

Monthly Arakan Review

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Arakan Under Siege: Widespread Insecurity as Arakan Conflicts Intensify

Monitoring of a brief situation of political tension, economic issues, social issues, and humanitarian issues in Western Myanmar in November 2023.



On November 14, the people in Ponnagyun township tried to extinguish a fire in their market caused by the Junta's heavy weapons. (Photo/Western News)

Key Remarks

The return of armed conflicts in Arakan has brought unprecedented momentum to the political scenarios in the state. Currently, the offensive military operations are being staged by the AA, while the junta forces are in defensive positions. Since military zones have moved into more urbanized and populated areas, there have been increased negative consequences for the civilian population.

The junta's massive trade and travel blockade within Arakan state has crippled all economic and business activities, resulting in scarcity, and rising prices of basic commodities such as rice, fuel, chili, and betel nuts, etc. As a result, the ordinary and poorer segments of the population are the most affected in the communities.

Both political and community insecurity have increased in Arakan this month. Almost all family members in both urban and rural areas of the state have faced various degrees of insecurity, ranging from arrests and artillery attacks to gunshots. The farming community faces additional challenges as they cannot harvest crops, and similarly, businesspeople cannot open their shops.

According to the CAS report, the total number of civilians affected since the return of armed fighting in November is 379, with 49 killed and 92 injured. Additionally, 236 were arrested this month. Moreover, the number of displaced people in the conflict areas has also increased, exceeding 40,000 in the state, who are in urgent need of emergency humanitarian assistance.

Political Affairs

In November 2023, the resurgence of armed conflicts between the junta regime and the Arakan Army (AA) occurred just before the one-year anniversary of the previous ceasefire that began in late November 2022. Consequently, local media agencies were filled with news related to the political situation, including armed conflicts, civilian casualties, and other emergency humanitarian issues.

Starting with the activities and movements of the junta in Rakhine State, on November 4, it was reported that the junta's military preparedness had seemingly increased. Four days later, they [intensified](#) checks on water travelers across the state. On the same day, fishermen in Thandwe township were barred from going to sea for three days due to a planned military exercise with Russia. As of November 8, [the head of a local police unit](#) in Ann Township was arrested by the junta. The junta military also continued live-fire drills in various areas of the state.

On November 13, the AA initiated an offensive military operation, leading to the surrender and abandonment of many junta bases in several townships. The following morning, six residents of Thandwe were arrested by junta authorities. Additionally, it was reported that the junta military lost about 40 camps in Rakhine State and [around 10 soldiers](#) were captured by the AA. As of November 15, approximately 100 junta police officers abandoned the Tin-Nyo police station in Mrauk-U township.

On November 16, as the AA captured the police station in Pauktaw town, junta forces responded with helicopter fire on several locations, leading to the evacuation of Pauktaw residents due to naval bombardment. On the same day, the AA took control of a BGPF in Maungdaw township. The military tension in Pauktaw town continued, and by

November 20, it was reported that more than 100 civilians in urban areas of Pauktaw had been detained by junta forces. Additionally, the AA targeted two more BGPF outposts in Buthidaung Township, and the junta withdrew three police stations and one checkpoint in the southernmost township of Gwa. On November 21, fighting resumed in Pauktaw town, and the AA rescued approximately 100 civilians from junta custody.

The following day, it was reported that within 10 days of armed clashes, the AA had captured four army camps and controlled around 40 abandoned junta camps across the state. The armed clashes in Paletwa, Buthidaung, and Maungdaw townships continued, and on November 23, another group of 104 civilians was rescued by the AA from Pauktaw town. As of November 28, the Bodhikone border guard station in Maungdaw was captured by the AA. On November 29, reports indicated that around 70 junta soldiers remained in Pauktaw after [approximately 100 had been killed](#) by the AA. The following day, the junta chief accused the AA of violating the ceasefire agreement.

The return of armed conflict in Rakhine State has also resulted in non-military consequences, such as civilian deaths, injuries, arrests, and a total trade and travel blockade, mainly imposed by junta forces and authorities in the state.

Economic Situations

As a side effect of the escalating military tension and conflicts in economic situations, people in Rakhine State faced various economic challenges, ranging from resource shortages, and rising commodity prices to livelihood challenges and business insecurities. Regarding resource shortages, as of November 8, it was reported that furniture manufacturers in Arakan State were struggling as forests disappeared.

When the armed conflicts broke out on November 13, locals engaged in panic buying of rice in Rathedaung, Buthidaung, and Minbya townships, leading to fuel shortages in some areas. By November 17, some banks closed in the northern townships of Rakhine State. As of November 21, Mrauk-U reportedly ran out of fuel, and within a week, Kyaukphyu and Thandwe faced rice shortages. A woman from a family of four in Kulabartaung Ward, Kyaukphyu, stated: “We used to cook about 10 tins of rice per day. Now we can only eat two tins. It’s saddening to see hungry children.”

By November 29, due to the junta’s blockade, Maungdaw experienced a rice shortage. On another front, as of November 14, the AA vowed to take action against exploitative price hikes. Khaing Thukha, the spokesperson for the AA, [said](#), “At a time when fighting has resumed in Rakhine State, we will take action against sellers who inflate prices of basic commodities for their own interests.” A restaurant owner [commented](#), “The prices of commodities are skyrocketing, including all basic foodstuffs. The price of one sack of rice increased by about K30,000.”

Meanwhile, local community members started facing more livelihood challenges. As of November 24, the junta banned fishing off the coast of Ngapali areas in Thandwe township. A local fisherman from Jeittaw Ward in Ngapali, Thandwe Township, [said](#), “We signed a pledge not to fish yesterday. I don’t know how long the fishing ban will last.” Days later, residents of Kyaukphyu faced similar fishing blockades by the junta. On November 22, it was reported that the junta’s blockade had taken a toll on daily wage earners in the state. A bricklayer in Sittwe’s Mangan Ward [remarked](#), “I am jobless because of the current situation. We are only hired when needed. If this continues, odd-job workers will starve. Crime might increase if people are starving.”

Finally, in economic news, many shops in Sittwe closed due to heavy artillery shelling on November 22. Banks across the state ran low on cash, and gold-selling shops in Rakhine also closed for security reasons.

Social Issues

In the social sector of Arakan, local media agencies have covered a variety of issues, including transportation, agriculture, education, healthcare, and the lack of basic services. Regarding the lack of basic services, it was reported on November 17 that electricity was cut off in Pauktaw following hostilities and armed clashes within the town. In the agricultural sector, on November 7, it was mentioned that Arakan farmers harvested paddy early due to fears of renewed fighting. Winter crop acreage also declined in Arakan State for the same reason.

As of November 25, farmers struggled to harvest paddy early amid the latest fighting. Two days later, it was reported that farmers faced a fuel scarcity, hindering the harvest due to road blockages by the junta. On November 28, a news report stated that due to a ban by junta battalion (539) in Kyauktaw, hundreds of acres of farmland could not be harvested. A local farmer [commented](#): “They didn’t even allow us to carry the hand-harvested rice. I think they should let us harvest by hand if not by machine. They also shot at us. All our big investments are now lost.”

On the same day, there was a redistribution of rice seeds in Minbya to enable individual households to cultivate vegetables. In the education sector, on November 13, it was reported that schools closed as conflict flared anew in Arakan State. Distance learners at Sittwe University also took exams amidst fear. The education department in Ann township warned its staff of punishment if they left without permission. As of November 23, over 1,000 schools were closed in Arakan State. The father of a student in Pauktaw town [stated](#): “All the locals from the town and surrounding villages have fled, so all the schools are closed. We don’t even know when we can return to our town.”

Regarding healthcare, on November 25, it was [reported](#) that pregnant women found it difficult to reach clinics and hospitals due to the resurgence of armed clashes. In the transportation sector, the blockage of roads and waterways by the junta in Arakan State amid renewed hostilities was mentioned on November 13. The following day, over 1,000 teachers were stranded in Sittwe due to the junta’s blockade of land and water routes. As of November 15, the junta also isolated Chin State’s Paletwa township. Consequently, nine days later, over 200 students from Paletwa were stuck in Kyauktaw due to the junta’s water route blockade.

Humanitarian Issues

In the humanitarian sector, since November 1, 2023, fearing the spread of conflicts from northern Myanmar, Rakhine locals have been preparing bomb shelters due to the fear of returning conflicts. The following day, it was reported that as winter approaches, Rakhine refugees urgently need blankets and warm clothes. Additionally, on November 2, the junta’s Myanmar delegation team made a second visit to Bangladesh to discuss refugee issues.

A Maungdaw resident [commented](#), “I don’t believe they can make any pragmatic decisions to resolve the matter. I heard they just checked the list of refugees and returned by 4 pm.” By November 6, it was mentioned that Arakan CSOs had gone into hiding amid increased junta scrutiny of their operations. The next day, 27 Muslim Rohingya refugees were arrested in Arakan State for illegally crossing the border. On November 7, the fear of renewed conflict in Rakhine State prompted some locals to flee. A resident of Pyeintaw village in Rathedaung Township [said](#): “Junta soldiers are frequently spotted in Angumaw. We’re obviously scared and worried about more fighting, which has already significantly affected our lives. We’re contemplating finding a safe haven in case we need to escape due to the potential for renewed conflict.”

On November 13, armed conflicts broke out in Rakhine State. Following the armed clashes in Pauktaw town on November 16, it was reported the next day those locals trapped by the fighting in Pauktaw needed emergency assistance. On November 18, the total number of displaced people reached [approximately 40,000](#) due to renewed

fighting, especially in Pauktaw, Ponnagyun, and Maungdaw townships. That same day, a UN relief agency urged the junta to allow unfettered aid activities in Arakan State. On November 21, local media reported that about 500 civilians were trapped by the fighting in Pauktaw. A resident trapped by the fighting in Pauktaw [stated](#), “Locals trapped by the fighting are concerned for their safety. They’ve run out of rice. I want relief groups to help the trapped people.” On November 23, it was mentioned that displaced people in Arakan were facing food shortages. A community elder in Pauktaw Township [said](#), “As the population increased and the days grew longer, food became scarce. We are banned from traveling from one place to another. Rice will run out in a few days. We face more hardships as social organizations do not come to the village.”

The emergency humanitarian needs in Arakan continue as the junta has massively blocked the movement of goods and commodities between townships. The UN and international humanitarian actors are also unable to adequately address the current situation.”

About the Report

This report is part of the CAS's monthly series, which delves into four key areas of the state of Arakan. The first section addresses political concerns, including the armed revolution, junta activities, and issues of political freedom. The second examines the state's economic climate, focusing on rising prices, declining demand, foreign direct investment, and border trade. The third and fourth sections cover social and humanitarian issues, respectively; these include education, health, migration, and the internally displaced persons (IDP) population.

Key data in the report are sourced from local media outlets, such as DMG, Western News, among others. The aim of this report is to shed new light on the situation for observers endeavoring to comprehend the dynamics at play in the region.

About Center for Arakan Studies (CAS)

The Center is an independent, non-partisan research institution established in December 2021 by a group of young professionals, including journalists, political analysts, researchers, and social workers. The Center aims to promote understanding of human rights, political, economic, and social dynamics in Arakan and related issues within Myanmar and beyond. Through rigorous research and reporting, the Center seeks to address the policy gaps with analysis and recommendations to support democratic change and collective solutions.

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