



SECURITY EXCHANGE



Security Exchange

InTouch Monthly - February 2023





Contents

Africa

Nigeria: Controversy over the country's most contested election	3
---	---

Americas

Suriname: Anti-government protesters storm parliament	5
---	---

Asia

Papua New Guinea: Kidnapped researchers rescued	7
---	---

Europe

Greece: Deadly train crash sparks protests	9
--	---

MENA

Israel: Major challenges facing new government	11
--	----

Disclaimer: Security Exchange Limited does not accept any liability if this report is used for an alternative purpose from which it is intended. The conclusions and recommendations contained herein are offered for the consideration of the addressee and are based on the information made available at the time of reporting. The addressee is under no obligation to adopt any of the recommended measures and Security Exchange Limited cannot be held liable for any resulting errors or omissions.



AFRICA

Nigeria: Controversy over the country's most contested election

Last month, Nigerians went to the polls following a nail-biting campaign to replace President Muhammadu Buhari. The election was considered the country's most contested since the end of military rule in 1999, with three frontrunners leading among 18 candidates. Former Lagos governor and political heavyweight Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) was considered a likely favourite against Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), but former Anambra State governor Peter Obi and his Labour Party emerged as a dark horse during the campaign.

Several polls indicated that Obi would be the candidate to beat, but in the end, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) declared the APC's Tinubu president-elect. This outcome was not necessarily shocking, but a myriad of problems during the vote prompted opposition parties and election observers to question the integrity of the result. Both the PDP and Labour Party leaders have called for fresh elections and announced they would challenge the result in court. Nigeria's electoral commission now faces a credibility crisis amid claims that the election was negatively affected by inefficiency and a lack of transparency.

Voting irregularities and technical difficulties

Immediately following the election, it was reported that the February election had Nigeria's lowest-ever election turnout at 29 percent. Contributing factors to the low turnout might include insecurity, fuel scarcity, and an ongoing currency crisis, but election observers stated that disenfranchisement due to logistical and technical issues may have also played a role. Voting delays were reported nationwide, forcing many voters to give up and return home when polling stations failed to open on time. Observers also said that there was evidence of vote-buying, ballot tampering, and voter intimidation but emphasised that it is currently impossible to determine the scale of these acts.

Disputes of the election results stem from two systems introduced by INEC: the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), used to verify voter identity, and the Election Result Viewing Portal (IREV), a platform where polling stations can upload results for public view. Initial excitement around the new technology and its potential to facilitate a more free and fair election reportedly led to a 50 percent increase in voter registration last year. Unfortunately, technical malfunctions with both systems rather led to a lack of transparency and efficiency in the election process. The BVAS system failed to capture some voters, and many of the 177,000 polling stations were unable to upload results to the IREV portal promptly. The final election results were subsequently delayed as INEC staff scrambled to resolve all issues, with some reportedly resorting to tabulating votes by hand.

INEC has since stated that the delays were caused by "technical glitches", poor internet connectivity, and security issues, but the organisational shortfalls have eroded trust in the democratic process. The commission has been accused of violating Nigeria's Electoral Act by failing to upload and publicly display results in real-time and enabling vote rigging and tampering before the winner was announced. To add to the political drama, Nigerians will head to the polls again in March to vote for state governor and local assembly elections. Polling stations will reportedly be using the same technology during the vote. Initially scheduled for 11 March, these elections have been postponed by one week to allow enough time for the commission to resolve all technical issues.

What happens next

One electoral battle may be over, but the war has just begun. Since last month's vote, INEC has been pressured to provide answers. Three other political parties have joined the Labour Party and the PDP in calls for a new election under improved conditions, all while still involved in campaigns for the upcoming state election. A lengthy long legal battle over the presidential election results is expected, but it is unlikely that these challenges will be successful. Nigeria has never had election results overturned, and to date, none of the opposition parties has provided evidence to substantiate their allegations of electoral fraud.

Regardless of how it happens, it is imperative that the matter is resolved quickly. The election dispute is another item to add to Nigeria's growing list of serious issues. Nigerians need a leader who will rise above the political infighting to provide concrete solutions in a country divided, with rising insecurity, high inflation, and a crippling currency crisis.



Ethiopia

8 February 2023: Two police officers killed, 17 injured after violent clashes in Addis Ababa

Two police officers were killed and 17 others were injured following a violent riot in Addis Ababa yesterday. The incident occurred at the St Lideta Orthodox Church, in Philidoro, where government officers clashed with church rioters at an undisclosed time.

Equatorial Guinea

10 February 2023: Curfew declared in Kié-Ntem following deaths by unknown illness

Authorities have declared a two-day curfew in Kié-Ntem after 20 people died of an unknown illness. According to officials at the Olamize District Hospital, the victims reportedly fell ill with a form of haemorrhagic fever. The cases are from three localities in the northern province, with four of the victims coming from the same family. The province will reportedly be under quarantine until the type of illness and the source of the outbreak are confirmed.

Togo

13 February 2023: Dozens of civilians killed in Kpendjal attack

On Friday, at least 31 civilians were killed during an attack in Kpendjal, Savanes. Militants reportedly invaded the villages of Tola and Gningou at around 02:00 local time. There has been no claim of responsibility for the attack.

South Africa

14 February 2023: South Africa declares national disaster due to floods

South Africa declared a national disaster on Monday after heavy rains caused flooding in seven provinces. Disaster management centres in the affected provinces have reported five deaths in KwaZulu-Natal and two in Mpumalanga. An unconfirmed number of people have also gone missing. The floods have caused significant infrastructural damage.

Angola

16 February 2023: One killed in Luanda protest

On Wednesday, one person was killed as security forces opened fire at a protest in Luanda. The protest, held by taxi drivers against the poor conditions of main roads in the capital, was reportedly dispersed by police using live bullets at around 13:30 local time. Police say the killing was not connected to the demonstration and that the officers were defending themselves after protesters started throwing stones and burning tyres.

Nigeria

16 February 2023: Officials report 20 new cases of Lassa fever in Edo

Health officials in Edo State have reported 20 new cases of Lassa fever. The cases, which include 13 children and seven adults, are currently being treated in a hospital. The state has recorded a consistent increase in cases in this latest outbreak, with a total of 173 confirmed cases and 25 deaths.

Somalia

20 February 2023: Dozens of al-Shabaab militants killed in Middle Shabelle operation

On Monday, 26 al-Shabaab militants were killed during a security operation in Middle Shabelle. The operation was carried out by the Somali National Army (SNA) and occurred between El Ba'ad and Ruunirgood. According to army officials, troops successfully destroyed several militant hideouts.

Zimbabwe

23 February 2023: Several injured following raid in Bulawayo

Several people were injured during clashes between street vendors and police in Bulawayo on Thursday. The incident occurred between 03:00 and 05:00 during a raid by the Bulawayo City Council on Fifth Avenue. Authorities were reportedly searching for unlicensed businesses in the Central Business District.

South Sudan

24 February 2023: Ten killed following boat attack near Gondokoro

On Wednesday, at least 10 people were killed during an attack near Gondokoro, Central Equatoria. Officials say bandits targeted a boat travelling from Juba to the Port of Adok in Unity State at around 16:00 local time.

DR Congo

28 February 2023: Eight ADF militants killed in Beni clashes

On Monday, eight Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militants were killed, and nine were captured during clashes in Beni, North Kivu. The fighting reportedly broke out between the militants and soldiers from the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) in the Mwalika valley. Four soldiers were also injured in the clashes, and troops recovered several weapons and explosives from the militants after the incident.



AMERICAS

Suriname: Anti-government protesters storm parliament

Suriname was thrust into the global spotlight when anti-government protesters stormed government buildings and other parts of the capital Paramaribo on 17 February. Demonstrators cited high living costs and government cuts to subsidies, which now compound a looming sovereign debt crisis, as the main reasons behind the violent unrest. Police used tear gas and rubber bullets in order to suppress a large group of protesters who attempted to burst into the Congress building, while thousands of others rioted in the capital's streets, reportedly looting shops and setting vehicles on fire. During the unrest, 19 people were hospitalised and 143 were arrested.

The austerity measures which caused the upheaval were imposed after the Surinamese government defaulted on its foreign debt for a third time since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The government then opted to remove subsidies for petrol and electricity in December 2021 as part of a loan program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, the IMF stopped paying out its loan to Suriname in March 2022 due to the country's inability to present a comprehensive plan for repayment. The lack of an effective framework for dealing with the post-pandemic debt crisis is another significant concern, as highlighted by IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva at a recent summit in India. Suriname's debt limbo is emblematic of this issue, and the IMF, World Bank, and G20 finance ministers are expected to discuss the matter at their upcoming spring meetings in Washington DC.

Suriname's situation is somewhat unique in that it is a middle-income country that was not allowed to participate in joint talks with G20 members as part of the IMF's restructuring plan. Instead, the country had to hold separate talks with each of the G20 members, including China and India. While the Paris Club and India have successfully restructured their loans, China has yet to do so, and private bondholders have also pushed back against the country's restructuring proposals. Additionally, private bondholders entered into restructuring talks with the Surinamese government in 2022 but failed to reach an agreement after the creditors said they would prefer to first see how much the country earns in oil royalties from new offshore fields.

The lack of incentive for private bondholders to restructure their loans has proven to be a significant challenge to the Surinamese creditors, and past multi-stakeholder approaches have seen wealthy countries and multilateral banks issue new credit to help buy privately-held sovereign debt and thus coax bondholders into restructuring. Moreover, the G20 plan provided no such financial carrots, only IMF blueprints for how countries could return to making debt payments if restructuring occurred - a similar issue to what Argentina has been facing.

Shortly following the incidents of 17 February, President Chan Santokhi addressed the nation pleading for peace and a swift return to work, claiming that the unrest would only exacerbate the issues. "We believe the economy should be normalized as quickly as possible...we acknowledge that the sense of security as a result of the eruptions surrounding the protest has been seriously affected...It has therefore been decided to boost security. Increased patrols have been carried out on several roads in recent days. That will continue." The government has significant challenges ahead, with a weak currency and ever-worsening economic crisis, the nation's 600,000 people are finding it more and more difficult to make ends meet. All whilst the government plans to eliminate subsidies for electricity, gas and other essentials in line with IMF-required spending cuts.



Argentina

6 February 2023: Two killed, six injured after shootings in Rosario

Two people were killed and six others were injured following a couple of shootings in Rosario, Santa Fe yesterday evening. One person was killed and three were injured on Misiones Street at around 00:00 local time. One person was killed and three others were injured on Abanderado Grandoli Avenue and Boulevard Seguí at around 00:30 local time. No arrests have been reported for either incident.

Ecuador

10 February 2023: President Lasso reshuffles cabinet after legislative defeat

Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso replaced several officials yesterday as part of a cabinet reshuffle. The measure comes after the president failed to pass referendums on extradition for organised crime and other topics last weekend. President Lasso appointed Henry Cevallos as the new Government Minister and also replaced the secretariats in the Legal Office of the Presidency, the Public Administration Office and the Office for Development of Peoples and Nationalities.

Paraguay

13 February 2023: Civilian kidnapped in Santo Domingo

One person was kidnapped in Santo Domingo, Guairá yesterday evening. The incident occurred in the Independencia area, at around 21:00 local time. No suspects have been identified.

Guatemala

13 February 2023: Three killed, four injured after civilian clashes in Sololá

On Friday afternoon, three people were killed and four others were injured following armed civilian clashes in Sololá. The incident occurred between residents of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán and Nahualá at around 15:45 local time, when the latter's mayor's residence was set on fire. Military personnel was deployed in order to re-establish order.

Peru

17 February 2023: Anti-government protesters block Desaguadero International Bridge in Puno

Authorities in Puno reported that protesters were blocking the International bridge between Perú and Bolivia in Desaguadero earlier today. The demonstrators gathered at the Desaguadero International Bridge and blocked it with stones demanding the resignation of President Boularte.

Brazil

20 February 2023: Three dozen dead, hundreds displaced due to landslides amid heavy rains around Sao Paulo

Heavy rains in southeast Brazil caused severe flooding and landslides that have killed 36 people and displaced hundreds as of Sunday around Sao Paulo. Rescue efforts remain underway. The incidents have caused chaos as thousands travelled to Brazil for Carnival celebrations. In response, the local government instilled a 180-day state of calamity.

Trinidad & Tobago

22 February 2023: Two killed, three injured after shooting in Morvant

Two people were killed and three others were injured following a shooting in Morvant, San Juan-Laventille yesterday afternoon. The incident occurred at a residence in Second Caledonia at around 16:30 local time. According to police, the incident was gang-related and no arrests have been made.

Chile

24 February 2023: Three killed during shootout with police in Santiago

One police officer and two suspected criminals were killed following a shootout in Santiago yesterday evening. The incident occurred at O'Higgins Park located at the intersection of Parque Avenue and Viel Avenue, at around 21:30 local time when police confronted suspects in an armed robbery. The rest of the suspects managed to flee.

Venezuela

24 February 2023: Education workers protest in Caracas

Teachers and education workers staged a protest in Caracas yesterday. The demonstrators gathered outside the Labour Inspectorate at around 09:00 local time in order to demand higher wages.

Colombia

27 February 2023: Four killed, two injured after shooting attack in Cartago

Four people were killed and two others were injured following a shooting in Cartago, Valle de Cauca yesterday evening. The incident occurred at a sports bar on Carrera 22, in Ciprés, at around 21:00 local time, when the victims were attacked whilst watching a football match. No arrests have been reported.



ASIA

Papua New Guinea: Kidnapped researchers rescued

Last month, a group of armed criminals abducted a team of researchers led by New Zealander archaeologist Professor Bryce Barker in Papua New Guinea's (PNG) remote highlands area, near Mount Bosavi. The researchers had been on a field study trip when they were captured and held for ransom by the group, leading to an international hostage-situation, as authorities desperately launched coordinated efforts to negotiate a release, whilst simultaneously preparing security forces to use "whatever means necessary" to free the captives – who were ultimately rescued during security operations.

Initially, four researchers and four local guides were taken hostage by the armed group on 19 February, including Australian-based New Zealander Prof Barker and three Papua New Guinean research associates – Jemina Haro, Cathy Alex, and Teppsy Beni. The group were reportedly taken hostage at gunpoint while conducting archaeological fieldwork, in what appeared to have been a "spur of the moment" attack by their captors. The local guides were apparently released the following day, while one of the researchers – Cathy Alex – was released on 22 February to relay the message that the captors were insisting the ransom be paid. The remaining three captives – Barker, Haro, and Beni – were eventually freed on 26 February.

Reports have indicated that the abduction may have come about as a result of an earlier altercation, in which security guards at a nearby logging site allegedly fired guns at two of the criminals, leaving two of their group badly injured. According to sources, the logging site had strengthened security following a kidnapping incident in 2022. Following the altercation, it's thought that the suspects – who have been described by local reports as a criminal gang of around 20 so-called 'runners' known to move guns and drugs across parts of PNG – then encountered the research group separately and decided to take them hostage in a bid to gain the attention of the authorities to demand compensation for their injuries.

The runners demanded a ransom of 3.5 million PNG Kina – the equivalent of close to one million USD (around £832,000). While Prime Minister James Marape stated that the hostages were freed via "covert operations" – which initially indicated that the ransom demand had not been paid – later reports have suggested that a smaller amount may have passed hands. The PNG government stated that the captors were ultimately given a sum of around 100,000 Kina (about \$28,400; £23,900). The initial ransom demand was made through Prof Barker's satellite phone and was met with the response that the 3.5m Kina requested was too large a sum to be readily accessed in the province.

At this stage, authorities reportedly urged the captors to accept a smaller sum which could be obtained locally. Following difficulties with Barker's satellite phone battery, which led to a stall in negotiations for several days as third-party communications unfolded, the captors kept moving their location to evade interception by authorities, until a release was eventually secured by the negotiation team. The governor of Hela province, Philip Undialu, said his team had only been able to begin substantial negotiations with the captors once they moved into an area with mobile phone coverage. The kidnappers had previously threatened to kill the hostages if they were approached by anyone in uniform, so the rescue team consisted of a plainclothes negotiation team - who were dispatched to the remote Bosavi area with the small sum of money, which the gunmen accepted, allowing the hostages to be safely extracted. The freed hostages were initially flown from Bosavi to Kutubu by helicopter, before being transferred to Port Moresby. Prof Barker has since arrived back in Australia following his release, while PNG police are pursuing prosecuting the kidnappers.



Australia

9 February 2023: Chinese security cameras removed amid security fears

Chinese-made surveillance cameras are set to be removed from defence sites over national security fears. The move follows a recent audit which found that some 900 pieces of surveillance equipment built by Chinese companies, Hikvision, and, Dahua, were being used on government estates. Similar moves to replace Chinese-made security cameras have already been made by both the US and the UK, citing concerns surrounding sensitive data vulnerability.

Philippines

10 February 2023: Five NPA rebels killed, one injured, three arrested after clashes in Cawayan

Five New People's Army (NPA) rebels were killed, another was injured and three others were arrested following clashes with security forces in Cawayan, Masbate earlier this morning. The incident occurred in Guiom at around 06:00 local time.

New Zealand

14 February 2023: National state of emergency declared

New Zealand has declared a national state of emergency amid recent flooding which has impacted much of the North Island following sustained periods of severe wet weather, including Cyclone Gabrielle, which has brought torrential downpours and strong winds to flood-hit areas.

Thailand

17 February 2023: Yala bomb blast kills police officer

A police officer has apparently been killed in a bomb explosion which occurred in the Bannang Sata district of Yala province on Friday. The blast reportedly happened at around 11:30 local time, in the Khuean Bang Lang area of Bannang Sata, when police personnel allegedly came under attack by several assailants using explosives and gunfire. While one police officer was killed amid the attack, at least four others have also been wounded.

Papua New Guinea

20 February 2023: Research team taken hostage in highlands

A team of researchers has apparently been taken hostage by armed assailants in Papua New Guinea's remote highlands area. The researchers include local academics and an Australian professor, and it's understood to the group had been on a study trip when they were captured by armed men. A ransom demand has been issued for their release, with authorities confirming they are in contact with

the kidnappers with an aim to have the hostages released "alive and safe".

Bangladesh

21 February 2023: Clashes erupt in Jhenaidah, Khulna

Violent clashes are said to have broken out between two groups in the Jhenaidah area of the Khulna Division, resulting in at least six people being injured. Local sources indicate the fighting has largely taken place outside the front entrance to the Government Mahtab Uddin Degree College, located just off the Jessore-Jhenaidah highway in the Kaliganj area of Jhenaidah, on Tuesday.

Sri Lanka

21 February 2023: Protest held in Kalutara

A demonstration has been staged in the Kalutara area of the Western Province. The protest reportedly comes over a recent hike in electricity tariffs in the area. The overnight protest comes as communities have increasingly begun to rally against rising costs of living, prompting residents to call on local government authorities to step in to reduce tariffs or allow concessions.

Indonesia

28 February 2023: Troops surround separatists holding New Zealand pilot

Indonesian security forces in the restive Papua region have reportedly surrounded separatists holding captive a New Zealand pilot. The country's chief security minister has confirmed the development on Tuesday, but highlighted that troops will exercise restraint while negotiations for the pilot's release continue. The rebels have said that they will not release the pilot unless Indonesia's government recognises the region's independence and withdraws troops.

China

28 February 2023: Clashes reported in Anyang, Henan

Clashes have reportedly broken out in the Anyang area of Henan province, where police are alleged to have clashed with protesters in Hua County on Monday. Local reports have suggested that the group of protesters had initially gathered to demonstrate against the local authorities and police over developments in a recent murder case. No details regarding any casualties have been reported.



EUROPE

Greece: Deadly train crash sparks protests

A major train collision which led to the deaths of at least 57 people in the Thessaly region has triggered widespread unrest in Greece, as thousands take part in ongoing protests over the disaster. The crash occurred shortly before midnight on Tuesday 28 February, near the city of Larissa, when a passenger train transporting some 350 people collided head-on with a freight train travelling along the same line in the opposite direction. The deadly crash has prompted strikes and protests, as rail workers and others affected by the tragedy have blamed the accident on government neglect.

The crash has become the country's worst rail disaster in living memory. Reports from the site of the crash detailed the extent of the carnage, confirming that the first four carriages of the passenger train had been derailed by the force of the impact. The first two carriages reportedly sustained the worst of the damage, with the front carriage completely crushed and burnt out. Rescue teams worked through the night to extract survivors from the wreckage of the train. In the days that followed, the Greek government declared three days of national mourning and said victims' funerals would be paid for by the state. Meanwhile, union members were joined by outraged members of the public as they gathered for protests in Athens and Thessaloniki – leading to large-scale demonstrations over the weekend, which saw police clash with protesters in Athens.

Amid the protests, Kostas Karamanlis has resigned as transport minister as a "sign of respect", while Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has released a statement, asking for forgiveness from families of victims killed in the accident. In his statement, Mitsotakis indicated that some fault likely lay with local authorities, as he insisted that modern operations should have made it impossible for two trains to be heading in opposite directions towards each other on the same line without anyone noticing. A 59-year-old station master from Larissa has since been charged with manslaughter by negligence. He appeared in court over the weekend and remains in custody, having purportedly admitted to sharing in the responsibility for the circumstances which led to the accident. He will likely face between 10 years and life in jail if convicted.

Meanwhile, the railway workers' union has blamed successive governments' alleged lack of respect towards Greek railways, claiming that the crash was an accident which had long been waiting to happen due to chronic underfunding and a lack of investment. Train drivers have long complained of problems associated with the electronic systems designed to warn of dangers on the tracks ahead, while Greek government ministers have claimed that any lack of funding was a direct result of strict terms associated with international bailouts following the country's 2010 debt crisis. Whilst recently announcing his resignation, Karamanlis stated that he was taking responsibility for the government's failure to modernise the country's railways – lending further evidence to claims the government had failed to adequately invest in updating national rail infrastructure. Protests and unrest surrounding the train crash have now gathered enough momentum to potentially become a defining political issue ahead of the upcoming general election and might even force the government to push back the initial proposed election date.



Serbia

7 February 2023: Cacak shooting injures one

A recent shooting incident which has occurred in Cacak, Moravica, has left at least one person wounded. The shooting happened on Monday, outside a restaurant, where it's claimed two restaurant workers became embroiled in a violent altercation. While the victim has been transferred to hospital, one person has been arrested following the incident.

Spain

8 February 2023: Health services impacted by cyberattack

Health services in Castilla y Leon (aka Castile and Leon) have reportedly been impacted by a suspected cyberattack on Wednesday. The attack is believed to have utilised phishing methods to target the health systems used by the Regional Health Management of Castilla y Leon.

France

9 February 2023: One killed in Tourcoing shooting

A person has been reported dead following a recent shooting incident which has occurred in the Tourcoing area of Hauts-de-France. The shooting has occurred on Thursday morning, outside the front of the victim's private residential property. Police have launched an investigation into what they suspect was a targeted killing, although the motive has yet to be determined and no suspects have been identified so far.

Germany

10 February 2023: Climate activists block traffic in Mainz

Climate activists blocked traffic in Mainz, Rhineland-Palatinate earlier today. The incident began at around 08:00 local time when Letzte Generation activists stuck themselves to the road on Saarsstrasse, blocking traffic towards the city centre. Police advised against travelling on the Mainz-Downtown (A60) junction, the second blockade of its kind this week.

Greece

24 February 2023: Two injured in Thessaloniki shooting

Two people have been wounded amid a recent shooting incident which has occurred in the Thessaloniki area of Central Macedonia. According to local reports, the shooting is understood to have occurred on Thursday, during the early hours of the morning, at around 04:00 local time, in a nightclub in the Ladadika area of the city. Among the two people injured includes the shooter, who was apparently wounded by people trying to defend the victim.

Lithuania

24 February 2023: Four detained on kidnapping charges

Four suspects have been arrested on suspected kidnapping charges in Kaunas. The arrests were made overnight, at around 00:10 local time on Friday morning, when police stopped a vehicle along Rasyte Street, following reports that four attackers had allegedly assaulted a victim and forced him into a vehicle with the apparent intention of coercing him to do something. Further details have yet to be confirmed.

Romania

24 February 2023: Pro-Ukraine protest held in Constanta

A protest in support of Ukraine has been staged in the Romanian capital city of Constanta. The demonstration has taken place on Friday, outside the Russian consulate building, along Strada Mihai Viteazu 5. According to local reports, an estimated 2,000 people are claimed to have taken part in the protest.

Italy

26 February 2023: Dozens killed after migrant boat sinks

At least 43 people have been killed after a migrant boat capsized off Italy on Sunday morning. A further 80 people were rescued following the accident, which occurred off Crotona in the southern Calabria region. The AGI news agency reported that the vessel was overcrowded and split apart during violent waves. Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi said that the incident was "a huge tragedy which shows the absolute need to act firmly against irregular migration channels."

Austria

27 February 2023: Police officer killed in Trieben shooting

A police officer has reportedly died following a shooting incident in Trieben, Styria, on Monday. The attack is said to have occurred at around 07:45 local time on Monday morning, at a police station in the Triebener Bundesstrasse area, where a police officer was apparently shot at by his colleague amid a dispute.

Norway

27 February 2023: Protest held in Oslo

A protest is being held in the capital city, Oslo, on Monday, in support of indigenous communities. The demonstration has been staged on Monday morning, with protesters congregating outside the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy building to block access to the site. The protest comes in support of the indigenous Sami community, amid brewing tensions between the community and the construction of wind farms in the Fosen peninsula.



MENA

Israel: Major challenges facing new government

Israel's new right-wing government is currently facing major challenges both inside the country and in the occupied territories. For the past year, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) has been conducting near-nightly raids during an anti-terror offensive in the West Bank following a series of Palestinian terror attacks that killed 31 people in 2022, and another 11 since the beginning of this year. The current situation is particularly volatile and dangerous. At the same time the new administration is also under increasing pressure over its attempts to reform the judiciary.

Since the start of this year, there has been an intensification of violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem – areas occupied by Israel since 1967. Palestinian gunmen killed two Israeli brothers outside the village of Huwara in late-February, sparking a reprisal attack carried out by a mob of far-right Jewish settlers. This was followed by an IDF raid on the Jenin refugee camp, killing six Palestinians including the man suspected of killing the Israeli brothers. The incident sparked protests across the West Bank and Gaza against the actions of the Israeli security forces, both in Jenin and more broadly. During a brief visit to the country, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin called on the Israelis to reduce tensions with the Palestinians and to “avoid any acts that could trigger more insecurity, including settlement expansion and inflammatory rhetoric.” He also expressed concern about violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers against the Palestinians. Much of the increase in violence has been blamed on the far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir; according to local media two dozen former police chiefs wrote to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to warn that Ben Gvir's policies will lead to another Palestinian intifada (uprising).

While tensions between the government and the Palestinians are increasing, mass protests against proposed judicial reforms in Israel have been taking place since January 2023. The protesters are opposing a bill that would overhaul the country's judicial system and limit the power and independence of the Supreme Court. The bill was introduced by Netanyahu's government after he won a narrow victory in the December 2022 elections. The bill aims to change the composition and selection process of the Judicial Appointments Committee, which nominates judges for all levels of courts. It will also allow Israel's parliament - the Knesset - to override Supreme Court rulings that strike down laws as unconstitutional with a simple majority vote.

The supporters of the bill argue that it is necessary to restore balance and accountability in the judiciary, which they accuse of being politicized, activist and elitist. They also claim that it would strengthen democracy by giving more power to the elected representatives of the people. Those who opposed it argue that it is an attempt to undermine the rule of law, weaken checks and balances, and erode democratic institutions. They also fear that it would enable Netanyahu to evade prosecution on corruption charges, which he denies. The protests have been organized by various civil society groups, opposition parties, legal associations, human rights organizations and former judges. They have been joined by thousands of citizens from different backgrounds and political affiliations.

The protests have been mostly peaceful but occasionally clashed with police or counter-protesters. Large rallies have been held every week in various cities across Israel, including Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and Beersheba. The largest protest so far took place on Thursday 9 March, when tens of thousands of protesters blocked Tel Aviv's main airport and disrupted Netanyahu's official trip to Italy.



Iran

11 February 2023: French-Iranian academic released from jail

French-Iranian academic Fariba Adelkhah has been released from jail in Teheran after spending more than three years in prison for allegedly conspiring against national security and committing acts of propaganda. Adelkhah denied both charges, pleading innocence, when she was jailed for five years in 2020. Supporters of Adelkhah have also rallied behind her, claiming she was unjustly imprisoned.

Lebanon

14 February 2023: Lebanon reiterates calls for financial aid

Lebanon has reiterated calls for global financial aid amid a last push effort to try and convince world leaders at a World Government Summit in Dubai. In the last two years, Lebanon's economy has severely deteriorated, leading World Bank officials to recently assess the country's financial situation as one of the most precarious in the Middle East.

Yemen

16 February 2023: Government forces target Houthi positions near Taiz

Government forces, supported by the local resistance, have conducted a raid on Houthi militia bases located to the east of Taiz. Local sources reported that government troops attacked Houthi strongholds in Sarmin, destroying their defensive positions. Furthermore, the government artillery fired at vehicles and groups from the Houthi forces near Hathran.

Libya

17 February 2023: Egypt working to release six nationals kidnapped in Libya

The Egyptian government said it was working to secure the release of six of its citizens who were kidnapped in Libya. Suspected criminal gangs abducted six Egyptian Coptic Christians, who had travelled across the border into eastern Libya last week, on the main road between Benghazi and Tripoli. "The six Egyptians are detained in an illegal immigration center in western Libya," the Egyptian foreign ministry said in a statement. According to sources in Egypt, the kidnappers demanded a ransom of \$30k for each of the hostages.

Tunisia

18 February 2023: Union leads rallies in Tunisia

The Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) has led rallies over the worsening economy across Tunisia. The largest demonstration was held in the city of Sfax on Saturday,

where crowds denounced the government's talks with the IMF. They also called for the release of Anis Kaabi, a UGTT official who was detained on 31 January during a strike.

Saudi Arabia

22 February 2023: Two Algerian pilgrims killed in stabbing, Mecca

Two Algerian pilgrims have been killed in a stabbing at a hotel in Mecca. Saudi police said another Algerian national has been detained in connection with the attack. "On the morning (of Monday), he behaved abnormally as a result of psychological pressure and he was nervous for an unknown reason that made him abnormal," said Salah Toumi, the secretary-general of Algeria's National Union of Tourism and Travel agencies. The group were reportedly visiting the holy site to perform the annual Hajj pilgrimage.

Egypt

22 February 2023: Three injured in clash over road dispute, Sohag

Three people have been wounded in a clash that was sparked by a traffic dispute in Sohag. The warden of Dar Al-Salam Police Station in Sohag Governorate reported that gunshots were fired in the Dar Al-Salam district. The wounded were taken to Sohag University Hospital for treatment, while two people have been arrested in connection with the shooting.

Turkey

22 February 2023: Six IS suspects detained in Samsun

Six people have been detained in the northern coastal city of Samsun for their alleged links to the Islamic State (IS). The suspects, four of whom are women, are of Iraqi and Syrian nationality. Officers from the anti-terrorism branch carried out raids in the Ilkadim and Atakum districts, during which digital materials were also seized.

Iraq

27 February 2023: Hundreds protest election law in Baghdad

Hundreds of people have joined a protest against proposed electoral reforms in Baghdad. Last week parliament debated reverting to one electoral district per governorate, a move which independent candidates claim would limit their chances of being elected. Another debate was scheduled for Monday but was postponed when independent lawmakers walked out. The security forces closed the Joumhouriya Bridge on the Tigris River and blocked areas around the Green Zone.