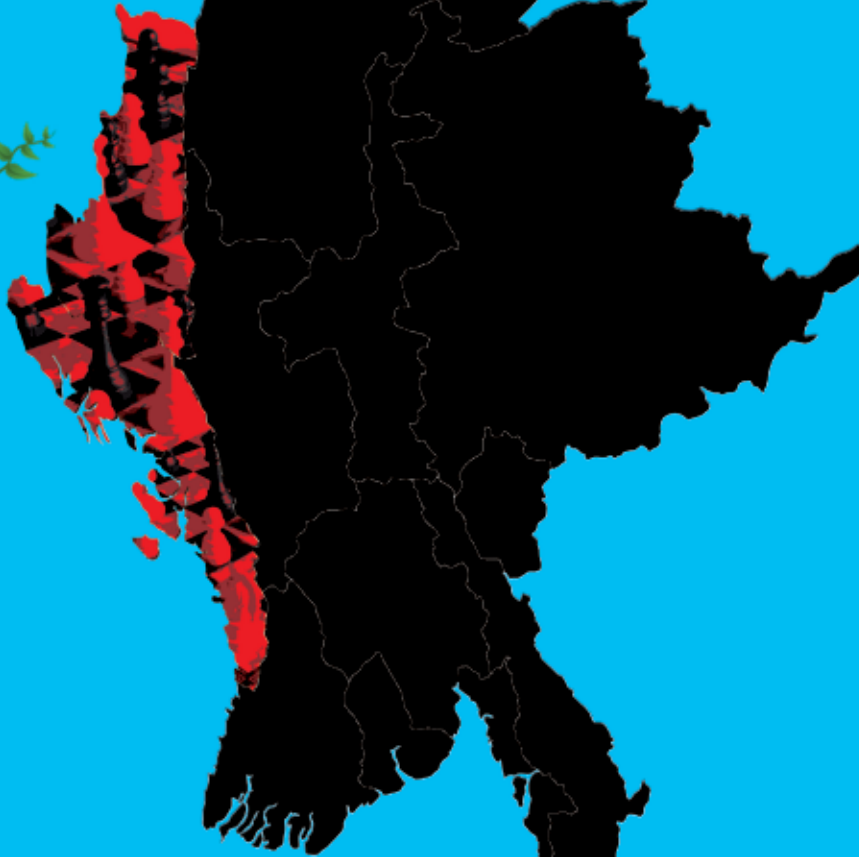




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Military-Political Rivalries in Rakhine State and Chin State and the future of Myanmar

Analysis Paper 2

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Objective

As a watchdog that has been monitoring peace process of Myanmar from the very outset, Myanmar Peace Monitor (MPM) of BNI (Burma News International) systematically monitors the peace process related issues and have continuously published analysis papers and reference books. The publication is made in accordance with our primary objective: **"To make sure that information, news and analysis on peace are accessible to the public so that they can read, cite and note them"**. When these books and reports are written, we have attempted to make sure that they are fair and free from any bias or any intent to hurt anyone or any organization and that they support a better peace process and a better society.

This analysis paper, entitled **"Military-political rivalries in Rakhine State and Chin State and the future of Myanmar"**, has been carefully analyzed and written with the aim of understanding the ongoing armed conflicts in Rakhine State. The aim of this analysis is to contribute to finding solutions to the problems of increasing civilian casualties, arrests and displaced persons in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State due to the escalation of armed conflicts in Rakhine State and, their subsequent impacts on other political, economic and social sectors.

1. Introduction

Subsequent to the political liberalization and the transition processes that started in 2011, there have been great changes within Myanmar society. Particularly, such changes were witnessed in Rakhine State metaphorically called 'The Western Gate of Myanmar'. Moreover, the existence of economic, political and security interests of neighbouring countries like China and India in Rakhine State – to a large extent – influence Rakhine State both negatively and positively. It can be vividly seen that many events and processes during the past few years were unprecedented throughout the history of the Rakhine State, in which the main projects of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor are located, and which is the part and parcel of India's strategic Kaladan Project.

Additionally, the number of fights between the Arakan Army (AA), which was established in 2009, and the Myanmar Tatmadaw has significantly been on the increase. Also, during 2019 and 2020, civilian casualties, the number of arrests and the displaced people were on the rise not only in Rakhine State but also in Paletwa township of Chin State. Before the armed conflicts, although the AA participated in the peace process which was initiated by the former president U Thein Sein, the AA did not take part in signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Later, the AA, being a member of the Northern Alliance, fought Myanmar Tatmadaw outside Rakhine State. After that, combats between the AA and the Tatmadaw broke out frequently and now have reached the peak.

The government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD) came to power after the 2015 General Elections and continued implementing the previous peace process. While doing so, the NLD government also conducted peace talks with the AA. However, the two sides failed to reach good, positive agreements; instead, the conflicts have raged. According to the in-country political observers, AA has been trying to establish a foothold in Rakhine State since 2015. Furthermore, the AA leaders have declared the political system 'confederation' on interviews or video files. Ostensibly, such an open declaration seems to have changed the opinions of the Myanmar Tatmadaw and the government on the armed conflicts in Rakhine State and the AA.

The Arakan Army, by directly engaging with Rakhine people on social media and digital technologies, frequently releases statements. Particularly, a slogan "Arakan Dream 2020" has been released as a political reminder to the public. Despite no direct interpretations as to that slogan, the leaders of the AA often declare that that the slogan connotes the reminder for the political grievances of Rakhine people in the past. In addition, they have said that the revolution is about communicating that it is the time for Rakhine people who live around the globe to return home and create a great national network of Rakhine people who are in different parts of the world.

While Myanmar Peace Support Initiatives starting from Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) to the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee

(FPNCC) were formed, there were discussions between the AA and the government. But the government declared the AA a terrorist group on March 23, 2020 and since then, it has led to worse armed conflicts. There arose voices of criticism on the attacks of "Myanmar Tatmadaw's operations for the suppression of insurgents" (the Myanmar Tatmadaw's usage) – on the AA in Rakhine State that the government has acknowledged the political legitimacy of the AA and, it was learnt from the news in the field that the military operations become more audacious within Rakhine State. This means that the government politically takes the responsibility of the Tatmadaw's military operations.

In addition, according to the press conferences of the Tatmadaw's True News Information Unit, the Unit repeatedly uses the phrase "Rakhine State is a friendly territory". For, as Rakhine State is a friendly territory where there were no armed forces after 1980, they could not stand seeing an armed force taking a foothold in Rakhine State. And the statements released by the Unit also suggest that Tatmadaw will completely crush such foothold of the AA in Rakhine State.

Meanwhile, some pointed out that, with the intensity of battles within Rakhine State, there has been a spiral of hate speech based on racial prejudices on the social media. Even before that, there were cases which the accounts and pages of the AA's top leaders on the social media were removed. The government, on the other hand, took actions to shut down the Internet in some townships of Rakhine State to support military operations. Although the government has repeatedly said that the internet shutdown is to ensure rule of law and stability in Rakhine State; in actual fact, the civil society organizations, international organizations and in-country political observers have often pointed out that it encourages the chances of covering up the human rights violations of the Tatmadaw on Rakhine people and Chin people in Paletwa township of Chin State.

Anyway, the armed conflicts raging in Rakhine State seem to have taken the form of total war rather than limited war and it is observed that according to the nature of war, only the deaths on both sides, civilian casualties and the number of the displaced persons and the hatred increase gradually. As far as the NLD government is concerned, instead of trying to solve the armed conflicts as a political conflict, granting the armed forces to legitimately use powers

suggests that it is that particular gesture that cause these conflicts to get worse. The more intense the armed conflicts, the more it seems to propel Rakhine State to far-away stance from the civilian government, and it may affect the political transition processes of Myanmar.

2. Rationales of the study

An officer in UN who has worked in the conflict areas in Latin America, Africa, Balkan countries and Asian countries described the current situations in Myanmar as "The most complex situation that I've ever seen". Different situations were complex – the president, the Cabinet, the Tatmadaw and the parliament, the government that provides power-sharing between the Tatmadaw and the parliament and dozens of ethnic armed organizations, generals, ex-generals and State counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, rivalries among her party, dozens of other political parties, the peace process comprising hundreds of civil society organizations, desire of having a chance to be a part as speakers for the future and Rakhine State in which violence between Buddhists and Islamists has escalated and further spreading in other regions. Additionally, China, America, Japan, India, UK and other countries are racing to influence Myanmar in every affair.¹

Although Rakhine is a State that is situated in the western part of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the ongoing armed conflicts in Rakhine State are largely influenced by the history of the feudal Rakhine State and the political inspirations of Rakhine people's patriotism. The root conflicts of the above-mentioned can mainly be assumed to drive from the wrong forms of nation building of Myanmar after World War II, and were due to the reawakening of nationalistic fervours of Rakhine people which were latent long time ago.

Since the early colonial periods, political movements were active all the time in Rakhine State and they were also active in the successive periods in history like Japanese revolution period, pre-independence periods, early independence periods.² It can be seen throughout the courses of history that not

1 Thant Myint-U, *The Hidden History of Burma: Race, Capitalism, and the Crisis of Democracy in the 21st Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2020), 187

2 P.94, U Maung Maung Soe (Survey on Mrauk-U). December, 2017.

only the Arakan Army (AA) but also other Arakan armed groups founded in various regions from the pre-independence periods until now tried to take a foothold in Rakhine State. However, due to the unusual topography of Rakhine State, it was not that easy for the Arakan Armed groups to take a foothold within Rakhine State. In particular, although there were events or records as to these groups' approaches to take a foothold in Rakhine State from Paletwa township (Chin State) and India's border, they did not succeed. Therefore, even the current penetration and waging wars of the AA within Rakhine State immensely changed in Rakhine people's mind.

The '**Arakan Dream 2020**', coined by the AA chief Major General Twan Mrat Naing, is concept that that the year 2020 will be the starting year of struggles in the name of "The Way of Rakhita," to achieve self-determination and the message spread at its core like wildfire among the Rakhine people. That message inspired nationalistic fervour among Rakhine people. That message seemed to evoke even the racial conflicts that broke out during the ancient Kings.³ In his book named 'The Hidden History of Burma', a historian Dr. Thant Myint-U wrote: "That is not a coincidence; it is clear that the incitements based on the national characteristics are the ways of taking advantage politically while other notions or plans are lacking."

Besides, it can be said that the role of party politics that started from political transformations in 2011 has helped raise the level of Rakhine people's politics gradually. The Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP) led by Dr. Aye Maung and the Arakan League of Democracy (ALD), with the vision of "**Unity of Rakhine people**", reached agreements to found the Arakan National Party (ANP) on May 15, 2013.⁴ However, afterwards, the Members of Parliament from ANP in Rakhine State Hluttaw, who won in the 2015 General Election, declared very often on the social media that they are disappointed with the political opinions of the party in power on the ethnic political parties.

Although the party in power said that these problems are due to the limitations of the 2008 Constitution, Rakhine people seemed to have lost faith in the Political System, which Rakhine people hoped would help achieve the

³ Ye Min Zaw, "What Does the Arakan Army Bring to Rakhine State?", The Irrawaddy, January 11, 2019, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/arakan-army-bringrakhine-state.html>.

⁴ P.141, U Maung Maung Soe (Survey on Mrauk-U). December, 2017.

equality for Rakhine people. In addition, when blockages are seen gradually developing in the Union Peace Conference which is believed to be another outlet, the course of Arakan armed revolution led by the AA gained more momentum. At the same time, socio-economic development did not turn out to flourish as assumed, instead, Rakhine State had been caught in the vicious cycle of political issues, and a lot of unexpected problems are the main causes that propel the situations to the armed conflicts currently spiraling in Rakhine State.

2.1. Research problems

This research paper is done based on the research questions on how the ongoing armed conflicts in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State and their after-effects impact people's property, lives and living conditions. To find the answers to these research questions, we have set up these research questions based on the following subjects:

- (1) Civilian casualties and arrests
- (2) Increasing number of the displaced persons
- (3) Ceasefire and peace talks
- (4) Election, internet shutdown and freedom of the press

Moreover, when conducting research for this analysis paper, efforts are made to make the most important conclusions evidence-based and some findings are written as policy recommendations.

2.2. Research Methodology and Design

Data collection and facts findings for this paper were based on two main sources of information. As the first one, interviews were conducted with those who have been directly or indirectly involved in the theme or the process of our research and, as the second one, data and facts were taken from the published and existing newspapers, periodicals, articles and books. When conducting interviews with the study participants, both Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were organized. Names

of the study participants will not be included without their consents in order that their views, opinions and perspectives can be freely discussed. However, names, organizations and relevant information are kept to ensure that research findings are strong, reliable and credible.

3. Analysis on the armed conflicts taking place in Rakhine State

When analyzing the armed conflicts happening in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State, many people have made several analyses and discussions from different perspectives on the issue. Reflecting these analyses, the majority of the analyses have been made based on the armed conflicts currently taking place in Rakhine State. However, as we presented earlier, the armed conflicts, taking place in Rakhine State, have incorporated historical factors as well as coincided with the shifts in the global political balance.

Moreover, there have also been conflict of interests among the internal political groups, increasing patriotism based on race/ religion among the public, and interdependences on the civil-military relations which is key to Myanmar political transition. This means that the current armed conflicts in Rakhine State are more sensitive than the armed revolutions that took place in Myanmar political history in the former times and racial sensitivities become more prevalent there.

Particularly, the differences in background between the armed conflicts that took place in the former times and the current armed conflicts taking place in Rakhine State have to some extent affected the stakeholders engaged in the armed conflicts. Unlike the former ethnic armed groups, Arakan Army has been able to carry out the recruitment, public relations, attracting with political aspirations, collecting and obtaining funds, purchase and collection of weapons/ammunitions, and so on more easily and more effectively on the digital platforms. Therefore, the primary factor that has helped the Arakan Army become a more powerful and stronger armed group is the systematic use of the 21st century modern information and technologies. Therefore, with the aim of military purpose, the government and the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) have shut down the internet connection in some townships of Rakhine State.

In addition, another prime factor that has supported the Arakan Army is its strategy of building a good alliance with other large ethnic armed groups. The government and the Tatmadaw are concerned about the fact that the Arakan Army has been able to set up relationships not only with the other armed ethnic groups but also with the security organizations/ personnel or authorities or powerful individuals from China, India and Bangladesh – despite the fact that their relations are not formal.

The current armed conflicts in Rakhine State are uniquely different from the previous ethnic armed revolution periods because there have been more security threats to the government, the Tatmadaw and the police force in Rakhine State since the Arakan Army has entered and set base in the state. In addition, it was also found that some top leaders of the Arakan Army stated some words online that “we have our own morals as well as our own swords”. Since the AA did not utter these words officially, it is difficult to understand. Besides, based on the activities of the AA, it can be analyzed that the AA has been willing to substitute the administrative mechanism and the security forces of the government with its own administration and the security mechanisms and then to build its stance strongly in Rakhine State.

Another distinctive feature of the armed conflicts taking place in Rakhine State is that the government and the Tatmadaw have had the same stance. Particularly, the civilian government has given political legitimacy to “Anti-terrorist Operations” (military jargon) of the Tatmadaw. This means that not only the Tatmadaw but also the civilian government regard the armed conflicts in Rakhine State as a matter relating to the national security. Although the civilian government did not convene the National Defense and Security Council, they met the top leaders of the Tatmadaw in the periods prior to the armed conflicts. In addition, a statement of the State Counsellor that praise and congratulates the Tatmadaw soldiers fighting in Rakhine State consolidated this assumption more.⁵

Attempts of the government and the Tatmadaw to establish better relations with the People’s Republic of China as well as with India were witnessed by

⁵ 7 Days News, 22nd April, 2020, Source – <http://13.251.204.60>

Story/184320?fbclid=IwAR2IAvijGo6F6gEzyWWNKO83JLMraT74PF16r2Q3NiuN105OxHFajlutCI

the formal visits of the State Counsellor, the ministers and the top leaders of the Tatmadaw. These formal visits were not only a national strategy aimed at keeping the balance of power in international relations in regional level but they also seemed to be intended for obtaining help in responding to the existence of the internal Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), especially the foothold of the AA in the borders of India-Myanmar and Myanmar-Bangladesh.

3.1 Civilian casualties and arrests

The issues of civilian casualties and arrests have been one of the issues that civilians have been experiencing on a daily basis since the beginning of the armed conflicts in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State. Particularly, the report entitled “An Avoidable War: Politics and Armed Conflict in Myanmar’s Rakhine State” published by International Crisis Group broadly described that the issue of a rise in the casualties of civilians as the consequences of the armed conflicts has become the primary factor to pay attention to the conflicts.⁶

Moreover, the media have often presented the cases of civilians’ deaths while they are being interrogated in custody but no voice has been raised and no accountable action have been taken yet by the responsible persons of the State. Meanwhile, more assassinations and an increasing number of cases of being arrested have been witnessed. Despite arguing about these issues under the different topics, the most fundamental issue is nothing but the armed conflicts. One of the analysts on the ethnic affairs commented thus: **“Whenever battles and armed conflicts break out, civilians fall prey to them in such a way. Such events happened not only in Myanmar history but also in world history. That’s why, it’s quite difficult to mitigate or prevent such incidents from taking place. The incidents of civilians’ deaths and getting arrested will be securely prevented only if armed conflicts and other political issues, which are the most fundamental issues, have been resolved.”**⁷

6 International Crisis Group (June 2020), An Avoidable War: Politics and Armed Conflict in Myanmar’s Rakhine State, Asia Report N’307, and Brussel. Source: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/307-avoidable-war-politics-and-armed-conflict-myanmars-rakhine-state>

7 Internal Interview (1), June 3, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

One of the leaders of a Civil Society Organization (CSO) implementing social development activities in Rakhine State also replied thus: “The number of civilian deaths is growing larger in Rakhine State. Several different organizations have been systematically monitoring and recording how many civilians have exactly been dead. However, what’s more important than these facts is that there have been many cases where coercive interrogations were conducted and people who are interrogated have been seized with suspect charges, without access to the rights of legal protection and against the legal procedures during their interrogating periods. You will find such cases in the media – those who died because of coercive interrogations while in custody, those who had to be hospitalized as a consequence of having been captured and interrogated, and so on. We need to pay more attention to these incidents. If the security organizations of a country give excuse the security for lawlessly capturing, interrogating and terrorizing civilians in this way, the future prospect of such a country would become extremely bad. Rakhine people are also Myanmar citizens – so they are fervently in need of legal protection. If the people have experienced many incidents of such lacking of legal protection, they may get engaged in the armed conflicts themselves in the long run. That’s why, the civilian government needs to make sure that these cases – whether they’re the cases of civilians being captured under suspicion or those of the civilians being interrogated – are conducted only according to the legal framework during the period of time when the main issues of the armed conflicts can’t yet be resolved.”⁸

One of the research organizations having connection with the Tatmadaw noted that the Tatmadaw has neither violated the prescribed law in capturing and interrogating the suspects nor performed beyond the Rules of Engagement in war-afflicted grounds, that the coercive interrogation video clips found on social media seemed to be due to the outlets of the Tatmadaw soldiers and that the Tatmadaw has never passed any rules and regulations permitting its members to engage in such violent interrogations to Prisoners Of War (POWs) and suspects whenever they are captured.⁹ However, it needs to be questioned that

8 Internal Interview (2), June 9, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

9 RFA, June 22, 2020, How do you view Rakhine war?

Source - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoBM2avm5i8>

similar cases of violent interrogation often take place in the war-afflicted areas.

In particular, shelling from heavy artillery to the villages nearby are one of the main causes of civilian deaths. On one hand, those engaged in the armed conflicts have never held themselves accountable for such shelling incidents but the stories of blaming each other are occasionally heard. On the other hand, the government has never expressed anything concerning such incidents. However, although the pieces of news reported on the media revealed which group used certain shells discovered in the shelling cases, it was found that there was a lack of accountability for the consequences. These events and causes have exacerbated the conflicts and led to racial conflicts because of the local people's feelings and emotions including bitterness, hatred, and so on.



The number of civilian deaths is growing larger in Rakhine State. Several different organizations have been systematically monitoring and recording how many civilians have exactly been dead. However, what's more important than these facts is that there have been many cases where coercive interrogations were conducted and people who are interrogated have been seized with suspect charges, without access to the rights of legal protection and against the legal procedures during their interrogating periods.



3.2 Increase in the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Because of the armed conflicts taking place in the northern part of Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State, the number of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) is increasing day by day. As consequences of the armed conflicts, the IDPs have been moving from their native villages to safer areas, building IDP camps built in safe areas or stayed either at monasteries or at their respective relatives' houses in the villages. Based on the data of Rakhine Ethnic Congress (REC), there are currently approximately more than 150,000 IDPs all over Rakhine State while, based on the data of Relief and Rehabilitation for Chin IDPs – RRCCI, about one fourth of the total population (approximately

15,000 people) in Paletwa township of Chin State are IDPs.

The difficulty in getting access to food, drinking water and fuels has been found to be one of the main challenges being currently faced by the IDPs. One of the leaders of a Civil Society Organization (CSO) said that foods and other materials for the IDPs have been provided primarily with the donations of local CSOs and international organizations and that the State-recognized IDP camps have been provided some support by the government.¹⁰ But only the IDP camps adjacent to the main road get easy access to these State-sponsored support while CSOs and town dignitaries have to provide supports for the IDP camps and host communities which have difficulties in terms of transportation and accessibility. Especially in the villages and IDP camps located along Kaladan River, the local people have not been accessible to support because of the blockages of roads and waterways by the Tatmadaw. Therefore, there are frequent shortages of foods and rations for the local people and the IDPs getting locked in those areas.

The second challenge that IDPs facing is security issue. According to one of the community leaders staying at an IDP camp, IDPs have been staying in the IDP camps in proximity of their respective villages. When they have are going back home when the war is paused to take care of their properties and cattle that have been left because of the conflicts, incidents often break out as some soldiers shoot at the local people returning home for such a purpose.¹¹

Many IDPs are not willing to stay in the IDP camps constructed by the government. The reasons are that those IDP camps built by the government are very far from their villages and that there are some unfortunate events where they sometimes happen to step on landmines on the way to their paddy fields from the IDP camps. In addition, the IDPs (especially women and children) feel insecure since the military enter into those IDP camps to make inspection at any time.

One of the activists working for the IDPs in Chin State said thus: **“IDPs are afraid of both the Tatamadaw and the AA. Although there has been no incident where the civilians are shot by the AA so far, there are fairly frequent shootings**

10 Internal Interview (3), June 9, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

11 Internal Interview (4), June 14, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

to the civilians by the other army. But another relevant thing is that, if a shooting to the civilians by the Tatmadaw happens, we can file a complaint to the government. On the other hand, if the AA commits such a civilian shooting, we don't know whom to complain to. Whether they take action against the individuals who commit such a crime is just another matter!"¹²

Additionally, IDPs encounter many challenges concerning health and education. The numbers of hospitals, clinics and medical supplies in the conflict affected areas are not enough and that the security of health workers is also worrying. Some injured persons died since they could not have been taken to and hospitalized in a township hospital in time. Even when the Covid-19 virus has spread around the globe and is terrifying, IDPs have no time to think about the Covid-19 pandemic but they have to care only for their day-to-day living and survival. Besides, in the education departments, teachers have had difficulties in conducting their activities at school because of the wars. According to the reports on the media, more than 100 teachers from Paletwa township of Chin State applied for transfer showing wars as their reason for transfer in January, 2020. Rakhine State is also faced with a situation that it is still unsure many schools will reopen on account of the ongoing wars and many parents are extremely worried about the security of their children.

Despite the fact that it is not known when the armed conflicts taking place in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State will come to an end, it will be mandatory that the issue of the IDPs in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State are unavoidably resolved. Hence, one of the leaders of a CSO who has worked persistently for the welfare of the IDPs in Kachin State commented thus: **"Speaking from my experience in Kachin State, it was extremely difficult in the beginning. Particularly, the government didn't trust us and neither did the international organizations. That's why we had to build friendliness and trust with them for a long time. In doing so, the CBOs (Community Based Organizations) need to devote themselves to the humanitarian work. Only then, they will come to have more understanding and familiarity as well as more trust so that they will be able to make systematic contributions to the welfare of the IDPs."**¹³

12 Internal Interview (5), June 9, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

13 Internal Interview (6), June 16, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

3.3 Ceasefire and peace negotiations

Not only military and political analysts but also a few experts from other fields of study have pointed out that the only way to resolve the armed conflicts in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State is to embrace ceasefire and peace negotiations. However, in practical situations, there were no satisfactory dialogue meetings among the government, the Tatmadaw and the AA. Looking back on the dialogue meetings, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi held a



IDPs are afraid of both the Tatmadaw and the AA. Although there has been no incident where the civilians are shot by the AA so far, there are fairly frequent shootings to the civilians by the other army. But another relevant thing is that, if a shooting to the civilians by the Tatmadaw happens, we can file a complaint to the government. On the other hand, if the AA commits such a civilian shooting, we don't know whom to complain to. Whether they take action against the individuals who commit such a crime is just another matter!



dialogue meeting with the 7 EAOs of the Northern Alliance to express the political stance of the government at the ceremony of Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong held in May 2017.¹⁴ Additionally, prior to the start of the third session of Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong, it was announced that the government had been making necessary arrangements for a dialogue meeting among the State Counsellor, the Commander-in-Chief of the Tatmadaw and the 7 EAOs of the Northern Alliance to be held in July 2018, and they also met during the period of holding that session.¹⁵

Although the Tatmadaw and the Northern Alliance had planned to hold the

14 Myanmar President Office, May 25, 2020.

Source - <https://www.president-office.gov.mm/?q=issues/peace/id-12104>

15 Mizzima Burmese, July 10, 2018.

Source - http://www.mizzimaburmese.com/article/41222?fbclid=IwAR0FoupqI76HrVN8tSGNB_M_F_ZboHfRj3sH7aIBbvRB1O623SfRbzxboxA

next dialogue meeting in August 2018 when Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong (Third Session) had been concluded, the meeting was postponed.¹⁶ Following that, 3 EAOs of the Northern Alliance and the Peace Commission (PC) met again in Kunming, China, on 5th September 2018.¹⁷ In 2019, there were no dialogue meetings among the government, the Tatmadaw and the EAOs of the Northern Alliance but, in June of the same year, the members of Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) met at Panghsang where United Wa State Army (UWSA) has headquarters. In 2020, there have been no meetings among the government, the Tatmadaw and the AA so far, and it was found that even in the periods of truce proposed by the Tatmadaw, Rakhine State was always left out, resulting in the escalation of battles.



At first, we had great expectations for the civilian government – that it would stay neutral by performing as a mediator and negotiator between the armed organizations. But ...



The most fundamental factor for initiating ceasefire and peace negotiations is political will. When the National League for Democracy (NLD) Party gained power, it continued to take measures in accordance with the implementation procedures of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) which was carried out by the previous government. Although changes in the implementation body and its members had been made, they have failed to come up with positive results. In addition, the relations between the civilian government and the Tatmadaw are a significant factor for peace negotiations. However, since the

16 Network Media Group, August 10, 2020.

Source - http://www.nmg-news.com/2018/08/10/5174?fbclid=IwAR01KBy9WV3XSYsrareZSfocjJpiyldE9x_yy0mpZni-MqvfhnekNNTQ

17 Radio Free Asia, September 4, 2018.

Source - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/ethnic-armed-groups-to-meet-with-myanmar-peace-commission09042018161046.html?fbclid=IwAR2gbdgy2DFjjTCfSDujDBnielT6iYacV2J5dzHY6mTU14pYB25XZibHii8>

time of the government designating the AA as a terrorist group, peace negotiations between the AA and the government and/or the Tatmadaw have reached deadlock.

In one of the interviews BNI conducted, one of the leaders of a CSO based in Rakhine State commented thus: **“The question of how the government and the Tatmadaw view the AA in terms of politics – this is crucially important. Regarding this, the Tatmadaw should not express its views inconsistently – that it would recognize the existence of the AA only in Laiza, later that it would not recognize its existence any longer, that it would not let the AA set up its military base in Rakhine State. On top of that, the government also first needs to stay neutral and recognize this issue as a political one, rather than just solving it in the form of armed conflicts. Only then, the future negotiations will be possible. If you look at the reality, the AA has been practically testifying its very existence by waging wars all over Rakhine State – whether neither the Tatmadaw nor the government have recognized its existence.”**¹⁸

In addition, he also said thus: **“At first, we had great expectations for the civilian government – that it would stay neutral by performing as a mediator and negotiator between the armed organizations. But now that the civilian government has already designated an EAO as a terrorist group and congratulated the members of the Tatmadaw engaged in the armed conflicts as heroes, it’s dead sure that national reconciliation they have often mentioned is not for other ethnic people.”**

Besides, free meetings are also essential for the materialization of ceasefire and peace negotiations which are pivotal for the cessation of armed conflicts. It is urgently necessary that the government holds independent dialogue meetings with full of political will with all the armed entities involved in the armed conflicts. In order to have such political will, it is essential that the government approaches the current armed conflicts not from the viewpoint of national security but from that of willingness to establish federal system embracing the political equality, national equality and so on between the EAOs and the government. Only then will the government be able to cancel its designation of the AA as a terrorist group and find its ways open again for tackling the matters

18 Internal Interview (7), June 10, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

of holding political dialogues and working out a ceasefire agreement. Otherwise, the armed conflicts taking place in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State may escalate, gradually leading to a situation of being too late to hold peace dialogues.

3.4 The Internet shutdown and freedom of press

21st June 2020 mark one year of internet shutdown since it was imposed in the majority of townships in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State. Although the government's reason for such an act in those areas was that it was for the interests of the public, there has been a widespread criticism that such an action has been taken only for the military purposes of the Tatmadaw. There have been assumptions that the Myanmar Tatmadaw has imposed the internet shutdown to have an upper hand on the AA in terms of warfare; however, there have been several analyses as to the fact that such a plan has never failed in its attempts to disconnect the communication route of the AA.¹⁹

Those who have been principally impacted by the internet shutdown are the civilians. Especially, the consequences of this internet shutdown include the decrease in the capacity to make an accurate coverage on the media with reference to such human rights abuses as the cases of war-afflicted internal displacements, arbitrary arrests of civilians, food shortages and destructions of shelters and properties, sexual exploitations, and so on. In addition, the people from Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State have also suffered from the consequences of the internet shutdown in their economic, educational and social affairs.

One of the reporters based in Rakhine State said thus: “The individuals who have been mainly affected by the internet shutdown in Rakhine State are the public. **“In the past, we reporters were able to send the pieces of news that we had collected to our mother news agency from wherever we liked. But now we’ve got to go directly to Sittwe solely for this purpose or send those news sources through a chance messenger. In doing so, we’re highly prone to danger.**

19 U Maung Maung Soe. “Rakhine war and its characters” (Part 3). Irrawaddy, 13th June, 2020.

Source: <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/article/2020/06/13/224570.html>

You may say that this is the most dangerous period of time for a person to go forth and back from one town to another in Rakhine State. It's because they (the Myanmar Tatmadaw) make a thorough check on the mobile phones of the travelers. If a traveler happens to have saved something inappropriate, it's done! That's why it's really dangerous for reporters like us. Although we were formerly able to send our pieces of news from wherever we liked, now we've got no choice but to go to Sittwe. As a result, it costs more. These are just the day-to-day challenges we reporters are faced with. We also have many difficulties in gathering other types of news.”²⁰



“In the past, we reporters were able to send the pieces of news that we had collected to our mother news agency from wherever we liked. But now we've got to go directly to Sittwe solely for this purpose or send those news sources through a chance messenger. In doing so, we're highly prone to danger.



Additionally, one of the leaders of a civil society responded: “We needed to put on stall some of the projects that is aimed for the wellbeing of the people. We even have other branches in other townships. But now when there is iInternet shutdown, it's extremely difficult for us to communicate and work with one another. What's more, the ordinary people who have been conducting economic transactions have to travel to Sittwe for such matters as sending and withdrawing money. It's also not at all safe for them to return home with a large amount of money in hand. Besides, as there is no internet access, the youth no longer get updated news and information. Although it's often said that we had to live without any internet access in the old days, the internet is more or less one of the fundamental necessities for human beings, isn't it? We've got to work online for many affairs including health, economic transactions, education, social dealings and so on. Many youths – sons and daughters – from Rakhine State have to go abroad and work there. Now when there is Covid-19 pandemic,

20 Internal Interview (8), June 11, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

many parents are worried about their children in foreign countries and those children abroad are also wondering if everything is okay with their parents. But since there is internet access, it's no longer easy to keep in touch with one another as before. Among these perils, anybody gets checked if they go to a town. If there is something fishy about somebody, the consequences are beyond thinking. As the consequences of the internet shutdown, there have been huge losses for Rakhine people.”²¹

In addition, there were several cases in which charges were pressed against the staff from news agencies who conducted interviews with the responsible persons from the AA concerning the armed conflicts taking place in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State and arrests under the such laws as Unlawful Association Act and Counter-terrorism Law’ and so on. Besides, some activists who participated in the movement on the first anniversary of internet shutdown in Rakhine and Chin States had been charged.

Such restrictions on freedom of press and freedom of expressions by the government are not a good sign for the democratic transition. It is paramount that pieces of news are fairly gathered not only for the public to be able to enjoy their rights to hear the voices of the stakeholders in the armed conflicts but also for the capability of news agencies to produce unbiased pieces of news. However, such restrictions on the freedoms of the media have led to the negative situation.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the armed conflicts happening in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State are full of uncertainties and are gradually getting worse. Especially if the wars in those areas cannot be stopped, not only will the number of the IDPs increase but there will also be more socio-economic crises in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State. The impact of these socio-economic crises will not stop in those areas but is likely to be experienced in the aspects of the politics, economy, diplomatic relations and so on of the whole Myanmar. Especially in this Covid-19 pandemic-induced global

21 Internal Interview (9), June 12, 2020 (BNI-MPM Interviews for Analysis Paper 2).

recession, there is likelihood that Myanmar will face not only the economic problems but also other probably subsequent ones including growth of political grudges in the ethnic regions, urgency of humanitarian aids for the IDPs, increase in the national budget deficit, increase in the number of such transnational issues as human trafficking/ illegal drug smuggling, etc. as the side effects of human migration, decrease in the number of foreign investments, rise in the number of sanctions imposed by international communities, and so on.



it is much more important that the ensuing protocols for free and fair elections are successfully performed including campaigning, voter registration list, vote casting procedures, vote tabulation, and announcing election results. In order to perform those tasks, wars must be stopped.



It is essential that the government needs to be aware of, understand and accept the fact that the armed conflict is not an issue which must be solved only from the security standpoint since the internal stabilities of a nation can affect regional peace and security. One of the most significant factors that should be taken into consideration in tackling the armed conflicts currently taking place in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State is social cohesion which is crucial to nation building. It is also necessary that the government take proactive measures to make sure no racial conflicts break out. In taking such proactive measures, it is also essential that the government solve these issues through fair dialogues and negotiation meetings that drive from the authentic political will, and informal meetings by forming systematic entities, rather than making attempts to handle the issues by using force.

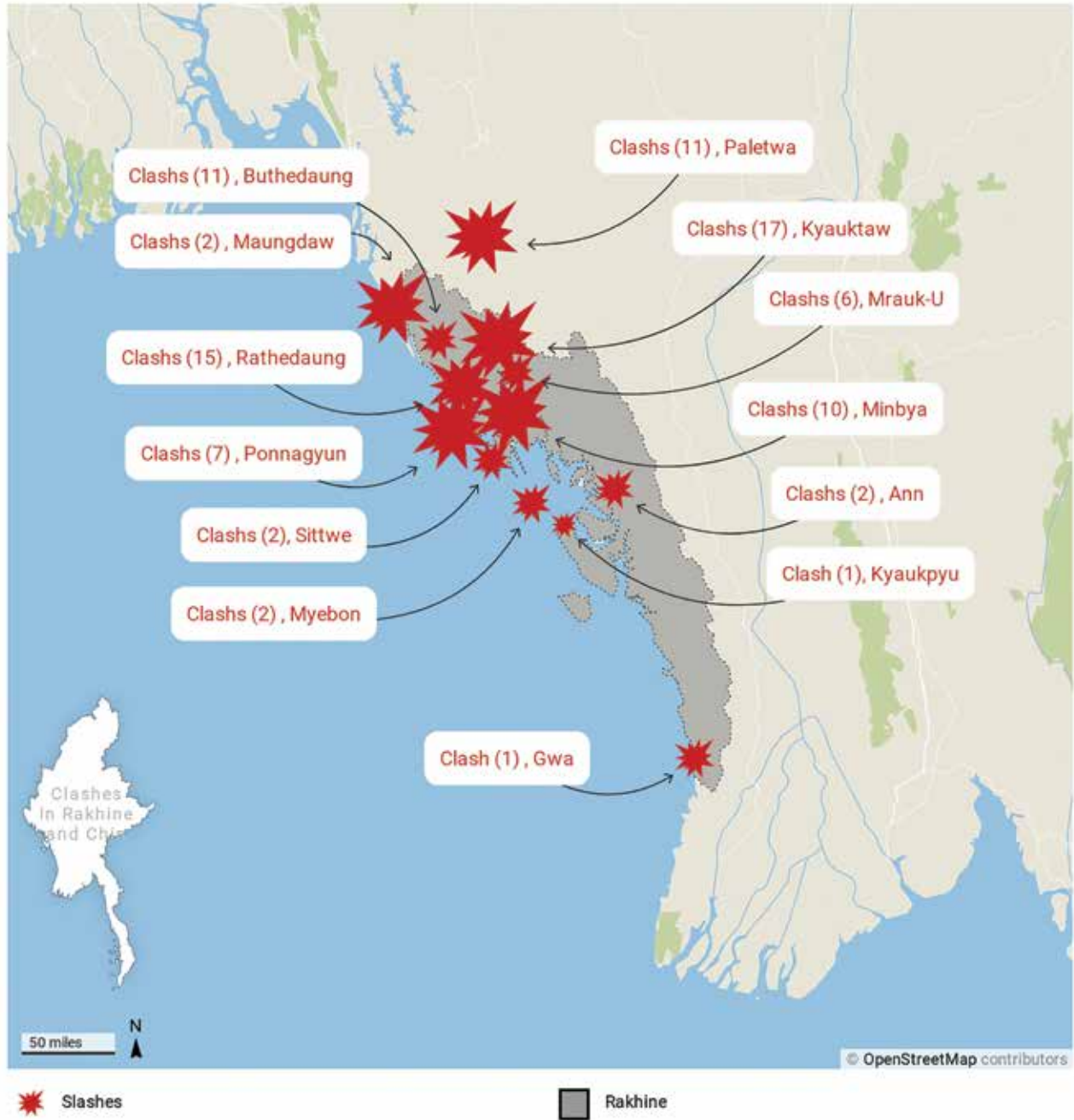
In addition, although there were concerns over whether elections will be successfully implemented in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State in the General Election, scheduled on 8th November, 2020, according to the

Union Election Commission (UEC) elections will be conducted in those areas. However, merely announcing that elections will be held in those areas is not enough; it is much more important that the ensuing protocols for free and fair elections are successfully performed including campaigning, voter registration list, vote casting procedures, vote tabulation, and announcing election results. In order to perform those tasks, wars must be stopped. Only then will the public be able to cast votes in a secure environment. Therefore, it is essential that the government hold negotiation meeting with the EAOs involved in the armed conflicts over the implementation of the ensuing election procedures.

The 2020 Election results and political paradigm shift can have much impact on the armed conflicts currently taking place in Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin State. Despite the fact that Rakhine people are generally less interested in the elections and party politics, a new political layout might come into being in which the government that will be formed with the new election results and the political parties that will win the majority votes in Rakhine State will be able to put an end to the ongoing armed conflicts. The rationale behind it is that there can be opportunities which can be taken to create a positive and future-oriented political atmosphere by changing the lives and emotions of the Rakhine people who are currently in despair groaning for the wars, deaths and other undesirable things. The political broadmindedness of the Union Government, and its national reconciliation policies on ethnic people are still in a position of mitigating the armed conflicts taking place in Rakhine State. However, the government should be especially aware that such a situation will persist for a certain period of time but it will go from bad to worse if adequate and renewed efforts are not made to restore it in time.

In addition, this analysis paper also presents that the civil-military relations of Myanmar still have an impact on all the aspects of Myanmar politics and recommends that the government needs to be extremely careful in keeping the two sides of power balance that will come into existence along with the 2020 General Election.

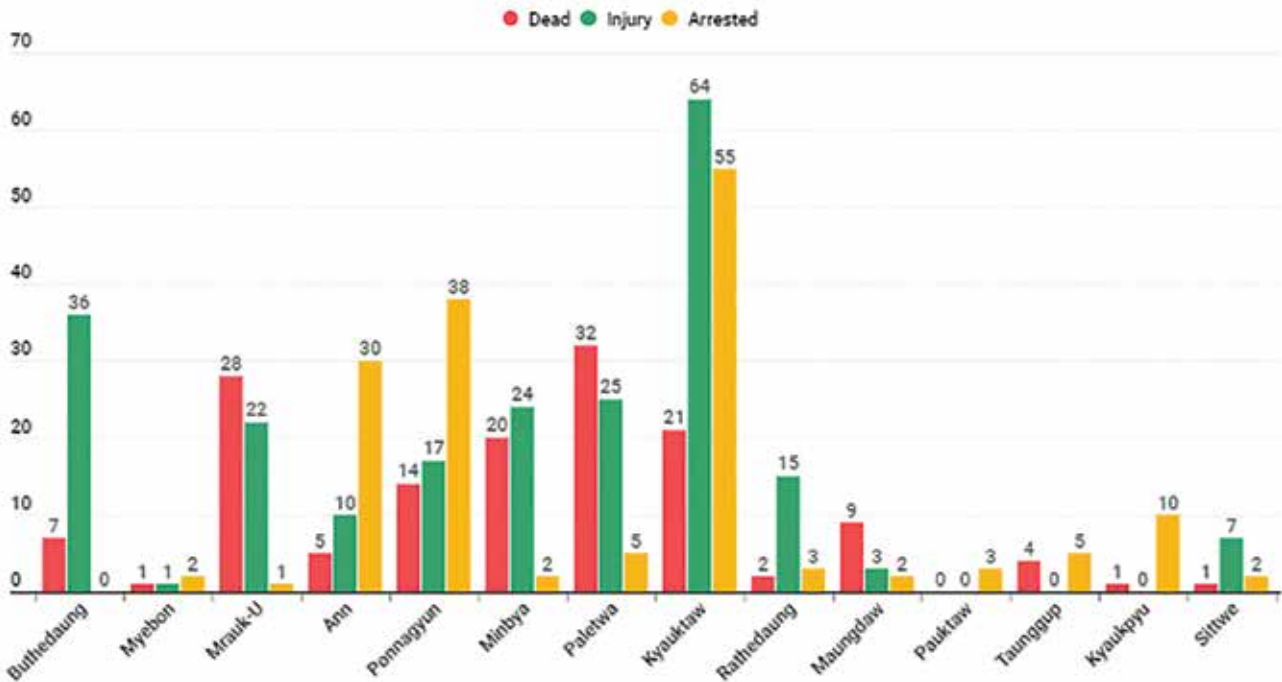
Number of Armed Clashes between Arakan Army and Tatmadaw in Rakhine State and Chin State (2020)



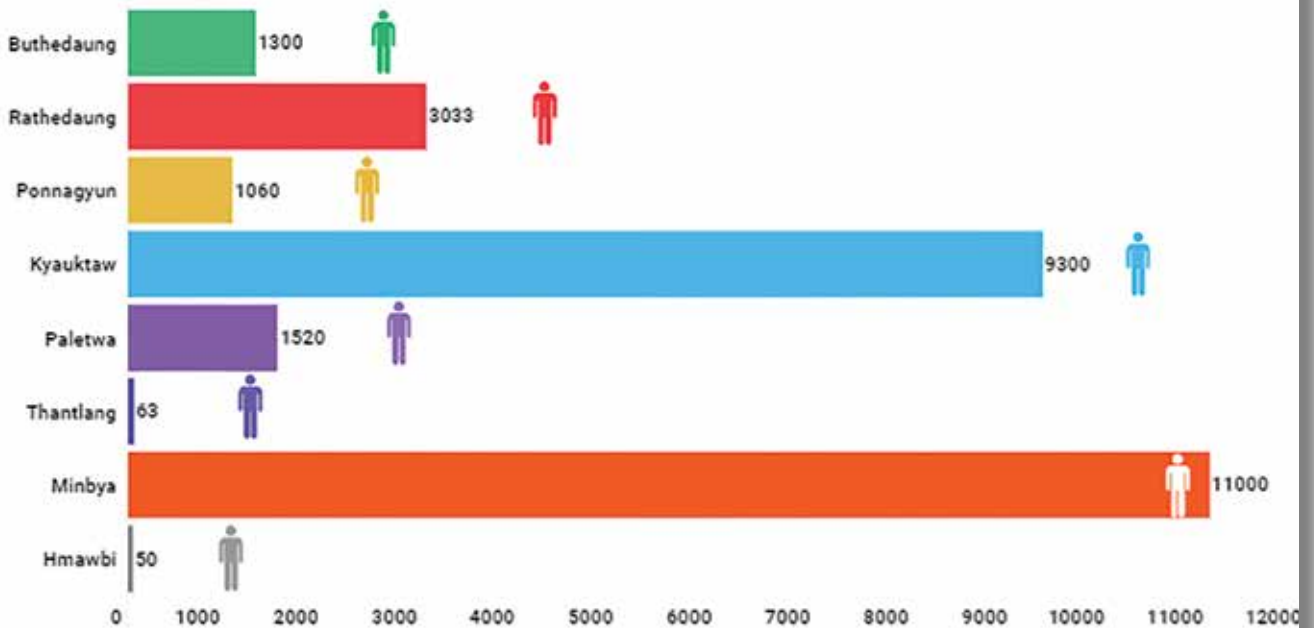
Map: Hninno - Source: BNI-MPM, Mohs - Created with Datawrapper

Remark - These data were based on the reported cases by the news and media

Number of Civilian Deaths, Injuries and Arrested People in Rakhine State and Paletwa - Chin State (2020)



Number of IDPs in Rakhine State and Chin State (2020)





**The First Casualty
when war comes
is truth**



Hiram W Johson, 1918