

# CASS

Community Analysis Support System

## RAKHINE STATE AND SOUTHERN CHIN STATE SCENARIO PLAN: July Update

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### 14 August: Looking Forward

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This July Update tracks a set of indicators drawn from the [\*\*Rakhine State and Southern Chin State Scenario Plan\*\*](#), published by CASS on 9 April, to document updates and consider implications for the humanitarian response. That scenario plan considered the trajectory of armed conflict in Rakhine State before nationwide elections expected for November 2020, and anticipated the impact of armed conflict for communities and the humanitarian response in western Myanmar, with the objective of facilitating forward-looking programming for humanitarian responders. Please see the [\*\*Rakhine State and Southern Chin State Scenario Plan\*\*](#) for the full consideration of scenarios, conflict trajectories and humanitarian impacts.

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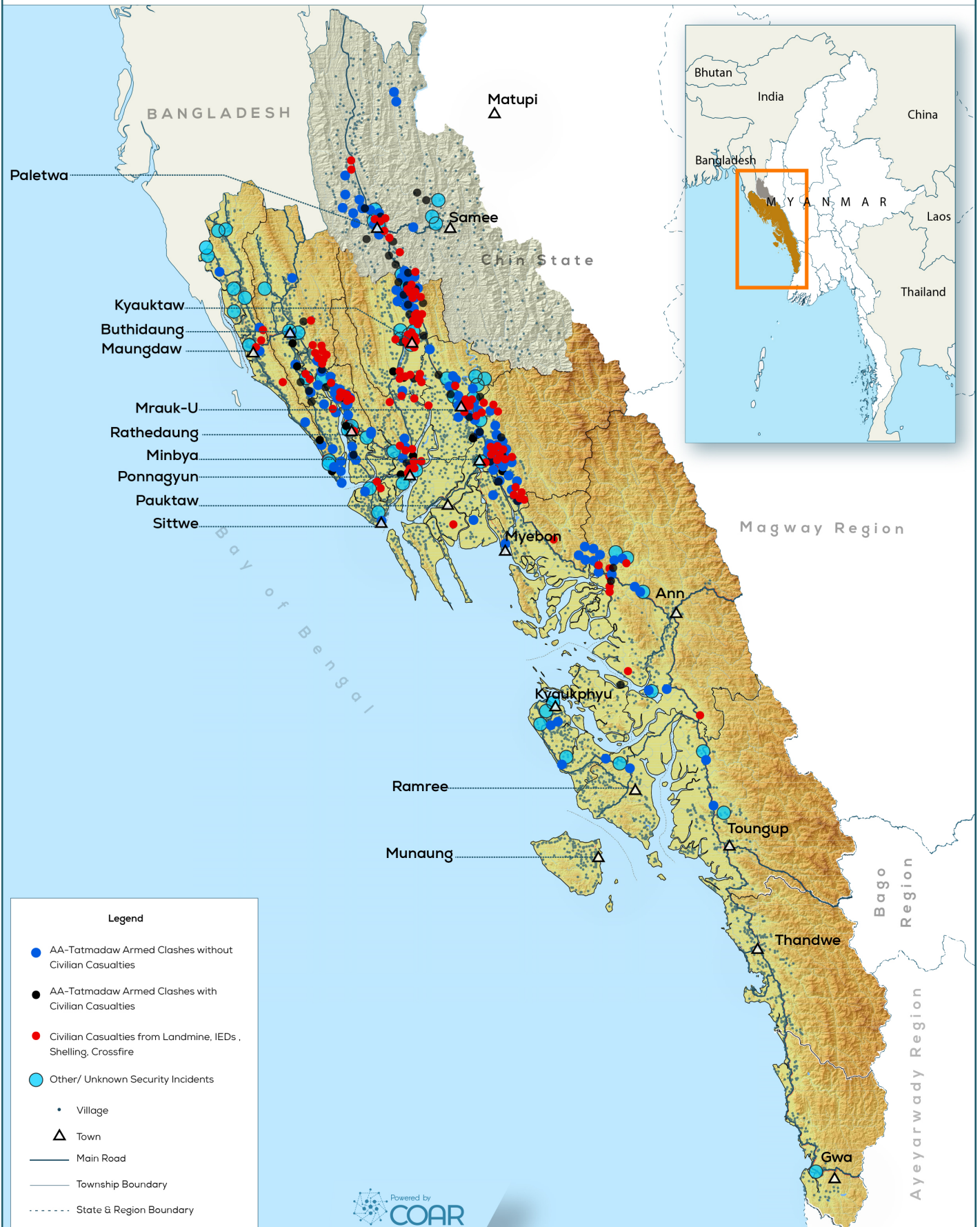
## // Summary

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Armed conflict in western Myanmar has stabilised throughout July. Armed clashes continued in Rathedaung Township after the Rakhine State Security and Border Affairs Minister ordered the evacuation of villages ahead of ‘clearance operations’. The operations themselves represented more continuity than change, but highlighted the lack of access for international agencies to affected populations. Local responders, however, had ready access, although were short in resources in some locations. Targeted killings and security incidents in urban areas and southern Rakhine State decreased during July, but tensions on the ground were exacerbated in late July by the Arakan Army’s exclusion from the upcoming Union Peace Conference. As such, the trajectory of armed conflict and its impact in Myanmar’s west best reflects one of status quo – as outlined in Scenario Three of the [\*\*Rakhine State and Southern Chin State Scenario Plan\*\*](#).







## // Indicators

### TARGETED KILLINGS AND URBAN WARFARE

There were few documented targeted killings or security incidents in urban areas during July. On 11 July one civilian was killed and another injured by **gunfire in downtown Ponnagyun**. Two police officers also went missing from urban areas during the period and their fate remains unclear. The

few urban incidents and targeted killings represents an outlier in trends of 2019 and 2020, and may have been due to the preoccupation of armed actors in remote areas, as fighting continued in northern Rathedaung and other areas.

### DISPLACEMENT

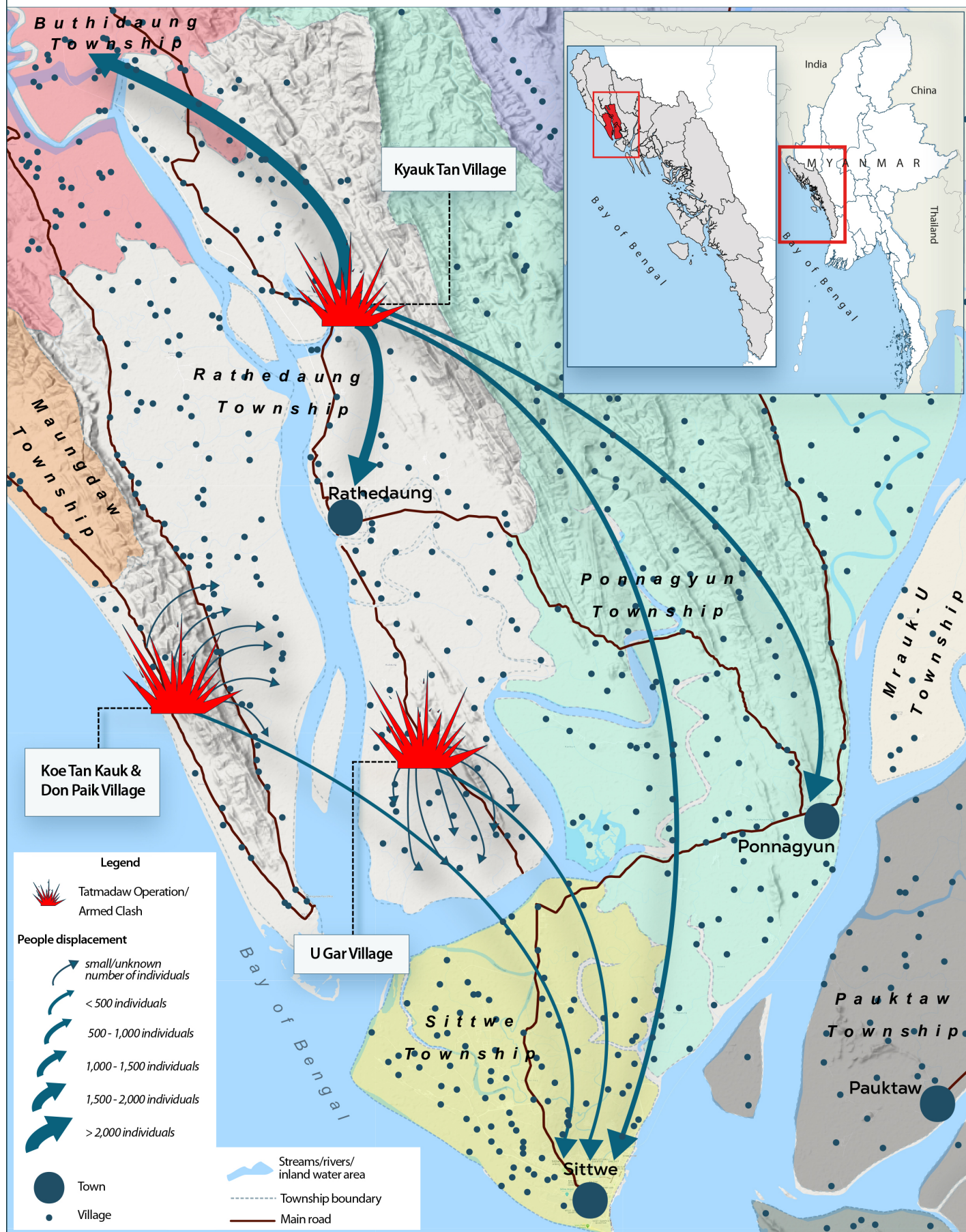
Displacement continued to rise in July. Displacement at this time in the agricultural cycle is highly disruptive, as the window for planting monsoon paddy is now closed. Farmers who have been unable to plant due to armed conflict and displacement will likely face future food and financial insecurity, with follow-on impacts to education.

- In Rathedaung, displacement followed an order from the Rakhine State Security and Border Affairs Minister to villagers to leave Kyauk Tan and surrounds ahead of Tatmadaw 'clearance operations'. While that terminology understandably sparked deep concern, the operations themselves represented **continuity more than change**. Sources on the ground suggest total displacement of approximately 5,000 people. This reflects the **numbers released by OCHA**, plus an additional estimated 2,400 Rakhine and Rohingya persons displaced into southern Buthidaung Township.
- As clashes spread further south, some 10,000 persons were displaced within southern Rathedaung before returning to their villages. An estimated 700 persons remain displaced in coastal Rathedaung.
- On 31 July the body of a 60 year old man was **found in a latrine pit** in Chein Kar Li village, coastal Rathedaung

Township. The Tatmadaw entered that village on 13 July, prompting villagers to flee. On 14 July, the victim's wife told local responders that she witnessed Tatmadaw troops shooting her unarmed husband at close range, but his body was only found weeks later. The Tatmadaw have denied the allegation.

- Local organisations in Kyauktaw are providing IDPs with new shelters after more than 3,000 displaced persons sheltering at seven schools in Kyauktaw town **have had to relocate**. The Union Government office on 13 May ordered displaced persons to vacate school facilities ahead of schools opening on 21 July.
- At least 2,000 people have been displaced after the Tatmadaw issued a 27 June verbal order to leave Dar Let village tract, Ann Township. Following severe restrictions on movement, food transportation and humanitarian access since at least January 2020, the Tatmadaw opened transport routes out of the village tract. There remain restrictions on the transportation of food into the village tract.
- An **influenza outbreak** was reported in several IDP sites in Mrauk U, Minbya, Buthedaung and Sittwe townships.





**Disclaimer:** Displacement figures and trajectories are from a variety of sources and represent broad trends. This CASS product is designed for information purposes only. This map may not show all the islands of the coastal areas due to scale limitations. Basemap data provided by MIMU and copyrighted to MIMU at <http://themimu.info/mimu-terms-and-conditions>. CASS cannot guarantee the complete accuracy of the information presented. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official acceptance or endorsement by CASS. For more information, please visit [cass-mm.org](http://cass-mm.org).

**Table 1: Rakhine State government displacement figures**

Township	16 March <sup>1</sup>	06 April <sup>2</sup>	05 May	08 June	21 June <sup>3</sup>	06 July <sup>4</sup>	25 July <sup>5</sup>
Ponnagyun	1,779	2,315	4,373	3,054	2,480	2,829	3,125
Kyauktaw	4,188	11,212	10,406	11,368	11,567	11,180	11,180
Mrauk U	16,089	16,344	16,609	16,888	16,888	17,944	18,211
Minbya	4,024	4,024	3,313	4,328	3,411	3,411	3,411
Pauktaw	365	433	498	503	503	503	503
Sittwe	1,641	2,422	2,819	3,211	3,170	4,636	4,782
Myebon	3,914	4,267	4,803	4,732	3,550	3,550	3,550
Ann	578	578	578	1,092	1,301	2,184	3,986
Rathedaung	15,061	15,061	14,575	14,575	14,575	15,305	16,889
Buthidaung	13,064	12,530	12,001	11,092	12,153	12,153	11,900
Kyaukphyu	–	–	–	–	–	287	287
<b>Total</b>	<b>60,703</b>	<b>69,186</b>	<b>69,975</b>	<b>70,843</b>	<b>69,598</b>	<b>73,982</b>	<b>77,824</b>

[1] Based on numbers provided by the Rakhine State Government dated 16 March.

[2] Based on numbers provided by the Rakhine State Government dated 6 April.

[3] Based on numbers provided by the Rakhine State Government dated 21 June. <https://twitter.com/ochamyanmar/status/1276065411797139457>.

[4] Based on numbers provided by the Rakhine State Government dated 6 July. <https://twitter.com/ochamyanmar/status/1281549664647475201>.

[5] Based on numbers provided by the Rakhine State Government dated 25 July. <https://twitter.com/ochamyanmar/status/1288792401977344000?s=19>

**Table 2: Displacement in Paletwa, southern Rakhine State**

	17 March	10 April	09 June	06 July	16 July
Paletwa <sup>6</sup>	1,823	8,196	7,655	7,655	8,323

[6] Paletwa figures are reported by humanitarian organisations.



**Table 3. Rakhine Ethnic Congress displacement figures**

Township	01 April <sup>7</sup>	01 May <sup>8</sup>	08 June <sup>9</sup>	07 July <sup>10</sup>
Ponnagyun	1,842	4,760	2,314	2,513
Kyauktaw	11,584	12,250	12,241	11,495
Mrauk U	16,415	17,027	17,193	17,383
Minbya	4,111	2,720	2,167	2,150
Pauktaw	410	698	598	594
Sittwe	3,454	3,548	3,895	5,316
Myebon	4,742	3,673	3,317	2,357
Ann	326	802	664	1,443
Rathedaung	8,732	8,486	8,248	9,754
Buthidaung	8,606	7,955	8,374	8,821
Maungdaw	622	622	632	
<b>Total</b>	<b>60,844</b>	<b>62,541</b>	<b>59,643</b>	<b>61,826</b>

[7] Based on numbers provided by Rakhine Ethnic Congress dated 1 April. [https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=810341739491020&id=250589055466294](https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=810341739491020&id=250589055466294)

[8] Based on numbers provided by Rakhine Ethnic Congress dated 1 May. REC also report that 101,670 additional people are affected by armed conflict outside of formal displacement sites. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=832211237304070&id=250589055466294](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=832211237304070&id=250589055466294).

[9] Based on numbers provided by Rakhine Ethnic Congress dated 8 June. <https://www.facebook.com/250589055466294/posts/859774027881124/>

[10] Based on numbers provided by Rakhine Ethnic Congress dated 7 July. REC also report that 128,571 additional people are affected by armed conflict outside of formal displacement sites. <https://www.facebook.com/250589055466294/posts/880124662512727/>

## HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Restrictions enforced by the Rakhine State government and military presence continue to present barriers to humanitarian access for both national and international responders.

- The Rathedaung operations since 23 June have highlighted that local organisations have much more access to communities than international agencies do. While communities can see that international response actors are attempting to reach conflict-affected populations, they also know that the actual ability to do so has been limited. If agencies cannot find ways

to respond to armed conflict-affected communities, they risk the reemergence of previously dominant narratives and bias. There are administrative, procedural, and programmatic challenges to working with local organisations. However, prioritising managing these challenges while continuing to advocate for access will represent a much more effective response. CASS has published a 'how to' guide for engaging religious leaders in a new paper on [Information Ecosystems in Northern Rakhine State](#).

## DIALOGUE

Dialogue remains stalled. While the Brotherhood Alliance had noted they were 'fully willing' to attend the Union Peace Conference scheduled for 19-21 August, the government on 5 August revealed that the [Arakan Army will not be invited](#), citing legal constraints. As a result, six other ethnic armed groups who have not yet signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement have said they [will not attend in solidarity](#). This will raise big questions about the inclusivity of the peace process.

- The Brotherhood Alliance's unilateral ceasefire from 1 June to 31 August remains in place, while the Tatmadaw's Western Command (Rakhine and southern Chin States) remains outside of the Tatmadaw's own unilateral ceasefire which covers other conflict-affected areas of Myanmar.
- Armed clashes have continued despite the Brotherhood Alliance's unilateral ceasefire, and tensions on the ground may be heightened as a result of the exclusion of the Arakan Army from the peace conference.

## ROHINGYA COMMUNITIES

Rohingya communities remain highly vulnerable, with many people trapped under movement restrictions in areas of ongoing active conflict. As discussed below, COVID-19 has not resulted in expected communal tensions, but has meant a harsh government crackdown on individuals returning informally from Bangladesh.

- In Sittwe Township IDP Muslim communities have made a donation **to mostly ethnic Rakhine IDPs**. The donation to the Rakhine Students Union from the Rakhine Muslims Student Union for the purpose of humanitarian response

prompted a visit by Rakhine students to the Sittwe camp complex to assess conditions. The groups are seeking support for further collaboration. While some social media users have hailed this as progress for reconciliation, others point to structural limitations of mammoth proportions.

- Hindu communities in Sittwe Township have also **offered humanitarian relief** to mostly ethnic Rakhine IDPs there, citing solidarity between the communities and support that Rakhine groups gave Hindus displaced by violence in 2012.

## SOUTHERN RAKHINE STATE

There were no security incidents in southern Rakhine State during July. While the National Security Organisation - Taungup was increasingly active through May and early June, its activity appears to have decreased significantly in July. There has been no public activity on its Facebook page and no further abductions or threats made against political figures in Taungup.

CASS will continue to monitor the situation in southern Rakhine State ahead of elections. The political competition between the National League for Democracy and ethnic Rakhine parties is expected to be much closer in the south than in the central and northern areas of the state.

## FRAGMENTATION OF CONFLICT

The Chin National Front has again **warned the Arakan Army** to 'get out' of southern Chin State, from where the Arakan Army has set up operations, while rumours continue to spread online regarding the mobilisation of an armed ethnic Chin group to push back against the Arakan Army. Meanwhile, media have continued to conflate the Arakan Army with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army.

- The greatest concern about reports of Chin armed groups' mobilisation in southern Chin State is the social cohesion issues these reports may prompt. These tensions are already present, and there is a risk that these reports – whether accurate or not – will heighten tensions and mistrust among communities on the ground.

- In an attempt to reach out to Chin communities, Arakan Army leader Htun Mrat Naing has given an interview to a Chin media group, and the Arakan Army has also posted a Youtube video of an ethnic Chin Arakan Army soldier addressing villagers in a Chin language in southern Chin State.

- While the Arakan Army and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army likely have had some communication as a result of movement through the same areas, any strategic collaboration is very unlikely. The two groups differ dramatically in resources, tactics and interests, and allying with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army risks Bangladeshi authorities cracking down on the Arakan Army's access to the border. Humanitarian agencies should beware of attempts to conflate the two armed groups, as such a narrative – largely designed for a non-Rakhine audience – continues to legitimise and fuel the conflict on the ground.

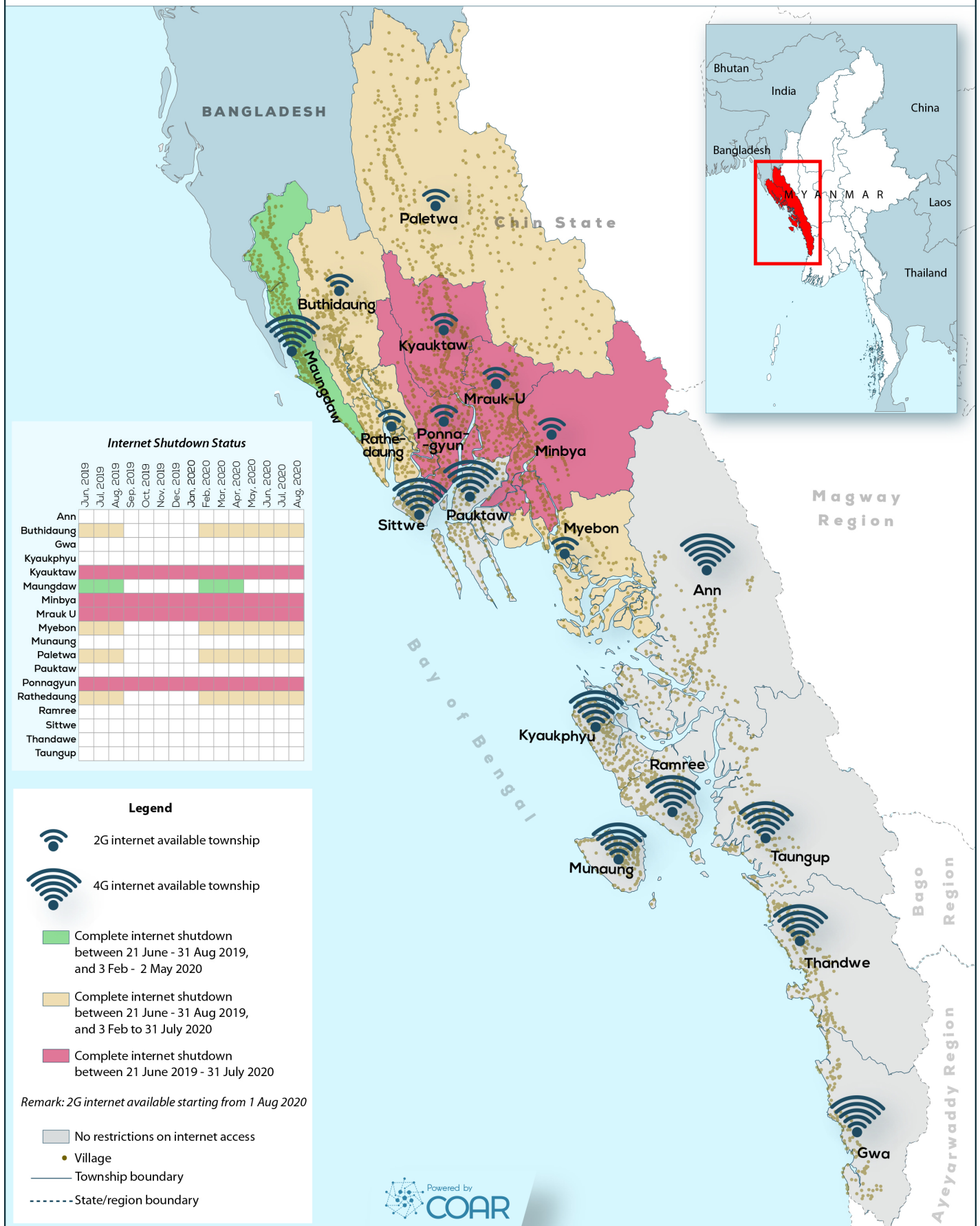
## GOVERNANCE

On 1 August, telecommunication operation Telenor announced that the government was **permitting operators to re-open** 2G mobile internet lines in eight townships of Rakhine and southern Chin states. 2G offers very limited access - with internet browsing, downloading images and video very difficult. Myanmar's Myanmar Ministry of Transport and Communications had instructed operators to shut down the internet in nine townships on 21 June 2019. The internet connection was reinstated in full only in Maungdaw Township only on 2 May 2020, and remains restricted in all other locations.

- Cash transfer and microfinance mobile phone applications are now somewhat accessible, and agencies can further explore opportunities to inject cash into urban and rural communities who continue to face the economic impacts of COVID-19 and ongoing armed conflict.
- On 8 July the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, released a **statement offering justification** for the internet shutdown. The statement read that the internet shutdown remains in place to prevent the Arakan Army from “exploiting mobile internet technologies to detonate IEDs and landmines, to incite hatred among different ethnic groups and to plan attacks or kidnappings of government officials.” Responses to the statement on Facebook showed little sympathy for the government's position, labeled it as insincere and suggested the shutdown was hiding human rights abuses.
- The **5 June resignation** of 62 ward and village tract leaders in Myebon Township has had dire impacts to Naypyidaw's governance structure. The Township General Administration Department has negotiated with administrators to guarantee their protection from arrest by the Tatmadaw on suspicions of affiliation with the Arakan Army. Although some admin-

istrators have returned to perform their administrative duties and functions in name, they do not carry the influence they previously did.

- Naypyidaw's local administrative mechanisms are increasingly being rivaled by new Arakan Army public governance committees. The Arakan Army has reportedly set up the committees in a majority of villages, where they serve administrative functions such as crime investigation, dispute resolution and the enforcement of alcohol and drug bans.
- Formal and informal village leaders continue to be impacted heavily by conflict. A village leader in Kyaukphyu was **briefly detained by the military** on suspicions of links to the Arakan Army, while a village leader in southern Chin State was **found dead** in Paletwa after his reported abduction by the Arakan Army.
- Given the risks of engaging with the Arakan Army's structures while the group remains designated under the Counter Terror act, humanitarian agencies should not engage such committees. However, agencies should be aware of these shifting dynamics and the implications for village administrators. Engagement may become possible if and when authorities change their approach to combating the Arakan Army.
- On 27 July, 118 CSOs from Rakhine State **demanding an investigation** by “an independent and impartial team” to ensure justice for an ethnic Rakhine woman allegedly **raped by three Tatmadaw soldiers** on 30 June. The Tatmadaw is reportedly conducting its own internal investigation, and prior experience suggests it will avoid an external investigation.





## COVID-19 UPDATES

While Rakhine State and greater Myanmar has apparently remained largely unaffected by the health impacts of COVID-19, the economic and political impacts continue to impact communities on the ground.

- More than 30 informal returnees to northern Rakhine State were prosecuted on charges of **'illegally' entering Myanmar** from Bangladesh under Section 13(1) of the Immigration Act. These prosecutions are in line with the **government's commitment** to take action against those entering the country 'illegally' or those facilitating illegal entry. While the ethnic and religious identities of those charged has not been made public, the majority are thought to be Rohingya returnees or their family members. The prosecutions illustrate a double-standard. Similar charges have not been made

in other areas despite many similar cases of entry on other land borders.

- At the community level, however, there is no indication that the presence of the virus is affecting communal relations in northern Rakhine State. Instead, as discussed above, relations in central Rakhine State show signs of improving.
- While the Ministry of Health and Sports has now **relaxed a ban on gatherings** and now permits up to 30 people to gather, in practice these restrictions have rarely been enforced. The restrictions on trade and movement will continue to impact livelihoods in Rakhine State, and a rapid emergence of numerous COVID-19 cases will likely mean stricter conditions and a harsher economic impact.

## ELECTIONS

Nationwide general elections remain scheduled for 8 November. Nationwide mobilisation will have implications for the situation in Rakhine State, even if polls in many locations remain unlikely. With few indications of dialogue forming, the conflict can only be expected to continue as the ruling National League for Democracy Party doubles down on national security rhetoric to appeal to its Bamar Buddhist voter base. Humanitarian agencies can expect a continuation of armed conflict, which will impact the main roads and urban areas. Controversy around voting rights for IDPs may also heighten tensions in camp areas.

- While polls will probably not be officially cancelled until October, indications of cancellations will be seen before then and include the ability of the Union Election Commission to post voter lists, which have been made visible nationwide from 25 July to 14 August.
- In many central and northern townships of Rakhine State, voter lists are scarce on the ground. The election commission relies heavily on the ward and village tract administration structure to implement elections, and the shifts in administration towards the Arakan Army has limited its access. Communities in some IDP sites and villages in Myebon Township report little knowledge of any upcoming election, and point to a communication breakdown between the township and village administration.
- The National League for Democracy announced its candidate lists for the election, but initially left large gaps in central Rakhine State. This reflects the fact that the party has **struggled to find people willing** to represent them

after the Arakan Army's consistent targeting of National League for Democracy representatives, at least one of whom has **died in Arakan Army custody**. The National League for Democracy announced candidates from the remaining constituencies in August.

- Mostly-Rohingya Muslim communities in rural villages and internment camps in central and northern Rakhine State have reported the absence of voter lists in many areas ahead of 8 November elections. While CASS has not been able to survey all villages, a random sample of villages and camps in 13 areas suggests that voter lists remain absent in many Muslim areas.
- International human rights groups have joined the Democracy and Human Rights Party – a Yangon-based party seeking support from Rohingya communities – in **demanding Myanmar to allow the Rohingya** and other Muslim groups in Rakhine State to vote in the 2020 election. In early 2015, the then-ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party government disenfranchised the Rohingya by **cancelling Temporary Registration Certificates ('white cards')** which the Rohingya and other Muslim populations in Rakhine State had been issued since the early 1990s.
- Advocacy towards voting rights for Muslims in northern Rakhine State needs to be implemented with strong caution. Advocacy risks playing into existing narratives which further marginalise the group. Advocacy aimed at voting rights for the Rohingya may also have **unintended implications for other diverse Muslim communities**.

## // August: Looking Forward

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With the Arakan Army's absence from the Union Peace Conference now confirmed, tensions between the Arakan Army and Tatmadaw will likely be played out on the battlefield. New displacement has already been reported in Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships since the announcement, and the Arakan Army has also brought violence to urban areas in early August. Humanitarian agencies should recognise the potential for the conflict to escalate post-rainy season (post October), and use this time to prepare. The pre-positioning of aid and development of relationships with both authorities and local humanitarian responders will support greater access. Humanitarian agencies should prepare to respond to communities in Myebon and northern Ann Townships. There, tensions are likely to continue given the presence of armed forces there and Tatmadaw restrictions on movements and the transportation of food. With or without armed clashes, displacement and other impacts including food shortages, movement restrictions, further governance shifts and disruption to livelihoods are likely to follow.



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