

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

26 March 2018

Egypt

Presidential election begins

The presidential election began on 26 March 2018 amidst heightened security precautions. It will last until 28 March 2018. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is expected to win the election. Sisi's sole challenger in the election is Mostafa Moussa, the chairperson of the liberal Al-Ghad party, who is being widely dismissed as a dummy candidate. Several candidates were convicted of criminal offences during the election campaign or were detained, others withdrew.

Attack on security chief of Alexandria

The security chief of Alexandria Mostafa al-Nemr and his chauffeur were killed in the Egyptian city of Alexandria in a bomb attack on 24 March 2018 in which four police officers were also wounded. Al-Nemr survived the assassination attempt. The attack has not yet been claimed but the state news agency has pointed the finger at the organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood., adding that it intended to obstruct the presidential election. However, ISIS recently warned the Egyptians about the vote and exhorted the Islamists to attack the security forces and politicians.

Afghanistan

Armed conflicts

Armed conflicts, air strikes and drone attacks, raids by security forces as well as attacks and bombings by rebels, in which civilians are also being killed or wounded, continue unabated. The following provinces, amongst others, were affected last week: Kabul (central Afghanistan), Badakhshan (north-eastern Afghanistan), Herat, Farah, Badghis (western Afghanistan), Nangarhar, Kunar (eastern Afghanistan), Helmand, Uruzgan, Kandahar, Zabul (southern Afghanistan), Faryab, Sar-i-Pul, Jawzjan (northern Afghanistan), Paktika und Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan).

Suicide bombings and attacks

On 19 March 2018, four members of Hizb-i Islami were killed in a suicide bombing in Jalalabad (Nangarhar/eastern Afghanistan), eight persons were wounded. In the Baharak district of Badakhshan province (north-eastern Afghanistan), the Taliban beheaded a woman. The background is not known. In the southern district of Herat province (Western Afghanistan), a civilian was killed when a bomb mounted to a bicycle detonated at a bazar. Nine persons were wounded.

On 21 March 2018, at least 29 persons were killed and at least 52 were wounded in a suicide bombing near a Shia mosque in Kabul. The majority of casualties were passers-by who were on their way to the mosque. Security measures had been stepped up for the Nowruz New Year celebrations so that the suicide bomber was prevented from reaching the mosque. He detonated his explosive device prematurely in front of Aliabad hospital. This was another bombing in a series of ISIS attacks against the Shia.

On 22 March 2018, a sniper shot a high-ranking police officer in Faryab (northern Afghanistan). Two children were killed in a mortar grenade attack on their home in Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan); two persons were wounded in the attack.

On 24 March 2018, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a wrestling match in Lashkargah (capital of Helmand/southern Afghanistan), killing at least 16 persons and wounding at least 52. One person was killed and several persons were wounded in a bomb explosion at the "Pashtun Protection Movement" in Kabul.

On 25 March 2018, another suicide bombing was carried out against Shia Muslims in Herat City (western Afghanistan). Security forces stopped two ISIS suicide bombers, preventing them from entering a mosque. Three persons were killed in the attack, nine persons were wounded.

On 26 March 2018, unknown gunmen shot a police officer dead in Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan).

Attacks on journalists

According to press releases, 21 Afghan journalists have been killed and 57 have been wounded since March 2017.

Helmand province: schools being used as a base by security forces

According to the Education Director of Helmand, 20 schools have been occupied by security forces in various parts of the southern province which they have since been using as a base.

Iraq

Security situation

In the week between 15 and 21 March 2018, 67 security incidents were registered. The provinces hit the hardest were Baghdad, Salahaddin, Ninive, Kirkuk, Diyala and Anbar. There are signs of an ISIS resurgence above all in the provinces of Diyala and Salahaddin.

Indian hostages kidnapped by ISIS discovered

A mass grave containing the bodies of 39 persons was found in Ninive province. They are the bodies of Indian labour migrants who were kidnapped by ISIS in Iraq around four years ago.

Iran

Ex-Vice- President convicted

The Revolutionary Court convicted former Vice-President Hamid Baghaei (who served under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) to 15 years in prison and to a fine of 43 billion toman (the equivalent of around EUR 8 million) on charges of misuse of public funds while in office, corruption and embezzlement. Baghaei was taken to Evin prison in Tehran. According to media sources, he immediately went on hunger strike in protest against the conviction.

Israel/Gaza Strip

The Israeli army claims to have destroyed two underground tunnels used by the radical Islamist Hamas in the early hours of 18 March 2018. Furthermore, the Israeli air force fired missiles at several destinations in the Palestinian Territories after an IED exploded along the border fence with Israel. An Army spokesperson has accused Hamas in this context of attempting to escalate the situation along the border fence. There were no casualties in either incidents.

Yemen/Saudi Arabia

Missiles on Saudi Arabia – one person killed

According to official Saudi-Arab sources, Shia Houthi rebels from Yemen have again fired missiles at the capital of Riyadh and other cities. Although the missiles were intercepted, debris killed an Egyptian man in Riyadh. According to media reports, two persons were also wounded.

Kenya

Forced anal examinations prohibited

Kenya's Court of Appeal ruled on 22 March 2018 that the use of forced anal examinations on homosexual men by the state is unlawful. Up to now, anyone suspected of engaging in homosexual activity was forced to undergo forced examinations. The National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) is representing two men who had undergone forced examinations in 2015. Their case was thrown out by the High Court in Mombasa in 2016.

Homosexual activity between men is punishable by up to 14 years in jail. However, there is no knowledge of any convictions so far.

Myanmar

President resigns

President Htin Kyaw has resigned, No reason was given for his resignation but it is claimed he wants to "take a rest from his current obligations". Myint Swe who is the speaker of parliament and a member of the National League for Democracy is likely to become his successor.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: 105 schoolgirls freed from captivity

According to a statement issued by the Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, on 25 March 2018, the terrorist organisation Boko Haram brought the schoolgirls they abducted back to Dapchi (Yobe state) on 21 March 2018. They had abducted 103 schoolgirls attending the Government Girls Secondary and Technical Colleges of Dapchi town as well as one schoolgirl and one school boy attending primary school who were on the College premises on 19 February 2018. Lai Mohammed claims six schoolgirls were not released. It had been reported earlier that five schoolgirls died while the kidnappers herded them into pick-up trucks. The sixth girl is a Christian who the kidnappers say refused to convert to Islam.

Boko Haram: government in ceasefire talks

On 25 March 2018, Lai Mohammed announced that the government has been in ceasefire talks with the terrorist organisation Boko Haram in a bid to putting an end to hostilities. A week-long ceasefire was declared on 19 March 2018 to enable the insurgents to drop off the Dapchi schoolgirls who had been kidnapped in February 2018.

Palestinians

UNRWA faces funding crisis

After the USA cut back its aid, UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) has launched an urgent global appeal to safeguard aid for five million Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian Autonomous Territories and in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The USA drastically cut its payments over the lack of willingness of the Palestinian government to engage in peace talks with Israel. In 2018, the USA has so far paid US\$ 60 million (2017: a total of US \$360 million). UNRWA managed to obtain US\$ 100 million (around EUR 82 million) at a conference on 15 March 2018. However, this merely closes part of the finance gap of around US\$ 450 million.

Somalia

Bombings in Mogadishu

According to police reports, four persons including the suicide bomber were killed on 25 March 2018 when a car bomb exploded near the Ministry of the Interior; five persons were wounded. Two soldiers were killed when another car bomb exploded at a checkpoint on 25 March 2018, around ten civilians were wounded. A suicide bomber who detonated a car bomb in front of a hotel that is frequented by politicians and business people claimed the lives of at least 14 persons on 22 March 2018. The majority were civilians. Al-Shabaab have claimed responsibility for the attack.

Humanitarian situation – UN issues warning

U.N. reports warn that the humanitarian crisis in Somalia will escalate in 2018 owing to food security issues. Drought and conflict have caused migration and food shortages. More than 1.8 million persons are affected by drought in northern and central Somalia. Livestock losses are affecting agriculture.

Syria

Rebels withdraw from Eastern Ghouta

According to media reports, the Syrian army meanwhile has around 90 percent of the besieged area of Eastern Ghouta under its control. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has said that hundreds of rebels and civilians have left the region in buses since 24 March 2018 after agreement was reached with the Syrian government. They are heading to Idlib province in northern Syria, one of the last remaining rebel bastions. On 23 March 2018, the rebel groups Failak al-Rahman and Ahrar al-Scham reportedly announced they were relinquishing the area under their control. They are said to have negotiated safe conduct in the region of Idlib.

Togo

Talks between the government and the opposition

A third round of talks between Togo's ruling party and the opposition resumed on 23 March 2018 after a month-long pause, with Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo Dankwa acting as mediator. The dialogue had been suspended temporarily in order to give both sides more time to consider each other's demands. According to some sources, the government has announced that it will discontinue preparations for this year's parliamentary and local elections.

Ukraine

Ex-helicopter navigator and MP Nadiya Savchenko detained on charges of planning a coup

The Member of Parliament Nadiya Savchenko, a Ukrainian ex-helicopter navigator was detained in Kiev on 22 March 2018 on charges of planning an attack on parliament. The General Prosecutor told parliament about the alleged plot, after which legislators voted by a vast majority to remove her political immunity and approved her arrest. Savchenko was considered to be a national hero after the Euromaidan revolution and fought alongside the Ukrainian Aidar volunteer battalion when she was arrested in the self-declared People's Republic of Luhansk in June 2014. She was subsequently taken to Russia where she was accused of coordinating an attack in which two Russian journalists were killed. After being convicted of being an accessory to murder and being sentenced to 22 years in jail, she was released in May 2016 after almost two years in jail when she was pardoned as part of a swap for two Russian servicemen. After her return to Ukraine, she was presented with the Star of the Hero of Ukraine award.

Savchenko entered parliament on the list of the Batkivshchyna party (Patriotic Party) of ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. She was expelled from the party in 2016 for having contacts with the Eastern Ukrainian separatist leaders and has since been partyless.

The 36-year-old is accused of planning a terrorist attack on parliament and of being involved in organising a coup. Savchenko has long been a controversial figure. She is associated with the Ukrainian Volodymyr Ruban who was arrested on 8 March 2018. He was on very good terms with both sides involved in the conflict in eastern Ukraine and was involved in Savchenko's exchange of prisoners.

