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WAR, FAMINE, REBEL GOVERNANCE IN ARAKAN

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



Photo Credit via DMG News

Executive Summary

In April 2025, Rakhine State faced escalating conflict as the Myanmar junta violated its 20-day truce with 409 attacks, including airstrikes in Kyaukphyu and the widespread destruction of civilian homes and a hospital in Sittwe. The Arakan Army (AA) consolidated its position by capturing the Nyaung Kyo camp in Bago Region, releasing 170 prisoners in Minbya, and enforcing governance-like curfews in Maungdaw. ARSA's attacks on minorities and rising cross-border tensions—including the AA's detention of Bangladesh fishermen—further intensified ethnic and regional friction. The AA's 16th anniversary highlighted its growing influence amid ongoing violence.

Also in April 2025, tensions escalated further as the junta reinforced security around Chinese projects in Kyaukphyu, which generate over \$575 million annually, while facing intensified assaults from the AA. Economic hardships deepened: low-denomination banknotes became unusable in Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, and Rathedaung; a rice import ban led to scarcity in Kyaukphyu; and the AA's enforcement of policies such as mandatory helmet use drove up prices. Cross-border cattle trade with Bangladesh was hampered by local levies, and the halt in commerce at Kanyin Chaung further strained the region's economy. These developments illustrate the complex interplay between conflict, economic instability, and emerging governance structures.

Meanwhile, Sittwe experienced a severe famine, with residents resorting to eating dogs and cats, while water shortages affected Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Rathedaung, and Maungdaw. The AA bolstered its image as a governing authority by punishing over 130 burglars in Maungdaw and adjudicating a rape case in Paletwa. Military restrictions—such as movement bans in Kyaukphyu and increased naval presence in Thandwe—further disrupted civilian livelihoods, especially fishing. Nevertheless, cultural events such as the Khumi Literature Centenary and traditional festivals continued despite the conflict. These conditions reflect Rakhine's worsening humanitarian crisis and the AA's attempts to assert control amid instability.

By the end of April 2025, Rakhine continued to endure widespread suffering. Junta bombings and drone strikes in Kyauktaw and Kyaukphyu killed and injured dozens, including children, despite an extended ceasefire. Landmines and unexploded ordnance caused regular casualties in Taungup, Mrauk-U, Gwa, Myebon, and Ann. In response, the AA resettled displaced residents in Paletwa and opened an orphanage for children of all ethnicities, highlighting its humanitarian and governance efforts. Food shortages in Thandwe, detentions in Sittwe, and the displacement of over 40,000 people to Kyaukphyu further strained civilian life. Cross-border developments included Bangladesh's agreement to a UN humanitarian corridor and Myanmar's verification of 180,000 Rohingya for repatriation—though concerns over their safety persisted.

Key Developments

A. Politics and Armed Conflicts

1. Junta's Truce Violations and Civilian Attacks in Kyaukphyu

Despite declaring a 20-day truce on April 2, the Myanmar junta violated it with 409 military assaults, including airstrikes and heavy artillery strikes in Kyaukphyu. Notable incidents included the use of 500-pound bombs and the deployment of paratroopers, with intense clashes reported as the junta attempted to reclaim AA-held areas. These violations highlight the junta's disregard for ceasefire agreements and its escalation of conflict in strategic zones.

2. **Arakan Army's Strategic and Humanitarian Gains**

On April 5, the Arakan Army (AA) fully captured the Nyaung Kyo strategic camp in Bago Region, marking a significant expansion of its influence beyond Rakhine State. On April 14, the AA released 170 prisoners of war and their families in Minbya ahead of Thingyan, demonstrating humanitarian efforts alongside its military advances. These events underscore the AA's growing military strength and administrative authority.

3. **Destruction of Civilian Infrastructure in Sittwe**

On April 19, Google Maps revealed the near-total destruction of village homes on the outskirts of Sittwe, indicating systematic targeting of civilian areas. On April 26, junta shelling in Wabo village, Sittwe, destroyed a hospital and over 200 homes, exacerbating civilian displacement. These incidents reflect the devastating impact of the conflict on civilian infrastructure and livelihoods.

General Overview

From April 1 to 30, 2025, Rakhine State witnessed intense conflict despite temporary ceasefires declared by both the Three Brotherhood Alliance and the junta. The junta's 409 assaults—including airstrikes in Kyaukphyu and the destruction of civilian infrastructure in Sittwe—violated its own truce and caused significant civilian harm. The Arakan Army strengthened its position by capturing strategic sites like Nyaung Kyo in Bago Region and implementing governance measures, such as curfews in Maungdaw and prisoner releases in Minbya. Ethnic tensions intensified with ARSA's attacks on minorities and cross-border incidents, including the AA's detention of Bangladeshi fishermen. While the AA's 16th anniversary highlighted its growing regional support, the ongoing violence and junta aggression underscore the persistent instability in Rakhine.

B. Economics

1. **Junta's Focus on Securing Chinese Projects in Kyaukphyu**

On April 7, the Chief Minister of the Rakhine State Military Council visited Kyaukphyu—under Arakan Army (AA) assault—to bolster security for Chinese-backed projects generating over \$575 million annually. This visit underscores the junta's prioritization of economic interests tied to foreign investment, despite ongoing conflict, and highlights Kyaukphyu's strategic importance.

2. **Economic Disruptions and Currency Issues in Rakhine**

On April 19, low-denomination banknotes (50 to 200 kyats) became unusable in Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, and Rathedaung, causing significant hardship for residents. On April 23, an import ban on rice in Kyaukphyu led to severe scarcity, exacerbating local economic strain. These developments reflect the acute impact of conflict and governance breakdowns on daily life and local markets.

3. **AA's Governance and Cross-Border Trade Issues**

The AA enforced mandatory motorcycle helmet use in areas under its control, driving up helmet prices. Meanwhile, traders faced challenges exporting cattle to Bangladesh due to levies imposed by local committees in Maungdaw. These incidents highlight the AA's attempts to impose regulatory order and the economic tensions created by cross-border trade restrictions amid sustained conflict.

General Overview

Between April 7 and April 24, 2025, Rakhine State faced compounding economic and security challenges amid the ongoing conflict between the Myanmar junta and the Arakan Army. The junta focused on protecting Chinese infrastructure projects in Kyaukphyu, valued at over \$575 million annually, even as AA offensives continued. Economic disruptions included the devaluation of low-

denomination currency in several townships and rice scarcity in Kyaukphyu following import restrictions. The AA's governance measures—such as enforcing helmet regulations—led to price surges, while cross-border cattle trade with Bangladesh was strained by new levies. These developments underscore the complex interplay between armed conflict, economic hardship, and competing claims to governance in Rakhine.

C. Social Affairs

1. Famine and Humanitarian Crisis in Sittwe

On April 4, working-class residents in Sittwe faced severe hunger, with reports on April 8 confirming widespread famine among the majority of the population still under military control. The crisis was exacerbated by extreme coping mechanisms, such as the slaughtering of dogs and cats for food, underscoring the dire food insecurity and deteriorating living conditions in junta-held areas.

2. Water Scarcity Across Rakhine Township

Residents in Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Rathedaung, and Maungdaw experienced acute water shortages, severely affecting daily life and compounding humanitarian challenges in these conflict-affected areas. These conditions underscore the broader infrastructure collapse and resource scarcity driven by prolonged conflict and governance failures.

3. AA's Governance and Social Measures in Controlled Areas

On April 24, the Arakan Army (AA) announced disciplinary action against two soldiers involved in a rape case in Paletwa, reinforcing its stated commitment to justice in areas under its control. On April 30, the AA reported having arrested and punished over 130 burglars in Maungdaw over a four-month period, addressing ongoing local crime concerns. These actions reflect the AA's attempts to assert authority and maintain social order amid conflict.

General Overview

Between April 3 and April 30, 2025, Rakhine State endured severe humanitarian and social crises amid continued conflict. In Sittwe, famine drove residents to extreme survival strategies, including consuming dogs and cats, while water scarcity in multiple townships highlighted the collapse of essential services. The AA intensified its governance efforts by punishing criminal offenses, including rape in Paletwa and burglary in Maungdaw. Despite the instability, cultural activities—such as the Khumi Literature Centenary and traditional festivals—continued. Military-imposed restrictions, including movement bans in Kyaukphyu and the junta navy's presence in Thandwe, further curtailed civilian livelihoods such as fishing. These developments underscore the deepening humanitarian crisis, the AA's expanding governance role, and the enduring toll of conflict on Rakhine's population.

D. Humanitarian Emergency

1. Civilian Casualties from Junta Bombings and Drone Strikes in Kyaukphyu

On April 19, junta bombings in Kyauktaw killed one civilian and wounded 21 others, including children. On April 25, drone strikes in Kyaukphyu killed five women, including an elderly woman and an 11-year-old girl, despite the junta having extended its ceasefire. These attacks highlight the junta's continued targeting of civilians and disregard for truce agreements, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

2. Landmine and Explosive Incidents Across Rakhine

Multiple incidents involving remnant bombs and landmines caused civilian harm: a teenage boy was killed in Taungup, a man lost his leg in Gwa, two civilians were injured in Mrauk-U, and others were wounded in Taungup, Myebon, and Ann. These events underscore the pervasive danger of unexploded ordnance, which hinders civilian safety and resettlement efforts.

3. AA's Humanitarian and Governance Initiatives

On April 7, the Arakan Army (AA) resettled residents from 21 villages in Paletwa but noted the need for landmine clearance to ensure safety. On April 24, the AA commander-in-chief's wife established the *Gautami Embrace* orphanage to care for orphaned children across ethnic groups in Rakhine, reflecting the AA's efforts to address humanitarian needs and promote inclusive governance.

General Overview

From April 3 to April 30, 2025, Rakhine State faced a worsening humanitarian crisis driven by junta violence and the lingering effects of conflict. Junta bombings and drone strikes in Kyauktaw and Kyaukphyu killed and injured civilians, including children, despite ceasefire extensions, while landmines and remnant explosives caused frequent civilian casualties across Taungup, Mrauk-U, Gwa, Myebon, and Ann. The AA supported displaced communities through resettlement in Paletwa and established an orphanage in Rakhine, but challenges such as food shortages in Thandwe and the detention of civilians in Sittwe persisted. Cross-border developments included Bangladesh's agreement to a UN humanitarian corridor and Myanmar's verification of 180,000 Rohingya for repatriation, though refugees expressed concerns over their safety. These events highlight the dire civilian toll, ongoing insecurity, and the AA's efforts to address humanitarian needs amid conflict.

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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