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Escalating Armed Conflict and Its Toll on Arakan: An October Report

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



An Arakanese resident reads the first issue of 'Arakkadesh'. (Photo: Development Media Group)

Key Remarks

- The politics of Arakan in October were still influenced by armed clashes and civilian casualties. The military offensives of the AA at the end of October began in a new warzone in Taungup, where the junta's Military Operation Command-5 (MOC-5) was stationed. The other three military theaters—Ann, Maungdaw, and Gwa—continued to intensify. Local news sources claimed that another junta command center in Ann was on the verge of falling, following the situation in Lashio, northern Shan state. In response, the junta increased airstrikes against innocent civilians in AA-controlled areas.
- The economic situation in Arakan remained dire. A lack of job opportunities, education, healthcare, and communication had become part of the daily routine. In some cases, local businesses saw opportunities as external imports from Burma and foreign countries were unavailable. One important development was the decline in illegal logging from Arakan Roma, due to the ongoing fighting in Ann and Taungup townships.
- Phone and internet communication blackouts continued in several townships of Arakan, and the availability of electricity in urban areas was minimal. Local transportation and trade remained difficult. The junta also imposed increased restrictions on the airports in Kyaukphyu and Sittwe, and further tightened control over informal trade between Arakan and other parts of Burma, even arresting its own officials.
- The number of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) continued to rise in new townships like Ann, Taungup, and Gwa. In many cases, IDPs faced severe shortages of food, shelter, and medicine, as humanitarian assistance from both local and international organizations declined. The lack of mobile banking and internet connectivity heavily hindered the transfer of money for humanitarian activities. Civilians in urban areas under the junta's control also faced increasing restrictions.

Political Affairs

The politics of Arakan in October were mainly dominated by the armed clashes between the Myanmar junta and the Arakan Army. On August 3, the Junta Navy and the AA engaged in a firefight in Kyaukphyu. Three days later, the AA launched an assault on the military's Ann-based Western Command, followed by intense fighting near Ann Town. On October 12, the AA launched a fierce offensive against NaKhaKha-5 in Maungdaw. Two days later, junta-AA clashes intensified in Gwa Township. On October 15, the conflict escalated as the junta defended its last remaining position in Maungdaw, while the AA ramped up its assault on the last standing regime battalion in the area. Fighting continued to intensify despite the junta's airstrikes on five villages near Ann. On October 20, the AA attacked the Ohn Kyi Kyun Naval Base near Dhanyawadi Base in Kyaukphyu.

On October 27, the AA made [its final push to capture NaKhaKha-5 Base](#) in Maungdaw. Two days later, the AA stepped up its attacks on junta positions in Ann Township. On October 31, [residents reported heavy clashes as the AA launched](#) a campaign to capture Taungup town.

"We heard from people coming into town that AA fighters attacked Pan Myauk Mountain. They said planes were flying overhead and dropping bombs, while artillery fired all day. It stopped briefly around noon," a woman said.

Concerning the activities of the junta, on October 1, 2024, [the junta-controlled five Arakanese towns began a census program](#). The next day, around 20 junta soldiers were killed when a Y-12 aircraft hit the wrong target near NaKhaKha-5 in Maungdaw. On October 4, regime airstrikes on a village in Taungup Township killed four civilians and injured seven. Three days later, it was reported that the junta had dug trenches along the roads to Sittwe. Thirteen bodies, including that of a child, were recovered after the junta's airstrikes on Tan Lwe Ywar Ma town. On October 9, the regime transferred about 400 prisoners from Sittwe to Pathein. The following day, near Bangladesh's St. Martin Island, the Myanmar Junta Navy opened fire, killing one fisherman and injuring two others. Two days later, four people were killed, and 16 were injured when junta airstrikes targeted residential wards in Kyauktaw Town.

On October 12, [the regime was accused of using cluster bombs](#) in Arakan State. On October 15, it was reported that the regime flexed its military muscle on the Ayeyarwady-Arakan border as the AA closed in. Two days later, the SAC's staff faced difficulties as all departments except education were forced to attend the office amid intense fighting in Ann Town.

On October 21, [the junta airdropped weapons and supplies](#) to No (5) Border Police Headquarters in Maungdaw. Two days later, the military hospital in Ann was relocated due to the AA offensive. On October 26, it was reported that Arakanese residents under junta-controlled areas faced extortion. Then, conscripts from central Myanmar suffered heavy losses on the Arakan Front. On October 30, the military airlifted food to the last-standing battalion in besieged Maungdaw. On the same day, five people were killed, and five were injured in regime airstrikes on villages in Taungup Township. The following day, a monk was injured in a junta airstrike on a village in Thandwe Township.

[Other important political news in Arakan](#) includes an October 7 ARSA ambush in Maungdaw Township, in which one woman was killed and four others were injured. The next day, the AA reported that a member of the Department of Law Enforcement and Public Security (DLEPS) was killed in an ARSA ambush. On October 11, [the beheaded bodies of two Buthidaung residents were recovered](#). One week later, five Muslim refugees were injured in an ARSA-RSO shootout at a Bangladesh refugee camp. On October 27, the ANP held an NCA experience briefing in Yangon.

Economic Situations

Similar to previous months, the dire economic situation in Arakan continued. On October 2, it was reported that India tried to ensure the continued operation of the Sittwe-India port, which had been halted due to ongoing fighting. The next day, bleak market conditions left farmers asking for ULA/AA intervention. On October 4, the traditional pottery business in Arakan State rebounded amid ongoing fighting. It was also reported that border trade with Bangladesh had halted at the military-controlled Sittwe and Maungdaw stations as the war escalated. At the same time, hundreds of Myanmar nationals were arrested in Malaysia amid a crackdown on migrant workers. The following day, [food prices soared in Gwa due to the junta blockade](#).

A female resident said, "Even if you can afford to pay high prices, you may not be able to buy it. Only one pharmacy was open in Gwa Town in September, but it has since closed. We can't buy medicine even for an ordinary fever."

On October 11, an Arakanese woman in Bangladesh was recognized as the 'Outstanding Woman in Business 2023.' Five days later, it was reported that there was no end in sight to the rising prices in Arakan State.

On October 17, the bamboo market experienced a downturn due to the conflict in Arakan State. The following day, clay pots made in Arakan State fetched good prices. On October 19, [illegal logging in the Arakan mountains halted](#) due to ongoing fighting. On the same day, tobacco farmers in Rambree Township benefited from the junta blockades. On October 20, winter crop farmers in Arakan faced numerous challenges.

On October 24, the AA ordered the acceptance of worn banknotes for transactions. The next day, it was noted that enforcing unregulated fuel sales in Arakan State was necessary. On October 29, it was reported that foreign firms maintained joint ventures with the military in conflict-ridden Arakan. "Large tankers come and go every few days. When they're here, we can't fish. Each time, it takes at least an hour or two. There's no fixed schedule for their movements, so we're struggling. For the next couple of months, they'll also be doing waterway work, which will make things even tougher for fishermen," explained a fishing industry worker from the Maday Island area, Kyaukphyu.

The following day, it was mentioned that crickets provided a temporary source of livelihood in Arakan.

Social Issues

The social news in Arakan was mainly dominated by livelihood difficulties, transportation challenges, and shortages of food and medicine. To start with the livelihood issues, on October 5, it was reported that fishing trawlers were plying waters off Kyaukphyu amid a ban on local fishermen. The next day, over 200 nuns in Sittwe faced hardships due to a lack of support amid fighting in Arakan. Then, on October 7, the hardships of war increasingly led Arakan IDPs to panhandle for survival. Three days later, the lack of jobs added to the torment of the local Rakhine population during the prolonged fighting. On October 23, IDP women engaged in manual labor to feed their families. Three days later, [it was reported that displaced](#) Mro people were going hungry in Maungdaw Township.

One displaced Mro woman said, "We still can't return home. We have no jobs here, and we are going hungry." One displaced man from Thiho Aye Village said, "We can eat on days when we are employed for casual jobs in nearby villages. When we are not employed, we have nothing to eat."

Regarding the telecommunications sector, it was reported that on October 15, [the junta cut off phone and internet services across Arakan State](#), except in three townships: Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Manaung. The next day, misinformation spread throughout Arakan State amid the communications blackout. On October 24, it was reported that at least four townships in Arakan faced communication blackouts.

The news regarding transportation challenges is also serious. On October 1, [three members of a Paletwa family were murdered while transporting commodities](#).

"On September 8, they started transporting food and fuel from Mizoram in a boat to deliver to Kyauktaw. They were killed along the way. Their bodies were recovered with severe injuries near Paletwa on September 17 and 18," said a resident of Paletwa.

Two days later, traders were on edge after three people were murdered on the Kaladan River. On October 7, the junta forces destroyed a bridge in Gwa before retreating. Three days later, four Kyaukphyu residents were arrested for attempting to carry foodstuffs. The junta tightened security measures at the airports of Kyaukphyu and Sittwe. On October 13, it was also reported that Muslim armed groups in Maungdaw posed a threat to local transportation. On October 31, [it was reported that the junta seized trucks transporting goods to Arakan State](#) and even arrested high-ranking officers for taking bribes.

"Recently, seven vehicles destined for the Arakan region were seized in Einme, which is connected to Wakema near the Arakan borders. The increasing military inspections have restricted supplies to Arakan State. The junta's Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI) is also involved in the inspections," said a female resident of Wakema town.

Humanitarian Issues

On October 2, it was reported that residents left Kan Htaung Gyi town, Myebone, after four airstrikes hit the area in the past seven months. Then, on October 4, as civilian casualties rose, so did the unmet need for aid to war-maimed victims. The next day, thousands of IDPs in Ann faced hardships due to a lack of assistance. Following this, the junta ordered the evacuation of seven villages in Ann, and residents began leaving.

As of mid-October, hundreds of IDPs were trapped at military checkpoints as fighting escalated in Gwa. The conflict-ridden Ma Gyi Ngu village in Gwa was then deserted by residents due to fishing restrictions. On October 21, more residents fled Gwa amid escalating hostilities. One day later, landmine risks discouraged many from returning home in Arakan and Chin states. [IDPs in Maungdaw Township also found safety](#) and stability elusive.

"IDPs are taking shelter in some villages. As the regime is attacking the villages where the IDPs live, they have to move from village to village and are facing many difficulties," said an IDP in the township. On October 23, the junta planned the demolition of 60 houses in Sittwe's Nazi Village for police station security. The next day, Arakan State IDPs were reported to be in need of warm clothes and blankets. At the same time, aid further declined for Arakan IDPs as mobile wallets were affected by a telecom blackout. On October 26, Muslim IDPs in Arakan State faced livelihood difficulties after eight months without WFP food aid. The following day, [the urgent need for winter gear grew](#) among displaced people in Arakan State as cold weather approached.

"It's already cold, even though winter has just started. Most displaced people don't have warm clothes, and there aren't enough blankets. Some displaced children are getting sick because they don't have blankets. If they don't get blankets and warm clothes soon, they might get really sick as it gets colder. The grown-ups are cold too, but they've given the thin blankets they brought to their kids, leaving themselves with nothing," said a woman who fled from Ga Nan Taung village in Ponnagyun Township.

[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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