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Struggling to Survive: The Human Cost of Conflict and Natural Disasters in Arakan

Monitoring of a brief situation of political tension, economic issues, social issues, and humanitarian issues in Arakan in July 2024.



Photo/Credit-Western News

Key Remarks

- The armed clashes in Arakan continued to increase, especially in Maungdaw town and Thandwe township. On the other hand, local residents in urban Sittwe faced a constant threat of arrest and violence from the junta authorities. Although the AA has captured the town of Buthidaung and besieged Maungdaw, observers are noting a surge in ARSA violence against civilians in these two townships.
- The farming community in Arakan is facing challenges related to various agricultural inputs such as fuel, fertilizer, rice seeds, machines, and labor. Various sources have reported a decline in agricultural plantation rates and outputs. The Central Youth Lai Association (CYLA) in Mizoram has continued to aggressively block exports of oil, medicines, and fertilizers into Arakan. Several Rakhine merchants have faced harassment and attacks from this organization, including the loss of their property.
- The IDP population has increased in the townships of Maungdaw, Thandwe, and Gwa, while the local population in AA-controlled areas faces a constant threat of airstrikes. Additionally, while the junta has relaxed restrictions on Rakhines traveling to Yangon, it has imposed strict restrictions on returns from Yangon and Mandalay. Flooding in many townships of Arakan has led to rising challenges for the socio-economic livelihood of the people.
- The humanitarian challenges in Arakan demand improved transborder assistance, especially from India and Bangladesh. Humanitarian organizations and workers also face significant barriers, such as lack of internet, phone communication, and banking systems for transferring money. The number of IDPs in Arakan has increased to nearly 600,000, but only 20 percent of them have received an adequate level of humanitarian assistance.

Political Affairs

During the first week of July, a landmine blast killed a villager in Gwa township on July 1. On the same day, the SAC fired artillery shells into nearby villages in Sittwe township due to suspicions of an AA advance. On July 2, the junta's election commission rejected the registration of the Arakan National Party (ANP), and later that day, [a junta airstrike on a Thandwe Township](#) village injured five locals.

The following day, the junta charged [40 Sittwe residents with unlawful association](#), and the battle for control of Thandwe continued to intensify. As of July 5, the AA ramped up attacks on military outposts in Ann Township. Additionally, a Buddhist monk and two IDPs were injured in a junta airstrike on a village monastery in Taungup Township. The AA's battle for control of Maungdaw also continued.

In the second week, on July 7, a man in Minbya township was killed in a landmine blast. Two days later, it was reported that [the regime had detained at least 700 Sittwe residents over the past two months](#). On July 10, two civilians were killed and three others injured by junta attacks in Thandwe and Kyaukphyu. On the same day, the military airlifted reinforcements to the strategic Ann Township. The following day, the AA completely occupied the Myanmar Junta's 55th Infantry Regiment in Thandwe. On July 12, the junta set fire to homes in a Maungdaw Township village, and shelling killed a Muslim university student and injured five others in Maungdaw. Three days later, [over 200 junta soldiers retreated](#) from Maungdaw's Kanyin Chaung Economic Zone.

"We saw some homes that were destroyed in the junta airstrike. We don't know exactly the extent of the damage. No one remains in the village; all villagers have fled to safer locations since the fighting broke out in the area," said a Muslim man in Maungdaw.

In the third week, on July 16, the regime conscripted 300 displaced Muslims in Sittwe. One day later, the Communist Party of China (CPC) invited four Myanmar political parties to China.

On July 18, the junta prepared defenses in Taungup, according to locals, and on the same day, Thandwe residents expressed concern over missing relatives. On July 20, the AA shot artillery shells into the compound of Ann's headquarters. As of July 22, the AA vowed a 'befitting' response after seven IDPs were found dead in Buthidaung Township. The following day, [a regime artillery attack killed one civilian and injured another](#) in a Thandwe Township village. On July 24, the regime set up outposts to defend the Ann-based Western Command against the AA onslaught. Later, on July 30, [the junta threatened actions against civil servants](#) who did not report for duty in Arakan State. The next day, hundreds of BGF troops fled from their base in Maungdaw Township. On the same day, a female school teacher and four others [were killed, and two others were injured](#) in an ARSA shooting in Maungdaw.

"It rained heavily, and we didn't hear any gunshots because the area is quite far from us. Later, we learned that ARSA rebels shot at a truck carrying goods near Kyee Kan Pyin (south) village," said a local resident.

Economic Situations

Regarding economic news for July, it was reported that on July 4, there was a scarcity of fertilizers, forcing farmers to use alternative substances. The following day, [losses mounted as Arakan merchants remained](#) stranded in Mizoram. "Merchants are at a loss. We trade during this difficult period not because we have extra money, but simply to make a living. We will suffer huge losses if we can't bring back those goods," said one merchant from Ponnagyun Township.

The next day, it was reported that rice harvests were expected to decline in Arakan State. As of July 9, members of the Central Youth Lai Association (CYLA) [destroyed fuel and goods belonging to Arakan merchants stuck in India](#).

One Arakan State merchant stranded in Mizoram said: "CYLA members destroyed 50 barrels of fuel bought by Arakan merchants on June 27 in Thitpokeche Village in Lawngtlai. They incinerated around 10 barrels and dumped 40 others into a creek."

On July 11, it was reported that cash shortages in Arakan worsened as fighting intensified. On the same day, the junta and Indian officials discussed the continued implementation of the stalled Kaladan transport project. As of July 17, it was [reported that local fruit sales were a rare bright spot](#) for agriculture in Arakan State. "During this difficult time, we have to sell seasonal fruits from our farms to support our families. We address livelihood hardships by selling seasonal fruits," said a fruit grower in the Laymyo Chaung area of Mrauk-U Township.

On the same day, the Indian court also banned fuel exports from Arakan State. Then, on July 23, India reopened the Mizoram-Paletwa route, but the ban on fuel, medicines, and fertilizers remained. "Though India has resumed trade, it still bans the export of pharmaceuticals, fuel, and fertilizer. All three items are vital, so India should not impose a total ban but should at least allow exports with a quota," [said a business owner in the state](#).

Finally, on July 29, farmers in Arakan struggled to access farmland amidst ongoing armed conflict. A farmer from Arakan [said](#), "Not only are we unable to plow the fields, but we also have no houses.

If the farmers cannot cultivate the land, food shortages will become a major problem for the people. In the coming years, if farming does not resume, we will all face serious difficulties and potential starvation. Paddy and rice are our main crops and are crucial for our survival."

Social Issues

In July, the people experienced increased hardships due to a series of disastrous incidents. The shortages of medicine and food became more severe, and widespread flooding in most townships of Arakan further exacerbated their vulnerabilities.

Significantly, this month the news reported that the military regime has been carrying out China-backed projects in Kyaukphyu township. For the purpose of transportation for China Patrol Shipping, the ThanZit River has been dug without consulting the residents. Consequently, [the regime has banned travel around Madae Island](#), resulting in livelihood hardships for those dependent on this marine resource.

Meanwhile, arbitrary arrests by the regime's forces have become more frequent. On July 8 and 12, they [investigated and extorted trading ships](#) owned by local people in Manaung and Rambree townships. Furthermore, about 20 people who were transporting [approximately MMK 6 billion for money exchange services](#) from Yangon to Arakan have been arrested by regime forces and have lost contact with their families. Additionally, the freedom of movement has been restricted for people wishing to return to Arakan (Rakhine State) from Yangon. Initially, people returning by flight were arrested, while travel from Rakhine to Yangon was allowed. Consequently, [people are using informal routes to return to Rakhine](#), with some being arrested and extorted by regime forces along the way.

Since July 25, news coverage has been dominated by reports of flooding until the end of the month. The floods, caused by heavy rains, affected Taunggok, Thandwe, and Gwa—areas already severely impacted by armed conflicts and widespread displacement. On the morning of July 27, [amid heavy fighting](#), the Kywe-O Bridge near Thandwe Town collapsed, resulting in the deaths of seven internally displaced persons (IDPs) as they attempted to cross from Jeittaw Ward, according to a resident of Thandwe.

The flooding, combined with the displacement of people in most townships in Arakan, has significantly increased the need for relief assistance, including food, shelter, and medicine, exacerbating the already severe shortages [caused by the blockade of transportation routes](#). "We can't buy medicine. Chronic patients have been without medicine for about two months," said a resident of Manaung on July 31, according to local news.

"Mosquitoes have increased more than last year. Most children now have the flu. I am worried because these diseases can also be fatal," said [a Muslim woman from Paungtoke Village](#) in Mrauk-U Township on July 30, according to the news.

Humanitarian Issues

At this pivotal moment in the Rakhine conflict, the Arakan Army (AA) has secured control over border areas with India and Bangladesh. The people of Rakhine are urgently seeking international humanitarian aid through these borders. They are urging [all international humanitarian organizations](#), including the United Nations, to ensure legal access across these borders for medical care and essential supplies.

Meanwhile, local charities in Arakan State have been compelled to halt their operations as the conflict between Myanmar's military regime and the Arakan Army (AA) has escalated. According

to charity founders, these organizations face significant challenges due to instability, reduced funding from economic turmoil, travel restrictions, and soaring fuel prices.

“Now is the most difficult time for us. With mobile phone and internet access cut off, we don’t know what is needed on the ground. Travel restrictions are also in place. Meanwhile, the cash shortage problem is growing, making it very difficult for us to continue our charity work,” said a member of a charity based in Gwa on July 16, [according to local media](#).

Additionally, “As the banking system is completely at a standstill, residents rely on online payment applications such as KBZ Pay and Wave Money to withdraw money. With cash scarce, withdrawal fees are skyrocketing. It is inconvenient for us to communicate with donors,” said [a member of a charity based in Mrauk-U](#).

On July 25, 2024, junta troops and militia members forcibly entered and looted the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) office in Bohmu Village, located in the Myoma Kanyintan Ward of Maungdaw Township, Arakan (Rakhine) State. According to a security guard from Maungdaw Township, [approximately 70 armed individuals broke into the Red Cross office](#), vandalized the premises, and stole medicine and office supplies. Lastly, in the conflict-affected town of Maungdaw, residents have been displaced, with AA forces assisting them in fleeing the conflict zones. This follows an announcement by an AA spokesperson about [the possibility of armed clashes in the urban areas of Maungdaw](#).

[About the Report](#)

This report is part of the CAS's monthly series, which delves into four key areas of the state of Arakan. The first section addresses political concerns, including the armed revolution, junta activities, and issues of political freedom. The second examines the state's economic climate, focusing on rising prices, declining demand, foreign direct investment, and border trade. The third and fourth sections cover social and humanitarian issues, respectively; these include education, health, migration, and the internally displaced persons (IDP) population.

Key data in the report are sourced from local media outlets, such as DMG, Western News, among others. The aim of this report is to shed new light on the situation for observers endeavoring to comprehend the dynamics at play in the region.

[About Center for Arakan Studies \(CAS\)](#)

The Center is an independent, non-partisan research institution established in December 2021 by a group of young professionals, including journalists, political analysts, researchers, and social workers. The Center aims to promote understanding of human rights, political, economic, and social dynamics in Arakan and related issues within Myanmar and beyond. Through rigorous research and reporting, the Center seeks to address the policy gaps with analysis and recommendations to support democratic change and collective solutions.

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