

Monthly Arakan Review

Center for Arakan Studies

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Humanitarian Aid Blocked and Destroyed in Arakan Amidst Rising Conflict

Monitoring of a brief situation of political tension, economic issues, social issues, and humanitarian issues in Arakan in June 2024.



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Key Remarks

- The Arakan Army (AA) increased its offensives in three key townships: Maungdaw, Ann, and Thandwe, during June 2024. The junta forces continued to suffer more in these military zones. Important news also included the AA chief's words toward the NUG, advising them "not to interfere in Arakan politics more than necessary," and a subsequent clash of opinions over the Rohingya issue in Buthidaung.
- While local civilian populations were suffering from the blockade of all trade, transportation, and travel activities, three key economic news items dominated the field. Merchants in Arakan faced huge difficulties due to the road blockade by the local Lai (Chin) association in Mizoram, affecting local trade between Paletwa and Mizoram. Additionally, a group of Chinese technicians visited the site of Kyaukphyu to study the feasibility of project implementation. Finally, all hotels in the famous Ngapali beach area were closed due to spreading armed clashes.
- The number of IDPs was increasing in Thandwe township, and local charity and CSO groups were struggling to help them. With increasing armed clashes in the area, the residents of Gwa were also reportedly panicking about their safety. Junta forces destroyed some bridges in Taungup township, imposing greater challenges for local transportation. In Sittway, the junta authorities ordered locals from nearby villages to move into the town.
- Civilian populations continue to face more challenges with the threat of starvation and food insecurity, especially in Taungup and Thandwe townships. In the case of Sittway, while local people were restricted from leaving their homes and town, the residents inside faced increasing socio-economic and security problems. Warehouses of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were reportedly looted and destroyed by junta authorities and allied forces in Maungdaw. Meanwhile, MSF (Doctors Without Borders) halted their medical operations in some northern townships of Arakan.

Political Affairs

The politics of Arakan in June were mainly dominated by military confrontations between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army (AA), the AA's seizure of SAC posts, civilian arrests by the SAC, arson and military attacks on civilian homes and properties, desertions within SAC ranks, and a press briefing by the ULA/AA.

To start with the AA-SAC armed clashes, on June 3, the Myanmar military and AA clashed near the popular beach town of Ngapali. Two days later, AA fighters advanced toward Thandwe's Ma Zin airport. On June 7, it was reported that Arakan [experienced the most armed clashes](#) during May. On June 13, news media mentioned that the AA was advancing its offensives in three more townships: Maungdaw, Ann, and Thandwe.

One week later, [intense fighting erupted in Maungdaw](#), where AA fighters attacked the 5th border guard battalion. On June 20, the AA launched artillery attacks on Ann town airfield, Western Command. The next day, the AA intercepted a junta reinforcement column in Taungup, consisting of over 60 soldiers. On June 26, the battle for control of Thandwe and Maungdaw intensified.

Regarding the activities of the ULA/AA, on June 3, locals reported that the AA seized key BGF outposts in Maungdaw. Two days later, the AA [took control of Thandwe's Tha Htay hydropower project and surrounding areas](#). On the same day, the AA chief asked the NUG not to speak "more than is necessary" on the Arakan issue. On June 8, the 9th ULA Press-Briefing stated that [at least 319 civilians were killed, and 8,500 buildings were destroyed in six months of Arakan conflicts](#).

Concerning the actions of the SAC, on June 1, it was reported that a former ANP youth leader, among four Arakanese men, was detained in Yangon. The next day, the ULA stated that the junta killed 53 people in Byine Phyu village under Sittwe township. On June 7, it was stated that the AA offensive [resulted in the death of over 400 junta soldiers in June](#). Six days later, the junta [reinforced](#) battalions in Taungup with Muslim conscripts. On June 17, it was reported that the military regime bombed villages in Taungup township near the Dynyawady navy base. On the same day, the junta stepped up bombing raids in Pauktaw township. Two days later, the junta [bolstered](#) defense in Gwa township.

On June 22, it was reported that Sittwe residents had to live in fear as the regime stepped up arbitrary arrests. Three days later, in Thandwe, troops and families of the 566th Light Infantry Battalion surrendered to the AA while the [remaining forces](#) merged with the 55th Infantry Battalion. On June 26, the regime tightened security along the Ayeyarwady-Arakan border. On June 29, a monastery and homes were destroyed in a junta airstrike on a village in Thandwe township, and staff in the township received no more salary.

Other political news in Arakan included the refugee repatriation issue from Bangladesh, a joint open letter by CSOs, statements by the Arakan American Community on the Buthidaung incident, and the arrest of escaped SAC staff from Taungup.

Economic Situations

The economic affairs of Arakan in June included topics such as agriculture, border trade, foreign direct investment, halting bank operations, hotel and tourism, rising commodity prices, and a ban on medical supplies. Addressing agricultural news, it was reported on June 10 that landmines posed a growing threat to Kyaukphyu farmers. On the same day, the AA [stated](#) that it would help beleaguered farmers grow paddy.

“Despite the challenges, we are trying to distribute [agricultural] inputs and fuel for farmers so that they can grow monsoon paddy in time,” said AA spokesman U Khaing Thukha.

On June 22, it was mentioned that many Kyaukphyu farmers dared not grow paddy due to the landmine threat. Finally, a week later, local sources said that farmers in conflict-hit Arakan State were unable to grow monsoon paddy. Regarding border trade, on June 12, it was mentioned that Arakan State residents hoped to benefit as India reopened trade routes with Paletwa. However, unfortunately, on June 25, [the trade route used to import goods from India to Arakan State was blocked](#).

“Hundreds of cargo trucks are stranded and are not allowed to pass. Merchants will suffer,” said an Arakanese merchant who was currently in Mizoram. A social activist from Ponnagyun added:

“The trade route was blockaded due to the military situation in Chin State. This will more or less harm bilateral relations. Both sides must exercise restraint.”

Finally, on June 29, India announced plans to repatriate Myanmar merchants trapped on the Mizoram-Paletwa trade route linking Arakan. On the question of FDI, on June 8, [Chinese diplomats visited Kyaukphyu to assess the ground situation](#). On June 27, India sought security protections for its projects in Myanmar, especially in Rakhine State.

Then, on June 3, [cash shortages pushed functional banking to the brink in Arakan State](#). One week later, all hotels stopped operations due to the armed fighting. On June 17, [as cash runs were low in Thandwe](#), residents faced dire food shortages. On June 12, Sittwe residents faced price rises as Yangon cargo shipments remained blocked. On June 28, the price of rice skyrocketed. Three days earlier, the SAC banned medical transportation in Kyaukphyu.

Social Issues

In June, civilian displacement caused by the armed conflicts between the Arakan Army (AA) and junta forces spread to the southern part of Arakan, particularly affecting Thandwe Township. On June 3, intense fighting erupted in Gawt village near Ma-Zin airport in Thandwe Township, where the famous Ngapali beach is located, leading to the temporary suspension of Yangon-Thandwe flights due to junta airstrikes, according to local residents. Since June 3, Air KBZ (K7-429), which operates [daily flights between Thandwe and Yangon, has suddenly halted operations](#).

The conflicts resulted in the number of IDPs surpassing 50,000 in Thandwe Township. In Shwe Hlay sub-township, which is now under AA's control, there are more than a thousand displaced persons from Daw Mya, Kyaung Kone, Pa Yit, Yae Kauk, Nat Taung Maw, and Gawt villages. Local residents stated that [the AA has rescued over 400 residents from Gawt village](#). Meanwhile, it has been reported that Myanmar's military regime has imposed strict travel restrictions on civil servants in Thandwe Township. [Junta regime employees are now required to obtain permission](#) from their superiors to travel.

Similar actions are happening to the civil servants in Gwa Township who want to flee to safe places [due to rumors of potential armed clashes](#) in July. Furthermore, anticipating the AA entering Taungup, junta forces [destroyed Kun Sam bridge](#), located 8 miles away from Taungup, on June 10. Beginning on June 12, the Arakan Army (AA) blocked a section of the Taungup-Padaung road that connects Arakan State with the Bago Region, according to a reliable source. An AA spokesperson stated that [the regime had been using the road to send reinforcements](#), including hundreds of Muslim conscripts, to its battalions in Taungup.

On June 15, a clash between the military and the Arakan Army (AA) erupted near Taungup's Chaungkauk Ward. Recent fighting in the area has displaced [hundreds of local people from at least 10 villages in Taungup Township](#). Additionally, the AA's efforts to seize territory have intensified in the vicinity of Ann Township. Following the fall of the Taw Hein Taung tactical operation command near Kazu Kaing in Ann Township after nearly three months of intense fighting, clashes [have now approached the Western Command base in Ann Township](#), Arakan (Rakhine) State, forcing many residents to flee.

In Maungdaw Township, which remained under the AA's attempts to seize control, junta forces destroyed six more concrete bridges in Maungdaw Township using landmines in June. On June 13, the destroyed structures included the Pann Zin Maw bridge, Hla Baw Zar bridge, 3-mile bridge, Mawyawadi bridge, Myin Hlut bridge, and Ah Lel Than Kyaw bridge. Additionally, on June 11, [junta soldiers from Taungup destroyed the Shwe Kun San bridge](#), located around eight miles from the town. In a statement issued on June 16, the AA claimed that their fighters had seized nearly all of the SAC's military camps in Maungdaw, near the Bay of Bengal. They urged residents of downtown Maungdaw to urgently [leave their homes and avoid staying in buildings occupied by junta forces](#).

According to reports from the junta community, more than 50,000 Muslims from Maungdaw Township have been taken by the Myanmar military junta and transported to Yangon through a paid transport service. The junta community alleges that the Minister of Rakhine Defense and Border Affairs, navy colonels, the local operations commander of Maungdaw Region, and Brigadier General Thu Rain Tun are jointly facilitating this movement, allegedly extorting money from the people involved. Local residents and the junta community report that [these Muslims were then allowed to leave on large motor boats bound for Malaysia, Thailand, and other countries](#). In Buthidaung and Mrauk U townships, it was reported that the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) [donated money and cattle to Muslim communities](#) for their religious festival on June 18.

In the vicinity of Sittwe, Myanmar's military regime has compelled [thousands of residents from 12 Arakanese villages in Sittwe Township to relocate to Sittwe Town](#), the administrative seat of Arakan State, by issuing an order effective June 9. On June 20, junta soldiers [arrested at least 40 individuals from Sittwe](#), including children, women, and elderly people, who had fled to Ponnagyun Township to escape the conflict during a patrol.

Humanitarian Issues

Starvation and food security have been reported as precarious in the townships of Thandwe and Sittwe. Residents stated that [thousands of local people displaced by clashes between the military and the Arakan Army \(AA\) in Thandwe Township urgently require food assistance](#). In Sittwe, the fear of conflict led most of the town's population to flee, causing the closure of markets, stores, restaurants, shops, and offices, resulting in economic collapse. A woman reported that due to livelihood crises, some residents are demolishing uninhabited houses and selling them as firewood. [Strict prohibitions by junta forces prevent residents from leaving Sittwe](#) for other townships.

Additionally, it has been reported that [at least 91 Mro ethnic families, totaling 595 individuals, are currently trapped in conflict zones around 3-mile in Maungdaw Township and require immediate assistance](#). Buthidaung town, predominantly Muslim, especially in Ward No. 5, urgently requires food, medicine, and shelter. The Arakan Army (AA) took full control of Buthidaung Township on May 18. Tens of thousands of residents, including Muslims, have been evacuated from Buthidaung Township by the Arakan People's Government and are seeking [urgent humanitarian aid from international organizations](#).

Meanwhile, in Ramree town, heavily damaged by junta airstrikes and artillery bombardments during nearly three months of fighting, residents have started the [process of rebuilding](#) after the AA gained control of the township. In Kyaukphyu, residents are returning to their homes after leaving the town due to fears of potential conflict. About half of the town's population fled when the Arakan Army (AA) advised residents in Kyaukphyu and Sittwe to evacuate. Residents explained they returned because [they faced difficulties elsewhere](#), lacking access to adequate food, shelter, healthcare, and education for their children.

On June 21, Myanmar junta members and its trained and armed individuals raided and looted supplies from the World Food Program's (WFP) humanitarian aid storage facility in Vasali Village, Maungdaw Township. Following the release of an aerial video by the Arakan Army (AA), the junta acknowledged the break-in. Major General Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson for the junta, admitted on June 27 through military-owned newspapers that they had taken 2,000 bags of rice grains from the warehouse. However, it remains unclear whether the junta obtained permission from the WFP, a UN organization in Myanmar, before seizing the rice bags. A Muslim resident reported that on June 22, [junta soldiers distributed these rice bags to Muslim residents of Maungdaw, apparently to garner support for the junta](#). The WFP of the United Nations condemned the looting of food supplies and the burning of its warehouse in Maungdaw town of Arakan State in Myanmar on June 22. The looting of food and other goods, along with the destruction of humanitarian facilities in Maungdaw, is undermining [WFP's relief efforts and must be stopped immediately](#), added the statement.

On June 28, residents of the Myoma Ka Nyin Tan neighborhood reported that Myanmar military troops forcibly entered the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warehouse in Ka Nyin Tan Ward, Maungdaw, and looted its contents. Moreover, residents of Maungdaw Township have reported that premises, buildings, and offices belonging to international humanitarian aid organizations, including [the United Nations, have been forcibly taken over and converted for military purposes](#). Additionally, these locations have been vandalized by Myanmar military troops and armed individuals associated with them.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) announced in a statement on June 27 that it has halted its humanitarian operations in the townships of Rathedaung, Buthidaung, and Maungdaw in Arakan State. The organization cited an extreme escalation of conflict, indiscriminate violence, and severe restrictions on humanitarian access in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar, as reasons for the suspension. "We are deeply concerned for the people heavily affected by the conflict," the statement [emphasized](#).

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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