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6.3.1. Violence of Kuki-Chin National Army and the military

Reports of a militant group called the Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA), an armed wing of the separatist group Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF)528 emerged in mid-2022.529 According to the Business Standard, the KNF claims to have an army of over 3 000 people, while other estimates indicate a strength of 50–60 individuals.530 KNF has been carrying out attacks in the district of Bandarban since 2022, in which it has targeted Bangladeshi security forces, killed military personnel and abducted civilians.531 Bangladeshi authorities have launched counter-operations against the group since October 2022,532 and skirmishes and crackdowns on civilians by the Bangladeshi security forces have been reported in Bandarban.533 According to Dhaka Tribune, in the period October 2022–April 2024, 6 army personnel were killed, as well as 17 KNF members, and more than 50 individuals were injured, and 30 kidnapped.534 Corroborating information could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

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The clashes have displaced civilians into India536 and Myanmar.537 Moreover, IWGIA criticised Bangladeshi media for relying on the Bangladeshi military's press service in their reporting, and labelling arrested and killed individuals as KNF members, who, according to IWGIA, were civilians of the Bawm community.538 Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) also reported on civilians killed or arrested by the security forces, while the military press service claimed that they were KNF members.539

Following a series of bank robberies carried out by the KNA/KNF on 2–3 April 2024,540 the military launched operations targeting the KNF/KNA in three subdistricts of Bandarban: Ruma, Thanchi, and Rowangchhari.541 By 12 June 2024 over 96 people had reportedly been arrested in various locations within the district, and 12 Bawm men had been killed in gunfights with Bangladeshi forces.542 Bangladeshi media reported on instances of gunfights taking place in May–July 2024, during which alleged KNA/KNF militants were killed and arrested.543 Media outlet Hill Voice reported on one army personnel being killed in a gunfight on 11 July 2024.543 Thereafter, media, relying on information from the military, continued to report on military operations targeting the group, including a raid against an 'insurgent camp' in Bandarban on 19 September 2024,544 and exchange of fire leading to the death of three 'KNA militants' on 24 November 2024,545 injuries to one Bangladeshi army member in Ruma on 30 December 2024, 546 and the death of two 'KNA militants' in Ruma on 27 January 2025.547 Hill Voice reported on KNF members extorting villagers for money and rice in a village in Ruma on 11 December 2024,

548 and further reported on two military operations in Rangamati involving hundreds of army personnel in February 2025 and April 2025.549

The CHT is a popular tourist destination,550 but since 18 October 2022, travel restrictions have been imposed intermittently due to security concerns.551 In particular, Bandardban's subdistricts of Thanchi, Rowangchhari and Ruma have faced travel restrictions, including after the series of bank robberies in April 2024. Restrictions on Thanchi were lifted on 23 June 2024, 552 but following communal violence (see section 6.3.2. Communal violence), travel restrictions were imposed in the whole CHT in the period 8–31 October 2024.553 Bandarban continued to face travel restrictions until 7 November 2024, when the ban was lifted for most districts, except Thanchi, Rowangchhari, and Ruma.554 Thanchi and Ruma were still under restrictions on 2 April 2025, while other sub-districts reportedly were 'bustling with tourists' during Eid al-Fitr.555 The travel ban in Thanchi and Ruma was lifted on 6 June 2025, but tourists were only permitted to visit designated zones.556

Military operations targeting KNF has reportedly impacted the Bawm community,557 which is a Christian group of the Kuku-Chine Mizo ethnic group.558 The community was involved in the formation of the separatist organisation KNF, and the KNF is therefore perceived as the 'Bawm party'.559 Following the bank robberies on 2–3 April 2024, the Bangladeshi military has reportedly been targeting the whole Bawm community in operations against KNF/KNA. Bawm people have been subjected to random mass arrests, including pregnant women and young children.560 Amnesty International reported on Bawm people being arbitrarily arrested, as 'the authorities assume that the entire community […] are part of, or supporters of, the KNF'.561 According to RRAG, 13 Bawm persons have been extrajudicially executed and 144 arbitrarily arrested in connection to the bank robberies.562 According to IWGIA, those arrested were students, schoolteachers, pastors, government employees, businessmen and farmers, as well as children as young as two months, elderly people, and pregnant women. The same source reported on at least 10 extrajudicial killings of civilians committed by the military in the period 7 April 2024–9 September 2024, including of a 13-year-old child and five students having no affiliation with the KNF.563 Many of those arrested in April–May 2024 remained in custody by the end of 2024, according to Amnesty International.564

Many of the Bawm community have moreover been displaced.565 IWGIA reported on 4 000 community members being displaced due to military operations in the period October 2022–September 2024.566 This can be contrasted with the fact that the Bawm community is one of the smaller indigenous groups in the CHT,567 with 12 529 individuals according to the 2022 national census.568 Some have fled into neighbouring countries while others have been hiding in jungle areas close to their villages,569 leaving their land vulnerable to illegal settlement.570

According to IWGIA, Bawm civilians have been enduring ‘severe hardship’ under the military operations, including collective punishment, harm and arbitrary arrests. Most Bawm villages in the administrative unions of Remakreprangsa (Ruma subdistrict, Bandarban571) and Swalok (Sadar subdistrict, Bandarban572) have reportedly been deserted or lack male residents.573 Amnesty International reported on five villages facing military crackdown: Bethel, Pankhyang, Suanlu, Faruk, Eden, and Darjeeling (in the subdistricts of Rowangchari and Ruma),574 while RRAG reported on arrests and other incidents taking place also in other villages in the same subdistricts, including: Basatlong, Bethani, Moonlai, as well as Bandarban Sadar.575 Reported incidents include:

- **8 April 2024**: security forces targeted Bethel village,576 which is located close to one of the banks that were robbed in early April 2024.577 Amnesty International reported that the military gathered its residents at the school grounds, separated men and women, and carried out random arrests.578 According to RRAG, 49 individuals of the Bawm community were arrested in total.579

- **11 April 2024**: IWGIA reported on the military forcing an entire village of the Bawm community in Eden Para (Ruma subdistrict, Bandarban) to stand under scorching sun for a full day without food or water, including children, women, and elderly people.580

- **2 May 2024**: the military targeted the Bawm village Painkhyang Para (Rowangchhari subdistrict, Bandarban).581 According to IWGIA, all villagers were gathered inside the village church, where they were kept for the full day without food or water. Military officials beat and harassed villagers inside the church and brought men outside one by one, and subsequently fired gunshots outside. Villagers inside the church assumed that the men were killed. The military brought 21 Bawm men outside in total, and two bodies were later found in the jungle, while 19 men remained missing.582 RRAG reported on five individuals being shot dead after the incident and 16 still being missing as of October 2024.583 According IWGIA, the military attacked the village in retaliation after the KNF had attacked a military patrol tram at Kaplong Para, Rowangchhari, injuring several military personnel.584

- **2 May 2024**: according to IWGIA, 48 Bawm men were arrested by the military in another village in Rowangchhari subdistrict of Bandarban. They were forced to work as porters for the military in a raid against the KNF. According to a victim, the military beat up the village head, using sticks and dragging him and slamming him on the ground, while he had his hands tied on his back. Thereafter, four soldiers were instructed to beat him further and repeatedly kicked the man. The Bawm men were forced to work all day with only small

amounts of food provided. Six of them were released the same evening, and upon their return to their village more than 30 villagers decided to flee the same evening, fearing for their lives.585

The military has furthermore imposed restrictions on the amount of rice that individuals may buy and carry in some subdistricts of Bandarban. In April 2024, restrictions were imposed on people not to buy or carry more than five kg of rice,586 and in some instances the restriction was limited to 1 kg587 – which is not enough to feed a family as noted by Amnesty International. 588 According to CGS, Bawm people in Ruma and Thanchi still faced restrictions on rice as of 6 September 2024.589 In 2024, there were reports of Bawm people's movement being restricted by the military carrying out random and extensive searches, and arrests of Bawm people trying to pass through checkpoints.590 According to IWGIA, reporting in September 2024, all vehicles have been stopped at checkpoints in Bandarban. 'Indigenous-looking' individuals have been required to show their national identity cards, and those identified as Bawm have been detained. IWGIA noted that the searches have been preventing Bawm people from carrying significant quantities of food, groceries, and medicine, and that it had become nearly impossible for Bawm people, who live in remote areas, to go to the market for daily necessities and to access basic needs like food, healthcare and education.591 Many Bawm students studying outside Bandarban returned to celebrate Eid al-Fitr in early April 2024, but some of them were arrested at checkpoints on their way back to their educational institutions, and many found themselves stuck in the area due to the security forces crackdown.592 According to IWGIA, some students were killed or displaced by security forces.593 It has not been possible to corroborate this information with other sources.

In September 2024, IWGIA further reported that security forces conducted raids and arrested Bawm individuals in Bandarban town, searching homes, workplaces, and government offices, and that many were 'brutally tortured' during detention.594 It has not been possible to corroborate this information with other sources within the time constraints of drafting this report.

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