which they suspected of being Chinese-owned in the region surrounding Ho Chi Minh City and in the south of the country. In so doing, they unintentionally also inflicted damage on companies from Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea. At least two Chinese died and numerous people suffered injuries. Up to 1,000 people were arrested. On 18.05.14 the police prevented further protests in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. By the weekend, more than 3,000 Chinese had fled Vietnam to escape the violence. 16 seriously injured people were flown out on a special flight. On 19.05.14 two of a total of five Chinese ships on which further Chinese are to leave the country arrived in the Vietnamese port of Vung Ang.

China and other countries bordering on the South China Sea, including Vietnam, have been at loggerheads for some years now over sovereign rights to territories in this region, which is rich in resources.