

Issue Brief

Arakan Army and Battles of Sittwe

No. (7/2026)
Military Sector



Map showing the villages surrounding Sittwe and the main military bases located near the city
(photo @people's spring)

15 July 2026

1. Introduction

(A) Main Focus	The conflict in Sittwe Township and the conditions civilians face
(B) Geographic Scope	Sittwe Township, Arakan/Rakhine State
(C) Reporting Period	January 2024- July 2026

Background and Context

In late 2023, renewed fighting erupted in Rakhine State, placing its capital city, Sittwe, under direct military threat and severely affecting residents and exposing them to the hardship of war. As the Arakan Army (AA) captured townships across Rakhine State one after another, Sittwe Township became a battlefield zone, even though there was no direct combat within the township itself, leaving rural communities to bear the brunt of the conflict. Consequently, fearing the imminent onset of potential battle, the vast majority of locals from Sittwe Township fled to AA-controlled territories as well as Yangon and other regions.

On the other hand, to prevent the AA from entering Sittwe, the Myanmar Military has erected perimeter fencing, planted landmines, deployed reinforcements around the township area, and completely blocked all routes. Travel from Sittwe to other regions in the country (e.g., Yangon and Mandalay) relies almost exclusively on air travel, while the Yangon–Sittwe maritime route operates under strict restrictions for import and export goods and commodities. Essential goods including petrol, diesel, and pharmaceuticals are heavily restricted, and food commodities are permitted to be shipped from Yangon on large vessels only under the stringent oversight of the military and the Military Intelligence Group (Sa Ra Pha), causing commodity prices to skyrocket. While these restrictions impose a severe burden on residents, it has become an avenue for corruption for the Myanmar Military and its affiliated personnel. Meanwhile, the residents are subjected to strict controls to prevent them from fleeing to AA-controlled territories.

Sittwe, facing continuous military threats, has experienced direct ground combat since mid-2024. In response to these military operations, the Myanmar military forces have intensified arrests under the pretext of guest list inspections, accusing residents of affiliation with the AA. As a result, local populations already enduring the prolonged impact of war are now confronting even greater hardship, marked by heightened political oppression and severe socio-economic distress.

This study is primarily based on reports published by local media outlets, findings from human rights organizations, statements issued by the United Nations and other international organizations, and interviews conducted by the Center for Arakan Studies (CAS).

2. Summary

February 2024

(a) Hundreds of thousands of residents flee Sittwe following rumours that the AA will attack the township by the end of February

Residents in Sittwe [reported](#) that hundreds of thousands of people from both urban and rural areas have been fleeing to safer areas away from the conflict, driven by circulating reports that the Arakan Army (AA) would launch an attack on Rakhine State's capital, Sittwe, by the end of February. A military observer told Narinjara News that public panic mounted significantly after the Myanmar Military blew up the Min Chaung Bridge in Ah Myint Kyun, located on the Yangon–Sittwe highway, to prevent the Arakan Army from advancing into the city.

(b) Junta artillery shelling in Sittwe kills 12 and injures 18

On the morning of February 29 in Sittwe, an artillery shell fired by Myanmar Military forces [exploded](#) near the Myoma Market, killing 12 civilians and severely injuring 18 others, according to local rescue workers.

May 2024

(c) Junta selects individuals at IDP camps in Sittwe for military training

Since May 25, the Myanmar Military [has been selecting](#) young IDPs by lottery from Rohingya displacement camps in Sittwe for mandatory military training. Camp administrators initially met on May 19 at a factory near the Man Si (Khwa Sone) junction, four miles from the city centre. On May 25, Rohingya residents at the Thet Kay Pyin IDP camp were forced to draw lots, according to a camp resident.

August 2024

(d) Taungup University excluded from Junta's announcement on eligible university admissions

Of the two higher education institutions in war-zone Rakhine State, Sittwe University was listed as eligible for university admissions, whereas Taungup University was [excluded](#), an omission likely attributed to the prevailing military situation, a resident told a regional news outlet. *"They (junta troops) have also deployed forces inside the university premises. Looking at this from a civilian perspective, it is completely unviable,"* a female university student said. *"I believe the university is unable to open because of their (junta troops)military presence combined with the current combat situation."*

(e) Junta heightens security in Sittwe following clashes

Following recent clashes within Sittwe Township, the Myanmar Military has reportedly heightened security and stepped up military preparations, according to local sources.

On August 30, the Arakan Army [attacked](#) a junta landing craft tank in a creek near Kankaw Kyun village in Sittwe Township, triggering intense fighting that lasted around three hours. Residents reported that in the aftermath of the engagement, the Myanmar Military established five additional checkpoints along the stretch of road connecting Kankaw Kyun village to the main highway, as well as near the Sittwe-based Regional Operations Command (ROC).

October 2024

(f) The Military Council has been digging trenches and reinforcing around the perimeter of Sittwe

Strongholds and trenches have been [constructed](#) along main access roads into the township, extending from Padaleik Village to the Regional Operations Command (ROC/DaKaSa), from the Yehchanpyin Port to the Balo Junction, and from the Shwe Min Gan Port to Kyay Taw.

“If you come from the Ponnagyun side, there are about ten trenches along the entrance road leading all the way to the ROC,” a local source stated. “They have also dug trenches from Yehchanpyin Jetty up to the area at the township entry where the statue of Bandula exists, as well as from Shwe Min Gan port toward the downtown. It is fair to say they are digging trenches around the entire perimeter of the city.”

February 2025

(g) The Arakan Army (AA) launches simultaneous offensives on Military outposts in Sittwe

The Arakan Army (AA) [carried out](#) simultaneous attacks against at least five military posts in Sittwe Township. The targeted locations included Wabo Village and adjacent areas directly across from it, such as Kyar Ma Thauk, Ah Myint Kyun, Padaleik, and Yehchanpyin.

April 2025

(h) The People's Militia trainees in Pathein sent to Sittwe

Military sources [report](#) that the Myanmar military is transporting graduates of the People's Military Service training program in Pathein, Ayeyarwady Region, to Sittwe, its sole remaining stronghold in northern Rakhine. A military source stated that approximately 70 members of the People's Militia, who completed Batch 9 training at the No. 6 Basic Military Training School in Shwe Myin Tin, Pathein, were deployed to Sittwe on April 9.

September 2025

(i) Severe medicine shortages force Sittwe residents to rely on herbal remedies

In Sittwe, which remains under Myanmar Military control, a severe shortage of essential medicines has forced residents to rely on remedies made from plants, according to local sources. Residents [reported](#) that the shortage worsened after the Military Council banned the air transport of pharmaceuticals, basic food supplies, and other goods on flights operating from Yangon and Sittwe starting in August.

January 2026

(j) Over 50 soldiers desert Sittwe-based military outposts within the first 15 days of January

Following the outbreak of clashes on the outskirts of Sittwe, several Myanmar Military troops unwilling to fight have been deserting, with more than 50 personnel fleeing between January 1 and January 15, according to reports. Local media [reported](#) that between January 12 and 13, a significant number of Military Council personnel from the Ohn Taw Gyi outpost and the Sittwe-based Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 270 abandoned their weapons and ammunition along the way, staging a mass desertion via waterways.

The report indicates that at around 9:00 PM on January 13, approximately 20 soldiers stationed at an outpost in Ohn Taw Gyi (Rohingya village) stole a local boat and deserted en masse. Similarly, at around 8 PM on January 12, two service members from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 270 reportedly abandoned their weapons and ammunition near the Zaw Pu Jar railway track before fleeing the area.

(k) Myanmar Military strictly forbids junta staff from buying flight tickets or returning home without approval as fighting approaches Sittwe

As fighting draws closer to Sittwe, Rakhine State, the junta has reportedly [instructed](#) non-CDM staff based in the township that taking leave without authorization from their respective ministries, purchasing flight tickets to return home, or absenting themselves from their departments without official permission is strictly prohibited under any circumstances.

April 2026

(l) Female head of Mani Yadanar IDP camp in Sittwe arrested

A female, head of Mani Yadanar Monastery IDP shelter in Ywa Gyi Taung Ward, Sittwe, was [arrested](#) on April 24 by a joint force of military, police, and immigration personnel. According to an internally displaced person (IDP), *“They conducted an overnight guest list check. As for the camp leader, they inspected her phone and took her away. They checked guest lists at other*

monasteries as well, but in her case, it seemed they came with prior intelligence, checked her phone, and arrested her.” Another IDP added, “They made the men tuck their longyis up to check for tattoos. We don’t know what specific information they were looking for, but the inspection itself was not aggressive.”

May 2026

(m) Junta troops arrest and assault six male IDPs in Sittwe, leaving one dead

A male IDP [died](#) after junta troops arrested and severely assaulted six men sheltering at the Sitta Thukha Kammathana Monastery in Sittwe, Rakhine State. According to a resident, joint forces of the military and police conducted overnight guest list inspections at several IDP locations including Sitta Thukha Kammathana, Tat Oo, Mogok, and Thayet Taw monasteries, at around 9:00 PM on May 9. Following the inspections, troops beat and detained the six male IDPs under the pretext of lacking proper documentation.

June 2026

(n) AA’s offensive advances near a village closest to Sittwe Regional Operations Command

The Arakan Army (AA)’s offensive targeting military outposts around Sittwe [has reached](#) the vicinity of Na Yee Kan Village, the closest settlement to the Sittwe Regional Operations Command (ROC/DaKaSa) at Shwe Min Gan Naval Base, sparking fierce fighting. Reports indicate that the AA launched attacks with heavy artillery alongside ground offensives against the junta's frontline outpost positions near Na Yee Kan Village, along the Sittwe–Yangon Union Highway, roughly 4 miles from Sittwe.

(o) Indian Ambassador visits Kaladan project port in Sittwe.

India’s Ambassador to Myanmar, Abhay Thakur, [visited](#) the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project site and the Indian Consulate in Sittwe, Rakhine State, on June 19, while also meeting with the Chief Minister of Rakhine State appointed by the junta, U Naing Oo, according to a statement released by the Indian Embassy in Myanmar on June 19. The visit came just over two weeks after junta chief Min Aung Hlaing made a five-day trip to India, during which he promised Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the Kaladan project would be fully completed.

3. Findings

1. In early 2024, escalating clashes and rising military tensions forced hundreds of thousands of residents to flee Sittwe in mass evacuations. Concurrently, the regime closed all overland routes and imposed severe restrictions on air and water transport, effectively trapping the remaining population within the township. Consequently, shortages of essential supplies such as

pharmaceuticals, foodstuffs, and fuel caused prices to skyrocket. Media reports indicate that locals, unable to secure even basic medicine, have been forced to rely on medicinal plants.

2. To counter the Arakan Army (AA)'s offensive, the Military Regime has heavily fortified the state capital, transforming it into a major stronghold by laying landmines, digging trenches, and establishing new outposts along all entry routes into Sittwe. This defensive strategy is further reinforced by deploying graduates of the People's Militia training from other regions to Sittwe and forcibly recruiting individuals from Rohingya IDP camps. These measures form part of a military strategy aimed at preventing the state capital from falling into the hands of the AA.

3. Under the guise of overnight guest list inspections and security checks, the Myanmar Military has increasingly carried out arbitrary arrests and violent assaults targeting internally displaced persons (IDPs) and residents. Recent acts of violence such as the incident in May 2026 where military forces severely beat and arrested six male IDPs, resulting in one fatality, and the arrest of a female IDP camp head in April stand as clear evidence of these atrocities. Such acts of intimidation are calculated to instill fear and suppress the local population, further worsening the suffering of civilians already enduring the brunt of the conflict.

4. As Arakan Army (AA) forces draw closer to the township, signs of weakening strength within the Myanmar Military have also become evident. Within the first two weeks of January 2026 alone, more than 50 soldiers abandoned their outposts, leaving behind weapons and ammunition to flee by boat. To counter this declining morale, the Myanmar Military has instituted stringent measures, issuing strict orders that prohibit its staff from purchasing flight tickets or returning home without authorization. These developments highlight a stark contrast: while the junta maintains a fortified exterior, internally it faces collapsing discipline and eroding loyalty.

5. By June 2026, the fighting had advanced from the outskirts of the township to directly threaten the Sittwe Regional Operations Command (ROC), with Arakan Army (AA)'s offensives reaching the Nari Kan village tract just four miles from the downtown. This proximity represents a significant military escalation, shifting the threat from a distant potential to an active engagement at the strategic heart of the Myanmar Military's final remaining stronghold in northern Rakhine State. Furthermore, the Indian Ambassador's visit to the Kaladan Port highlights how a major regional power continues to closely monitor the developments in Sittwe amid the escalating humanitarian and military crisis.

4. Analysis

The military contest over Sittwe Township carries far broader regional and international significance than a typical struggle to control a single town or territory. Sittwe serves as the capital of Rakhine State and stands as the Myanmar Military's final remaining control in the entire northern region. Consequently, if the Myanmar Military loses Sittwe, northern Rakhine State would become entirely free of junta presence. Furthermore, as a state capital, its fall would mark a historic milestone in Myanmar's civil war as the first state capital to break free from military control.

Furthermore, the battles in Sittwe have the potential to impact the regional geopolitical landscape. If the Arakan Army (AA) successfully captures Sittwe, the Indian government's perception of the Military government as an entity capable of providing security guarantees for the Kaladan Project would be diminished. This outcome could also generate a positive strategic ripple effect for other revolutionary forces.

The battles in Sittwe Township also highlight how military operations are deeply intertwined with socioeconomic and humanitarian issues. As the most populous township in Rakhine State, with a dense Rohingya Muslim population remaining in both urban areas and rural areas, international organizations are closely monitoring what has become a near-critical humanitarian crisis under the escalating military conditions. Even under current conditions, residents are forced to endure trade and travel blockades, increasing oppression and extortion by the Myanmar Military, and arbitrary arrests carried out under various pretexts.

The military situation in Sittwe Township also highlights the Myanmar military forces' brutal and inhumane tactical operations. The Myanmar Military has committed severe human rights violations, including forcibly destroying numerous villages in the township to construct military strongholds, driving rural populations into the city without any adequate socioeconomic guarantees, forcing urban residents into military recruitment, and committing massacres such as the Byine Phyu village incident. Consequently, keeping hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped as human shields for military strategy creates the potential for catastrophic and unimaginable consequences if military hostilities intensify further.

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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