

Issue Brief

MUNAUNG ISLAND: AMID ISOLATION AND MOUNTING CONSTRAINTS

No. (8/2026)

Politics and Socioeconomics Sector



Munaung Island (source @google earth)

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1. Introduction

(A) Main Focus	A study on the military and political changes in Munaung Township and their impacts on the security and socioeconomic conditions of local communities.
(B) Geographic Scope	Munaung Township, Arakan/Rakhine State, Myanmar
(C) Study Period	From November 2023 to June 2026

Background and Context

Following the resurgence and escalation of fighting in Rakhine State in November 2023, the Arakan Army (AA) has gained control of 14 townships across the state. Munaung Township, together with Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, remains among the areas still under the control of the military regime. Although no fighting has taken place in Munaung Township, the island township is considered strategically important for military control of the Rakhine coastal region. The military regime has continued to strengthen its control over Munaung Township by imposing tighter restrictions on the movement of people and goods, reinforcing military infrastructure, and carrying out ongoing military preparations.

As a consequence of these military activities and restrictions, local fishing and other livelihood activities have been affected. Rising prices of essential commodities and medicines, shortages of goods, limited access to basic healthcare services, and restricted access to electricity and communication services have further exacerbated socioeconomic difficulties among local communities. The situation has become increasingly isolated, particularly following the loss of regular connections with Ramree, Kyaukphyu, Taungup, and Thandwe townships after these areas came under AA control.

Furthermore, during 2025 and 2026, there have been increasing military and administrative activities in Munaung, including preparations for elections, the resumption of airline services, and the expansion of the military presence through measures such as the development of the airport, the establishment and strengthening of checkpoints, and the deployment of additional troops.

This study provides an overview of key security, humanitarian, and socioeconomic developments in Munaung Township from November 2023 to the present, and examines their impacts on local communities. The analysis is based primarily on reports and information published by local news sources and media outlets.

2. Summary of Findings

November 2023

(a) Food, medicine, and basic services shortages in Munaung Township due to the military Regime's Blockade of Waterways

Beginning on 13 November 2023, the military regime blocked major land and waterways in Rakhine State, resulting in shortages of food, medicine, and fuel in Munaung Island, which relies almost entirely [on maritime transportation](#). Residents faced increasing difficulties in accessing basic food items such as rice, vegetables, and fish. Coastal fishing activities also came to a halt, significantly affecting local livelihoods. Shortages of medicines created difficulties for emergency patients in accessing medical treatment, while in some cases it was no longer possible to transfer patients to Taungup Township for further medical care. In addition, fuel shortages posed a risk of disruption to electricity and telecommunications services, with mobile phone services reportedly cut off in some villages.

(b) MPT mobile services begin to experience disruptions in several Rakhine Townships, including Munaung

Due to the military regime's restrictions on transportation, fuel supplies could not be delivered to mobile phone towers. As a result, MPT mobile services were disrupted in parts of Ann, Myebon, Pauktaw, and [Munaung townships](#), affecting local residents' access to telecommunications and the internet.

December 2023

(c) Rising livelihood difficulties in Munaung due to the military regime's restrictions on movement

The military regime's restrictions on land and maritime transportation within Rakhine State resulted in [food shortages](#) in Munaung Township. As a consequence, the livelihoods and access to necessities of low-income households reportedly deteriorated further.

January 2024

(d) Military regime officials allegedly permit gambling operations and collect fees in Munaung

In January 2024, gambling operations were reportedly held daily in several villages in Munaung Township, with military regime officials allegedly collecting fees from the operators. Local residents reported that these [gambling activities](#) were contributing to social problems and negatively affecting the behaviour and moral development of young people.

February 2024

(e) Military regime prepares to upgrade Sa Mon Te Airport in Munaung for military use

In February 2024, the military regime was reportedly preparing to expand and upgrade [Sa Mon Te Airport](#) in Munaung for military purposes. According to local sources, the authorities were constructing perimeter walls and carrying out other improvements to enable transport aircraft and military helicopters to land at the airport. However, these reports could not be independently verified.

March 2024

(f) Military regime orders urgent collection of conscription lists in Munaung

In early March 2024, the military regime reportedly [instructed](#) ward and village administrators in Munaung Township to submit, within one day, [lists of young people aged 18 to 35](#) from their respective wards and villages.

However, village administrators reportedly [refused to comply](#) with the order. By late March, the military regime reportedly sought to persuade residents to join the military by assuring them that they would [not be deployed to the front lines](#), and would instead serve within their own communities. It subsequently demanded recruits from villages across Munaung Township.

In April, some village administrators reportedly went into [hiding](#) rather than provide lists of potential recruits. The military regime's conscription-related activities heightened concerns among young people and their families. One young man in his twenties reportedly [drowned while attempting to flee](#) due to fears of being conscripted.

(g) Social activists in Munaung accused of having links to the AA and placed on watchlists

In March 2024, social activists and local residents from several villages in Munaung Township were reportedly [placed on watchlists](#) at the Munaung Myoma Police Station, under the military regime, after being accused of having links to the Arakan Army (AA). An unnamed social activist told Narinjara News that those listed feared arrest.

The activist said that four people from their village had reportedly been placed on the police station's list. According to the source, none of those listed were AA members or had received military training. The source alleged that merely reading reports about the fighting and discussing the situation with family members at home had led authorities to label them as affiliated with the AA.

(h) Phone Shop owner in Munaung sentenced to three years in prison after being accused of supporting the PDF

A phone shop owner from Munaung was reportedly sentenced to 3 years in [prison under Section 505\(a\)](#) for allegedly supporting the People's Defence Force (PDF). Ko Sithu Aung, also known as U Khaung Phyu, the owner of Megha Thitsa Phone Shop, was reportedly sentenced on 29 March under Section 505(a) after being accused on social media of providing support to the PDF. Residents described the sentence as unjust.

(i) Military regime expands troop deployments and establishes additional positions in Munaung

Despite the absence of armed clashes in Munaung Township, the military regime reportedly deployed additional troops and established military positions at the Munaung Township Hall and in Kha Ohn Maw Village.

A Munaung resident told Narinjara News that around 100 soldiers were transported to the township by landing craft on 19 March. Some of the soldiers reportedly took up positions at the township hall, while others were reportedly deployed in Kha Ohn Maw village near the solar power plant.

The military regime reportedly expanded its [troop presence and established additional military positions](#) in urban wards and several villages across Munaung Township. Local residents also reported increased checks of guest lists and household registration records, the establishment of observation posts, and expanded military preparations in villages.

April 2024

(j) Military regime pressures Munaung residents to sign statements opposing the Arakan Army

Military regime personnel reportedly entered Thit Pon Village in Munaung Township and convened a meeting with residents. Residents were allegedly [forced to sign](#) documents stating their opposition to the Arakan Army (AA), including providing their names, national registration numbers, and residential addresses. In addition, on 18 April, military regime personnel reportedly ordered around 400 households in the village to relocate to villages approximately 10 miles to the north by 25 April, accusing them of supporting the AA. However, on 23 April, residents were reportedly [required to sign pledges](#) stating that “they would no longer oppose the military regime”, after which they were permitted to remain in the village.

July 2024

(k) Health crisis in Munaung worsens due to severe medicine shortages

Due to the military regime's restrictions on maritime transportation and the movement of goods, Munaung Township reportedly faced severe shortages of medicines, leaving more than 57,000 people, [estimated at around 60,000](#), facing difficulties accessing healthcare services.

At the township public hospital, most doctors and healthcare workers had reportedly fled, leaving only one assistant doctor and a small number of healthcare staff. Medicine supplies were also reportedly depleted. As a result, patients with chronic illnesses and those requiring emergency care reportedly died without receiving adequate treatment.

Previously, emergency patients could be referred to hospitals in Thandwe and Taungup for further treatment. However, such referrals were reportedly no longer possible due to the blockade of maritime routes, further worsening the health and humanitarian situation of local communities.

August 2024

(l) Security and livelihood concerns rise in Munaung amid military regime operations and landmine contamination

Beginning in the final week of July 2024, the military regime reportedly conducted [military patrols and operations](#) across approximately 15 villages in Munaung Township, moving from one village to another and temporarily occupying monasteries, schools, civilian residential areas, and public buildings. The military columns reportedly sought to persuade local residents to join the military and questioned them about whether members of the Arakan Army (AA) had entered the area. Although no armed clashes had taken place, these activities reportedly heightened security concerns among local communities.

In addition, local residents reported that military vessels and armed speedboats had been deployed along the [waterways between Ramree and Munaung](#), while additional observation posts were established along the Mye Ni Taung area and landmines were reportedly laid. [Landmines](#) were reportedly planted in farmland, along coastal areas, and in locations where local residents traditionally collected shellfish near villages surrounding naval bases. Warning signs indicating the presence of landmines were also reportedly installed.

September 2024

(m) Medicine shortages leave patients with chronic illnesses facing a health crisis in Munaung

In September 2024, the military regime reportedly tightened restrictions on the transportation of

medicines into Munaung Township, leaving patients with heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic conditions without adequate access to essential medication and facing a growing health crisis.

The township public hospital also reportedly faced [shortages of medicines and healthcare personnel](#). Emergency patients seeking treatment outside the township encountered restrictions on travel, security concerns, and financial difficulties. Local residents and medical workers warned that medicine shortages had reportedly contributed to deaths among some patients with chronic illnesses, pregnant women, and emergency patients.

Following the fall of Thandwe, the military regime reportedly began strengthening Munaung as a defensive position and tightened security measures, further worsening the humanitarian situation in the township.

February 2025

(n) Livelihoods and food security deteriorate in Munaung due to strict restrictions on fishing

In February 2025, after the military regime increased security measures in Rakhine townships that remained outside the control of the Arakan Army (AA), it reportedly imposed a complete [ban on offshore fishing](#) in Munaung Township.

Approximately 75 % of local residents reportedly depend on fishing for their livelihoods. The ban therefore resulted in a significant loss of income and left many households facing worsening difficulties in meeting their basic needs. Declining incomes, combined with rising prices of commodities and medicines, reportedly left some residents unable to afford even basic healthcare. Local residents also reported that trade was largely controlled by individuals close to the military, resulting in exceptionally high commodity prices. At the same time, the military regime reportedly continued efforts to recruit members for local militia forces and maintained firm control over Munaung town through the reinforcement of both naval and ground forces.

March 2025

(o) Residents of two villages in Munaung forcibly relocated to make way for Military camps

In March 2025, the military regime reportedly ordered residents of Nget Pyaung Taw and Ah Nauk Par villages, located near the Hmyaw Taw U naval base in Munaung Township, to [demolish their homes and relocate](#) to make way for the construction of military camps.

Local residents said the villages are situated in strategically important locations that provide access to and control over maritime routes toward the Kyaukphyu area. Residents had reportedly faced similar relocation orders in April 2024. After subsequently returning to their original villages due to livelihood difficulties, they were reportedly ordered to leave again.



Military regime police personnel at Munaung Airport (Photo: Development Media Group)

June 2025

(p) Military regime navy arrests and extorts fishermen in Munaung

In the first week of June, military regime personnel aboard a naval vessel stationed in the waters off Munaung reportedly fired at and arrested five fishing boats carrying local fishermen who depend on fishing for their livelihoods, according to a Munaung resident who spoke to Narinjara News.

Military regime naval vessels reportedly threatened and fired at local fishermen who ventured out to sea, before detaining and questioning them. The authorities reportedly demanded more than MMK 1 million from each detained fisherman as [extortion](#).

October 2025

(q) Rakhine Nationalities Party (RNP) opens offices in Munaung

[The Rakhine Nationalities Party \(RNP\)](#), led by U Ba Shein, was reportedly preparing to contest the election to be organized by the military-appointed election commission. The party reportedly opened offices in Kha Ei Village, Kuntang, and other villages in Munaung Township.

(r) Phoneline services restored ahead of the election remain unavailable in rural areas

As the election approached, the military-appointed election commission reportedly restored mobile phone services in Munaung town. However, the service was reportedly available only within the urban wards and areas extending approximately two miles from the town, while mobile services [remained unavailable](#) in rural villages.

(s) Pregnant women and children face severe gaps in healthcare services

At the 500-bed public hospital in Munaung town, antenatal care, childhood immunization, and emergency obstetric services reportedly remained severely limited due to [shortages of medicines, medical supplies, and specialist doctors](#). Local residents and healthcare workers also reported that government-supplied medicines for maternal and child healthcare had been unavailable for several years.

December 2025**(t) Security tightened in Munaung following shooting death of Captain assigned to polling station security**

On the evening of 4 December 2025, a captain from Light Infantry Battalion 34, based in Kyaukphyu, who had reportedly arrived in Munaung, Rakhine State, to provide security for a polling station, was [shot at close range and killed](#).

According to reports, the officer was shot after going outside upon noticing a person or movement nearby and later died after being taken to hospital. Some sources suggested that the incident may have been linked to an internal conflict within the military, although this could not be independently verified. Following the incident, military authorities reportedly increased security measures and patrols throughout Munaung town.

(u) Increased military reinforcements and operations raise security measures in Munaung

Although no armed clashes had taken place in Munaung Township, local residents reported that beginning in late October 2025, the military regime [reinforced its forces](#) in the township by sea, with an estimated 300 personnel deployed. The reinforcements reportedly included newly trained conscripts, who were subsequently sent into villages for military operations. The troops reportedly entered villages, including Thit Pon, Kyaung Laung Kwin, and Naga Mee Taunk, and temporarily stayed in monasteries. They also reportedly encouraged villagers to provide information about anyone suspected of having links to the Arakan Army (AA).

April 2026

(v) Military regime plans to renovate Munaung Airport and resume airline services

In April 2026, the military regime reportedly [planned to renovate](#) Munaung Airport within one month and [resume air services](#) from May. From 24 April, [Yangon–Munaung flights](#) were reportedly scheduled to resume with Myanmar Airways International (MAI), with a ticket price of MMK 630,000 per passenger. Residents from Munaung reportedly assessed that the resumption of air services could be linked not only to local transportation needs but also to the military regime's logistical requirements, including the movement of personnel and supplies.

May 2026

(w) Munaung–Yangon airfares rise to more than twice the officially set price

In May 2026, Munaung–Yangon air tickets were reportedly being sold for as much as MMK 1.5 million, [more than twice](#) the officially set fare of MMK 630,000. The sharp increase was reportedly attributed to limited ticket availability and high demand, creating further difficulties for local residents seeking to travel.

(x) Security increased around Munaung airport as military regime establishes new checkpoint

In May 2026, the military regime reportedly increased security around Sa mon Tayi Airport in Munaung and established [an additional checkpoint](#) nearby. According to local residents, around 20 soldiers and security personnel were deployed at the checkpoint. The checkpoint is reportedly located along a major transportation route on Munaung Island.

(y) Military regime conducts Gyrocopter and Paramotor training flights in Kyaukphyu and Munaung

In late May 2026, the military-appointed authorities reportedly conducted [training flights involving gyrocopters and paramotors](#) in Kyaukphyu and Munaung townships as part of preparations to counter the Arakan Army's offensive. According to local residents and military observers, the training may have formed part of preparations for reconnaissance and combat-related operations during the monsoon season.

June 2026

(z) Munaung town receives only one hour and 15 minutes of electricity per day

Munaung Town, which remains under the administration of the military regime, reportedly receives electricity for only [one hour and 15 minutes per day](#) on a rotating basis among different

urban wards. Electricity distribution has reportedly been restricted due to battery failures at the solar-powered electricity plant. The military regime has stated that the batteries will be replaced during the 2026–2027 fiscal year.

3. Findings

1. Following the Arakan Army's expansion of control over most townships in Rakhine State after November 2023, the military regime continued to expand its troop presence, security measures, and military infrastructure in Munaung Township. Although no fighting has taken place in the township, Munaung has increasingly become a more significant military area.

2. The expansion and establishment of additional checkpoints, military patrols and operations, the laying of landmines, and pressure on residents for military conscription, as well as threats against those suspected of having links with the AA or other resistance groups, have increasingly restricted the freedom of movement and daily activities of local communities. Security measures and movement restrictions have consequently intensified.

3. Livelihoods have been significantly affected by restrictions on fishing activities, the arrest and extortion of fishermen, and the presence of landmines near farmland and along coastal areas. Restrictions on the transportation of goods have further reduced major sources of income, making it increasingly difficult for local communities to meet their basic needs. Shortages of medicines and inadequate access to basic healthcare services, particularly insufficient healthcare for pregnant women and children, have increased health risks among the population. The restoration of MPT mobile phone services, along with increased security measures, has also emerged as notable political and administrative developments during periods of election preparations.

4. The continued limited availability of basic services, including electricity provided only for restricted hours, constrained telecommunications services, and the high cost of air travel despite the resumption of flights, continues to affect the daily lives of residents negatively. At the same time, military and transport infrastructure has been further developed, including the renovation of the airport, the resumption of air services, and strengthened airport security. Training flights involving gyrocopters and paramotors have also reportedly been expanded.

4. Analysis

Munaung Township has remained one of the island areas still under the control of the military regime since November 2023, as the Arakan Army (AA) expanded its control over most townships in Rakhine State. It is also one of the few areas in Rakhine State where no armed clashes have taken place to date. However, the absence of fighting does not necessarily indicate that local communities enjoy security or socioeconomic stability. Due to Munaung's geographical characteristics as an island and the military regime's restrictions on the movement of people and the transportation of goods and medicines, humanitarian difficulties have persisted over an extended period.

In particular, Manaung is an isolated island township with no land borders connecting it to other townships in Rakhine State, making it highly dependent on maritime transportation. As these routes have been tightly controlled by the military regime, access to medicines, food, and basic commodities has declined, while health services have continued to deteriorate. The lack of access to basic healthcare for pregnant women, newborns, and people with chronic illnesses reflects a humanitarian crisis arising not from armed conflict itself, but from deliberate restrictions and controls imposed on the movement and supply of essential goods.

The telecommunications sector has also placed Munaung in a different situation from areas under AA control. Although the military regime announced plans to restore MPT mobile services, prolonged communication disruptions and geographic restrictions have severely affected local communities' access to economic activities, healthcare, and information. While civil society organizations and residents in some AA-controlled areas have been able to use alternative communication methods, including satellite internet services such as Starlink, access to such alternatives in Munaung has reportedly remained unavailable due to the military regime's direct control. This has further deepened the township's digital isolation. Such restrictions have had significant implications for access to emergency healthcare, humanitarian coordination, and economic activities.

At the same time, although no fighting has taken place in Munaung township to date, the military regime has continuously expanded its military presence since late 2025, including increasing troop deployments, reopening the airport, establishing additional checkpoints, conducting training and operations involving gyrocopters and paramotors, and increasing nighttime patrols and security measures. These activities can be assessed as indicating efforts to safeguard Munaung Island's strategic importance and strengthen defensive preparations for potential future military operations, rather than merely responding to an immediate military threat from the AA. In particular, as military pressure between the AA and regime forces continues to increase in areas such as Kyaukphyu, the military regime appears to be seeking to further utilize Munaung as a logistical support and rear-area defensive base.

In addition, although the renovation of the airport and the resumption of air services have been presented as measures intended to improve transportation for residents, most residents have been unable to benefit substantially from these services due to exceptionally high ticket prices and continued restrictions on travel. Consequently, the resumption of these infrastructure and transport services appears to serve military and administrative objectives more than the needs of the local population.

Overall, Munaung should not be regarded as a "stable area" simply because there has been no active armed conflict. Rather, it has increasingly developed into a militarized island under tight control. While military preparations and security measures have intensified, local communities continue to face declining freedom of movement, restricted communications, deteriorating access to healthcare, and worsening livelihood conditions. Although Munaung has not yet experienced direct armed conflict, it is likely to remain an area where long-term humanitarian and protection concerns coexist with increasing military and administrative controls.

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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