

# Monthly Arakan Review

Center for Arakan Studies

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## Political Tensions Among Different Parties in Arakan Grow

*Monitoring of a brief situation of political tension, economic issues, social issues, and humanitarian issues in Western Myanmar in July 2023.*



*ALP new recruit training in September 2022 (Photo/DMG).*

## Key Remarks

In the politics of Arakan during the month of July, an increased degree of tension can be found between the two key political actors: the junta and ULA. The junta continued the imprisonment of the suspected civilian on account of having links with the ULA/AA and increased their activities of weapon testing and territorial expansion. On the other hand, the news related to the clashes between the ARSA and AA also appeared on the local media outlets drawing much attention from both the local population and the international community.

The post-Mocha cyclone economic revival in Rakhine is not still happening. Many locals face increased prices of the general commodity amidst the destruction lost due to the cyclone. The profits from the export commodities come to decrease due to the increased transportation cost. Border trade with Bangladesh was also negatively affected following the US sanction on the two junta-owned banks concerning the dollar exchange. Many reports confirm the increased potential for migration due to the frustration and devastation posed by the cyclone strike.

The strike of Cyclone Mocha brought the additional burden to the already bad health and educational sectors in the State. The junta's priority for the restoration of electricity and repairing of the building and infrastructure is also focused on the government related sectors and more urbanized areas. As a result, many schools, hospitals, clinics, and other public infrastructures in the rural areas are still neglected, imposing more hardships on the local population. Local concerns on the outbreak of seasonal diseases.

The junta's blockade on the UN and international humanitarian aid assistance remains continuing. More importantly, the junta authorities have hardly released any statement on the progress of the post-cyclone recovery and rehabilitation in statistics or percentage. A ULA statement released on July 14 has stated that around 70 percent of the total disaster affected population has been re-sheltered along with food and medicine provision. But, on the other hand, many local media outlets have also mentioned that there are many villages in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships lacking essential food and lifesaving items partly due to the junta's blockage on the humanitarian assistance and communication barriers.

## Part- I: Political Affairs

In the politics of Arakan during July, the news covered in the local media agencies are mostly related to the activities of the junta authorities, actions of the ULA/AA, political freedom, the situations of the ALP, armed revolution, and elections. Starting with the news related to the activities of the junta authorities, it is said that three junta soldiers died due to health problems on July 1. On the other hand, [3 junta border guard officers were also reported](#) to defect into the AA in Maungdaw township while a local restaurant in Rambree township was demolished and the owner was arrested by the junta in July 2023.

Another news on July 4 also said that the Junta authorities tightened security in Sittwe following assassination of three Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) officials on July 1. On July 9, the Junta forces searched for 3 defected Border Guard Forces (BGFs) from one village to another in Maungdaw township. On July 18, the security's tightening in urban Sittwe areas increased, a resident said. On July 20, a news article also said that [several oil field workers](#) were arrested in Ramree Township and four junta personnel again deserted in Maungdaw Township.

Two days later, hundreds of junta soldiers reinforced near the place where Arakan Army and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) fought in Buthidaung township. Next, the junta conducted more weapon-tests in Min-Bya township, Rakhine State. On July 24, the news said that the junta arranged a pleasure trip for wounded soldiers to Ngapali Beach. Four days later, the junta military also notified about the planned weapons testing in Min-Bya township

on July 28 and on the same day, the junta authority also [conducted reconnaissance in AA controlled areas](#) during night hours.

When it comes to the AA related news, a 3rd-July news article said that the AA recognition ceremony for [over 300 officer-candidates](#) was held for the first time in Rakhine. And, July 19, casualties reported during AA-ARSA clashes in Buthidaung Township. On the next day, the locals from the Buthidaung township also confirmed [the fighting and clash between ARSA and AA](#). With regard to political freedom, on July 1, [the former Arakan State's chief-minister](#) allowed cataract surgery and a man from Minbya charged with unlawful association died at Ann hospital. On July 5, families called for a speedier trial in case of the Kyaukphyu duo facing incitement charges.

On the next day, the former chief minister and his daughter relocated to different prison facilities and two Ramree men arrested over land dispute are charged under eviction law. Then, on July 7, Thandwe GAD employee was sentenced to two years in prison for incitement and on July 11, [six Taunggoke residents](#) were sentenced to four years in prison on AA-related terrorism charges. On July 17, two Buthidaung Township administrators charged with unlawful association and on July 24, cases finally underway for Kyaukphyu Township residents charged for alleged AA ties.

News related to armed tension and revolution, on July 2, the three Brotherhood Alliance agreed to cooperate on fighting terrorism and other crime. On July 7, students and their unions vowed to end the military dictatorship in Myanmar. On July 15, tensions rose as junta forces [searched for two missing soldiers](#) in AA-controlled regions. Two days later, the AA joined KIA to defend territory from junta forces. Then, the military Council refused to relinquish two villages captured from AA on July 20. A news on July 31 said that the BPLA recruits [received their first sniper course](#) from AA members.



## Part- II: Economic Situations

The news related to the economic sector of Arakan expressed in the local media outlets during July mostly covered rising prices of the commodities, foreign direct investments, migration, border trade and agricultural issues.

When it comes to the rising prices of the basic commodities, on July 1, a news article said that fishermen in Rakhine State were burdened by rising equipment costs while goldsmiths suffer from steep decline in demand for gold in line with a news one week later. On July 24, a news article also mentioned that the betel leaf prices rose in the State after Cyclone Mocha devastated local supply. Two days later, another news said that the new K20,000 banknote may increase prices of essential commodities in Rakhine State.

“Prices have been going up since the cyclonic storm. It’s still going on,” said [a woman from Sittwe](#). Still, some news on July 10, on the other hand, said that the crabbing industry suffered amid price decline. [A crab dealers from Ponnagyun township](#) said: “China does not buy crab in the aftermath of the storm. It has begun to buy again. However, the profit is low because of the high transportation costs.

A state-owned media on July 30 mentioned that the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) would launch a sale of 50,000 bags of reserved rice at more equitable prices. Shortage of commodities also happened as the local manufacturers cannot keep up with plastic bag demands in the State. To turn into the border trade, a news article on July 7, said that [the border traders were unimpressed](#) by the junta’s easing of restrictions on export earnings. One day later, another news article mentioned that the prices nosedived as Bangladesh suspended imports from Myanmar. [U Tin Aung Oo, chairman](#) of the Arakan State Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said:

“The trade with Bangladesh has declined due to some policy problems in export procedures.”

In the agricultural sector, a news article on July 20 mentioned that the junta sought to sell fertilizer at reduced prices for farmers in the State. But, in another news on July 28, it is said that [the junta authorities asked farmers](#) in Rakhine to repay agricultural loans. Concerning the news related to the foreign direct investment, a news on July 7 said that the [Kyaukphyu farmers were asked to pay](#) a fine of Korean Won 27 millions after losing a case of confiscated farmlands under Shwe Natural Gas Project. “From our side, we cannot pay the amount. The Korean lawyer’s group paid the amount to the company through the court,” a local farmer from Kyaukphyu township said.

Then, the news on July 20 said that [a Hong Kong company owned natural gas plants](#) in Kyaukphyu suspended operations. For Sittwe seaport, a news article in July 19 mentioned that the merchants, cargo shippers hope to gain access to India-funded Sittwe Port and it was highlighted on July 31 that [the junta official said local coasters](#) will be given access to India-funded port in Sittwe.

Then, related to the migration problem, a news article on July 8 mentioned that Cyclone Mocha is the latest factor driving worker exodus from Arakan State and the Thai labor ministry extends visa application window for Myanmar migrant workers, a news article two days later said. A news article on July 26 also highlighted those hundreds of locals left Ponnagyun township for jobs overseas. “They have lost their livelihoods after farms were damaged by the storm. It takes several years for certain types of plants to bear fruit and parts for selling. So, many have left for overseas, where they can make money immediately,” said a social worker from Ponnagyun township.

### **Part- III: Social Issues**

After two months of Mocha cyclone, [the restoration of damaged electrical power lines and substations](#) in all of Northern Rakhine State as described by the Global New Light of Myanmar. In Maungdaw township, a local resident said that priority has been given to schools and government offices, while restoring the supply and private residences are yet to receive the supply. On the other hand, many schools in the rural areas under the townships of Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, Kyauktaw and Pauktaw are yet to be repaired and opened. Out of 3,193 basic schools in Rakhine State, 1,337 school buildings were badly damaged by Mocha on 14 May. On 1 June, the junta announced that [2,410 schools were already opened](#) in Rakhine State along with the schools across Myanmar.

On 6<sup>th</sup> July news, each farmer in Mrauk-U township has been provided one to seven bags of paddy seeds at below-market prices by the junta and [the provision is also in cyclone-hit Sittwe](#), Rathedaung, Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, and Pauktaw townships. Those paddy seeds were from Ayeyarwaddy and Bago regions and

were transported by cargo ships, military vessels and military trucks at the arrangement of the National Disaster Management Committee in Nay Pyi Taw. Hundreds of thousands of farmers in Mocha-ravaged parts of Arakan State will need substantial assistance for recovery as many have lost homes, paddy seed stocks and cattle in the storm. More than 27,600 cattle were killed by the cyclone in Sittwe and Rathedaung townships, the junta said in a statement on May 19.

During the first ten days of July, Junta Senior General Min Aung Hlaing arrived at the Rakhine State and gave his order to take action against shops that are charging higher prices for goods such as building materials and other consumer goods after the Mocha cyclone. Moreover, the Mocha left the people in [high demand of imported goods](#) primarily from outside of the state, mostly Yangon and more than 30 trucks are operating carrying vegetables, basic foodstuffs and other items to Sittwe.

Addition to Mocha, the rainy season enhances the likelihood of dengue fever, reportedly found 21 cases in Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Taungup and Kyaukphyu on the day of 1<sup>st</sup> July and on 15<sup>th</sup>, [5 children deceased due to dengue fever](#). Therefore, the residents are demanding mosquito-control activities not only in the city but also in the surrounding rural areas. On Junta Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's visit, [he also promised to fulfill the healthcare needs of local residents](#) and meanwhile healthcare facilities in both urban and rural parts of Arakan State are poorly equipped, and they are also understaffed.

Apart from those socio-economic impacts, the Mocha has warned of climate change and notorious impacts on the environment. According to the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, Myanmar is experiencing a shortened monsoon season, changing rain patterns, increased average temperatures and more cyclones in its coastal areas as a consequence of climate change. Moreover, animal visits at a marine national park on Nanthar Island in Rathedaung Township, Arakan State, where [rare species of animals often come to graze](#), decreased by 70 percent following Cyclone Mocha, according to the Rakhine Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association. The mangroves and forest coverage are also in decline which are also one of the causes of the destructive and frequent storms. Minister Khin Maung Yi, while addressing a meeting with township level officials at Rakhine State Forest department's director office on 2 July declared that [204,200 trees will be planted during the rainy season](#) as a special initiative.

Local concerns about environmental degradation seen as the locals in Mala Kyun village in Kyauk Phyu village have concerned and complained about smelling drainage from the onshore gas terminal (OGT) of the Shwe gas project, run by POSCO International Co., [calling for social and environmental impact assessments](#). Moreover, the residents in Sittwe have concerns about sand mining at Sittwe's ViewPoint beach leaving the entire beach disfigured by large sinkholes and pits, demanding the local authorities and public to work together and raise awareness.

#### **Part- IV: Humanitarian Issues**

The news covered by the junta-controlled media such as Global News Light of Myanmar are enriched with the meetings and the donations made by them for the Mocha affected people. The donation materials are detailed and declared including names of the individual donor, however, no group of recipients are included in the news and at ground level, residents open up no or few support by the junta. On July 10, the junta chief visited Rakhine State, commenting that the rehabilitation process was going successfully after the cyclonic storm. Rakhine politician U Pe Than states that it is really different from the ground situation and urges [the junta to lift restrictions](#) on assistance of the international organizations. On July 15, the [junta extended the declaration of Rakhine](#) as a natural disaster area until September 15.

According to the July 21 released report of the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar, the junta has only received US\$19 million from multiple donors, although it will require more than US\$330 million for rehabilitation of the victims of Cyclone Mocha. [International agencies have to make donations through the regime](#), which accepts relief supplies in Yangon, and transport them to Rakhine State [by itself](#). In July, the following international and state or non-state organizations are reportedly delivering relief assistance to the Mocha affected people either directly or mostly through the Junta.

Relief and rehabilitation remain required in many villages in storm-hit townships. In the double minority group residing village, Mroya in Maungdaw township, more than 600 ethnic Mro people [are reportedly facing food shortages](#). In Maungdaw Township, locals in Kainggyi Village which is home to more than 600 people from 132 households, are facing difficulties rebuilding their homes. Local people along the upper reaches of Yoe Creek in Arakan State's Kyauktaw Township, meanwhile, are reportedly facing challenges although they have received some relief supplies. Residents in one such settlement, Thaluchaung Village, which has more than 200 homes, have reportedly yet to receive relief items from the junta. Residents in London Village, Mrauk-U Township, have not received relief items so far. Moreover, crowded camps for IDPs in Arakan State's Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw and Rathedaung townships are at risk of diarrhea and other health problems due to the toilets destroyed by the Mocha Cyclone.

#### The Nippon Foundation led by Yohei Sasakawa, who is also Japan's special envoy for national reconciliation in Myanmar

- Provided 64,000 sacks of rice in areas controlled by seven ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) that are signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) over the past year on July 5

#### Ling Jiou Mountain (HK) Buddhist Society Ltd and White Jade Wang Enterprise Co Ltd

- Each donated K10 million for repairing religious edifices affected by the Mocha at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture in Nay Pyi Taw July 3.

#### Thailand: H.E. Ms. Busadee Santipitaks, Deputy Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs

- Delivered relief items: corrugated zinc sheets, roof nails, common nails and solar cell lamps through Siam Cement Public Company Limited (SCG) to H.E. U Chit Swe, Ambassador of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to Thailand, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand on July 11

#### POSCO International Co., and the Shwe Yang Metta Foundation, a local charity, are reportedly donating 6,000 bags of rice to Cyclone Mocha victims in Rakhine on July 15.

The Arrakha Emergency Relief and Resettlement Committee (ERRCA) under the ULA/AA, which is formed to carry out rehabilitation activities for the Rakhine people affected by cyclone Mocha, [announced on 14 July](#) that even after two months of the massive storm, the Rakhine region needs emergency assistance and rehabilitation works. In their statement, after collecting accurate data of damages in order to carry out relief and rehabilitation activities, the committee started working to address the livelihood issues of the local people and 75 percent of the damaged house owners were reached within two months after the disaster with the scheme for shelters.

## About the Report

This report is a part of the monthly report series by the CAS. The report usually covers four key areas happening in the state of Rakhine. The first part covers the politics concerning the armed revolution, the junta activities and political freedom, etc. The second is about the economic situations of the state that correspond to issues like rising prices, declining demand, foreign direct investment, and border trade, etc. Then, it is the third and fourth sectors which touch the social issues such as education, health, and migration in the region and for the humanitarian sector, the key items are post-Cyclone Mocha related situations and recovery activities and IDP population.

The key data in the report comes from the local media outlets such as the DMG, Western News and other sources. This report is aimed to contribute a new shell of light for those observers who are trying to understand and watch the dynamics happening in the region.

## 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), [www.arakanstudies.org](http://www.arakanstudies.org)