

Special Study of Arakan Affairs

Socio-economic challenges of people in Arakan related to communication blackouts

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Telecommunication Sector



People seen facing communication difficulties due to internet outages in Rakhine State.

(Photo Credit to Western News)

March 31 , 2026

1. Introduction

(a) Main Topic	Socio-economic challenges of people in Arakan related to communication blackouts
(b) Geographical Area	All 17 townships within Arakan/Rakhine State
(c) Time Period	From November 2023 to February 2026
Since the resurgence of intense armed conflict in Arakan in November 2023, phone and internet services were initially restricted before escalating to a state-wide blackout by 2024. While these disruptions are often attributed to military/security reasons and fuel shortages for telecom towers, they have severely limited the public's right to information and exacerbated daily hardships. These ongoing blackouts have a broad impact on social relations, business operations, economic activities, and daily life in Arakan. Furthermore, local charity groups, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and humanitarian groups face immense challenges in internal coordination, timely emergency response, and administrative management. Therefore, this study analyzes the impact of telecommunication blackout on the daily lives of populations based on local media reports, CSO documentation, and first-hand experiences of residents.	

2. Summary of Key Data

November 2023

MPT phone lines are cut in some townships

- Some areas in Ann, Myebon, Pauktaw, and Munaung townships experienced phone and internet disruptions due to fuel shortages affecting telecom towers, leaving MPT services largely non-functional.

December 2023

Most areas in Rakhine lost phone and internet access, except for Mytel

- In Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Ponnagyun, Kyauk Taw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Ann, Taungup, Kyaukpyu, Ramree, Munaung, Myebon, and Pauktaw townships, phone and internet services were disrupted except for Mytel networks. These outages occurred due to fuel shortages, damaged underground cables, and limited maintenance capabilities. The residents also reported that the military reduced internet speed, making communication more difficult.

January 2024

Stricter communication restrictions in some areas

- In Ponnagyun and Sittwe townships, phone and internet access were further restricted. Fiber-optic internet in Sittwe was completely cut off, with mobile data access available only in limited government offices. In Ponnagyun, although phone lines were accessible through Ooredoo and military-owned Mytel networks, internet access was totally blocked.

October 2024

Complete communication blackout across Rakhine

- Although limited connectivity existed in some areas during the early stages of renewed clashes, phone and internet lines were completely cut off throughout Arakan since October 13, 2024.

Misinformation and security concerns rise

- With phone and internet lines entirely cut, residents lacked timely access to information related to armed clashes and security, relying on second-hand reports that often spread misinformation. Since civilians cannot receive timely warnings regarding airstrikes and armed clashes, which impose additional risks on civilians.

June 2025

96% of residents in Arakan lacked access to a phone and the internet

- Even where Starlink internet was available, costs were high, and usage was limited, which made it difficult for people to access information and conduct daily activities.

Starlink access in areas controlled by the Arakan Army (AA)

- The Arakha People's Revolutionary Government operated Starlink service centers for paid public access. However, many residents still faced difficulties accessing the internet due to service fees, limited hours, and poor internet quality.

July 2025

Standardized Starlink service fees

- Starlink internet service fees were reduced from 5,000 MMK to 2,000 MMK per hour in all towns, which improves accessibility. However, service coverage remained limited in remote rural areas.

August 2025

Casualties while trying to access the internet

- A family from Khwekhauk village, Plaetwa Township, drowned in the Lay Myo River while traveling to Mrauk-U to access the internet, resulting in three deaths and one missing.

Starlink temporarily suspended due to airstrike threats

- The ULA/AA temporarily shuts down Starlink internet service in Arakan due to the consecutive airstrikes on Mrauk-U, Minbya, Pauktaw, and Kyaukpyu townships.

September 2025

Limited phone line access restored under the junta (SSPC) controlled areas

- In Sittwe, Mytel phone services were restored temporarily, but were cut off again after about a week. Since the resumption of intense fighting, it has been reported that MEC phone lines are available in Manaung, while MPT and Mytel services are accessible in sporadic patches across Sittwe. Additionally, only the MPT network is currently functional in Kyaukphyu.

October 2025

MPT reactivated for election purposes in Manaung

- From October 10, 2025, MPT lines reopened in Manaung and surrounding areas to facilitate election-related activities, though coverage was limited to a certain distance, and SIM card pieces skyrocketed.

January 2026

AA technical department announces Starlink rental regulations

- The Arakan Army's technical department launched a Starlink rental program to support social and economic development, facilitate information flow, and support public, media, and NGO operations. The regulations outlined four types of rentals with various installation and usage fees.

All applicants must submit a National ID and a local administrator's recommendation by **March 2026**.

Starlink Usage & Rental Categories are as follows

Category	Description	Key Financial Requirements	Eligibility / Notes
1. Managed Line Access	Connecting to department-owned internet	500,000 MMK deposit + cable installation fees (based on distance).	Monthly bills vary by data package and business type.
2. Device Rental	Renting a Starlink device directly from the Technology Dept.	2M MMK install fee, 5M MMK deposit, and 1M MMK monthly fee (3 months upfront).	Monthly fees are subject to international exchange rates.
3. Private Device Registration	Registering a privately purchased Starlink device with the Dept.	2M MMK registration fee and 1M MMK monthly fee (3 months upfront).	Mandatory for all private Starlink device owners.
4. Public Centers	Operating community internet centers in partnership with APRG.	<i>Financials are not specified</i>	Requires security clearance and endorsements from the ULA/AA or relevant department

January 2026

Airstrike on a Starlink Internet Public Center

- In Ponnagyun township, near Pak Khauk Seik village, a Starlink internet service center was targeted by the military with an airstrike by dropping three 300-pound bombs. Although there were no casualties, some buildings were damaged, and residents were frightened and forced to relocate.

February 2026

Internet disruptions continue to delay emergency aid

- In areas controlled by the ULA/AA, an ongoing communication barrier continued to hinder humanitarian and emergency services, as people must travel to public Starlink centers to access them, causing delays and challenges.

3. Key Findings

1. Since the resumption of fighting in November 2023, telecommunications networks in Rakhine have been severely restricted. This represents a "hybrid disruption pattern" emerging from a combination of political control, security risks, and technological limitations during the conflict.
2. In the early stages of the conflict, the SSPC restricted phone lines and limited internet speeds in heavy combat zones, citing damaged telecom towers, power outages, and fuel shortages. However, once the AA seized control of various townships, the SSPC completely cut off all communications to those areas. Currently, internet access is fully restricted in three towns under its control, and phone lines are being restored for political leverage during the election period.
3. The lack of telecommunication prevents people from accessing reliable information sources, resulting in the spread of rumors and misinformation. Furthermore, early warnings for airstrikes or artillery attacks cannot reach civilians, making timely evacuation difficult and increasing the risk of injury and death.
4. The disruption of phone and internet services also slows down socio-economic activities and humanitarian assistance. Families reliant on remittances from relatives working abroad face extreme hardship as they cannot receive and withdraw funds, threatening their basic survival. Humanitarian organizations are unable to assess urgent ground needs in real-time, resulting in preventable loss of life. Additionally, young people face significant barriers to personal and professional development due to the lack of internet access.
5. In the areas controlled by the Arakan Army, internet centers are provided by the Arakan People's Revolutionary Government, but services are limited by waiting times, high costs, and restricted hours. Most internet centers operate only in urban areas, requiring rural residents to travel through natural hazards or areas with airstrike risks to access them. While the Arakan People's Revolutionary Government issued regulations for renting Starlink internet, the high cost of equipment and monthly fees remain largely unaffordable for ordinary citizens.

4. Analysis

In the 21st century, telecommunication services such as phone and internet are essential daily necessities for every individual. However, due to armed conflicts, the residents in Arakan still face challenges in fully accessing these services. Traditionally, restoring phone and internet usage depends directly on the ceasefire and political peace between the military commission government and the Arakan Army.

On one hand, conventional communication networks remain under the control of the central government (e.g., Naypyidaw), while innovative Starlink technology (except for the U.S. influence) operates outside the control of any government, offering opportunities to access the internet during conflict. This provides hope for internet access to residents in areas under the ULA/AA control. However, during the current period, the extent to which civilians can freely access these services depends on security considerations and other external constraints.

On the other hand, in the three towns administered by the SSPC within Arakan, phone and internet services can remain restricted due to security and control reasons. Consequently, most residents of Arakan continue to experience more limited access to communication networks compared to other parts of the country, such as Yangon or Mandalay, resulting in delays in information flow and limited opportunities for knowledge and capacity building.

About Center for Arakan Studies

The Center for Arakan Studies is an independent, non-partisan research organization established in December 2021 by journalists, political analysts, researchers, and social workers. The Center aims to enhance understanding of Arakan affairs by publishing rigorous research on human rights conditions, political, economic, and social developments in Arakan, as well as issues related to Arakan within Myanmar and internationally. The Center produces policy briefs and monthly reports on topics related to Arakan, which are published through its website and various publications.

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