

MONTHLY ARAKAN REVIEW

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

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Ongoing Human Rights Violations and Socioeconomic Crisis Amidst Military Tension



Photo Credit to Western News (Residents of Minbya are concerned about the risk of riverbank collapse along the Laymyo River during the rainy season.)

Executive Summary

- The Arakan Army (AA) significantly expanded territorial control and state-like governance functions in May 2026, seizing junta camps, issuing vehicle licenses, releasing prisoners of war, and conducting cross-border diplomacy with Bangladesh. The Myanmar Junta responded with cluster bomb attacks, daily airstrikes, and a multi-front offensive, but struggled with forced conscription failures and the loss of key battalions as the AA gained both military ground and popular legitimacy.
- Cross-border trade showed tentative recovery in May 2026 as the Teknaf land port reopened with Bangladesh and an Indian cargo ship marked the 300th vessel to reach Sittwe Port, but internal supply chains collapsed due to junta blockades on key routes. Severe commodity price surges, sanitary pad shortages in Sittwe, and merchant hoarding reflected deep economic uncertainty, while private entrepreneurs hesitated to fully join the reopened border trade.
- The ULA's civilian health department provided free eye surgeries and treated disease outbreaks in May 2026, but a shortage of doctors and lack of childhood vaccinations left communities vulnerable, while education access deteriorated as textbook prices surged and IDP children remained largely unable to attend classes. Women's safety emerged as a critical concern following the sexual harassment of a female journalist, while the AA demonstrated cultural governance by launching a literary journal, training language teachers, and donating cattle to Muslim communities for Qurbani.
- Rakhine State suffered catastrophic civilian harm in May 2026 from junta airstrikes, cluster bombs, navy shelling, and landmines, alongside systematic arrests and the torture death of a detainee in Sittwe. Mass displacement exceeded 50,000 people in Kyaukphyu alone, with IDPs facing urgent shortages of water, food, shelter, and menstrual hygiene products, while humanitarian aid was severely hampered by access restrictions and fuel shortages.

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A. Politics: Three Key Highlights

1. May 7–8, 2026 – Junta [launches a massive aerial](#) assault on Kyauktaw and Minbya.

The Myanmar Junta Air Force carried out a large-scale bombing campaign against Kyauktaw and Minbya Townships, causing significant civilian casualties and destruction. This assault marked a major escalation in the junta's aerial warfare strategy against Arakan Army-controlled territories. The bombings displaced thousands of residents and overwhelmed local humanitarian response capacities.

2. May 9, 2026 – Arakan Army [formally hands over](#) 14 Bangladeshi nationals to border guards.

The Arakan Army detained 14 Bangladeshi citizens for illegal fishing in Arakanese waters and subsequently repatriated them through an official handover to the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB). This event demonstrates the AA's capacity to conduct cross-border diplomatic and law enforcement functions normally reserved for sovereign states. The orderly repatriation suggested an unofficial channel of communication between the AA and Bangladeshi authorities despite the ongoing civil war.

3. May 24, 2026 – AA [releases 57 prisoners](#), including POWs, to mark Qurbani holiday.

The Arakan Army granted amnesty and released 57 detained individuals, which included prisoners of war captured from junta forces, in observance of the Qurbani (Eid al-Adha) religious holiday. The release signaled the AA's attempt to project itself as a legitimate governing authority operating under humanitarian and religious principles. Among those freed were both battlefield captives and civilians previously held on security-related charges.

Summarized Overview

Between May 1 and June 1, 2026, the Arakan Army consolidated its administrative control across Rakhine State by issuing vehicle licenses, regulating food safety, prosecuting child sexual abuse cases, and even launching an "Arakan Lottery" to fund governance activities. Concurrently, AA forces seized multiple junta camps and weapons factories, pushed regime troops into retreat near Kyaukphyu's naval stations, and expanded operations into Sagaing and Bago Regions. The Myanmar Junta responded with daily airstrikes, artillery shelling from navy vessels, and a multi-front offensive to reclaim lost territories, while also imposing curfews and blocking food supplies to civilian villages. The AA demonstrated state-like functions by arresting Bangladeshi fishermen, repatriating them through formal border handovers, releasing prisoners of war for religious holidays, and engaging in diplomatic interviews with international media. Meanwhile, the junta struggled with forced conscription failures, war crimes accusations, and the loss of key battalions, as the AA continued to gain both military ground and popular legitimacy among Rakhine's diverse ethnic communities.

B. Economic Situations: Three Key Highlights

1. May 2, 2026 – Bangladesh-Rakhine border [trade resumes](#) after one-year halt.

The Teknaf land port reopened with the arrival of a Myanmar timber cargo boat, marking the formal resumption of cross-border trade between Bangladesh and Rakhine State after a full year of suspended operations. Merchants on both sides expressed cautious optimism but noted that full-scale commercial activities would require additional time to restore previous trade volumes. This development signaled a potential economic lifeline for Rakhine's war-affected communities despite the ongoing civil conflict.

2. May 16, 2026 – Indian cargo [ship reaches Sittwe Port](#) as the 300th vessel milestone.

An Indian cargo ship arrived at Sittwe Port, marking the 300th vessel to dock at the strategically significant deep-sea port under the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. The milestone highlighted India's continued investment in Rakhine State's infrastructure despite the deteriorating security situation and the Arakan Army's expanding territorial control. The port's operation remains a key geopolitical asset for New Delhi's access to Myanmar's western coastline and onward connectivity to northeastern Indian states.

3. May 18, 2026 – Regime restrictions on sanitary pad transportation [create shortages](#) in Sittwe.

Junta-imposed restrictions on the transport of sanitary pads into Sittwe caused severe shortages of essential menstrual hygiene products for women and displaced persons in the city. The blockade, part of broader military supply controls, highlighted how conflict-related logistical restrictions directly impact women's health and dignity in non-combat settings. Humanitarian workers warned that such shortages force women to use unsafe alternatives, increasing risks of infection and reproductive health complications.

Summarized Overview

Throughout May 2026, Rakhine State experienced severe economic disruption as border trade routes reopened while internal supply lines collapsed due to junta blockades and active fighting. Bangladesh-Rakhine cross-border trade resumed after a year-long halt, and an Indian cargo ship marked the 300th vessel to reach Sittwe Port, signaling continued international economic engagement. However, commodity prices surged dramatically across the state as the junta blocked key trade routes, including the Saw road connecting Magway and Chin States to Rakhine. Air ticket prices to Manaung more than doubled, while sanitary pad shortages emerged in Sittwe due to transport restrictions, and hundreds of trucks were stranded on the India-Arakan trade route because of heavy rain. Local merchants began hoarding goods to wait for further price increases, while private entrepreneurs hesitated to fully join the reopened Bangladesh border trade, reflecting deep uncertainty about the conflict's trajectory.

C. Social Crisis: Three Key Highlights

1. May 4, 2026 – Female journalist in Arakan [faces sexual](#) harassment and threats.

A female journalist working in Arakan State was subjected to sexual harassment and direct threats, prompting widespread concern among media professionals and women's rights advocates. The incident highlighted the heightened dangers faced by women reporters covering conflict zones, where they are vulnerable to both general security risks and gender-based violence. Women's groups subsequently issued a joint statement demanding that the Arakan Army provide enforceable safety guarantees for female journalists operating in AA-controlled areas.

2. May 20, 2026 – Skin disease outbreak [affects](#) over 1,000 IDPs in Rathedaung camp.

An internally displaced persons camp in Rathedaung Township, sheltering more than 1,000 people, experienced a widespread outbreak of pruritic skin disease that caused significant suffering among residents. Overcrowded living conditions, limited access to clean water, and inadequate sanitation facilities within the camp contributed to the rapid spread of the infection. Healthcare workers on the ground lacked sufficient medications and training to contain the outbreak, exposing critical gaps in humanitarian health provision for displaced populations.

3. May 28, 2026 – AA [donates cattle to Muslim communities](#) for Qurbani religious observance.

The Arakan Army donated cattle to Muslim communities in Maungdaw and Mrauk-U Districts to facilitate their celebration of Qurbani (Eid al-Adha), a major religious holiday requiring animal sacrifice. The gesture represented a strategic effort by the AA to build interfaith goodwill and demonstrate inclusive governance toward religious minorities within its controlled territories. Local Muslim leaders cautiously welcomed the donations while privately expressing continued concerns about broader community safety and long-term intercommunal relations.

Summarized Overview

Throughout May 2026, the Arakan Army's civilian governance arm, the ULA, expanded healthcare and education services in AA-controlled areas while grappling with severe resource limitations and unmet needs. The Arakan Public Health Department provided free eye surgeries, issued dengue fever warnings, and treated skin disease outbreaks, yet a deepening shortage of doctors and unvaccinated children left many communities vulnerable. Education access remained highly strained, with textbook prices surging ahead of school season, Muslim children dropping out at rising rates, and many IDP children unable to attend classes at all. Civil society groups and women's organizations increasingly pressured the AA to address sexual harassment of journalists, relax medical certificate requirements, and improve camp conditions for displaced persons. Despite these challenges, the AA demonstrated governance ambitions by launching a new literary journal, sponsoring a singing competition, training 120 Khami language teachers, and making religious donations to Muslim communities for Qurbani.

D. Humanitarian Crisis: Three Key Highlights

1. May 8, 2026 – Junta [uses cluster bombs](#) in Kyauktaw and Minbya, killing a child.

The Myanmar Army launched airstrikes using cluster bombs on Kyauktaw and Minbya Townships, marking a serious escalation in the conflict. Three civilians were confirmed dead, including a child, highlighting the indiscriminate nature of these banned weapons. The attack drew condemnation due to the severe and long-term danger cluster munitions pose to local communities.

2. May 11, 2026 – Junta forces [torture an arrested civilian](#) to death in Sittwe.

Junta forces in Sittwe arrested six civilians and subsequently tortured one of them to death while in custody. This brutal incident underscores the junta's pattern of lethal violence against detainees rather than lawful treatment. The death sparked fear among local residents, particularly within Muslim communities who have frequently been targeted for arrest.

3. May 19, 2026 – Navy shelling in Kyaukphyu [kills a woman and injures seven](#), including a monk.

A Myanmar Navy vessel fired artillery shells into a populated area of Kyaukphyu, resulting in the death of one woman. Seven others were injured in the attack, including a Buddhist monk, demonstrating the indiscriminate nature of naval shelling. This event highlighted how civilians, even religious figures, are not spared from the escalating military operations in coastal towns.

Summarized Overview

Between early and late May 2026, Rakhine State experienced a severe escalation in conflict, leading to dozens of civilian casualties from junta airstrikes, artillery shelling, and landmines. Mass displacement surged, with over 50,000 internally displaced persons in Kyaukphyu alone facing urgent shortages of water, food, and shelter ahead of the monsoon season. Junta forces conducted systematic arrests of Muslims and ethnic Arakanese in Sittwe, including cases of torture and death in custody. Humanitarian aid from local groups, the European Union, and the UN provided some relief, but access restrictions and fuel shortages severely hampered operations. Additionally, a rising number of young Arakanese were reported missing in Yangon, pointing to enforced disappearances beyond the main conflict zone.

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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