

Monthly Arakan Review

Center for Arakan Studies

No.22. August. 2024

Rising Civilian Casualties, Economic Turmoil, and Humanitarian Crises in Arakan State, August 2024

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



Photo/Credit-Western News

Key Remarks

- The armed clashes between the military junta and the AA continued in the townships of Maungdaw, Thandwe, and Gwa in Arakan. On other fronts, the AA engaged in armed fighting against the ARSA in Maungdaw. The confrontation between the ULA/AA and the CNF/CNA remained intense, particularly after the detainment of two AA soldiers by the CNF, who pressured them to confess according to narratives dictated by the latter.
- Severe economic hardships worsened for the local population in Arakan. These hardships include rising unemployment and out-migration, the suspension of traditional weaving businesses, damage to rice fields due to flooding, inflation, currency (kyat) devaluation, and cash shortages. Among these, the broken banking system and restrictions on cash transportation have caused a severe scarcity of money, making it difficult for local people to use cash for transactions in the market.
- Widespread flooding in August, particularly in areas like Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, and Minbya, caused severe damage, destroying several acres of rice fields. In addition, the junta restricted the movement of its staff, preventing them from leaving town, while nuns in Sittwe faced livelihood difficulties due to decreasing donations.
- The ULA/AA implemented humanitarian activities to assist flood victims. Orphanage care centers in Sittwe made emergency donation requests, and humanitarian workers were reportedly trapped in urban Sittwe. Meanwhile, IDPs in Rathedaung struggled with food and shelter shortages, and humanitarian actors were involved in assisting new IDPs in Thandwe and Gwa townships.

Political Affairs

Civilian casualties due to the armed clashes continued in Arakan. On August 1, 2024, it was reported that [the junta's attacks in July killed 56 civilians and injured 48 in Arakan](#).

An Arakanese politician stated that there are “hundreds of civilian casualties in Arakan State every month,” adding, “Most civilian casualties were caused by the regime’s airstrikes. The regime’s attacks on civilians will continue. As people, it is important to create safe places to live.”

The next day, the AA banned sea travel off the Thandwe and Gwa coasts as the junta reinforced those areas. Meanwhile, the regime denied reports of six civilian deaths in Ngapali due to artillery shelling. It was also reported that [hundreds of Muslim youths fled to Bangladesh after 30 were recruited from Maungdaw](#).

On August 3, it was reported that 9 ARSA members were captured by AA forces after the former killed 5 civilians in Maungdaw. The battle for control of Maungdaw continued to rage. A day later, the AA accused the CNF/CNA of coercing false confessions from two detained AA fighters.

“We have received reliable information that two AA soldiers were subjected to various forms of torture by the CNF/CNA. The CNF/CNA asked the two AA soldiers to testify as they wished,” said [U Khaing Thukha, spokesperson of the AA](#).

The following day, the regime detained three local men in Taungup and dozens more in Sittwe. On August 5, it was reported that the junta was forcibly recruiting Muslims trapped in Maungdaw. A day later, the Three Brotherhood Alliance urged Beijing to prevent the junta's targeted bombing of civilians.

On August 7, the ULA/AA expressed grief over the deaths of Muslim civilians in Maungdaw, denying any involvement. It was later reported that the AA rescued 372 prisoners from Thandwe jail and sent

41 political prisoners back to their families. On the same day, the junta detained policemen on Made Island after a colleague defected.

On August 10, [the Maungdaw district police chief and township officer](#), along with many others, defected to the AA. In response, the junta erected fencing around Sittwe to prevent AA fighters from entering the town. Two days later, the battle for control of Kyeintali escalated. On August 14, the junta forces retreated from Kyeintali after suffering heavy casualties. A day later, all government functionaries were relocated from Gwa as an AA offensive was anticipated. On August 17, intense fighting continued in Maungdaw. Three days later, junta families fled Taungup, [fearing an AA offensive](#).

"Without the commander's signature, neither family members of the junta forces nor anyone else is allowed to pass through the checkpoints. Soldiers are not allowed to send their families. Only a few families have managed to escape," said a source close to the military.

On August 21, the ULA/AA released a fact-checked report addressing an incident near Maungdaw. The next day, [the junta recalled veterans in Ann to active duty](#). It was also reported that the trial of the former ANP youth leader was delayed due to the absence of prosecution witnesses.

As of August 24, the junta ordered staff of the general administration department from Arakan townships to work in Sittwe. Two days later, the AA called on the junta soldiers at Maungdaw's BGF Battalion No. 5 to surrender. On August 26, [the AA questioned the UN rights chief's remarks on Arakan](#). On August 31, [the junta sought population lists from Ann to create a militia](#).

"Fifteen men were chosen through a lottery from each village tract. Soldiers from Sa-Ya-Pha and the western command stated they were following orders from higher officials. These trained men will be used as a reserve unit to confront the Arakan Army (AA) fighters if needed," said a local man familiar with the village tracts.

Economic Situations

Regarding economic news from Arakan in August, it was reported on the first day of the month that [more Muslims left Arakan in search of better prospects abroad](#). A Muslim man from Wakin Village in Kyauktaw Township said: "Many young people from our village have left for Malaysia. People are suffering economic hardships here without jobs, so they take the risk."

On the same day, thousands of acres of paddy fields were flooded in Kyauktaw Township, and rice prices soared in battle-hit Maungdaw. On August 3, [gold shop owners in Arakan suspended gold purchases](#).

A week later, on August 8, [reports indicated that traditional Arakanese weaving businesses were suffering due to the ongoing conflict](#). Daw Ma Tin Thein from War Bo Village stated: "Weaving is the primary source of livelihood in our village, but all the villagers have fled. So, we have lost our livelihoods."

Additionally, fruit yields declined in the remote areas of Ponnagyun Township, and prices surged as betel leaves became scarce in Arakan. In mid-August, it was reported that [Arakan merchants in India found the kyat's depreciation prohibitive for doing business](#).

"When the Myanmar currency depreciates, if we exchange currency and buy it, the Arakan market will already incur a loss. When traders sell their products, the price of goods in Arakan State can rise to almost double what it was before," said an Arakanese merchant in India.

On August 21, local media reported that food and fuel prices continued to rise unrelentingly in Arakan. Three days later, the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar (ISP-Myanmar) stated that the AA had

partially taken control of 9 out of 11 Chinese-backed projects in Arakan. Meanwhile, small-scale livestock farmers suspended operations amid the ongoing conflict.

Social Issues

“It has been raining continuously for over two weeks. The river water levels have been rising steadily, and by yesterday afternoon, the water was slowly creeping into the compound. Other low-lying villages have been underwater for days. In Pan Myaung village, the river has flooded the low-lying areas and even reached the houses,” said a resident from Mrauk-U Township on August 2.

[Incessant rain caused river floods](#), submerging villages in Mrauk-U, Minbya, and Kyauktaw townships. On the same day, pregnant women in Thandwe were reportedly struggling to get the healthcare they needed.

The following day, [navy personnel seized medicines and electrical equipment worth millions of kyats](#), which had been transported from Yangon near Sittwe. “The goods were seized last week. The navy personnel sent them to the port. Even the sailors are being detained,” said a reliable source. Meanwhile, monkeys in Kyauktaw went hungry amid conflict and hyperinflation.

On August 8, it was reported that the junta banned government employees from leaving Sittwe, and the blockades imposed by the junta led to a shortage of HIV drugs. Four days later, it was reported that [the junta destroyed 22 bridges during fighting in Arakan](#).

“The junta soldiers are destroying bridges to create hardships for the locals. If you're sick, you can't travel. Trading has become too difficult. They're targeting the bridges because they fear the AA fighters,” said a local woman in Pauktaw.

As of August 19, reports indicated that IDPs were suffering health problems due to medicine shortages and price hikes. Three days later, [the media reported that the fighting had deprived children of immunizations in the state](#).

“When my elder son was younger, nurses came to the villages and gave children routine vaccinations against polio, measles, and other diseases. But my younger child has missed out on vaccines, so I am worried,” said a mother of two from Kyauktaw Township.

In addition, several townships in Arakan saw an increase in robberies in residential complexes. Over 200 displaced persons in Ponnagyun were suffering from skin diseases. The General Administration Department (GAD) in Kyaukphyu controlled air ticket sales to Yangon. Furthermore, hundreds of students from universities in Sittwe and Taungup were transferred to other locations.

Tragically, [nuns in Sittwe went hungry, as reported on August 28](#). One nun said: “We can't go on alms rounds. Prices are high, and laypeople can't make donations like they used to. Nuns also need money for meals, medicines, and other essentials. They are struggling to make ends meet.”

“We don't see nuns often anymore. People can't make donations like before,” said a resident of Sittwe. Finally, Arakanese IDPs in Yangon were reported to be facing numerous hardships.

“Some people do help them, and generally, ordinary civilians don't discriminate. The real problem lies with the ward administration officers, police, and some landlords. They demand higher rents and fees,” said an Arakanese who came to Yangon.

Humanitarian Issues

"We don't have any boats ready for us. If the water rises further, it will create serious problems, so we decided to leave. The entire village is now evacuating," said a woman from Zedi Kone Village, who had relocated to Maung Thar Kone Village in Mrauk-U Township.

Residents evacuated from several villages as the Lemro River continued to rise. Numerous villages in Kyauktaw Township were flooded, and flood victims were in need of food and shelter. On August 4, [the AA began flood relief initiatives](#).

"AA members are relocating people to safer areas. Many villagers have been evacuated as the river's water level keeps rising," said a local resident. Meanwhile, [an orphanage in Sittwe sought support amidst a sharp decline in donations](#). "Previously, well-wishers from not only Sittwe but also other townships donated cash and in-kind contributions to the orphanage. Now, everyone is struggling, so they can't donate anymore. Sometimes people from abroad send donations. We are running the orphanage with a small amount of contributions," said U La Min Kyaw Thu, an official from the ABC Foundation.

On August 12, it was reported that [23 UN staff members and their families were trapped in Maungdaw](#). Displaced residents in Maungdaw Township were in urgent need of relief supplies. Homes for the elderly in Arakan were also struggling due to declining donations.

Two days later, IDPs in Arakan faced severe food shortages. [The AA provided food and shelter to Muslim IDPs](#), but urgent aid was still needed for displaced persons in Maungdaw. On August 15, there was a diarrhea outbreak in Maungdaw, and the AA appealed for urgent medical assistance.

A week later, it was reported that [IDPs in Rathedaung Township were experiencing livelihood hardships](#). On August 24, the junta [tightened security checks](#) on Arakanese IDPs in the Ayeyarwady Region.

"The regime implemented strict security checks on Arakanese IDPs in the Ayeyarwady Region after fighting began in Gwa Township on August 10. The owners of homes accommodating the Arakanese IDPs had to pledge to the regime that their homes were being rented to the IDPs," said an Arakanese IDP in Yekyi Township.

Finally, on August 29, it was reported that [aid workers were struggling to assist IDPs in Thandwe and Gwa due to cash shortages](#).

"With fewer mobile money agents than before, it is difficult to convert donations into cash. Sometimes we have to search for people willing to transfer money and exchange cash. Since cash is hard to come by, there are delays in providing aid to IDPs," said an aid worker in Thandwe Township.

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.

Contact: info@arakanstudies.org
www.arakanstudies.org