

# SPECIAL REPORT

Center For Arakan Studies

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## Arakan At a Feeble Cease-fire

*Monitoring of a brief situation of Political, Economic, Social and Humanitarian Issues in Rakhine State from January to April 2023.*



(Photo/Western News)

This special report is a part of Quarterly Report Series, published by the Center for Arakan Studies (CAS), trying to highlight and analyze the news on the local media combination through the first four months of 2023. The CAS has released a monthly report in the previous three months from January through February to March, and these reports can be available [www.arakanstudies.org](http://www.arakanstudies.org).

## Key Remarks

In political sector, news related to elections, political freedom, SAC-junta activity, armed revolution, and ceasefire situations has been the most dominant on the local media agencies in the past four months from January to April in Rakhine. Election news includes the junta appointed-Union Election Committee (UEC) approval of political parties, removal of non-registered parties' signboards, anti-election campaigns, junta authority conduction of population census, USDP chief visit into Rakhine, local people's perception of elections, Chinese ambassador's discussion with the UEC, ULA's stance on elections.

In economic sector, migration and agricultural issues occupy as the top two coverage of local media. For Migration, it includes the junta-controlled media statement on arrests of 'Rohingya' migrants, propaganda on the return of Rakhine people, Rakhine workers in Malaysia demand for contact with homes, detainment of Thai authority to Rakhine migrants, illegal migrant workers arrested in Thailand while returning to home, and Mro ethnic minority facing livelihood challenges. In Agriculture, local farmers facing high costs and poor harvests, developing special farming zone by the junta, the necessity of more oil crops in the state, the rising price of grains, the demand of farmers to allocate reserve funds and more technological support, the decline of winter crop cultivation are seen.

In social sector, the two most prominent news covered by local media are about healthcare and insufficient basic service provision. At first, it is about mass campaigns and awareness raising of COVID-19, attention to special diseases, call for the removal of FDA-banned food products, warning for high temperatures, complaints about the staff and medicine supply inadequacy, drug-related disease, junta military mobile medical team, Covid vaccination for students. And the second one is related to the scarcity of drinking water, the rising price of cooling devices, the construction of free homes in Sittwe, giving compensation to residents for not working on solar plants, lack of electricity during the examination period, disputes on electricity bills, diseases due to the unclean and unpurified drinking water.

In humanitarian sector, the issues related to the resumption of the humanitarian provision, the forced returns and refugee repatriation issue from Bangladesh, and the state of humanitarian assistance provision in the existing IDP camps in the state are the most prominent ones.



Photo 1. "Rakhine State, Myanmar (as of 16 Jul 2013)," UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, July 16, 2013.

## Politics: Junta “Sham” Electoral Politics on the Rise

*In January:* The Arakan political climate in January 2023 showed the signs and calamity of the post-conflict period. The two parties, such as the ULA and junta authorities, attempted to extract the political profits as far as possible on account of the ceasefire. Yet, Rakhine electoral political parties are not on united ground for the coming the junta projected election. And the ULA/AA, a kingmaker of the state, remains silent on the question of election.

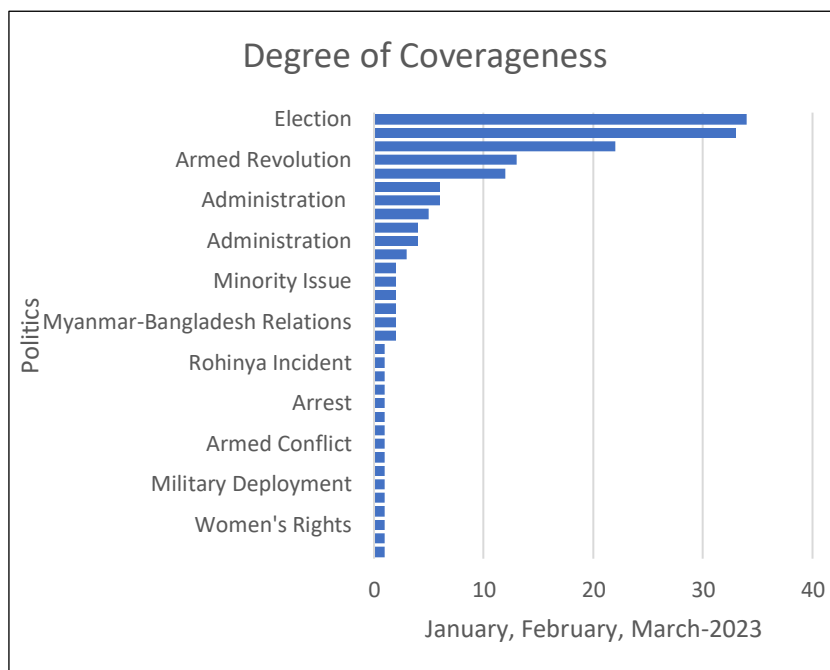
*In February:* Both tensions and relaxation could be seen in politics in Rakhine. Tensions between AA and junta forces happened due after the junta forces' reinforcement, such as military types of equipment and patrol and attempted more restrictions toward the ULA administrative and judiciary sectors in the southern townships such as Kyaukphyu and Taunggoke. Relaxation could be found in the areas of trade, transportation, and communication sectors. On the other hand, electoral politics regarding the coming junta “sham” elections have become more repetitive in the local news as the trend is to be watched.

*In March:* While the junta's forces and AA are now in an informal truce, the news of the registration of the political parties in Rakhine has become more prominent in March. As the two-armed parties are in lack of trust in each other, the reinforcements of the military force and silent confrontation become the affairs of politics. For example, neither the junta has a clear date for its sham election, nor the ULA has a decisive stand on election issues.

*In April:* Both the junta and ULA authority attempted to promote their closeness and familiarity with the local population through the celebration of the traditional ‘Thingyan water festivals’. For the junta authority, they celebrated the events in the key urban areas, such as Sittwe, Kyaukphyu and Thandwe, whereas the rural areas, such as ‘Zee-Chaung Dam’ and ‘Lay-Myore Riverbank’ became hubs of public celebrations organised by the ULA authority. In opposition to other areas, the festivals are less politicised. But, apart from these superficial events, the dynamics of Arakan politics still exist in a highly intense situation.

## Distribution of 'Political News'

Theme	Count of Theme
Election	34
Political Freedom	33
SAC activity	22
Armed Revolution	13
Ceasefire	12
Rohingya incident	6
Administration	6
ALP	5
Minority Issues	4
Administration	4
ULA/AA Anniversary	3
Peace Process	2
Minority Issue	2
Armed Revolution	2
BD Military Test	2
Myanmar-Bangladesh Relations	2
Soldiers Defection	2
Public Service	1
Rohingya Incident	1
Repatriation	1
Civilian Fatalities	1
Arrest	1
Defection	1
Relations with China	1
Armed Conflict	1
Civilian Causality	1
Peace	1
Military Deployment	1
Border Issues	1
External Presence	1
Women's Rights	1
Freedom of Expression	1
India's Interference	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>170</b>



### *Election:*

UEC approval of political parties, removal of non-registered parties' signboards, anti-election campaigns, junta authority conduction of population census, USDP chief visit into Rakhine, local people's perception of elections, Chinese ambassador's discussion with UEC, ULA's stance on elections.

### *Political Freedom:*

Junta sentence of the death penalty to students, trial delay at junta court, violations of prisoners' rights, exclusion of AA-related prisoners in the junta's amnesty, continual imposition of curfew in some townships, warning of linking to the AA and arrests to businessmen, local arrested on account of link with NUG, CRPH.

### *SAC activity:*

BGF killing to each other, junta chief's repetitive visits, military reinforcement, extension of emergency rule by the junta, junta's supporters' protests the UNSE resolution in Rakhine, junta soldiers' defection, junta soldiers' killings to civilians.

### *Armed Revolution:*

AA vice-chief meeting with CDM healthcare professionals and online presence on Karenni event, AA statement on the anniversary of Chin, Magway and MNDAA resistance force, three northern alliance statement on UWSA, AA chief attendance on Chin revolution anniversary.



## Economics: Migration and Price of commodity Continue

*In January:* The relaxation of trade and transportation in the post-conflict scenario brought some progress and hope for the local business community, especially in the areas of border trade with Bangladesh. However, as the negative consequences of the political instability and economic hardship affected the livelihoods of the local population in Rakhine, the amount of emigration, especially leaving foreign countries like Thailand and Malaysia, is still a significant symptom of harsh economic conditions in Rakhine.

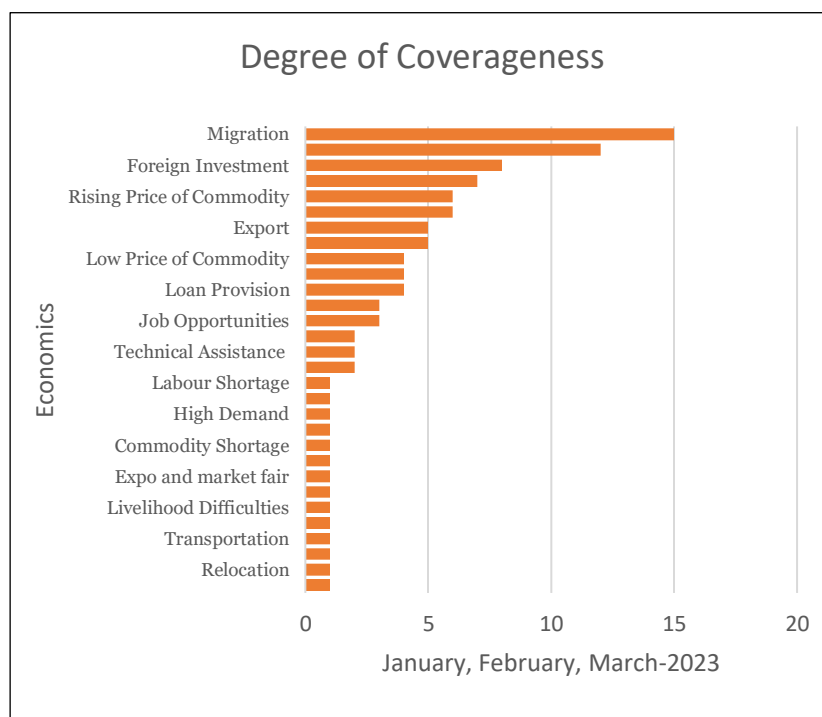
*In February:* The economic situation remains frustrating despite the fact that the current “humanitarian” truce is in place. It has frequently been seen that many people without formal documents attempted to immigrate for work to other parts of the country and neighbouring countries such as Thailand and Malaysia. While multi-million-dollar foreign investments between the Junta regime and foreign countries such as China and India are in the process of implementation, small and medium enterprises in the Rakhine state, jobless cases have been at the top.

*In March:* The junta authority in Rakhine attempted to show the truce with the AA as a model for other parts of the country, especially for the ethnic armed groups. The repetitive visits of the junta chief to the state also intended to be showed off some political messages of so-called ‘peace and development’ in the region. The real changes in the local economic livelihoods are not yet seen now.

*In April:* The volume of migrant workers to the neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, China, and Malaysia, is still on the rise. In many cases, (Rohingya) Muslim people got arrested along the way to these destinations due to the lack of legal documents and got jailed. On the other hand, the junta authority planned to promote the export volume of rice into Bangladesh, although the price of rice is rising in the state. The requirement of dollar currency in trade with Bangladesh also has negative impacts on the local trade community. People see less hope and confidence from the recent junta chief visit to the state and increasing foreign projects in the area.

***Distribution of 'Economic News'***

Theme	Count of Theme
Migration	15
Agriculture	12
Foreign Investment	8
Humanitarian Assistance	7
Rising Price of	
Commodity	6
Unlawful Taxation	6
Export	5
Illegal Logging	5
Low Price of Commodity	4
IDP Community	4
Loan Provision	4
Shortage of Resources	3
Job Opportunities	3
Shortage of Raw Materials	2
Technical Assistance	2
MSMEs	2
Labour Shortage	1
Import	1
High Demand	1
Mine Explosion	1
Commodity Shortage	1
Technical Requirements	1
Expo and market fair	1
Tourism Industry	1
Livelihood Difficulties	1
Trade Restriction	1
Transportation	1
Labour Rights	1
Relocation	1
Repatriation	1
Grand Total	102

***Migration:***

Junta-controlled media statement on arrests of 'Rohingya' migrants, propaganda on return of Rakhine people, Rakhine workers in Malaysia demand for contact with homes, detainment of Thai authority to Rakhine migrants, illegal migrant workers arrested in Thailand to go back home, Mro ethnic minority facing livelihood challenges.

***Agriculture:***

Farmers facing high costs and poor harvests, developing special farming zone by the junta, the necessity of more oil crops in the state, rising price of grains, the demand of farmers to allocate reserve funds and more technological support, decline of winter crop cultivation,

***Foreign Investment:***

Thailand shows an interest in investing in rice milling and livestock farming, wind power project in Gwa, local in lack of trust on Chinese investments, resumption of India backed Kaladan project, signation of junta authority with Russia for Negali resort project, junta's income from gas projects in Rakhine.

## Social: Healthcare System in Breakdown

*In January:* Although the temporary truce is in place, the threat of landmine danger toward rural community security remains active. The local news expressed the explosion of the mine and, consequently, killing some local residents, including the youths and students. Next, the Rohingya students studying at the universities in urban Sittwe areas also still face educational discrimination when it comes to the right to choose of subjects and degrees.

*In February:* Community security in Rakhine state is now under-challenged in many parts of Rakhine. Typical instances can mostly be found in the urban Sittwe areas under the control of the junta authority. Besides, university and basic education systems in Rakhine are now under regular operation, but challenges come out due to the rising price of general commodities and living costs in the State's Capital, Sittwe.

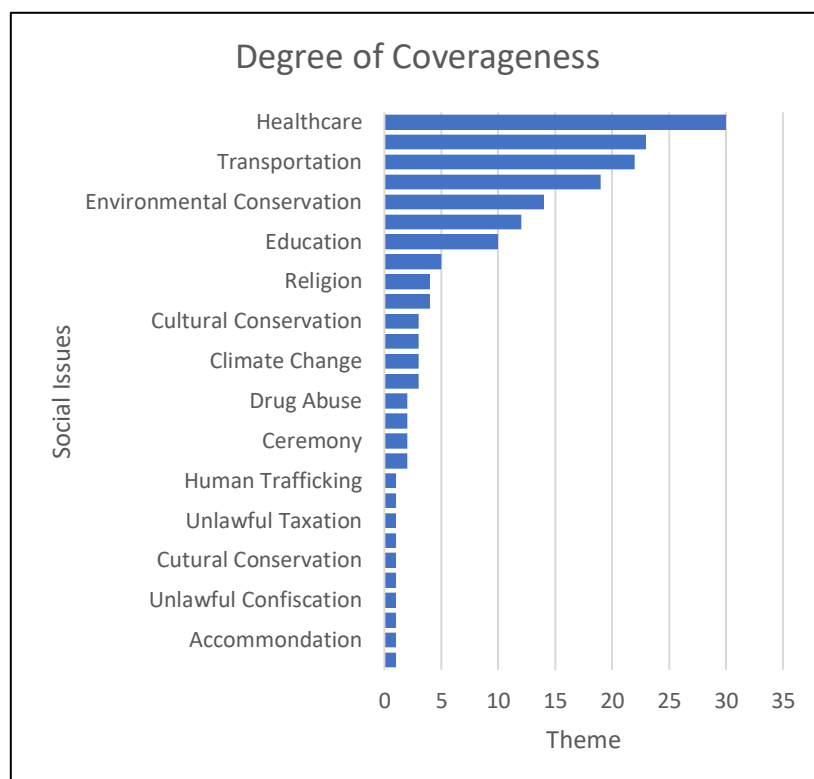
*In March:* Despite the trade and transportation relaxation after the informal truce in late November 2022, the junta imposed some restrictions on the movement of goods and commodities outside and inside the state, including for traders requiring permission from the junta authority. Shortage of water due to the rising temperatures in the summer, on the other hand, becomes an issue for the local population.

*In April:* The news of 'Thingyan water festivals and scarcity of water dominated the news coverage during this month in Rakhine State. The effort of the junta authority to provide underground water for the residents of Sittwe, the capital city of the State, is also unsuccessful. On the other hand, the lack of medical facilities and staff in the hospitals and clinics can also be found. Next, rising temperatures without the availability of electricity caused the local population to complain about the service quality of the authority.



## Distribution of 'Social News

Theme	Count of Theme
Healthcare	30
Lack of Basic Services	23
Transportation	22
Community Insecurity	19
Environmental Conservation	14
Social Crimes	12
Education	10
Traditional Festival	5
Religion	4
Fraud	4
Cultural Conservation	3
Traffic Accidents	3
Climate Change	3
Public Service	3
Drug Abuse	2
Minority Issue	2
Ceremony	2
Livelihood Difficulties	2
Human Trafficking	1
Traditional Festivals	1
Unlawful Taxation	1
Electricity	1
Cultural Conservation	1
Sports	1
Unlawful Confiscation	1
Telecommunication	1
Accommodation	1
Market Arrangement	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>173</b>



### Healthcare:

Mass campaigns and awareness raising of COVID-19, attention to special diseases, call for the removal of FDA-banned food products, warning for high temperatures, complaints on staff and medicine supply inadequacy, drug-related disease, junta military mobile medical team, Covid vaccination for students.

### Lack of Basic Service:

Scarcity of drinking water, the rising price of cooling devices, the construction of free homes in Sittwe, giving compensation to residents for not working on solar plants, lack of electricity during the examination period, disputes on electricity bills, diseases due to the unclean and unpurified drinking water.

### Transportation:

Requirement of recommendation letter for local travel in Maungdaw township, difficulty of acquiring motorbike license, introduction of one-way traffic in Pauktaw, call for better transportation of disabilities, parking, and traffic problems in Sittwe, blockage of medical supplies by junta, death of many people due to accidents, call for more and better roads, locals building of own bridge, call for resumption Mrauk-U airport project, call of removal of restriction on the roads.

### Community Insecurity:

Destruction of homes due to sea erosion, calls of roadside petrol by Sittwe residents, the rise of fire outbreaks, insecurity due to the entry of junta troops, formation of neighbourhood watch team due to rising crimes, frequent broke out of gunfire, arrested by armed groups to youths, mine explosion.

## Humanitarian: Forced Returns of Displaced People

### *Situations of resuming humanitarian deliveries:*

During the first four months of 2023, after the informal ceasefire between the junta military and the Arakan Army, the junta restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian assistance for both local and international non-governmental organizations in Arakan State have been gradually lifted. However, some areas in the southern parts of Buthidaung and northern parts of Maungdaw townships were still not freely accessible till April by the World Food Programme (WFP). Moreover, the time-consuming process of travel authorization (TA) under the junta authority has prominent negative impacts because various humanitarian agencies are said to be put under pressure to sign the MoU with the authority to overcome different administrative barriers.

### *Forced Returns of Displaced People and Refugee Repatriation:*

During these four months, the regime pressured a large number of displaced people, affected by both the armed clashes and communal violence, to return to their homes despite the areas not being in a safe situation. The forced return was most obvious in the month of March, carried out by both means of coercion and incentives. The IDPs have been informed that their camps will be demolished after the deadline and will be provided with some cash for livelihoods. The urgency occurred consequently following the visits of the junta-appointed ministers to the displacement camps in the townships of Sittwe, Minbya, Kyauktaw and Mrauk-U in February following the visit of the Japanese special envoy for national reconciliation in Myanmar, Yohei Sasakawa, to the displacement camps in Arakan.

On the other hand, a foreign delegation comprising diplomats from China, India, and Bangladesh, as well as representatives from the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, met in the second week of March with junta-appointed officials. These officials are in charge of transit camps for Rohingya refugees in Maungdaw Township to observe the junta's preparations for the repatriation of refugees from Bangladesh. Then, in April, the junta verified more than 700 Rohingya refugees for repatriation so far as part of a pilot project agreed with the Bangladeshi

government, covered in “Myanma Alin”, one of state media, on April 4. To date, the representatives of the refugee team who visited relocation camps on the Rakhine side said that they are not satisfied with the current state of offer by the junta authority.

### ***The humanitarian circumstance in the displacement camps***

The situations of the people who require emergency or sustainable humanitarian assistance in Rakhine are still not satisfactory, as their basic needs and livelihoods are not adequately restored. It is important to mention the severity of rain in the coming rainy season and the proximity of the floods and storms in the coastal state of Rakhine; the IDPs demand urgent repair of damaged shelters. Moreover, it is considered to integrate the supportive or facilitating strategy for their livelihood mechanisms should quickly be reinstated. According to U Sein Maung, who is in charge of the Kwee Htee camp,

“Previously, the World Food Programme (WFP) supplied us with rice. So, we could make do with our earnings from selling firewood. But WFP has stopped supplying us, and we are going hungry. We only get 2,500 kyats for 100 sticks of firewood, but a basket of rice is 16,000 kyats. We can’t afford it,”.

In line with the latest news from the Development Media News (DMG) on May 7, there are currently at least seventy thousand IDPs who are not able to return homes but are in need of humanitarian assistance. On the other hand, some of the former IDPs who returned to homes under the forced relocations of the junta authority are said to face a more uncertain future and rejoin already existing IDP camps.

## About this special report

This report is an effort trying to highlight and analyze the news on the local media combination through the first four months of 2023. Because the CAS has released a monthly report in the previous three months from January through February to March, and these reports can be available [www.arakanstudies.org](http://www.arakanstudies.org).

In this quarterly report, the CAS has combined all key trends and critical issues happened during the previous four months in Rakhine such as politics, economics, social issue, and humanitarian affairs. For the first three sectors, there are two portions such as 'trended remarks' and 'combined tables' for all four months. Regarding the methodology of the report, all the key sources of information come from the local media news such as Development Media Group (DMG), Narijarian, Arakan Express News, Broder News Agency, and Western News.

This report aims to better understanding of the trends in politics, economics, social and humanitarian issues happening in Rakhine, and to be helpful for observers not to miss important changes and priorities among the local population as well as be utilized in collecting information and making sense of critical issues for policy change for the respective actors.

## About Center for Arakan Studies (CAS)

The Center is an independent, non-partisan and research institution established in December 2021 by a group of young professionals including journalists, political analysts, researchers, social workers. The Center aims to advocate the understanding of the situation of human rights, politics, economic, and social dynamics in Arakan/Rakhine, and issues related to Arakan affairs in Myanmar and beyond, through rigorous research and reports. The Center also intends to perform the task of fulfilling the policy gaps through analysis and recommendations in favor of democratic policy change and common solutions.

Contact – [info@arakanstudies.org](mailto:info@arakanstudies.org)