



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

8 June 2020

Afghanistan

Hostilities, attacks, civilian casualties

Following the three-day ceasefire at the end of Ramadan (24.05. to 26.05.20), which was largely adhered to, there have been reports of attacks and hostilities once again over the past two weeks. On 30.05.20, two employees of the private TV station Khorsid TV were killed along with six other people in an attack by Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP). On 02.06.20 a well-known preacher and one other person were killed in a suicide attack near the Wazir Mohammad Akbar mosque in the Kabul district of the same name. The Taliban strongly condemned the attack, for which no-one has claimed responsibility. Various road bombs (in Kabul, Kandahar and Kunduz, for example) have claimed civilian lives. Finally, hostilities resumed in various provinces, involving US warplanes for the first time since the troop withdrawal agreement with the Taliban.

UN report on Taliban and other groups opposed to the government

On 02.06.20 the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the UN Security Council published a report on the Taliban, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) and other groups opposed to the government, with details of their strength, local presence and funding. The report cites evidence of cooperation between parts of the Taliban, in particular the Haqqani network, and ISKP (cf. BN of 11.05.20). The Taliban is assumed to have between 55,000 and 85,000 fighters. Supporters and non-combatants could raise the total figure to 100,000 (the Afghan security forces reportedly number approx. 352,000). The reports states that the information available to the UN monitoring team clearly shows that the Taliban have no difficulties in the areas of recruitment, funding, weapons or ammunition. The Taliban reportedly have annual revenue in the order of 300 million to 1.5 billion US dollars, partly as a result of criminal activities. The Taliban are also said to still maintain relations with Al Qaeda. The latter's strength is estimated at 400 to 600 armed supporters in twelve provinces. In the wake of military defeats in Nangarhar, ISPK reportedly disposes of approx. 2,200 fighters, primarily in remote parts of the eastern province of Kunar, but also in other locations. The organisation is said to have cells throughout the country whose aim is to carry out spectacular attacks. According to the report, there are also indications that between 6,000 and 6,500 Pakistanis are fighting on the side of the Taliban. These belong to Pakistani groups such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba. In addition, organisations such as Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Jamaat Ansarullah Tajikistan and Lashkar-e-Islam are reportedly also active, as well as other smaller groups.

COVID-19 pandemic

The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 continues to rise. People have tested positive for coronavirus in all 34 provinces. Kabul has the highest number of cases, followed by Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar and Kandahar. The governor of Kabul province estimates that more than a million people could be infected there.

On 06.06.20 the government issued new guidelines to contain coronavirus. The provisions include a ban on gatherings of more than ten people and on older people leaving their homes. All schools, universities, restaurants, parks, sports facilities and wedding halls are to remain closed for three months. Bus transport between towns and cities remains suspended.

Bolivia

Electoral commission sets new date for elections

The National Electoral Commission has set 06.09.20 as the new date for the postponed presidential elections, in agreement with the parties concerned. The ballot to elect a new president and a new parliament was originally planned for 03.05.20 and was subsequently postponed indefinitely due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The elections became necessary as a result of president Evo Morales' announcement in November 2019 that he was resigning.

Burkina Faso

Series of attacks claims many lives

On 30.05.20 armed assailants attacked a cattle market in the village of Kompiembiga in the country's East region (15 kilometres from the town of Palma, to the south of the Fada/Pama road route). At least 25 people were shot dead in the attack.

On 30.05.20 unknown assailants attacked a humanitarian convoy which was returning from a trip to Foubé to deliver food for internally displaced people in the Centre-Nord region. Five civilians and seven gendarmes were killed in the attack and several people were injured. Several occupants of the vehicles are missing.

According to information from the government, 15 people were killed in the north of the country on 29.05.20, when a convoy organised by traders came under fire. Several people were reportedly abducted.

On 29.05.20 armed assailants attacked a convoy of six trucks organised by traders which was returning from the Friday market in Titao, on the road between Titao and Sollé in the Nord region, close to the border with Mali. The convoy was under escort from the Koglweogo self-defence militia. According to information from the government, 15 people were killed in the attack. The government has blamed the three attacks on Jihadist groups.

Burundi

Government camp wins presidential and parliamentary elections

The government's candidate, Evariste Ndayishimiye (Conseil National de Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD)), won the presidential elections of 20.05.20, claiming 68.7 % of the vote (cf. BN of 25.05.20). Opposition candidate Agathon Rwaso (Congrès National pour la Liberté – CNL) took 24.2 % of votes cast. In the parliamentary elections held on the same day, the governing CNDD-FDD party won 86 seats and the CNL 32. This was announced by the constitutional court on 04.06.20. The court also rejected Rwaso's appeal against the election result. Rwaso challenged the election, claiming electoral fraud. Government supporters allegedly cast multiple votes or voted using the names of dead people, and members of the government's militia, Imbonerakure, reportedly besieged polling stations. Opposition election monitors were allegedly driven out of polling stations or arrested. The country's Catholic episcopal conference has also spoken of irregularities and cast doubt on the election result.

Cameroon

Journalist dies in prison

On 05.06.20 army spokesman Cyrille Atonfack Nguemo acknowledged that the journalist Samuel Ebuwe Ajiekia, known as Samuel Wazizi, had been arrested by the police on 01.08.19. He stated that Wazizi had been handed over to the military for further questioning on 07.08.19 and placed in the custody of the judicial police care of the

gendarmérie (military police) in Jaunde on 13.08.19. Shortly afterwards, he allegedly fell ill and was admitted to a hospital in Jaunde, where he died of blood poisoning on 17.08.20. Nguemo denied that he was tortured. He said that Wazizi's family had been informed of his death. This is denied by Wazizi's brother and his lawyer, however. The journalists' union, Syndicat National des Journalistes du Cameroun (SNJC), confirmed Wazizi's death via Twitter and Facebook on 02.06.20 and stated that he had died after having suffered torture while in custody. The SNJC and the Society for Threatened Peoples (GfbV) have since called for an independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the journalist's death. According to military spokesman Nguemo, Wazizi was arrested on charges of having coordinated the logistics of fighters belonging to the anglophone separatists.

Colombia

Nobel Peace Prize winner Santos calls for protection for social activists

Former president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Juan Manuel Santos has called on the state to guarantee the safety of human rights activists, environmental campaigners and other activists, in the face of a recent substantial rise in the number of homicides committed against these categories of people. According to the human rights organisation INDEPAZ, more than 100 activists were killed between the beginning of the year and the end of May 2020 alone. According to information in the media, the perpetrators are paramilitary forces, common criminals, drug cartels, assassins hired by companies, members of the rebel organisation Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and dissidents of the officially disbanded Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).

Membership of FARC guerrilla organisation doubles

Four years after the peace accord between the government and the FARC guerrilla organisation, rebel splinter groups again have thousands of members. This emerges from media reports citing secret service information. The group is said to have doubled its manpower to 4,600 members in the space of just one year. This makes FARC the second-strongest guerrilla organisation in the country, after the ELN rebel group.

Indigenous families driven from their homes

On 21.05.20 more than 300 families belonging to the indigenous Embéra Dóbida ethnic group temporarily left a reserve in the north-west of the country on food and in boats. According to media reports, they fled as a result of armed clashes between the paramilitary group Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, also known as Clan de Golfo) and the ELN. The national organisation for indigenous peoples, Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC), has reported that the families returned to their homes on 23.05.20, following intervention by the army and the authorities. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that more than 10,000 were driven from their homes between January and the end of April 2020 alone, against the background of the armed conflicts in Colombia. Most recently, it emerged that 70 families belonging to the Embera Eyávida indigenous community had been driven out of the autonomous region of Majoré (cf. BN of 11.05.20).

US elite troops arrive

Large numbers of people demonstrated outside the US embassy in the capital, Bogotá on 03.06.20 against the arrival of soldiers belonging to the U.S. Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) special unit. According to media reports, the demonstrators included numerous teachers, trade unionists and activists belonging to social movements. A joint statement by the US ambassador and the Colombian defence ministry indicates that the SFAB will commence operations in Colombia at the beginning of June 2020. Its official remit is to advise and support the local armed forces in combating drug trafficking. No further details were revealed. MPs have since called for information on aspects such as the number of troops, the period of deployment and concrete operations, stating that the deployment of US military requires a parliamentary mandate.

China

Security law for Hong Kong ratified

On 28.05.20 the National People's Congress instructed its Standing Committee to enact a security law for Hong Kong which is officially aimed at countering subversive, terrorist and separatist activities and interference by foreign

forces. Critics fear that it will be used to further restrict the freedom of the democracy and protest movement in the Special Administrative Region (cf. BN of 25.05.20).

Hong Kong: Memorial event to mark the crushing of the pro-democracy movement in 1989

On 02.06.20 the ban on gatherings of more than eight people which has been imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic was extended by two weeks. For the first time since 1990, the authorities consequently declined to approve a memorial event to mark the anniversary of the violent crushing of the pro-democracy movement in the People's Republic China in 1989. Activists belonging to Hong Kong's democracy movement see this as an attempt to prevent demonstrations. Thousands of people nevertheless gathered in Victoria Park in the city's Causeway Bay district on 04.06.20.

On the days around 04.06.89, the military killed an unknown number of demonstrators at various locations, including Tiananmen Square in Peking. In mainland China, all memories of what happened are suppressed.

Hong Kong: Protests against law on disregard for the national anthem

On 04.06.20 the Legislative Council, Hong Kong's non-freely elected parliament, approved a law which makes disregard for the Chinese national anthem punishable with a custodial sentence of up to three years and a fine of up to 50,000 Hong Kong dollars (approx. 5,750 euros). The pro-democracy camp largely boycotted the vote, as it regards the law as an encroachment on the right of freedom of expression.

A debate on the law was initially deferred on 27.05.20, after protests by MPs from the pro-democracy camp led to tumultuous scenes in parliament. On the same day, the police used force against people who were demonstrating in various city districts against the new law and the planned security law (see above). More than 360 people were arrested.

DR Congo

ADF attacks villages

According to information from a representative of the Center for Studies for the Promotion of Peace, Democracy and Human Rights (CEPADHO), fighters of the Islamist rebel organisation Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) attacked the village of Samboko, situated around 100 kilometres to the south of the town of Bunia in the eastern province of North Kivu, on 26.05.20. They killed at least 40 people with machetes and looted the village. On the day before, they attacked the nearby village of Makutano, killing 17 people.

Ethiopia/Sudan

Fatal incident in border region

The Sudanese news agency SUNA has reported that a Sudanese army officer and a child were killed by members of the Ethiopian military in the province of Al Qadarif in eastern Sudan on 28.05.20. Another Sudanese officer and several civilians were reportedly injured in the incident. The background to the clash is unclear. For decades, Ethiopian farmers have been using farmland in the Sudanese border area to cultivate crops. This was tolerated by the government under former president Omar Al-Bashir. Sudan's interim government wishes to put an end to this practice, however, and has evidently dispatched the military to the region. The Ethiopian armed forces reportedly responded when an Ethiopian militiaman was injured in an exchange of fire. Directly after the most recent incident, the governments of both countries agreed to seek a solution by diplomatic means.

India

COVID-19 pandemic

The number of officially registered COVID-19 infections has soared. Most of the confirmed cases of infection were reported from the federal states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. In the particularly severely affected regions, the lockdown is to remain in force until 30.06.20. At the same time, the central government has recommended a three-stage opening plan. The first stage of the relaxation measures provides for religious institutions, restaurants and

shopping centres to be allowed to reopen from 08.06.20. Each federal state is to apply the central government's recommendations on its own responsibility, according to the prevailing situation.

In the major cities of Delhi and Mumbai, the state hospitals are seriously overstretched. Since these hospitals in Delhi have been approaching full capacity, the more than 100 private hospitals there have been required to make at least a fifth of their beds available for corona patients.

Kashmir: Renewed protests

Renewed protests against the central government broke out in the Indian union state of Jammu and Kashmir on 07.06.20, following the deaths of five insurgents. The fatalities followed in the wake of exchanges of fire between soldiers and rebels in Shopian. Hundreds of protesters subsequently threw stones at security forces. The latter responded to the attacks by firing bullets and tear gas.

India/China

Kashmir/Ladakh: Path to a peaceful agreement?

Signs of a possible peaceful accord between India and China are emerging in the eastern part of the Kashmir region. Since its territorial reform in 2019, which led to the area of Kashmir under Indian administration being divided into the two union territories of Jammu and Kashmir on the one hand and Ladakh on the other, the eastern part of Ladakh has bordered on the part of the region to which China lays claim, known as Aksai Chin. Troop movements by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) into neighbouring Indian-controlled Ladakh were observed here in May 2020. China takes a critical stance towards the construction of border infrastructure such as roads, defence installations and landing sites along the border, which is some 3,500 kilometres in length. In response, the PLA set up a stationary base in the Galwan valley after Indian troops had blocked the construction of a road in the Demchok region. According to an official statement on 05.06.20, the two countries aim to de-escalate the situation peacefully and seek a joint solution for the border.

Iran

New parliament begins work

The new parliament began work in Teheran on 27.05.20. A coalition of conservatives and ultra-conservatives won the election on 21.02.20. The reformers and moderate conservatives close to president Hassan Rohani find themselves in the minority in the new legislative period. This is attributable to the corona crisis as well as disappointment among Rohani's supporters at what they see as his failed policies. In the past four years, only around 43% of those eligible to vote turned out. In Teheran, the figure was even below 30%. This represents the lowest turnout in the country's 41-year history. Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf, Teheran's former mayor and chief of police, was elected as the new speaker of parliament. The speaker of parliament is one of the most powerful political posts. As well as directing parliamentary business, he also has a seat on the Supreme Council of Economic Cooperation. This body, established in 2018, is the highest authority on economic issues and determines the handling of the US sanctions against Iran.

14 year-old girl victim of honour killing

Iranian media have reported that a 14 year-old girl was killed by her father in a village in Gilan province on 21.05.20. The father considered his honour offended, because his daughter had had a relationship with a 29 year-old man. The father has since been arrested and faces a prison sentence of up to ten years. The death penalty is ruled out, because he is considered the girl's guardian under Islamic law. Honour killings are no rare occurrence in Iran, especially in rural regions with patriarchal structures. Perpetrators commonly receive mild sentences. While no official statistics are available, it is estimated that between 375 and 450 honour killings take place annually. The victims are for the most part women.

Acquisition of citizenship through Iranian mothers to be possible in future

Following a change to the law, children of Iranian mothers and foreign fathers will be able to acquire Iranian citizenship in future. To date, it has only been possible to acquire citizenship via an Iranian father. It is estimated

that some 150,000 marriages took place between Iranian women and foreign men up to 2015. According to statistical information, these marriages have produced more than 500,000 children, who live in Iran but have not held Iranian nationality to date. Children without citizenship have no entitlement to education, social insurance or permanent residence in the Islamic Republic.

COVID-19 pandemic: Further easing of restrictions despite rise in number of infections

Despite rising numbers of infections, president Hassan Rohani intends to introduce further measures to ease the corona restrictions. Day nurseries and cinemas are to re-open from mid-June 2020, for example, subject to certain restrictions and compliance with hygiene requirements. Concerts are also to become possible again. Rohani has announced on his website that mosques are to be opened and Friday prayers are to be held again.

According to information from the health ministry, more than 2,260 new infections were reported again on 06.06.20, together with 75 new deaths. On the previous day, the number of new infections was in excess of 3,000. Experts and the ministry see the easing of restrictions as the main reason for this increase.

Kosovo

New head of government

A narrow majority of 61 of the total of 120 members of parliament elected conservative politician Avdullah Hoti as the country's new prime minister on 03.06.20. He replaces Albin Kurti as head of government. Kurti is a reform-oriented, left-wing politician who had only been in office since February 2020. At the end of March 2020 Kurti was toppled by a vote of no confidence (cf. BN of 30.03.20), since when he had continued in office only in a caretaker role. The leader of the Vetevendosje (Self-Determination) party fought against his successor's election until the very end. Hoti belongs to the Democratic League of Kosovo party (LDK), which has been a coalition partner to date. He was nominated by Kosovo's president, Hashim Thaci, who is a political opponent of Kurti. Kosovo's constitutional court declared Hoti's nomination to be legal on 28.05.20. The Vetevendosje party's supporters are pushing vehemently for new elections.

Lebanon

Sudden escalation of demonstrations

Religious insults between supporters of predominantly Sunni and Shiite parties during demonstrations in Beirut led to spontaneous fighting and demonstrations in Beirut, Al-Mazraa and Qasqas, as well as in Sidon and Tripoli, on 06.06.20.

The leading authorities of both Sunni and Shiite Islam condemned the actions and insults in the strongest terms on the same day, and politicians from all parties called for calm. While there is no knowledge of any fatalities, a number of people were injured.

Libya/Egypt

Egyptian president proposes ceasefire

Following discussions between the Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, general Khalifa Haftar and the president of the parliament based in eastern Libya (HoR), Aquila Saleh, the Egyptian head of state spoke out in favour of a ceasefire being introduced in Libya from 08.06.20. He also proposed that foreign fighters should be withdrawn and that a presidential council should be elected for a term of one and a half years in Libya. Mohammed Gnnu, spokesman of the Government of National Accord (GNA) which rules in western Libya, rejected el-Sisi's proposals.

Egypt's government supports general Haftar's troops, as do the United Arab Emirates and Russia. The GNA, led by Fayez al-Sarraj, receives military aid from Qatar and Turkey.

Haftar's troops and allied militias have lost strategically important locations in western Libya in recent weeks. According to al-Sarraj, GNA troops brought all of Tripoli and the strategically important town of Tarhouna under their control on 04.06. and 05.06.20.

Morocco

Print media and textile sector resume operations

The ban on the production and distribution of print media which was imposed on 28.03.20 was lifted on 26.05.20. It had been feared that print media could spread coronavirus. Textile companies in the Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region have been allowed to resume production after the festival marking the end of the fasting month (Eid Al-Fitr), subject to compliance with conditions to protect their employees.

Corona app released

The health ministry released the Wiqaytna corona app on 01.06.20. This works via Bluetooth and can be used on a voluntary basis. It informs the user by SMS or push message if they have come closer to an infected person than the recommended minimum distance in the past 21 days. This technology depends on the other person concerned also using Wiqaytna, with the Bluetooth function active.

Own quick test developed

The Moroccan Foundation for Advanced Science, Innovation and Research (MAScIR) has developed its own RT-PCR test for the SARS-COV 2 virus, which has since been validated by state laboratories and the Institut Pasteur in Paris.

Nigeria

Many die in attacks by bandits in north-west

On 02.06. and 03.06.20 armed attackers raided the villages of Awala Zaman Gida, Yargada Bolakke and Gidan Runji in the Talata Mafara and Maru Local Government Areas of the federal state of Zamfara. The police have reported that 21 villagers were killed, while villagers put the number at 25. Armed bandits on motorcycles attacked the villages of Garki, Dan Aduwa, Kuzari and Katuma in the Sabon Local Government Area of the federal state of Sokoto on the night of 27.05.20. They shot 74 people dead. A recently published report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) states that over 8,000 people have been killed in north-western Nigeria in the past nine years as a result of violence perpetrated by herdsmen, farmers and criminal gangs.

Pakistan

COVID-19 pandemic

The numbers of COVID-19 infections have soared in the Pakistani province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Many hospitals are operating close to full capacity, particular in Peshawar. Doctors have called for support, warning the government that the available bed capacities will soon be exhausted. Additional beds, medical equipment and more medically trained personnel are required. There is also a shortage of protective equipment for doctors, over 400 of whom have already become infected with coronavirus. In view of attacks on health staff, there are calls for security personnel to be deployed at hospitals.

Ahmadi accused of blasphemy

According to a press release from the Ahmadiyya community, one of its female members, Ramzan Bibi, has been reported to the police in the district of Nankana in Punjab province for allegedly insulting the prophet Mohammed. Bibi had offered a donation to a neighbouring Muslim community, which rejected her offer on account of her religious affiliation as an Ahmadi. On inquiring as to why her offer was being rejected, she was insulted and attacked by a crowd of people. Islamic fundamentalists reported her to the police for alleged blasphemy, whereupon she

was arrested. The case of the Christian woman Asia Bibi, which came to international attention, also occurred in this district.

Accusations of blasphemy against religious minorities are a recurrent phenomenon in Pakistan. On 01.05.20 a producer of footballs was reported for alleged blasphemy because the design of the footballs allegedly constituted an insult to Islam.

Pakistan/India

Joint measures to tackle plague of locusts

Pakistan and India intend to undertake joint measures to tackle the plague of locusts which has broken out in both countries and is threatening the pulse and cereal crop. A state of emergency has been declared in Pakistan as a result of the most severe plague for decades. The measures are to be coordinated by the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South-West Asia (SWAC), which was set up by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 1964. The commission comprises Afghanistan, India, Iran and Pakistan.

Russian Federation

Putin announces referendum

On 01.07.20 the Russian people are to vote on the most significant amendment to their constitution to date. The aim of the plebiscite is to legitimise a possible extension to president Vladimir Putin's term in office. Russia's long-standing president Putin could acquire substantially broader powers and a prolongation of his tenure until 2036, if he were to be re-elected twice. He would then be 84 years old.

This is to be made possible by a referendum which was originally planned for April 2020 and had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Putin, the corona situation is largely under control in the country and a vote on the amendment to the constitution can be held on 01.07.20.

Election administrator Ella Pamfilowa is promising that the ballot will go ahead with due safety, stating that masks and gloves will be provided, as well as ballpoint pens for once-only use. A mobile station is also to be available for people who cannot go to the polling stations. In order to minimise the risk of infection, voting is to begin six days before the official date.

Critics of this most far-reaching amendment to Russia's constitution ever fear not only that the ballot might safely go ahead, but also that the result has already been decided. The most recent polls in April 2020 put Putin and his reform short of a majority, however, at 47 % - the president's approval ratings have plummeted to an all-time low since the beginning of the corona crisis. In contrast, parliament and the constitutional court approved Putin's wishes post-haste and without any major deliberations back in the winter of 2019.

Somalia

Health staff killed

It has been reported that seven health staff and a shop owner were abducted from a health centre in the village of Gololey near to the town of Balad, Middle Shabelle region, on 27.05.20. They were found shot dead on the following day. Both Al-Shabaab and the Somali national army are accused of being behind the attack.

Civilians killed in explosion

At least ten people were killed and twelve injured when a land mine exploded on the road between Mogadishu and Afgoye on 31.05.20. The victims were reportedly travelling in a minibus on their way to a funeral. It is unclear who was behind the attack.

Police officers killed by Al-Shabaab

A bomb exploded in a car in Mogadishu on 28.05.20, killing two police officers. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Syria

Idlib: Turkish soldier killed in attack

The Turkish defence ministry has confirmed that an attack on an armoured ambulance car occurred on 05.06.20, in the course of which one soldier was killed and two injured. In response, the military shelled targets in the region, without disclosing any further details as to the location concerned. An agreement reached between Russia and Turkey as protecting powers on 05.03.20 has substantially reduced hostilities in north-western Syria to date.

Recruitment for fighting in Libya

A report by Reuters claims that a private security and military company from Russia recruited more than 900 Syrians to join the fighting in Libya in the month of May 2020 alone. According to the report, the company, which has already been operating in Syria, Ukraine and Libya for some time, trains the fighters at centres in the Syrian heartland and pays them between 1,000 and 2,000 US dollars a month. The recruited mercenaries allegedly include a large proportion of former Syrian rebels who have fought against the Assad government and Russia as its protecting power.

While the relocation of fighters to Libya represents a breach of a UN arms embargo, it has been common practice for some time now. The Russian private company allegedly puts the mercenaries into service with general Khalifa Haftar, who is allied with Russia. Syrians from the Turkish-occupied areas of northern Syria are already fighting on the other side in Libya.

Currency crisis

The Syrian pound (SYP) fell to a new all-time low on 04.06.20. Observers are attributing this drop to fears of the consequences of tougher US sanctions as well as the seizure of assets belonging to a prominent industrial magnate in Syria.

The “Caesar act” adopted by the US congress to protect Syria’s civilian population, which imposes sanctions on foreign companies which do business with Syrian businessmen from president Assad’s circles, is to enter into force in June 2020. At the same time, an open row is raging in Syria between the government and one of the wealthiest men in the country and a cousin of president Assad, Rami Makhlouf. Assets of Makhlouf which have been seized include hotels and bank branches as well as the Syriatel group, one of two mobile phone companies in Syria.

One US dollar most recently cost SYP 2,050. Prior to the war, the exchange rate stood at around 1:47. The erosion of the currency has been gathering momentum since mid-October 2019, when the financial crisis broke out in Lebanon.

Venezuela

COVID-19 pandemic: Cooperation between Guaidó and Maduro

On 01.06.20 representatives of both sides signed a provisional agreement to jointly obtain international funds for the fight against coronavirus. Although the officially reported numbers of cases remain low, neither side denies the danger.

Yemen

Journalist killed in Aden.

A journalist was shot dead by unknown attackers outside his home in Aden on 02.06.20. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. The journalist was reportedly known to support independence for the south, for which he faced criticism from the Al-Islah political party.

Donors’ conference falls short of target

On 02.06.20 the UN and Saudi Arabia held a virtual donors’ conference to collect money for humanitarian aid in Yemen. The donors pledged 1.35 billion US dollars – as compared to the set target of 2.41 billion US dollars. The

UN has already stopped or scaled down 75% of its aid programmes due to a lack of funding. The World Food Programme has also responded, halving its food rations and discontinuing its payment of salaries to health staff.

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BN-Redaktion@bamf.bund.de