

# Monthly Arakan Review

Center for Arakan Studies

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## Crisis in Arakan: A Look at April's Challenges

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



*Photo/Credit-BNI*

## Key Remarks

- April marked the fifth month of resumed armed clashes in Arakan. While at least nine towns in central Arakan have been captured by the AA forces, the latter's offensives intensified in the two northernmost townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung, Ann township of central Arakan, and Thandwe township of Southern Arakan. On another front, the junta authorities continued the forced recruitment of Rohingya Muslim residents, especially in the northern townships like Buthiduang and Maungdaw, and many observers warned of the risk of instigating communal violence.
- Economic disaster continued during the month of April. In many cases, the junta authorities raided and seized the medical and essential rice supplies of the local civilian population. Next, the prices of local commodities were skyrocketing while the scarcity of goods and services increased. India halted what little trade regulation across the border with Arakan.
- The largest religious and social festival called 'Thungurn' ended in silence amidst the ongoing armed conflicts in Arakan. Meanwhile, social crimes increased in the junta-held urban areas, especially in big cities like Sittwe and Kyaukphyu. In many cases, civilians who escaped from the town faced incidents of having their things stolen from their houses. Rising temperatures bring health issues for the elderly and young children.
- Humanitarian demand in the region rises, whereas the supply is declining. Humanitarian actors continue to face challenges in operational context due to both security-political and technical factors. Rising temperatures produce the problem of water shortage, and many families are also now facing a hunger crisis, leading to a reduction in rice consumption. On another front, medicine and life-saving materials are insufficient, resulting in existential threats for patients who need serious medical operations.

## Political Affairs

Arakan politics during April were primarily dominated by news related to armed conflicts, including casualties, surrenders, atrocities, displacements, inspections, military exercises, reinforcement, recruitment, and propaganda from the junta council (SAC authority). Additionally, there were inspections, landmine clearance operations, seizures, warnings, and public relations activities from the ULA/AA, along with intense armed clashes between the two-armed parties. Unprecedentedly, the ULA's response to the UN Human Rights Chief's statement was well-reported on local media platforms.

Beginning with the armed clashes between the two sides, the Arakan Army launched assaults on military camps in Ann Township on April 3, 2024. A resident [said to the Narinjara news](#), "Civilian casualties were reported due to artillery shells fired by the junta troops stationed on Tawhein mountain. The regime soldiers fire heavy weapons whenever they clash with the AA. Local people are also afraid of losing their lives."

On the same day, AA also [continued its onslaught](#) against junta battalions in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships. One week later, on April 10, it was reported that the three artillery shells fired by AA fighters [exploded](#) in the western command base in Ann. On that day, marking the 15th anniversary of its founding, the AA chief also [vowed](#) to take full control of Arakan State.

On April 13, the AA [clashed](#) with the military in Thandwe township. Three days later, [Military-AA clashes](#) were also reported on the Minbu-Magway road in the Magway region. As of April 24, the spokesperson of the AA committed to protecting civilians of Buthidaung regardless of their race or religion. Two days later, it was also reported that armed clashes [broke](#) out near a hydropower project in Thandwe township. On April 27, the AA [attempted](#) to seize Buthidaung-based No. 15 Military Operations Command.

Regarding the junta activities, on April 1, they [stepped](#) up the conscription drive in Manaung of southern Arakan. Five days later, the Maungdaw District administrator and some departmental staff deserted. As of April 8, the junta threatened to stop international aid if Sittwe Muslim villagers [refused](#) military recruitment. On April 11, the junta [recruited](#) over 1,000 Muslims in Sittwe and summoned 1,000 more.

“Some of them have already died in fighting in Rathedaung. More than 200 Muslims were trained in each batch. Some were dispatched to guard Palinpyin Village,” said a young Muslim man from Sittwe.

The junta authority in Arakan continued its activities of recruiting local Muslims in addition to other minority groups. In the politics of Arakan during April, AA took issue with the UN human rights chief's Arakan State comments. The AA [described](#) Türk's [comments](#) as biased and lacking in ground conditions and information.

## Economic Situations

The economic issues during April covered commodity shortages, suspension of the banking system, tourism, the rising prices of commodities, migration, economic decline, and foreign direct investments. Concerning the supply and demand of commodities, on April 6, Ann township [faced](#) a rice shortage, and shops limited sales to households.

“We don't know what to do when rice stocks run out. The regime has made sure nothing can be brought into the town,” said a resident of Ann.

Three days later, it was [reported](#) that rice stocks were running out in three Arakan towns: Taunggoke, Kyaukphyu, and Ann. As of April 12, it was said that one pyi of rice cost 10,000 Kyats in Ann, and manual laborers [survived](#) on dry rice. One week later, food prices [continued to soar](#) in Ann Township due to the junta blockade and fighting.

“We have had to reduce our food consumption. We are just managing to survive. We have no job and no income. We can't go to the clinic when we get sick. We are only waiting to die if it goes on like this,” said a woman from Aukywar Village in Ann Township.

Regarding investments, on April 28, it was reported that around 500 Chinese arrived in Kyaukphyu amidst rising armed clashes in the area. The news added that they [shipped](#) directly into Kyaukphyu from China along with 20 machines, food, and other accessories. One day later, it was [mentioned that fighting halted](#) the Tha Htay Chaung hydropower dam construction in Thandwe.

On another front, a news piece on April 13 reported that Arakanese migrants struggled to leave Myanmar in a bid to dodge the draft.

“We can't return to Arakan State. But we have no income here [in Yangon], and we have concerns for our safety because of the conscription law. So, many more [Arakanese people] are trying to work overseas,” [said](#) a male Arakanese in Yangon. Regarding trade, on April 23, it was reported that rice exports from Taunggoke to Burma [continued](#) despite rice scarcity in Arakan. Two days later, another report said that India [halted exports via Paletwa](#).

“We heard that displaced people from Myanmar who have taken shelter in Mizoram are short of basic foodstuffs, and exports to [Myanmar] were therefore suspended. We also heard that the ban was made for the safety of elections in India,” said a merchant from Paletwa Township.

As of April 29, the junta forces started seizing imported medicines in Thandwe. “Now, the military junta has banned importing medicines. This month, all imported drugs were seized, including those ordered from the mainland, by the military battalions. We don't know why medicines are being seized,” said a pharmacy owner in Thandwe.

## Social Issues

The increasing events of human insecurity were observed in April, highlighting crimes, food insecurity, and collapsing healthcare services. While April traditionally welcomes the new year with the traditional Thingyan water festival, Arakan State could not celebrate in the majority of townships, except for the festival organized by the Junta in Kyauk Phyu township, where military tensions between the junta and Arakan Army (AA) are running high on a grand scale. On the other hand, the United League of Arakan (ULA) issued an appeal on April 11 to the Rakhine people, urging them [to avoid gatherings](#) during the Thingyan period due to the possibility of junta regime airstrikes and shelling attacks.

The heightened insecurity is felt due to incidents of rampant mugging, robbery, and murder. One such incident occurred when U Kyaw Lwin Oo, who owns the Mya construction materials shop in Kyaukphyu, reported to local media on April 6 that [a group of men brazenly stole](#) from his store in the middle of the day. Moreover, houses left by internally displaced persons fleeing potential armed conflicts in Sittwe, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Pauktaw, and Rambree [are being invaded](#) by unidentified people with the intention of selling materials from those houses.

On April 11, the bodies of two young residents were found with cuts on their necks and heels in Buthidaung township. A resident commented to the local media on that day, “There are some people who are inciting ethnic and religious conflicts. Hundreds of Muslims are being trained and used in the conflicts. The armed Muslims are breaking into Rakhine family houses during the night hours. They [are supported](#) by soldiers from behind the scene.”

Furthermore, five male villagers aged 40 to 50 from Abuja Village in northern Maungdaw were abducted by an unidentified armed group on April 17. Their bodies were found near the village on April 22, according to residents. The AA spokesman Khaing Thukha [denied allegations circulating](#) on social media that the five were killed by them. Moreover, [an abduction](#) by The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) of two men working in an auto repair shop in Maungdaw Township was reported on April 28.

The transportation blockade by both actors, the junta and the ULA/AA amidst the conflicts, negatively impacts the people. On April 2, the AA [declared](#) an indefinite emergency closure of the vital transportation road linking Ann township of Arakan State to Padan village under Ngape township of Magway region in central Myanmar due to fighting that erupted along the 60-mile-long road. Then, on April 9, junta soldiers [destroyed](#) the Sittwe-Ann road using backhoes when conflicts erupted near the 373rd Light Infantry Battalion base in Ann township. As roads are blocked due to ongoing fighting, there is a shortage of food in Ann Township, and the prices of goods have soared. Some food prices have tripled or more since January. The price of rice has increased from K3,500 per psi to over K10,000 in Ann Township. The price of dried pepper has gone up from K20,000 per viss to K80,000, and the price of cooking oil has shot up from K30,000 per gallon to K80,000. Consequently, thousands of residents in Ann Township are [suffering from food shortages](#), and some deaths have even been attributed to a lack of nutrition.

The ongoing conflicts drastically limit healthcare services in Arakan State due to a lack of medicines and travel restrictions. People with chronic illnesses [requiring regular treatment](#) at healthcare facilities are particularly affected. Notably, the El Niño-induced temperature rise makes people more prone to illnesses such as fever, cough, and diarrhea. As displacement camps have a large number of people living together, they face more difficulties in the summer months, and there is growing concern over public health issues. The average summer temperature in Arakan State last year was 34 degrees Celsius, and this year the temperature in April [has reached 38 degrees Celsius](#), with the temperature expected to continue rising, according to the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology (DMH).

## Humanitarian Issues

The humanitarian crisis in Arakan State poses detrimental challenges for IDPs to access the basic necessities of life. Shortages in water, food, medicine, and shelter create dire situations for them.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), as of April 3, [nearly 157,000 people have been displaced](#) in Arakan State since renewed fighting broke out in November 2023. By the end of April, the UNOCHA report stated that the number of displaced individuals in Rakhine State, along with Paletwa township of Chin State, had increased to 166,000 people. The sudden increase followed arson attacks on houses in Buthidaung township, raising fears over inter-communal tension.

Six months after the resumption of conflicts, civilians face starvation, water shortages, and a lack of medicine as major concerns. The transportation blockade, humanitarian assistance ban, and skyrocketing prices are also contributing factors.

### Stories of Starvation:



"We get no assistance at all. And there are no jobs available. We have to sell our belongings and borrow money from lenders by paying interest. If it continues like this, we will soon face starvation," [said Daw Hla Aye Soe](#) from the Myadazaung displacement camp in Mrauk-U to the media on April 9.

"Livelihood is very difficult here. Many people are starving as they are not getting assistance," said [an official](#) from the Minbya IDP camp to local media on April 13.

"He had eight family members, and they needed 10 cans of rice per meal. Due to the shortage, they could only manage four cans per meal. He went with his son to buy rice grains. Unfortunately, about three miles away from Htan Chaung village, he died from exhaustion," interpreted a village elder about U Tun Win, who [died from starvation](#) in Ann township on April 22.

### **Water Scarcity:**

"Water is scarce here. The available muddy water is used for bathing. Children and women are particularly suffering from various skin-related ailments. As they are surviving with difficulties, skin diseases add another problem. Access to medicine is also limited. Even a deworming pill for children costs Kyats 3,000," [said](#) a woman from Yoe Ta Yoke village in Ponnagyun township to the media on April 4.

### **Shortage of Medicine:**

"People with diabetes and high blood pressure have a harder time due to the shortage of medicines. Even if locals get sick and cough, there is no medicine to drink," said U Than Tun, [a resident of Thinponetan village](#) in Ponnagyun township to the media on April 7.

"During these days, both children and adults get sick due to excessive heat. I want to drink rehydration salt, but I can't buy it. If residents have a health emergency, they are worried," said [a resident of Hsinthel village](#) in Ponnagyun township to the media on April 7.

"If we go by boat from our village to a rural healthcare center in Poeshweeypin village, it takes five hours. Now that a liter of petrol is K15,000, a trip to the clinic costs over K100,000. The cost of medicine for one patient may be from K200,000 to almost K300,000. Medicines are also expensive. So when we are sick, we rely on traditional medicine," [said Daw Hla May](#), a local woman in Khwethae village in Ponnagyun township to the media on April 7.

## **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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