

Monthly Arakan Review

Center for Arakan Studies

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February in Focus: Arakan's Conflict and Crops

Monitoring of a brief situation of political tension, economic issues, social issues, and humanitarian issues in Arakan in February 2025.



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Executive Summary

- In February, Arakan experienced an escalation of conflict, with the military junta intensifying airstrikes on Arakan Army (AA)-controlled areas and causing considerable destruction. The AA has continued to hold key strategic locations, including vital military sites. Attacks on civilians—through bombings and landmine incidents—have resulted in numerous casualties and significant displacement.
- Recent developments in Arakan have had major economic and agricultural impacts. Disruptions to Myanmar-Bangladesh maritime trade, caused by AA inspections of cargo ships, have halted sea trade and affected local businesses and international routes. In response to the conflict, many farmers have turned to winter-crop cultivation, while others prepare for the mountain-crop season, despite challenges such as declining paddy prices and restrictions on fuel shipments. Additionally, the AA has supported local agriculture by returning land previously seized by the military, reflecting its efforts to stabilize areas under its control.
- Arakan is facing deepening humanitarian challenges, including water shortages, disease outbreaks, and medication scarcity, which particularly affect children and people with mental-health issues. In Paletwa, a lack of medicine has led to deaths, while residents of Sittwe remain trapped by the junta's military restrictions. These conditions highlight the growing impact of ongoing conflict and resource scarcity in the region.
- The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar is worsening, with nearly 570,000 displaced people in Rakhine State requiring aid. Funding cuts—including the suspension of \$39 million in U.S. aid—have exacerbated the situation, and in Sittwe, Muslim refugees have gone without food assistance for almost two months. In Maungdaw, residents are hesitant to return because of landmines and the risk of airstrikes, while Bangladesh is pressuring for refugee repatriation. Displaced Rakhine individuals in the Ayeyarwady Region receive minimal support, underscoring severe resource shortages and continuing displacement.

Key Developments

Politics and Armed Conflict

1. **Escalating Attacks and Airstrikes:** The Myanmar junta launched airstrikes in key areas, including Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, Maungdaw, and Gwa, significantly impacting local populations. For instance, on February 8, 2025, airstrikes on AA-controlled areas in Gwa and Rathedaung resulted in one fatality and several injuries. Similarly, on February 26, 2025, airstrikes in Wah Bo village of Sittwe destroyed ten houses.
2. **AA Offensive and Territorial Gains:** The Arakan Army (AA) has carried out multiple assaults, seizing important military positions such as Goke See Tower on February 3, 2025, and launching synchronized attacks on junta bases in Sittwe and Kyaukphyu. Notably, on February 24, 2025, AA forces attacked the Dhanyawadi Naval Base and the 32nd Police Battalion in Kyaukphyu.
3. **Humanitarian Impact and Civilian Casualties:** The ongoing conflict has inflicted significant suffering on civilians. On February 12, 2025, the AA removed more than 30 landmines in Muslim-majority villages in Maungdaw, highlighting the human toll of the fighting. Additionally, on February 21, 2025, deadly bombings in Pauktaw Township killed four people, including two children, and injured others. Explosive remnants of war and ongoing clashes have caused numerous casualties across Maungdaw, Pauktaw, and Gwa.
4. **General Information:** From February 1 to March 1, 2025, the situation in Myanmar—particularly in Rakhine State and surrounding areas—worsened due to escalating conflict between the Myanmar military junta and the Arakan Army (AA). The junta intensified its air-strike campaigns on AA-controlled areas, notably in Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Maungdaw, leaving significant destruction in their wake. Conversely, the AA continued to assert control over key regions, including strategic military sites such as Goke See Tower and Dhanyawadi Naval Base. Throughout

the month, multiple bomb explosions, landmine incidents, and attacks on civilian areas caused fatalities and injuries. In particular, on February 21, 2025, a bombing in Pauktaw claimed several civilian lives—including those of children—and caused extensive damage to homes. The ongoing violence has displaced many people, with both sides suffering heavy losses. Despite these aggressive military actions, diplomatic talks remain stalled, and the humanitarian crisis continues to grow, especially in Rakhine State.

B. Economics

1. **AA Releases Final Detained Cargo Vessel, Naf River:** On February 2, 2025, the Arakan Army (AA) released the last detained cargo vessel in the Naf River. This step marks significant progress in reducing tensions along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, where trade and movement had previously been disrupted.
2. **Bank Operations Halted in Sittwe Amid Escalating Military Tensions:** On February 20, 2025, escalating military tensions in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State, prompted the suspension of bank operations. Funds were transferred to Yangon as a precautionary measure. This disruption highlights the instability affecting the region.
3. **AA Returns Agricultural Land to Original Owners in Arakan:** On February 28, 2025, the AA returned thousands of acres of agricultural land to their original owners in Arakan State. This move is viewed as a significant gesture of reconciliation and self-governance in areas under AA control.
4. **General Information:** Over the past month, several notable developments have taken place across Myanmar's Rakhine State and surrounding areas. On February 3, 2025, Myanmar-Bangladesh maritime trade was disrupted after AA inspections of cargo ships halted sea traffic between the two nations, affecting local businesses and international trade routes.

In Rakhine State, the economic landscape is shifting. On February 11, 2025, farmers increasingly focused on winter-crop cultivation, which could provide a vital income source amid ongoing conflict. Meanwhile, on February 19, 2025, residents in AA-controlled areas began preparing for the coming mountain-crop season despite persistent challenges.

By February 25, 2025, farmers faced financial strain from declining paddy prices, compounding the difficulties of rural agriculture. The same day, military restrictions on fuel shipments from Ayeyarwady to Rakhine State added further pressure on local businesses and farmers.

In terms of governance, the AA has demonstrated efforts to support local agricultural communities, as shown by its February 28, 2025, return of thousands of acres of land previously seized by the military. This action reflects the AA's ongoing attempts to build trust and stabilize areas under its control.

C. Social Affairs

1. **HIV Stigma Addressed with Community Education** *Date: 1-Feb-25 / Location: Mrauk-U:* A mother and son, previously expelled from their village for allegedly having HIV, were allowed back into Mrauk-U after a health-awareness seminar was held in the village. This marks a step toward reducing stigma and educating the community about health issues.
2. **Junta Tightens Control Amid Rising Tensions:** *Date: 10-Feb-25 / Location: Sittwe:* The junta shut down all routes into and out of Sittwe, regulating boats and sampans and effectively isolating the town. This follows reports of power outages and rising firewood prices on 4-Feb-25, exacerbating residents' struggles amid the conflict.
3. **AA Imposes Environmental and Security Measures:** *Date: 24-Feb-25 / Location: Arakan Mountains and nearby areas:* The Arakan Army (AA) enforced a three-year logging prohibition in the Arakan Mountains, building on earlier efforts such as area-clearance operations in the Mayu Mountains (4-Feb-25, Maungdaw Township) and restrictions on fishing and bird hunting near Abawngtaw

Lake (15-Feb-25, Mrauk-U). These measures reflect a focus on environmental protection and local security.

4. **General Information:** *Locations: Pauktaw, Ponnagyun, Minbya, Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, Paletwa*
Across Rakhine State, residents face mounting challenges: water shortages and diarrheal diseases are feared in Pauktaw, Ponnagyun, and Minbya (6-Feb-25); children under one year have gone without vaccinations for more than a year (7-Feb-25); and medication shortages affect people with mental-health issues (14-Feb-25). In Paletwa, three deaths were reported due to a lack of medicine (24-Feb-25), while Sittwe residents remain trapped by junta restrictions (21-Feb-25), highlighting a deepening humanitarian crisis amid conflict and resource scarcity.

D. Humanitarian Emergency

1. **Villages Evacuated Amid Escalating Conflict:** *Date: 17-Feb-25 / Location: Rathedaung*
As military tensions intensified in Sittwe, three villages near Ngaumaw Beach in Rathedaung Township were relocated to safer areas, reflecting growing displacement caused by the conflict.
2. **Fear of Airstrikes Drives Mass Exodus:** *Date: 22-Feb-25 / Locations: Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, Pauktaw:* Concerns about air-strike dangers prompted thousands of residents from these three townships to flee as conflict-related risks escalated, compounding the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State.
3. **Junta Threatens Villagers Trapped in Conflict Zone:** *Date: 24-Feb-25 / Location: Kyaukphyu:* The junta threatened to shoot villagers from Thitpuktaung near the Dhanyawaddy Naval Base if they attempted to flee, leaving most residents trapped amid ongoing fighting and highlighting severe restrictions on civilian movement.
4. **General Information:** *Locations: Sittwe, Maungdaw, Kyaukphyu, Ayeyarwady Region, Bangladesh*
The humanitarian situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate, with nearly 570,000 displaced people in Rakhine State needing aid (24-Feb-25, ICRC report). Funding cuts—including the suspension of \$39 million in aid by the Trump administration (6-Feb-25) and USAID's funding pause affecting displaced persons (22-Feb-25)—have worsened the challenges. In Sittwe, Muslim refugees have gone without food assistance for almost two months (25-Feb-25), while in Maungdaw, residents hesitate to return because of mines and the threat of airstrikes (21-Feb-25). Meanwhile, Bangladesh is pushing for refugee repatriation (24-Feb-25), and displaced Rakhine individuals in the Ayeyarwady Region receive minimal junta support of 20,000 kyats per person per month (27-Feb-25), underscoring widespread resource shortages and continued displacement.

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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