

Monthly Arakan Review

CENTER FOR ARAKAN STUDIES

N0.39. January. 2026

Battle for Rakhine's Last Strongholds: Arakan Army Offensives, Sham Elections, and Civilian Hardships in Sittwe-Kyaukphyu

*Monitoring of a brief situation of political tension, economic, social, and humanitarian
issues in Arakan in January 2026.*



Photo Credit to One Nation News (The Islamic religious award ceremony was held in Mrauk-U on January 31, 2026)



Executive Summary

- ❖ The Arakan Army pressed offensives toward Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, capturing outposts, inflicting junta casualties/desertions, and enforcing local governance (drugs, traffic, health, security rules). Junta responded with airstrikes, artillery, and blockades. Border clashes with ARSA escalated near Bangladesh. Junta's "sham" election gave USDP wins in limited pockets amid fraud, low turnout, and international rejection. ICJ hearings on the Rohingya genocide advanced with survivor testimonies and arguments on atrocities/citizenship.
- ❖ Agriculture showed mixed outcomes, including strong paddy/betel yields but low prices, high costs, and conflict-related disruptions (e.g., watermelon, Thazin flowers, salt/brickmaking declines). Fishing was hindered by blockades and resource scarcity. Bangladesh trade disrupted by smuggling arrests. The Kyaukphyu deep-sea port project progressed despite 6+ billion kyats in compensation and a Chinese security deployment, raising local concerns.
- ❖ AA/ULA prioritized civilian services in controlled areas: opened a medical school, conducted child vaccinations (especially in Paletwa), and received donations to address shortages. Health challenges persisted, with rising cases of pneumonia and flu among children and skin diseases among displaced people in Rathedaung. Religious tolerance is evident in events/condolences across faiths, including Christianity and Islam. Plastic waste poses growing environmental risks. Youth education and prospects remained uncertain amid conflict. Overall, AA efforts focused on building social stability and public services despite war-related pressures.
- ❖ Intense junta airstrikes, artillery, drones, and blockades caused mass displacement (two-thirds of Kyaukphyu by Jan 6, thousands near Sittwe on Jan 30), forcing civilians into bomb shelters or flight. Civilian casualties mounted from shelling, drones, landmines/ERW (dozens killed/injured, including children/infants). IDPs faced acute water shortages, severe cold, health risks, and livelihood collapse (e.g., begging). The regime detained hundreds of Muslims in Sittwe; AA assisted some evacuations (e.g., Maungdaw Muslims from ARSA threats). Charities provided emergency relief (food, clothing, wells, and psychosocial support for children) but needs remained critical and did not de-escalate.

A. Politics: Three Key Highlights

1. 1-Jan-26 to mid-Jan-26: Intensified junta airstrikes and AA advances

Junta (SSPC) carried out repeated airstrikes and artillery on Arakan areas (Sittwe, Thandwe, Kyaukphyu, etc.), targeting AA positions and civilians. AA countered with drone/heavy attacks (e.g., Dhanyawaddy Naval Base on Jan 7), [outpost captures](#) near Sittwe (Jan 9), and territorial pushes, causing junta casualties and desertions.

2. 12-Jan-26 to 30-Jan-26: ICJ hearings on Rohingya genocide case

ICJ in The Hague held oral hearings on Gambia's case against Myanmar for the Rohingya genocide. Key moments: Gambia's arguments and survivor testimonies, Myanmar's denials (blaming lower-level actions/ARSA), and [debates on citizenship/reparations](#). Hearings linked to ongoing Rakhine border clashes.

3. Early to late January 2026: Junta's "sham" election results

Junta's phased election saw USDP claim wins in limited Rakhine pockets (Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, Manaung) amid low turnout, fraud claims, and exclusion of AA areas. Results favored military allies; faced ASEAN/UN [non-recognition and criticism](#).

General Overview

In January 2026, Arakan saw intense fighting as the Arakan Army (AA/ULA) pressed offensives toward Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, capturing outposts, inflicting heavy junta casualties, and prompting soldier desertions, while consolidating governance in controlled areas through regulations on drugs, traffic, health, and security alerts. The junta responded with frequent airstrikes, artillery shelling, fishing/travel blockades, and fortifications, worsening civilian hardship and displacement. Border clashes with ARSA militants escalated near Bangladesh, involving gunfire, arrests, and security measures. The junta's phased "sham" election delivered USDP victories in limited pockets (Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, Manaung) amid low turnout, exclusions of AA territories, fraud claims, and near-universal international non-recognition. Simultaneously, the ICJ in The Hague held critical hearings on the Rohingya genocide case, featuring survivor testimonies and arguments over atrocities, citizenship, and reparations. Overall, the month highlighted deepening AA territorial and administrative control, junta repression and isolation, ongoing ethnic tensions, and severe civilian suffering.

B. Economic Fall down: Three Key Highlights

1. 3-Jan-26 to mid-Jan-26: Mixed agriculture outcomes amid challenges

Farmers in Arakan harvested winter crops (e.g., paddy) with good yields and prices in some areas, but many faced hardships: low paddy prices led to financial struggles (January 5), watermelon farmers hit by [low demand and rising costs](#) (January 6), Thazin flower cultivation threatened by fighting/disasters (January 14), and brickmaking/salt farming declined due to low demand, high costs, and market issues (late January). AA-controlled areas saw efforts to promote natural fertilizers and address supply problems.

2. 5-Jan-26 to 19-Jan-26: Border trade disruptions and arrests

Cross-border trade with Bangladesh faced repeated crackdowns: Bangladesh authorities arrested traders smuggling cement/diesel (18 on January 5, 11 on January 19) and [goods intended](#) for Arakan (January 15), and apprehended locals with arms near the border (January 16). Fishermen and water resource users struggled with declining resources, junta blockades, and security threats, affecting fishing across multiple townships.

3. 10-Jan-26 to 13-Jan-26: Chinese deep-sea port project compensation and security

Compensation exceeding 6 billion kyats was allocated for farmland used in reservoirs for the China-backed Kyaukphyu deep-sea port project (January 10), but locals [reported incomplete payments](#) (January 12).



Hundreds of Chinese security personnel were deployed in Kyaukphyu to protect related projects (January 13), highlighting FDI tensions amid local concerns.

General Overview

In January 2026, Arakan's economy showed a mix of resilience and strain: agriculture had strong yields/prices for some crops (paddy, betel leaf, Thai durian) but suffered from low demand, high costs, market shortages, and conflict disruptions (e.g., Thazin flowers, brickmaking, salt farming). Fishing and water-based livelihoods declined due to resource scarcity, junta blockades, and security issues. Cross-border trade with Bangladesh was severely disrupted by the arrests of traders/smugglers (cement, diesel, goods), while the Kyaukphyu Chinese deep-sea port project advanced amid massive farmland compensation and heavy Chinese security deployment, raising local concerns about incomplete payouts and sovereignty. AA-controlled areas focused on local production support (natural fertilizers, market access hopes) amid broader economic pressures from war, blockades, and rising commodity costs (gold, timber, airfare). Overall, the month reflected civilian economic hardship, border frictions, and foreign investment dynamics in a conflict-affected region.

C. Social Crisis: Three Key Highlights

1. 7-Jan-26 to 16-Jan-26: Healthcare initiatives and vaccination efforts

In AA-controlled areas, child vaccinations [remained insufficient](#) (January 7), prompting appeals and donations (e.g., Saw Mae Kyi Foundation donated K1 million to the ULA health department on January 7). ULA opened [a medical school](#) to strengthen local healthcare (January 12). In Paletwa, children under 5 received vaccinations from the Arakan government (January 16).

2. 22-Jan-26 to 29-Jan-26: Rising health concerns in vulnerable groups

Children across Arakan faced increasing [pneumonia and flu cases](#) (January 22). Skin diseases spread among displaced communities in Rathedaung Township (January 29), highlighting ongoing public health challenges amid displacement and conflict.

3. 12-Jan-26 to 31-Jan-26: Religion, and environmental developments

Religious events included ULA condolences for a Christian leader's passing in Paletwa (January 13) and an Islamic [charity/award ceremony](#) in AA areas (January 31), showing tolerance for religious activities. Environmental risks increased due to indiscriminate plastic waste disposal (January 24). Youth education and future prospects remained uncertain (January 31).

General Overview

In January 2026, the AA/ULA administration prioritized healthcare and education in controlled areas: launching a medical school (January 12), providing child vaccinations (especially in Paletwa), and receiving donations to address shortages. However, public health challenges persisted with rising pneumonia/flu in children (January 22) and skin diseases among displaced people (January 29). Religious tolerance was evident through events and condolences across faiths (Christian, Islamic). Environmental concerns grew from plastic waste risks (January 24). Youth education faced ongoing uncertainty amid conflict. Overall, the month reflected AA efforts to build civilian services and social stability in governed territories despite war-related health, displacement, and environmental pressures.

D. Humanitarian Issue: Three Key Highlights

1. 1-Jan-26 to 6-Jan-26: Mass civilian displacement from intense fighting

Junta airstrikes and shelling triggered widespread displacement across Rakhine (January 1), with civilians in Thandwe sleeping in bomb shelters (January 2) and Manaung residents severely affected by blockades (January 3). AA assisted in relocating displaced Muslims in Maungdaw due [to ARSA threats](#) (January 3). By January 6, two-thirds of Kyaukphyu residents fled fighting near the city, exacerbating humanitarian needs.

2. 6-Jan-26 to 19-Jan-26: Escalating humanitarian needs and civilian casualties in Kyaukphyu

Over 50,000 displaced in Kyaukphyu required emergency aid (January 7), with worsening water shortages (January 14, 19), severe cold affecting IDPs (January 27), and junta artillery/drone strikes killing/injuring civilians (e.g., IDP couple on January 15, 4 killed/9 injured in one week on January 24). [Bodies of missing women](#) were found (January 8), and landmines/ERW killed/injured dozens (2025 stats on January 8). Charities provided aid (e.g., donations for IDPs on January 6, 9, 11, 18, 20).

3. 20-Jan-26 to 31-Jan-26: Ongoing casualties, arrests, and displacement

Junta actions caused further deaths (e.g., 8-year-old boy from ERW on January 20, infant from drone strike on January 27, POWs bombed in AA facility on January 21) and injuries. [Thousands displaced](#) from shelling near Sittwe (January 30) and drone attacks forcing Kyaukphyu villagers to flee (January 31). The regime detained hundreds of Muslims in Sittwe (January 8, 27). Children needed psychosocial support (January 28), and livelihood crises pushed IDPs to beg for food (January 21).

General Overview

In January 2026, Arakan (especially Kyaukphyu, Maungdaw, Ponnagyun, and Sittwe areas) faced a severe humanitarian crisis from junta airstrikes, artillery, drone attacks, and blockades, displacing tens of thousands (e.g., two-thirds of Kyaukphyu by January 6, thousands near Sittwe on January 30) and forcing civilians into bomb shelters or flight. Civilian casualties mounted from shelling, drones, landmines/ERW (dozens killed/injured), and unexploded ordnance, including children and the elderly. IDPs endured water shortages, severe cold, health risks, and livelihood collapse (e.g., begging). The regime detained hundreds of Muslims in Sittwe, while AA assisted some evacuations (e.g., Muslims in Maungdaw). Charities and local groups provided emergency aid (food, clothing, wells) but needs remained acute with no relief in sight amid ongoing conflict.



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 Development Media Group, 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.

Contact: info@arakanstudies.org
www.arakanstudies.org