

Monthly Report_December_2022

To present the changing conflict map in Arakan and neighbouring areas

To address the political climate, economic livelihoods and social issues happening in Arakan

To analyze the relations among changes in terms of armed conflict plus casualties, arrests, and humanitarian issues

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1. Key Remarks

- ❖ The introduction of the recent temporary truce in late November brought some level of stability to the Rakhine state in December 2022. But, the reinforcement activities and military build-up by the junta forces also meant that there was still a trust deficit in the relations between the two parties. In another way, the ordinary population was also not observed to achieve community peace and security at the moment.
- ❖ During the current temporary truce, the preparation of the junta authority and its forces, its proxy party like the USDP party in Rakhine State, for the upcoming sham election is found to accelerate its campaign involving its members. This momentum will continue as the election date comes closer. The stands of Rakhine political parties like the Arakan National Party (ANP), and the Arakan Front Party (AFP) will also appear more and more. But, The political stance of the ULA on the election hasn't expressed anything yet, but its impression will definitely affect the entire Rakhine state.
- ❖ On the economic front, the acceleration of the junta authority for the implementation of some foreign investment projects can be found. For some investments like the 'Nayputaung marble stone production project' in Taunggup township, there are some local protests. But, due to the nature of current politics,

it is more likely to be ineffective. Next, the re-initiation of the border trade with Bangladesh would bring some relaxation and profits for the trading community and other related people.

- ❖ In the social sector, the rise of theft, murder and robbery, which can be seen as the results of socioeconomic difficulties, continues to take place in both urban and rural areas. No effective response can still be seen. The lack of medicines and doctors in the clinics and hospitals must be handled, and the closure of schools and the absence of school teachers must also be addressed in both conflict-affected areas and across the State.
- ❖ For humanitarian and IDP issues, the news report mostly describes the forced relocation of the IDP population by the junta authority and the blockage of humanitarian assistance for some areas under the reason of ‘security’. As it is not purely a technical issue, the political understanding and negotiation between the two parties will bring more relaxation for the IDP community. As it has been shown during the previous armed clashes, the unilateral dependency on the will of the junta authority for the humanitarian challenge is quite unrealistic and challenging. Thus, engaging with other de facto authorities in the areas is critical not just for peacetime but also for the conflict period.

1. Background of the Report

In the first week of August 2022, armed clashes resumed between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army in northern Rakhine — by breaking an informal ceasefire — that had been agreed to just days before the 2020 election. Unexpectedly, fighting paused again to address the deepening humanitarian crisis in November 2022. According to the Center for Arakan Studies (CAS) data entry, during about four months from (start month) to (end month) of fighting, at least 97 battles between the two armed groups occurred. At least 64 civilians were killed, and at least 107 were injured, mostly by random artillery shellings and deliberate killings by the junta forces. The junta arrested around 300 civilians. As of early November 2022, Khaing Thukha, AA spokesperson said in a press conference, that at least 80 out of the 200 arrested people by the junta administration were released.

At the beginning of the ceasefire, hopes were high that many of those who the junta had arrested would be released. However, as of January 10, although the junta released around 700 prisoners in Rakhine at the event of union day, anyone who is related to political cases especially for those who are arrested on suspicion of ties with the AA was not included in the released list. On the other hand, the ULA authority has also engaged in

arresting the Arakan Front Party (AFP) politicians, and junta officials. The APF is led by Rakhine nationalist Dr. Aye Maung, and the party frequently is criticized by the Rakhine public because of good relations with the junta administration.

As for humanitarian challenges, the number of internally displaced persons grew to 98,500 in northern Rakhine, and the neighbouring Paletwa Township, Chin State, according to the UN report on November 28, 2022. The intensity of the humanitarian crisis deepened not just for the internally displaced persons but also for the general residents, especially for those who are living in the conflict-affected areas due to the blockage of humanitarian assistance by the junta authority since September 15, 2022. It included the restriction of travel and trade activities among the townships and outside of the state from September until they agreed on a recent temporary truce in November. The ULA Spokesperson [mentioned](#) the scenarios as a 'humanitarian pause' rather than a military decision. At the moment, although there are now prominent relaxations of civilian trade and travel and humanitarian assistance, many restrictions remain there, which will also be included as a key part of this report.

The data and information collected in this report are mainly based on local media agencies and platforms which are managed by the CAS data entry team. In this report, the political climate, economic situations and social issues happening in Rakhine will be addressed. At the end, the report has been summarized as the key remarks that the CAS would like to present to the respective report readers.

2. A Quick Look at Political Climate

The political situation in December stabilized to a degree because of the ceasefire; however, the fragile peace is continuously undermined by the consequences of conflict and junta machinations. Headlines about the planned election, military reinforcements, military interference in civil administration, community insecurity frequently appear in local outlets.

In the first week of December, the military started reinforcing troops in Minbya, Mrauk-U, and Kyauktaw townships. On December 3, , in two separate incidents landmine explosions injured one Mro and one Rohingya man in. In some cases, the military's vessels returned money and materials collected from the boat owners in Rathedaung townships.

"After the informal ceasefire, AA made a detailed list of what was taken from the boats travelling in the area and sent a letter of objection to the army. AA took action against that navy officer to give back the money and materials collected by SAC's military

vessel to 30 boats yesterday. After doing this, the navy and the army no longer dare to ask for more. Everything is fine," a boat owner [told Narinjara](#) on December 6, 2022.

The Kaman minority ethnic people also held their national day on December 5, 2022, in Yangon and called for more minority rights. In the second week, 70 village administrators resigned in Ponnagyun township and residents of Mrauk-U, Minbya, Kyauktaw, Maungdaw, Ponnagyun, Myebon townships called for the lift of curfew by Junta on December 10. The military proxy party, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), prepares for August 2023 through a meeting with its townships party members.

December's third week saw Rakhine State Day held in Sittwe with the chairperson of the junta's Rakhine State Administration Council junta council mentioning their peace talks with the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and [willingness](#) of the discussion with the ULA/AA as well. In Rathedaung township, at least junta-appointed 19 ward and village administrators resigned on December 17. Family members of political prisoners told local media that they demanded permission to meet with their loved ones by relaxing the COVID-19 restrictions. In Kyaukphyu township, the local people also called for allowing no checking for the emergency patients on the roads to the hospital. On the other hand, in Kyauktaw township, the local people were frightened due to the gunfire of the junta soldiers as well on December 21. For the election news, the Rakhine State junta administration has begun the process of census conduction for the coming election.

In the final week of December, the news said that the junta soldiers sold food and commodities near the markets of Sittwe, Ann, Taungup, and Gwa townships. But, only a few people bought it. On the other hand, the NCA signatory groups, including the ALP, discussed with junta leaders regarding the constitution amendment process on December 24. While the news of military reinforcements continued, cases of gunfire were also reported along the border with Bangladesh. In Maungdaw township, government employees and some local people hide from sight due to [the fear of arrest by the junta forces](#). While the family members of the prisoners called for the release of their loved ones during the ceasefire period, the local people in Rethedaung and Ponnagyun townships also faced administrative delays due to the resignation of local administrators. Finally, the FPNCC members, including the ULA, met with the new China special envoy to Myanmar on December 29. The NCA signatory groups, [including the ALP, issued a statement](#) on December 30 on the agreement of the junta-organized 2023 election.

3. Situations of Economic Livelihoods

The news feed of December mostly covered the revocation of travel and transportation restrictions in some townships, followed by the ceasefire agreement between the two parties. The resuming occurred only for specific routes such as (partially opening) Kyauk Taw-Paletwa waterway, Sittwe-Ponnagyun road, and Maungdaw-Ahngumaw road during the first week of the month. On the contrary, some routes, particularly Ponnagyun-Rathedaung and Minbya-Myebon roads, were not included in the lift. However, the latter road through Kyetsin Bridge connecting Minbya-Myebone townships was allowed for communication and transportation a few days later.

Regarding the blockage for the Ponnagyun-Rathedaung road, a car driver [told Development Media Group](#) on December 8,

“Only motorbikes and three-wheelers can pass those (junta forces) checkpoints, and [four-wheeled] vehicles are not allowed. Locals are suffering a lot from the blockade, including their livelihoods and health.”

On the other hand, the news also highlighted the unlawful taxation by the junta personnel in Sittwe township. The issue is reported at Yaychanpyin ferry port and Satyoekya Bridge in Sittwe; the junta officers and policemen are forcibly collecting money from boat owners. Sometimes, their checks on boats unnecessarily take a long and ask for money from 50000 kyats to more than 100000 kyats. Otherwise, the boat passage is not smoothly allowed.

Despite there being some liberalisation of the roads, the free passage of some goods is still not allowed. Rice and medicine are especially investigated where merchants and pharmacy store owners have to seek permission for the transportation of rice and medicines with the recommendations of the doctors. Numerous sacks of rice must be carried only by military-provided cargo boats. That kind of tight control has grave impacts across the Rakhine State, including Ann township, where the junta forces largely dominate the road and communication lines.

The implications resulting from about three months-long travel restrictions imposed by the junta resulted in food, medicine and fuel shortage, skyrocketing commodities prices and a deficit in trade value. Literally, the border trade through Maungdaw has declined by 95 per cent since the Myanmar military blocked off trade routes on 13th August, according to merchants.

“The trade declined by 30 per cent in September, a further 30 per cent in October, and another 30 per cent in the first week of November, and it had declined by a total of 95 per cent in the last week of November,” the Chairperson of the Maungdaw Border Traders Association, U Aung Myint Thein [answered to Development Media Group](#) on

December 1.

The economic situation during the whole month did not show positive along with the challenging livelihoods of the people. The local businesses such as Arakan State oysters, betel nuts, dried fish and saltwater shrimp hatchery are in hardship as the local people eat less and demand declines. On the other hand, local products are not able to win the competitive market with imports from abroad. With increasing prices of labour and raw materials, some suppliers or harvesters choose to step away.

“Big oysters are imported from China through the border. Their oysters are much bigger than ours. So, people buy imported oysters and not ours. Oysters imported from China are also cheaper. So, our oysters are not selling at all. It is also partly because people are spending less on consumption,” said Ko Khaing Aung, an oyster farmer in Ramree township.

In addition to it, the agriculture sector is also negatively affected by climate change and has less time for cultivation due to armed conflicts. It thus ends up with the farmers indebted to loans and also leaving their farms.

According to U Kyaw Zan, Chairperson of the Arakan Farmers’ Union [replying to Development Media Group](#) on 18th December,

“About 30 percent of farmers will be in a situation where they will give up their land. Those who have gone abroad and those who work on rented farms are also in a situation where they cannot repay their debts.”

This ending month of the year, however, brings good news for local pepper growers with the technical assistance provided by the farming community support group called Organ Land. They can share the techniques which can help them be successful in growing two non-native varieties of pepper and make profits. Regarding foreign investments and trade, the junta administration seems welcoming to more foreign projects regardless of criticism by the local community.

In the second week of December, a Chinese government-owned company called “POWER CHINA ” visited the Rakhine State Military Council to discuss the Kyaukphyu project, which is part of their wind power building project in six townships of Myanmar. Furthermore, the junta accelerated the restart of the controversial Vietnam-backed Nayputaung marble stone production project in Taunggok Township, which was suspended under the NLD administration.

“The project has inflicted immeasurable environmental impacts. It might well impact

the farms of local people and water resources. The military council is implementing this project only for their interests,” said local environmental conservationist Ko Myo Lwin [told Narinjara News Agency](#) on December 5.

In Sittwe, a new port as part of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project will be opened soon to allow direct trade between Myanmar and India, according to the Arakan State military council.

“This project gained constructive opinions from the residents, yet, its environmental and social impacts need to be better explained to the public as a whole,” commented the Managing Director of the Arakan Rivers Network.

4. Addressing Important Social Issues

Crimes, thefts, robberies, and murders-related news receive a super high popularity index with thousands of shares on Facebook. Women are seen as vulnerable targets to commit crimes. In Myebon, a woman was found raped and murdered outside the village, and in Rathedaung, an 85-year-old grandma was robbed of her gold earrings and killed. Moreover, two men were slaughtered assumingly by thieves, and two were severely injured, which led the residents to feel insecure.

As the lawlessness of the regime increases, ordinary crime has proliferated, and locals are seriously concerned. Due to the decrease in administrative capacity and the rule of law under the competing authorities of the junta and ULA, the level of the crimes seem to increase as the challenges of joblessness, inflation and poverty are getting worse. As the political and economic situations become unstable, criminals are taking advantage of the situation.

Followed by that news are those of local residents demanding for repairing of old transportation infrastructures, which have been promised or are urgent. The junta claims a shortage of budget to start repairing the damaged Strand road in Chaungwa ward in Rathedaung Township. Moreover, thousands of residents from about 15 villages in Minbya Township’s Kudoseik Village tract are facing difficulties because a bridge over a creek used frequently by locals is damaged. On the other side, a new bridge crossing Gwa Creek and connecting Gwa Township with the Magyingu area in Ayeyarwady Region is intended to open to traffic soon, hoping for economic and [employment opportunities](#).

Starting the health care situation in December, the Kyarinntaung cottage hospital in Myebon, despite two years passed since its opening, has not hosted doctors to provide services to the local residents. Residents from Thae Khon village on Maye-Ngu Island in

Pauktaw Township said that about 30 villagers are suffering from diarrhea after drinking seawater which they have been drinking since a storm hit the village in October. Moreover, low quality of municipal performances, such as the lack of regular garbage collection, and the fetid smell emanating from the garbage heaps, have increased health problems for residents of Rakhine State.

Many schools were closed due to arm conflicts between the junta forces and the Arakan Army over the past few months. Weeks after the November 26 ceasefire, some schools haven't yet reopened in Minbya, Kyauktaw and Rathedaung townships. The junta administration is assumed as planning to diminish the expenses in the education sector while collecting money from the students. The Arakan State Education Department will run matriculation exam centres primarily in towns because few matriculation students (with the old education system) are taking the exam. Due to this announcement, the junta may decrease the government's expenditure on holding the exam; in contrast, students from rural areas find it financially difficult to commute to town to sit for the exam. On the other hand, the school fee for distance learners at the University of Sittwe for the 2023 academic year has more than doubled, according to the University staff. Distance learners who come from other parts of Rakhine State are already having difficulties due to high costs for accommodation and meals in Capital Sittwe, and of that change, some choose to give up their educational journey, instead of going abroad to work illegally.

“As the political situation is not good, I don't want to continue my studies. I don't want to ask for money from my parents as the hostel rent is high and other prices are also increasing. So, I have decided to go abroad.” [said a distance learner](#) from Maungdaw to DMG on December 29.

5. State of Humanitarian Challenges

It has been over four months since the junta prohibited access to some humanitarian assistance delivery in northern Rakhine except the World Food Programme, which has had access since September. The restriction order was not lifted even a week after the truce. As quoted as an official working NGO staff in Rakhine said on December 2, *“I heard roads have been reopened, but travel restrictions on NGOs have not yet been officially lifted”*.

Amid rising military tensions with the AA, the regime banned local and international NGOs from travelling to Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Mrauk-U, Minbya and Myebon townships as of 18th July, citing security concerns. The regime imposed

additional restrictions in November, barring aid agencies from travelling to Kyauktaw and Pauktaw townships as well.

Moreover, the UNOCHA statement on December 8 urges that *“Humanitarian agencies hope that restrictions on humanitarian aid and the movement of civilians, which have been restricted since September, will soon be eased so that aid can be delivered.”*

Starting from December 20, the de facto authorities approved access to the UN and INGOs to all areas of Pauktaw township and the urban area of Kyauktaw. The transportation of medicine, medical items, and other commodities between Yangon and Sittwe have also been re-allowed. Staff movement between central and northern Rakhine has also been approved. However, access to six restricted townships (Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon, Rathedaung, Buthidaung and Maungdaw) has been reopened only for urban areas. As of 27 December, 11 organisations have secured travel authorisation (TAs) to provide humanitarian assistance in Sittwe and Pauktaw townships, while others are still waiting for approval.

Readdressing the account of IDPs in November, a total of 98,500 in Rakhine State and Paletwa township has a little decreased to 90,500 IDPs as of 19 December because some IDPs returned to their home after the fragile ceasefire in November, while more than 16,000 IDPs (resulted by recent fighting) remain displaced to Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw, Paletwa, Ponnagyun and Sittwe townships. In this place, some IDPs are forcibly returned home amidst the risk of mining by the junta administration. More than 400 IDPs from Abaung Thar Village in Paletwa Township were reportedly forced to return to their homes with the provision of food for one month by the junta council. On the morning of 26 December, an elder of the community said that the IDPs who were sheltering in the Cyclone Center in Paletwa town were sent back by the council with a provision of 30,000 kyats for each and [sent halfway by boat](#). Moreover, saying that there should be no IDPs in Pauktaw Township, Rakhine State, the Military Council is forcing refugees from Sai Tok Village to return to their homes by paying 600,000 kyats per family. Despite this forced repatriation, there is no guarantee of safety and assistance to resettlement. An IDP from Tinma Village, Kyauktaw township, said that since IDPs are in crisis due to lack of regular aid, they want to resettle and work in their home village.

Taking into consideration the mere living conditions for IDPs, civilian properties such as houses were also burnt during the conflicts and shelters are urgently needed to survive in strong winter. In Hsin Inn Gyi village in Ponnagyun township, seven houses were damaged and some houses burnt, and seven houses reportedly burnt down in Wet Kyein (Mro) village in Maungdaw township. According to the local news DMG recording, at least 23 houses have been razed by artillery strikes and junta arson attacks in Rakhine since August. The internally displaced persons fleeing from the danger of

heavy artillery and armed clashes are currently taking temporary shelter at monasteries and at relatives' places.

Moreover, as the junta banned the international humanitarian agencies' delivery of assistance, the pre-existed and recently fled IDPs are facing food shortages and nutritional deficiencies in the camps. Donation of rice by the Nippon Foundation has been re-delivered since October 18, and out of more than 55,000 bags of rice, about 39,000 bags of rice have been donated to the camps in Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon and Pauktaw, Buthidaung and Maungdaw as of 24 December, said U Win Aung who is coordinating for rice donation. Access to clean water and easy access to health care has also been an important issue that needs to be solved.

Referring to the ULA statement released on December 1, the armed conflict has been temporarily halted due to the humanitarian pause adding the intervention of Mr. Sasakawa, the Japanese government's special representative for Myanmar National Reconciliation who is Chairman of the Nippon Foundation, and the AA personnel are observed helping harvest the ripped paddy fields of the residents who had fled in many villages of Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U and Minbya Townships.