

Monthly Arakan Review

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Cyclone Mocha' "Politicization" And "Weaponization"

Monitoring of a brief situation of political tension, the native economic impacts of Cyclone Mocha making of more challenges for health and education sectors, and humanitarian response to Mocha-hit communities in Western Myanmar in June 2023.



Photo; A group of students playing in front of Cyclone Mocha-hit school in Kyauktaw township. (Credit –CJ via Western News)

Key Remarks

In the politics of Arakan during June 2023, the strike of Cyclone Mocha brought a visible impact, and, in some senses, it is paradoxical. Since the negative impacts of the cyclone caused both SAC and ULA parties to reframe from persuading harsh policy and actions toward each other, the blockage on aid delivery for the disaster affected people and torture, arrest and continued imprisonment of the local people increased more tensions.

The strike of Cyclone Mocha in the mid-May has huge impacts on the already devastated economic situations of the Arakan. Although the trade and transportation are relatively relaxed due to the de facto ceasefire, restriction, and remaining blockages. The cyclone strike caused many local livelihoods into destruction, but recovery and rehabilitation activities are still in stuck. Changes in border trade happened due to the sanction of the US over two junta run banks.

The damage of schools, hospitals and basic public infrastructure caused unmeasurable degree of loss for the social sectors in Arakan. Raining seasons is already entered. Yet, schools and clinics especially in the rural areas need reconstructions. Otherwise, psychological damage of the local community is huge urging many people to leave homes and native areas for better lives. Active and effective civil society participation is more important in need.

The current humanitarian crisis happening in Arakan needs a more innovative ways of approaching, particularly with the local civil society community and de facto authority such as the ULA/AA in the region. The unilateral restriction of the aid delivery and recovery activities by the junta authorities only caused more delay and obstacles challenging the critical time of the local community for achieving the pre-cyclone state. The current Mocha scenarios also showed a clear picture that the regional and international approaches for the humanitarian emergency in Rakhine in particular, and Myanmar as a whole is ineffective and unrealistic.



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

Part- I: Ceasefire and Peace Talk Continues, But Tension Emerges

In the politics of Arakan, the news during June is mostly dominated by the issues related to the armed revolution, political freedom, peace process and, and landmine explosion.

Issues related to the political freedom are more common ones. On June 13, a resident from Rathedaung was reported to be released after completing sentence. He was jailed by the Sittwe District Court under Sections 50(j), and 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law. The ex-prisoner said¹;

“I was released this morning after completing my sentence. I was detained for nearly three years. I was unfairly arrested and jailed.”

But, on the other hand, the junta still holds over 1,000 NLD members behind bars, says ousted ruling party. Then, some news on June 15 said that the defendants suffer as verdict delays continue to plague Arakan State courts. Likewise, in Kyaukphyu township, verdict postponed pair charged with incitement while the inmates’ families call for allowing prison visits².

Otherwise, the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), the oldest armed group of Arakan which signed a national wide ceasefire in 2015, was accused of detaining two Sittwe men in line with a source on June 23³. A source close to the family of Ko Kyaw Naing Soe said,

¹https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0p4smd695SGEjM7yx4XNkQwrP2RuZTyhQ7mzB78rbdQ1LSeh7aGqw2DwwQZrammjl&id=100064908151155&mibextid=Nif5oz

²https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0AnjoD2J1yPNF6Ywn6wKdfToLpwhKZrhzarHfcuDGU5Dnp6Ab9y2h2cZBATHz4sMCl&id=100064908151155&mibextid=Nif5oz

³https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid025qBvZ7jfW2hEH&tqmuVr74HnoWg8aeQ2KzwrinQi7v35bRc6e13pSjqBWdmdEeKhl&id=100064908151155&mibextid=Nif5oz

“They (ALP) didn’t tell why they (ALP) arrested him. They (ALP) only said they (ALP) had a reason to arrest him. He was beaten with a rifle butt as he was taken.”

More importantly, dozens of civilian detainees from previous Arakan fighting are remained behind the bars, another news added. Besides, there is also an endless trial postponement for three detainees in Kyauktaw township. On June 28, a Sittwe man imprisoned for 2018 bomb blasts was also released. Failure of junta prosecutors in making court appointments leads to suffering for Kyaukphyu detainees.

In the section of armed revolution, the Brotherhood Alliance (AA, TNLA, and MNDAA) lauded establishment of Karenni governing body on June 12 while they also sent congratulatory message to MNTJP/MNDAA (Ko Kang group) on its 10th founding anniversary on June 29⁴. Regarding the actions of the junta military, local news on June 9 said that weapons discharged from military training school caused scare in Minbya Township. And some boatmen were also beaten by soldiers accusing to be AA members on June 28.

For the issues related to the minority affairs, it was reported that the Hindus gather for chariot festival in Maungdaw on June 24. And the Muslim community in Arakan also celebrated Eid al-Adha on June 29 while the rice and money were provided by ULA to Muslim people during Eid in Arakan in the same day⁵. Then, for peace and peace process, the two-days peace talk was held between SAC’s NSPNC and MNDAA, TNLA and AA on June 2 and 3.

Part- II: Negative Economic Impacts of Cyclone Mocha

⁴https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02nWnUc8jm3xC4cWUDUFny7uc6ByzQG5ZPHrJ5qANL8BTK3rK5Cxz6FvjKWqeLuseJ4l&id=100064714144852&mibextid=Nif5oz

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During the month of June 2023, the local news related to the economic issues generally cover agricultural sector, rising price of the basic commodities, low supply and demand for a particular product, situation of border trade, loan provision and foreign investment.

Firstly, when it comes to the news about the rising price of some commodities, a local news on June 1 said that per tical gold prices in Arakan surpassed 3 million kyat and it is also a part of nationwide phenomenon. Then, it was the price of cattle that come to rise after the strike of Cyclone Mocha. In line with a Kyettawpyin resident from Sittwe, he said⁶.

“The price hit between 1.4 million kyats to 1.7 million kyats in the aftermath of the storm. The price of cows has also increased from 600,000 to over 800,000 kyats. The price has increased because many cattle were killed, and stocks have significantly declined.”

These rising price items also include other basic consuming goods such as sugar, fruits and more importantly rice as well. On the other hand, local news on June 5 said that Nipa palm thatching business sees revival in aftermath of Cyclone Mocha.

Among the people harmed by the rising price of the commodity, low-income families are the most severely affected. On June 17, a news said that low-income families hit hardest as the prices of basic foods and other goods have soared in the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha. Then, at the same time, the Muslim people also faced difficulty in celebrating Eid because of cattle price increase. Finally, other news mentioned that the prices of essential commodities continued to rise in Paletwa due to junta’s restriction during the month of June⁷.

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https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0SQRQHdRof11FV8XdoakNVyprU

In agricultural sector, local news on June 6 said that the junta authority claimed that they will provide free or low-cost rice seeds in storm-ravaged parts of Arakan State for the farming community. There were also negative messages in the news related to the border trade as well. On June 19 and 27, two similar news said that in the post-cyclone Mocha period, Myanmar-Bangladesh border trade decreased and Myanmar's border trade with Bangladesh slumped as well. U Aung Aung, a Rakhine businessperson commented⁸.

"The decrease in trade is also reported due to the storm. The payment method from the Bangladesh banks have also created problems because the Bangladesh central bank does not allow the payment for Myanmar goods with US dollars," he added.

Then, two news concerning the commodity shortage also come out. On June 13 and 14, news related to the shortage of bamboo and iceberg were also reported. For ice shortage, another resident added, "We are running a diesel generator for the sake of other businesses that need ice. Our plant still can't run at its full capacity because we don't have electricity,"

And Junta commerce minister on June 16 claimed that Paletwa- Zorampu road is under construction and the Kaladan project will not be affected by Arakan State unrest⁹. Other news includes a Rakhine female migrant worker's death in Thailand, livelihood difficulties of local population such as selling gold for rebuilding homes, crop damage, and others.

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Part- III: Strike of Cyclone Mocha Adds More Challenges

Since it has been over one month after the destructive Mocha Cyclone-hit the Arakan, its negative consequences in various aspects of human and community insecurity have become prominent. Food insecurity, electricity shocks, inadequate and insecure delivery of health care and education services and climate-change imposed environmental problems are right in front of the eyes.

Rice as main food production is as challenging as the impacts of climate change and skyrocketing prices of inputs and soaring fertilizer prices, estimating paddy yields reportedly decreased by as much as 50 percent during this year’s growing season in Arakan. “It hasn’t rained yet, but we are plowing the field. It is cloudy at night, but no rain yet. I think it will be less rainy this year. I am also worried about drought, like last year. If there is a drought, farmers will be in trouble,” said U San Thein Aung, a local farmer from Kwasone Village in Mrauk-U Township¹⁰. According to U Aung Kyaw Mya, chairman of the Arakan Farmers’ Union¹¹,

“Farmers are facing difficulties in growing monsoon paddy. They need tractors and paddy seeds. It will be beneficial for farmers in storm-hit areas if the junta provides them with paddy seeds”.

Moreover, aftermath of Mocha, not only human but also animals are at risk of famine as reportedly moneys living on Thaylar Giri Mawra Patta Mountain, a famous pilgrimage site in Arakan State’s Kyauktaw Township, are being forced down the mountain and can be found asking for food from passersby and even eating rice now, an unusual dietary choice, according to the local pagoda board

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<https://www.facebook.com/466648543487562/posts/pfbid08ny1s2ChRrYzV8AVrQUnFw7Hh4T8nAJJXUEpNVuoRn1pV9PyGbS6CQZhdcdKJefkl/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

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of trustees. Many fruit trees were blown down by Cyclone Mocha which has made it more difficult for monkeys to acquire food¹².

Electrical shocks and fire break incidents are consequently broken out by Mocha. On 10th June, an employee working for the Electricity Supply Enterprise (ESE) from Ayeyarwady Region died from electrocution in Sittwe. Likewise, another distressing incident unfolded near the Sittwe cemetery, where a young man involved in roof repairs at a monastery suffered fatal electrocution, when he accidentally touched a power cord that fell on the roof and certain neighborhoods within Sittwe Township experienced electrical short-circuits, resulting in damage to lights, lamps, meter readers, and other electronic equipment¹³.

Furthermore, as the cyclone destroyed almost all of infrastructure including public service delivered buildings of healthcare and education, both sectors have been inadequate for basic services delivery. Many villagers in Arakan are reportedly suffering from Diarrhea especially in Pauktaw, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Rathedaung and Maungdaw townships because of drinking dirty water and cases of the mosquito-borne dengue fever have become more common due to an increase in garbage and the lack of proper drainage and sanitation around houses and drains in townships in post-cyclone Arakan, according to the Arakan State Department of Public Health (DPH)¹⁴.

During a visit to Arakan in May, the Myanmar regime's second in command, Vice Senior General Soe Win, instructed local authorities to repair healthcare

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facilities and public schools destroyed by Cyclone Mocha on a prioritised basis. The cyclonic storm destroyed hundreds of healthcare facilities in Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Pauktaw, Rathedaung and Buthidaung townships, and 58 percent of the healthcare centres have been repaired, the state military council said on the Thi Kyar Say Chin Ngwe Thazin Facebook account on June 15. However, there are patients in some cases being treated under tarpaulins, and in rural areas, homes are being used as clinics¹⁵. Despite those efforts, vulnerable residents from cyclone-affected areas are highly demanding for easy access to health care services such as establishment of mobile clinics around neighbourhood because of transportation, communication and financial problems encountered.

In the education sector, the cyclone reportedly damaged over 2000 of Rakhine State's 3,193 basic education facilities according to the Arakan State Administration Council. Despite significant property damage, schools were ordered to open on June 1 as education is set as a priority, said Arakan State Administration Council Spokesman U Hla Thein on May 24. A total of 2,400 schools were opened on June 1 in Arakan State, according to junta-controlled newspapers and many schools are prone to insecurity by roofing and walls. As the school registration opened on 25th May as usual yearly, the teachers who are also cyclone-affected people had forcibly to run the education mechanism ordered by the Arakan State Administration Council. The parents also had to find ways to register for class for their children amidst hardships of livings impacted by the storm. Reportedly, the students at the damaged schools were away from active learning, instead, they were forced to come to unsafe area and clean the campus¹⁶. According to the repairing status, the State education director U Ba Htwee Sein informed that about 50 local construction companies

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under the education ministry and 55 companies under the construction ministry were engaged for reconstruction of school buildings in various townships.

Part- III: A Special Focus on Cyclone Mocha Updates

CSO Level: Guerilla Approach to Humanitarian Assistance on Ground

"I have gone many days without having enough rice to eat. Every time I see my damaged house, I feel a heavy burden in my heart. I can't even imagine how my family will survive the upcoming rainy season in this state. Donors have provided food, but we also need building materials. It would be wonderful if more people could step forward and donate the materials required for rebuilding", a cyclone victim from Kyauktaw raised her voice¹⁷.

Public voices have appeared from inadequate aid assistance, aid delivery abuse, unorganized delivery system and the quality of the aids, mostly provided by the junta. Storm-affected people, especially those in Ale Phayonekar Island and thousands of Rakhine and Rohingya IDP camps in Pauktaw and Sittwe townships are in demand of reliable relief. Metal roofing sheets are urgently needed to repair shelters at the Thechaung Muslim IDP camp in Sittwe Township, which was hard-hit by the storm, said U Maung Maung Sein, in-charge of the displacement camp on 5th June¹⁸.

While in urgent need of welcoming heavy rainy season, some of the corrugated roofing sheets supplied by the junta for Panphechaung village-tract in Kyauktaw Township were thin and old, which were not reliable to use as roofing said village

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<https://www.facebook.com/466648543487562/posts/pfbid02qPeM3X9GaD3H527xz3KMuw7eHRryY7njS9PCzfprAStGmBqHwf4TPehpXEwS2LM6l/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

officials¹⁹. On the other hand, there are some Cyclone affected residents in Sittwe reportedly not receiving relief items because they did not provide their household registration cards to the respective ward administrators as part of preparations for the junta's planned election.

Furthermore, the fishing sector has been drastically devastated and thus people who make a living on that suffer from livelihood hardships.

"Fishing villages have been completely decimated. With the destruction of fishing trawlers and nets, the operation of any fishing industry has become impossible. As someone who typically earns a living through repairing boats, I am now unable to mend any vessels and must prioritize repairing my damaged house instead. We, carpenters, along with everyone else, are confronting a multitude of challenges. The storm ravaged our sun-dried fish and cuttlefish, causing losses amounting to hundreds of thousands of kyats," said Ko San Ni, the Thekon villager and a carpenter²⁰.

According to Daw Ma Myint San, a local fisherwoman from Thae Khon Village²¹. "We hope that aid reaches the ground as soon as possible. We will only be able to continue our work as soon as aid arrives on the ground. We welcome any assistance and hope for more aid".

Mro ethnic villages along the upper reaches of the Saitin Creek in Buthidaung Township are critically in need of assistance as relief items supplied by local and foreign organisations are not reaching the area. Many homes in Mro ethnic villages such as Laywai, Thalukyun, Letpankaing, Innchaungwa,

¹⁹

<https://www.facebook.com/466648543487562/posts/pfbid0NcMFSxooy48qgXvVTmag4pKxTY5QiPe8LN37ERmMTQe2wC4bixo4mWuVCof3fwmvl/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

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Aungchanmyae, Khalar-U, Thalyphyar, Konemaunglay and Minkaing were destroyed and the residents concern about the following health care problems as there is none rural medical villages and children's access to education²².

Out of those raising voices, communities have expressed on the same page about their reliance on aid provided by civil society organizations and charity organizations rather than the military council.

In certain villages in Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun, and Sittwe townships, the affected communities are solely reliant on food donations provided by civil society organizations for their survival. Despite the international community's donation of tents, tarpaulin sheets, building materials, food, and medicine to assist the cyclone-affected people in Rakhine through the Military Council, over 20 days have passed since the storm struck, and these essential items have yet to reach the victims.

The situation was more threatened when the SAC ordered on June 8 that the Arakan State military council last week notified local and international organizations providing humanitarian aid in Arakan State to halt operations until further notice. Then on June 11, the junta's Minister of Security and Border Affairs in Rakhine state, Colonel Kyaw Thura with his signature circulated online that local and international non-governmental organisations providing relief items in the state have been allowed to resume operations²³.

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<https://www.facebook.com/466648543487562/posts/pfbid0SdJ6QVJC1thdWxmsaE6HL6zxsU5gFs7d2Qi7kLQv64Mm4i12JNVcmjRio5gRezKtl/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

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In this place, local NGOs and CSOs are required to prior inform the relief activities to the township administrators, however, the INGOs and UN agencies are allowed to deliver to their beneficiaries only through the SAC²⁴.

Amidst those restrictions, on ground situation, most of the CSOs either unregistered organizations or registered organizations have chosen alternative approaches which shall be defined as Guerilla Approach to Humanitarian Assistance with the aim of successfully delivering to the targeted vulnerable communities by the Mocha.

“If we ask for permission from the state military council to provide relief items to storm victims, will we get permission?” said an official from a CSO²⁵.

Additionally, an aid worker from a CSO said “although the SAC has imposed restriction order and also approval to resumption of direct aid delivery to the people, we are hesitating to provide our information by security concern reason and thus decide not to prior or aftermath inform to the SAC officials about our aid delivery plan, and we choose to implement every action in low profile²⁶.”

The aid workers from CBOs and CSOs find every possible way to deliver humanitarian assistance by coordinating either with residents from affected areas or with flexible village administrators. Sometimes, assistance is delivered through more difficult transportation and more sophisticated ways to avoid the SAC checkpoints and investigation.

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https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0N49dVM7DqjzgZnGDPEbUQFVh_pPcHe8AYZyExvfthXZpdoKWSHqQi3SQboxZeZZGBI&id=102405104899336&mibextid=Nif5oz

²⁵ CAS interview with a CSO staff on June 30, 2023.

²⁶ CAS interview with an aid worker on June 30, 2023.

About the Report

This report is a part of the ‘Monthly Report’ series released by the Center for Arakan Studies (CAS). For the month of ‘June’, the CAS has developed this new report based on the four key sections: politics, economics, social issues, and humanitarian context mainly focusing on the situation happening in Arakan.

Readers of this report can observe the key trends tending in Arakan politics despite being a de facto ceasefire between the political authorities: the junta and the ULA. Since the strike of Cyclone Mocha on the Arakan coast in the mid-May impacted huge destructions on the socio-economic lives of the local population, the concentration of the local community is much on the rehabilitation and recovery activities. But, since there are still ‘politicization’ and ‘weaponization’ of aid delivery mainly by the junta authority, the situations do not go as smooth as possible.

The key sources of the information and data in this report are from the key local media agencies such as the ‘Development Media Group (DMG)’, ‘Western News’ and ‘Nanrijara’, etc. The key news presented in the report as the also ones presented in these various media platforms.

More importantly, the report also invites the reader to read a special look on the humanitarian part as it has mainly focused on the update of the post-Mocha Cyclone time. This part has presented the actions of the political authorities, and the state of local and international non-governmental organizations in the process of rehabilitation and recovery. Then, mentioning the voices and opinions of the local disaster affected communities are worth noting.

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.

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