

CAS is an independent, non-partisan and research-oriented group conducting research and analyzing issues related to Arakan Affairs.



Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, alongside deputy ethnic affairs minister and ex-ANP leader Zaw Aye Maung, were seen in their visit to Rakhine's Capital Sittwe in Feb.28.2023 (Photo/Western News)

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Key Remarks

In February 2023, both tensions and relaxation could be seen in politics in Rakhine State. Tensions between the Arakan Army, and junta forces happened due after the junta forces' reinforcement such as military types of equipment, patrol and attempted more restrictions toward the ULA administrative and judiciary sectors in the southern townships

such as Kyuatkyu and Tanggok. Relaxation could be found in the areas of trade, transportation, and communication sectors. On the other hand, electoral politics regarding the coming junta “sham” elections in August have become more repetitive in the local news as the trend is to be watched.

The economic situation remains frustrating despite the fact that the current “humanitarian” truce is in place. It has frequently been seen that many people without formal documents attempted to immigrate for work to other parts of the countries and neighboring countries such as Thailand and Malaysia. While multi-million-dollar foreign investments between the Junta regime and foreign countries such as China and India are in the process of implementation, small and medium enterprises in the Rakhine state, jobless cases have been at the top.

Community security in Rakhine state is now under-challenged in many parts of Rakhine. Typical instances can mostly be found in the urban Sittwe areas under the control of the junta authority. Besides, university and basic

education systems in Rakhine are now under regular operation, but challenges come out due to the rising price of general commodities and living costs in the State's Capital Sittwe.

The Internally Displaced Persons in Rakhine have been forced to return to their home by Junta authorities, and they are under more and more pressure for the relocation by both means of coercion and incentives of the junta authorities. However, guarantees for the security and economic livelihood in their original locations have not been found yet. On the other hand, the scarcity of water can be found in the displacement camps due to the rising temperature, and shelter construction is recommended to be prepared for the coming rainy seasons as well.



Yohei Sasakawa, the Japanese special envoy for national reconciliation in Myanmar, visited displacement camps in Rakhine over weekend in Feb 4. (photo/Arakan Princess Media)

Toward A More Critical Politics

Second month of 2023, the political climate news covered by local news media appeared mostly junta “shame” election, peace and conflict scenarios, the status of political freedom, border issues as well as the state of human rights violations in Rakhine.

When it comes to the peace and conflict pendulum, there are several changes that happened during February. These pieces of news included another six months-extension of the military council for their stay in power. Following that, many political analysts said that it would only force more instability and destruction nationwide.

On the other hand, Yohei Sasakawa, chairperson of the Nippon Peace Foundation and Japan’s special envoy for national reconciliation to Myanmar, urged both sides of the armed parties in Arakan to install a permanent halt to the ceasefire on February 4¹. But, five days later, quite contradictory, the Northern Brotherhood Alliance, including the ULA/AA, declared that they stood firmly together with the anti-military armed resistance and revolution². Later on February 23, the Chinese special envoy to Myanmar met with the leaders of FPNCC groups³. Some political analysts said that this visit could also be regarded as a counter-balance action by China against the office installation by

the National Unity Government (NUG) in Washington DC.

On the restrictions and urging people by Junta authority not to participate in ULA/AA administration, in Response, Khaing Thuka, a spokesperson of the ULA/AA said in the press conference that “We are keeping a close eye on this matter. If the Myanmar military continues to behave in such a bad way, the fighting may return at any time”⁴.

Regarding the administrative affairs of both authorities in Rakhine state, the military regime changed the chief minister of the state, one who was a former border security minister. It can be said as a move into a more militarized governance by the junta authorities. Then, on the ULA side, the court sentenced a man convicted of high-profile murder to the death penalty, but the concerned family members complained against the decision⁵. Then, the passport-making process in Sittwe remained closed as of February 24, although the regime announced that the process was opened two days ago.

Political freedom and suppression in Rakhine state remained challenged despite the current truce in place. Some people in Maungdaw are under threats of arrest by the military council on accused of having links with the National Unity Government (NUG)⁶ in Feb 4. Next, the military

¹ Development Media Group (2.4.2023). Japanese peace broker Urges permanent halt to fighting between Myanmar military and AA.

<https://www.dmediag.com/news/phtms.html>

² Narinjara News (2.10.2023). Northern Brotherhood Alliance declares stand with Burmese revolution.

<https://www.narinjara.com/news/detail/63e665a81bd6f537aa2ca052>

³ Development Media Group (2.23.2023). Chinese envoy meets leaders of three northern Myanmar ethnic armed groups. <https://www.dmediag.com/news/cemlo.html>

⁴ Narinjara News (2.27.2023).

စစ်ကောင်စီကျင်းပမည့်ရွေးကောက်ပွဲ

ရခိုင်ပြည်သူများအတွက် တစ်စုံတစ်ရာအထောက်အပံ့ မဖြစ်နိုင်ဟု သတင်းစာရှင်းလင်းပွဲတွင် ULA/ AA ပြော.

<https://burmese.narinjara.com/news/detail/63fc35a024c6660813e2ea7d?fbclid=IwAR3B2YT9BX6jE5oYHWRqpkbVgqKsg2IdPpIRRyF4LOvgLyYmo33fSIYTclY>

⁵ Development Media Group (2.8.2023). Family of Man convicted of high profile murder in Sittwe to appeal ULA court’s death sentence.

<https://www.dmediag.com/news/hpmi.html>

⁶ Development Media Group (2.4.2023). Maungdaw man charged with incitement over alleged links to

court in Thandwe postponed 12 arrests related to the AA. On the other hand, the junta authority still refused the chance of medical treatment of eye surgery for the former Rakhine State chief minister. In addition, this kind of restriction also happened to other prisoners in Sittwe prison. Then, in the late days of the month, the ULA/AA spokesperson said that they were in negotiation with the Myanmar junta for the release of detained civilians⁷.

Regarding junta “sham” election, it is said that the double minority parties in Rakhine found many difficulties in party registration due to the new registration law. Then, among Rakhine political parties, Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) decided

not to participate in the coming election. However, Arakan Front Party (AFP) led by Dr Aye Maung registered to participate in the election in Feb 28, and Dr.Aye Maung also told his party members to resign if they are associated with ULA/AA⁸. On the other hand, Arakan National Party (ANP) is indecisive on the election issue, while the ULA/AA spokesperson said the election is meaningless for the people in Rakhine State. Finally, other political news during February contained rights violations by the junta soldiers toward Rakhine civilians, AA soldiers toward Chin ethnic civilians, the arrest of an ARSA leader, and border security restrictions by Bangladesh authority.



Arakan Army spokesperson Khaing Thura at the online press conference on Feb 27 (Photo/DMG)

National Unity Government and affiliated CRPH.

<https://www.dmediag.com/news/5762-cagu>

⁷ Development Media Group (2.27.2023). Arakan Army in talks with Myanmar Junta for release of detained civilians. <https://www.dmediag.com/news/aitwm.html>

⁸ Western News (2.28.2023). AFP

ပါတီရပ်တည်ရေးအတွက် AA နှင့်ဆက်စပ်သူများ ပါတီမှ

နှုတ်ထွက်ပေးရန် ဒေါက်တာအေးမောင် ပြော၊
စစ်ကောင်စီထံ ပါတီ မှတ်ပုံတင်.

<https://www.facebook.com/westernnewsagency>

Frustrated Economic Situations

Despite the introduction of the “humanitarian” truce in the late November of last year, many people still find less hopeful regarding how to exit from the current difficult economic situation. This condition was mainly expressed by the fact that a large number of people without formal documents attempted to migrate to foreign countries such as Thailand and Malaysia, and also got arrested many times in Thailand-Myanmar border or within Thailand.

During February 2023, hundreds of people who are both Rakhine and Rohingya have been arrested by either Myanmar authorities for the latter or by Thai authorities for the former. In line with a Muslim community leader who told local media, mentioning “some have citizenship ID cards. Some have documents pending for citizenship approval. Some might not have ID cards. But even those who have ID cards are also restricted, and it is not easy for us to travel.”⁹

Next, the shortage of skilled labours happened in Rakhine traditional pottery industry, which could possibly lead to the end of the industry. On the other hand, the local people are also worried about both the shortage and rising price of rice in Rakhine state due to the high demand from other parts of the country¹⁰.

Furthermore, there was also news regarding the technical assistance in Rakhine State for the salt farming business by salt farmers from Mon state. At the same time, Pauktaw saltwater shrimp breeder tested a new kind of Thai method for the business. For the agricultural case, the junta chief minister called for expanding summer paddy cultivation in Rakhine state.

⁹ Development Media Group (2.18.2023). More than 100 Arakan State Muslims detained since Feb 1, junta media reports. <https://www.dmediag.com/news/mt1a.html>

¹⁰ Narinjara (2.15.2023). ရခိုင်မှ ဆန်စပါး ပြည်မဘက်က ဝယ်လိုအားကောင်းနေ.

However, another news said that the farming community in State still have to repay up to 78 billion kyats loan.

“Our paddy plants were damaged after the fields were inundated by saltwater after the storm. When we were forced from our homes by the fighting, we left behind our cattle in our village. The cattle ate up paddy. So, we had no paddy at all this year. We have to buy from others, even for household consumption. So, no one in our village could repay their loan this year,” a farmer from Ponnagyun township told DMG on Feb 20¹¹.

On the other hand, financial assistances are also in need for the charity teaching vocational skills for women opened in Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon, Kyaukphyu, and Taungup townships. “We have run into a lot of difficulties. We have been looking for donors to continue to provide free training for women. We will have to reduce our lessons if we have no money...” said the project officer of the foundation.

In terms of the export sector, due to the high demand for teed fetching, the prices are rising for the export of commodities. Next, the junta authority introduced a new QR code system to regulate the border trade with Bangladesh.

Besides, the junta government signed MOU for the Ngapali resort project. The news continued to say that talks were also held about the potential for direct flights from Russia to this seaside resort as the ones happened for

<https://www.facebook.com/151742128171206/posts/pfbid02yrGdRD9pPhHeKL7sp6WDXWdcjWHcbacU2PupFBn e6o4S2KER6yapbymPyi36NovTl/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

¹¹ Development Media Group (2.20.2023). Arakan Farmers Yet to repay agricultural loans totaling k78 billion. <https://www.dmediag.com/news/afytr.html>

Thailand¹². Then, India backed the ‘Kaladan Project’ was also resumed construction for the Paletwa-Zorampur road within five years of the target. “Each company that wins the tender has to build 10 kilometres of road. The road is still at

Communities are Socially Insecure

Despite the informal truce between the junta forces and the AA, the Junta troops are still entering the villages frequently, in which the residents and nearby are still concerned about their safety and the resumption of the armed clashes.

Around the 10th of February, a group of soldiers arrived in some villages such as Kalaraung, Kharaing and Pan Htaw under Taungup township, southern Rakhine. It probed many people suspecting their involvement with the ULA/AA. Moreover, noticeably since the 23rd of February, the junta troops, with about 45 soldiers, have been reportedly monitoring the movement of the public in Minbya township¹⁴.

Furthermore, the junta forces have prohibited residents in Ponnaguyn township to organize religious festivals at the historical San Myone Taw and Guwa pagodas at night¹⁵. On the other hand, the Arakan Army (AA) has imposed a ban on Zat Pwe's performances from February 14 until March

the dirt level. Construction companies will build the road step by step. The current construction of the dirt road is to allow vehicles and machinery to travel,” said the project manager of a contracting company¹³.

18 for the upcoming matriculation examination¹⁶. According to Director U Khaing Htoo Aung of ‘Yadanar Lin’ Zat Thabin, the events were not able to perform for years due to fighting between the Tatmadaw and AA from late 2018 to November 2020, with some groups disbanding during that period.

In the month of February, three boys were dead, and five people were injured due to the landmine blast reportedly. The 13 years old boy in Maungdaw township was also included in the deceased list due to landmines¹⁷. According to Arakanese philanthropist and writer Wai Hun Aung, “Most landmine victims are rural people. They are inherently poor. Landmine victims need to be seriously assisted by social organisations, INGOs and NGOs, and the government”.

Community insecurity is also accompanied by growing social crimes. Near the Sittwe University, a robbery occurred under daylight on February 12, and a Khami tribe man was found dead with

¹² Narinjara (2.7.2023). ငပလီ အပန်းဖြေအိမ်ရာ စီမံကိန်းအတွက် ရှားနှင့် မြန်မာ MoU လက်မှတ်ရေးထိုး.

<https://www.facebook.com/151742128171206/posts/pfbid02bX9N8Muupd4MWcFX44s9qv5aPWHCb6pEms5x5K31JfuKyNnSwJoZ27sfj9qdMazjl/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

¹³ Development Media Group (2.9.2023). Construction of India-Backed Paletwa-Zarampur road resumes with targeted completion in five years.

<https://www.dmediag.com/news/wtci.html>

¹⁴ Narinjara (2.10.2023).

အပစ်ရပ်ထားသော်လည်းစစ်ကောင်စီတပ်သည် တောင်ကုတ်မြို့နယ်မှ ကျေးရွာတစ်ချို့သို့ ဝင်ရောက်ပြီး ULAနှင့်ဆက်စပ်သူများကို စုံစမ်းနေ.

<https://www.facebook.com/151742128171206/posts/pfbid03C7ofDQbv5iek37rKZZhyCjAL7EqdwRTBj1Sf7xVjW19RXkSCKVqaG3LqMPDzNMil/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

¹⁵ Development Media Group (2.1.2023). ပုဏ္ဏားကျွန်းမြို့ရှိ သမိုင်းဝင် ဂူဘုရားပွဲတွင် ညအချိန် ပွဲလမ်းသဘင်မကျင်းပရန် စစ်ကောင်စီတားမြစ်.

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¹⁶ Development Media Group (2.13.2023). AA Puts One-Month Stop At Zat Pwe Performances in Arakan State.

<https://www.dmediag.com/news/apom.html>

¹⁷ Narinjara (2.3.2023). မောင်တောမြို့နယ်

ခမောင်းဆိပ်ကျေးရွာတွင် ၅တန်းကျောင်းသားတစ်ဦး စစ်ကျန်ဗုံးသီးတစ်လုံးပေါက်ကွဲ၍ သေဆုံး.

<https://www.facebook.com/151742128171206/posts/pfbid027ToBgwTHEZyw1h98TbpDBtaPcDrTAFWBX2VcCv h7iXDLF7kbEq36eRrJVc7rBj4Kl/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

serious injuries on February 8 in Buthidaung township. On about 25th February, it was reported that a robber broke into a house at night, and the owner of the house was killed in the Southern Ward of Kanhtaunggyi town in Myebon Township.

Apart from the domestic insecurity of residents, the migrants are also in the face of unsafety and repatriation, mainly in the Thailand area. A Myanmar broker who was looking for jobs for Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand was killed on February 12.

More than 600 Myanmar nationals who were detained for various reasons in Thailand and whose dates of release had already passed were extradited on February 2 from a Thai immigration detention centre in Ranong to Kawthaung of Myanmar¹⁸. On the other hand, the Myanmar military regime has returned 423 Muslims to Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships after they unsuccessfully attempted to leave Myanmar for overseas destinations¹⁹.

Regarding the education sector, the Global News Light of Myanmar, junta mouthpiece declared that training schools would be opened in Sittwe, Thandwe and Ann townships for students who have completed secondary education, allowing them to pick a subject of their choice from among industrial technology, agriculture, and livestock skills.

Furthermore, sixty exam centres will be run in towns in Arakan State for the upcoming

matriculation examination in March, which will be the last one organised under the current curriculum, according to the Arakan State Education Department.

A total of 19,165 students have registered for the matriculation exam this year, though the number declined by half that last year²⁰. The public health and treatment centres in Arakan are calling in priority for male nurses against the embedded perception of nursing as a job for a woman.

Sixty-eight male and 437 aspiring female nurses are currently studying at Sittwe's Nursing and Midwifery Training School. One factor motivating the push for more men as nurses is the notion that specific medical issues are best discussed under male-to-male situations, according to healthcare workers in the field.

During this month, the news popularity index regarding cultural and environmental conservation is also highly covered. The residents of Mrauk-U Township have criticized and attempted to stop the junta's paving of a road at the first tier of Nandawyargon (the palace mound) in the ancient Arakanese archaeological zone.

Moreover, the coral reefs off the coast of Pyin Kauk village in Manaung township should be carefully conserved among the various travellers. In Sittwe, a private firm, Tet Lan Co., has initiated a private garbage collection system and also a CSO has conducted an opinion poll on garbage disposal in Sittwe.

¹⁸ Narinjara (2.2.2023). ရနောင်းလဝကအချုပ်က လွတ်ရက်စေ့ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံသားများကို ကော့သောင်းသို့ ပြန်ပို့.

<https://www.facebook.com/151742128171206/posts/pfbid0JA7RVKFKojFZ6xH5zYW25TcD4RGKdUGJ5pqxL1H88co8ctLy7Q5aVu7o76SeH1wHl/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

¹⁹ Development Media Group (2.4.2023). ပြည်ပထွက်ခွာရန်ကြိုးစားသည့် ရခိုင်က မွတ်ဆလင် ၄၀၀ ကျော်ကို စစ်ကောင်စီက နေရပ်ပြန်ပို့.

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²⁰ Development Media Group (2.11.2023). ရခိုင်တွင် တက္ကသိုလ်ဝင်တန်းစာမေးပွဲကို စာစစ်ဌာန ၆၀ ဖြင့် မြို့ပေါ်မှာစစ်ဆေးမည်.

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An IDP woman feeding food to his children (Photo/Westen News)

Internally Displaced Persons Under Pressure

In the month of February, there appeared a rape case in an IDP camp²¹. Ten Muslim women who have said they were raped by the manager in a camp for IDPs in Sittwe Township were summoned by the Sittwe District Police for questioning.

The camp manager is accused of raping up to 45 women between 2021 and August 2, 2022. One of the victims, a 30-year-old woman, filed a complaint with the Sittwe Township police station on August 3, 2022. On February 9, nine other victims came forward to file complaints with the junta-appointed Arakan State chief

minister, demanding that police also bring charges against the camp manager based on their cases.

Under the headline of humanitarian issues, the Japanese Special Envoy for national reconciliation, Sasakawa, visited IDP camps in Arakan for the third time on 4th February. In the second week, the junta-appointed ministers visited displacement camps in the townships of Sittwe, Minbya, Kyauktaw and Mrauk-U, during which they urged internally displaced people (IDPs) to return to their homes²².

²¹ Development Media Group (2.20.2023). Police question Muslim women alleging rape by IDP camp manager in Sittwe Twsp.
<https://www.dmediag.com/news/pqmw.html>

²² Development Media Group (2.11.2023). လုံခြုံရေးအာမခံချက်မရှိဘဲ ရခိုင်စစ်ရှောင်များကို စစ်ကောင်စီဝန်ကြီးများက နေရပ်ပြန်ရန် ဖိအားပေး.
<https://www.facebook.com/466648543487562/posts/pfbid02nS87P9Eqw8JpMNEQk9JRRBCCStUoTSnkD>

Former Lower House lawmaker U Aung Thaung Shwe said the regime is doing so to ease international pressures. The regime is irresponsible to repeatedly ask IDPs to return to their homes while it has not made any systematic preparations to facilitate their return, critics say.

Ahead of any large-scale return, IDPs want authorities to provide food supplies and sources of livelihood for them, and there are also concerns about Myanmar military deployments near their villages. IDPs are also concerned about the risk of landmines and unexploded ordnance potentially littered across the farms and forests.

Additionally, the junta-controlled Myanmar Alin daily reported on 24th February that the military regime is preparing to re-accept more than 1,000 Muslim refugees who fled Arakan State amid brutal military crackdowns in 2016 and 2017 and living in refugee camps in Bangladesh as a pilot project.

On 27th February, AA spokesperson U Khaing Thukha questioned whether the junta's purported desire to begin the repatriation was genuine and disclosed an opinion that the regime is taking a pretend step to gain international recognition.

Moreover, the news released on 15th February said that Bangladeshi authorities are sending Muslim refugees displaced by fighting last month around Taungpyo Letyar, in Bangladesh's Bandarban District, to the Kutupalong refugee camp. The houses of refugees were torched in fighting between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) near the Myanmar-Bangladesh border on January 17-18, and refugees took shelter at a school in Taungpyo

Letwe²³. Bangladesh's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission is leading the effort to send displaced Muslim refugees to the Kutupalong refugee camp. A total of 2,420 Muslim refugees from 448 households displaced by the fighting were sent to Kutupalong refugee camp on Tuesday and Wednesday, according to Rakhine Daily, a junta media mouthpiece.

Concerning the news covering humanitarian assistance, the US Embassy in Yangon announced on February 16 that it had provided an additional \$50 million for that due to increased displacements, armed conflict, and growing food insecurity in Myanmar.

The WFP in Arakan is currently verifying the IDP population list living in some IDP camps in Mrauk U township. "The list of IDPs has been reviewed by the WFP so that only those who live in the camp should be registered. Now it is necessary to provide a new list of IDPs who have left their homes and are in difficulty. But those who have returned to their homes should be excluded from the list of the camps; otherwise, the international assistance for IDPs who are living in the camps will be affected," said a Rakhine social activist.

Regarding access to basic needs, the problem of insufficient and unclean water is still prevalent as the summer season is coming close. Reportedly, the IDPs in A Htet Myet Hle camp in Ponnagyun township and Thae Khong village on Myay Ngu island in Pauktaw township suffer from skin diseases, diarrhoea, cough, sickness due to the impurity of drinking water partly affected by seawater flooding last year. Furthermore, Sittwe residents have faced insufficient water due to the drying up of Kandawgyi Lake, a major supply of water.

[qR9tzBoq5JDRZ1HeYpiRPCYqrKNPTEjl/?mibextid=Nif5oz](https://www.facebook.com/466648543487562/posts/pfbid0jdHzq8PSXKBBTb52kXSks1tcgFTdPqLZkLjyhwdgTGSTinpusbqeKTZCfo7PXXpL/?mibextid=Nif5oz)

²³ Development Media Group (2.15.2023).

နယ်စပ်တွင် တိုက်ပွဲဖြစ်ပွားမှုကြောင့်

ထွက်ပြေးနေရသည့် မွတ်ဆလင်ဒုက္ခသည်များကို

ကူတူပါလောင်စခန်းသို့ ပို့ဆောင်

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IDP People in Rakhine State (Photo/Narinjara)

About Center for Arakan Studies (CAS)

The Center for Arakan Studies (CAS) is an independent, nonpartisan, and research-oriented group established by a group of Arakanese youths who are journalists, political analysts, researchers, social workers, and activists. The Center aims to conduct research collaboratively with other institutions and organizations, and independently undertake research about human rights, political, economic, and social dynamics in Arakan, and issues to Arakan affairs in Burma and beyond through analysis and recommendations in favor of policy change and common solutions.

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