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Arakan Faces Military Strikes, Economic Decline, and Health Emergencies

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



Photo/Credit-DMG

Key Remarks

- Armed clashes continued in several townships in Arakan during September, including Maungdaw, Ann, and Gwa. The junta's planned census is unlikely to be conducted in Arakan. Additionally, the junta intensified its defense of key towns like Sittway and Kyaukphyu following its declaration of the AA as a terrorist organization. Meanwhile, the AA spokesperson issued a stern warning, threatening retaliation if Bangladesh continued to allow the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) and other Rohingya militants to operate from its territory.
- Economic conditions in Arakan show no signs of progress or potential for development. Rising prices of basic commodities remain a widespread issue, and the junta has only permitted fishing in Kyaukphyu for its patronized network. The local fishing community in Kyaukphyu has also been affected by the degradation of the Thanzit River, primarily due to increased shipping traffic and construction along the river.
- Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Arakan are facing environmental and health crises due to a lack of clean drinking water and poor hygiene. In addition, the junta has banned ships from docking at Sittway port, and some residents of Ponnagyun have resorted to selling their blood for income. In Myebon, two Rohingya women died from malnutrition.
- The Nippon Foundation provided food aid to Arakanese IDPs in Yangon, and some Arakanese IDPs were arrested in the Ayeyarwady region. The ICRC chief also visited Rakhine to assess the dire humanitarian situation. Meanwhile, thousands of flood victims remain in urgent need of assistance, while the AA has offered some support to Chin communities.

Political Affairs

Starting with the junta's activities in Arakan, in the first week of September, the junta mobilized Muslims near Sittwe to participate in armed clashes and launched airstrikes on Sittwe and Ponnagyun townships. Despite the intensifying civil war, the junta pressed forward with its census plan, though [sources claimed](#) that conducting a household census in Arakan State is unlikely.

"Who will conduct the census in Arakan State, and which social organizations will be involved? Most townships currently lack personnel, and those who are present cannot leave their locations. The junta forces and police personnel are unable to provide security. So, conducting a census enumeration in the Arakan region is impossible," said U Pe Than, a political analyst.

The junta military then fortified villages at the gateway to Sittwe. On September 4, the MNDAA, TNLA, and AA were declared terrorist organizations by the junta. On September 7, another group of 100 Byine Phyu residents were sentenced to three years in prison.

On September 10, dozens were killed in junta airstrikes on AA detention camps, and the airstrikes completely destroyed UN office buildings in Maungdaw. Following this, local Muslims at the latest junta checkpoints in Sittwe Township were subjected to extortion. The junta also erected a fence in Kyaukphyu to defend against the AA. On September 24, [two people were killed](#), and three others were injured in a junta airstrike in Taungup Township. The next day, two civilians were killed, and at least 10 others were injured in another junta airstrike on Khan Taunggyi, Myebon Township.

On September 30, junta air forces dropped bombs on villages along the Sittwe-Ponnagyun border, reducing scores of homes to ashes in Maungdaw. Pro-junta parties then endorsed the regime's invitations for resistance forces to join the negotiating table.

Meanwhile, on another front, [four AA fighters were killed](#), and one was injured in an RSO border ambush on September 2, 2024.

"RSO terrorists are now using Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh as their base to conduct military operations. We have informed the Bangladeshi authorities. If they use Bangladesh's territory to launch attacks on ULA/AA troops across the Naf River, we will retaliate decisively," said AA spokesperson U Khaing Thukha.

On September 6, the AA confirmed the complete capture of the Maung Shwe Lay naval base in Thandwe. Later, the AA reported capturing the last two outposts under the 5th Border Guard Police Battalion (NaKhaKha-5) in Maungdaw. On September 13, the AA vowed to take action against corrupt officials within its ranks and launched a drone attack on the junta camp in Taungup. The AA pledged to intensify its attacks in Arakan State and, on September 30, delivered weapons to the CDF-Matupi Brigade-1.

Economic Situations

On September 9, it was reported that cigarette production had declined amid the conflict in Arakan State. Cigarette producer U Sein Maung from Kyauktaw town [said](#): "We can only produce between 1,000 and 2,000 cigarettes now, down from around 10,000 per day." Additionally, the junta banned local residents from fishing off the coast of Arakan State, while allowing junta-linked companies to continue. It was also reported that around 3,000 Arakan residents had been detained in Malaysia over the past three months. Women in rural Arakan continued to face limited job prospects and unfulfilled potential.

On September 17, the degradation of the Thanzit River caused significant environmental damage in Kyaukphyu Township. A former Kyaukphyu MP [commented](#): "They are dredging the Thanzit River with ships and equipment starting from Maday Island. The dredging has been ongoing since early September, using modern machinery."

On September 21, the ULA [banned the import of foreign and mainland alcoholic beverages](#) into Arakan. "We have to sell all our remaining alcohol within three months. If we cannot, we will have to discard it. Otherwise, serious actions will be taken. We'll face losses, but we won't complain," said [a woman selling alcoholic beverages](#) in Arakan.

Meanwhile, Arakan salt farmers suffered losses due to transportation barriers and high fuel prices. Women in Arakan also experienced difficulties due to a shortage of sanitary pads. "In rural areas, most women cannot afford sanitary pads. Often, the shops run out of supplies, forcing us to use cloth instead. I worry about the long-term health effects of using cloth," said a woman from Lay Gwa Sone village in Rathedaung Township.

Finally, on September 30, it was reported that winter crop farmers in Arakan were in need of seeds and other agricultural inputs.

Social Issues

On September 2, 2024, it was reported that [skin disease had become a growing concern](#) among the local population in Arakan State.

"Displaced people suffer from skin diseases due to overcrowding in displacement camps, lack of clean drinking water, and poor hygiene. However, those outside the camps are also vulnerable to skin diseases, often caused by poor water quality and allergies," said a health worker in Kyauktaw Township.

The junta then barred private cargo ships from docking at Sittwe Port, and reports [emerged of impoverished residents](#) and IDPs in Ponnagyun selling their blood for money. A member of the Ponnagyun Youth Association said: "Due to livelihood hardships, people are forced to take on any

back-breaking job available to survive. When they donate blood, they need to rest and can't work, which prevents them from supporting their families. So, blood donors are asking for compensation." On September 5, the junta seized a cargo ship carrying food to Kyaukphyu. The Lin Yaung Chi Foundation offered free education to displaced children in Ponnagyun, who were in desperate need of textbooks. Meanwhile, residents of Taungup described a rise in crime as a result of the junta's blockades.

Locals in Gwa are facing shortages of food and medicine, along with fears of increasing crime in conflict-torn Arakan State. Additionally, [cases of malaria and dengue were on the rise](#) in remote villages of Kyauktaw Township as of September 16, 2024.

"There are no healthcare services here. People have died from malaria. Those without money cannot even go to the hospital for treatment," said U Sein Thar Htwee, a resident of Pyaingtaing Village. Residents in Ramree Township demanded repairs to damaged roads, while a cargo boat sank in Arakan, resulting in a loss of 370 million kyats. [Environmentalists reported](#) "less illegal logging of Wunbaik mangroves after the AA took control of Ramree" on September 23, 2024.

"Locals usually cut down firewood from the Wunbaik Reserve Mangrove Forest due to power outages. However, since the AA seized Ramree, there has been no illegal logging in the forest," said an environmentalist.

Two women died of malnutrition in a Muslim IDP camp in Myebon, and chronic patients struggled due to a medical blockade in Manaung Township. The junta also arrested six Kyaukphyu residents and seized banned tablets worth over 2.2 billion kyats. Air ticket prices skyrocketed in Arakan State, accompanied by an alarming rise in drug addiction among Arakanese youth.

Humanitarian Issues

On September 1, 2024, the Nippon Foundation [planned to provide food aid](#) to Arakanese IDPs in Yangon. "Those who have fled the conflict in rural areas and are now facing a livelihood crisis will be given priority. We will focus on people in the outskirts of Yangon rather than those in the downtown area," said Arakan National Network (ANN) chairman Ko Tin Htoo Aung.

It was reported that around 30 Arakanese IDPs were arrested in Ayeyarwady, leaving their families clueless about their whereabouts. Additionally, on September 4, the Burmese community in Chiang Mai hosted a 'Daring Flowers' fundraising event for Arakanese IDPs. The ICRC chief visited Arakan State on September 10 [to witness the dire humanitarian needs firsthand](#).

"We are engaging in bilateral and confidential dialogues with all parties involved in the conflict to remind them of their obligation to respect international humanitarian laws and to ensure the safety of civilians and humanitarian workers," stated Mirjana Spoljaric, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The junta chief claimed adherence to the Geneva Conventions, which was met with derision, especially as the junta evicted hundreds of households in Sittwe Township. On September 18, it was reported that [thousands of flood victims](#) in Minbya Township were in need of aid.

"We have lost our homes and are facing food shortages as the recent flood destroyed everything. We evacuated to safer locations in advance," said a resident of Minbya Township.

In addition, hundreds of evictees from Sittwe faced challenges with food and accommodation, while the flood in Minbya left one person dead, damaged about 300 houses, and submerged 20 villages. IDPs in Maungdaw were in need of food and healthcare services, and returnees to remote villages in Kyauktaw Township faced tough times.

The AA provided a week's supply of rice to 14 flood-affected Chin villages in Minbya. The hardships forced Arakanese IDPs in Yangon to return to Sittwe. Residents who lost their homes during the battle for Mrauk-U were in urgent need of aid, and Muslim IDPs at the Myebon displacement camp faced a lack of food and medicine. Thousands of Arakanese residents displaced by fighting in the Kachin jade mining hub added to the humanitarian burden on the Arakanese community.

"We had to stop working and flee to safer locations due to the fighting in Hpakant Township," said one resident of Arakan State. "We are in a lot of trouble right now. We were forced to flee our homes by the fighting. Soon, we will go hungry. We would like to ask concerned officials to provide for us," said a resident of Pauktaw Township, who had relocated to Hpakant.

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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