

Burma

News from Kayah, Chin, Karen, Arakan States and Sagaing Region

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Kayah State

Regime Destroys Food and Medicine for Refugees in Southeastern Myanmar

Myanmar junta troops destroyed supplies of rice and medicine intended for over 3,000 internally displaced people (IDP's) in Pekon, southern Shan State, who were forced to flee their homes after intense fighting broke out between regime forces and civilian resistance fighters last month.

More than 100,000 villagers from over 150 villages and downtown areas in Pekon and Demoso, Hpruso and Loikaw townships in Kayah State have now been displaced for weeks.

Locals told The Irrawaddy that on June 8 junta forces burned 80 bags of rice, three barrels of cooking oil, dried food, medicine and two vehicles being stored at Loi Ying village in Pekon Township. The vehicles were an ambulance from the Moby (Moebye) free funeral services association and a private car.

"Junta forces and people defense forces (PDF) were involved in heavy fighting on June 7. On that day we gathered food supplies for the refugees in the village. As the PDF members withdrew, we were left with the food. But we were forced to flee when the military entered the village. They torched everything on June 8," said one local.

"Medicines to treat diarrhea were among the items burned. Currently, over 3,000 IDP's are sharing what little rice they have. They fled from their homes due to the fighting that followed the PDF's seizure of Moby police station," he added.

Loi Ying village, which is home to ethnic Kayan people, is located over 15 miles from Pekon town. The whole village fled the fighting, which began in Kayah State's Demoso Township, which borders

Pekon.

Villagers have sought shelter at monasteries, churches and nearby villages by displaying white flags. But their temporary shelters have been attacked by the military regime's artillery, with junta forces accusing the PDF of taking cover in them. An artillery attack on a church in Kayan Thar Yar village on May 24 killed four civilians sheltering there, prompting residents to flee into nearby forests and hills.

The IDPs are reportedly sheltering at ten different locations and are living on the support provided by local civil society groups. But many places lack adequate supplies of food, medicine and clean drinking water.

Fighting halted on Thursday and Friday, but locals are still fleeing whenever they see soldiers entering their villages, according to a spokesperson for the IDPs management committee in Pekin Kaw Khu in Loikaw Township.

He said they could not buy petrol, while donated food supplies are being held up by military checkpoints and the closure of the road linking Aung Pan and Taunggyi in Shan State.

Junta forces have set up checkpoints along the transport routes within Kayah State, blocking local transport. All vehicles travelling between Kayah State and Pekon and from Taunggyi are also being inspected.

Pekin Kaw Khu IDP camp is currently hosting more than 1,500 people and they only have food for one week.

"If they continue blocking the road, all the IDP's could face going hungry," added the spokesperson.

He urged that food, medicine and materials for shelters should be allowed past the checkpoints.

Myanmar regime troops are trying to eliminate the local PDF force. For about a week, they have cut off electricity, internet and cell phone access in areas where they suspect the PDF to be operating.

Junta troops have been accused of targeting civilians as well as the PDF.

A total of 131 locals have been detained since March 10, according to the Progressive Karenni People Force. Seven of those were arrested while on their way to the IDP camps.

The Irrawaddy

- The Irrawaddy 11 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/regime-destroys-food-and-medicine-for-refugees-in-southeastern-myanmar.html>

Myanmar Junta Deploys Reinforcements to Eliminate Kayah Civilian Resistance

Myanmar's military has been intensifying efforts to seize control of Kayah State's Demoso Township

from the combined forces of the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) and People Defense Force (PDF). Fighting began in the township, which sits on a key road junction, on May 21.

The military has used artillery in civilian areas, particularly Dawt Ngan Khar ward on the highway from Demoso to Taungoo in Bago Region, which suffers daily barrages.

"They launched artillery attacks [on Wednesday] but we did not confront the military. If they enter Dawt Ngan Khar ward, clashes occur. When they use artillery, we fall back and they torch the houses. Artillery attacks have increased in recent days," said a PDF spokesman in Demoso.



Military trucks heading to Loikaw from Taungoo on the Taungoo-Thandaunggyi road. / CJ

The regime has reportedly deployed reinforcements from Taungoo against Dawt Ngan Khar.

The PDF spokesman said resistance fighters would defend the town. "We will try our best to prevent them taking our town," he said.

The regime's state officials issued a directive on June 4 saying the PDF would be eliminated in the township and all civilians should leave.

Over 100 regime troops are stationed across the state border in Leiktho, Bago Region, according to the KNDF's information officer.



Junta troops move to Loikaw on the Taungoo-Thandaunggyi road. / CJ

He said the armed group would continue to oppose the junta forces. "Wherever they come from, either Taungoo or Shan State, we are ready to fight, to protect our homes and our state," he said.

Junta forces have been deployed in Myaung Auk, Ngwe Taung and Dawt Ngan Khar wards in Demoso town with Infantry Battalion 102 controlling the east of the town.

Electricity has been cut for four days in the west of the town, where the civilian forces are based. Mobile and internet connections are also down.

A Demoso resident said Dawt Ngan Khar's houses have been destroyed. "It is not fighting between the troops and the resistance. They [junta troops] are just destroying people's abandoned homes. They have no ethics and just want to destroy everything."



Houses destroyed by junta artillery in Dawt Ngan Khar, Demoso. / CJ

Junta troops have reportedly buried dead soldiers in village cornfields. Churches have also been destroyed.

An artillery attack on a church in Kayan Thar Yar village on May 24 killed four sheltering civilians, prompting residents to flee into forests.

The Irrawaddy is unable to confirm the exact casualty numbers.

Troops have also reportedly fired on villages displaying white flags sheltering displaced residents from Loikaw and Pekon Township in Shan State.

More than 100,000 villages from Demoso, Hpruso and Loikaw have been displaced with many in hiding, too scared to establish camps as they fear further attacks.



Houses destroyed by junta artillery in Dawt Ngan Khar, Demoso. / CJ

A Kayah-based ethnic armed organization, the Karenni National Progress Party (KNPP), urged the military to follow its code of conduct and avoid targeting civilian homes and religious buildings.

KNPP's secretary Khu Daniel told The Irrawaddy this week that the armed group stands by the people. He said the military's excessive use of force increased tensions and encourage more civilians to oppose the regime.

Since the Feb. 1 coup, the regime has faced protests in towns and cities and shootouts across Kayah, Chin and Kachin states and Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay regions. The regime has killed at least 858 people and detained nearly 6,000 people, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

The Irrawaddy

• The Irrawaddy 11 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/regime-destroys-food-and-medicine-for-refugees-in-southeastern-myanmar.html>

Interview: Kayah Rebel Army Backs Civilian Resistance Against Regime

In Kayah State, military tensions are running high between the junta and the combined Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) and People's Defense Force (PDF).

There is fierce fighting in Demoso, Loikaw and Hpruso townships. The regime has carried out airstrikes on civilian resistance fighters and used artillery on civilian areas. It has also brought hundreds of reinforcements into Kayah State.

The military authorities have informed the general administration departments in Demoso, Loikaw and Hpruso that civilians should leave their homes as further attacks are planned.

Armed groups in the state include the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), which is over 60 years old. It is backing the civilian resistance.

KNPP spokesman Khu Daniel recently talked to The Irrawaddy.

How is the KNPP involved in armed conflict in Kayah State?

Khu Daniel : The KNPP headquarters has not instructed its members to fight. But to stand by the people has long been our stance. We are helping the people when they are attacked. That's all.

What is the view of the KNPP on the regime's shelling of towns and villages in Kayah State?

We oppose the attacks. They should not attack civilians who have nothing to do with the fighting.

How is the KNPP performing on the battlefield?

We have confronted them twice when they came to search our training ground. That's all. We stay in our territory and they stay away. They are only attacking towns and villages, not our camps.

Is there no military tension between the regime and KNPP on the ground?

There is no military tension between us. But we stand by the people. Harming the people amounts to harming us.

Are the KNPP troops helping the resistance on the ground?

We stand by the people.

How is the relationship between the PDF and KNPP?

The PDF is formed by the people. It is happening across the country. It is a public movement. We won't object to it. Under the rules of engagement, both sides must make sure innocent civilians are not harmed. The military should not attack schools, hospitals and churches. These are the international rules of engagement. But they don't follow those rules and have opened fire indiscriminately on churches, monasteries, schools and hospitals. We can't accept that.

The regime asked ethnic armed groups to hold peace talks after the coup. How is your

relationship with the regime?

We have barely had any communication since the coup. They might contact our political wing. But there have been no official talks with either our political or armed wings.

At a lower level, some military officers have informally asked us to help control Karenni PDF. But they only asked personally and not through official letters.

We heard the regime told civilians in Demoso, Loikaw and Hpruso to flee. We also heard reinforcements are coming to attack the PDF. Does the KNPP have any more information?

There have been increased military deployments. Between 100 and 200 reinforcements came from Shan State during recent fighting. Others have arrived by air. The military also brought in over 100 troops from Taungoo. But we are focusing on the people. They are in real trouble. We are arranging food for them.

How is the military performing against the young resistance fighters?

The military wants to annihilate them. It didn't use aircraft when it was fighting ethnic armed groups in the past. But now it is heavily using aircraft against the people. It shouldn't do that. And it is indiscriminately attacking religious places and health clinics. It is attacking unarmed civilians.

The military response is more intense than its previous attacks on us. The response is unfair. We are trained and experienced. The people have no proper training or weapons. Some are only using swords. The best weapons they have are rudimentary rifles. It is not fair to use modern armaments against them. The military wants to take complete control and remove all armed resistance.

What will happen to Kayah State if the fighting continues?

People will suffer more. They will get desperate and there will be increased tension. Both sides will suffer.

Currently, people rely on food donations from outside Kayah State and we don't know if all the displaced people in the state are receiving food. We hear people are seriously short of food but we have difficulty communicating with the people. Communications are erratic and humanitarian groups can't go to the affected areas because of security concerns.

What will the KNPP do if clashes intensify?

We oppose the junta. The KNPP will stand by the people.

The Irrawaddy

• The Irrawaddy 9 juin 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-drops-charges-against-arakan-army-chiefs-relatives.html>

Chin State

Chin Fighters Say 165 Myanmar Junta Troops Killed Since Late April

A total of 165 junta soldiers were killed and another 123 were wounded in shootouts with civilian resistance fighters in Chin State in the 49 days between April 24 and June 11, the Chinland Defense Force said.

In the same period, about 30 civilian resistance fighters were killed and 45 injured, while nine civilian deaths and four injuries were reported, the group said in a statement.

However, The Irrawaddy was not able to independently verify the military casualties. The military regime has not published any figures relating to the army's casualties in Chin State.

The firefights in Chin State started on April 24 when residents took up old-fashioned homemade hunting rifles and launched an attack on the police station in the mountaintop town of Mindat. The residents launched the attack after police broke a promise to release six detained anti-regime protesters.

Since then, residents of Chin State have formed civilian resistance forces in each township to resist junta troops.

Clashes between civilian resistance fighters of the Chinland Defense Force and regime troops have been reported in six of Chin State's nine township: Kanpetlet, Mindat, Hakha, Thantlang, Falam and Tedim.

In the shootouts, most civilian resistance fighters have been armed with old-fashioned homemade hunting rifles and homemade single-barrel shotguns, while junta forces have been armed with heavy explosives, artillery, rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons, and have called in air strikes.

On Thursday alone, shootouts in Hakha and Thantlang townships killed 27 junta soldiers including an army captain, and reportedly left several others wounded.

Since the firefight in Thantlang, more than 1,000 villagers have fled their homes.

Last Sunday, around 50 junta soldiers were killed as fighting intensified between regime troops and Chin civilian resistance fighters in Mindat. The clashes occurred when military troops in two columns attempted to raid villages sheltering internally displaced persons in the northern part of the town.

After losing such a large number of soldiers, the junta bombed the civilian resistance fighters twice using fighter aircraft. In the clashes in Mindat, junta forces have used the military's Battalion No. 274 based in Mindat and an artillery unit based in nearby Kyaukhtu, Magwe Region. They have attacked the civilian resistance units with heavy explosives and artillery rounds.

Civilian resistance fighters of Chinland Defense Force-Mindat claim junta forces often use chemical weapons, saying some of the military's explosives contain no shrapnel but leave the civilian fighters unconscious or feeling dizzy.

Some 90 percent of Mindat's population of 25,000 have fled their homes since junta forces seized the town on May 12.

Currently, military reinforcements are attempting to raid villages sheltering the residents who fled Mindat.

The Irrawaddy

- The Irrawaddy 12 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/chin-fighters-say-165-myanmar-junta-troops-killed-since-late-april.html>

27 Myanmar Junta Soldiers Killed in Chin State Clashes

Around 27 junta soldiers, including an army captain, were killed by civilian resistance fighters during clashes in Chin State on Thursday. The shootouts took place in Hakha and Thantlang townships and resulted in over 1,000 villagers fleeing their homes.

At about 3pm on Thursday, fighters from the Chinland Defense Force ambushed 70 regime troops patrolling the Hakha- Gangaw Highway, some 30 miles south of Hakha, the Chin State capital.

During 30 minutes of fighting, junta forces used explosives against the civilian resistance fighters. Around ten junta soldiers were killed and at least five others wounded in the firefight, according to the Chinland Defense Force spokesperson.

Earlier on Thursday morning, a group of 26 military regime soldiers clashed with the Chinland Defense Force in Thantlang Township, 18 miles to the north of Thantlang town. Around 17 junta troops, including an army captain, were killed, while no resistance casualties were reported, according to a statement from the Chinland Defense Force – Thantlang.

More than 100 junta reinforcements continued fighting with the civilian resistance fighters until Friday, causing more than 1,000 residents from four nearby villages to flee their homes, the spokesperson for the Chinland Defense Force told the Irrawaddy on Friday.

In Hakha, more than 80 residents have been detained for staging anti-regime protests and having anti-regime protest photos or activities on their cell phones and social media accounts. Junta security forces in Hakha are inspecting people entering the town, as well as checking the cell phones of local residents.

On Thursday, the Chinland Defense Force warned that it will carry on conducting intense defensive actions against junta troops across Chin State until the 80 detained Hakha residents are released.

“No matter how many more soldiers the junta uses against us, we will keep resisting them,” the spokesperson of the Chinland Defense Force told the Irrawaddy.

Since early May, shootouts between civilian resistance fighters and regime forces have been reported in over half of Chin State. Clashes have occurred in six of Chin State’s nine townships: Kanpetlet, Mindat, Hakha, Thantlang, Falam and Tedim.

Over 100 regime soldiers have reportedly been killed, while the civilian resistance fighters have suffered more than 24 casualties.

The Irrawaddy

• The Irrawaddy 11 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/regime-destroys-food-and-medicine-for-refugees-in-southeastern-myanmar.html>

More Schools Closed in Myanmar's Chin State Amid COVID-19 Spike

All schools in Paletwa Township, Chin State, have been closed since June 9 after COVID-19 cases were reported.

Schools in Sagaing Region's Tamu and Kale townships and Chin State's Tonzang, Hakha, Thantlang, Falam and Tedim townships were closed on June 7 after coronavirus cases were reported a week after schools reopened nationwide.

According to the junta-controlled health ministry, 528 cases were reported in Sagaing Region from Feb. 1 to June 4. Chin State saw 319 cases with six deaths in the same period.

A man from Myitwa village near the Indian border tested positive for coronavirus at Paletwa Township hospital on June 8.

Six others, including fellow villagers who accompanied him to the hospital and their boatman, tested positive, according to Paletwa residents.

Among those infected are two teachers and a student.

"The township education officer has instructed us to close the schools," U Kyaw Win Naing, a teacher from Paletwa, told The Irrawaddy.

The officer instructed teachers to avoid traveling until further notice.

"A teacher said he does not know when the schools will reopen," said a student's father from Samee in Paletwa.

The seven COVID-19 patients are being treated in Paletwa and the authorities have sealed off the guesthouse they used.

The Irrawaddy

• The Irrawaddy 11 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/regime-destroys-food-and-medicine-for-refugees-in-southeastern-myanmar.html>

Myanmar Junta Troops Killed in Chin State Fighting

Serious fighting in Mindat, Chin State on Monday and Tuesday has left at least 13 junta soldiers dead after civilian resistance fighters attacked regime forces sent to reinforce security in the mountain-top town. Clashes have been taking place in Mindat since April 24, but have intensified since Monday.

“There has been a shootout going on with the junta reinforcements. Civilians intercepted them at the entrance to town yesterday and were able to prevent them from entering. Now, the junta forces are trying again,” said a Mindat resident.

On Tuesday morning, civilian fighters intercepted nine military trucks carrying junta reinforcements.

Resistance fighters also attacked junta troops in two places outside Mindat on Monday. There was also a clash at the border between Chin State and Magwe Region, said residents.

Locals said that 13 junta troops were killed in the clashes and a military truck went up in flames.

“There are no reported casualties from the civilian side. At first, we heard that seven of the regime forces had died. But this morning we heard from the military that a total of 13 died,” said a Mindat resident.

Military-run newspapers reported that the security forces were attacked with traditional firearms and rifles in Mindat, leaving one soldier dead, another three injured and a military vehicle destroyed by fire.

Fighting erupted in Mindat on April 24 after police refused to release six detained anti-regime protesters. Three policemen were reportedly killed in fighting that night.

“We asked them to release the protesters, but they wouldn’t. As tensions grew, the military shot at a biker in the evening. He wasn’t hit, but as they shot first, the young people responded,” said a Mindat resident.

“This is how the fighting has escalated in the town. There were a number of shootouts on Saturday and Sunday in the town. There were no casualties. But later the fighting became intense. We only have traditional firearms. We have to defend ourselves as they shot at us first,” he added.

All shops in Mindat were closed on Tuesday and the streets were deserted.

“We are not just doing this for our town. This is a crisis that concerns everyone in Myanmar. As things have happened, we have to try and do our best,” said another Mindat resident.

Junta troops in Kani, Mingin and Yimabin townships in Sagaing Region were ordered to reinforce Mindat on Sunday, Sagaing residents told The Irrawaddy.

Residents in various parts of Chin State and Sagaing Region use traditional firearms for hunting. Now, they are fighting the junta forces with those firearms, as well as homemade weapons.

The Irrawaddy

• The Irrawaddy 27 April 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-troops-killed-chin-state-fighting.html>

Sagaing Region

Ten Myanmar Junta Troops Killed in Sagaing Region Ambush

About 10 junta soldiers were reportedly killed and 10 wounded during a shootout with civilian resistance fighters in Kani Township, Sagaing Region, on Wednesday afternoon.

The Kani's People Defense Force ambushed five military vehicles carrying around 70 troops on the Monywa-Kalewa highway, according to residents.

The trucks were returning to a camp at Yargyi village after looting nearby Thalin village, which had been abandoned.

Junta soldiers reportedly triggered landmines beside the highway.

The Irrawaddy could not independently confirm the casualty numbers.

No resistance casualties were reported, said residents.

"The firefight stopped at around 5pm when the civilians stopped shooting due to the rain. The junta soldiers retreated to Yargyi," a resident told The Irrawaddy on Thursday.

He said the soldiers moved from Yargyi to Mingin Township on Thursday morning.

Around 5,000 residents from 10 villages in the area have now fled their homes.

Shootouts started in Kani Township on April 2.

The Irrawaddy

- The Irrawaddy 10 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-troops-killed-chin-state-fighting.html>

Karen State

Ethnic Karen Armed Group in Myanmar to Abide by Ceasefire Agreement

The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) chief of staff Saw Johnny has said that he will follow the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) framework to the letter.

The KNLA is the armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU), one of the most powerful ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, which signed the NCA with U Thein Sein's government in 2015.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Saw Johnny said that he would follow the guidelines of KNU General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, who in a May 10 public statement urged stakeholders to solve political problems through dialogue.

The KNU chairman's statement came after the military launched airstrikes on civilians from late March to early May in retaliation for attacks on military outposts by the KNLA's Brigade 5.

"I am saddened to see efforts to solve political problems arising in 2021 by taking up arms. Political problems need to be solved by political means, which is negotiation," said Gen. Saw Mutu Sae Poe.

His statement prompted mixed reactions, including strong criticism from Karen communities. The KNLA's Brigade 5 told The Irrawaddy that it viewed the general's statement as the personal opinion of a leader but not an order, saying that it would continue to do what it is supposed to do.

Now, a month after the KNU chairman issued his controversial statement, the KNLA chief has said the armed wing of the KNU will strictly follow the NCA and urged his troops to exercise strict military discipline.

The Irrawaddy was unable to contact a KNLA spokesperson for a comment on Saw Johnny's statement.

"The letter is intended to enforce discipline on KNLA troops and ensure that they obey orders from headquarters," said an officer from the KNU headquarters.

KNLA Brigade 5 has been clashing with junta security forces in Karen State's Papun District since March and military tensions are running high in the area.

On June 5, the Karen National Defense Organization, which is under the command of the KNU, attacked junta troops in the border town of Myawaddy, along with the Myawaddy People's Defense Force and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army.

The Irrawaddy

- The Irrawaddy 10 juin 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/ethnic-karen-armed-group-in-myanmar-to-abide-by-ceasefire-agreement.html>

Arakan / Rakhin State

Myanmar Junta Drops Charges Against Arakan Army Chief's Relatives AA chief's family members were among the ten released on June 9.

Detained relatives of the Arakan Army (AA) chief have been released from prison after all charges against them were dropped, as the military regime seeks to bolster ties with the ethnic armed group based in western Myanmar's Rakhine State.

The younger brother and sister of AA chief Major-General Tun Myat Naing, as well as the AA leader's brother-in-law, were part of a group of ten people released on Wednesday. Their release

followed a May 27 request from the Myanmar Police Force's Special Branch asking the Central Committee for Counterterrorism to allow it to drop the lawsuits against them.

Defence lawyer U Aung Kyaw Sein told The Irrawaddy that the military intends to seek reconciliation with the AA by dropping the charges. The ten were arrested on terrorism charges in 2019 at a time of heightened tension between the Myanmar military and the AA.

The AA chief's brother Ko Aung Myat Kyaw was arrested with seven other people by Singapore police on July 10, 2019 at the request of Myanmar authorities over allegations that they were financially backing the AA.

Most of the eight detainees were members of the Arakanese Association-Singapore (AAS), a social welfare organization that contributes relief aid from Singapore to ethnic Rakhine people displaced by fighting in Rakhine State.

They were subsequently deported to Myanmar, where authorities arrested them on arrival at Yangon International Airport and charged them under the Counter-Terrorism Law. They had since been held in Insein Prison.

"They were released this afternoon," Ma Hnin Hnin Shwe, the sister of one of the detainees Ma May Myat Mon, told The Irrawaddy on Wednesday.

The AA chief's sister Ma Moe Hnin Phyu and her husband Ko Kyaw Naing were arrested in October, 2019 at Yangon International Airport as Ko Kyaw Naing returned from Chiang Mai in Thailand.

Police said the charges were linked to explosive materials seized in Mandalay a month earlier. Ko Kyaw Naing was accused of funding a suspect linked to the seized explosive materials.

After fighting broke out between the military and AA in late 2018 in Rakhine State, the Myanmar authorities declared the AA a terrorist group in March 2020.

However, the two sides have observed an unofficial ceasefire since November last year after Nippon Foundation chairman Yōhei Sasakawa brokered talks between the AA and the military.

During the talks the AA demanded that all the cases opened for alleged ties with the armed group be dropped and all detainees be released.

The State Administration Council, as Myanmar's junta describes itself, removed the AA from the list of terrorist groups on March 11 this year. That was followed by the regime dropping charges against some individuals arrested over their alleged ties with the AA.

Authorities had charged over 270 people in some 90 cases during two years of fighting between the AA and the military.

The Irrawaddy

- The Irrawaddy 10 juin 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-drops-charges-against-arakan-army-chiefs-relatives.html>

