

Arakan Review: Return To War

Center for Arakan Studies (CAS)

November 7
2022 Issue 1
www.arakanstudies.org

August – September – October 2022



Table of Contents

1. Summary.....	2
2. Background.....	2
3. New Developments	3
4. Critical Notes on Civilian Casualties	4
5. Humanitarian Challenges	5
6. Four Significant Highlights.....	6
1. The ULA/AA gained more territory	6
2. Targeted arrests of its servants, businesspeople, and social workers.....	6
3. Forced attempts to relocate IDP	6
4. Conflict Spreading.....	7

Purpose of Report,

This report aims at the regional and international community including both governmental and non-governmental organizations including journalists, scholars, academia, and interested individuals to gain a better understanding of Rakhine/Arakan affairs.

1. Summary

Just 20 months after a de facto ceasefire between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army (AA), a series of armed clashes resumed in three locations in northern Rakhine, and another one in its neighboring southern Chin state's Paletwa.

The returning war since August 2022 shows no signs of stopping now. The negative impacts of the armed conflict on the civilian population are also quite visible.

The objectives of the current report are to present the changing conflict map in Rakhine and its neighboring areas, and to analyze the relations among changes in terms of armed clashes plus casualties, arrests, and humanitarian crisis. The collected data in this report mainly rely on the local, national, and regional news and observations.

The current report will also consist of three key sections such as new developments regarding the changing conflict map and its consequences, notes on the civilian casualties and the topic of humanitarian challenges. In the final part, four key highlights during the previous three months have been mentioned.

2. Background

Rakhine State is one of the most underdeveloped and highly conflicted areas in Myanmar despite having its rich and proud memories in its history. It is also a place that is militarily unstable, politically fragile, economically impoverished, socially fragmented, culturally, and ethnically diverse, religiously divided.

As a result of the military coup in the first week of February last year, the country has fallen into a situation of political turmoil, administrative vacuum and rising violence and a nationwide political uprising against the military junta.

Nevertheless, Rakhine State remained relatively stable while other states and regions witnessed massive peaceful protests against the coup, civil services joined the civil disobedience movement (CDM) and a few months later, peaceful protesters turned into armed resistance groups.

The junta's council ended an-internet shutdown that had been in effect for 18 months¹ and offered Arakan National Party (ANP)'s leader a seat on its administrative council on February 22. The council also released Rakhine nationalist politician Dr. Aye Maung and Rakhine Writer Wai Han Aung on February 13³, 2021, as well as AA leader family members on June 9 last year⁴. Later in March 2021, the United League of Arakan (ULA) and its armed wing, the AA were also delisted from "the terrorist list". But the junta remains the group on the list of 'unlawful association'.

Yet, the political and military climate of Rakhine had been relatively stable most of the time because of the policies of the



Rakhine (Arakan) State in Myanmar

junta State administration Council (SAC) to separate the Rakhine region from other political movements in the country, and the United League of Arakan (ULA) leadership to focus more on the military, political and administrative build-ups by maintaining stability in Rakhine and sponsoring anti-coup regime political movements.

However, the resumption of the current armed clashes has become inevitable due after the informal military agreement never reached a political agreement while the junta authority efforted to contain the military and administrative expansions of the ULA into the central and southern parts of the state. Consequently, the ULA leadership was unhappy with the imposition of trade and trade restriction by the junta in the state.

From 2018-2020, analysts described fighting between the AA and the Sit-Tat as the fiercest Myanmar had seen in decades

¹ Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, Emily Fishbein, "In Myanmar One Blackout Ends, Another Begins," The Rest of World, February 10, 2022.

² Irrawaddy, "Rakhine Party Under Pressure for Taking Position on Myanmar Regime's Governing Body," February 9, 2022.

³ Myanmar Now, "Prominent Rakhine nationalists among prisoners released in amnesty," February 13, 2022.

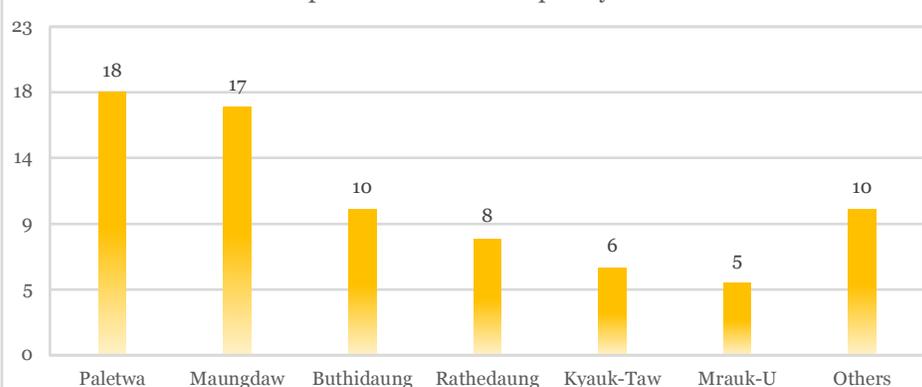
⁴ Development Media Group, "10 people including three of AA chief's family members acquitted of terrorism charges," June 9, 2022.

and the AA’s fighting has become one of the most serious the threats against the junta’s forces⁵.

Just before the national election, around two years of fighting suddenly ceased in Rakhine brokered by Sasakwa, Japanese peace envoy. Soon after the military seized power in February last year, the AA avoided breaking a truce instead, the group’s political wing, ULA took the opportunity reportedly to extend its administrative and judicial mechanisms across Rakhine⁶.

The group officially announced in early August that the residents in Rakhine could file or submit their legal disputes including over crimes, land issues, and theft to the ULA’s judiciary department. It also said it intends “to bring justice for all people living in Rakhine State, regardless of race and religion”⁷.

Townships Based on the Frequency of Conflict



As the ULA administration grows, the de facto ceasefire between two groups was not able to formalise due after the junta started to contain the ULA administrative expansion and reinforced its troop across Rakhine, and the AA refused an invitation to join junta-peace talks in the Naypyidaw in early June.

Soon after, the deputy leader of the junta administration during his visit to Rakhine ordered his troops to be “ready to fight any time.”⁸

On July 4, the tension between both exploded after the junta launched an airstrike against an AA base in a territory controlled by the Karen National Union, killing at least six soldiers and injuring many others. A week later, the AA launched a retaliatory attack against junta forces in northern Rakhine, killing at least four, injuring many others and capturing at least 14 alive.

In early August, a series of armed clashes between the AA and junta forces erupted in three locations in northern Rakhine, and another one in its neighboring southern Chin state.

3. New Developments

Based on news reports, the Center for Arakan Studies has identified at least 74 battles have erupted between the junta military and the AA over the previous three months.

At least 10 clashes could be reported as ‘fierce battles’ based on the intensity of fighting, combatant casualties, and number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The four townships in which these fighting outbreak were Maungdaw, Paletwa, Buthedaung, and Rethedaung.

Other less frequent and small-scale armed clashes and mine explosions also happened in the townships like Taunggok, Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Minbya, Myaybone, and Ann. But the most frequent clashes took place 18 locations in Paletwa and 17 locations in Maungdaw, which both townships possessing international borders and important geo-strategic interests.

On August 2, 2022, the first clash between the two actors in Kinn Chaung and Tha Htay Kone villages in eastern Paletwa city could be found. Soon after, the fighting rapidly moved to other townships such as Maungdaw and Rethedaung townships.

About 10 days later, a fierce battle erupted near Donpaik and Cheinkhali villages on the base of the Mayu mountain ranges in the west Rethedaung township. During its clash, at least 31 junta soldiers were killed while around 700 IDPs were forced to displace because of fear to be bombed at their

village.

As battles in these townships continued, the fighting sparked into southern township Taunggok, and central township Mrauk-U on August 25 and 28 respectively.

And a series of fierce battles in September continued mostly in the two townships of Paletwa and Maungdaw.

On September 1, the intensive fighting began killing many junta soldiers who tried to break out the west of Myeik Wa village near the Indian border in Paletwa Township, in which the military council also launched the air strike. This incident also forced around 500 local villagers to flee into the India border.

Similarly, the stormy fights that took place on September 3, 9,15,19 and 22 in different locations in Maungdaw township such as Kha Maung Seik, Min Khamaung, Tarain, Mingyi, Long Dom, KyainChaung, Gottpi, Mee Taik, Gutar Pyin and Thayet Taung villages, and turned hundreds of villagers into displacement camps.

More furious and frequent fighting could be found in Buthedaung township in October. On October 3 and 27, two fierce battles have been reported near Kyauk Sar Taing Village

⁵ International Crisis Group, “From Election to Ceasefire in Myanmar’s Rakhine State,” December 23, 2020.

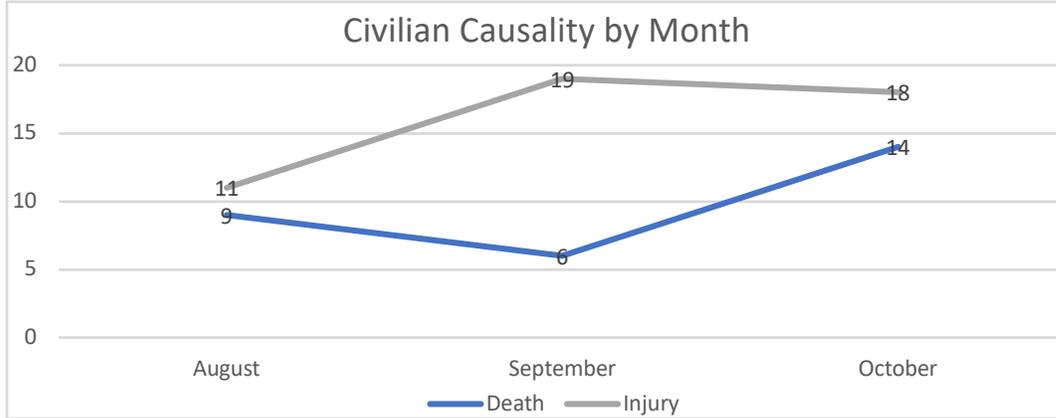
⁶ Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, “Arakan Army extends administrative grip on Rakhine State,” Frontier Myanmar,” August 6, 2021.

⁷ Myanmar Now, “the ULA/AA to establish its own judicial system in Rakhine State,” August 3, 2021.

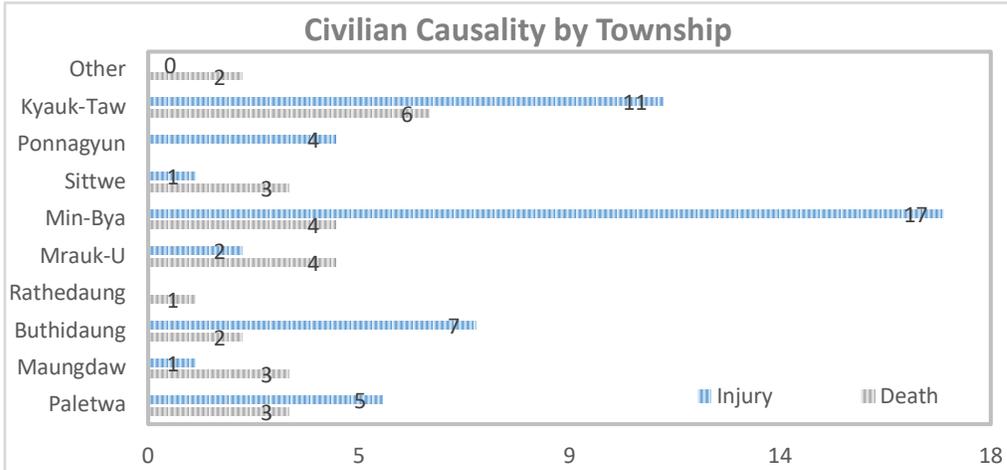
⁸ Khine Nyein Chan, Nan Oo Nway, “Hundreds of junta troops have surrendered to AA, group claims,” Myanmar Now, June 15, 2022.

and Taung (Muslim) Village in Buthedaung township respectively and at least 28 junta soldiers were killed with more than 30 injuries.

Some numbers of AA soldiers were also reportedly killed and injured during the clashes. During September, the frequency and intensity of the armed clashes peaked other than in the other two months.



In line with the data, the junta engaged at least 7 airstrikes and one reported drone strike, but the effectiveness of the actions remains hard to verify. Excessive use of artillery shelling especially by the junta forces could be accounted for, but the exact number cannot be described. Along the fights, at least 139 soldiers of the junta military were mentioned to be killed on the battlefields although the rest number and the exact inquiries are hard to notify. Not exactly knowing the casualties from the AA side, but at least 10 could be counted as deaths and injuries over the previous three months fighting.



Other forms of civilian deaths included gun fire at security gates and mine explosions. Differently from the intensity and frequency of the armed clashes, the highest civilian fatalities occurred in relatively stable townships such as six in Kyauk-Taw and four in Mrauk-U.

Apart from this, the two Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) members on August 13, a Nationwide ceasefire agreement signatory group, were killed in the rest huts of Gyim chaung village in Maungdaw township because of unknown gunshots.

On August 28, 2022, three civilians were also killed by the junta artillery shelling from Battalion 377 (Kha-Ma-Ra-Mrauk U). A total of nine civilians were killed by junta shelling during August. Then, the civilian fatalities continued as the junta soldiers shot an innocent Rohingya civilian from Dar Paing village in front of Police Battalion 36, in Bu May village, Sittwe township

on September 4. Other kinds of civilian deaths were mainly the results of random artillery shelling by the junta forces in the nearby villages and six civilians were killed in September.

However, October marked the highest rate of civilian fatalities with 13 compared to the former two months. Again, more than 90 percent of civilian deaths were due to the junta artillery shellings into the surrounding areas.

For instance, on October 17, three civilians from Palaung Pyin Village of Minbya township were killed due to artillery shelling of Minbya-based junta forces. And a similar event happened on the same day in Kyauk-Taw township’s Paikthel village killing at least one Rohingya.

Regarding civilian fatalities during the previous three months, 39 per cent (11) of all deaths are female and 32 percent (nice) are minority people including Rohingya and Chin ethnicities. At least seven out of 28 civilians are under 18-year-old. Others killed include students, teachers and pregnant women.

When it comes to civilian injuries, a total of 48 people including one Bangladeshi citizen was wounded by the negative impacts of armed clashes in the previous three months.

On September 16, a person named Aoung Gya Thowai Tanchangya was severely wounded in a landmine explosion on the Myanmar side in the Bangladesh border along Naikhongchhari upazila of Bandarban when he crossed the border to bring his cattle. One of his legs was blown off from the knee down in the explosion.

4. Critical Notes on Civilian Casualties

At least 28 civilians have been killed due to either direct or indirect impacts of the armed clashes during the previous three months in Rakhine and bordering areas of Paletwa township according to the CAS data entry. More than 90 per cent of the civilian deaths are due after the artillery shelling by the junta military into the nearby villages.

Apart from this number, two civilians were wounded and hospitalized due to the gunshots of the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) members on October 9.

The key causes of the injury are artillery shelling, airstrike, a landmine explosion, and gunshot. Data also shows that most of the injury population are not from highly conflict-sensitive areas such as Paletwa and Maungdaw but from the townships such as Minbya, Kyauktaw, Buthedaung and Ponnagyun.

The civilian injuries in September and October are similarly higher in 19 and 18 respectively than in August listed with 11.

Apart from these two lists: death and injury, the collected data also shows on August 12 that there are at least 6 disappeared civilians in two different events on the same day from the same village of Khamaung Seik village in Maungdaw township.

The first incident occurred when the auto-rickshaw drivers from Khamaung Seik village were disappeared at milepost No. 43, about six miles northwest of Khamaung Seik village on their way back from sending food supplies to a border guard police outpost.

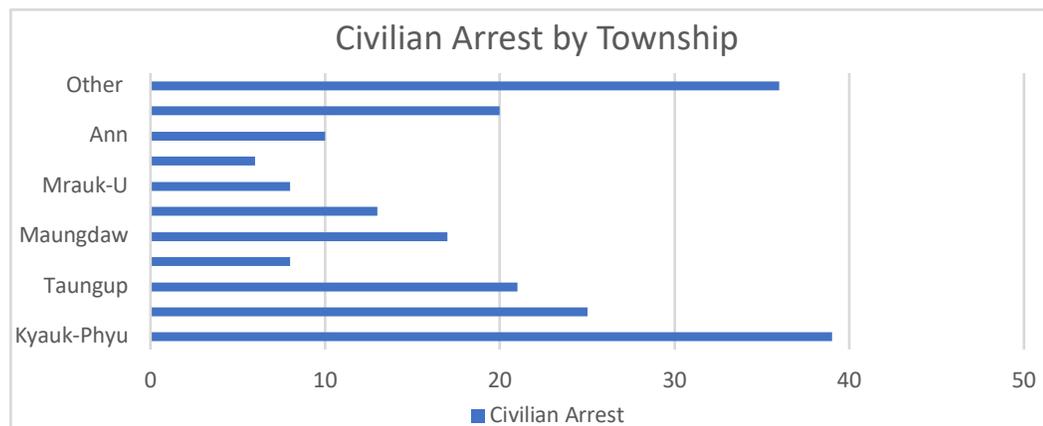
In the second story, three villagers were missed at a place, about one-mile western part of Khamaung Seik village.

In the previous three months, at least 217 people were arrested by both sides of armed conflict but mostly by the junta military and authority. Out of this number, at least 13 persons are members of either armed party. Thus, the total number of arrests of civilians is around 200 and more than 90 per cent of arrests by the junta.

The key reasons for arresting the civilians are mostly 'to investigate' without any judicial process. The backgrounds of the arrested persons vary and very often, are schoolteachers, students, doctors, government staff from the 'General Administration Department' (GAD), leaders from social and charity organizations, and businessmen. The three townships such as Kyauk-Phyu, Rambree and Taungup in the central parts of the state experience as the highest number of civilians arrested in 37, 25 and 21 respectively.

The other three key townships include Buthdaung (20), Maungdaw (17) and Sittwe (13). By month, the civilian arrest was highest in October than in the other two months.

As far as it can be reported, most of the arrested populations are sued by the clauses under Section 17 (1) of the Unlawful Association Act and Section 505 (a) of the Penal Code. To date, the ULA spokesperson said that only 80 people out of around 200 arrested civilians have been released.



5. Humanitarian Challenges

Regarding the issue of humanitarian challenges, the data collected from the local media agencies are sometimes hard to reflect the ground information and thus, this reporting will also apply some data gathered from different sources including the United Nations Offices for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), and the ULA.

As of September 5, the UNOCHA had estimated that almost 9,600 people (about 2270 households) have been displaced in Rakhine state and its bordering Paletwa areas in Chin State since fighting resumed in early August. Therefore, the total number of IDPs in addition to the amount released by the previous round of clashes (74400) increased to 84,000 people. Some 22 days later, the UNOCHA again released the report which says another round of IDPs about 17,400 people have been displaced due to the continued armed clashes.⁹

The latest data from the UNOCHA showed that another batch of 16,500 locals fled due to the ongoing conflict between September 27 and October 25. Therefore, the total number of IDPs in the Rakhine and Paletwa regions has now increased to 90,500 of which 43500 can be regarded as newly displaced people.¹⁰

Another source that the report can describe regarding the IDP population released by ULA on October 5. The group said the total number IDP in Rakhine and Paletwa region till October 4, 2022, was counted as 82,419 persons in 20,357 households situated in 150 camps. Out of this total, 6,167 people are the newly IDPs due to the resumed fighting in August. Thus, the 76,252 people are the IDP population from the previous conflict.¹¹

Compared to the two sources from the UNOCHA and ULA, there is a difference (1,852) concerning the number of old IDP populations such as 74,400 by UNOCHA and 76,252 by ULA. The difference is also found regarding the number of new IDP populations between the two institutions. For instance, until October 5, the ULA has counted the total number of new IDPs as 6,167 whereas for the UNOCHA, it is already 27,000 (9600+17400) on September 27.

⁹ UNOCHA. (2022). *Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 23*. UNOCHA. <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-23-31-october-2022>

¹⁰ (UNOCHA, 2022)

¹¹ ULA (2022). *As of October 4, the lists of IDP and other information in Arakan and Paletwa*. <https://www.arakanarmy.net/post/%E1%81%84-%E1%81%81%E1%80%9D>

Considering the two variations, it can also be regarded that the UNOCHA counted as less than the ULA did for the old IDP population whereas the UNOCHA enumerated as **more** than the ULA did for the **new IDP**.

Independently, the Center for Arakan Studies (CAS) remains difficulties of accessing and counting of the IDP population, the report will also rely on these two sources in mentioning the backgrounds, locations, and situations of the IDP community. For the UNOCHA, as of October 25, the largest block of IDP community exists in Buthidaung township as 5,300 followed by Rathedaung and Mrauk U sharing about 2,000 in each township. The number wasn't clear whether it is the old or new IDP population.

In line with the ULA sources, concerning the new IDP population, Kyauk-Taw township has hosted the largest group at 16,60 while Buthidaung stands at the second as 12,13 IDP population until October 5. As the data from the ULA is 20 earlier than the UNOCHA, the rest and the new 4087 IDPs shall be released between October 5 and 25. The difference in number shall also be understood as the variation based on the accounting system and information sources.

The IDP populations in Rakhine and Paletwa areas are also now under immerse in need of emergency assistance and humanitarian support. As the junta authority has suspended most of the humanitarian response in Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rathedaung, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebone townships since 15th September, the IDP people in these townships are in need of the UN and INGOs' assistance leading shortages in food, shelter, and other relief items.

In line with the ULA report on October 5, there are at least 52 infants, and 23 pregnant women among the 6,167 new IDP population. And, for the whole both old and new IDP communities of 82,419, pregnant women accounted for 954, disabled persons for 645 and unhealthy 572.

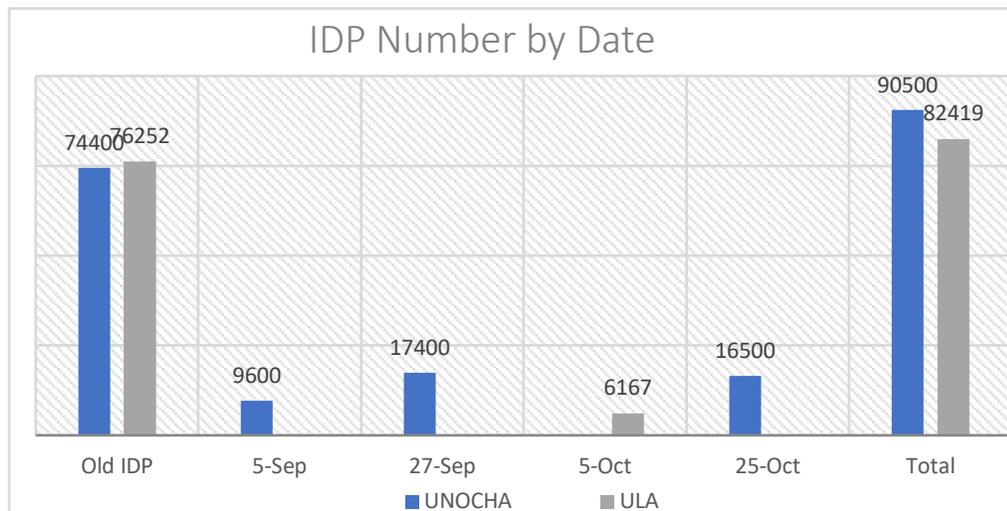
6. Four Significant Highlights

1. The ULA/AA gained more territory

In the previous round of conflict (2018-2020), Maungdaw township stood as low intensity conflict area with no big challenge to the junta control along the border areas with Bangladesh.

The resumed armed clashes in August changed this conflict map ending the de facto control of AA over a large swath of new territory in the northern Maungdaw bordering Bangladesh. In line with CSA data, Paletwa and Maungdaw stand at the most frequent and fierce battlefield areas in the previous three months and the AA has also captured at least 31 junta military outposts, and camps especially in the

bordering areas with Bangladesh and on the Mayu mountain range.



This turning point also caused the junta reinforcement means from using land routes by military vehicles to using waterways from the ports in Rakhine state capital Sittwe to the ports in Maungdaw township.

2. Targeted arrests of its servants, businesspeople, and social workers

Differently from the previous round of conflict, both the military junta and AA engaged in a more limited form of warfare for designated territory and purposes. While the AA accelerated its attacks in the northernmost townships of the state such as Maungdaw, Buthedaung, and neighboring Paletwa, the military junta tried not to lose more territory in these areas and made no major offensives operations in other townships.

However, for this time, the countering tactics of the junta are arresting suspicious junta servants and businessmen on account of giving taxes and donating money into the ULA treasury and social workers accused of aiding the AA members and IDP community.

At least 29 government servants, 26 businesspersons, and 14 social workers were arrested and detained among the arrested population. This tactic is also criticized as aiming to cut off the sources of support for the ULA/AA movement.

3. Forced attempts to relocate IDP

Amidst rising civilian deaths and injuries across the battlefields and blockage on the flow of humanitarian assistance to the IDP camps, the junta authority attempted to do the forced return of the IDP community in several locations of the northern townships.

On October 19, the local junta officers summoned and forced the camp leaders to move involuntarily and used various tactics to do it such as cutting off the aids, possible charges of trespassing, and other forms of threat and pressure in Buthidaung township.

The IDPs responded that they are not ready for this plan as the conflicts in their original area are ongoing, the danger of landmines is still active, and they can be human shields on the battlefields.

Although the possible actions by the junta for refusing to move from the current location is still unknown, many IDPs are worried that they can be arrested, and their homes could be demolished.

Apart from this humanitarian issue, the arrest on Rohingya for moving outside of Rakhine state also increased in the previous three months. The latest data from Burman Human Rights Network (BHRN) showed that at least 209 in August, 145 in September and 295 in October were arrested by the junta authority in various locations and are most convicted under section 6 (3) of the 1949 Residents of Burman Registration Act, which carries a maximum two-year sentence.¹²

4. Conflict Spreading

The armed conflict from 2018 to 2020 was mostly restricted to the bounded territory of 7 northern townships such as Kyauk-Taw, Mrauk-U, Min-Bya and Mye-Bone, Rethedaung, Ponnagyun, and Buthidaung within three northern districts such as Mrauk-U, Sittwe and Maungdaw and neighbouring Paletwa township.

But, for this time, more armed clashes in the new areas of the southern townships such as Taungup, Kyauk-Phyu and Rambree have been and could be seen resulting from the release of new IDP populations, civilian deaths, injuries, and arrests to disappearance. Even during the de facto ceasefire periods, there were many incidents in which the junta forces efforted to contain the ULA administrative and judiciary expansion into the Southern townships like Kyauk-Phyu, Rambree and Taungup, possibly even Thandwe and Gwa by arresting the suspicious civilians and ULA members and raiding the targeted areas.

On the other hand, the local news reported the ULA/AA was consistently moving new forces and building new bases in these areas, especially in Taungkok township. Consequently, two armed clashes broke out in the previous months, the first one on August 25 when at a location between Chaungthongkhwa and Kyeintaw villages in the southern part of Taungup and took about 20 minutes resulting in some casualties from the junta side and the relocation of villagers into safer areas.

The second clash happened on September 16 when the AA attacked the military vehicles transporting soldiers from the water ports, and the battlefield was just three miles far away from the town and took about 40 minutes. At the same event, the AA also attacked on the military navy.

So, the changing conflict map is also worth noting given the fact that Kyauk-Phyu, Rambree and Taungup ranked as the three highest regarding the arrests and detaining by the junta authority during the three months.

About Center for Arakan Studies

The Center for Arakan Studies (CAS) is an independent, non-partisan and research-oriented group established by a group of Arakanese youths who are journalists, political analysts, researchers, social workers, and activists.

The Center aims to conduct research collaboratively with other institutions and organizations, and independently undertake research about human rights, political, economic, and social dynamics in Arakan, and issues to Arakan affairs in Burma and beyond through analysis and recommendations in favor of policy change and common solutions.

Contact – info@arakanstudies.org

¹² Burma Human Rights Network, summary of monthly situation update for October 22, <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Summary-of-Monthly->

[Situation-Update-for-October-2022.html?soid=1129958286276&aid=50geumjhgDQ](https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Situation-Update-for-October-2022.html?soid=1129958286276&aid=50geumjhgDQ).