

# Monthly Arakan Review

Center for Arakan Studies

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## The Flooding, and Rise of Armed Groups' Activities in Arakan Add Another Layer of Hardship

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



*Myanmar-Bangladesh border guards are reported to [patrol on Naff river along the border areas](#) on August 23, 2023 (Photo/Narinjara)*

## Key Remarks

In the politics of Arakan during August, the state of civic and political freedom is still not healthy although the state is under a de facto informal ceasefire between the ULA/AA and Junta regime. Offensive military activities of the junta have come to increase while the two parallel authorities are in a state of suspicion and doubt. The increasing movement of the Rohingya armed militants such as the ARSA and other groups also brought concerns among the local population in the northern part of Arakan, bordering to Bangladesh.

The state of Arakan economy, even after the four months of the Cyclone Mocha, is still not fully recovered. Many families and local businesses are struggling with the rising prices of the basic commodities and kyat depreciation. Meanwhile, the border trade with Bangladesh also faced various challenges ranging from the reduction of the trade volume to the restriction of the junta authorities on certain commodities. Farmers and agricultural communities still do not receive enough loans from the junta authorities.

While the social consequences of the Cyclone Mocha strike are still developing, the torrential flooding in many townships of the state brought more challenges and miseries for the local population. Many acres of farmland and plantation developed after the Cyclone Mocha are again destroyed by the flooding during August. Local community members become more vulnerable, and many are forced to migrate into other parts of the country and neighboring countries.

The junta authorities in Arakan have still blocked the humanitarian assistance of the UN and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in Arakan despite being in massive need for the emergency relief. The IDPs camps destroyed by the Cyclone Mocha are again flooded during August. The World Bank released an assessment report on the impacts of the Cyclone Mocha and said that the total economic loss of the cyclone is USD 2.24 billion in which the damage in Arakan covers 27% of the total amount as around USD 600 million. The current humanitarian efforts by both the junta authorities and the ULA are far from satisfactory.

## Part- I: Political Affairs

During the month of August, the political related news expressed by the local media agencies include the state of civic and political freedom, activities of the junta authority and military, armed revolution, ongoing peace process, the activities of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), the junta projected election, and external relations.

Starting with the news of civic and political freedom, 256 prisoners in Arakan were released in the latest junta amnesty on August 1, 2023 but there were [only 62 related to the ULA/AA](#). Another news article also mentioned that more than 100 people, prosecuted on suspicion of being Arakan Army (AA) sympathizers, were still inside the bars. And, quite contradictingly, on August 15, an Arakanese women's activist was arrested for joining 'rice crisis day' event on August 13.

U Myat Tun, Director of the Rakhine Human Rights Defenders and Promoters Association (RHRDPA) [told Development Media Group \(DMG\)](#) on 15 August, "arresting and prosecuting a person for doing work that should be done for their nation is an unjust violation of human rights by the military regime. This is contrary to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,"

Moreover, other news on the civic and political freedom continued that ruling in case of three Kyauktaw men again deferred and arrested people on suspicion of being the AA members and 2 young men deprived of trials for 9 months.

Then, news of the junta activities in the state covered that on August 2, 2023, Rakhine ethnic junta state chief minister Dr. Aung Kyaw Min was removed from military council positions, and the junta police arrested the two KTV owners and dozens of employees on account of the regulatory violations on August 5. On August 25, the schools in Maungdaw Township village were closed due to the junta military presence after the armed clashes between the AA and ARSA. On August 2, 2023, the ARSA [was accused of abducting two Muslim men in northern Maungdaw](#) while AA was also reported to monitor the actions by the military council and ARSA in Northern Arakan.

News concerning the armed revolution was also reported. On August 26, the Deputy ULA/AA chief said to publish his poetry collection and on August 30, the media reported that AA provided [special combat training](#) to the Student Armed Force (SAF). Then, in the election and peace process related news, on August 7, the Global New Light of Myanmar expressed that the junta authority made efforts to facilitate smooth transition to elected government. On the other hand, political parties in Arakan are said to struggle to comply with junta's registration law in line with a news article on August 30.

For the peace process, on August 10, the Karen National Union (KNU) said that [Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement \(NCA\) is now null and void](#) but the ALP in Arakan is an active participant of the NCA. On that issue, [the current five NCA signatories](#) are reported to discuss constitutional amendments with the junta authorities on August 30, 2023. There are also two important pieces of news related to the foreign countries' roles in Myanmar and Arakan politics. On August 12, 2023, in line with an ISP-Myanmar report, China is said to support Myanmar junta's planned election. Myanmar-Bangladesh border guards are reported to [patrol on Naff river along the border areas](#) on August 23, 2023.

## **Part- II: Economic Situations**

The news related to the economic situations of Arakan during the month of August cover border trade, commodity shortage, employment opportunities, foreign direct investment, loan provision, rising price of the commodity, unlawful taxation, and migration.

On August 3, a news reported that [Myanmar's border trade with Bangladesh slumped](#) but the junta-controlled media noted that [Sittwe and Maungdaw posts reaped trade value of US\\$0.07878 mln as of August 2nd week](#). For export, the salt surplus caused the suppliers from Arakan eyeing the Bangladesh market. On August 15, [hundreds of cartons of illegal, Chinese-made ORIS cigarettes](#) were seized at Maungdaw checkpoint. And soft-shell crab farming thrives in Gwa and brings more new job opportunities in the state. On the other hand, Rakhine private fiber boat industry faces existential crisis due to high price of raw materials.

Then, another news article expressed that dried coconuts are in short supply and fetching good prices in Arakan. The rising price of the commodity is also very common. Food prices rose further following the birth of K20,000 banknote and on August 7, Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) sold [another 120,000 bags of reserve rice](#) to stabilize domestic rice prices. Next, the gold price per tical approached K4 million and the MRF is again said to sell rice at reduced prices for storm-hit parts of Arakan State. In addition, with rising gold prices and depreciating kyat, real estate is winning investors' favor with the demand for more land.

“People who are working overseas have also invested in land. They buy and sell land now. They invest their money,” [said](#) the Secretary U San Kyar Maung of the Arakan State Real Estate Agents Association.

In the sector of the foreign direct investments, on August 25, the military council chief [insisted on implementing Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone and Deep Sea Port](#) at the earliest along with the Kyaukphyu-Mandalay railroad.

And, the Hong Kong company VPower is reported to halt 4 Myanmar power projects including that in Kyaukphyu. For the loan provision, the MSMEs in Arakan are said yet to receive promised loans from junta authorities and the junta's agricultural bank asked for the required repayment of Covid-19 loans as [a condition of new borrowing](#) on August 25. And the business owners in the state also voiced their doubts over junta's promised post-cyclone loans.

“We [haven't heard anything about loans](#). I doubt we will be given loans. Perhaps many business owners have applied for loans, and they [the regime] is still determining the amount of the loans,” said prawn farmer U Kyaw Thaung from Ponnagyun Township.

In another sector, the junta also ordered the longstanding Sittwe beach eateries to pack up shop and facing eviction, Sittwe beach eateries' petition seeks livelihood consideration. On August 23, the news also reported that the junta navy personnel [collected money from firewood & timber boats](#) in Rambree.

Then, in the news on the migration, [the two Muslims died and 45 missing](#) in boat capsized off the coast of Arakan on August 8, 2023. One day later, [boat capsized death toll climbs to 13, with 34 additional people missing](#). And, [Rohingyas from refugee camps in Bangladesh](#) who were heading to Malaysia detained in Mon State are also reported to face prison time under immigration law of Myanmar.

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

This month's news is tremendously covered with the destructive floods after 3 months of the Cyclone Mocha strike on the coast of Arakan, and the increasing rate of crimes observed compared to the recent months.

The floods that were encountered in townships of Thandwe, Taunggup, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Mrauk-U, Myebon, from north to south of the state, resulting in disruption in agriculture, livelihood, transportation, and casualties during the first two weeks. Within three days from August 5 to 7, [two people drowned and another two went missing](#) due to territorial rains that brought rising tides in rivers and creeks in the villages of Minbya, KyaukTaw and Ann townships. According to the Development Media Group (DMG), various reasons such as [natural disasters, transportation difficulties, negligence and drowning](#) while fishing for food caused at least 66 people to die from drowning in the two months from July to August 17, including 45 Rohingyas drowning while transporting to Malaysia on August 7.

As a consequence, the riverbanks have collapsed and [30 houses on them have been destroyed](#) in Taunggup township and at least 50 villages in Kyauktaw and Minbya townships were flooded due to heavy rainfall. “Streets and houses as well as the market and farms have been flooded since yesterday. In some places, the water level has reached six feet high,” said U Zaw Myo Chit, a resident of Thayettapin Village on August 5. Moreover, floods destroyed 8,848 acres of farmlands and affected 11,132 acres of farmlands in Arakan, according to figures compiled by the Arakan State Department of Agriculture. Floods destroyed [more than 70,000 acres of farmlands and killed 139 cattles](#) in Arakan State, according to data compiled by the ULA on August 14.

“Farmers seek paddy seeds from others to replant their damaged paddy fields. Farmers are having difficulties accessing paddy seeds,” said U Maung Hla, a local farmer from Minphu Village in Minbya Township on August 15.

Alongside with the tragic situation about climate change impacts, people face daily insecurity by the rising incidents of crimes. A dead man (unidentified) wrapped in a burlap sack was discovered in Myolel Creek in Sittwe's Rupa Mrauk ward at around 5 p.m. on August 8, according to local charity Metta Yaung Chi Foundation. “We have heard about

more homicides and discovery of dead bodies lately, besides the crimes of theft and mugging. It is horrifying that the man was killed and dumped in a fertilizer sack,” said Daw Aye Nu Chay from Setyonesu Ward on that day.

Additionally, a 25-year-old woman from Shwebaho Village, Maungdaw Township, has been missing for about three days, with no indication as to her whereabouts or well-being while returning home from farmlands at about 9 a.m. on August 18, said a family member. On August 25 in Rambree township, a young man, suspected of committing a crime of raping of a minor girl, at Laytaung sub-town of Rakhine State’s Rambree township, was arrested by Arakan Army (AA) members.

Looking back to the educational infrastructures damaged by Cyclone Mocha, out of 1,538 public schools damaged or destroyed by Cyclone Mocha across 10 townships, 1,279 schools have been repaired so far,” said U Ba Htwee Sein, director of the Arakan State Education Office on August 4. However, there have been classrooms under the tarpaulin shelters and thus the locals urged in urgency. Furthermore, Garuna Uyin, a monastic school in Ahtet Laynyintaung Village in the Laymyochaung area, Mrauk-U Township, which is home to dozens of students from poor families from at least 10 villages in the Laymyochaung area is reportedly in need of financial assistance.

### Part- IV: Humanitarian Issues

Township	IDP camps	Damaged Shelters
KyaukTaw	Nyaungchaung	142
Mrauk -U	Tin Nyo	200
	Myatazaung	32

#### Double Suffering by the Negative Impacts of Mocha Cyclone and Flooding

Regarding the humanitarian sector, the widespread floods posed double suffering to the vulnerable people by Cyclone Mocha. More than 370 shelters in some camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Arakan State’s Kyauktaw and Mrauk-U townships were destroyed by flooding triggered by torrential rains, according to displacement camp officials.

As of August 10, the camps described above were destroyed by the floods reportedly, though the data cannot cover the whole damages across the state. Moreover, more than 530 IDPs taking shelter at the displacement camps in Paletwa, Chin State, have been temporarily evacuated. “About two-thirds of the displacement camp has already been submerged by floodwaters,” said U Maung Hla Win, an official from the displacement camp there.

On a statement released by the ULA/AA on August 14, they have urged developed countries, neighbouring countries, members of ASEAN and international agencies to provide food supplies and healthcare services to victims affected by Cyclone Mocha and subsequent flooding in Arakan State, and to help them to re-establish their livelihoods. According to the ULA/AA, a total of 28,072 houses were flooded in Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon, Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Taungup and Thandwe townships due to persistent rains since July 31.

#### Appendix of implications by Cyclone Mocha



The World Bank's report, Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE), on August 7 reported that Cyclone Mocha destroyed in Arakan and Chin States, Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay regions in [the cost of direct damages to buildings, infrastructure and agriculture is estimated at USD 2.24 billion](#). After three months of it, 70 percent of affected people in Arakan State are yet to receive adequate shelter. A female member of Apauk Wa village youth association informed that [only 25 percent of affected people of Kyauktaw Township](#) could rebuild their houses. The others are living under tarpaulins or temporary huts.

On August 15, the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), Martin Griffiths, met with junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyitaw to [discuss the provision of humanitarian assistance](#) in Myanmar. A day later, the UN humanitarian chief also met officials from the Arakan State military council, residents and Rohingya IDPs. "He came to meet me to discuss the provision of humanitarian assistance. I asked him to provide assistance for people displaced and affected by the fighting, Cyclone Mocha and floods. He also asked about sectarian conflicts in Arakan State. He said he would report to the UN about what he saw on his trip, and arrange to provide humanitarian assistance," said [the abbot of the Shwe Saeti Monastery in Sittwe](#).

"I told him about how [we are struggling to make ends meet](#), and asked them to help us get citizenship ID cards. He said he would report our request to the UN," said U Hla Kyaw, manager of Ohn Taung Gyi Muslim IDP camp in Sittwe.

On August 19, the statement by [UNOCHA Myanmar declared](#) that the Humanitarian Response Plan and Cyclone Mocha Flash Appeal are only 25 percent funded. While only about 20 percent of storm victims have received assistance, the junta has imposed travel restrictions on international organizations helping storm victims, as well as on the delivery and distribution of relief supplies, [according to a July 21 report by the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar](#).

On August 22 at the press conference, [junta spokesman Major-General Zaw Min Tun disclosed](#) that "We got over K33 billion and over US\$750,000 from donors at home and abroad for the storm victims during the period from May 14 to August 21", despite its transparency delivering to [the affected areas](#). Then, on August 30, Junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing ordered the ministers of all levels to systematically regulate local and international nongovernmental organizations because they are [the stooges of agencies and foreign governments funding](#) them. Showing that the travel ban on the non-governmental relief agencies wouldn't be relaxed. The ICRC has not been allowed to provide humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people (IDPs) camps in Rathedaung Township since June.

"We are only allowed to [provide supplies through the township General Administration Department](#)," said a source from the International Committee of the Red Cross. By means of receiving and delivering the resources of relief from the nongovernmental donors through the junta's own administrative channel, the junta seems to take advantage of its in building up their political image covering its negligence on transparency and adequacy.

#### [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.